

made to review the **history of Rome**, from its simple beginnings to its full development, from the patriarchal virtues of its early founders to the luxury and depravity of those latter days. All this account is expressed in terms pregnant with meaning, but very rapidly, especially the description of former virtues, which forms the background to the picture. Soon we see Rome abandoned to the designing ambition of wicked men, the laws violated with impunity, and wealth and lust replacing all higher aspirations.

568. As a natural consequence we see **the Roman youth corrupt**, leading a life of extravagance and dissipation. Here we have the materials which are to be kindled into a vast conflagration. Now Catiline, whose commanding figure has struck us from the beginning, steps forward to apply the match. His methods of corrupting still further the Roman nobility, the intended tools of his ambition, and of next gaining them and binding them to himself, are most vividly described. With this comes a brief sketch of Catiline's former career, which makes the whole narrative more probable.

569. With No. XVII. begins the narration of **the Conspiracy** itself. So far great skill was required to keep unity in view while tracing the various remote and proximate cause of the events; but unity has been well maintained: all is clear and interesting. Now the narrative becomes more exciting; it reads like a novel or a tragedy. We see the most desperate of the young Roman nobles assembled at night around Catiline. We have his speech almost in his own words—and an artful speech it is, showing the justice and necessity of conspiring. For Sallust understood human nature well: he knew that the most vicious men will hide their wickedness from their own eyes under the cloak of justice, or at least of a sad necessity. Then the plan of action intended by Catiline is more fully devel-

oped; there are stirring scenes, as that of the conspirators pledging themselves to each other in cups of human blood.

570. But now a new personage, **Furius**, is introduced, whose foolish vanity must lead to the discovery of the criminal plot. All this is as naturally developed as in a well-conceived novel. Rome takes the alarm. **Cicero is made consul**. Here, however, it appears that private rancor in Sallust against the noble "Father of his country" prevented the historian from adding another great source of beauty and interest to his narrative. For as every element of evil had skilfully been gathered around Catiline, so now Cicero might and should have been made the central figure of the opposing group. Artistic beauty suggested it; truth required it; and the story would have gained from it in thrilling interest.

571. It will be a useful study to **compare** with Sallust's account of Catiline's Conspiracy the narrative of the Gunpowder Plot in Lingard's *History of England* (vol. vi. c. 1), or, better still, Father Gerard's *Narrative of the Gunpowder Plot*, which is more reliable.

#### § 2. *Proper Instruction for the Reader.*

572. That a history may impart **proper instruction** to the reader, two rules must be observed:

*Rule 1.*—The facts must be narrated without false coloring, so that they may appear to the reader such as they really are.

*Rule 2.*—The historian should not be constantly interrupting his narrative to preach a sermon or point a moral; such practice would be inartistic, blending the historical with the didactic style of composition—as great a fault against good taste as the blending of two styles in architecture.

573. But **should the historian never show himself**, never

aid his readers directly to take the right view of the facts, by saying honestly what he himself thinks of them? This is the point on which critics and historians differ considerably, so that they may be divided into three distinct schools.

574. One school may be called the **Fatalistic School** of history. It wishes the historian not only to utter no judgment on the facts presented, approving some and condemning others, but not even to form such a judgment in his own mind. Writers of this school in reality admit no radical or essential difference between right and wrong; or at most they consider this distinction as a matter of opinion only, which therefore the historian may leave to the taste of the reader. Of this school Thiers and Mignet are the leaders among the French. Bancroft is one of their imitators in this country. As scepticism is spreading, there is a tendency in many late historians to adopt the same course.

575. The second may be called the **Descriptive School**. It allows the historian to form his own judgment, but directs him never to utter it in so many words, but to describe or represent the facts in such a manner as to inculcate his own conclusions on the reader. This is, at present, a very popular school, adopted by some very good men and by many writers of unsound principles.

