

MILMAN AS A HISTORIAN.

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IT is almost exactly a century since Milman made the first announcement of his having undertaken the serious study of ecclesiastical history. "I have begun a *History of Christianity*," he wrote to a friend on his fortieth birthday early in 1831, "but whether I shall continue it in defiance of episcopal fogotry and such incendiary proceedings I have scarcely determined." He then added,—the remark leads to the observation that his knowledge of the past was greater than his powers of prophecy,—“However, I suppose in these regenerating times Bishops will not last long. How many of them must put on their wigs the wrong way, in trembling anticipation of the approaching crisis!”

Henry Hart Milman was at this time Vicar of St. Mary's, Reading, and in addition Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford. He had been born at 47 Lower Brook Street on February 10, 1791, and was the youngest son of Sir Francis Milman, Physician to George III. The Milmans were an old Devonshire stock, and Sir Francis had had as his immediate ancestors, "scholars and country clergymen," men who had been "content to live their quiet life, to discharge the uneventful duties of their station, in that picturesque fringe of broken ground which lies between Dartmoor and the Channel."¹

After some years at a preparatory school Milman, at the age of eleven, was admitted to Eton as a King's scholar. Dr. Goodall was then Headmaster, and under him and his successor, Dr. Keate, Milman seems to have been perfectly contented. This was probably because there had already manifested itself that "inexhaustible interest in literature and desire for scholarly attainments" which was to characterize him to the end of his days. In due course he went up to Oxford—"the most beautiful place I ever saw," he calls it in a letter to a sister—and became a member of Brasenose. His university career further revealed the possession of gifts far beyond the ordinary; for in addition to a brilliant first, he gained the Newdigate, the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse, as well as the Essay Prizes in both English and Latin. The poems which received such recognition were well above the standard usually attained in such effusions, and his "Apollo Belvidere" in particular showed genuine feeling and power. At any rate its fame was wide enough to attract the attention of the author of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, who announced that

His lines on Apollo
Beat all the rest hollow
And gained him the Newdigate Prize.

Whatever else they had done for Milman his years at Eton

¹ *Henry Hart Milman, D.D.*, by Arthur Milman, LL.D., p. 4.

and Oxford had given him a taste for all that was best in literature and a refined judgment which sometimes found it hard to put up with inferior productions. It is characteristic of him that when he had at last completed his *History of Latin Christianity*, a task which involved many years spent in the company of writers of very inferior Greek and Latin, he should turn for relief to "his old friends the great classical writers."

It is perhaps of interest to notice that during his time at Oxford he wrote a play, a tragedy named *Fazio*, which was sufficiently well thought of to be produced on the stage under the title of *The Italian Wife*. Such was the state of the Copyright Laws that the author's consent was not asked for before the appearance of his play, and indeed, owing to the change in the title, he was for some time not aware that his work had been so honoured.

In 1816 Milman was ordained by Bishop, later Archbishop, Howley, and after a curacy of only a few months was presented to the living of St. Mary's, Reading. The care of an important parish, however, did not have the effect of drying up the well-springs of poetic composition, for during the early years of his incumbency he wrote three religious dramas, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, *The Martyr of Antioch*, and *Belshazzar*. His fame as a poet was soundly established by these plays, which in their day enjoyed a considerable reputation, and when in 1821 he offered himself for the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford he was duly elected. He seems to have had some fears that the competition of another young Oxford poet, John Keble, might endanger his chances. But Keble was not yet known as the author of *The Christian Year* and did not offer himself; his own turn was to come when on Milman's resignation in 1831 he succeeded to his office.

But even the composition of religious dramas and the delivery of sermons did not exhaust Milman's extraordinary literary powers. In addition to these onerous occupations he entered at this time upon a connection which was to end only with his life, he began to write for *The Quarterly Review*. The first contribution which came from his pen, it may be worth while to mention, was on "Italian Tragedy"; this appeared in the October number of 1820. His last was published in July, 1865, about three years before his death, and its subject was "Pagan and Christian Sepulchres."

