

To it nearly all the great questions on which men now most widely differ from each other properly belong; and however much the lecturer may desire to avoid controversy, and to give with fairness and impartiality a view of both sides of any historical question, yet in the discharge of his duty as an expounder of history, he must necessarily express, or at least indicate, his own opinions,—opinions which some may consider erroneous.

The universality of history, if not a proof of its importance, yet exhibits the opinion of mankind in every age and in every nation respecting it. No tribe, however rude, is without some attempt at a history; the painted walls of Mexico, the poems of the Druids, the pyramids of Egypt, the mounds of the American Indians, all told tales of their ancestors to later generations, and reminded them of the past.

But not only is history of universal interest to every nation, but also to every single individual; for it is to this that all appeal. Theologians, politicians, philosophers, of every shade of opinion, advocating every variety of social or political theories, differing in all else, agree only in appealing to history, for it is "Philosophy teaching by examples."

To a nation in its collective capacity a knowledge of its own history is inestimable. The end of every political society or state, is to promote the highest happiness of the nation; and to do this, it must seek to preserve and to perfect itself, to preserve itself from dangers, whether external or internal, which threaten its destruction or dissolution; and to perfect itself, by the establishment of such laws and political institutions as may best conduce to the happiness of its citizens. But in order to do this properly a nation must know itself. Without this knowledge it cannot make any successful endeavours after its own perfection. It must know what its present state is, what progress it has already made, to enable it to perceive what further advance it has to make. It must observe what steps have led to its present prosperity, in order to judge what will be most likely to conduce to its future progress. It must observe and take warning from those events of its history which seemed for a time to cause it to retrograde, which laid it open to external attacks, or which produced internal convulsions.

Yet the error of parallelism must be carefully guarded against. We must not too hastily infer similar results from apparently similar causes; for, from the changes which take place in the conditions of society arises the certainty that no past states can ever be renewed. There is no such thing as a recurring cycle of events. The mere fact of an event, or of a state of society, having once existed, is a guarantee that it shall never exist again. "So subtle and obstinate is the operation of this law," says

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