Froude's History of England

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There appeared a few years since a 'Comic History of England,' duly caricaturing and falsifying all our great national events, and representing the English people, for many centuries back, as a mob of fools and knaves, led by the nose in each generation by a few arch− fools and arch−knaves. Some thoughtful persons regarded the book with utter contempt and indignation; it seemed to them a crime to have written it; a proof of 'banausia,' as Aristotle would have called it, only to be outdone by the writing a 'Comic Bible.' After a while, however, their indignation began to subside; their second thoughts, as usual, were more charitable than their first; they were not surprised to hear that the author was an honest, just, and able magistrate; they saw that the publication of such a book involved no moral turpitude; that it was merely meant as a jest on a subject on which jesting was permissible, and as a money speculation in a field of which men had a right to make money; while all which seemed offensive in it was merely the outcome, and as it were apotheosis, of that method of writing English history which has been popular for nearly a hundred years. 'Which of our modern historians,' they asked themselves, 'has had any real feeling of the importance, the sacredness, of his subject?−−any real trust in, or respect for, the characters with whom he dealt? Has not the belief of each and all of them been the same−−that on the whole, the many always have been fools and knaves; foolish and knavish enough, at least, to become the puppets of a few fools and knaves who held the reins of power? Have they not held that, on the whole, the problems of human nature and human history have been sufficiently solved by Gibbon and Voltaire, Gil Blas and Figaro; that our forefathers were silly barbarians; that this glorious nineteenth century is the one region of light, and that all before was outer darkness, peopled by 'foreign devils,' Englishmen, no doubt, according to the flesh, but in spirit, in knowledge, in creed, in customs, so utterly different from ourselves that we shall merely show our sentimentalism by doing aught but laughing at them?

On what other principle have our English histories as yet been constructed, even down to the children's books, which taught us in childhood that the history of this country was nothing but a string of foolish wars, carried on by wicked kings, for reasons hitherto unexplained, save on that great historic law of Goldsmith's by which Sir Archibald Alison would still explain the French Revolution −

'The dog, to serve his private ends,
Went mad, and bit the man?'

It will be answered by some, and perhaps rather angrily, that these strictures are too sweeping; that there is arising, in a certain quarter, a school of history books for young people of a far more reverent tone, which tries to do full honour to the Church and her work in the world. Those books of this school which we have seen, we must reply, seem just as much wanting in real reverence for the past as the school of Gibbon and Voltaire. It is not the past which they reverence, but a few characters or facts eclectically picked out of the past, and, for the most part, made to look beautiful by ignoring all the features which will not suit their preconceived pseudo−ideal. There is in these books a scarcely concealed dissatisfaction with the whole course of the British mind since the Reformation, and (though they are not inclined to confess the fact) with its whole course before the Reformation, because that course was one of steady struggle against the Papacy and its anti−national pretensions. They are the outcome of an utterly un−English tone of thought; and the so− called 'ages of faith' are pleasant and useful to them, principally because they are distant and unknown enough to enable them to conceal from their readers that in the ages on which they look back as ideally perfect a Bernard and a Francis of Assisi were crying all day long−−'O that my head were a fountain of tears, that I might weep for the sins of my people!' Dante was cursing popes and prelates in the name of the God of Righteousness; Boccaccio and Chaucer were lifting the veil from priestly abominations of which we now are ashamed even to read; and Wolsey, seeing the rottenness of the whole system, spent his mighty talents, and at last poured out his soul unto death, in one long useless effort to make the crooked straight, and number that which had been weighed in the balances of God, and found for ever wanting. To ignore

wilfully facts like these, which were patent all along to the British nation, facts on which the British laity acted, till they finally conquered at the Reformation, and on which they are acting still, and will, probably, act for ever, is not to have any real reverence for the opinions or virtues of our forefathers; and we are not astonished to find repeated, in such books, the old stock calumnies against our lay and Protestant worthies, taken at second− hand from the pages of Lingard. In copying from Lingard, however, this party has done no more than those writers have who would repudiate any party−−almost any Christian−−purpose. Lingard is known to have been a learned man, and to have examined many manuscripts which few else had taken the trouble to look at; so his word is to be taken, no one thinking it worth while to ask whether he has either honestly read or honestly quoted the documents. It suited the sentimental and lazy liberality of the last generation to make a show of fairness by letting the Popish historian tell his side of the story, and to sneer at the illiberal old notion that gentlemen of his class were given to be rather careless about historic truth when they had a purpose to serve thereby; and Lingard is now actually recommended as a standard authority for the young by educated Protestants, who seem utterly unable to see that, whether the man be honest or not, his whole view of the course of British events since Becket first quarrelled with his king must be antipodal to their own; and that his account of all which has passed for three hundred years since the fall of Wolsey is most likely to be (and, indeed, may be proved to be) one huge libel on the whole nation, and the destiny which God has marked out for it.

There is, indeed, no intrinsic cause why the ecclesiastical, or pseudo−Catholic, view of history should, in any wise, conduce to a just appreciation of our forefathers. For not only did our forefathers rebel against that conception again and again, till they finally trampled it under their feet, and so appear, prima facie, as offenders to be judged at its bar; but the conception itself is one which takes the very same view of nature as that cynic conception of which we spoke above. Man, with the Romish divines, is, ipso facto, the same being as the man of Voltaire, Le Sage, or Beaumarchais; he is an insane and degraded being, who is to be kept in order, and, as far as may be, cured and set to work by an ecclesiastical system; and the only threads of light in the dark web of his history are clerical and theurgic, not lay and human. Voltaire is the very experimentum crucis of this ugly fact. European history looks to him what it would have looked to his Jesuit preceptors, had the sacerdotal element in it been wanting; what heathen history actually did look to them. He eliminates the sacerdotal element, and nothing remains but the chaos of apes and wolves which the Jesuits had taught him to believe was the original substratum of society. The humanity of his history−−even of his 'Pucelle d'Orleans,−−is simply the humanity of Sanchez and the rest of those vingtquatre Peres who hang gibbeted for ever in the pages of Pascal. He is superior to his teachers, certainly, in this, that he has hope for humanity on earth; dreams of a new and nobler life for society, by means of a true and scientific knowledge of the laws of the moral and material universe; in a word, he has, in the midst of all his filth and his atheism, a faith in a righteous and truth−revealing God, which the priests who brought him up had not. Let the truth be spoken, even though in favour of such a destroying Azrael as Voltaire. And what if his primary conception of humanity be utterly base? Is that of our modern historians so much higher? Do Christian men seem to them, on the whole, in all ages, to have had the spirit of God with them, leading them into truth, however imperfectly and confusedly they may have learnt his lessons?

Have they ever heard with their ears, or listened when their fathers have declared unto them, the noble works which God did in their days, and in the old time before them? Do they believe that the path of Christendom has been, on the whole, the path of life and the right way, and that the living God is leading her therein? Are they proud of the old British worthies? Are they jealous and tender of the reputation of their ancestors? Do they believe that there were any worthies at all in England before the steam−engine and political economy were discovered? Do their conceptions of past society and the past generations retain anything of that great thought which is common to all the Aryan races−−that is, to all races who have left aught behind them better than mere mounds of earth−−to Hindoo and Persian, Greek and Roman, Teuton and Scandinavian, that men are the sons of the heroes, who were the sons of God? Or do they believe that for civilised people of the nineteenth century it is as well to say as little as possible about ancestors who possessed our vices without our amenities, our ignorance without our science; who were bred, no matter how, like flies by summer heat, out of that everlasting midden which men call the world, to buzz and sting their foolish day, and leave behind them a fresh race which knows them not, and could win no honour by owning them, and which owes them no more than if it had been produced, as

midden−flies were said to be of old, by some spontaneous generation?

It is not probable that this writer will be likely to undervalue political economy, or the steam−engine, or any other solid and practical good which God has unveiled to this generation. All that he does demand (for he has a right to demand it) is that rational men should believe that our forefathers were at least as good as we are; that whatsoever their measure of light was, they acted up to what they knew as faithfully as we do; and that, on the whole, it was not their fault if they did not know more. Even now the real discoveries of the age are made, as of old, by a very few men; and, when made, have to struggle, as of old, against all manner of superstitions, lazinesses, scepticisms. Is the history of the Minie rifle one so very complimentary to our age's quickness of perception that we can afford to throw many stones at the prejudices of our ancestors? The truth is that, as of old, 'many men talk of Robin Hood who never shot in his bow'; and many talk of Bacon who never discovered a law by induction since they were born. As far as our experience goes, those who are loudest in their jubilations over the wonderful progress of the age are those who have never helped that progress forward one inch, but find it a great deal easier and more profitable to use the results which humbler men have painfully worked out as second−hand capital for hustings−speeches and railway books, and flatter a mechanics' institute of self−satisfied youths by telling them that the least instructed of them is wiser than Erigena or Roger Bacon. Let them be. They have their reward. And so also has the patient and humble man of science, who, the more he knows, confesses the more how little he knows, and looks back with affectionate reverence on the great men of old time−−on Archimedes and Ptolemy, Aristotle and Pliny, and many another honourable man who, walking in great darkness, sought a ray of light, and did not seek in vain,−−as integral parts of that golden chain of which he is but one link more; as scientific forefathers, without whose aid his science could not have had a being.