It was Milman's known connection with the *Quarterly* which led Byron, quite wrongly, to include him amongst those whom he accused of being guilty of the attack on Keats which had appeared in its pages.

"Who kill'd John Keats?"
 "I," said the Quarterly,
 So savage and Tartarly;
 "'Twas one of my feats."

"Who shot the arrow?"
 "The poet-priest Milman
 (So ready to kill man),
 Or Southey or Barrow."

Possessed as he was of such varied, and if one may say so, such popular gifts, and backed by no little influence, it might have seemed that Milman would not long remain a mere parish priest. Unfortunately by a bold, but from the standpoint of promotion, an unwise, adventure into the paths of theological learning, he aroused such criticism that it was not until 1835, when Sir Robert Peel offered him the rectory of St. Margaret's, Westminster, to which there had just been attached a prebendal stall in the Abbey, that his unusual powers, both as a writer and as a preacher, received any ecclesiastical recognition. The occasion of his awaking the suspicions of the godly was quite a simple one. He was asked to contribute a volume on "The History of the Jews" to Murray's *Family Library*, and determined to write it as he would have written the history of any other people. In particular he endeavoured to depict the characters of the Old Testament as living human beings, instead of the lay figures to which generations of pious readers had become accustomed. The attempt was praiseworthy, but sadly premature. The religious world in 1830 was not prepared to welcome the description of Abraham as a "sheikh"—to give one instance of Milman's "modernism"—and the daring author was denounced as a dangerous innovator. Henceforth, for years, the path of promotion was closed to him.

The *History of Christianity*, to which reference was made above, was intended by both author and publisher to be a vindication of the substantial orthodoxy of the former. It was accordingly arranged that it should make its appearance in the same series as its notorious predecessor had done. Before, however, the work was ready the *Family Library* had ceased to exist, and it was as an independent publication that it finally came out in 1840. The full title of the volume was the *History of Christianity from the Birth of Christ to the Abolition of Paganism in the Roman Empire*, and it deserves attention, not so much for its own sake, but as the predecessor of the much more ambitious *History of Latin Christianity*. This great work, however, did not see the light until many years later; three volumes being published in 1854 and the same number in the following year. By this time Milman was Dean of St. Paul's.¹

Though Milman may not have shared the high ambition of Macaulay, who desired for his *History* that it might "for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of the young ladies," yet his reputation as an author and the vastness and importance of his subject no doubt justified him in the anticipation that his work would receive notice favourable enough to recompense him for his long and tedious labours. His most ardent expectations must have been realized, for from its first issue until almost our own day the *History of Latin Christianity* has earned,

¹ When in 1911 the Deanery was offered to its present occupant, Mr. Asquith made a graceful reference to its high literary traditions and to the need for reviving them. He mentioned in this connection the names of Milman, Mansel and Church: see Inge, *Assessments and Anticipations*, p. 33.

both as literature and as history, the highest commendation. Dean Stanley declared it to be "a complete epic and philosophy of medieval Christianity"; J. A. Froude went so far as to see in it "the finest historical work in the English language"; whilst a greater historian than either of them, Bishop Stubbs, declared that the treatment of German Church history was "lucid, eloquent, touching." When in 1900 Milman's son, as an act of filial piety, compiled the Memoir of his father upon which I have largely drawn, he affirmed that the *History of Latin Christianity* had "taken rank as one of the standard works of English literature," and as recently as 1913 Mr. G. P. Gooch in his learned volume, *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century*, could still regard it as one of "the outstanding achievements of the early Victorian era" and as relieving England "from Newman's reproach that she possessed no ecclesiastical historian but Gibbon."

