

He proceeds to show that their example was followed by the opponents of the Church generally. Unfortunately most English writers have ranked themselves with her enemies. How this hostility has led to various systems of falsification we shall have occasion to explain in the next article.

## ARTICLE V. SPECIAL SOURCES OF ERROR.

535. **The law of truthfulness** in historical writings is thus expressed by Cicero :

“Who does not know that the first law of history is that it shall dare say nothing false, next that it shall not fear to tell the whole truth, again that the narration suggest no suspicion of favor or enmity?” (*De Or.*, ii. 15).

This wise rule may be **violated in four ways**, which constitute so many sources of error—namely, by *false assertions*, by the *suppression of facts*, by *partiality*, by prejudice or *hostility*. There is a fifth source of error, less familiar to the ancients—*i.e.*, the misrepresentation of facts by *false theories*.

§ 1. *False Statements.*

536. No truly great historian would deliberately stain his pages with **false statements**. When these occur they are usually the result of misinformation, of prejudice, or of such party spirit as blinds the mind to the light of truth. As examples of false statements, the **results of misinformation**, we may refer to the works of Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, and to the portions of Rollin which are drawn from those unreliable authorities. Lenormant and Chevalier speak with great respect of those authors ; but they judiciously add :

“To reproduce as a whole the facts which they relate, and to give

them as an account of the chain of principal events in Egyptian or Abyssinian history, . . . would convey an absolutely untrue idea” (*History of the East*, Introduction).

Happily, Rawlinson’s notes in his edition of Herodotus correct most of the errors in the original. Lenormant and Chevalier’s *History of the East* now replaces the corresponding parts of Rollin.

537. Of false statements **resulting from a violent partisan spirit** James Melne points out many examples occurring in Froude’s *History of England*. (See a series of articles on Froude in the *Catholic World* for 1870.)

538. **Misquoting and mistranslating documents** is a method of falsification that comes under the head of false statements. In this connection it has been said “Mr. Froude does not seem to have fully grasped the meaning of inverted commas.” (For examples of this defect see *Catholic World* for October, 1870, p. 73 ; and *Month* for 1879, p. 142.)

539. It is usual for great historians to give in **marginal notes** references to their authorities for every important statement. Prescott blames the earlier editions of Bancroft’s *History of the United States* for discarding notes and abridging references, and he points out the evil results of this practice (*Miscellanies*, p. 327). The last edition of Bancroft has omitted references, and is now merely a popular book, no longer a work of great authority. (See articles on Bancroft in the *Catholic World* for 1883–84.)

540. How **documents may be distorted** from their real meaning by designing men is exemplified by the efforts of Gibbon to cast a doubt on the testimony of the Sacred Scriptures. Three Evangelists narrate that there was darkness over all the earth at the death of our Blessed Saviour. Gibbon, to invalidate their testimony, says among other things : “A distinct chapter of Pliny is designed for



eclipses of an extraordinary nature and unusual duration" (chap. xv.) Now, Pliny pretends to give only an example, and the distinct chapter referred to is only this brief paragraph, which we quote entire :

"There happen wonderful and protracted eclipses" [notice the plural number], "as was the one which occurred when Cæsar had been slain, and while the war of Antony was carried on, at which time the sun was pale for a whole year continuously" (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, ii. 30).

### § 2. *Suppression of Facts.*

541. Witnesses before our courts of justice are made to swear that they will tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The reason is that the **suppression of facts** may be, and often is, equivalent to a false statement. This suppression is another of the disingenuous methods by which Gibbon attacks the Christian religion. Prescott writes :

"He [Gibbon] has often slurred over in the text such particulars as might reflect most credit on the character of the religion, or shuffled them into a note at the bottom of the page, while all that admits of a doubtful complexion in its early propagation is ostentatiously blazoned and set in contrast to the most amiable features of paganism," etc. (Essay on *Conquest of Granada*).

It is a remarkable illustration of the power of prejudice that Prescott, who has written this correct criticism of Gibbon, should have incurred a similar reproach in his writings. He has described the conversion of Mexico to Christianity in a manner analogous to Gibbon's method of accounting for the early rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire. (See Spalding's *Miscellanea*, p. 293.)