Meanwhile, this general tone of irreverence for our forefathers is no hopeful sign. It is unwise to 'inquire why the former times were better than these'; to hang lazily and weakly over some eclectic dream of a past golden age; for to do so is to deny that God is working in this age, as well as in past ages; that His light is as near us now as it was to the worthies of old time.

But it is more than unwise to boast and rejoice that the former times were worse than these; and to teach young people to say in their hearts, 'What clever fellows we are, compared with our stupid old fogies of fathers!' More than unwise; for possibly it may be false in fact. To look at the political and moral state of Europe at this moment, Christendom can hardly afford to look down on any preceding century, and seems to be in want of something which neither science nor constitutional government seems able to supply. Whether our forefathers also lacked that something we will not inquire just now; but if they did, their want of scientific and political knowledge was evidently not the cause of the defect; or why is not Spain now infinitely better, instead of being infinitely worse off, than she was three hundred years ago?

At home, too−−But on the question whether we are so very much better off than our forefathers Mr. Froude, not we, must speak: for he has deliberately, in his new history, set himself to the solution of this question, and we will not anticipate what he has to say; what we would rather insist on now are the moral effects produced on our young people by books which teach them to look with contempt on all generations but their own, and with suspicion on all public characters save a few contemporaries of their own especial party.

There is an ancient Hebrew book, which contains a singular story concerning a grandson who was cursed because his father laughed at the frailty of the grandfather. Whether the reader shall regard that story (as we do) as a literal fact recorded by inspired wisdom, as an instance of one of the great root−laws of family life, and therefore of that national life which (as the Hebrew book so cunningly shows) is the organic development of the family life; or whether he shall treat it (as we do not) as a mere apologue or myth, he must confess that it is equally grand in its simplicity and singular in its unexpected result. The words of the story, taken literally and simply, no more justify the notion that Canaan's slavery was any magical consequence of the old patriarch's anger than they do the well−known theory that it was the cause of the Negro's blackness. Ham shows a low, foul, irreverent, unnatural temper towards his father. The old man's shame is not a cause of shame to his son, but only of laughter. Noah

prophesies (in the fullest and deepest meaning of that word) that a curse will come upon that son's son; that he will be a slave of slaves; and reason and experience show that he spoke truth. Let the young but see that their fathers have no reverence for the generation before them, then will they in turn have no reverence for their fathers. Let them be taught that the sins of their ancestors involve their own honour so little that they need not take any trouble to clear the blot off the scutcheon, but may safely sit down and laugh over it, saying, 'Very likely it is true. If so, it is very amusing; and if not−−what matter?'−−Then those young people are being bred up in a habit of mind which contains in itself all the capabilities of degradation and slavery, in self−conceit, hasty assertion, disbelief in nobleness, and all the other 'credulities of scepticism': parted from that past from which they take their common origin, they are parted also from each other, and become selfish, self−seeking, divided, and therefore weak: disbelieving in the nobleness of those who have gone before them, they learn more and more to disbelieve in the nobleness of those around them; and, by denying God's works of old, come, by a just and dreadful Nemesis, to be unable to see his works in the men of their own day; to suspect and impugn valour, righteousness, disinterestedness in their contemporaries; to attribute low motives; to pride themselves on looking at men and things as 'men who know the world,' so the young puppies style it; to be less and less chivalrous to women, less and less respectful to old men, less and less ashamed of boasting about their sensual appetites; in a word, to show all those symptoms which, when fully developed, leave a generation without fixed principles, without strong faith, without self− restraint, without moral cohesion, the sensual and divided prey of any race, however inferior in scientific knowledge, which has a clear and fixed notion of its work and destiny. That many of these signs are themselves more and more ominously showing in our young men, from the fine gentleman who rides in Rotten Row to the boy−mechanic who listens enraptured to Mr. Holyoake's exposures of the absurdity of all human things save Mr. Holyoake's self, is a fact which presses itself most on those who have watched this age most carefully, and who (rightly or wrongly) attribute much of this miserable temper to the way in which history has been written among us for the last hundred years.

Whether or not Mr. Froude would agree with these notions, he is more or less responsible for them; for they have been suggested by his 'History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth.' It was impossible to read the book without feeling the contrast between its tone and that of every other account of the times which one had ever seen. Mr. Froude seems to have set to work upon the principle, too much ignored in judging of the past, that the historian's success must depend on his dramatic faculty; and not merely on that constructive element of the faculty in which Mr. Macaulay shows such astonishing power, but on that higher and deeper critical element which ought to precede the constructive process, and without which the constructive element will merely enable a writer, as was once bitterly but truly said, 'to produce the greatest possible misrepresentation with the least possible distortion of fact.' That deeper dramatic faculty, the critical, is not logical merely, but moral, and depends on the moral health, the wideness and heartiness of his moral sympathies, by which he can put himself−−as Mr. Froude has attempted to do, and as we think successfully−−into the place of each and every character, and not merely feel for them, but feel with them. He does not merely describe their actions from the outside, attributing them arbitrarily to motives which are pretty sure to be the lowest possible, because it is easier to conceive a low motive than a lofty one, and to call a man a villain than to unravel patiently the tangled web of good and evil of which his thoughts are composed. He has attempted to conceive of his characters as he would if they had been his own contemporaries and equals, acting, speaking in his company; and he has therefore thought himself bound to act toward them by those rules of charity and courtesy, common alike to Christian morals, English law, and decent society; namely, to hold every man innocent till he is proved guilty; where a doubt exists, to give the prisoner at the bar the benefit of it; not to excite the minds of the public against him by those insinuative or vituperative epithets, which are but adders and scorpions; and, on the whole, to believe that a man's death and burial is not the least reason for ceasing to behave to him like a gentleman and a Christian. We are not inclined to play with solemn things, or to copy Lucian and Quevedo in writing dialogues of the dead; but what dialogues might some bold pen dash off between the old sons of Anak, at whose coming Hades has long ago been moved, and to receive whom all the kings of the nation have risen up, and the little scribblers who have fancied themselves able to fathom and describe characters to whom they were but pigmies! Conceive a half− hour's interview between Queen Elizabeth and some popular lady− scribbler, who has been deluding herself into the fancy that gossiping inventories of millinery are history . . . 'You pretend to judge me, whose labours, whose

cares, whose fiery trials were, beside yours, as the heaving volcano beside a boy's firework? You condemn my weaknesses? Know that they were stronger than your strength! You impute motives for my sins? Know that till you are as great as I have been, for evil and for good, you will be as little able to comprehend my sins as my righteousness! Poor marsh−croaker, who wishest not merely to swell up to the bulk of the ox, but to embrace it in thy little paws, know thine own size, and leave me to be judged by Him who made me!' . . . How the poor soul would shrink back into nothing before that lion eye which saw and guided the destinies of the world, and all the flunkey−nature (if such a vice exist beyond the grave) come out in utter abjectness, as if the ass in the fable, on making his kick at the dead lion, had discovered to his horror that the lion was alive and well−−Spirit of Quevedo! finish for us the picture which we cannot finish for ourselves.

In a very different spirit from such has Mr. Froude approached these times. Great and good deeds were done in them; and it has therefore seemed probable to him that there were great and good men there to do them. Thoroughly awake to the fact that the Reformation was the new birth of the British nation, it has seemed to him a puzzling theory which attributes its success to the lust of a tyrant and the cupidity of his courtiers. It has evidently seemed to him paradoxical that a king who was reputed to have been a satyr, instead of keeping as many concubines as seemed good to him, should have chosen to gratify his passions by entering six times into the strict bonds of matrimony, religiously observing those bonds. It has seemed to him even more paradoxical that one reputed to have been the most sanguinary tyrant who ever disgraced the English throne should have been not only endured, but loved and regretted by a fierce and free−spoken people; and he, we suppose, could comprehend as little as we can the reasoning of such a passage as the following, especially when it proceeds from the pen of so wise and venerable a writer as Mr. Hallam.

'A government administered with so frequent violations, not only of the chartered privileges of Englishmen, but of those still more sacred rights which natural law has established, must have been regarded, one would imagine, with just abhorrence and earnest longings for a change. Yet contemporary authorities by no means answer this expectation. Some mention Henry after his death in language of eulogy;' (not only Elizabeth, be it remembered, but Cromwell also, always spoke of him with deepest respect; and their language always found an echo in the English heart;) 'and if we except those whom attachment to the ancient religion had inspired with hatred to his memory, few seem to have been aware that his name would descend to posterity among those of the many tyrants and oppressors of innocence whom the wrath of Heaven has raised up, and the servility of man endured.'

The names of even those few we should be glad to have; for it seems to us that, with the exception of a few ultra−Protestants, who could not forgive that persecution of the Reformers which he certainly permitted, if not encouraged, during one period of his reign, no one adopted the modern view of his character till more than a hundred years after his death, when belief in all nobleness and faith had died out among an ignoble and faithless generation, and the scandalous gossip of such a light rogue as Osborne was taken into the place of honest and respectful history.

To clear up such seeming paradoxes as these by carefully examining the facts of the sixteenth century has been Mr. Froude's work; and we have the results of his labour in two volumes, embracing only a period of eleven years; but giving promise that the mysteries of the succeeding time will be well cleared up for us in future volumes, and that we shall find our forefathers to have been, if no better, at least no worse men than ourselves. He has brought to the task known talents and learning, a mastery over English prose almost unequalled in this generation, a spirit of most patient and good−tempered research, and that intimate knowledge of human motives and passions which his former books have shown, and which we have a right to expect from any scholar who has really profited by Aristotle's unrivalled Ethics. He has fairly examined every contemporary document within his reach, and, as he informs us in the preface, he has been enabled, through the kindness of Sir Francis Palgrave, to consult a great number of MSS. relating to the Reformation, hitherto all but unknown to the public, and referred to in his work as MSS. in the Rolls' House, where the originals are easily accessible. These, he states, he intends to publish, with additions from his own reading, as soon as he has brought his history down to the end of Henry the Eighth's reign.