Milman had prepared himself for his gigantic task, for such it was without any question, by bringing out an edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, in which he incorporated many additional notes, some original, some borrowed from Guizot. This edition held its place until Bury's magnificent achievement rendered all other editions obsolete. Milman regarded his own history as in part a supplement to Gibbon, in part a correction of him. The conjunction of these two great historians at once calls to mind the different fate which has befallen their writings. Gibbon is still read; but Milman's fame, like "a lingering star with lessening ray," seems in danger of almost complete oblivion. No longer does the proud but bashful schoolboy receive his just reward in terms of Milman, nor stagger back to his place borne down by the numerous volumes in their seemly leather binding. The volumes of Milman now find themselves, in dull and faded cloth, slumbering on the shelves of the second-hand bookshop, where their serried ranks afford a sad but significant proof of the passing of yet another great reputation.

Macaulay and Froude appear quite frequently in cheap reprints; Milman, save for the inclusion of *The History of the Jews in Everyman's Library*, seems never to have received even this tribute. Still more galling to those who value his work is the fact that a hasty perusal of the Bibliographies appended to the several volumes of the *Cambridge Medieval History* failed to discover even a mention of his name. This sudden and almost complete loss of reputation is surely a thing to be regretted, even if one cannot subscribe to some of the exaggerated opinions, for as such they are now revealed, quoted above. For as literature alone Milman deserves to survive.

In claiming this merit for Milman I do not, of course, wish it to be inferred that I regard him as standing absolutely in the first rank among writers of history. The unevenness of his style makes such a claim impossible of maintenance. But among its constituents are undeniable brilliance and immense vigour, a species of majestic velocity which saves it from ever becoming either pompous or pedestrian. Mingled, however, with passages remark-

able for power and refinement are others which can only be described as crude and unpolished. Much of the merit of his prose style Milman undoubtedly owed to his vivid use of the poet's imagination, which from time to time flames out in noble and exalted rhetoric. It was this feature of Milman's style which attracted Archbishop Whately and disposed him to include a long extract from Milman's Bampton Lectures in the *Elements of Rhetoric*. This passage (vi, p. 267) describes the supposed effect upon the mind of a simple Christian missionary of his first encounter with one of the magnificent cities of Syria or Greece.

Regarded as a whole the *History of Latin Christianity* deserves praise as a spirited account of the growth and decline of the most important of medieval institutions, the Papacy. If it is a little uncertain in the opening stages and shows signs towards the end of the author's weakening grasp, the middle parts are strong and vigorous, and effectively recall to life the happenings of departed days, both in their splendour and in their gloom. They show a complete mastery of what the Professor of Modern History at Cambridge has well termed "the principal craft of the historian—the art of narrative."¹

Lecky declared his admiration for Milman by placing him in the very select class of historians who have combined in a large measure the three great requisites of knowledge, soundness of judgment, and inexorable love of truth. This is just allocation, for Milman undoubtedly possessed all three. Knowledge was certainly his, and in his capacious mind he stored up facts with a wide comprehensiveness such as has not often been exceeded even by historians of a higher reputation. This knowledge he acquired by a first-hand study of the original authorities, for Milman was no mere compiler, content to make use of the researches of others, and in spite of his finding medieval Greek and Latin very little to his liking—not every century can produce writers such as John of Salisbury—his close following of the authorities was as sedulous as that of any disciple of Ranke. That the facts as he saw them were not always such as they appear to be to later workers in the same field cannot be denied; to admit this, however, is not unduly to blame Milman, for no man can be expected to surmount the necessary limitations of his times. Since the *History of Latin Christianity* was written the number of authorities at the disposal of the student has increased enormously, as also their accessibility. Judged by any reasonable standard Milman's knowledge was adequate to his task, and no one but a Madame du Deffand could call him superficial, though doubtless that lady, since she abandoned her reading of Gibbon for this fault, would not have acquitted him of the charge.

