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Letters On The Study And Use Of History

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Letter V. 1. The great use of history, properly so called, as distinguished from the writings of mere annalists and antiquaries. 2. Greek and roman historians. 3. Some idea of a complete history. 4. ...

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L E T T E R V.

- I. *The great use of history, properly so called, as distinguished from the writings of mere annalists and antiquaries.*
- II. *Greek and Roman historians.*
- III. *Some idea of a complete history.*
- IV. *Further cautions to be observed in this study, and the regulation of it according to the different professions, and situations of men: above all, the use to be made of it (1) by divines, and (2) by those who are called to the service of their country.*

I REMEMBER my last letter ended abruptly, and a long interval has since passed: so that the thread I had then spun has slipt from me. I will try to recover it, and to pursue the task your lordship has obliged me to continue. Besides the pleasure of obeying your orders, it is like-

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wife of some advantage to myself, to recollect my thoughts, and resume a study in which I was conversant formerly. For nothing can be more true than that saying of SOLON reported by PLATO, tho censured by him impertinently enough in one of his wild books of laws—*Affidue addiscens, ad senium venio.* The truth is, the most knowing man in the course of the longest life, will have always much to learn, and the wisest and best much to improve. This rule will hold in the knowledge and improvement to be acquired by the study of history: and therefore even he who has gone to this school in his youth, should not neglect it in his age. “I read in LIVY, says MONTAIGNE, “ what another man does not: and PLUTARCH read there what I do not.” Just so the same man may read at fifty what he did not read in the same book at five and twenty: at least I have found it so, by my own experience on many occasions.

BY

By comparing, in this study, the experience of other men and other ages with our own, we improve both: we analyse, as it were, philosophy. We reduce all the abstract speculations of ethics, and all the general rules of human policy, to their first principles. With these advantages every man may, tho' few men do, advance daily towards those ideas, those increated essences a Platonist would say, which no human creature can reach in practice, but in the nearest approaches to which the perfection of our nature consists: because every approach of this kind renders a man better, and wiser, for himself, for his family, for the little community of his own country, and for the great community of the world. Be not surprized, my Lord, at the order in which I place these objects. Whatever order divines and moralists, who contemplate the duties belonging to these objects, may place them in, this is the order they hold

in nature: and I have always thought that we might lead ourselves and others to private virtue, more effectually by a due observation of this order, than by any of those sublime refinements that pervert it.

Self-Love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake:
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race.

So sings our friend POPE, my lord, and so I believe. So I shall prove too, if I mistake not, in an epistle I am about to write to him, in order to complete a set that were writ some years ago.

A MAN of my age, who returns to the study of history, has no time to lose, because he has little to live: a man of your Lordship's age has no time to lose, because he has much to do. For different reasons therefore the same rules will suit

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us. Neither of us must grope in the dark, neither of us must wander in the light. I have done the first formerly a good deal; *ne verba mihi darentur; ne aliquid esse in hac recondita antiquitatis scientia magni ac secreti boni judicarem.* If you take my word, you will throw none of your time away in the same manner: and I shall have the less regret for that which I have mispent, if I persuade you to hasten down from the broken traditions of antiquity, to the more entire as well as more authentic histories of ages more modern. In the study of these we shall find many a complete series of events, preceded by a deduction of their immediate and remote causes, related in their full extent, and accompanied with such a detail of circumstances, and characters, as may transport the attentive reader back to the very time, make him a party to the councils, and an actor in the whole scene of affairs. Such draughts as these, either found in history or ex-

tracted by our own application from it, and such alone, are truly useful. Thus history becomes what she ought to be, and what she has been sometimes called, *magistra vitae*, the mistress, like philosophy, of human life. If she is not this, she is at best *nuntia vetustatis*, the gazette of antiquity, or a dry register of useless anecdotes. SÜETONIUS says that TIBERIUS used to enquire of the grammarians, *quæ mater Hecubæ, quod Achil- lis nomen inter virgines fuisset, quid sirenes cantare sint solitæ?* SENECA mentions certain Greek authors, who examined very accurately, whether ANACREON loved wine or women best, whether SAPPHO was a common whore, with other points of equal importance: and I make no doubt but that a man, better acquainted than I have the honor to be with the learned persons of our own country, might find some who have discovered several anecdotes concerning the giant ALBION, concerning SAMOTHES
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the son of BRITO the grandson of JAPHET, and concerning BRUTUS who led a colony into our island after the siege of Troy, as the others re-peopled it after the deluge. But ten millions of such anecdotes as these, tho they were true; and complete authentic volumes of Egyptian or Chaldean, of Greek or Latin, of Gallic or British, of French or Saxon records, would be of no value in my sense, because of no use towards our improvement in wisdom and virtue; if they contained nothing more than dynasties and genealogies, and a bare mention of remarkable events in the order of time, like journals, chronological tables, or dry and meagre annals,