576. The third may be called the **Judicial School**, in which the historian, like a judge, after fully examining the evidence on both sides, boldly pronounces his judgment, approving and condemning as important occasions may require. This school is that of the ancients; it is best exemplified in Tacitus, the prince of historians, who brands with ignominy the human monsters that bore the sceptre of the Roman Empire during so many calamitous years. To the same school belong, among the moderns, Bossuet in his

*Discourse on Universal History*, Alzog and Darras in their *Histories of the Church*, Ranke in his *History of the Popes*, and a multitude of others of the best historians.

577. The Fatalistic school is utterly unsound in principle and pernicious in practice. Of the two other schools the **Judicial** is, we think, **preferable** for several reasons:

1. It appears to be more honest on the part of the historian to state clearly his views on important events.
2. It is more useful; for the historian, who is supposed to be a man of maturity and wisdom, is better qualified to form such a judgment than ordinary readers, and thus can guide them aright.
3. It is the practice sanctioned by the approbation of ages.

578. 4. The only plausible objection brought against it—viz., that the historian may misjudge the facts—vanishes if we consider that the Descriptive school may mislead its readers as well, and that in a more pernicious manner. For in the Descriptive school the historian inculcates his private judgments by the coloring which he gives to the facts; he does not lead the reader to judge for himself, but he forces his own conclusions on him.

579. 5. The Judicial school adds to the narrative the warmth of genuine passion, which, as the readers of Tacitus well know, contributes more to interest than any degree of ornament. In fact, without such honest warmth that defect is felt for which Prescott blames Gibbon when he says ("Essay on Irving"):

"It is a consequence of this scepticism in Gibbon, as with Voltaire, that his writings are nowhere warmed with a generous moral sentiment. The most sublime of all spectacles, that of the martyr who suffers for conscience' sake, . . . is contemplated by the historian with the smile, or rather sneer, of philosophic indifference. This is not only bad taste, as he is addressing a Christian audience,

but he thus voluntarily relinquishes one of the most powerful engines for the movement of human passion, which is never so easily excited as by deeds of suffering, self-devoted heroism."

Certainly, the Judicial manner of writing history may be abused; but every good thing may be abused, and the Descriptive manner is still more liable to this objection.

## ARTICLE VIII. THE STYLE OF HISTORY.

580. As history is one of the noblest and most dignified species of composition, all critics mention dignity as the chief quality of **historical style**. But **dignity** does not mean pomposity; and such writers as Gibbon, Robertson, and Bancroft become less interesting by their excess of stateliness. Prescott says:

"The historian of the *Decline and Fall* too rarely forgets his own importance in that of his subject. The consequence which he attaches to his personal labors is shown in a bloated dignity of expression and an ostentation of ornament that contrast whimsically enough with the trifling topics and commonplace thoughts on which, in the course of his long work, they are occasionally employed. He nowhere moves along with the easy freedom of nature, but seems to leap, as it were, from triad to triad by a succession of strained, convulsive efforts" (*Miscell.*, "Irving").

In what, then, consists the dignity of style which history requires?

581. **Dignity consists, (a) in a proper gravity**, which Blair explains thus:

"Gravity must always be maintained in the narration. There must be no meanness nor vulgarity in the style; no quaint nor colloquial phrases; no affectation of pertness or wit. The smart or the sneering manner of telling a story is inconsistent with the historical character. I do not say that the historian is never to let himself down. He may sometimes do it with propriety, in order to diversify the strain of his narration, which, if it be perfectly uniform, is apt

to become tiresome. But he should be careful never to descend too far; and on occasions when a light or ludicrous anecdote is proper to be recorded, it is generally better to throw it into a note than to hazard becoming too familiar by introducing it into the body of the work" (Lecture xxxvi.)