So too in regard to soundness of judgment and respect for truth. These he held in a close union which was never threatened by fear of divorce. His passion for truth was indeed such that no consideration would have drawn him into abandoning its pure

¹ G. M. Trevelyan, *Clio, a Muse*, p. 14 in the original edition.

and austere language in order to adopt the easy dialect of compromise. It was no mean achievement, in an age when the Papacy was beginning afresh to be feared—Cardinal Wiseman's famous Pastoral Letter *Ex Porta Flaminia* had been published in October, 1850—to write so fairly and so fearlessly of the Roman Church. Milman here showed that he was capable of reaching the lofty standard which Sainte Beuve postulated in his ideal critic; he seldom failed to put himself in the place of those of whom he was writing and as the occasion required could be *tantôt pour Argos tantôt pour Iliou*.

Together with a penetrating judgment Milman possessed, what is by no means its universal accompaniment, the power of formulating his conclusions in a manner at once succinct and impressive. Considerations of space have not permitted me to quote examples of Milman's style, but the following short extract, dealing with the attitude to be adopted by the historian towards the superstitions of the age which he is studying, seems to me so happily to exhibit these qualities in conjunction, as to warrant its inclusion. "History, to be true," he writes, "must condescend to speak the language of legend; the belief of the times is part of the record of the times; and, though there may occur what may baffle its more calm and searching philosophy, it must not disdain that which was the primal, almost universal, motive of human life" (*Latin Christianity*, vol. ii, p. 82).

The fundamental cause of Milman's comparative failure to produce historical work which would stand the test of time, as that of Gibbon has done, is undoubtedly to be sought for in the fact that he tried to cover too much ground. If we include the *History of the Jews*, as we certainly should, among his historical works, we find that the fortunes of the People of God are traced out from the dawn of civilization almost to the Reformation. No man, not even a German professor, could hope to master all the authorities for so vast a period or devote to them that profound research which the scientific study of history now demands. We are not surprised, therefore, to find in the *History of Latin Christianity*, to which, as the crown of his work, I shall confine my criticisms, a number of actual errors of fact, as well as instances of defective judgment, so far that is as judgment is concerned with the relative importance of particular movements or events.

The errors of fact are the mistakes to which a scholar is prone who, working indeed on original authorities, yet from weariness or hurry fails to read them with sufficient care. One interesting example of such a failure is the statement (vol. iii, p. 360 in the original edition) that Abelard, at a certain epoch in his career, was recalled to his native Brittany owing to "a domestic affliction, the death of his beloved mother." The actual cause, however, was not her death, but the expressed wish to say farewell to him before she followed her husband's example and entered the religious life. This mistake was pointed out by reviewers, and in later editions (e.g. the third, to which my own references are made)

Milman altered the phrase into the rather lame statement: "a domestic cause, the invitation of his beloved mother" (vol. iv, p. 343). In a similar manner the speech denouncing the papal legates to the Albigenses (vol. vi, p. 13) is attributed to St. Dominic, whereas a reference to the original authority—Jordanus, *Vita S. Dominici*, c. i, n. 16—shows that it was actually delivered by the saint's companion, Diego de Azeveda, Bishop of Osma.¹ Again the account of St. Dunstan (vol. iv, pp. 25 ff.) contains a number of misstatements. Writing as he did before Bishop Stubbs had exposed the unsatisfactory nature of the authorities for Dunstan's life, Milman could be pardoned for a too trustworthy acceptance of them, since he was not a specialist in the period; but some of his errors are due, not to the too close following of the authorities, but to variation from them.