I SAY the same of all those modern compositions in which we find rather the heads of history, than any thing that deserves to be called history. Their authors are either abridgers or compilers. The first do neither honor to themselves

nor good to mankind; for surely the abridger is in a form below the translator: and the book, at least the history, that wants to be abridged, does not deserve to be read. They have done anciently a great deal of hurt by substituting many a bad book in the place of a good one; and by giving occasion to men, who contented themselves with extracts and abridgments, to neglect, and through their neglect to lose the invaluable originals: for which reason I curse CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENETES as heartily as I do GREGORY. The second are of some use, as far as they contribute to preserve public acts, and dates, and the memory of great events. But they who are thus employed have seldom the means of knowing those private passages on which all public transactions depend, and as seldom the skill and the talents necessary to put what they do know well together: they cannot see the working of the mine, but their industry collects the
matter

matter that is thrown out. It is the business, or it should be so, of others to separate the pure ore from the dross, to stamp it into coin, and to enrich not encumber mankind. When there are none sufficient to this task, there may be antiquaries, and there may be journalists or annalists, but there are no historians.

It is worth while to observe the progress that the Romans and the Greeks made towards history. The Romans had journalists or annalists from the very beginning of their state. In the sixth century, or very near it at soonest, they began to have antiquaries, and some attempts were made towards writing of history. I call these first historical productions attempts only or essays: and they were no more, neither among the Romans nor among the Greeks. *Graeci ipsi sic initio scriptitarunt, ut noster Cato, ut Piſtor, ut Piſo.* It is ANTHONY, not the triumvir, my lord, but his grandfather
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the famous orator, who says this in the second book of *Tully de oratore*: he adds afterwards, *Itaque qualis apud Graecos Pherecydes, Hellanicus, Acusilaus, aliique permulti, talis noster Cato, & Pictor, & Piso.* I know that ANTHONY speaks here strictly of defect of stile and want of oratory. They were *tantummodo narratores, non exornatores*, as he expresses himself: but as they wanted stile and skill to write in such a manner as might answer all the ends of history, so they wanted materials. PHERECYDES writ something about IPHIGENIA, and the festivals of BACCHUS. HELLANICUS was a poetical historian, and ACUSILAUS graved genealogies on plates of brass. PICTOR, who is called by LIVY *scriptorum antiquissimus*, published I think some short annals of his own time. Neither he nor PISO could have sufficient materials for the history of Rome; nor CATO, I presume, even for the antiquities of Italy. The Romans, with the other people of
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that country, were then just rising out of barbarity, and growing acquainted with letters; for those that the Grecian colonies might bring into Sicily, and the southern parts of Italy, spread little, or lasted little, and made in the whole no figure. And whatever learning might have flourished among the ancient Etrurians, which was perhaps at most nothing better than augury and divination and superstitious rites, which were admired and cultivated in ignorant ages, even that was almost entirely worn out of memory. Pedants who would impose all the traditions of the four first ages of Rome, for authentic history, have insisted much on certain annals, of which mention is made in the very place I have just now quoted.

Ab initio rerum Romanarum, says the same interlocutor, usque ad P. Mucium pontificem maximum, res omnes singulorum annorum mandabat literis pontifex maximus, efferebatque in album, & proponebat tabulam domi, potestas ut esset populo cognoscendi,

noscendi, iidemque etiam nunc annales maximi nominantur. But, my lord, be pleased to take notice, that the very distinction I make is made here between a bare annalist and an historian: *Erat historia nihil aliud, nisi annalium confectio.* Take notice likewise, by the way, that LIVY, whose particular application it had been to search into this matter, affirms positively that the greatest part of all public and private monuments, among which he specifies these very annals, had been destroyed in the sack of Rome by the Gauls: and PLUTARCH cites CLODIUS for the same assertion, in the life of NUMA POMPILIUS. Take notice in the last place of that which is more immediately to our present purpose. These annals could contain nothing more than short minutes or memorandums hung up in a table at the pontiff's house, like the rules of the game in a billiard-room, and much such history as we have in the epitomies prefixed to the
books

books of LIVY or of any other historian, in lapidary inscriptions, or in some modern almanacs. Materials for history they were no doubt, but scanty and insufficient; such as those ages could produce when writing and reading were accomplishments so uncommon, that the praetor was directed by law, *clavum pangere*, to drive a nail into the door of a temple, that the number of years might be reckoned by the number of nails. Such in short as we have in monkish annalists, and other ancient chroniclers of nations now in being: but not such as can entitle the authors of them to be called historians, nor can enable others to write history in that fulness in which it must be written to become a lesson of ethics and politics. The truth is, nations like men have their Infancy: and the few passages of that time, which they retain, are not such as deserved most to be remembered; but such as, being most proportioned to that age, made the strongest impressions

