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# SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF MR. FROUDE'S HISTORICAL METHODS.

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Two years ago last December, the fifth day, Mr. Froude wrote the preface to "Oceana," or "England and her Colonies." The book gives us Mr. Froude's impressions of the political, social, and material condition of Australia and New Zealand. Two years later, Mr. Froude writes a second book on the English Colonies. This time, he gives us a picture of "The English in the West Indies." Both these works come to us from one who is essayist, historian, traveller, a scholar of exceptional attainments, a writer whose style is brilliant, fascinating, and all but persuasive.

The design of this paper is not to review either "Oceana" or "The English in the West Indies," but rather to make them do duty as guides. These books are unlike anything Mr. Froude has written before; yet they are very fair illustrations of his method in writing history. It will not be regarded a misuse of the recent work of this historian, if we make it serve as a glass through which to look at his more remote writings.

For convenience of treatment, "Oceana" will be taken as the guide in these illustrations of Mr. Froude's historical methods. Before entering on the study of Mr. Froude's methods, an approximate answer is offered to the question, "What is the true method in writing history?" The impression is abroad that history is an easy study. This is true, if we mean that it is easy to understand, because it is written in language which is untechnical. But it is very far from the

truth, if we mean that history is an easy subject to master. The department of dogmatic theology in our seminaries is commonly regarded the most difficult to fill. But the opinion is ventured that there is no study which calls for so much as that of historical theology. Whether we look at the preparation demanded in the knowledge of original authorities, in the thorough acquaintance with the spirit, the laws, the customs, the language, of the period whose history is portrayed; or whether we regard that fine prerequisite for all true historical treatment,—honest dealing with authorities, and a sacred purpose to set forth the truth at any price,—from whatever point of view we look at it, the work of the historical theologian demands qualifications of the highest order. This same will hold true of all historical statement, whatever definition we give of history. We may call it with one, "philosophy teaching by example," or with another, "the precepts of moral philosophy reduced to example," or with a third, "the knowledge of man as a political being." With either definition, it is true that history is no easy study to master. The true method, then, in writing history, must, first of all, recognize that the work it has set itself to do is of the most exacting kind. This becomes the more evident, when we see the special peril to which the historian is exposed, viz., that of sacrificing truth to style. To make narrative attractive and description pleasing is both a peril and a privilege. It is a peril, whenever one aims for excellence of style, no matter what becomes of excellence of material. It is a peril, when, to make a story pleasing, one softens hard facts into metaphors, thus making history not a serious study, but an "elegant amusement." It is a privilege, when, in graphic description, accuracy is never sacrificed to brilliancy. It is a privilege, when fidelity in setting forth things as they are, easily unites itself to graceful and vigorous expression. Prof. E. A. Freeman in his "Methods of Historical Study" well says that "a narrative that is true and dull is better than one that is false though lively." He then wittily describes the temptation to which all writers of

history are exposed. "The danger of sacrificing excellence of matter to excellence of style may make us almost lament the unavoidable partnership between history and literature. We may be tempted to envy the lot of the geometer or the chemist in whose ways are no such pitfalls. The most winning style, the choicest metaphors, the neatest phrases from foreign tongues, would all be thrown away if they were devoted to proving that any two sides of a triangle are not always greater than the third side. When they are devoted to proving that a man cut off his wife's head one day, and married her maid the next, out of sheer love for his country, they win believers for the paradox."

The true historical method must then acknowledge that the difficulties in such study are great, the dangers, real, the demands, exacting. Three illustrations are offered of Mr. Froude's methods in writing history. They cannot be put before us in a better way than in his own words. In his essay on "The Lives of the Saints," one of his "Short Studies on Great Subjects," he says, "We cannot relate facts as they are. They must first pass through ourselves, and we are more or less than mortal, if they gather nothing in the transit. The great outlines alone lie around us. The details, we each fill up variously according to the turn of our sympathies, the extent of our knowledge, or our general theory of things." This last sentence is worthy of note, because it is in no respects a confession, but the deliberate statement of what Mr. Froude believes to be a necessary condition in historical study. We shall not be accused of unfairness, if we look at Mr. Froude in the light of his own words.