Some of the Dean's mistakes are surprising, and can only be explained as due to that possibility of error which dogs even the most careful scholar, a kind of "blind spot" in the brain. Freeman, who regarded himself, in spite of the palisade at "Senlac," as the High Priest of the Temple of Accuracy, once even accused him of deriving Rheims from St. Remigius. As Milman, in his school-days, if not later, must have read the Second Book of Cæsar's *Gallic War*, and as editor of Gibbon must have known of Julian's camp at Rheims long before the birth of the Saint,² the mistake is truly a strange one. Yet the accusation appears in a letter to Dean Stephens who has printed it in his biography of Freeman.³

The other class of shortcoming is the failure to recognize the outstanding importance of certain movements and events. As an instance of this I would cite the inadequate treatment of the heresies of a Manichean type in vol. iii, pp. 442 f. Milman, in my judgment, shows a lack of sympathy with the Albigenses and too ready a tendency to accept the testimony of their opponents: "they were," he says, "if their accusers speak true, profligates rather than sectaries." Quite so. But did their accusers speak true? It must be remembered that for their beliefs and practices little other account has been allowed to survive than that which comes from hostile or interested witnesses. The Albigenses were certainly very much more or very much less than mere profligates, even according to their enemies. The account of Abelard, to which reference was made above, besides being not entirely trustworthy in some of its details, is as a whole not entirely worthy of its fascinating subject. One might have imagined that Milman's own liberal views would have disposed him to be sympathetic with one who was struggling to purify, so he claimed, the prevailing and traditional faith. Such, however, is not the case. Was it,

¹ I have already pointed out this error in the second edition of my *Hulsean Lectures, Erasmus the Reformer*, p. 124, n. 1.

² See *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. ii, p. 276 in Bury's edition.

³ See *Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman*, by W. R. W. Stephens, vol. ii, p. 315.

one wonders, because all unconsciously he was trying to show, as in the earlier *History of Christianity*, that he was himself much more orthodox than many had supposed him to be?

But the most patent failure to grasp the significance of an event is displayed by the almost complete neglect of the great Council gathered in Rome by Innocent III in 1215, and known to history as the Fourth Lateran. This council, to quote what I have written elsewhere, "as it was the most largely attended so it was the most important of all the Councils of the Middle Ages: in fact it would be no exaggeration to say that it was the most important assembly of the Roman Communion before the Counter-Reformation."¹ Yet Milman considered that a bare paragraph was all that was called for; though he was quite willing to enter into a good deal of "secret history"—of very doubtful value—concerning the fortunes of Raymond of Toulouse who attended it (vol. v, pp. 342 ff.).

These are deficiencies of method. In addition to them there is evidence of a quite serious deficiency in sympathy, a deficiency indeed which Milman shared with all the historians of that epoch—a lack of real depth of thought. As a body they were strong in narrative and descriptive powers; but they seemed content to skim the surface of history rather than plunge into its depths. Outward events and spectacles aroused their keenest interest; the hidden motives which inspired them, the unseen currents by which they were controlled, especially if they were of a philosophic nature, leave them cold. Dean Church in his delightful essay on Milman,² whilst attributing to him the high gifts of "imagination and insight, fearless courage, the strongest feeling about right and wrong, with the largest equity," yet had to confess that he failed to exhibit "a due appreciation of the reality and depth of those eternal problems of religious thought and feeling which have made theology." It is interesting to notice that even Creighton has had the same accusation—that of caring for the external rather than for the inward, theological side of the Church's history—brought against him. One might have thought that in the case of Dean and Bishop alike, the necessity of preaching Sunday by Sunday, during many years of their lives, to an ordinary congregation, would in some measure have supplemented what was originally a temperamental defect. But the accusation is probably just as applied to them both, and is perhaps covered by the more comprehensive charge which Newman once brought against the whole Anglo-Saxon race; "It is not easy," he declared pathetically, "to wind up an Englishman to a dogmatic level."

The above reasons, however, are not in themselves sufficient to account for the neglect of Milman in recent years. Such neglect is largely due to a general attitude of mind on the part of those who have been the leaders of historical studies in this country for

¹ *Innocent III* in "Great Medieval Churchmen Series," p. 164.

² This Essay has been reprinted in *Occasional Papers*, vol. i, pp. 155 ff. (Eversley Edition).

the last few generations. Their efforts have implanted in their disciples a deep distrust of any writer of history who shows literary qualities.