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on their minds. In those nations that preserve their dominion long, and grow up to manhood, the elegant as well as the necessary arts and sciences are improved to some degree of perfection: and history, that was at first intended only to record the names or perhaps the general characters of some famous men, and to transmit in gross the remarkable events of every age to posterity, is raised to answer another, and a nobler end.

II. Thus it happened among the Greeks, but much more among the Romans, notwithstanding the prejudices in favour of the former, even among the latter. I have sometimes thought that VIRGIL might have justly ascribed to his country-men the praise of writing history better, as well as that of affording the noblest subjects for it, in those famous verses, * where the different excellencies

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* Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera,
Credo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore vultus;
Orabunt

of the two nations are so finely touched: but he would have weakened perhaps by lengthening, and have flattened the climax. Open HERODOTUS, you are entertained by an agreeable story-teller, who meant to entertain, and nothing more. Read THUCYDIDES or XENOPHON, you are taught indeed as well as entertained: and the statesman or the general, the philosopher or the orator, speaks to you in every page. They wrote on subjects on which they were well informed, and they treated them fully: they maintained the dignity of history, and thought it beneath them to vamp up old traditions, like the writers of their age and country, and to be the trumpeters of a lying antiquity. The CYROPAEDIA of XENOPHON may be objected perhaps; but if he gave it for a romance

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Orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus
Describent radio, et surgentia fidera dicent:
Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,
Hae tibi erunt artes, pacique imponere morem;
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos.

not an history, as he might for aught we can tell, it is out of the case: and if he gave it for an history not a romance, I should prefer his authority to that of HERODOTUS or any other of his countrymen. But however this might be, and whatever merit we may justly ascribe to these two writers, who were almost single in their kind, and who treated but small portions of history; certain it is in general, that the levity as well as loquacity of the Greeks made them incapable of keeping up to the true standard of history: and even POLYBIUS and DIONYSIUS of Halicarnassus must bow to the great Roman authors. Many principal men of that commonwealth wrote memorials of their own actions and their own times: SYLLA, CAESAR, LABIENUS, POLLIO, AUGUSTUS, and others. What writers of memorials, what compilers of the *materia historica* were these? What genius was necessary to finish up the pictures that such masters had

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sketched?

sketched? Rome afforded men that were equal to the task. Let the remains, the precious remains, of SALUST, of LIVY, and of TACITUS, witness this truth. When TACITUS wrote, even the appearances of virtue had been long proscribed, and taste was grown corrupt as well as manners. Yet history preserved her integrity and her lustre. She preserved them in the writings of some whom TACITUS mentions, in none perhaps more than his own; every line of which out-weighs whole pages of such a rhetor as FAMIANUS STRADA. I single him out among the moderns, because he had the foolish presumption to censure TACITUS, and to write history himself: and your lordship will forgive this short excursion in honor of a favourite author.

WHAT a school of private and public virtue had been opened to us at the resurrection of letters, if the latter histo-

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rians of the Roman commonwealth, and the first of the succeeding monarchy, had come down to us entire? The few that are come down, tho broken and imperfect, compose the best body of history that we have, nay the only body of ancient history that deserves to be an object of study. It fails us indeed most at that remarkable and fatal period, where our reasonable curiosity is raised the highest. LIVY employed five and forty books to bring his history down to the end of the sixth century, and the breaking out of the third Punic war: but he employed ninety-five to bring it down from thence to the death of DRUSUS; that is, through the course of one hundred and twenty or thirty years. APPIAN, DION CASSIUS, and others, nay even PLUTARCH included, make us but poor amends for what is lost of LIVY. Among all the adventitious helps by which we endeavour to supply this loss in some degree, the best are those that

we find scattered up and down in the works of TULLY. His orations particularly and his letters contain many curious anecdotes and instructive reflections, concerning the intrigues and machinations that were carried on against liberty, from CATILINE'S conspiracy to CAESAR'S. The state of the government, the constitution and temper of the several parties, and the characters of the principal persons who figured at that time on the public stage, are to be seen there in a stronger and truer light than they would have appeared perhaps if he had writ purposely on this subject, and even in those memorials which he somewhere promises ATTICUS to write. *Excudam aliquod Heraclidium opus, quod lateat in thesauris tuis.* He would hardly have unmasked in such a work, as freely as in familiar occasional letters, POMPEY, CATO, BRUTUS, nay himself; the four men of Rome, on whose praises he dwelt with the greatest complacency.