But Mr. Froude's chief text−book seems to have been State Papers and Acts of Parliament. He has begun his work in the only temper in which a man can write accurately and well; in a temper of trust toward the generation whom he describes. The only temper; for if a man has no affection for the characters of whom he reads, he will never understand them; if he has no respect for his subject, he will never take the trouble to exhaust it. To such an author the Statutes at large, as the deliberate expression of the nation's will and conscience, will appear the most important of all sources of information; the first to be consulted, the last to be contradicted; the Canon which is not to be checked and corrected by private letters and flying pamphlets, but which is to check and correct them. This seems Mr. Froude's theory; and we are at no pains to confess that if he be wrong we see no hope of arriving at truth. If these public documents are not to be admitted in evidence before all others, we see no hope for the faithful and earnest historian; he must give himself up to swim as he may on the frothy stream of private letters, anecdotes, and pamphlets, the puppet of the ignorance, credulity, peevishness, spite, of any and every gossip and scribbler.

Beginning his history with the fall of Wolsey, Mr. Froude enters, of course, at his first step into the vexed question of Henry's divorce: an introductory chapter, on the general state of England, we shall notice hereafter.

A very short inspection of the method in which he handles the divorce question gives us at once confidence in his temper and judgment, and hope that we may at last come to some clearer understanding of it than the old law gives us, which we have already quoted, concerning the dog who went mad to serve his private ends. In a few masterly pages he sketches for us the rotting and dying Church, which had recovered her power after the Wars of the Roses over an exhausted nation; but in form only, not in life. Wolsey, with whom he has fair and understanding sympathy, he sketches as the transition minister, 'loving England well, but loving Rome better,' who intends a reform of the Church, but who, as the Pope's commissioner for that very purpose, is liable to a praemunire, and therefore dare not appeal to Parliament to carry out his designs, even if he could have counted on the Parliament's assistance in any measures designed to invigorate the Church. At last arises in the divorce question the accident which brings to an issue on its most vital point the question of Papal power in England, and which finally draws down ruin upon Wolsey himself.

This appears to have begun in the winter of 1526−27. It was proposed to marry the Princess Mary to a son of the French king. The Bishop of Tarbes, who conducted the negotiations, advised himself, apparently by special instigation of the evil spirit, to raise a question as to her legitimacy.

No more ingenious plan for convulsing England could have been devised. The marriage from which Mary sprang only stood on a reluctant and doubtful dispensation of the Pope's. Henry had entered into it at the entreaty of his ministers, contrary to a solemn promise given to his father, and in spite of the remonstrances of the Archbishop of Canterbury. No blessing seemed to have rested on it. All his children had died young, save this one sickly girl: a sure note of divine displeasure in the eyes of that coarse−minded Church which has always declared the chief, if not the only, purpose of marriage to be the procreation of children.

But more: to question Mary's legitimacy was to throw open the question of succession to half a dozen ambitious competitors. It was, too probably, to involve England at Henry's death in another civil war of the Roses, and in all the internecine horrors which were still rankling in the memories of men; and probably, also, to bring down a French or Scotch invasion. There was then too good reason, as Mr. Froude shows at length, for Wolsey's assertion to John Cassalis−− 'If his Holiness, which God forbid, shall show himself unwilling to listen to the King's demands, to me assuredly it will be but grief to live longer, for the innumerable evils which I foresee will follow . . . Nothing before us but universal and inevitable ruin.' Too good reason there was for the confession of the Pope himself to Gardner, 'What danger it was to the realm to have this thing hang in suspense . . . That without an heir−male, etc., the realm was like to come to dissolution.' Too good reason for the bold assertion of the Cardinal−Governor of Bologna, that 'he knew the guise of England as few men did, and that if the King should die without heirs−male, he was sure that it would cost two hundred thousand men's lives; and that to avoid this mischief by a second marriage, he thought, would deserve heaven.' Too good reason for the assertion of Hall, that

'all indifferent and discreet persons judged it necessary for the Pope to grant Henry a divorce, and, by enabling him to marry again, give him the hope of an undisputed heir−male.' The Pope had full power to do this; in fact, such cases had been for centuries integral parts of his jurisdiction as head of Christendom. But he was at once too timid and too time−serving to exercise his acknowledged authority; and thus, just at the very moment when his spiritual power was being tried in the balance, he chose himself to expose his political power to the same test. Both were equally found wanting. He had, it appeared, as little heart to do justice among kings and princes as he had to seek and to save the souls of men; and the Reformation followed as a matter of course.

Through the tangled brakes of this divorce question Mr. Froude leads us with ease and grace, throwing light, and even beauty, into dark nooks where before all was mist, not merely by his intimate acquaintance with the facts, but still more by his deep knowledge of human character, and of woman's even more than of man's. For the first time the actors in this long tragedy appear to us as no mere bodiless and soulless names, but as beings of like passions with ourselves, comprehensible, coherent, organic, even in their inconsistencies. Catherine of Arragon is still the Catherine of Shakspeare; but Mr. Froude has given us the key to many parts of her story which Shakspeare left unexplained, and delicately enough has made us understand how Henry's affections, if he ever had any for her−−faithfully as he had kept (with one exception) to that loveless mariage de convenance−−may have been gradually replaced by indifference and even dislike, long before the divorce was forced on him as a question not only of duty to the nation, but of duty to Heaven. And that he did see it in this latter light, Mr. Froude brings proof from his own words, from which we can escape only by believing that the confessedly honest 'Bluff King Hal' had suddenly become a consummate liar and a canting hypocrite.

Delicately, too, as if speaking of a lady whom he had met in modern society (as a gentleman is bound to do), does Mr. Froude touch on the sins of that hapless woman, who played for Henry's crown, and paid for it with her life. With all mercy and courtesy he gives us proof (for he thinks it his duty to do so) of the French mis−education, the petty cunning, the tendency to sensuality, the wilful indelicacy of her position in Henry's household as the rival of his queen, which made her last catastrophe at least possible. Of the justice of her sentence he has no doubt, any more than of her pre−engagement to some one, as proved by a letter existing among Cromwell's papers. Poor thing! If she did that which was laid to her charge, and more, she did nothing, after all, but what she had been in the habit of seeing the queens and princesses of the French court do notoriously, and laugh over shamelessly; while, as Mr. Froude well says, 'If we are to hold her entirely free from guilt, we place not only the King, but the Privy Council, the Judges, the Lords and Commons, and the two Houses of Convocation, in a position fatal to their honour and degrading to ordinary humanity' (Mr. Froude should have added Anne Boleyn's own uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, and her father, who were on the commission appointed to try her lovers, and her cousin, Anthony St. Leger, a man of the very highest character and ability, who was on the jury which found a true bill against her). 'We can not,' continues Mr. Froude, 'acquiesce without inquiry in so painful a conclusion. The English nation also, as well as she, deserves justice at our hands; and it cannot be thought uncharitable if we look with some scrutiny at the career of a person who, but for the catastrophe with which it closed, would not have so readily obtained forgiveness for having admitted the addresses of the King, or for having received the homage of the court as its future sovereign, while the King's wife, her mistress, as yet resided under the same roof.' Mr. Froude's conclusion is, after examining the facts, the same with the whole nation of England in Henry's reign: but no one can accuse him of want of sympathy with the unhappy woman, who reads the eloquent and affecting account of her trial and death, which ends his second volume. Our only fear is, that by having thus told the truth he has, instead of justifying our ancestors, only added one more to the list of people who are to be 'given up' with a cynical shrug and smile. We have heard already, and among young ladies too, who can be as cynical as other people in these times, such speeches as, 'Well, I suppose he has proved Anne Boleyn to be a bad creature; but that does not make that horrid Henry any more right in cutting off her head.' Thus two people will be despised where only one was before, and the fact still ignored, that it is just as senseless to say that Henry cut off Anne Boleyn's head as that Queen Victoria hanged Palmer. Death, and death of a far more horrible kind than that which Anne Boleyn suffered, was the established penalty of the offences of which she was convicted: and which had in her case this fearful aggravation, that they were offences not against Henry merely, but against the whole English nation. She had been married in order that there might be an undisputed heir to the throne, and a fearful war

avoided. To throw into dispute, by any conduct of hers, the legitimacy of her own offspring, argued a levity or a hard− heartedness which of itself deserved the severest punishment.

We will pass from this disagreeable topic to Mr. Froude's lifelike sketch of Pope Clement, and the endless tracasseries into which his mingled weakness and cunning led him, and which, like most crooked dealings, ended by defeating their own object. Pages 125 et sqq. of Vol. I. contain sketches of him, his thoughts and ways, as amusing as they are historically important; but we have no space to quote from them. It will be well for those to whom the Reformation is still a matter of astonishment to read those pages, and consider what manner of man he was, in spite of all pretended divine authority, under whose rule the Romish system received its irrecoverable wound.

