

UNIVERSAL HISTORY.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

Various plans of historical prelections—Chronological method—Method of treating history as subservient only to the science of politics—Plan of the present work—Division by epochs rejected, and why—a predominant nation always the principal object—Ancient history—Greece—Collateral objects, Egypt, Phœnicia, &c.—Views of government, science, arts, &c.—Rome, its collateral and incidental objects of history—Decline of the empire—Gothic nations—Modern history—Saracens—Charlemagne—Laws, &c. of that age—Britain—Continental European kingdoms—Crusades—Russia, Switzerland—Fall of Eastern empire—Moors—Portuguese discoveries—The Reformation—Asia—India—Revolt of the Netherlands—Age of Henry IV. and Elizabeth—Revolution and close of British history—Spain—France—Sweden—Age of Louis XIV.—Charles XII.—Peter the Great—Conclusion—Progress of Science and Literature in Europe.

INGENIOUS men, whose department in the course of education, both in the foreign universities and in our own, was the science of universal history, have followed different methods or plans of historical prelections. In some of the universities of the Continent, the Epitome of Turselline has been used as a text-book, on which the lectures of the professor were an extended commentary, giving considerable amplitude, and consequently illustration, to what is little more than a dry, though a very perspicuous chronicle of events, from the creation of the world to the end of the seventeenth century. Such were the lectures of Peter Burman, who for many years sustained a high reputation as Professor of History at Utrecht; and such were likewise the prelections of Professor Mackie, in the University of Edinburgh. They were composed in the Latin language, which, down to the middle of the 18th century, was the universal vehicle of academical instruction; an institution which, although attended with one important benefit, namely, the support and diffusion of classical learning, has perhaps been wisely laid aside as unfavorable to the ample and copious illustration of a

science which cannot easily be given but in the vernacular tongue. The lectures on the Epitome of Turselline, which I have mentioned, were, therefore, as might be expected, little more than a dry narration of facts. If, in order to derive profit from history, nothing more were necessary than that the memory should be stored with all the remarkable events that have occurred from the Creation to the present time, properly arranged in the order in which they happened, there could be no better book than the Epitome of Turselline, or the more enlarged *Rationarium* of Petavius. But books of this kind, and illustrations of such authors, when they are nothing more than amplifications of their text, have neither the charms of history nor its utility. As they contain no display of character, nor any spirit of reflection, they are incapable of either exciting the feelings, animating the curiosity, or stimulating the powers of the understanding: and without these qualities, they want even the power of impressing the memory; for where the attention is not vigorously kept awake, either by the excitement of some passion, or the stimulus of a rational curiosity, exercised in developing the springs and consequences of events, we listen with indifference even to the most orderly and perspicuous narration, and no durable impression is made upon the mind.

Aware of these obvious consequences, and sensible that historical prelections on a plan of this kind were inadequate to the purpose of conveying useful knowledge or improvement, some professors, of acknowledged abilities, have in the instruction of their pupils pursued a method entirely opposite. They have considered history in no other light than as furnishing documents and proofs illustrative of the science of politics and the law of nations. In this view, laying down a regular system of political science, their historical lectures were no other than disquisitions on the several heads or titles of public law, illustrated by examples drawn from ancient and modern history.

By this latter method, it is not to be denied that much useful knowledge may be communicated; and where the professed object is the study of politics, or that instruction which is commonly termed *diplomatic*, it is the proper plan to be pursued. But the study of history, and that of politics, though closely allied to each other, and kindred sciences, are still different branches of mental discipline; the one preparatory and subservient to the other. The student of politics or public law is presumed to have that previous acquaintance with history which it is the object of a course of historical study to communicate; and without such acquaintance his study of politics will be altogether idle and fruitless. A little reflection will suffice to convince us that it is not possible, in the most ample and judicious course of lectures on history, to convey such a knowledge of political economy as may be communicated in a course of prelections on that science; for this plain reason, that in lectures on history, politics cannot be treated as a regular

and connected system. But much less is it possible in a course of prelections on political economy to communicate to the student a sufficient knowledge of history: for in such prelections, history must lose all connection whatever, and become nothing else than a magazine of facts, taken at random from the annals of all different nations, without regard to time or the order of events, but selected merely as they happen to furnish a convenient illustration. In this way, we see but imperfectly that chain which joins effects to their causes; we lose all view of the gradual progress of manners, the advancement of man from barbarism to civilization, and thence to refinement and corruption; we see nothing of the connection of states and empires, or the mutual influence which they have upon each other; above all, we lose entirely the best benefit of history, its utility as a school of morals.

As the two plans I have mentioned are in a manner opposite extremes—the one possessing nothing but method, without any reflection; the other a great deal of reflection, but without method—it has been my endeavor, in the following Commentaries on Universal History, to steer a middle course, and by endeavoring to remedy the imperfection of either method, to unite, if possible, the advantages of both.

While, therefore, so much regard is paid to the chronological order of events as is necessary for exhibiting the progress of mankind in society, and communicating just views of the state of the world in all the different ages to which authentic history extends, I shall, in the delineation of the rise and fall of empires, and the revolutions of states, pay more attention to the connection of *subject* than that of *time*.