The age in which LIVY flourished abounded with such materials as these: they were fresh, they were authentic; it was easy to procure them, it was safe to employ them. How he did employ them in executing the second part of his design, we may judge by his execution of the first: and I own to your lordship I should be glad to exchange, if it were possible, what we have of this history for what we have not. Would you not be glad, my lord, to see in one stupendous draught the whole progress of that government from liberty to servitude? the whole series of causes and effects, apparent and real, public and private? those which all men saw, and all good men lamented and opposed at the time; and those which were so disguised to the prejudices, to the partialities of a divided people, and even to the corruption of mankind, that many did not, and that many could pretend they did not, discern them, till it was too late to resist them?

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I am sorry to say it, this part of the Roman story would be not only more curious and more authentic than the former, but of more immediate and more important application to the present state of Britain. But it is lost: the loss is irreparable, and your lordship will not blame me for deploring it.

III. THEY who set up for scepticism may not regret the loss of such an history: but this I will be bold to assert to them, that an history must be writ on this plan, and must aim at least at these perfections, or it will answer sufficiently none of the intentions of history. That it will not answer sufficiently the intention I have insisted upon in these letters, that of instructing posterity by the examples of former ages, is manifest: and I think it is as manifest that an history cannot be said even to relate faithfully, and inform us truly, that does not relate fully, and inform us of all that is necessary to

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make a true judgment concerning the matters contained in it. Naked facts, without the causes that produced them and the circumstances that accompanied them, are not sufficient to characterize actions or counsels. The nice degrees of wisdom and of folly, of virtue and of vice, will not only be undiscoverable in them; but we must be very often unable to determine under which of these characters they fall in general. The sceptics I am speaking of are therefore guilty of this absurdity: the nearer an history comes to the true idea of history, the better it informs and the more it instructs us, the more worthy to be rejected it appears to them. I have said and allowed enough to content any reasonable man about the uncertainty of history. I have owned that the best are defective, and I will add in this place an observation which did not, I think, occur to me before. Conjecture is not always distinguished perhaps as it ought to be;

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be; so that an ingenious writer may sometimes do very innocently, what a malicious writer does very criminally as often as he dares, and as his malice requires it: he may account for events after they have happened, by a system of causes and conduct that did not really produce them, tho' it might possibly or even probably have produced them. But this observation, like several others, becomes a reason for examining and comparing authorities, and for preferring some, not for rejecting all. DAVILA, a noble historian surely, and one whom I should not scruple to confess equal in many respects to LIVY, as I should not scruple to prefer his countryman GUICCIARDIN to THUCYDIDES in every respect; DAVILA, my lord, was accused from the first publication of his history, or at least was suspected, of too much refinement and subtilty; in developing the secret motives of actions, in laying the causes of events too deep, and deducing them often through a series of

progreſſion too complicated, and too artiſtly wrought. But yet the ſuſpicious perſon who ſhould reject this hiſtorian upon ſuch general inducements as theſe, would have no grace to oppoſe his ſuſpicions to the authority of the firſt duke of Epernon, who had been an actor, and a principal actor too, in many of the ſcenes that DAVILA recites. GIRARD, ſecretary to this duke and no contemptible biographer, relates, that this hiſtory came down to the place where the old man reſided in Gaſcony, a little before his death; that he red it to him, that the duke confirmed the truth of the narrations in it, and ſeemed only ſurprized by what means the author could be ſo well informed of the moſt ſecret councils and meaſures of thoſe times?

IV. I HAVE ſaid enough on this head, and your lordſhip may be induced perhaps, by what I have ſaid, to think with me, that ſuch hiſtories as theſe, whether
ancient

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ancient or modern, deserve alone to be studied. Let us leave the credulous learned to write history without materials, or to study those who do so; to wrangle about ancient traditions, and to ring different changes on the same sett of bells. Let us leave the sceptics, in modern as well as ancient history, to triumph in the notable discovery of the ides of one month mistaken for the calends of another, or in the various dates and contradictory circumstances which they find in weekly gazettes and monthly mercuries. Whilst they are thus employed, your lordship and I will proceed, if you please, to consider more closely than we have yet done, the rule mentioned above; that I mean of using discernment and choice in the study of the most authentic history, that of not wandering in the light, which is as necessary as that of not groping in the dark.