But of all these figures, not excepting Henry's own, Wolsey stands out as the most grand and tragical; and Mr. Froude has done good service to history, if only in making us understand at last the wondrous 'butcher's son.' Shakspeare seems to have felt (though he could explain the reason neither to his auditors nor, perhaps, to himself) that Wolsey was, on the whole, an heroical man. Mr. Froude shows at once his strength and his weakness; his deep sense of the rottenness of the Church; his purpose to purge her from those abominations which were as well known, it seems, to him as they were afterwards to the whole people of England; his vast schemes for education; his still vaster schemes for breaking the alliance with Spain, and uniting France and England as fellow−servants of the Pope, and twin−pillars of the sacred fabric of the Church, which helped so much toward his interest in Catherine's divorce, as a 'means' (these are his own words) 'to bind my most excellent sovereign and this glorious realm to the holy Roman See in faith and obedience for ever'; his hopes of deposing the Emperor, putting down the German heresies, and driving back the Turks beyond the pale of Christendom; his pathetic confession to the Bishop of Bayonne that 'if he could only see the divorce arranged, the King re−married, the succession settled, and the laws and the Church reformed, he would retire from the world, and would serve God the remainder of his days.'

Peace be with him! He was surely a noble soul; misled, it may be−−as who is not when his turn comes?−−by the pride of conscious power; and 'though he loved England well, yet loving Rome better': but still it is a comfort to see, either in past or in present, one more brother whom we need not despise, even though he may have wasted his energies on a dream.

And on a dream he did waste them, in spite of all his cunning. As Mr. Froude, in a noble passage, says:−

> 'Extravagant as his hopes seem, the prospect of realising them was, humanly speaking, neither chimerical nor even improbable. He had but made the common mistake of men of the world, who are the representatives of an old order of things, when that order is doomed and dying. He could not read the signs of the times; and confounding the barrenness of death with the barrenness of winter, which might be followed by a new spring and summer, he believed that the old life−tree of Catholicism, which in fact was but cumbering the ground, might bloom again in its old beauty. The thing which he called heresy was the fire of Almighty God, which no politic congregation of princes, no state machinery, though it were never so active, could trample out; and as, in the early years of Christianity, the meanest slave who was thrown to the wild beasts for his presence at the forbidden mysteries of the Gospel saw deeper, in the divine power of his faith, into the future even of this earthly world, than the sagest of his imperial persecutors,−−so a truer political prophet than Wolsey would have been found in the most ignorant of those poor men for whom his police were searching in the purlieus of London, who were risking death and torture in disseminating the pernicious volumes of the English Testament.'

It will be seen from this magnificent passage that Mr. Froude is distinctly a Protestant. He is one, to judge from his book; and all the better one, because he can sympathise with whatsoever nobleness, even with whatsoever mere conservatism, existed in the Catholic party. And therefore, because he has sympathies which are not merely party ones, but human ones, he has given the world, in these two volumes, a history of the early Reformation altogether unequalled. This human sympathy, while it has enabled him to embalm in most affecting prose the sad story of the noble though mistaken Carthusians, and to make even the Nun of Kent interesting, because truly womanly, in her very folly and deceit, has enabled him likewise to show us the hearts of the early martyrs as they never have been shown before. His sketch of the Christian Brothers, and his little true romance of Anthony Dalaber, the Oxford student, are gems of writing; while his conception of Latimer, on whom he looks as the hero of the movement, and all but an English Luther, is as worthy of Latimer as it is of himself. It is written as history should be, discriminatingly, patiently, and yet lovingly and genially; rejoicing not in evil, but in the truth; and rejoicing still more in goodness, where goodness can honestly be found.

To the ecclesiastical and political elements in the English Reformation Mr. Froude devotes a large portion of his book. We shall not enter into the questions which he discusses therein. That aspect of the movement is a foreign and a delicate subject, from discussing which a Scotch periodical may be excused. {2} North Britain had a somewhat different problem to solve from her southern sister, and solved it in an altogether different way: but this we must say, that the facts and, still more, the State Papers (especially the petition of the Commons, as contrasted with the utterly benighted answer of the Bishops) which Mr. Froude gives are such as to raise our opinion of the method on which the English part of the Reformation was conducted, and make us believe that in this, as in other matters, both Henry and his Parliament, though still doctrinal Romanists, were sound−headed practical Englishmen.

This result is of the same kind as most of those at which Mr. Froude arrives. They form altogether a general justification of our ancestors in Henry the Eighth's time, if not of Henry the Eighth himself, which frees Mr. Froude from that charge of irreverence to the past generations against which we protested in the beginning of the article. We hope honestly that he may be as successful in his next volumes as he has been in these, in vindicating the worthies of the sixteenth century. Whether he shall fail or not, and whether or not he has altogether succeeded, in the volumes before us, his book marks a new epoch, and, we trust, a healthier and loftier one, in English history. We trust that they inaugurate a time in which the deeds of our forefathers shall be looked on as sacred heirlooms; their sins as our shame, their victories as bequests to us; when men shall have sufficient confidence in those to whom they owe their existence to scrutinise faithfully and patiently every fact concerning them, with a proud trust that, search as they may, they will not find much of which to be ashamed.

Lastly, Mr. Froude takes a view of Henry's character, not, indeed, new (for it is the original one), but obsolete for now two hundred years. Let it be well understood that he makes no attempt (he has been accused thereof) to whitewash Henry: all that he does is to remove as far as he can the modern layers of 'black−wash,' and to let the man himself, fair or foul, be seen. For the result he is not responsible: it depends on facts; and unless Mr. Froude has knowingly concealed facts to an amount of which even a Lingard might be ashamed, the result is that Henry the Eighth was actually very much the man which he appeared to be to the English nation in his own generation, and for two or three generations after his death−−a result which need not astonish us, if we will only give our ancestors credit for having at least as much common sense as ourselves, and believe (why should we not?) that, on the whole, they understood their own business better than we are likely to do.

'The bloated tyrant,' it is confessed, contrived somehow or other to be popular enough. Mr. Froude tells us the reasons. He was not born a bloated tyrant, any more than Queen Elizabeth (though the fact is not generally known) was born a wizened old woman. He was from youth, till he was long past his grand climacteric, a very handsome, powerful, and active man, temperate in his habits, good−humoured, frank and honest in his speech (as even his enemies are forced to confess). He seems to have been (as his portraits prove sufficiently), for good and for evil, a thorough John Bull; a thorough Englishman: but one of the very highest type.

'Had he died (says Mr. Froude) previous to the first agitation of the divorce, his loss would have been deplored as one of the heaviest misfortunes which had ever befallen this country, and he would have left a name which would have taken its place in history by the side of the Black Prince or the Conqueror of Agincourt. Left at the most trying age, with his character unformed, with the means of gratifying every inclination, and married by his ministers, when a boy, to an unattractive woman far his senior, he had lived for thirty−six years almost without blame, and bore through England the reputation of an upright and virtuous king. Nature had been prodigal to him of her rarest gifts . . . Of his intellectual ability we are not left to judge from the suspicious panegyrics of his contemporaries. His State Papers and letters may be placed by the side of those of Wolsey or of Cromwell, and they lose nothing by the comparison. Though they are broadly different, the perception is equally clear, the expression equally powerful; and they breathe throughout an irresistible vigour of purpose. In addition to this, he had a fine musical taste, carefully cultivated; he spoke and wrote in four languages; and his knowledge of a multitude of subjects, with which his versatile ability made him conversant, would have formed the reputation of any ordinary man. He was among the best physicians of his age. He was his own engineer, inventing improvements in artillery and new constructions in shipbuilding; and this not with the condescending incapacity of a royal amateur, but with thorough workmanlike understanding. His reading was vast, especially in theology. He was 'attentive,' as it is called, 'to his religious duties,' being present at the services in chapel two or three times a day with unfailing regularity, and showing, to outward appearance, a real sense of religious obligation in the energy and purity of his life. In private he was good−humoured and good−natured. His letters to his secretaries, though never undignified, are simple, easy, and unrestrained, and the letters written by them to him are similarly plain and business−like, as if the writers knew that the person whom they were addressing disliked compliments, and chose to be treated as a man. He seems to have been always kind, always considerate; inquiring into their private concerns with genuine interest, and winning, as a consequence, their sincere and unaffected attachment. As a ruler he had been eminently popular. All his wars had been successful. He had the splendid tastes in which the English people most delighted; . . . he had more than once been tried with insurrection, which he had soothed down without bloodshed, and extinguished in forgiveness . . . And it is certain that if he had died before the divorce was mooted, Henry VIII., like the Roman emperor said by Tacitus to have been censensu omnium dignus imperii nisi imperasset, would have been considered by posterity as formed by Providence for the conduct of the Reformation, and his loss would have been deplored as a perpetual calamity.'

Mr. Froude has, of course, not written these words without having facts whereby to prove them. One he gives in an important note containing an extract from a letter of the Venetian Ambassador in 1515. At least, if his conclusions be correct, we must think twice ere we deny his assertion that 'the man best able of all living Englishmen to govern England had been set to do it by the conditions of his birth.'

'We are bound,' as Mr. Froude says, 'to allow him the benefit of his past career, and be careful to remember it in interpreting his later actions.' 'The true defect in his moral constitution, that "intense and imperious will" common to all princes of the Plantagenet blood, had not yet been tested.' That he did, in his later years, act in many ways neither wisely nor well, no one denies; that his conduct did not alienate the hearts of his subjects is what needs explanation; and Mr. Froude's opinions on this matter, novel as they are, and utterly opposed to that of the standard modern historians, require careful examination. Now I am not inclined to debate Henry the Eighth's

character, or any other subject, as between Mr. Froude and an author of the obscurantist or pseudo−conservative school. Mr. Froude is Liberal; and so am I. I wish to look at the question as between Mr. Froude and other Liberals; and therefore, of course, first, as between Mr. Froude and Mr. Hallam.