In this view, I shall reject entirely the common method of arranging general history according to certain epochs or eras; and this, as I conceive, upon sufficient grounds. The arguments commonly used for this method of arrangement are, 1. The great help it affords to the memory for fixing the chronological dates of remarkable events in the history of any particular nation; and 2. The assistance which these epochs give to the mind, towards forming distinct ideas of all that is passing at the same period of time through all the different states or kingdoms. The first of these arguments supposes the epochs to be taken chiefly from the history of a single nation; as those of the Bishop of Meaux (M. Bossuet) in his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, an admirable work of its peculiar kind, and which justly maintains a great reputation. In this luminous epitome, the history of all the different states and kingdoms is arranged according to some remarkable events taken, for the greatest part, from the *History of the Jews*. The second argument supposes the epochs taken from the history of different nations, and to be such remarkable events as had a general influence on mankind, or an effect upon the state of society, over a considerable portion of the globe. Such are the epochs

assumed by M. Mehegan in his *Tableau de l'Histoire Universelle*; or those of the *Abbé Millot*, in his *Elémens de l'Histoire Générale*.

With regard to the former of these methods, namely, that of M. Bossuet, there can be no doubt, that by calling the attention particularly to a few great and striking events in the history of any nation, the precise date of these great events may be very easily impressed upon the memory. They serve as great landmarks, and the mind easily recollects their place and the time of their erection; but this is nearly all the benefit we derive from them. They afford no help towards fixing the dates, or even the order and succession of the intermediate events, many of which may be highly important, and equally deserving of remembrance as the epoch itself. Nay, there is even a probability that the recollection of those epochs may tend to confound the chronological order of the intermediate events, by referring them all to one common era which alone is fixed upon the memory: But, to remember the order and regular succession of events, is all that is of use or importance in chronological history. It is a matter of small importance to record in the mind the precise date of any remarkable fact as it stands in a table of chronology. If actions and events preserve in the mind their due series and relation to each other, a critical accuracy with respect to the years of the Julian period in which they happened, or the precise Olympiad, is mere useless pedantry.

The history of the Jews is of the greatest importance, as being the venerable basis of the Christian religion. It is therefore deserving of the most profound and attentive study. But the Jews, during the chief periods of their history, were a small and sequestered people, whose annals record only their connections, or their hostile differences with the petty tribes which surrounded them, or the nations in their immediate neighborhood. It was therefore injudicious in M. Bossuet, whose object was to exhibit a view of universal history, to make this nation the great and prominent group in his painting of the world, to which all the other parts of his extensive picture were subordinate. In the selection of many of his epochs—as for instance, the Calling of Abraham, the Promulgation of the Law by Moses, and the Building of Solomon's Temple—he affords us no assistance in the arrangement of events in the great empires of antiquity, with which the Jews in those remote periods had no connection.

The epochs of Mehegan and of Millot, if considered only as sections or divisions of the subject, are chosen with sufficient propriety. Thus the Roman history is divided by Millot into several epochs, as the Kings—the Consuls—the Tribunes of the People—the Decemvirs—Rome taken by the Gauls—the war with Pyrrhus, &c. Such an arrangement is well adapted to the history of a single nation, and it may afford some little aid to the recollec-

tion of intermediate events in the annals of that nation: but where the object is a delineation of general history, or of all that is passing in the world at the same period of time, this method has not the same advantage. Thus, for example, in the *Tableau de l'Histoire Moderne* of Mehegan, the seventh epoch is Christopher Columbus, 1492, being the date of his discovery of America. The next epoch is the peace of Westphalia, between France, Sweden, and the Empire, in 1648. Supposing these epochs to be easily remembered, it may be asked what help they afford towards the recollection of the dates of any of the intermediate events in this interval of one hundred and fifty-six years, or of the order in which they succeeded each other. Yet some of these were among the most remarkable that have occurred in the annals of the world: for instance, the Reformation in Germany and England—the Revolt of the Netherlands, and the Establishment of the Republic of the United Provinces—the Edict of Nantes, giving toleration to the Protestants in France—the Expulsion of the Moors from Spain. The recollection that the discovery of America happened in 1492, affords no help to the remembrance of the time of the Reformation, nor tends to fix in the memory whether the expulsion of the Moors preceded or followed the revolution of the Netherlands. The classing of these unconnected events under one general epoch, tends only to a confused reference of them all to one date, although, between them, there was almost a century of difference of time.

Besides, in every method of classification, there ought to be a relation between the objects classified, which the mind at once perceives, so that the idea of the one naturally leads to or suggests that of the other. Now such connection it is evident there cannot be in such an arrangement, where the events happening in a certain period of time over the whole globe, are all referred to one event that happened in the first year of that period, in one particular nation.

