

## ARTICLE III.

BUCKLE'S HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION<sup>1</sup>

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THE recent death of Mr. Buckle took the world by surprise. In the prime of life, possessed of an ample fortune, and free from the cares and hardships which cut short the days of many literary men, he might have been expected to reach the green old age enjoyed so often by English scholars and statesmen. When Lord Macaulay, after a long and brilliant career in literature and statesmanship, announced his purpose "to write the history of England from the accession of king James the Second down to a time which is within the memory of men still living," his most hopeful readers doubted if the work, postponed to so late a period of life, would ever be completed. But when Mr. Buckle, in his thirty-fifth year, published the first volume of his great work, and announced that several others were in a state of forwardness, men of letters anticipated that, like Hume and Gibbon, he would give to the world a *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεῖ*, a work, by its originality and learning, sure of immortality. The grave has closed over both historians, and the work of each is unfinished; but Lord Macaulay has left a classic torso, beautiful in incompleteness; Mr. Buckle has left only a gigantic fragment, suggestive, like the fossil rib of a mastodon, of vast stature and prodigious strength.

The story of his life, told in this country for the first time since his decease, gives the clue to the singular defects of his character and his History. He was an insatiable reader from his childhood, like John Milton; and like Milton, too, was blessed with an indulgent father, proud of his abilities, and willing to release him from care and toil, and leave him to

<sup>1</sup> History of Civilization in England. By Henry Thomas Buckle, Vols. I. II. New York: D. Appleton and Co.

woo the muses at his own sweet will. But, unlike Milton, he escaped the severe discipline of English schools and universities, and was left, at the early age of fourteen, to consult his own tastes in study, without the guidance or control of wise teachers. Such a method of study yielded its natural fruits. The undisciplined boy grew up to manhood, with an overweening confidence in self, and a hearty contempt for men and institutions beyond the range of his personal sympathies. The intense dogmatism of his history is a natural sequel to his distorted education. Two or three years on the lower forms of Rugby or Eton, with a constrained submission to older boys, and to monitors and teachers, or the experience of men and life gained by a competition with equals at Cambridge or Oxford, might have supplemented original mental defects, and made him a wiser man and a more discriminating historian. Mr. Coleridge always confessed a great obligation to one of his masters who had given him a sound flogging in boyhood, for impudence in broaching sceptical opinions; and one has an instinctive feeling, in reading our author's crude theories, that a similar discipline in his boyhood might have exerted a wholesome influence.

Mr. Buckle entered on his literary career with high hopes. He aspired to the fame of a discoverer. He wished to be honored in the new science of history as a Copernicus, who first comprehended the relations of man to nature, solved the mysteries enveloping human progress, and disclosed the subtle causes which control social revolutions.<sup>1</sup> He had little respect for the laborers who had preceded him in this

<sup>1</sup> "I hope to accomplish for the history of man something equivalent, or at all events analogous, to what has been effected by other inquirers for the different branches of natural science. In regard to nature, events apparently the most irregular and capricious have been explained, and have been shown to be in accordance with certain fixed and universal laws. This has been done because men of ability, and, above all, men of patient, untiring thought, have studied natural events with the view of discovering their regularity; and if human events were subjected to a similar treatment, we have every right to expect similar results." — Vol. I. p. 5.

field of inquiry. They were, in his opinion, only blind leaders of the blind. The theories of religion and race and government, by which they interpreted the movements of history, were of no more value than the cycles and epicycles by which Ptolemy explained the movements of the solar system. He assumed to make known simple and intelligible laws, which regulate all human progress, and to demonstrate that "the movements of nations are perfectly regular, and, like all other movements, are solely determined by their antecedents" (vol. ii. 205). Astronomy had grown into a science, he said, by setting aside the dreams of the astrologer; and chemistry, by discarding the arts of the magician. History could be raised to the same dignity by eliminating from it the antiquated ideas of a supernatural providence, and the freedom of the human will, and the influences of race and government and religion. "There can be no science of history so long as one holds that the actions of men are determined, not by fixed law, but by free-will, or by supernatural influences or providence" (i. 6).

In place of such theories, called with characteristic energy "the druff and offal of a bygone age," he aimed to prove that the character and destiny of nations are determined by the food they eat, the soil they cultivate, the climate which enfolds them, and the natural phenomena with which they are conversant. The knowledge of these phenomena he considered the only lever by which man can be lifted from barbarism to civilization, and the degree to which this knowledge is diffused as the ultimate test of social progress. To demonstrate this theory, by showing that the leading nations of the world have attained their greatness in accordance with its methods, is the object proposed in Mr. Buckle's *History*. The first volume summons France and England to the bar as witnesses; the second volume professes to present conclusive testimony from Scotland and Spain.