542. Are there not some **details which an historian may properly suppress**? There certainly are; for as history aims at useful instruction, whatever can in no

way contribute to this purpose is to be omitted; for instance, the scandalous details of the voluptuous lives of Tiberius and Heliogabalus. But only details are to be suppressed, not important facts; thus the life of David would be incomplete without the story of his fall into sin. Such events are important for the instruction of mankind, and as such they are related both by profane and sacred writers. It is not usually expedient, in writing the life of Luther, to quote freely from the shocking vulgarities of his *Table Talk*; but it is a falsification of history to garble some of the extracts without warning the reader, as is done in Bohn's edition.

543. In encyclopædias, and similar works of reference, falsification by suppression of facts is often carried very far. Thus in the latest edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a work of high pretensions, the article on "Missions to the Heathens" suppresses and ignores almost all the facts regarding Catholic missions. (See a detailed criticism of the article in the *Dublin Review* for July, 1884.)

### § 3. *Partiality.*

544. It is not required, nor is it even desirable, that the historian shall feel no **special affection** for the nation whose history he writes. In fact, unless he can sincerely sympathize with the actors of his story he will scarcely do justice to their motives :

"Who would think," asks Prescott, "of looking to a Frenchman for a history of England? to an Englishman for the best history of France? Ill fares it with the nation that cannot find writers of genius to tell its own story. What foreign hand could have painted like Herodotus and Thucydides the achievements of the Greeks? Who like Livy and Tacitus have portrayed the shifting character of the Roman in his rise, meridian, and fall? Had the Greeks trusted their story to these same Romans, what would have been their fate with posterity? Let the Carthaginians tell" (*Miscellanies*, "Bancroft").



Washington Irving did not sympathize with the Spaniards in their struggle for independence from Moorish domination: the result is that his *Conquest of Granada* fails to bring out the true spirit of that heroic enterprise; the work looks like the parody of a history.

545. But, on the other hand, **excessive sympathy** with a cause often leads to serious misrepresentations, and gross injustice towards its opponents. Livy is severely blamed for such partiality to Rome. Still, it must be remembered that Livy is not our only authority on the subject which he has treated. Several Greek historians support his statements concerning the virtues and the glory of the early Romans. The criticism passed on Livy by Macaulay in his "Essay on History" is exaggerated, as are many other statements in that unreliable essay (*supra* No. 51).

#### § 4. *Prejudice or Hostility.*

546. We have seen that prejudice may readily prevent an author from discovering the truth; but it often goes further, and under the form of **hostility** it leads the historian to make unjust attacks upon his opponents. This hostility sometimes manifests itself by direct charges, as when Prescott writes: "In that day the principle that the end justifies the means was fully recognized" (*History of Ferdinand and Isabella*, vol. i. p. 245).

547. False charges are often disguised under the form of **innuendoes**.

"Gibbon," says Prescott, "by a style of innuendo that conveys more than meets the ear, has contrived, with Iago-like duplicity, to breathe a taint of suspicion on the purity which he dares not openly assail" ("Essay on Irving").

This unmanly system of warfare is not uncommon. After Irving has given us such a character of Ferdinand as the

most reliable authorities prove him to have deserved, he continues thus: "It has been added, however, that he had more bigotry than religion, that his ambition was craving rather than magnanimous," etc. Irving does not say that such charges rested on good authority; he merely breathes suspicion on a character which he appears unwilling to assail openly (*History of Columbus*, book ii. c. ii.) Another species of innuendo consists in suggesting unworthy motives where the actions related are honorable, as Irving does in attributing to Ferdinand unworthy motives for encouraging Columbus; and he introduces these motives with a mere *perhaps* (c. iii.)

#### § 5. *False Theories.*

548. **False theories** are a source of falsification which requires special attention, both because they are extensively used by late writers, and because they escape detection on the part of many readers. Macaulay gives a lucid explanation of them:

"The best historians of later times have been seduced from truth, not by their imagination, but by their reason. They far excel their predecessors in the art of deducing general principles from facts. But unhappily they have fallen into the error of distorting facts to suit general principles. They arrive at a theory from looking at some of the phenomena, and the remaining phenomena they strain or curtail to suit the theory. For this purpose it is not necessary that they should assert what is absolutely false. . . . In every human character and transaction there is a mixture of good and evil: a little exaggeration, a little suppression, a judicious use of epithets, a watchful and searching scepticism with respect to the evidence on one side, a convenient credulity with respect to every report or tradition on the other, may easily make a saint of Laud or a tyrant of Henry the Fourth. This species of misrepresentation abounds in the most valuable works of modern historians" (*Essays*, "History").