Mr. Hallam's name is so venerable and his work so Important, that to set ourselves up as judges in this or in any matter between him and Mr. Froude would be mere impertinence: but speaking merely as learners, we have surely a right to inquire why Mr. Hallam has entered on the whole question of Henry's relations to his Parliament with a praejudicium against them; for which Mr. Froude finds no ground whatsoever in fact. Why are all acts both of Henry and his Parliament to be taken in malam partem? They were not Whigs, certainly: neither were Socrates and Plato, nor even St. Paul and St. John. They may have been honest men as men go, or they may not: but why is there to be a feeling against them rather than for them? Why is Henry always called a tyrant, and his Parliament servile? The epithets have become so common and unquestioned that our interrogation may seem startling. Still we make it. Why was Henry a tyrant? That may be true, but must be proved by facts. Where are they? Is the mere fact of a monarch's asking for money a crime in him and his ministers? The question would rather seem to be, Were the moneys for which Henry asked needed or no; and, when granted, were they rightly or wrongly applied? And on these subjects we want much more information than we obtain from any epithets. The author of a constitutional history should rise above epithets: or, if he uses them, should corroborate them by facts. Why should not historians be as fair and as cautious in accusing Henry and Wolsey as they would be in accusing Queen Victoria and Lord Palmerston? What right, allow us to ask, has a grave constitutional historian to say that 'We cannot, indeed, doubt that the unshackled and despotic condition of his friend, Francis I., afforded a mortifying contrast to Henry? What document exists in which Henry is represented as regretting that he is the king of a free people?−−for such Mr. Hallam confesses, just above, England was held to be, and was actually in comparison with France. If the document does not exist, Mr. Hallam has surely stepped out of the field of the historian into that of the novelist, a la Scott or Dumas. The Parliament sometimes grants Henry's demands: sometimes it refuses them, and he has to help himself by other means. Why are both cases to be interpreted in malam partem? Why is the Parliament's granting to be always a proof of its servility?−−its refusing always a proof of Henry's tyranny and rapacity? Both views are mere praejudicia, reasonable perhaps, and possible: but why is not a praejudicium of the opposite kind as rational and as possible? Why has not a historian a right to start, as Mr. Froude does, by taking for granted that both parties may have been on the whole right; that the Parliament granted certain sums because Henry was right in asking for them; refused others because Henry was wrong; even that, in some cases, Henry may have been right in asking, the Parliament wrong in refusing; and that in such a case, under the pressure of critical times, Henry was forced to get as he could the money which he saw that the national cause required? Let it be as folks will. Let Henry be sometimes right, and the Parliament sometimes likewise; or the Parliament always right, or Henry always right; or anything else, save this strange diseased theory that both must have been always wrong, and that, evidence to that effect failing, motives must be insinuated, or openly asserted, from the writer's mere imagination. This may be a dream: but it is as easy to imagine as the other, and more pleasant also. It will probably be answered (though not by Mr. Hallam himself) by a sneer: 'You do not seem to know much of the world, sir.' But so would Figaro and Gil Blas have said, and on exactly the same grounds.

Let us examine a stock instance of Henry's 'rapacity' and his Parliament's servility, namely, the exactions in 1524 and 1525, and the subsequent 'release of the King's debts.' What are the facts of the case? France and Scotland had attacked England in 1514. The Scotch were beaten at Flodden. The French lost Tournay and Therouenne, and, when peace was made, agreed to pay the expenses of the war. Times changed, and the expenses were not paid.

A similar war arose in 1524, and cost England immense sums. A large army was maintained on the Scotch Border, another army invaded France; and Wolsey, not venturing to call a Parliament,−−because he was, as Pope's legate, liable to a praemunire,−−raised money by contributions and benevolences, which were levied, it seems on the whole, uniformly and equally (save that they weighed more heavily on the rich than on the poor, if that be a fault), and differed from taxes only in not having received the consent of Parliament. Doubtless, this was not the best way of raising money: but what if, under the circumstances, it were the only one? What if, too, on the whole, the money so raised was really given willingly by the nation? The sequel alone could decide that.

The first contribution for which Wolsey asked was paid. The second was resisted, and was not paid; proving thereby that the nation need not pay unless it chose. The court gave way; and the war became defensive only till 1525.

Then the tide turned. The danger, then, was not from Francis, but from the Emperor. Francis was taken prisoner at Pavia; and shortly after Rome was sacked by Bourbon.

The effect of all this in England is told at large in Mr. Froude's second chapter. Henry became bond for Francis's ransom, to be paid to the Emperor. He spent 500,000 crowns more in paying the French army; and in the terms of peace made with France, a sum−total was agreed on for the whole debt, old and new, to be paid as soon as possible; and an annual pension of 500,000 crowns besides. The French exchequer, however, still remained bankrupt, and again the money was not paid.

Parliament, when it met in 1529, reviewed the circumstances of the expenditure, and finding it all such as the nation on the whole approved, legalised the taxation by benevolences retrospectively: and this is the whole mare's nest of the first payment of Henry's debts; if, at least, any faith is to be put in the preamble of the Act for the release of the King's Debts, 21 Hen. VIII. c. 24. 'The King's loving subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, calling to remembrance the inestimable costs, charges, and expenses which the King's Highness hath necessarily been compelled to support and sustain since his assumption to his crown, estate, and dignity royal, as well for the extinction of a right dangerous and damnable schism, sprung in the Church, as for the modifying the insatiable and inordinate ambition of them who, while aspiring to the monarchy of Christendom, did put universal troubles and divisions in the same, intending, if they might, not only to have subdued this realm, but also all the rest, unto their power and subjection−−for resistance whereof the King's Highness was compelled to marvellous charges−−both for the supportation of sundry armies by sea and land, and also for divers and manifold contribution on hand, to save and keep his own subjects at home in rest and repose−−which hath been so politically handled that, when the most part of all Christian lands have been infested with cruel wars, the great Head and Prince of the world (the Pope) brought into captivity, cities and towns taken, spoiled, burnt, and sacked−−the King's said subjects in all this time, by the high providence and politic means of his Grace, have been nevertheless preserved, defended, and maintained from all these inconvenients, etc.

'Considering, furthermore, that his Highness, in and about the premises, hath been fain to employ not only all such sums of money as hath risen or grown by contributions made unto his Grace by his loving subjects−−but also, over and above the same, sundry other notable and excellent sums of his own treasure and yearly revenues, among which manifold great sums so employed, his Highness also, as is notoriously known, and as doth evidently appear by the ACCOUNTS OF THE SAME, hath to that use, and none other, converted all such money as by any of his subjects hath been advanced to his Grace by way of prest or loan, either particularly, or by any taxation made of the same−−being things so well collocate and bestowed, seeing the said high and great fruits and effects thereof insured to the surety and commodity and tranquillity of this realm−−of our mind and consent, do freely, absolutely, give and grant to the King's Highness all and every sum or sums of money,' etc.

The second release of the King's debts, in 1544, is very similar. The King's debts and necessities were really, when we come to examine them, those of the nation: in 1538−40 England was put into a thorough state of defence from end to end. Fortresses were built along the Scottish Border, and all along the coast opposite France and Flanders. The people were drilled and armed, the fleet equipped; and the nation, for the time, became one great army. And nothing but this, as may be proved by an overwhelming mass of evidence, saved the country from invasion. Here were enormous necessary expenses which must be met.

In 1543 a million crowns were to have been paid by Francis the First as part of his old debt. It was not paid: but, on the contrary, Henry had to go to war for it. The nation again relinquished their claim, and allowed Henry to raise another benevolence in 1545, concerning which Mr. Hallam tells us a great deal, but not one word of the political circumstances which led to it or to the release, keeping his sympathies and his paper for the sorrows of

refractory Alderman Reed, who, refusing (alone of all the citizens) to contribute to the support of troops on the Scotch Border or elsewhere, was sent down, by a sort of rough justice, to serve on the Scotch Border himself, and judge of the 'perils of the nation' with his own eyes; and being−−one is pleased to hear−−taken prisoner by the Scots, had to pay a great deal more as ransom than he would have paid as benevolence.

But to return. What proof is there, in all this, of that servility which most historians, and Mr. Hallam among the rest, are wont to attribute to Henry's Parliaments? What feeling appears on the face of this document, which we have given and quoted, but one honourable to the nation? Through the falsehood of a foreign nation the King is unable to perform his engagements to the people. Is not the just and generous course in such a case to release him from those engagements? Does this preamble, does a single fact of the case, justify historians in talking of these 'king's debts' in just the same tone as that in which they would have spoken if the King had squandered the money on private pleasures? Perhaps most people who write small histories believe that this really was the case. They certainly would gather no other impression from the pages of Mr. Hallam. No doubt the act must have been burdensome on some people. Many, we are told, had bequeathed their promissory notes to their children, used their reversionary interest in the loan in many ways; and these, of course, felt the change very heavily. No doubt: but why have we not a right to suppose that the Parliament were aware of that fact; but chose it as the less of the two evils? The King had spent the money; he was unable to recover it from Francis; could only refund it by raising some fresh tax or benevolence: and why may not the Parliament have considered the release of old taxes likely to offend fewer people than the imposition of new ones? It is certainly an ugly thing to break public faith; but to prove that public faith was broken, we must prove that Henry compelled the Parliament to release him; if the act was of their own free will, no public faith was broken, for they were the representatives of the nation, and through them the nation forgave its own debt. And what evidence have we that they did not represent the nation, and that, on the whole, we must suppose, as we should in the case of any other men, that they best knew their own business? May we not apply to this case, and to others, mutatis mutandis, the argument which Mr. Froude uses so boldly and well in the case of Anne Boleyn's trial−−'The English nation also, as well as . . . deserves justice at our hands?'