Mr. Buckle brought to his work many extraordinary qualifications, even his enemies being judges. He was inspired by a lofty enthusiasm, which transmuted the

drudgery of toil into pleasure, and made him indifferent to the praise or censure of the world. He had a vast and multifarious learning, which, though sometimes superficial, and often paraded with an offensive pedantry, was generally remarkable for accuracy no less than breadth. Diligent students marvelled at the range of his researches, and the tenacity of his memory. Men of small mental stature are cumbered by great learning, like David with Saul's armor, and lose the power of original thought. Mr. Buckle was always the master, never the slave, of his learning. He was an original thinker, as well as a ripe scholar. His pages are full of profound and bold and suggestive thoughts, which quicken the sluggish reader, and startle or delight the reflective mind. His style is unsurpassed by any historian; never dull or careless, never cumbrous or obscure, it is singularly elastic, changing readily with its subject; now simple in narrative; now vigorous and sinewy in statement; and anon rising, in argument, into a majestic eloquence. It is always employed, too, simply as the vehicle of thought, and expresses with exactness the author's precise shade of meaning.

These are good qualities, entitling their possessor to a high rank in the world of letters. We concede them to Mr. Buckle in an uncommon degree. But they do not make a historian. His mental deficiencies or eccentricities were equally marked, some of them due to natural temperament, others to an unfortunate education, and they disqualify him for a candid and trustworthy writer of history.

He was a materialist in philosophy. Differing in a few particulars from Comte and the Positive School, he agreed with him in ascribing to material causes the growth of nations, and the forms of social institutions. This philosophy may be adequate to the discovery of the laws of natural science, but the great problems of history will elude its analysis. A mole, burrowing in a cornfield, is quite as capable of interpreting the movements of the heavens, as a materialistic philosopher of interpreting the movements of

mankind, who is blind to the fact of a personal God, as a force immanent in nature; of an intelligent Providence, shaping the destiny of nations by the eternal laws of justice; and of the human will, as a power superior to natural forces.

The materialism of our author sinks to a lower level, by many degrees, than Mr. Darwin's. The latter resolves man into a developed monad, guided in its progress towards intelligence by the unerring law of natural selection. But after the monad has culminated in man, it is freed from the mastery of physical forces, and becomes a sovereign, by virtue of reason and will. The origin may be ignoble; the stages of progress, through which the ascent is made, may be humiliating; but man himself approaches to divinity in his power to comprehend the laws of the universe, and to control its forces for his own use. But the philosophy of Mr. Buckle makes man the servant instead of the lord of nature, and the slave instead of the master of circumstances. He is held in bondage by physical laws, and denied even the power of the nascent lion in Milton's pagan cosmology, "pawing to get free." The "Prometheus Bound" of Aeschylus could find no place in the human family, by the psychology of this system. It is obvious that one holding such low views of human nature is unprepared to write human history.

Nor did Mr. Buckle correct the errors of his philosophy by a large practical experience. He had little knowledge of men. He was a student in the cloister, not an observer in the living world. He solved difficult problems by theory, not by experience; by looking into his books, rather than looking into real life. Nor was this habit an arbitrary or accidental one. It was adopted deliberately, as essential to the highest success in historical study. In the finest passage in his second volume, which, under the guise of an exposition of the aims and methods of the historian, may be regarded as an elaborate eulogy of himself, he says:

"Some of the most pleasurable incentives to action he must disregard. Not for him are those rewards which, in other pursuits, the same energy

would have earned; not for him the sweets of popular applause; not for him the luxury of power; not for him a share in the councils of his country; not for him a conspicuous and honored place before the public eye. Albeit conscious of what he could do, he may not compete in the great contest; he cannot hope to win the prize; he cannot even enjoy the excitement of the struggle. To him the arena is closed."— II. 256.

This theory we believe to be radically false, and fidelity to it has caused some of the fatal blemishes in his History. The great masters in this department have been also leaders in the state, or magnates in the social world. Thucydides, Livy, Machiavelli, Guizot, Thiers, Niebuhr, and Macaulay had a long experience in public life, and could say of the great events which they narrated, some of them, like Aeneas, "quorum magna pars fui;" others, with more modesty, "haud ignotus loquor." Tacitus and Hume and Gibbon were not retired scholars, but men of the world, whose intimate knowledge of all classes of society enabled them to penetrate to the subtle springs of human action. But Mr. Buckle learned little of men by mingling with his race, and this practical ignorance is obvious in his History. He writes like a philosopher, to defend a theory; not like a historian tracing the steps of human progress, in the successive triumphs of mind over matter, and the development of the intellect and the conscience by the discipline of life. His sketches of the achievements of the study are masterly, for here he is at home; and his analyses of scientific and philosophic progress cannot be surpassed. But the men, drawn upon his canvas, whether statesmen or scholars,— and he has little to say of the humbler classes,— are not men of flesh and blood, such as we meet in daily life, but intellectual machines, without conscience or heart.