549. Macaulay applies this criticism to Hume and to



Gibbon, and especially to Mitford's *History of Greece*. Orestes A. Brownson, in his *Quarterly Review* for 1852 (p. 423), applies it to several others:

"Herder, Kant, Hegel, Guizot, Cousin, Michelet, and even Carlyle and Macaulay," he says, "are instances in point, as all who are familiar with their writings need not be informed. None of them give us genuine history; they merely give us their speculations on what is not history, and what, according to those speculations, ought to be history. It is the common error of the modern school of so-called philosophical historians, and to which school Mr. Bancroft belongs, though he is not by any means the worst of the school, to suppose that history may be reduced to the terms of a speculative science, and be written, as it were, *a priori*. 'Give me the geographical position of a people,' says the brilliant and eloquent Cousin, 'and I will give you its history.'"

550. Brownson gives the following **examples of false theories**:

"Herder finds in all history only his ideas of human progress; Kant finds nothing but his categories; Hegel finds the significance and end of all history, the operations of divine Providence, of all mankind, and of all nature, to have been the establishment of the Prussian monarchy; Mr. Bancroft finds that the original purpose of creation, of God and the universe, is fulfilled in the establishment of American democracy."

The same article of Brownson's, in analyzing the entire theory of Bancroft, shows conclusively that the philosophical speculations of that historian are not merely visionary, but fraught with false principles of government and morality tending to the ruin of society. The article deserves most careful study (Brownson's *Quarterly Review* for 1852, "Bancroft").

551. **Carlyle's theory is:**

(a) That the world is ever tending to go wrong. From time to time appear great minds that labor to set it right. These are his "Heroes," who are not to be judged, but

whose conduct is law for us. Such are Oliver Cromwell, Mahomet, Napoleon I., Frederick the Great, as well as St. Paul, Shakspeare, Dante, Burns, Luther, and Calvin; not Voltaire, who only pulled down. "It is from the heart of the world that he [the Hero] comes; he is a portion of the primal reality of things" (Carlyle).

(b) The world is all wrong now: "God's laws are become a Great Happiness Principle, a Parliamentary expediency." "The Universe—a swine's trough," all scrambling for felicity.

(c) Religion is very necessary. It is moral rectitude as understood by Cromwell and the Puritans. They read their duty in themselves; the Bible only aided them. At need they did violence to it. Carlyle is so much their brother that he excuses or admires their excesses. He sets them before us as models, and judges both past and present by them alone. "Carlyle's style has introduced into this country a thoroughly false method of writing history" (Justin MacCarthy).

552. Macaulay, in his *History of England*, disclaims all theory; but, unconsciously perhaps, he inculcates the "Great Happiness Principle," which Carlyle condemns. By this standard everything is judged. Puritanism is good, the Establishment bad, Catholicity worst of all. This last did some good in the Dark Ages, when "the priests, with all their faults, were by far the wisest portion of society"; it is now become "an unjust and noxious tyranny" (*Hist. of England*, chap. i.)

Hence he is more severe on blunders than on crimes. While "under Cromwell hell was the dread of being found guilty before the just Judge, now it is the dread of making a bad speculation or of transgressing etiquette" (Carlyle). Macaulay is the impersonation of the spirit of the world. (See also *Dublin Review* for April, 1886, "Studies of History.")



## ARTICLE VI. THE PLAN OF A HISTORY.

553. To erect a building that shall unite beauty with usefulness we need, besides sound material, a suitable **plan** drawn by a skilful architect. In the same manner the historian must conceive an artistic plan for the composition of his work. Now, everything artistic supposes unity of design. The events that make up a history must be bound together by some connecting principle, which enables the mind to see them in their bearing on one another, and to view them as the portions of one entire group.

554. This unity is easily attained in **particular histories**—that is, in those which narrate one event, such as the Conspiracy of Catiline, the French Revolution of 1789, etc.

But the difficulty is much greater in general or **universal histories**, which deal with various nations, each of which presents an independent series of events. In such works both utility and artistic beauty require that some leading idea shall combine those separate parts into a harmonious whole. The ancients, with their well-known perfection of taste, are here again our models.