MAN

MAN is the subject of every history; and to know him well, we must see him and consider him, as history alone can present him to us, in every age, in every country, in every state, in life and in death. History therefore of all kinds, of civilized and uncivilized, of ancient and modern nations, in short all history, that descends to a sufficient detail of human actions and characters, is useful to bring us acquainted with our species, nay with ourselves. To teach and to inculcate the general principles of virtue, and the general rules of wisdom and good policy, which result from such details of actions and characters, comes for the most part, and always should come, expressly and directly into the design of those who are capable of giving such details: and therefore whilst they narrate as historians, they hint often as philosophers; they put into our hands, as it were, on every proper occasion, the
end

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end of a clue, that serves to remind us of searching, and to guide us in the search of that truth which the example before us either establishes or illustrates. If a writer neglects this part, we are able however to supply his neglect by our own attention and industry: and when he gives us a good history of Peruvians or Mexicans, of Chinese or Tartars, of Muscovites or Negroes, we may blame him, but we must blame ourselves much more, if we do not make it a good lesson of philosophy. This being the general use of history, it is not to be neglected. Every one may make it, who is able to read and to reflect on what he reads: and every one who makes it will find, in his degree, the benefit that arises from an early acquaintance contracted in this manner with mankind. We are not only passengers or sojourners in this world, but we are absolute strangers at the first steps we make in it. Our guides are often ignorant, often unfaithful. By
this

this map of the country which history spreads before us, we may learn, if we please, to guide ourselves. In our journey through it, we are beset on every side. We are besieged sometimes even in our strongest holds. Terrors and temptations, conducted by the passions of other men, assault us: and our own passions, that correspond with these, betray us. History is a collection of the journals of those who have travelled through the same country, and been exposed to the same accidents: and their good and their ill success are equally instructive. In this pursuit of knowledge an immense field is spread to us; general histories, sacred and profane; the histories of particular countries, particular events, particular orders, particular men; memorials, anecdotes, travels. But we must not ramble in this field without discernment or choice, nor even with these must we ramble too long.

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As to the choice of authors, who have writ on all these various subjects, so much has been said by learned men concerning all those that deserve attention, and their several characters are so well established, that it would be a sort of pedantic affectation to lead your lordship through so voluminous, and at the same time so easy, a detail. I pass it over therefore in order to observe, that as soon as we have taken this general view of mankind, and of the course of human affairs in different ages and different parts of the world; we ought to apply, and the shortness of human life considered, to confine ourselves almost entirely in our study of history, to such histories as have an immediate relation to our professions, or to our rank and situation in the society to which we belong. Let me instance in the profession of divinity, as the noblest and the most important.

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(1) I HAVE said so much concerning the share which divines of all religions have taken in the corruption of history, that I should have anathemas pronounced against me, no doubt, in the east and the west, by the dairo, the mufti, and the pope, if these letters were submitted to ecclesiastical censure; for surely, my lord, the clergy have a better title than the sons of Apollo to be called *genus irritabile vatum*. What would it be, if I went about to shew, how many of the christian clergy abuse by mis-representation and false quotation, the history they can no longer corrupt? and yet this task would not be, even to me, an hard one. But as I mean to speak in this place of christian divines alone, so I mean to speak of such of them particularly as may be called divines without any sneer: of such of them, for some such I think there are, as believe themselves, and would have mankind believe; not for
temporal

temporal but spiritual interest, not for the sake of the clergy, but for the sake of mankind. Now it has been long matter of astonishment to me, how such persons as these could take so much silly pains to establish mystery on metaphysics, revelation on philosophy, and matters of fact on abstract reasoning? A religion founded on the authority of a divine mission, confirmed by prophecies and miracles, appeals to facts: and the facts must be proved as all other facts that pass for authentic are proved; for faith, so reasonable after this proof, is absurd before it. If they are thus proved, the religion will prevail without the assistance of so much profound reasoning: if they are not thus proved, the authority of it will sink in the world even with this assistance. The divines object in their disputes with atheists, and they object very justly, that these men require improper proofs; proofs that are not suited to the nature of the subject,

ject, and then cavil that such proofs are not furnished. But what then do they mean, to fall into the same absurdity themselves in their disputes with theists, and to din improper proofs in ears that are open to proper proofs? The matter is of great moment, my lord, and I make no excuse for the zeal which obliges me to dwell a little on it. A serious and honest application to the study of ecclesiastical history, and every part of prophane history and chronology relative to it, is incumbent on such reverend persons as are here spoken of, on a double account: because history alone can furnish the proper proofs, that the religion they teach is of God; and because the unfair manner, in which these proofs have been and are daily furnished, creates prejudices, and gives advantages against christianity that require to be removed. No scholar will dare to deny, that false history, as well as sham miracles, has been employed to propagate
christianity

Christianity formerly: and whoever examines the writers of our own age will find the same abuse of history continued. Many and many instances of this abuse might be produced. It is grown into custom, writers copy one another, and the mistake that was committed, or the falshood that was invented by one, is adopted by hundreds.