Another hindrance to our author's success was his intense dogmatism. It blinded him utterly to his own defects, and unfitted him to form a candid judgment of the opinions of others. It is a curious fact that he furnished illustrations of the mental and moral vices he most sharply condemned. His volumes have many fine tributes to the value of induction in the discovery of truth; and he deals unsparing censure

to men of the first eminence in philosophy and science, because they neglected the Baconian method. But he is a victim to an intellectual pravity, closely akin to the moral pravity described by Paul: What he does, he allows not; for what he would, that he does not, and what he would not, that does he. He extols the inductive method of reasoning, but follows the deductive. He frames his theory, and marshals facts to sustain it, instead of patiently collecting his facts, and educing the theory. Every reader instinctively feels that he is in the presence of an ingenious advocate, not an inductive philosopher. Facts at variance with his theory are overlooked, or, if too prominent to be ignored, are explained away by hypotheses at variance with his principles. When the difficulties are most perplexing, his assertions grow more vehement, as the worsted party in argument often covers his defeat by angry words.

His dogmatism often assumes the worst forms of intolerance. He denounces religious persecution as the blackest sin in the catalogue of crimes: "compared to it all other crimes are of small account"; but he is quite unconscious that he combined in his own character the elements which make up a Duke of Alva or a Torquemada. The supreme confidence in the truth of his own opinions, and his incapacity to make allowance for the opinions of others, would have made him a model inquisitor, whose hand would have never failed from the weakness of his heart. No modesty betrayed him into a doubt of his own infallibility. If self-unconsciousness, as Mr. Ruskin maintains, is a test of true greatness, we fear that neither Mr. Buckle nor Mr. Ruskin can claim a place among the magnates. We know of no author in our generation, whose abuse of others is so unstinted. He says of past historians: "They are unable to understand social phenomena"; of statesmen: "I have had occasion to read many thousand letters written by diplomatists and politicians, and I have hardly ever found an instance of one who understood the spirit and tendency of the age in which he lived." He characterized the Bridgewater Treatises, and

the Burnet Prize Essays, as "school-boy productions," and imputed to Knox and the Scotch Reformers the lowest and meanest motives. It would go hard with the reputation of our author, if his readers should mete to him the same measure he gives to others.

As no formal review of Mr. Buckle's works has appeared in our pages, it has seemed proper to give this sketch of his mental character, and his qualifications as a historian, before proceeding to a notice of the second volume of his *History*, which has more recently appeared. Our objections to this volume will be included under three heads: *The fundamental principles are unsound; The facts adduced are not trustworthy; The reasoning is fallacious.*

1. The fundamental principles are unsound. Mr. Buckle nowhere defines civilization, though this would seem essential to any attempt to unfold its history, and the exact laws which control its development. He seems to lose himself and to beguile his readers with eloquent phrases about progress; but if one attempts to analyze his ideas of progress, they resolve themselves into intellectual progress simply, and civilization is made identical with knowledge. He says: "The growth of European civilization is *solely* due to the progress of knowledge, and the progress of knowledge depends on the number of truths which the human intellect discovers, and on the extent to which they are diffused." This seems, at first sight, a strong assertion, but when adjusted to the theory of civilization held by our author, is reduced to the bald truism, that progress in knowledge is solely due to progress in knowledge.

But if we substitute, in place of Mr. Buckle's, the true idea of civilization, defining it, the well-being of a community, indicated, not by intelligence alone, but by morality and religion and refinement; by industrial activity and social freedom and philanthropic institutions, the strong assertion becomes a transparent untruth, for the course of history proves that progress in knowledge has no power of itself to secure morality or refinement or freedom or benevolence.

The best epochs in Grecian and Roman civilization had passed before those nations made their largest attainments in knowledge, and as learning increased, power and happiness declined. The most brilliant eras of scientific discovery in Europe have been marked by extreme corruption in the state and profligacy in society. The confession of the Roman poet, "I know the right, but follow the wrong," is an embodiment of the world's experience, that knowledge alone cannot create nobility of individual character, or confer happiness upon a nation. The leaders of literature in past ages have failed to be patterns of social virtue, and many of them have found, like Solomon, that increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow.