An attempt to consider the worth of Milman as a historian thus raises the whole question of the end of historical study. Since the days of Freeman, who is commonly supposed to have held that a manuscript was only valuable when it had been printed, there has been a striking change, mainly under German influences, of the attitude of scholars in this matter, and historical research unless it results in the discovery and publication of fresh material tends to be regarded as having missed its mark. An insistence of the importance of discovering fresh material is, of course, very praiseworthy, but too strict an insistence upon it may lead to stagnation, to the production of numberless elaborate and carefully documented essays which no one, except a few specialists, will read or care to read.

Among the most useful, and certainly among the most interesting, of the works of the historian are studies on a considerable scale by a single hand. But the vast accumulation of authorities, even of printed authorities alone, together with the mass of monographs, now makes such works physically impossible within an average life-time. No man could cover more than a small period as the latest scientific scholar would have it done. Future historians will more and more have to imitate the methods of the laboratory and entrust much of the detail of their work to pupils and assistants. Certainly if they hope to cover more than a limited field, they will have to make a fuller and freer use of the results of other workers. It is probable that two distinct types of historical student will eventually emerge and definitely be recognized—the type which gives itself up to research pure and simple, and the type which correlates and presents the results of the labour of others. It is hardly necessary to insist that scholars of the latter type must themselves have served an apprenticeship as “hewers of wood and drawers of water.”

When all is said and done it must be recognized that very different qualities are called for in, say, the editor of a manuscript and the author of a continuous history covering a long period. The number of scholars who possess both sets of qualities is bound to be small. In this connection one is reminded of Macaulay's opinion that Niebuhr would have been “the first writer of his time if his talent for communicating truths had borne any proportion to his talent for investigating them.” We shall need specialists, therefore, not only in periods and subjects, but in methods and functions as well. When Lord Acton made his famous attack on Creighton's historical standpoint and conception of the task of the historian,¹ he warned him, in words which had

¹ The attack was made in a review of vols. iii. and iv. of Creighton's *History of the Papacy* in the pages of the *English Historical Review* of which Creighton was the editor! The latter was at first considerably upset by this unexpected difference, but his sense of humour came to his rescue and he

almost a sinister ring,¹ that "Studious men who (had) grown grey with the dust of papal archives (were) on the track behind him." But Lord Acton failed to realize that these pallid scholars often become content with the mere accumulation of material, and are apt to descend to the grave leaving behind them nothing beyond a reputation for vast learning and a few thin volumes of collected essays and reviews.

But there is some excuse for them. Ruskin once affirmed that nature is "always mysterious, but always abundant." A similar combination of abundance and mystery is only too familiar to the historian, for the multiplication of material, instead of simplifying his task, seems often to render it more complicated. The mystery is deepened and not dispelled. At the same time the collection of material must go on, for in fresh material adequately apprehended, lies the only hope of a more complete understanding, not only of events but of the motives which prompted them. How often does the historian find himself baffled in the search for the motives which may have inspired a particular course of action by the inability to discover, with any exactness, what actually occurred? But to the end many problems will remain without solution, for truth has obscurities which are irremediable, and increased knowledge of the past does not inevitably carry with it a clearer view of events.

The effect of the discovery of fresh material is often, by a natural sequence, the promulgation of fresh theories; but the pioneer must never lose sight of the possibility of his materials being of more value than his theories. It is not always the new theories which are of value in themselves, but the collection and arrangement of the facts which support them. The theory may be disproved, but the facts, if they have been faithfully and accurately presented, have permanent value. This is what the scientist means when he admits that although Newton's explanation of the Law of Gravitation may no longer be accepted, his work has not lost its "descriptive" value. This knowledge should be a consolation and an encouragement to the faithful student both in natural science and in history.