ABBADIE says in his famous book, that the gospel of St. MATTHEW is cited by CLEMENS bishop of Rome, a disciple of the apostles; that BARNABAS cites it in his epistle; that IGNATIUS and POLYCARPE receive it; and that the same fathers, that give testimony for MATTHEW, give it likewise for MARK. Nay your lordship will find, I believe, that the present bishop of London in his third pastoral letter speaks to the same effect. I will not trouble you nor myself with any more instances of the same kind. Let this which occurred to me as I was

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writing suffice. It may well suffice; for I presume the fact advanced by the minister and the bishop is a mistake. If the fathers of the first century do mention some passages that are agreeable to what we read in our evangelists, will it follow that these fathers had the same gospels before them? To say so is a manifest abuse of history, and quite inexcusable in writers that knew, or should have known, that these fathers made use of other gospels, wherein such passages might be contained, or they might be preserved in unwritten tradition. Besides which I could almost venture to affirm that these fathers of the first century do not expressly name the gospels we have of MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, and JOHN. To the two reasons that have been given why those who make divinity their profession should study history, particularly ecclesiastical history, with an honest and serious application; in order to support christianity against the attacks
of

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of unbelievers, and to remove the doubts and prejudices that the unfair proceedings of men of their own order have raised in minds candid but not implicit, willing to be informed but curious to examine; to these I say we may add another consideration that seems to me of no small importance. Writers of the Roman religion have attempted to shew, that the text of the holy writ is on many accounts insufficient to be the sole criterion of orthodoxy: I apprehend too that they have shewn it. Sure I am that experience, from the first promulgation of christianity to this hour, shews abundantly with how much ease and success the most opposite, the most extravagant, nay the most impious opinions, and the most contradictory faiths, may be founded on the same text; and plausibly defended by the same authority. Writers of the reformed religion have erected their batteries against tradition; and the only difficulty they had to encounter in this

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enterprize lay in levelling and pointing their cannon so as to avoid demolishing, in one common ruin, the traditions they retain, and those they reject. Each side has been employed to weaken the cause and explode the system of his adversary: and whilst they have been so employed, they have jointly laid their axes to the root of christianity: for thus men will be apt to reason upon what they have advanced, “ If the text has not that authenticity, clearness, and precision which
“ are necessary to establish it as a divine
“ and a certain rule of faith and practice; and if the tradition of the church,
“ from the first ages of it till the days
“ of LUTHER and CALVIN, has been
“ corrupted itself, and has served to corrupt the faith and practice of christians; there remains at this time no
“ standard at all of christianity. By consequence either this religion was not
“ originally of divine institution, or else
“ God has not provided effectually for
“ pre-

“ preserving the genuine purity of it,
“ and the gates of hell have actually pre-
“ vailed, in contradiction to his promise,
“ against the church.” The best effect
of this reasoning that can be hoped for,
is that men should fall into theism, and
subscribe to the first proposition : he must
be worse than an atheist who can affirm
the last. The dilemma is terrible, my
lord, Party zeal and private interest have
formed it : the common interest of christi-
anity is deeply concerned to solve it.
Now I presume it can never be solved
without a more accurate examination,
not only of the christian but of the jewish
system, than learned men have been hi-
therto impartial enough and sagacious
enough to take, or honest enough to
communicate. Whilst the authenticity
and sense of the text of the bible remain
as disputable, and whilst the tradition of
the church remains as problematical, to
say no worse, as the immense labours of
the christian divines in several commu-

nions have made them appear to be; christianity may lean on the civil and ecclesiastical power, and be supported by the forcible influence of education: but the proper force of religion, that force which subdues the mind and awes the conscience by conviction, will be wanting.