The unsoundness of this principle in Mr. Buckle's theory is obvious, if we give the widest scope to the term "knowledge," including in it all truth, physical, intellectual, aesthetic, and moral. It is more palpable if we limit it chiefly to the phenomena of nature, as is his ordinary method. His dogmatism is too extreme to speak a kind word for all departments of knowledge. Scientific discovery is the object of his worship, and scientific knowledge he extols as the chief factor in human progress. The most useful inventions never inspire him to eloquent periods: for poetry, in the highest flights of Shakspeare and Milton, he cherishes an ill-disguised contempt; and he ridicules the opinion that moral teachings exerts an appreciable influence on civilization. These prejudices of Mr. Buckle, assumed to be truths by his perverse self-confidence, are hardly worthy of notice, except as they lie at the foundation of his theory. Any critic, of small ability, might demonstrate that such inventions as gunpowder, the mariner's compass, the printing-press, the steam-engine, and the telegraph, have been mightier agents in the world's progress, than remarkable discoveries, like the law of gravity, or the circulation of the blood, or the succession of geological strata. Nor would it be a harder task to prove that the poetry of Homer and Shakspeare has given a more powerful stimulus to intellectual

activity than the scientific truths of Aristotle and Newton ; and that Paul and John in their religious teachings have contributed more potent elements to human progress than Leibnitz and La Place by their investigations of natural phenomena. Guizot is a wiser observer than Mr. Buckle, when he discovers the Christian religion to be the chief factor in modern civilization, and that scientific progress has always followed in its wake, not heralded its coming. A Scotch critic, at the close of some strong arguments against our author's principle, shrewdly suggests a practical test of its soundness : " he should contrast Paul, rearing amidst the ruins of Greek and Roman culture a new moral world ; and La Place, amid the wreck of French institutions, discovering the laws that regulate phenomena ; and show in the one case, the *zero* of stationary ethics, and, in the other, the *plus* of intellectual progress."

Another fundamental principle of Mr. Buckle is equally erroneous, that scepticism is essential to progress. He says :

" To scepticism we owe the spirit of inquiry, which, during the last two centuries, has gradually encroached on every subject."—I. p. 242.

" Scepticism in physics must always be the beginning of science, and in religion must always be the beginning of toleration."—I. p. 250.

" In physics it is the necessary precursor of science ; in politics, of liberty ; in theology, of toleration."—I. p. 258.

This dogma is the more worthy of examination, because it has become a part of the cant of our day, by which sceptics claim to be leaders of the world's progress. It has a semblance of truth, but only as the statement of an exceptional law, not as the normal condition of the human mind or of society. The assertion is confuted by stubborn facts. The eras of great intellectual activity in the world's history have been ages characterized by strong belief, while eras of general scepticism have been followed almost uniformly by intellectual torpor. The great discoverers, whose labors have contributed largely to human progress, have been, with few exceptions, men of earnest beliefs, and the champions of scepticism have gathered their laurels chiefly on the field

of general literature. Scepticism is indeed intimately related to great discoveries, but those, who, like Mr. Buckle, make it a pioneer to them, are guilty of the serious blunder of confounding cause and effect. Scepticism is not the antecedent of intellectual activity, but its consequent. It does not lead to discovery, but follows it. When large accessions have been made to human knowledge, it is natural that the accumulation of new facts should undermine old principles, and create doubts of old beliefs, and lead to a reconstruction of systems in science and theology. It was not a disbelief of the Ptolemaic system which led to a discovery of the true motion of the solar system, but the discoveries of Copernicus created the disbelief. Doubts of the Mosaic cosmogony did not induce to geological discovery, but the discoveries of geologists compelled a new interpretation of Genesis.

If facts confute this theory, a careful analysis of mental phenomena shows more clearly its absurdity. Negation is powerless to create a motive force; affirmation alone can beget it. Faith in an established order in the universe is the only stimulus to investigation. Faith in the uniformity of law, which may be learned by study, is the true guide to discovery. "The works of the Lord are great, *sought out* of all them that have pleasure therein." The stronger one's faith in a personal God, the Creator and Preserver and Governor of the world, the stronger, in a direct ratio, must be the incentive to search out the plan by which he works and the laws which he administers. And conversely, the stronger one's scepticism in a divine order in nature, or in the universality of law, the weaker, in an inverse ratio, must be the impulse to investigate phenomena. It was Newton's belief that the law of attraction extended through all space, which led him to examine and re-examine the elements of the law of gravitation. It was Leverrier's belief in the law that certain inexplicable perturbations in the solar system must be due to an unknown planet, which led him to the discovery of the planet Neptune. It is a similar

belief in the established order in creation, which leads geologists to infer from the succession of strata, filled with peculiar fossils, that the world has existed for ages. Nor is it unfair to add, as an *argumentum ad hominem*, that belief has been the motive power to Mr. Buckle's scholarship and historical labors. Without the faith that "the movements of nations are perfectly regular," following an unvarying law, he would have had no impulse to acquire his prodigious learning, and the two volumes of his *History* would have been unwritten.