582. It consists, (*b*) in the use of such **ornaments of style** as will set off the thoughts to the best advantage, without, however, diverting the attention of the reader from the thoughts to the figures, from the march of the events to the harmonious flow of the sentences. History admits of a rich style, as rich as any other species of prose composition; but no writing admits of bombast—*i.e.*, of more sound than sense, such as we find in the following lines of Bancroft (*Hist. of U. S.*, vol. i. p. 209):

"It is one of the surprising results of moral power that language, composed of fleeting sounds, retains and transmits the remembrance of past occurrences long after every monument has passed away. Of the labors of the Indians on the soil of Virginia there remains nothing so respectable as would be a common ditch for the draining of lands; the memorials of their former existence are found only in the names of their rivers and their mountains. Unchanging nature retains the appellations which were given by those whose villages have disappeared and whose tribes have become extinct."

The middle sentence would have been all-sufficient.

583. **Exactness** is a second quality of style in history. It consists in expressing just what the historian means, and not merely something like it. For instance, one of the sources of vagueness in the first sentence of the passage just quoted is the use of the word *moral* in a meaning which the word does not properly bear; for 'moral' regards law, or the distinction of right and wrong, which is not in question here.

584. Exactness should affect even the smallest words and the apparently insignificant portions of a sentence; an ill-chosen or ill-placed adjective or adverb is often enough to

give a wrong notion to the reader which will accompany him through life. But this quality is **particularly required** with regard to the names of men and places, the dates of events, and similar minutiae, which perhaps make no great show in the work, but which must be distinctly and carefully noted if the events are to be rightly understood. It has often happened that an inexactness in such details has involved historical events in considerable confusion.

585. **Calmness** is a third quality which should belong to historical style. For the historian is like a judge who has examined a cause thoroughly, and who gives us the wise conclusions at which his mind has coolly and deliberately arrived. Strong passion is inimical to correctness of thought and expression. Macaulay, for example, is evidently too passionate on many occasions; and the sensational style of Carlyle would strip history of that calm dignity which so becomes its character. Still, we have seen that a certain glow of feeling is highly proper in the language of an honest historian, and we have quoted Prescott as censuring Gibbon and Voltaire for their apathy at the sight of heroic virtue (No. 579).

#### ARTICLE IX. VARIOUS SPECIES OF HISTORICAL WRITING.

586. The following are the **principal species** of historical writing: history proper; annals, memoirs, and travels; philosophical histories; and biographies.

##### § 1. *History proper.*

587. **History proper**, called by Polybius and by German critics 'Pragmatical,' embraces *general, particular, and special* histories.

588. **A general history** treats of several nations, as Alison's *History of Modern Europe*. If it embraces all nations and times it is properly called **universal**. General histo-

ries should (a) suppress minor details, so that the important events, names, and dates stand out prominently; (b) observe due proportion among the parts—for instance, in a general history of the Church one country should not engross most of the attention of the writer.

589. **A particular history** treats of one nation, one province, one event, as Lingard's *History of England*, Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, etc. It enters more into detail, offers more picturesque passages, more dramatic scenes.

590. **A special history** relates events in as far only as they bear on one science, one art, one special consideration; such is Bossuet's *History of the Variations of Protestantism*, any history of painting, commerce, literature, etc. The advantage of special histories is that they throw a concentrated light on one particular branch of study.

##### § 2. *Annals, Memoirs, and Travels.*

591. **Annals or Chronicles** are not so much histories as a supply of materials for future histories. Being mere records of events penned down from day to day, they require no plan nor deep thought, but fidelity and distinctness throughout, and completeness with regard to all matters of importance. They need not be elegantly worded; still, as Prescott observes, we find that some chronicles of the middle ages, in spite of their ill-formed and obsolete idiom, are read with more delight than many modern histories of high pretensions, because their narrative is more spirited (*Miscell.*, p. 107).

We may mention here the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists, S.J., a learned collection of biographies and of records from which the lives of the saints are usually written. Baronius' *Annales Ecclesiastici* contain the history of the Church from the first to the sixteenth century. Both

these most valuable works rise far above the dignity of ordinary annals.