I HAD reason therefore to produce divinity, as one instance of those professions that require a particular application to the study of some particular parts of history: and since I have said so much on the subject in my zeal for christianity, I will add this further. The resurrection of letters was a fatal period: the christian system has been attacked and wounded too very severely since that time. The defence has been better made indeed by modern divines, than it had been by ancient fathers and apologists. The moderns have invented new methods of defence, and have abandoned some posts that

that were not tenable : but still there are others, in defending which they lie under great disadvantages. Such are various facts, piously believed in former times, but on which the truth of christianity has been rested very imprudently in more enlightened ages ; because the falsity of some, and the gross improbability of others are so evident, that instead of answering the purpose for which they were invented, they have rendered the whole tenor of ecclesiastical history and tradition precarious, ever since a strict but just application of the rules of criticism has been made to them. I touch these things lightly ; but if your lordship reflects upon them, you will find reason perhaps to think as I do, that it is high time the clergy in all christian communions should join their forces, and establish those historical facts, which are the foundations of the whole system, on clear and unquestionable historical authority, such as they require in all cases

of moment from others ; reject candidly what cannot be thus established ; and pursue their enquiries in the same spirit of truth through all the ages of the church ; without any regard to historians, fathers, or councils, more than they are strictly entitled to on the face of what they have transmitted to us, on their own consistency, and on the concurrence of other authority. Our pastors would be thus, I presume, much better employed than they generally are. Those of the clergy who make religion merely a trade, who regard nothing more than the subsistence it affords them, or in higher life the wealth and power they enjoy by the means of it, may say to themselves that it will last their time, or that policy and reason of state will preserve the form of a church when the spirit of religion is extinct. But those whom I mentioned above, those who act for spiritual not temporal ends, and are desirous that men should believe and
practise

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practise the doctrines of christianity as well as go to church and pay tithes, will feel and own the weight of such considerations as these; and agree that however the people have been and may be still amused, yet christianity has been in decay ever since the resurrection of letters: and that it cannot be supported as it was supported before that aera, nor by any other way than that which I propose, and which a due application to the study of history, chronology, and criticism, would enable our divines to pursue, no doubt, with success.

I MIGHT instance, in other professions, the obligation men lie under of applying themselves to certain parts of history, and I can hardly forbear doing it in that of the law; in its nature the noblest and most beneficial to mankind, in its abuse and debasement the most fordid and the most pernicious. A lawyer now is nothing more, I speak of ninety-nine in an
hundred

hundred at least, to use some of TULLY's words, *nisi leguleius quidam, cautus & acutus, praeco actionum, cantor formularum, auceps syllabarum*. But there have been lawyers that were orators, philosophers, historians: there have been BACONS and CLARENDONS, my lord. There will be none such any more, till in some better age, true ambition or the love of fame prevails over avarice: and till men find leisure and encouragement to prepare themselves for the exercise of this profession, by climbing up to the *vantage ground*, so my lord BACON calls it, of science; instead of groveling all their lives below, in a mean but gainful application to all the little arts of chicane. Till this happen, the profession of the law will scarce deserve to be ranked among the learned professions: and whenever it happens, one of the vantage grounds, to which men must climb, is metaphysical, and the other historical knowledge. They must pry into the secret recesses of the

human heart, and become well acquainted with the whole moral world, that they may discover the abstract reason of all laws: and they must trace the laws of particular states, especially of their own, from the first rough sketches to the more perfect draughts; from the first causes or occasions that produced them, through all the effects good and bad that they produced. But I am running insensibly into a subject, which would detain me too long from one that relates more immediately to your lordship, and with which I intend to conclude this long letter.

(2) I pass from the consideration of those professions to which particular parts or kinds of history seem to belong: and I come to speak of the study of history, as a necessary mean to prepare men for the discharge of that duty which they owe to their country, and which is common to all the members of every society that

that is constituted according to the rules of right reason, and with a due regard to the common good. I have met in St. REAL's works, or some other French book, with a ridicule cast on private men who make history a political study, or who apply themselves in any manner to affairs of state. But the reflection is too general. In governments so arbitrary by their constitution, that the will of the prince is not only the supreme but the sole law, it is so far from being a duty, that it may be dangerous, and must be impertinent in men, who are not called by the prince to the administration of public affairs, to concern themselves about it, or to fit themselves for it. The sole vocation there is the favour of the court; and whatever designation God makes by the talents he bestows, tho it may serve, which it seldom ever does, to direct the choice of the prince, yet I presume that it cannot become a reason to particular men, or create a duty on them, to devote themselves