It is almost needless to attempt a refutation of another principle of our author's theory: that the progress of nations depends on physical laws, and is regulated by food and soil and climate and the effects of nature. The most superficial reader must see that his induction of facts is incomplete and his generalizations hasty. If one honestly takes his data, and applies them on a larger scale, they are found to be worthless. A fertile soil and warm climate must, of necessity, develop a rapid and brilliant civilization, says our author, and points in confirmation to Egypt and India. But Brazil and Central Africa have possessed these elements for centuries, without any notable advance in civilization. The first application of the law is not satisfactory. Again, says Mr. Buckle, a warm climate, where a vegetable diet is sufficient for the inhabitants, and is cheap and produced in abundance, creates great social inequalities, and leads to despotism; while a colder climate, where animal food, at dearer rates, is essential to life, induces social equality, and leads to republicanism. The theory is a very intelligible one, but, as soon as we pass from his illustrations, it works badly. Russia has the coldest climate of any European nation, and animal food is an important part of the national diet; but it has at the same time the greatest social inequalities and the most absolute despotism in Europe. There are many islands in the Pacific, on the other hand, where hard labor and animal food are almost unknown; but they support a large population, having

few social distinctions, and nothing worthy of the name of a government. And to confute the theory beyond all doubt, the same sky and soil and climate give birth to opposite civilizations, proving that the cause of difference lies not in nature, but in man. The Indian races lived for centuries on the fertile soil of North America without apparent progress, while the Anglo-Saxon race, under the same external influences, have developed a material wealth and a mental activity unequalled in history. The luxuriant valley of the Mississippi ought, on this theory, to reproduce the castes and despotism of India, but it is distinguished, above other sections of our country, for its ultra-democracy.

The attempt of Mr. Buckle to trace the rise of superstition to a familiarity with awful phenomena of nature, as earthquakes and volcanoes, is no more successful. He can find a few countries where the law holds good, apparently. But a larger and more careful inquiry fails to sustain it. In Iceland these phenomena are witnessed on the most gigantic scale, but the people are remarkably free from superstition; while in Scotland, where they are almost unknown, and in Spain, where they are infrequent, the people are, in Mr. Buckle's opinion, the most superstitious in Europe.

Principles which fail so frequently and signally when one attempts to apply them are of little value. But the human mind, without a labored refutation, rejects instinctively this bald materialism. Man is not the slave of nature, but its lord, and his power to overcome and control the adverse influences of nature is a crucial test of his social progress. Moral character and the distinctions of race, which our author affects to despise, are mightier agents in civilization than all physical influences. He attributes the indolence of the Spaniards, and their superstition, in part to the uncertainty of agricultural returns, growing out of the aridity of the soil and the irregularity of rain. But the Moors, with the same natural disadvantages, were neither indolent nor superstitious. Their ingenious industry converted Southern Spain into a luxuriant garden, where the annual crops were

abundant and uniform. They did what the Spaniards never attempted, but God designed man everywhere to do. They exerted a sovereignty over nature, and controlled its tendency to drought by a thorough system of irrigation. The Indian tribes gathered only a scanty subsistence from the barren soil of New England, and slowly wasted towards extinction; but the Anglo-Saxon race, by superior energy of character, have triumphed over all natural obstacles, and founded on the same barren soil a mighty empire.

Mr. Buckle's philosophy of history is palpably false. It must discard the three unsound principles which underlie it—the controlling influence of physical causes, the quickening influence of scepticism, and the superiority of intellectual to moral truth—before it can solve the intricate problems of the world's civilization.

2. The facts adduced by Mr. Buckle are not trustworthy.

This has been shown, in part, in the previous remarks on soil and climate. He errs not so much in false statements as in suppressing important facts. He attaches an undue value to those which favor his theories, and conceals or explains away those which are adverse. We may attribute this, perhaps, to a constitutional defect; a want of power to see things in their true relations and proportions. It is apparent in the very arrangement of the contents of his volumes. A most inordinate space is given to an analysis of scientific works, like those of Adam Smith and Black and Hunter. The analysis is admirable, but strangely out of place in a history. The defect becomes more serious when he marshals facts in support of a theory. By failing to adjust them in their true relations, his statements sometimes have the effect of falsehoods. He detects the error in others, for he says: "in all large fields of inquiry there are a sufficient number of empirical coincidences to make a plausible case in favor of whatever view a man chooses to advocate"; but he never suspects the tendency in himself, though it would be difficult to find an author in our generation who has sinned so flagrantly.