592. **Memoirs** relate such facts as have fallen under the personal observation of the writer. They descend from the stateliness of the historic style; they should be sprightly and interesting, give useful information with regard to facts and characteristic traits of persons. Cardinal Wiseman's *Recollections of the Four Last Popes*, General Sherman's *Memoirs*, are examples in point. *Cæsar's Commentaries* of the Gallic and the Civil Wars are the most perfect memoirs in existence.

593. **Travels** may be ranked with memoirs as furnishing the materials for future histories. Such are the graphic narratives of the great American missionary Father De Smet, Livingstone's African and Kane's Arctic Explorations, Vetromile's Travels in the Holy Land, etc.

### § 3. *Philosophical Histories.*

594. **Philosophical histories** are those in which the principles derived from the facts are made more prominent than the facts themselves. When the work is so taken up with theories that it resembles an essay rather than a narrative, it is called a **philosophy of history**.

595. Philosophical histories are of comparatively recent origin. The first in time, and so far the grandest in conception, is Bossuet's **Discourse on Universal History**, the English version of which is unfortunately garbled, omitting whatever is distinctively Catholic. The work enables us to realize the definition which Bunsen gives of history, as "that most sacred epic or dramatic poem, of which God is the author, humanity the hero, and the historian the philosophical interpreter." Bossuet's idea is to unveil the workings of Providence in the government of mankind.

596. **Voltaire**, in his *Essai sur les Mœurs* and in his *His-*

*tory of Louis XIV.*, exhibits his anti-Christian theories, which made Prescott say: "He resembled the allegorical agents of Milton, paving the way across the gulf of Chaos for the spirits of mischief to enter more easily upon the earth" (*Miscell.*, p. 99).

597. **Montesquieu**, in his *Grandeur et Décadence des Romains*, used the facts of history simply as the arguments of a thesis, or, as Prescott calls it, "the ingredients from which the spirit was to be extracted. But this was not always the spirit of truth" (*Ib.* p. 100).

598. **Buckle's History of Civilization** is but a fragment of what was intended to be a voluminous work. It is brilliant in style but weak in logic; its spirit is infidel.

599. **Guizot** wrote his *History of Civilization* in a Christian spirit. It is full of novel views, of sagacious inductions, of pathetic eloquence, but also of capital errors. It pays some glowing tributes to the Catholic Church; but the author, being an alien, often fails to understand this divine institution, and grossly misconceives its legislation.

600. The most valuable Philosophy of History is **Balmes'** noble work, *Protestantism and Catholicity compared in their Effects on the Civilization of Europe*. It analyzes the history of modern times, and discusses all the vital questions which have agitated the civilized world in the last three centuries. It combines varied information, lofty views, sound principles, close reasoning, all expressed in a noble style, whose eloquence is preserved in the English translation.

### § 4. *Biography.*

601. **Biography** is the history of the life and character of a particular person. Such writings present two **advantages**:

1. They throw light upon general history; for it is a

common saying that the history of the world is to a great extent the record of the great men of the world. Such men exert a powerful influence upon all around them, and usually contribute greatly to shape the events of the age in which they live, and even of future ages. Their influence, however, has been exaggerated by some writers, particularly by Carlyle in his lectures on Heroes. The great events of the world's history have generally deeper and wider causes than the character of one or two individuals. Still, it is true that Almighty God raises up great geniuses at proper times to accomplish His designs of mercy or justice on the nations. Thus He raised Cyrus for the establishment, and Alexander for the overthrow, of the Persian empire, and both these conquerors for the protection of His chosen people (Josephus, *Antiq.*, xi. c. 8; Daniel viii.)

602. 2. Biographies aid the reader to understand human nature more thoroughly when he studies it in the passions, the virtues, and the foibles of remarkable characters. He will there find that man, as such, is in many respects a feeble and very defective being, elevated, however, at times by the principles which he imbibes, and by the natural or supernatural strength of will and intellect with which he carries these principles into effect.