The division of Universal History into epochs, goes upon this idea, that a comprehensive picture is to be presented to the view of all the remarkable events and actions which were going forward upon the face of the earth at the same period of time. Now, a picture of this kind, if equal justice is done to every part of it, would present a most confused and uninstrucive composition. In order to preserve the strict chronological order, many of the most important public events which are progressive, and of considerable duration, must be interrupted, almost in their commencement, or in the middle of their progress; and the attention carried off to an infinite variety of different objects and scenes, totally unconnected with each other. Thus, M. Bossuet makes no scruple to transport his reader in a single sentence from Jerusalem to Lacedæmon, from the atrocities of Jehu in exterminating the royal house of Judah, and the criminal usurpation of Athaliah, to the foundation

of the Spartan republic, and the politic plans of Lycurgus; and, with equal impropriety, he hurries back the reader in the next sentence to the conclusion of the history of Athaliah, the punishment of her crimes, and the restoration of Joas, king of Judah, to the throne of his ancestors.

But what are the advantages of this strict chronological order, that we must sacrifice so much to it? Order is beautiful, but it is no otherwise so than as subservient to utility; and a whimsical order confounds, instead of elucidating. We certainly make a bad exchange, if we lose all ideas of a connected history of any single nation, and all the important lessons which arise from remarking the progress of events, and the chain which links them with their causes, for the sake of a forced association of events happening in distant nations, which have no other connection than that of time.

I shall now briefly lay down that plan which I propose to follow in these Commentaries on Universal History.

When the world is viewed at any period, either of ancient or of modern history, we generally observe one nation or empire predominant, to whom all the rest bear, as it were, an underpart, and to whose history we find, in general, that the principal events in other nations may be referred from some natural connection.

This predominant nation I propose to exhibit to view as the principal object, whose history, as being in reality the most important, is therefore to be more fully delineated; while the rest, as subordinate, are brought into view only when they come to have an obvious connection with the principal. The antecedent history of such subordinate nations will then be traced in a short retrospect of their own annals. Such collateral views, which figure only as episodes, I shall endeavor so to regulate, as that they shall have no hurtful effect in violating the unity of the principal piece.

For the earliest periods of the history of the world, we have no records of equal authority with the Sacred Scriptures. They ascend to a period antecedent to the formation of regular states or communities, they are long prior to the authentic annals of the profane nations,* and they are, therefore, our only lights on those distant and dark ages of the infancy of the human race.

* Moses conducted the Israelites out of Egypt 1491 years before the birth of Christ, according to the Chronology of Usher. Sanchoniatho, supposed the most ancient of the profane writers, lived several years after the Trojan war (B. C. 1184;) and the fragments which pass under his name are of the most doubtful authority. They were compiled, as Philo of Biblos informs us, from certain ancient Ammonian records, which, amidst a great mass of fabulous and allegorical matter, contained, as was supposed, some historical facts, which Sanchoniatho has extracted. Homer lived, as is believed, about a century later than Sanchoniatho. Cadmus of Miletus the first prose historian among the profane writers, flourished under Cyrus about 540 years before Christ.

Among the profane nations of antiquity, that which first makes a remarkable figure, and whose history at the same time has a claim to be regarded as authentic, is the states of Greece. They therefore demand a peculiar attention, and it is of importance to trace their history to its origin. But the Greeks were indebted for the greatest part of their knowledge to the Egyptians and Phœnicians. These, therefore, as relative to the leading nation, demand a portion of our attention, and naturally precede, or pave the way to, the history of the Greeks. For a similar reason, the Assyrians, a rival nation, conquered by the Egyptians at one time, and conquerors of them afterwards in their turn, (though their early history is extremely dark and uncertain,) require likewise a share in our observation.

The Greeks then come to fill up the whole of the picture, and we endeavor to present an accurate delineation of their independent states, the singular constitution of the two great republics of Sparta and Athens, and the outlines of their history, down to the period of the Persian war, commenced by Darius, the son of Hystaspes, and prosecuted under his successors Xerxes and Artaxerxes. This connection naturally induces a short retrospect to the preceding periods of the Persian history; the rise of that monarchy, the nature of its government, the manners of the people, and the singular religion of the ancient Persians, which subsisted without much adulteration for some thousands of years, and is still kept alive among a particular sect at this day.

The conclusion of the Persian war brings us back to the internal history of the states of Greece. We observe the subjection of Athens to the ambitious Pericles, and the seeds sown of the decline of that illustrious republic. The divisions of Greece engage our attention; the war of Peloponnesus; the corruption of the Spartan constitution introduced by Lysander; the glory of Thebes under Pelopidas and Epaminondas. We consider now the ambitious schemes of Philip of Macedon, the renewal of the war with Persia, and the immense conquests of Alexander the Great. We see, in fine, the total corruption of the Greeks; the extinction of all public virtue; the last feeble remains of patriotism in the union of the Achæan states; and the final reduction and submission of Greece to the arms of the Romans.

The history of this illustrious people, the Greeks, furnishes a most ample field of reflection. The policy and constitution of the different states, particularly the two great and rival republics of Athens and Lacedæmon, demand our attention, as singularly illustrative of ancient manners, and the wonderful effects of habit and discipline on the nature of man. The causes which contributed to the rise and decline of those commonwealths are pregnant with political instruction. The change which the national character of the Greeks in general underwent, is a striking circumstance in the history of human nature, and will illustrate the influence of morals