He shifts the aspects and relations of his facts with the adroitness of a skilful magician. If he wishes to prove that, in the great march of affairs, general laws rule with uniform results, the facts come ready to his hand. He says: "individual peculiarities count for nothing"; "prevalent opinions are the inevitable results of circumstances"; "suicide is merely the product of the general conditions of society, and a given number of persons must put an end to their own life." The testimony of consciousness invalidates such assertions, but this gives him no trouble. He denies the validity of consciousness, and the value of metaphysical studies. By such general laws crime seems to be wholly eliminated, and it is not easy to discover any moral difference between death by small-pox and death by suicide; between saving a man from drowning, or pushing him from a precipice; for "the individual only carries into effect the necessary consequence of preceding circumstances."

All this is startling, and one looks suspiciously at the facts on which the conclusions rest. These facts become flexible to his hand as the implements of the conjuror. When he wishes to magnify the influence of scepticism—"presto, agrimento!"—the magical wand waves, the handkerchief turns to a dove! In the interests of scepticism, Descartes is called the profoundest of French thinkers. A metaphysician, before ridiculed, is now worthy "to be honored above the most successful discoverers of physical laws." The reason assigned is equally remarkable: because "we ought to prefer freedom to knowledge, and liberty to science." The excellence discerned in Descartes is no less singular: "His chief merit is, that his method rests solely on the consciousness that each man has of the operations of his own mind;" "it is this which has given to his philosophy the peculiar sublimity which distinguishes it from all other systems."

There is a tradition of an English advocate, who commenced his plea by a strong argument against his client; and, on being informed of his blunder by a colleague, turned

gracefully to the court, and apologized for having presented the case of his opponent in the strongest light possible, that he might show how easily it was refuted. Such an experiment would be hazardous at the bar, and it creates distrust of Mr. Buckle's fairness to find him, in one chapter, denying the validity of consciousness, and in the next, ascribing to it a value above physical laws; on one page asserting that "individual peculiarities count for nothing," and on another, that individual statesmen and philosophers change the character of an age.

This distrust of his impartiality is increased by a careful scrutiny of the facts cited in support of any favorite theory. One or two illustrations will show our meaning. He has a personal antipathy to the clergy as an order in society.<sup>1</sup> This antipathy disposes him to be a severe judge. He arraigns, therefore, the Scottish clergy as an ignorant, superstitious, and vindictive body, a burden and a curse to the state. To substantiate his charge, he fills several pages with quotations from Scotch preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The general effect is appalling. But when one sifts the testimony, it appears that the most startling passages are quotations from the poetical books of the Bible, which he cannot or will not recognize. Many of the others are ironical, many are metaphorical; and he is too blind to detect the irony and metaphor, or too prejudiced to admit it. A theologian might easily collate numerous extracts from Dr. Hare, Judge Edmonds, and Mr. Davis, and hold them up to public ridicule as specimens of the arrogance and absurdity of scientific research in our age. But he would gain little credit with honorable men by such unfairness, and Mr. Buckle is entitled to no higher confidence in his bitter tirade against the Scotch preachers.

<sup>1</sup> One of Mr. Buckle's personal friends, in an obituary notice, ascribes this antipathy to his presence in boyhood in a religious circle, where Edward Irving attempted to raise a dead man. If the statement is reliable, it shows very curiously how impressions and impulses assumed in Mr. Buckle's mind the place of convictions and beliefs.

Had he been careful to collect facts adverse to his antipathies, he would have found that the Scotch clergy, denounced as opposed to the diffusion of knowledge, have been, from the first, the earnest advocates of national schools, and devised the first system of national education in Europe. He would have found also, that, instead of being ignorant, many of them have been among the first scholars of their age, and have made important contributions to different departments of knowledge. He would have been compelled, also, to modify his harsh sentence, that they have been vindictive persecutors, and confess that they have never put any one to death for heresy.