I. The first illustration of his historical methods is found in that he fails to subordinate literary style to historic truth. There seems to be no other explanation for the extraordinary things in many of his works than in the words of the essay just quoted. The outlines of history lie round about him. The details, he fills up in a way ever attractive, though startling. The trustworthiness of these details must be measured "by the turn of his sympathies, the extent of his knowledge, and

his general theory of things." "Oceana" is the most recent illustration in hand. Mr. Froude could not travel from England to Aukland, and return across our continent, without saying many good things in a way never commonplace. But it has been given to Mr. Edward Wakefield, a member of the House of Representatives in New Zealand, to show us Mr. Froude's method in narrative and description as applied to Australia. Attention was called, at the time, to this review of "Oceana" in the *Nineteenth Century* of August, 1886. The quotations then made by the daily press are not so familiar but that they may be repeated. Speaking of Adelaide in South Australia, Mr. Froude says, "Seven miles away, we saw below us in a basin, with a river winding through it, a city of 150,000 inhabitants, not one of whom has ever known, or will know, a moment's anxiety as to the recurring regularity of his three meals a day." Mr. Wakefield answers that "Adelaide is not in a basin, but on the highest land in the neighborhood. There is no river winding through it, but the little Torrens, which has long since been dammed up, and converted into a lake in the park lands. The population of Adelaide with all its suburbs never exceeded 75,000, and when Mr. Froude was there, great numbers of them were leaving daily, starved out by the failure of the harvest, the drought, and the commercial depression." Mr. Wakefield describes a visit in 1885, the same year in which Mr. Froude was there, in which he saw more poverty and worse poverty than in the twenty-five previous years in the colonies. He says, "I attended the sittings of the Benevolent Relief Committee, and learned something about the anxiety of some of the inhabitants of Adelaide as to the 'recurring regularity of their three meals a day.' Since then, the Government house has been mobbed by multitudes of people clamoring for the means of subsistence." Thus much for Mr. Froude's geographical eyesight. Some one has called geography, "one of the two eyes of history." The truth of the definition in any given description of the earth's surface will depend very much on

the character of this organ of eye-sight. It will be of little service to history, if it be, as Mr. Froude says was true of Pompey the Great, "a squint-eye."

Other citations might be made quite as startling as this, of Mr. Froude's inaccuracy in the statement of facts, which he had the very best opportunity of verifying. It may seem a little heartless to quote Mr. Froude against himself. But in view of the repeated misstatement of fact, the false picture he gives of the political sentiments of the colonies, the characterization of men and things, for which he had simply the authority of hearsay,—just because he has "filled up the outlines" with such details as these, we may fairly read to Mr. Froude from his "Julius Cæsar." "Gossip," says he, in criticising some reflections on the character of the Roman Emperor, "is not evidence, nor does it become evidence, because it has been repeated through many generations." Leaving "Oceana" for a moment, let us go back a few years for an illustration of this same spirit. This charge of inaccuracy, which has been reaffirmed by Mr. Charles Eliot Norton in the "Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle," is quite as old as the earliest of Mr. Froude's writings. In the *Contemporary Review* of April, 1867, there is a careful notice of the last two volumes of Mr. Froude's "History of England," that part which deals with Ireland. Much praise has been given this history, because of the specially favorable opportunities the writer had in his access to state documents. Can it be, then, accident or incident in Mr. Froude's writings, that his reviewer, in examining these very same documents, and comparing them with these two volumes on Ireland, found misstatements of historical facts scattered all through? Or turn again to his essay on "Criticism and the Gospel History." A single quotation will suffice. "Every thinking person who has been brought up a Christian and desires to remain a Christian, yet who knows anything of what is passing in the world, is looking to be told on what evidence the New Testament claims to be received. The state of opinion proves of itself