Certainly it does: but it is a disagreeable token of the method on which we have been accustomed to write the history of our own forefathers, that Mr. Froude should find it necessary to state formally so very simple a truth.

What proof, we ask again, is there that this old Parliament was 'servile'? Had that been so, Wolsey would not have been afraid to summon it. The specific reason for not summoning a Parliament for six years after that of 1524 was that they were not servile; that when (here we are quoting Mr. Hallam, and not Mr. Froude) Wolsey entered the House of Commons with a great train, seemingly for the purpose of intimidation, they 'made no other answer to his harangues than that it was their usage to debate only among themselves.' The debates on this occasion lasted fifteen or sixteen days, during which, says an eye−witness, 'there has been the greatest and sorest hold in the Lower House,' 'the matter debated and beaten'; 'such hold that the House was like to have been dissevered'; in a word, hard fighting−−and why not honest fighting?−−between the court party and the Opposition, 'which ended,' says Mr. Hallam, 'in the court party obtaining, with the utmost difficulty, a grant much inferior to the Cardinal's original requisition.' What token of servility is here?

And is it reasonable to suppose that after Wolsey was conquered, and a comparatively popular ministry had succeeded, and that memorable Parliament of 1529 (which Mr. Froude, not unjustly, thinks more memorable than the Long Parliament itself) began its great work with a high hand, backed not merely by the King, but by the public opinion of the majority of England, their decisions are likely to have been more servile than before? If they resisted the King when they disagreed with him, are they to be accused of servility because they worked with him when they agreed with him? Is an Opposition always in the right; a ministerial party always in the wrong? Is it an offence against the people to agree with the monarch, even when he agrees with the people himself? Simple as these questions are, one must really stop to ask them.

No doubt pains were often taken to secure elections favourable to the Government. Are none taken now? Are not more taken now? Will any historian show us the documents which prove the existence, in the sixteenth century, of Reform Club, Carlton Club, whippers−in and nominees, governmental and opposition, and all the rest of the beautiful machinery which protects our Reformed Parliament from the evil influences of bribery and corruption? Pah!−−We have somewhat too much glass in our modern House to afford to throw stones at our forefathers' old St. Stephen's. At the worst, what was done then but that without which it is said to be impossible to carry on a Government now? Take an instance from the Parliament of 1539, one in which there is no doubt Government influence was used in order to prevent as much as possible the return of members favourable to the clergy−−for the good reason that the clergy were no doubt, on their own side, intimidating voters by all those terrors of the unseen world which had so long been to them a source of boundless profit and power.

Cromwell writes to the King to say that he has secured a seat for a certain Sir Richard Morrison; but for what purpose? As one who no doubt 'should be ready to answer and take up such as should crack or face with literature of learning, if any such should be.' There was, then, free discussion; they expected clever and learned speakers in the Opposition, and on subjects of the deepest import, not merely political, but spiritual; and the Government needed men to answer such. What more natural than that so close on the 'Pilgrimage of Grace,' and in the midst of so great dangers at home and abroad, the Government should have done their best to secure a well−disposed House (one would like to know when they would not)? But surely the very effort (confessedly exceptional) and the acknowledged difficulty prove that Parliament were no mere 'registrars of edicts.'

But the strongest argument against the tyranny of the Tudors, and especially of Henry VIII. in his 'benevolences,' is derived from the state of the people themselves. If these benevolences had been really unpopular, they would not have been paid. In one case we have seen, a benevolence was not paid for that very reason. For the method of the Tudor sovereigns, like that of their predecessors, was the very opposite to that of tyrants in every age and country. The first act of a tyrant has always been to disarm the people, and to surround himself with a standing army. The Tudor method was, as Mr. Froude shows us by many interesting facts, to keep the people armed and drilled, even to compel them to learn the use of weapons. Throughout England spread one vast military organisation, which made every adult a soldier, and enabled him to find, at a day's notice, his commanding officer, whether landlord, sheriff, or lieutenant of the county; so that, as a foreign ambassador of the time remarks with astonishment (we quote from memory), 'England is the strongest nation on earth, for though the King has not a single mercenary soldier, he can raise in three days an army of two hundred thousand men.'

And of what temper those men were it is well known enough. Mr. Froude calls them−−and we beg leave to endorse, without exception, Mr. Froude's opinion−−'A sturdy high−hearted race, sound in body and fierce in spirit, and furnished with thews and sinews which, under the stimulus of those "great shins of beef," their common diet, were the wonder of the age.' 'What comyn folke in all this world,' says a State Paper in 1515, 'may compare with the comyns of England in riches, freedom, liberty, welfare, and all prosperity? What comyn folk is so mighty, so strong in the felde, as the comyns of England?' In authentic stories of actions under Henry VIII.−−and, we will add, under Elizabeth likewise−−where the accuracy of the account is undeniable, no disparity of force made Englishmen shrink from enemies whenever they could meet them. Again and again a few thousands of them carried dismay into the heart of France. Four hundred adventurers, vagabond apprentices of London, who formed a volunteer corps in the Calais garrison, were for years, Hall says, the terror of Normandy. In the very frolic of conscious power they fought and plundered without pay, without reward, save what they could win for themselves; and when they fell at last, they fell only when surrounded by six times their number, and were cut to pieces in careless desperation. Invariably, by friend and foe alike, the English are described as the fiercest people in all Europe−−English wild beasts Benvenuto Cellini calls them; and this great physical power they owed to the profuse abundance in which they lived, to the soldier's training in which every one of them was bred from childhood.

Mr. Froude's novel assertion about profuse abundance must be weighed by those who have read his invaluable introductory chapter. But we must ask at once how it was possible to levy on such an armed populace a tax which

they were determined not to pay, and felt that they were not bound to pay, either in law or justice? Conceive Lord Palmerston's sending down to demand a 'benevolence' from the army at Aldershot, beginning with the general in command and descending to the privates . . . What would be the consequences? Ugly enough: but gentle in comparison with those of any attempt to exact a really unpopular tax from a nation of well−armed Englishmen, unless they, on the whole, thought the tax fit to be paid. They would grumble, of course, whether they intended to pay or not,−−for were they not Englishmen, our own flesh and blood?−−and grumble all the more in person, because they had no Press to grumble for them: but what is there then in the M.P.'s letter to Lord Surrey, quoted by Mr. Hallam, p. 25, or in the more pointed letter of Warham's, two pages on, which we do not see lying on our breakfast tables in half the newspapers every week? Poor, pedantic, obstructive old Warham, himself very angry at so much being asked of his brother clergymen, and at their being sworn as to the value of their goods (so like are old times to new ones); and being, on the whole, of opinion that the world (the Church included) is going to the devil, says that as he has been 'showed in a secret manner of his friends, the people sore grudgeth and murmureth, and speaketh cursedly among themselves, as far as they dare, saying they shall never have rest of payments as long as some liveth, and that they had better die than thus be continually handed, reckoning themselves, their wives and children, as despoulit, and not greatly caring what they do, or what becomes of them.'

Very dreadful−−if true: which last point depends very much upon who Warham was. Now, on reading Mr. Froude's or any other good history, we shall find that Warham was one of the leaders of that despondent party which will always have its antitype in England. Have we, too, not heard within the last seven years similar prophecies of desolation, mourning, and woe−−of the Church tottering on the verge of ruin, the peasantry starving under the horrors of free trade, noble families reduced to the verge of beggary by double income−tax? Even such a prophet seems Warham to have been−−of all people in that day, one of the last whom one would have asked for an opinion.

Poor old Warham, however, was not so far wrong in this particular case; for the 'despoulit' slaves of Suffolk, not content with grumbling, rose up with sword and bow, and vowed that they would not pay. Whereon the bloated tyrant sent his praetorians, and enforced payment by scou pages on, which we do not see lying on our breakfast tables in half the newspapers every week? Poor, pedantic, obstructive old Warham, himself very angry at so much being asked of his brother clergymen, and at their being sworn as to the value of their goods (so like are old times to new ones); and being, on the whole, of opinion that the world (the Church included) is going to the devil, says that as he has been 'showed in a secret manner of his friends, the people sore grudgeth and murmureth, and speaketh cursedly among themselves, as far as they dare, saying they shall never have rest of payments as long as some liveth, and that they had better die than thus be continually handed, reckoning themselves, their wives and children, as despoulit, and not greatly caring what they do, or what becomes of them.'

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From all which facts−−they are Mr. Hallam's, not Mr. Froude's−−we can deduce not tyranny, but lenity, good sense, and the frank withdrawal from a wrong position as soon as the unwillingness of the people proved it to be a wrong one.