With a similar spirit of unfairness, he ascribes the decline of Spain in national greatness solely to the bigotry of the Catholic clergy and the superstition of the people. If he had treated these as prominent causes, or even as controlling causes, no exception would have been taken to his statement. But when a thoughtful student of history, who has traced the influence of American discovery and American gold upon Spanish character, and marked the drain of the most energetic and enterprising citizens by migration, and noted the debasing effect of colonial life, finds none of these causes alluded to, or apparently thought of, he is compelled to doubt either the penetration or the fairness of our author. Nor has he a word to say of the suppression of the Spanish Commons, which may have been the fatal blow to Spanish liberty, as Macaulay believes the establishment of standing armies prostrated European freedom.

No other proof is needed of our assertion that Mr. Buckle's citation of facts is not trustworthy, but is designedly limited and partial in defence of a theory, not broad and generous in search of the truth.

3. A third objection to the History is found in its fallacious reasoning.

The logic is weak, and the conclusions from his premises may be reversed by any skillful critic, and made to refute the theories of the author. Instances of this kind are

numerous. He wishes to prove that general causes control national progress and decay ; that individual influence is of little moment, and governments have little power to accelerate or retard the progress of civilization. Spain is cited in proof of this assertion, and its history for several centuries is reviewed, by way of demonstration. He gives a brilliant sketch of its gradual decline from a position as the first power in Europe to an abject weakness bordering on national extinction. It was borne down inevitably into the deep abyss, he says, by the superstition and loyalty of the people. But this sketch, by which he designs to furnish a conclusive proof of the impotence of the government for permanent good or evil, seems to us to prove precisely the reverse, that the national prosperity has always reflected the character of the rulers. Under able sovereigns, as Ferdinand and Isabella, and Charles V., the nation rose rapidly in wealth and power to the first place in Europe. Under a weaker monarch, Philip II., it began to decline, and a succession of impotent rulers reduced it to a fourth-rate power. After touching the lowest point of decline, its condition slowly improved by the administration of wise statesmen under weak monarchs, until the accession of a wise monarch, Charles III., aided by sagacious counsellors, renewed the prosperity of its palmiest days. After him came a line of idiotic sovereigns, and a succession of ignorant statesmen, and the kingdom relapsed into general poverty and ruin. We give Mr. Buckle's own outline of facts, without exaggeration or perversion, and we hold that a sound logic must draw from these premises a conclusion precisely the opposite of his : viz. that the character of the rulers regulated the civilization of Spain, and general causes were of small account. The superstition and loyalty of the people have been, as he acknowledges, fixed quantities from the reign of Ferdinand to the present queen ; the ability and wisdom of the rulers have been the variable quantities, and these have turned the scale. Nor will any candid historian deny that individual minds and strong governments often give charac-

ter to a nation or an age. The genius of Cromwell made England a leading power of Europe; the imbecility of Charles the Second reduced it to a fief of France. Peter the Great, by the force of personal character, lifted Russia from barbarism. Pelopidas and Epaminondas made Thebes, under their administration, the mistress of Greece. Philip and Alexander raised Macedon to a sovereignty over Asia. The kingdom of Italy owes its existence to the genius of Count Cavour far more than to the general course of events; and it is yet uncertain whether it will long outlive the great statesman. With such facts before him, one may hesitate to accept Mr. Buckle's dogmatic assertion, that "general causes uniformly rule, and individual peculiarities are of no account."

Nor is he more fortunate in his argument from Scottish history. Detesting the religious zeal of the Scotch, which he calls superstition, he aims to prove that it has been a fatal barrier to the advance of civilization. But the logic limps badly. Let us examine the train of reasoning. It is a little complicated. The paralyzing power of superstition caused Spain to recede steadily from its high rank, till it became a cypher in Europe. The influence of general causes is uniform, and the same superstition in Scotland ought to cause a similar retrograde movement. But, instead of declining, Scotland has been steadily rising in intelligence and wealth and influence.

A cautious reasoner would confess that there must be some flaw either in the major or the minor premise. But the ingenuity of Mr. Buckle was rarely at fault, and he evaded the dilemma by saying, that a want of loyalty to sovereigns gave the Scotch nation an independence which neutralized their superstition; and their prosperity was due to political freedom, and in spite of religious despotism. Two important objections lie against this plea; the political loyalty of the Scotch Highlanders has never been surpassed, even in Spain; and the despotism of the religious leaders was the direct cause, as Mr. Buckle confesses, of the civil

freedom, and the remote cause, therefore, of the social prosperity.