that the arguments hitherto offered produce no conviction." This statement has, possibly, literary merit, but Mr. Froude could scarcely have constructed a paragraph in which historic truth is so conspicuously absent. He would do well to listen to one who can speak with authority on this subject. "The position and character of an historian," says Professor Fisher in the "Supernatural Origin of Christianity," "will affect his selection and disposition of matter. But the question is whether he is betrayed into inveracity and perversion by the bent of his mind and his party connections." One is inclined to remind Mr. Froude of an experience he himself recounts when he was in Melbourne. In a visit to the observatory one evening, he had looked through the telescope at the Southern Cross. He remembered that once he had seen through another telescope a blue star, and he expressed a desire to renew his acquaintance with it. "I had to learn," he writes, "that there were really no blue stars, and that the color was due to an imperfectly achromatic lens." We submit the question, as to whether our author is not equally misled and misleading in looking at some other celestial truths.

II. We are ready to notice a second illustration of Mr. Froude's historical methods. Keeping in mind the words quoted above, the details with which he fills up the historical outlines are unduly shaped by the turn of his sympathies, or, in familiar phrase, his judgment is controlled by his feeling. In this description of England's Colonies, there is a brilliant portraiture of Sir George Grey, a colonial governor of twenty years ago. Mr. Froude's admiration is sufficiently seen in a single sentence. Speaking of Cape Town, he says, "Sir George Grey's statue stands in the gardens under the window, and if the Cape Colonists were given to idolatry, they would worship at that spot." But a nearer view of Sir George Grey fails to verify this worshipful picture. Let it be remembered that this ex-governor is now living in elegant retirement and exclusiveness at his villa in a lonely island off the coast of Aukland, and that Mr.

Froude was royally feasted in the brief visit he made to New Zealand. The picture which the satisfied guest draws of his sufficient host needs to be corrected in one or two respects. We learn through this member of the colonial legislature that the career and character of the ex-governor would hardly be recognized in Mr. Froude's portrait gallery. The two years he was Prime Minister of the colony are described as the darkest period in the political history of New Zealand. On the assembling of the Colonial Parliament in 1879, a resolution affirming that Sir George Grey's Ministry "had so mismanaged and maladministered the affairs of the country, that they no longer possessed the confidence of this house," was carried in the House of Representatives by the largest vote ever recorded on a ministerial question. Admitting now that this criticism is possibly overcharged with feeling, we turn from Mr. Froude's portrait of this man of public affairs to three other notable pictures.

The first is the well-known "Julius Cæsar," which Mr. Froude modestly calls "A Sketch." Three brief quotations are taken from the beginning, the middle, and the end. "Suetonius," says Mr. Froude in the introduction, "shows an effort at veracity, a serious anxiety to tell his story impartially." Then, he adds with amazing unconsciousness of self, "therefore, I am able to follow him as my guide." The second quotation farther on is equally suggestive. "The tendency to idolize great men, and the tendency to depreciate them, arises alike in the emotions." Then, our historian shows us how the idolizing of great men is done, in a most extraordinary paragraph, the very last in the book. "Strange and startling resemblance between the founder of the kingdom of this world, and the Founder of the kingdom not of this world, for which the first was a preparation. Each was denounced for making himself a king. Each was maligned as the friend of publicans and sinners. Each was betrayed by those he had loved and cared for. Each was put to death, and Cæsar also was believed to have risen again and ascended