603. Knowing now the two advantages to be aimed at, we shall readily discover the **rules which the biographer must follow.**

*Rule 1.*—Only very remarkable men and women should be made the **subjects** of biographies—such persons as have widely influenced public events, or such as afford the reader special opportunities for studying the workings of human nature or the operations of divine grace.

*Rule 2.*—The writer should clearly trace the **influence** which the subject of his biography exercised over persons

or events, avoiding the common mistake of introducing irrelevant facts with which he had but little to do.

*Rule 3.*—He must exhibit the true **character** of his hero: the motives of his conduct, the grasp of his intellect, the principles which he has adopted, the promptings of his passions, the power or the weakness of his will, the causes that have contributed to the development of his virtues or his vices. We may refer to Father Morris' *Life of St. Thomas Becket* as a model in this respect. Characters are often better represented by mentioning sayings, incidents, etc., than by the description of battles and other public exploits. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is replete with familiar traits.

*Rule 4.*—The facts narrated, even the familiar traits and incidents, must be drawn from **authentic sources** or from personal knowledge. Of late the practice has gained ground of quoting liberally in biographies from the letters and other writings of the persons concerned; and the results of this innovation are very gratifying. Thus Father Coleridge gives us the **Life and Letters** of St. Francis Xavier, Father Bowden those of F. W. Faber. Bouhours had already written in French an excellent biography of St. Xavier, which the poet Dryden thought it worth his while to translate into English. It seemed difficult to surpass this masterpiece, but extensive quotations from the Saint's own letters have enabled Coleridge to overcome the difficulty.

604. **A danger to be guarded against** in biographies is an excess of admiration or hatred for the character described. Carlyle idolizes his hero Oliver Cromwell; Abbott extols Napoleon I., while Scott undervalues the qualities of this great genius. No human work is perfect.

605. Still, **literature is rich in successful biographies;** the

**Latin** *Lives* of Cornelius Nepos and the **Greek** *Lives* of Plutarch are deservedly admired. The latter gains much interest for his biographies by presenting them in pairs, comparing a Grecian with a Roman character; but fidelity to truth is often wanting. Xenophon's *Cyropædia* is highly praised for its literary qualities, but not for the truth of its narrative. Tacitus' *Life of Agricola* is a work unsurpassed in merit.

606. Of **French** biographies we may mention with special praise Audin's *Lives of Luther, Calvin, Henry VIII., and Leo X.*; Baunard's *Life of Madame Barat*, the foundress of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and his *Life of Madame Duchesne*. (See also *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, 1878, p. 321, on Pope Alexander VI.)

607. In **English** model biographies are numerous; in particular, Miss Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England and of Scotland*, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, Sparks' *American Biographies*, Clarke's *Deceased Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Kathleen O'Meara's *Life of Ozanam*, Thompson's *Lives of St. Aloysius and St. Stanislaus*. The *Life of Washington*, by Washington Irving, is probably the most elaborate and most successful biography written in the English language.

608. There are many modern works of considerable historical and literary value which comprise not merely the life, but the **life and times** together, of some distinguished personage. In such books the hero must never be lost sight of; for unity requires that only those events be introduced which have some real connection with the leading character. All must be made to cluster around him, without, however, attributing to him more influence than he really exercised. Among the most valuable works of this kind are Hurter's *Life of Innocent III.*, Voigt's *Life of*

*Gregory VII.*, Hübner's *Sixtus V.*, Hefele's *Ximenes*, Montalembert's *Life and Times of St. Elizabeth of Hungary*.

609. In **conclusion** we may remark that while in many species of literature the highest point of perfection appears to have been reached, and a decline to have set in, history has been remarkably improved within this century, and there seems to be, in the minds of many, an earnest determination to establish on earth the reign of historic truth.