But, conceding full force to this ingenious plea, it does not help his main argument, that general causes are uniform, and will inevitably produce the same results. Spain, by this argument, in virtue of soil and climate and food, ought to be among the first nations of the world, but the superstition of its people has given birth to a strong government, and prevented social progress. Scotland, on the other hand, by virtue of soil and climate and food, ought to take rank among barbarous nations. The superstition of its people, superadded to these natural disadvantages, ought to sink it far below Spain, and create a despotic government to bar all possible progress. So runs the logic. The facts run otherwise. Scotland, as the direct result of its superstition, has had a mild government and a free people and, in spite of natural disadvantages, has attained a brilliant civilization, worthy to compare with the most favored nations of Europe. If the uniform action of general laws produces such discordant results, it is quite certain that under Mr. Buckle's guidance history cannot yet take its place among the exact sciences.

He makes one more attempt to save his theory, and enters another plea: that the spread of scepticism in Scotland saved it from the fate of Spain. He discovers in the eighteenth century a magnificent growth of the scepticism which, by his philosophy, is "the necessary precursor, in physics, of science; in politics, of freedom; and in religion, of toleration." This plea is his last hope, and he relies on it, as Napoleon on the charge of the Old Guard at Waterloo, to turn a defeat into a victory. But never was discomfiture more complete. The sceptical philosophy is to his theory what the jutting rock was to the "one-horse-shay" in Dr. Holmes's comic poem, and leaves it a pile of worthless dust. The scepticism was not the precursor of political freedom, for, by Mr. Buckle's own testimony, the freedom preceded the scepticism, and was the offspring of the religion or

superstition of Scotland. Nor was scepticism the parent of scientific progress, for he laments that the scientific inquiry of Scotland followed the deductive method, instead of the inductive taught by scepticism, and that this error was derived from the dominant theological method. The science, therefore, as well as the freedom of Scotland, sprang from religion. Nor did the scepticism give birth to religious toleration. One may learn from Dr. Carlyle's Autobiography how deeply this scepticism penetrated into the heart of the Scottish Church. Many of its leaders had no faith in evangelical piety, and the General Assembly, in an annual meeting at Edinburgh found its afternoon sessions deserted, as the members, clerical and lay, flocked to the theatre to hear Mrs. Siddons in tragedy. But this wide-spread scepticism failed — and it is a lasting regret to Mr. Buckle — to exert an appreciable influence on the Scotch theology, and the people continue to be, in his opinion, the most superstitious and intolerant nation of Europe.

We think our readers will admit that the reasoning of our author is very fallacious, and that from his own premises, so carefully elaborated in this volume, a rigorous logic must refute his theory. Taking the data which he has furnished from the history of Scotland and Spain, the conclusion is inevitable, that, in the development of these countries, special influences have been more powerful than general causes; that in the former country superstition has been the chief motive power, and in the latter government and rulers.

It is sad, in view of the recent death of Mr. Buckle, to read some passages in this volume, which seem to contain a premonition of his approaching end: "Of all that I had hoped to do, I now find but too surely how small a part I shall accomplish. Little did I know how the horizon enlarges as well as recedes, and how vainly we grasp at the fleeting forms which melt away and elude us in the distance. In those early aspirations there was much that was fanciful, perhaps there was much also that was foolish. Perhaps,

too, they contained a moral defect, and savored of an arrogance which belongs to a strength that refuses to recognize its own weakness. . . . . To me they seem now more like the visions of a disordered fancy, than the sober realities of things that were and are not."—II. pp. 257, 258.

The *History of Civilization in England* will remain a fragment. The sword, fallen from our author's hands, no other can lift. Few living men have the ability to complete it on the scale which he projected; no one, probably, has the hardihood to attempt it. If the giants have failed to reach heaven by heaping Pelion upon Ossa, mortals may dismiss all hope of success. We cannot regret the failure of Mr. Buckle to establish his philosophy of history. It would have been a calamity to the race, and have turned the dial of the world backward. We must regret that he failed to discover a wise Providence, directing the world's progress by a harmonious union of general and special causes, and ordaining man to be, not the victim of physical laws, but their master and interpreter. Then in God's light would he have seen light; the problems of history would have disclosed a new order and beauty in their solution, and his commanding abilities would have instructed instead of bewildering mankind.

[NOTE.— Since this Article was prepared (designed for the January number), a posthumous volume has appeared, with two of Mr. Buckle's *Essays*, and a brief biographical sketch of the author. The sketch is very imperfect and unsatisfactory; full of detail where information was needless, and reticent in the very particulars about which one desires to be informed. The essays are characteristic of their author. Rich in learning, fertile in suggestion, and comprehensive in discussion, they are full of his peculiar crotchets, on which he insists with great vehemence. These crotchets often provoke the reader by their want of practical wisdom, which a little acquaintance with men and daily life would have supplied. The biography and essays only confirm the opinion expressed in the Article, that Mr. Buckle was too much of a recluse to comprehend human life, or unfold human history.]