into heaven, and become a divine being." Verily, this is giving the old Roman very much more than his due, for it is "rendering unto Cæsar" not only "the things that are Cæsar's," but the things which belong alone to Him, who was Cæsar's unacknowledged King. Before such sentimentalism, criticism finds it hard to be patient, and is tempted to apply to Mr. Froude his own characterization of Cicero—"Nature half made a great man, and left him uncompleted." The second picture which illustrates Mr. Froude's idolatry of emotion, is the familiar delineation of the character of Henry the Eighth. It is thirty years by the date in the English edition, since the first two volumes of Mr. Froude's "History of England" appeared, with its marvellous picture of the Tudor king. It is surely a very ingenious defence of Henry's character against the verdict of three centuries. The spirit of historical criticism has been called a charitable spirit. Thus one generation reopens the case, and sets aside the verdict of a previous age. Possibly, Benedict Arnold may receive milder judgment at our second centennial than he did at our first. Robespierre has found his friends, who believe him to have been "an honest fanatic of iron will and small intellect." Mary Queen of Scots is anathematized by one generation, and canonized by the next. Shakespeare has located King John, though we are not so sure but that his ghost may be transferred to some more goodly place. Mr. Froude came, he tells us, to the study of his royal hero with no blind admiration. But it is obvious enough that he soon becomes an advocate, then a partisan, nor does he leave the king until he has exalted him into the rank of a saint, who is possessed of more than "a royal inability to do wrong." Mr. Froude tells us that there is a flea in the microscope, which has ever remained to be mistaken for a monster. The repeated domestic transfers and tragedies of King Henry are explained on the ground of the king's supreme anxiety to keep the succession unbroken. For, says Mr. Froude in one of his characteristically fine utterances, "Henry breathed the atmosphere of suspended insurrection,

and he was determined to make insurrection a failing business." Most people will, however, continue to believe with another that "if Henry had survived Katherine Parr, he would have given her place to the most beautiful woman whom he could have prevailed upon to risk his perilous embraces preliminary to those of the executioner."

Thus much for a glance at Mr. Froude's setting forth of the character of this famous king. He begins his study with the cry, "Fair play for this misjudged man." But the tendency to idolize gets the better of his judgment, and, as he closes his work, he cries, "Verily, the gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." In the *National Review* of 1857, a writer wittily voices the feeling of the world at large as to the truthfulness of the verdict on the character of King Henry. "It is fortunate," says this writer, "that no man of talent has ever ventured to write the biography of Satan. For had this been done, there would have been one sincere, enthusiastic, open, devout, devil-worshipper on earth, which would have been a novel, but not an altogether moral aspect for the eyes of men. A most clear, luminous, and satisfactory account of the conduct of Satan in Eden might have been furnished. It would have been made out that all the fault of the first recorded sin was with Eve, who had taken advantage of the devil's unsophisticated nature, to impose upon his innocence and simplicity, and had then gone about among the neighbors to scandalize his character at tea-tables and quilting parties." We pass over Mr. Froude's picture of Carlyle, he, who was more curt than courteous, with one or two brief references to Carlyle's "Life in London." The question of Mr. Froude's accuracy in interpreting, reporting, and printing the "Letters," of Carlyle, is possibly still undecided. At all events, we may give Mr. Froude whatever benefit belongs to him from his recent denial. In this earlier publication, however, we have Mr. Froude's personal tribute to Carlyle. It is a good illustration of what he calls "the tendency to idolize great men."

"Carlyle is the truest and noblest man I ever met in this world. I for one was saved by Carlyle's writings from positivism, or Romanism, or atheism, or any other of the creeds or no creeds, which in those days were whirling us about in Oxford like leaves in an autumn storm. Carlyle taught me a creed, which I could then accept as really true, which I have held ever since with increasing confidence. Then and always I looked on him, and have looked on him, as my master." What was this creed which Carlyle taught his devoted pupil? Writing to John Sterling, Carlyle says, "Finally, assure yourself that I am neither Pagan, nor Turk, nor circumcised Jew, but an unfortunate Christian individual resident at Chelsea in this year of grace, neither Pantheist, nor Potheist, nor any Theist nor Ist whatever, having the most decided contempt for all such manner of system builders. By God's blessing, one has got two eyes to look with, also a mind capable of knowing and believing. This is all the creed I will at this time insist on."

Later on, we know that Carlyle announced his disbelief in historical Christianity, and his conviction that the events cited in the Apostle's Creed could never have happened. But Mr. Froude seems to have met with some retribution for his loyal following of his master. The recent difficulties with the Carlyle family must make him regret that he did not follow the first advice Carlyle gave him in 1843, even though later on he retracted it. "I will say to my biographer, Forbear, poor fool. Let no life of me be written. If thou write, it will be mere delusion and hallucination."