555. Thus Herodotus, while embracing in his work all the nations known in his day, arranges the parts so as to develop this one idea: "that the whole empire of Persia, after subjugating and incorporating with itself all the nations of the East, was in its turn conquered by united Greece." His history resembles an heroic poem, in which one great enterprise or action is related. We find ourselves at once in the midst of the events, and we are gradually informed of all that preceded by long episodes appropriately introduced. Both in the main narration, which is the history of the Persian war, and in the various episodes or partial

histories of different lands, one philosophic thought is ever held before us—that of a Nemesis or avenging deity, which causes the exalted to be humbled.

556. **Polybius**, whom Blair pronounces the most successful of all ancient historians in respect to unity, wrote what he calls a *Universal History*—not, indeed, comprising all times, but all nations within a given period; he maintains unity by professing to show "how and by what sort of policy almost all the countries of the inhabited earth, in less than fifty-three years, passed into the power of Rome."

557. **Livy** exhibits "the power of Rome arising from humble beginnings and extending through gradual conquests to universal empire." Thus Livy begins at the centre and spreads to the circumference of Roman power, while Polybius begins at the circumference and unites all its parts with the centre.

558. **Thucydides**, on the contrary, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, has entirely neglected this source of light and beauty. Though his subject possessed the closest unity, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus observes, his account of it has none, but it is cut up into various campaigns, into winters and summers; he leaves one enterprise or expedition unfinished, to carry us away to disconnected events in other parts of Greece. (See Dionys. Halic. Letter to Cneius Pompey.)

559. Among modern historians **Archibald Alison** is very successful in maintaining unity. He had a difficult task to perform, as he had undertaken to write the *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 to the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815*, which he afterwards continued to the accession of Louis Napoleon in 1852. His bond of unity is expressed in the following lines of his preface:

"Its earliest years [*i.e.* of the French Revolution] suggest at



every page reflections on the evils of political fanaticism, and the terrible consequences of democratic fervor; the latter on the debasing effects of absolute despotism and the sanguinary march of military ambition."

Alison's is truly a learned work, but it bears a partisan character. To his mind the English constitution is the ideal of perfection politically, and the Church of England religiously; everything else is measured by its approach to these two standards.

560. **The different parts** also of a large history must have their own principles of unity. For instance, one period of a nation's history may be marked by the steady growth of popular freedom, another by the constant increase of absolutism in the ruling power.

561. It is evident that the **selection of a false principle** or leading idea will cause misconceptions of many events, as if in the history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the author should pretend to see the growth of liberty, whereas those centuries rather promoted the principles of absolutism. When the philosophic ideas which connect or underlie a history are made so prominent that the facts are not fully considered, but only in so far as they bear on the theory or the thesis, the work is then called a philosophical history, or the philosophy of history, of which species we are yet to treat.

#### ARTICLE VII. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FACTS.

562. **The facts should be so developed** as to secure two results—the *artistic beauty* of the narrative, and *proper instruction* for the reader.

##### § 1. *The Artistic Beauty of the Narrative.*

563. The **artistic beauty of the narrative** is attained by

the observance of the precepts laid down for narration (*supra*, book iv. c. iii.)

As an example of the application of these precepts to a history, we shall here add a **criticism of Sallust's "Conspiracy of Catiline,"** confining our remarks to the artistic beauty of the narrative.

564. It is evident that not all the circumstances of that intricate plot, all that was said and done in Rome and elsewhere in connection with it, can be or need be narrated by the historian. He must "exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole." Let us suppose that we see Sallust at work. How does he go about it? He has formed to himself a clear conception of the events. He knows that the conspiracy did not arise suddenly and of itself, nor was it entirely the work of one designing man; but it was the natural outcome of a **combination of causes**, which had been some time developing before they produced so vast an effect.

565. He will, then, begin by showing us those causes at work. This, however, he does not attempt to do by a philosophical discussion, but by an exhibition of the facts. For the sake of unity he seizes upon **one prominent figure**, around which all the separate facts are made to cluster, as the parts in a group of statuary are gathered around one central figure. This prominent figure is Catiline. After his introduction, therefore, the historian at once makes us acquainted with that personage, who is to remain prominently before us during the whole narrative, like the hero of an epic poem.

566. This sketch, or **Character of Catiline**, is certainly a striking picture, perhaps overdrawn so far as truth is concerned, but artistically adapted to arouse interest from the opening of the story.

567. With this commanding figure before us, we are next