This instance is well brought forward (though only in a line or two, by Mr. Froude) as one among many proofs that the working classes in Henry the Eighth's time 'enjoyed an abundance far beyond that which in general falls to the lot of that order in long−settled countries, incomparably beyond what the same class were enjoying at that very time in Germany or France. The laws secured them; and that the laws were put in force, we have the direct evidence of successive acts of the Legislature, justifying the general policy by its success: and we have also the indirect evidence of the contented loyalty of the great body of the people, at a time when, if they had been discontented, they held in their own hands the means of asserting what the law acknowledged to be their right. 'The Government,' as we have just shown at length, 'had no power to compel injustice . . . If the peasantry had been suffering under any real grievances we should have heard of them when the religious rebellions furnished so fair an opportunity to press them forward. Complaint was loud enough, when complaint was just, under the Somerset Protectorate.'

Such broad facts as these−−for facts they are−−ought to make us pause ere we boast of the greater liberty enjoyed by Englishmen of the present day, as compared with the tyranny of Tudor times. Thank God, there is no lack of that blessing now: but was there any real lack of it then? Certainly the outward notes of a tyranny exist now in far greater completeness than then. A standing army, a Government police, ministries who bear no love to a militia, and would consider the compulsory arming and drilling of the people as a dangerous insanity, do not look at first sight as much like 'free institutions' as a Government which, though again and again in danger not merely of rebellion, but of internecine wars of succession, so trusted the people as to force weapons into their hands from boyhood. Let us not be mistaken: we are no hankerers after retrogression: the present system works very well; let it be; all that we say is that the imputation of despotic institutions lies, prima facie, rather against the reign of Queen Victoria than against that of King Henry the Eighth. Of course it is not so in fact. Many modern methods, which are despotic in appearance, are not so in practice. Let us believe that the same was the case in the sixteenth century. Our governors now understand their own business best, and make a very fair compromise between discipline and freedom. Let us believe that the men of the sixteenth century did so likewise. All we ask is that our forefathers should be judged as we wish to be judged ourselves, 'not according to outward appearance, but with righteous judgment.'

Mr. Froude finds the cause of this general contentment and loyalty of the masses in the extreme care which the Government took of their well−being. The introductory chapter, in which he proves to his own satisfaction the correctness of his opinion, is well worth the study of our political economists. The facts which he brings seem certainly overwhelming; of course, they can only be met by counter− facts; and our knowledge does not enable us either to corroborate or refute his statements. The chief argument used against them seems to us, at least, to show that for some cause or other the working classes were prosperous enough. It is said the Acts of Parliament regulating wages do not fix the minimum of wages, but the maximum. They are not intended to defend the employed against the employer, but the employer against the employed, in a defective state of the labour market, when the workmen, by the fewness of their numbers, were enabled to make extravagant demands. Let this be the case−−we do not say that it is so−−what is it but a token of prosperity among the working classes? A labour market so thin that workmen can demand their own price for their labour, till Parliament is compelled to bring them to reason, is surely a time of prosperity to the employed− −a time of full work and high wages; of full stomachs, inclined from very prosperity to 'wax fat and kick.' If, however, any learned statistician should be able to advance, on the opposite side of the question, enough to weaken some of Mr. Froude's conclusions, he must still, if he be a just man, do honour to the noble morality of this most striking chapter, couched as it is in as perfect English as we have ever had the delight of reading. We shall leave, then, the battle of facts to be fought out by statisticians, always asking Mr. Froude's readers to bear in mind that, though other facts may be true, yet his facts are no less true likewise; and we shall quote at length, both as a specimen of his manner and of his matter, the last three pages of this introductory chapter, in which, after speaking of the severity of the laws against vagrancy, and showing how they were excused by the organisation which found employment for every able− bodied man, he goes on to say:−

'It was therefore the expressed conviction of the English nation that it was better for a man not to live at all than to live a profitless and worthless life. The vagabond was a sore spot upon the commonwealth, to be healed by wholesale discipline if the gangrene was not incurable; to be cut away with the knife if the milder treatment of the cart−whip failed to be of profit.

'A measure so extreme in its severity was partly dictated by policy. The state of the country was critical; and the danger from questionable persons traversing it, unexamined and uncontrolled, was greater than at ordinary times. But in point of justice as well as of prudence it harmonised with the iron temper of the age, and it answered well for the government of a fierce and powerful people, in whose hearts lay an intense hatred of rascality, and among whom no one could have lapsed into evil courses except by deliberate preference for them. The moral sinew of the English must have been strong indeed when it admitted of such stringent bracing; but, on the whole, they were ruled as they preferred to be ruled; and if wisdom can be tested by success, the manner in which they passed the great crisis of the Reformation is the best justification of their princes. The era was great throughout Europe. The Italians of the age of Michael Angelo, the Spaniards who were the contemporaries of Cortez, the Germans who shook off the Pope at the call of Luther, and the splendid chivalry of Francis I. of France, were no common men. But they were all brought face to face with the same trials, and none met them as the English met them. The English alone never lost their self−possession, and if they owed something to fortune in their escape from anarchy, they owed more to the strong hand and steady purpose of their rulers.

'To conclude this chapter, then.

'In the brief review of the system under which England was governed, we have seen a state of things in which the principles of political economy were, consciously or unconsciously, contradicted; where an attempt, more or less successful, was made to bring the production and distribution of wealth under the moral rule of right or wrong; and where those laws of supply and demand, which we are now taught to regard as immutable ordinances of nature, were absorbed or superseded by a higher code. It is necessary for me to repeat that I am not holding up the sixteenth century as a model which the nineteenth might safely follow. The population has become too large, and employment too complicated and fluctuating, to admit of such control; while, in default of control, the relapse upon self−interest as the one motive principle is certain to ensue, and, when it ensues, is absolute in its operations. But as, even with us, these so−called ordinances of nature in time of war consent to be suspended, and duty to his country becomes with every good citizen a higher motive of action than the advantages which he may gain in an enemy's market; so it is not uncheering to look back upon a time when the nation was in a normal condition of militancy against social injustice−−when the Government was enabled, by happy circumstances, to pursue into detail a single and serious aim at the well−being−−well−being in its widest sense−−of all members of the commonwealth. There were difficulties and drawbacks at that time as well as this. Of Liberty, in the modern sense of the word−−of the supposed right of every man "to do

what he will with his own," or with himself−−there was no idea. To the question, if ever it was asked, "May I not do what I will with my own?" there was the brief answer, "No man may do what is wrong, either with what is his own or with what is another's." Producers, too, who were not permitted to drive down their workmen's wages by competition, could not sell their goods as cheaply as they might have done, and the consumer paid for the law in an advance of price; but the burden, though it fell heavily on the rich, lightly touched the poor and the rich consented cheerfully to a tax which ensured the loyalty of the people. The working man of modern times has bought the extension of his liberty at the price of his material comfort. The higher classes have gained in wealth what they have lost in power. It is not for the historian to balance advantages. His duty is with the facts.'

Our forefathers, then, were not free, if we attach to that word the meaning which our Transatlantic brothers seem inclined to give to it. They had not learnt to deify self−will, and to claim for each member of the human race a right to the indulgence of every eccentricity. They called themselves free, and boasted of their freedom; but their conception of liberty was that of all old nations, a freedom which not only allowed of discipline, but which grew out of it. No people had less wish to exalt the kingly power into that specious tyranny, a paternal Government; the king was with them, and always had been, both formally and really, subject to their choice; bound by many oaths to many duties; the minister, not the master of the people. But their whole conception of political life was, nevertheless, shaped by their conception of family life. Strict obedience, stern discipline, compulsory education in practical duties, was the law of the latter; without such training they thought their sons could never become in any true sense men. And when they grew up, their civic life was to be conducted on the same principles, for the very purpose of enabling them to live as members of a free nation. If the self− will of the individual was curbed, now and then, needlessly−−as it is the nature of all human methods to caricature themselves at times−− the purpose was, not to weaken the man, but to strengthen him by strengthening the body to which he belonged. The nation was to be free, self−helping, self−containing, unconquerable; to that great purpose the will, the fancy−−even, if need be, the mortal life of the individual, must give way. Men must be trained at all costs in self− restraint, because only so could they become heroes in the day of danger; in self−sacrifice for the common good, because only so would they remain united, while foreign nations and evil home influences were trying to tear them asunder. In a word, their conception of life was as a warfare; their organisation that of a regiment. It is a question whether the conception of corporate life embodied in a regiment or army be not, after all, the best working one for this world. At least the problem of a perfect society, howsoever beautiful on paper, will always issue in a compromise, more or less perfect−−let us hope more and more perfect as the centuries roll on−− between the strictness of military discipline and the Irishman's laissez−faire ideal, wherein 'every man should do that which was right in the sight of his own eyes, and wrong too, if he liked.' At least, such had England been for centuries; under such a system had she thriven; a fact which, duly considered, should silence somewhat those gentlemen who, not being of a military turn themselves, inform Europe so patriotically and so prudently that 'England is not a military nation.'