III. A brief reference only is offered to a third illustration of Mr. Froude's historical methods. There is a manifest want of candor in dealing with religious questions, due, as it seems, to the religious habit. It appears in this work of his on the English Colonies, when he contents himself with the most flippant reference to the history of Christian missions among the Maori of New Zealand. Mr. Froude pays a coldly courteous tribute to Bishop Selwyn, and sees no occasion for even an allusion to John Coleridge Patteson, the martyr of

the Melanesian Islands. It is seen again as he stops at Honolulu on his way home. All he has to say of the missions to the Sandwich Islands is that "no great results seem yet to have been arrived at either intellectually or morally. There is a varnish, over the place, of Yankee civilization, which has destroyed the natural vitality, without as yet producing anything better or as good." But "Oceana" is a fair picture of Mr. Froude's other writings, in respect of want of candor. In his "Life of Bunyan," his best work, as many think, in his "Life and Times of Thomas à Becket," in his several series of "Short Studies on Great Subjects," one misses that quality of supremest value,—fairness in dealing with those from whom he differs. To him, English clergymen are not simply men, "but men of a particular sort, and unfortunately something not more but less than men, who have sacrificed their own selves to become the paid instruments of a system." The Church of England with its roll of noble men and martyrs, with its story of magnificent achievements, Mr. Froude respects as little as did Cromwell's soldiers the cathedrals, on which they laid their irreverent hands. "A foolish church," he says, "chattering parrot-like old notes, of which it had forgot the meaning, a clergy who mistook their fool's cap and bells for a crown of wisdom and the music of the spheres." The "Nemesis of Faith," published in 1849, is now out of print. In the catalogue of the Boston Public Library, it is put down as "Fiction." It is fiction in more senses than one, into which we may drop the dreary fact of the sadness of religious scepticism.

"Of what religion are you," said an English lady to Rogers the poet. "What religion, Madam? I am of the religion of all sensible men." "And what is that," she asked. "All sensible men, Madam, keep that to themselves." In this early work, Mr. Froude succeeds in a measure in doing this latter, while making very evident to his readers that which is not his religion. An Oxford student was once asked at examination to give the doctrine

of the Anglican Church on good works. He answered with laudable caution, "A few of them would not do a man any harm." The conversation of the poor women whom Bunyan overheard, and which resulted in his conversion, was about a religion which believed in the supreme need of the human heart of God's redeeming grace. Mr. Froude tells us that the language of those humble women has now lost its meaning, and that if they were alive to-day, they would use it no longer. Yet one is inclined to wish that Mr. Froude believed more in that kind of religion, for surely a little of it would do him no harm. It would do his many readers an amount of good.

This much for "Oceana." With slight modifications, the same may be said of the "English in the West Indies." A far more brilliant book than the first, with less flagrant misstatements. But here again, we note inexcusable inaccuracies: for example, the assertion that Spanish sugar is admitted to the United States free of duty; and again, that our country was eager to conclude a reciprocity treaty with the British Colonies; while for judgment controlled by feeling, and candor obscured by prejudice, we note Mr. Froude's unremitting hostility to Mr. Gladstone, as well as the frequent unfair and ungenerous characterizations of Christianity, political pessimism and religious pessimism going hand in hand.

These three illustrations of Mr. Froude's are thus summarized. Historic truth sacrificed to literary style, judgment swayed by feeling, candor obscured by prejudice. Principal Tulloch, in his "Religious Thought in Britain in the Nineteenth Century," gives us a striking illustration of the exact reverse of Mr. Froude's method. "What we perhaps all need most to learn is not satisfaction with our opinions, for that is easily acquired by most, but the capacity of looking beyond our horizon, of searching for deeper foundations than our ordinary beliefs, and a more sympathetic appreciation of the beliefs of others. While cherishing therefore what we believe to be true, let us keep our minds open to all truth, and especially to the teaching of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."