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themselves to the public service. Look on the Turkish government. See a fellow taken, from rowing in a common passage-boat, by the caprice of the prince : see him invested next day with all the power the foldans took under the caliphs, or the mayors of the palace under the successors of CLOVIS : see a whole empire governed by the ignorance, inexperience, and arbitrary will of this tyrant, and a few other subordinate tyrants, as ignorant and unexperienced as himself. In France indeed, tho an absolute government, things go a little better. Arts and sciences are encouraged, and here and there an example may be found of a man who has risen by some extraordinary talents, amidst innumerable examples of men who have arrived at the greatest honors and highest posts by no other merit than that of assiduous fawning, attendance, or of skill in some despicable puerile amusement ; in training wasps, for instance, to take regular flights
like

like hawks, and stoop at flies. The nobility of France, like the children of tribute among the ancient Saracens and modern Turks, are set apart for wars. They are bred to make love, to hunt, and to fight: and if any of them should acquire knowledge superior to this, they would acquire that which might be prejudicial to themselves, but could not become beneficial to their country. The affairs of state are trusted to other hands. Some have risen to them by drudging long in business: some have been made ministers almost in the cradle: and the whole power of the government has been abandoned to others in the dotage of life. There is a monarchy, an absolute monarchy too, I mean that of China, wherein the administration of the government is carried on, under the direction of the prince, ever since the dominion of the Tartars has been established, by several classes of Mandarins, and according to the deliberation and advice of several orders

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ders of councils : the admiffion to which
claffes and orders depends on the abilities
of the candidates, as their rife in them
depends on the behaviour they hold, and
the improvements they make afterwards.
Under fuch a government, it is neither
impertinent nor ridiculous, in any of the
fubjects who are invited by their circum-
ftances, or pushed to it by their talents,
to make the hiftory of their own and of
other countries a political ftudy, and to
fit themfelves by this and all other ways
for the fervice of the public. It is not
dangerous neither ; or an honor that out-
weighs the danger attends it : fince pri-
vate men have a right by the ancient con-
ftitution of this government, as well as
councils of ftate, to represent to the prince
the abufes of his adminiftration. But ftill
men have not there the fame occafion to
concern themfelves in the affairs of the
ftate, as the nature of a free government
gives to the members of it. In our own
country, for in our own the forms of a
free

free government at least are hitherto preserved, men are not only designed for the public service by the circumstances of their situation, and their talents, all which may happen in others: but they are designed to it by their birth in many cases, and in all cases they may dedicate themselves to this service, and take in different degrees some share in it, whether they are called to it by the prince or no. In absolute governments, all public service is to the prince, and he nominates all those that serve the public. In free governments, there is a distinct and a principal service due to the state. Even the king, of such a limited monarchy as ours, is but the first servant of the people. Among his subjects, some are appointed by the constitution, and others are elected by the people, to carry on the exercise of the legislative power jointly with him, and to controul the executive power independently on him. Thus your lordship is born a member of that
order

order of men, in whom a third part of the supreme power of the government resides: and your right to the exercise of the power belonging to this order not being yet opened, you are chosen into another body of men who have different power and a different constitution, but who possess another third part of the supreme legislative authority, for as long a time as the commission or trust delegated to them by the people lasts. Free-men who are neither born to the first, nor elected to the last, have a right however to complain, to represent, to petition, and I add even to do more in cases of the utmost extremity. For sure there cannot be a greater absurdity, than to affirm that the people have a remedy in resistance, when their prince attempts to enslave them; but that they have none, when their representatives sell themselves and them.

THE

THE sum of what I have been saying is, that in free governments, the public service is not confined to those whom the prince appoints to different posts in the administration under him; that there the care of the state is the care of multitudes; that many are called to it in a particular manner by their rank, and by other circumstances of their situation; and that even those whom the prince appoints are not only answerable to him, but like him, and before him, to the nation, for their behaviour in their several posts. It can never be impertinent nor ridiculous therefore in such a country, whatever it might be in the abböt of ST. REAL's, which was Savoy I think; or in Peru, under the INCAS, where GARCILASSO DE LA VEGA says it was lawful for none but the nobility to study—for men of all degrees to instruct themselves in those affairs wherein they may be actors, or judges of those that act, or controwlers of those

those that judge. On the contrary, it is incumbent on every man to instruct himself, as well as the means and opportunities he has permit, concerning the nature and interests of the government, and those rights and duties that belong to him, or to his superiors, or to his inferiors. This in general; but in particular, it is certain that the obligations under which we lie to serve our country increase, in proportion to the ranks we hold, and the other circumstances of birth, fortune, and situation that call us to this service; and above all to the talents which God has given us to perform it.

It is in this view, that I shall address to your lordship whatever I have further to say on the study of history.