From this dogma we beg leave to differ utterly. Britain is at this moment, in our eyes, the only military nation in Europe. All other nations seem to us to have military governments, but not to be military themselves. As proof of the assertion, we appeal merely to the existence of our militia. While other nations are employing conscription, we have raised in twelve months a noble army, every soul of which has volunteered as a free man; and yet, forsooth, we are not a military nation! We are not ashamed to tell how, but the other day, standing in the rear of those militia regiments, no matter where, a flush of pride came over us at the sight of those lads, but a few months since helpless and awkward country boors, now full of sturdy intelligence, cheerful obedience, and the manhood which can afford to be respectful to others, because it respects itself, and knows that it is respected in turn. True, they had not the lightness, the order, the practical ease, the cunning self− helpfulness of the splendid German legionaries who stood beside them, the breast of every other private decorated with clasps and medals for service in the wars of seven years since. As an invading body, perhaps, one would have preferred the Germans; but only

because experience had taught them already what it would teach in twelve months to the Berkshire or Cambridge 'clod.' There, to us, was the true test of England's military qualities; her young men had come by tens of thousands, of their own free will, to be made soldiers of by her country gentlemen, and treated by them the while as men to be educated, not as things to be compelled; not driven like sheep to the slaughter, to be disciplined by men with whom they had no bond but the mere official one of military obedience; and 'What,' we ask ourselves, 'does England lack to make her a second Rome?' Her people have physical strength, animal courage, that self−dependence of freemen which enabled at Inkerman the privates to fight on literally without officers, every man for his own hand. She has inventive genius, enormous wealth; and if, as is said, her soldiers lack at present the self−helpfulness of the Zouave, it is ridiculous to suppose that that quality could long be wanting in the men of a nation which is at this moment the foremost in the work of emigration and colonisation. If organising power and military system be, as is said, lacking in high quarters, surely there must be organising power enough somewhere in the greatest industrial nation upon earth, ready to come forward when there is a real demand for it; and whatever be the defects of our system, we are surely not as far behind Prussia or France as Rome was behind the Carthaginians and the Greeks whom she crushed. A few years sufficed for them to learn all they needed from their enemies; fewer still would suffice us to learn from our friends. Our working classes are not, like those of America, in a state of physical comfort too great to make it worth while for them to leave their home occupations; and whether that be a good or an evil, it at least ensures us, as our militia proves, an almost inexhaustible supply of volunteers. What a new and awful scene for the world's drama, did such a nation as this once set before itself, steadily and ruthlessly, as Rome did of old, the idea of conquest. Even now, waging war as she has done, as it were, [Greek text which cannot be reproduced] thinking war too unimportant a part of her work to employ on it her highest intellects, her flag has advanced in the last fifty years over more vast and richer tracts than that of any European nation upon earth. What keeps her from the dream which lured to their destruction Babylon, Macedonia, Rome?

This: that, thank God, she has a conscience still; that, feeling intensely the sacredness of her own national life, she has learned to look on that of other people's as sacred also; and since, in the fifteenth century, she finally repented of that wild and unrighteous dream of conquering France, she has discovered more and more that true military greatness lies in the power of defence, and not of attack; not in waging war, but being able to wage it; and has gone on her true mission of replenishing the earth more peacefully, on the whole, and more humanely, than did ever nation before her; conquering only when it was necessary to put down the lawlessness of the savage few for the well−being of the civilised many. This has been her idea; she may have confused it and herself in Caffre or in Chinese wars; for who can always be true to the light within him? But this has been her idea; and therefore she stands and grows and thrives, a virgin land for now eight hundred years.

But a fancy has come over us during the last blessed forty years of unexampled peace, from which our ancestors of the sixteenth century were kept by stern and yet most wholesome lessons; the fancy that peace, and not war, is the normal condition of the world. The fancy is so fair that we blame none who cherish it; after all they do good by cherishing it; they point us to an ideal which we should otherwise forget, as Babylon, Rome, France in the seventeenth century, forgot utterly. Only they are in haste (and pardonable haste too) to realise that ideal, forgetting that to do so would be really to stop short of it, and to rest contented in some form of human society far lower than that which God has actually prepared for those who love Him. Better to believe that all our conceptions of the height to which the human race might attain are poor and paltry compared with that toward which God is guiding it, and for which he is disciplining it by awful lessons: and to fight on, if need be, ruthless, and yet full of pity−−and many a noble soul has learnt within the last two years how easy it is to reconcile in practice that seeming paradox of words−−smiting down stoutly evil wheresoever we shall find it, and saying, 'What ought to be, we know not; God alone can know: but that this ought not to be, we do know, and here, in God's name, it shall not stay.'

We repeat it: war, in some shape or other, is the normal condition of the world. It is a fearful fact: but we shall not abolish it by ignoring it, and ignoring by the same method the teaching of our Bibles. Not in mere metaphor does the gospel of Love describe the life of the individual good man as a perpetual warfare. Not in mere metaphor does the apostle of Love see in his visions of the world's future no Arcadian shepherd paradises, not even a perfect civilisation, but an eternal war in heaven, wrath and woe, plague and earthquake; and amid the everlasting storm, the voices of the saints beneath the altar crying, 'Lord, how long?' Shall we pretend to have more tender hearts

than the old man of Ephesus, whose dying sermon, so old legends say, was nought but−−'Little children, love one another'; and who yet could denounce the liar and the hater and the covetous man, and proclaim the vengeance of God against all evildoers, with all the fierceness of an Isaiah? It was enough for him−−let it be enough for us−−that he should see, above the thunder− cloud, and the rain of blood, and the scorpion swarm, and the great angel calling all the fowl of heaven to the supper of the great God, that they might eat the flesh of kings and valiant men, a city of God eternal in the heavens, and yet eternally descending among men; a perfect order, justice, love, and peace, becoming actual more and more in every age, through all the fearful training needful for a fallen race.

Let that be enough for us: but do not let us fancy that what is true of the two extremes must not needs be true of the mean also; that while the life of the individual and of the universe is one of perpetual self−defence, the life of the nation can be aught else: or that any appliances of scientific comforts, any intellectual cultivation, even any of the most direct and common−sense arguments of self−interest, can avail to quiet in man those outbursts of wrath, ambition, cupidity, wounded pride, which have periodically convulsed, and will convulse to the end, the human race. The philosopher in his study may prove their absurdity, their suicidal folly, till, deluded by the strange lull of a forty years' peace, he may look on wars as in the same category with flagellantisms, witch−manias, and other 'popular delusions,' as insanities of the past, impossible henceforth; and may prophesy, as really wise political economists were doing in 1847, that mankind had grown too sensible to go to war any more. And behold, the peace proves only to be the lull before the thunderstorm; and one electric shock sets free forces unsuspected, transcendental, supernatural in the deepest sense; forces which we can no more stop, by shrieks at their absurdity, from incarnating themselves in actual blood, and misery, and horror, than we can control the madman in his paroxysm by telling him that he is a madman. And so the fair vision of the student is buried once more in rack and hail and driving storm; and, like Daniel of old when rejoicing over the coming restoration of his people, he sees beyond the victory some darker struggle still, and lets his notes of triumph die away into a wail,−−'And the end thereof shall be with a flood; and to the end of the war desolations are determined.'

It is as impossible as it would be unwise to conceal from ourselves the fact that all the Continental nations look upon our present peace as but transitory, momentary; and on the Crimean war as but the prologue to a fearful drama−−all the more fearful because none knows its purpose, its plot, which character will be assumed by any given actor, and, least of all, the denouement of the whole. All that they feel and know is that everything which has happened since 1848 has exasperated, not calmed, the electric tension of the European atmosphere; that a rottenness, rapidly growing intolerable alike 'to God and the enemies of God,' has eaten into the vitals of Continental life; that their rulers know neither where they are nor whither they are going, and only pray that things may last out their time: all notes which one would interpret as proving the Continent to be already ripe for subjection to some one devouring race of conquerors, were there not a ray of hope in an expectation, even more painful to our human pity, which is held by some of the wisest among the Germans; namely, that the coming war will fast resolve into no struggle between bankrupt monarchs and their respective armies, but a war between nations themselves, an internecine war of opinions and of creeds. There are wise Germans now who prophesy, with sacred tears, a second 'Thirty Years' War,' with all its frantic horrors, for their hapless country, which has found two centuries too short a time wherein to recover from the exhaustion of that first fearful scourge. Let us trust, if that war shall beget its new Tillys and Wallensteins, it shall also beget its new Gustavus Adolphus, and many another child of Light: but let us not hope that we can stand by in idle comfort, and that when the overflowing scourge passes by it shall not reach to us. Shame to us, were that our destiny! Shame to us, were we to refuse our share in the struggles of the human race, and to stand by in idle comfort while the Lord's battles are being fought. Honour to us, if in that day we have chosen for our leaders, as our forefathers of the sixteenth century did, men who see the work which God would have them do, and have hearts and heads to do it. Honour to us, if we spend this transient lull, as our forefathers of the sixteenth century did, in setting our house in order, in redressing every grievance, reforming every abuse, knitting the hearts of the British nation together by practical care and help between class and class, man and man, governor and governed, that we may bequeath to our children, as Henry the Eighth's men did to theirs, a British national life, so united and whole−hearted, so clear in purpose and sturdy in execution, so trained to know the right side at the first glance and take it, that they shall look back with love and honour upon us, their fathers, determined to carry out, even to the death, the method

which we have bequeathed to them. Then, if God will that the powers of evil, physical and spiritual, should combine against this land, as they did in the days of good Queen Bess, we shall not have lived in vain; for those who, as in Queen Bess's days, thought to yoke for their own use a labouring ox, will find, as then, that they have roused a lion from his den.

Footnotes:

{1} North British Review, No. LI., November 1856.−−'A History of England, from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth.' By J. A. Froude, M.A., late Fellow of Exeter college, Oxford. London: J. W. Parker and Son, West Strand. 2 vols. 1856.

{2} This article appeared in the North British Review.