The parallel which I have thus drawn between the scientific and the historical student is in accordance with the prevailing tone among those who are leaders in historical studies. I am a little inclined to suspect, however, that among their followers there is, combined with much ardour, a failure to recognize the limitations of the scientific method as a model for the historian. For one thing the scientist can obviously be no complete guide since he is little, if at all, concerned with the inner significance of phenomena; to the historian as to the philosopher this is their chief interest. Furthermore, the amount of certainty which can be obtained by the methods of the scientist is greatly exaggerated by those who

suggested, in a letter to Mr. R. L. Poole, that he ought to add a note to the review to the effect that "The Editor is not responsible for the opinions expressed in the above article."

¹ Dr. Trevelyan has assured us that Acton dearly liked "to make your flesh creep" (*Chio*, p. 51). Have we here an instance of it?

have no first-hand acquaintance with them. A distinguished contemporary physicist has admitted that even in the most exact of the sciences we are compelled to face the surprising fact that "we have no infallible criterion of truth and no infallibly true theories."¹ After all it is in mathematics alone that we can get complete certitude, and there only because we are dealing with abstractions. The more concrete things become, the more they become incapable of certainty, because time and change at once enter in. In mathematics the ground and the consequent are simultaneous and no succession of cause and effect need be considered.

Certainty is the ideal end of the historian, but generally he has to be content with probability. There is a distinct danger that the scientific historian may, in his quest for absolute certainty, demand more than evidence can possibly afford him; he may arrive at the stage which aroused Anatole France's playful jibe and be incapable of accepting anything as true unless it took place in a laboratory. The historian, no doubt, would be glad to have before him the sworn statements of all the principal actors in an event which he is considering; but even if he had such evidence, he would still find much room for the exercise of his imagination.

Since problems in history are not to be solved merely by evidence, it is necessary for the historian to possess, in addition to the ability to collect and weigh it, a trained and disciplined imagination. If he have it not, no amount of labour or research will compensate him for the deficiency. Imagination properly used is

" a spell
To summon fancies out of Time's dark cell,"

but the need for training and discipline is obvious though sometimes ignored. The unrestrained imagination is apt to wander too far from the evidence, and indeed sometimes to become a substitute for facts which are actually ascertainable. One calls to mind in this connection the famous flight of fancy in Mr. G. K. Chesterton's *St. Francis of Assisi* in which he describes the last homecoming of the saint to the city of his birth. "His heart rejoiced," writes Mr. Chesterton, "when they saw afar off on the Assisian hill the solemn pillars of the Portiuncula" (p. 167). Upon this collection of astounding misstatements one cannot do better than quote Dr. Walter Seton's comment: "It may be observed that the Portiuncula is not on a hill, that it was then surrounded by a forest, and that it has no solemn pillars which could be seen afar off, especially by a man who was nearly blind!"²

But imagination is of service to the historian, not only for the reconstruction of the sequence of outward events, but also as an aid to the perception of the thoughts and motives of those who

¹ Alexander Wood, *In Pursuit of Truth*, p. 66.

² In *St. Francis of Assisi: Commemoration Essays*, p. 223. Dare one suggest that Mr. Chesterton has confused the Portiuncula with the Church of St. Francis which now crowns the hill of Assisi!

took part in them. It is here that the mere worker in archives is often deficient. He is prone to lose touch with the world of men around him ; and it is in this world, after all, and not in libraries, that things actually happen. The scientific historian may garner an immense harvest of facts ; but he is in danger of having only a vague conception of the mysterious workings of the human mind. In this connection I believe that the new psychology, used with becoming caution, may furnish the historical student with valuable clues to the motives of his actors.¹

During the last few paragraphs we have been gradually approaching the great question, so frequently and so fiercely debated, as to whether history is a department of letters or of science. The debate is really futile, for it must be realized at length that history belongs exclusively neither to science nor to literature,² and that from each of them the historian must be prepared to learn his lesson. In the collection of his material he must be a scientist ; but in arranging and presenting it to his readers he must be, so far as in him lies, a literary artist. Profundity of research must be crowned by lucidity and precision of style.

The older historians by their descriptive writings—Thackeray once said that Macaulay would travel a hundred miles to make a single line—produced books which were worth reading for their own sakes, simply as literature. In their desire to demonstrate beyond all doubting that history is a science some recent historians seem to think it necessary to banish from their pages all charm or skill which would in the least make men suspect that it was a branch of letters.

In consequence of this there has arisen a school of writers of history and biography who are to be distinguished from the older writers of historical fiction, more by the claims which by inference they put forward and the form in which their works appear, than by any greater regard for the facts as they are known to scholars. Their method would appear to be to choose, on artistic or commercial grounds, some subject or character ; to arrive at a conception of it which appeals to them ; and then to select and arrange their material according to its suitability to their scheme.³ Such a treatment undoubtedly leads to clear and persuasive writing, and the historian, faced by conflicting pieces of evidence which seem to make a clear presentation, nay even a consistent theory, out of the question, may well envy them the easy grace with which, unencumbered by any excessive burden of knowledge, they lightly

¹ I may perhaps be allowed to refer to my own attempt to apply such theories to the mysterious case of Philip Augustus and Ingeborg in my recent volume on *Innocent III*, pp. 95 ff.

² Lord Bryce once remarked that one might just as well argue whether the sea was blue or green, since it is sometimes one, sometimes the other.

³ Wilfred Ward wrote some very wise words on this temptation in his *Last Lectures*, p. 155. "The artist's gift may tempt the biographer to form a fancy picture which is easier to paint and more effective than the truth because it ignores some of the perplexing and apparently contradictory evidence in the documents."

skip over too obtrusive facts. But a warning is necessary, a warning which is the more urgent in view of the wide circulation which such productions, thanks to skilful "puffing," not infrequently obtain. The writer who follows the primrose path of his own devising may indeed be a more seductive guide than one who is laboriously endeavouring to make his way across "the rugged acres of history"—to use a phrase coined by Yorke Powell. It is the latter, however, who alone has seen the real end of the journey, the goal of the genuine searcher after truth.¹

An attempt to bolster up a reputation which is not worthy of survival is a vain task, since any success which may attend it will inevitably be as transitory and as delusive as the apparent renewal of life which night, by its enfolding darkness, seems to bring to dying embers. But I do not believe that such a result will follow the attempt to bring Milman into renewed prominence; for in Milman we have a historian who combined, in no small degree, the virtues of both the scientific and the literary historian. He had an adequate conception of his responsibilities and duties as a scholar and writer upon a great theme; his style is attractive; and he was at pains to discover his facts. In spite of certain defects, to which attention was drawn above, his work deserves a higher consideration than it has received of late. Some of its qualities seem to entitle it to a lofty position among historical writings; it is as a whole, fair and tolerant to all views; there is nothing else, on a similar scale, which covers the same large field; while apart altogether from its historical merits, it has literary merits which ought to be sufficient to save it from oblivion. For the historical student a new period of life would demand a new edition, annotated as Bury annotated Gibbon. But such an edition should not be beyond the powers and the patience of some of our younger scholars, and to carry it out adequately would be to lay the foundations of an almost unrivalled knowledge of medieval history.

¹ Parts of the above paragraphs are based on pp. vii. f. of my volume *Innocent III*, to which reference has already been made.

Mr. G. Herbert Capron has written a short essay *Before Times Eternal*, which is described as an "Attempt to explore something of the Nature and Eternal thought of God as the Background against which alone can be seen, in its true proportion and value, the foreground of His earthly Manifestation of Himself in the Person and Redemptive work of Jesus Christ." He shows some of the mistakes which are to be avoided if we are to reach a true conception of God. We must attempt the seemingly impossible and try to think of God in terms of God, and not merely in terms of Man. His setting forth of the revelation of Christ in the light of the unfathomable depths of God's Being provides stimulating thoughts which the earnest student will be glad to follow out.