

tive, no trace of haste, ill nature, or thoughtlessness can be discovered in his writings. Acquainted with the innumerable religious absurdities which had in every age exhibited themselves under one name or another, for which thousands had been ready to battle, but of which, when the first fervour of fanaticism subsided, they were heartily ashamed, and with the many dogmas in which truth was separated from error by such slight and almost imperceptible distinctions, that without the aid of authority many wise men would be puzzled to say where the one ended and the other began, and knowing that in most cases error arose from an ignorant and misguided zeal for the truth—for few men would deliberately turn from the path which they believed would lead to salvation—he could look upon all the phantasies which had swarmed in England with the mild charity of a Christian—for “charity is” ever “according to knowledge”—not with the baneful and withering sneer of a sceptic, or the narrow bigotry and hate of a sectary. United with a Church that knew no limit in space or duration, he could not, like the disciple of a “local and temporary theology,” suffer his mind to be embittered by any feeling of humiliation, because the members of that Church in this particular corner of the globe were for a while suffering a severe probation; and viewing the fanatical outbreaks of her opponents as tornadoes to warn her servants that they must not sleep upon their posts, he could feel no more reason to misrepresent their fury, than a mariner could to libel the elements in his log-book. Hence in his history you find no sect maligned or misrepresented; no doctrines, or motives, or conduct, imputed which they would repudiate; and hence you find no Protestant out of the pale of the Establishment complaining of its truthfulness, impartiality, or justice. Knowing fully the limits of the temporal as well as of the spiritual rights of the pontiff and the distinction between his temporal and spiritual character, and how little the Church was accountable for the error of the man or the prince, he could not hesitate to tell the whole truth, where a writer of less learning would be more scrupulous. Knowing also that there is no real connexion—whatever some people may think to the contrary—between the truth of Catholic doctrines and the misconduct of professed Catholics, unless of course that conduct be the consequence of believing in those doctrines, he could have no motive for concealing, denying, or justifying the faults or crimes of real or nominal Catholics. He was also free from that greatest of literary foibles, and worst bone of a historian—a system of philosophy; that is to say, a certain number of propositions—no matter what—concerning society, with which, like the classic tyrant of antiquity, he is to size every transaction. Nothing can be more ruinous to the fidelity of history than the indulgence of this fancy, as, instead of waiting to evolve his principles from a clear view of a long train of events, the philosophic historian—for that is the name—perverts and colours his facts to make them coincide with his theory, and acts just as if nations

were made merely to elucidate the fantasies of literary speculators. It may be said, that if a man have a strong mind, he cannot be guilty of such trifling; but the fact of his setting out to write history in accordance with a theory is a proof of weakness or knavery. He regards his theory as of more importance than any history, and cannot impartially set down events which plainly refute or contradict that theory. It is not in human nature to do it, and no man has yet done it. In every department of life the disposition, not arising from improper motives, to determine off-hand and in general terms the nature and character of things, in themselves obscure, intricate, and complicated, is evidence of a weak, inexperienced, and self-sufficient mind. Thus you see young presumptuous lawyers resolving every case by the standard of certain general principles, omitting from their consideration some apparently unimportant circumstances, which, however, take it altogether out of the operation of those principles, and which, when barely mentioned by some quiet unpretending counsel, turn them and their client out of court. Thus young physicians, flushed with the latest theories, without waiting patiently to consider all the symptoms of a disease, determine its character off-hand, prescribe some favourite nostrum, hold a *post mortem* examination, and learn caution. Thus young men generally, on hearing the details of any transaction, characterize it at once, and in general terms; but old men review all the facts more deliberately, consider what can be said on every side, hesitate to pronounce categorically upon it, and if called upon to act, merely do whatever the occasion requires of them. And thus, finally, men of weak judgments, a little learning, little experience, some conceit, and a turn for speculation or day-dreaming, write history, — resolved to make every transaction quadrate with their notions of “the eternal fitness of things,” viewing every fact in the light most congenial with their fancies, and deciding dogmatically, and in general terms, the character of every transaction, and the good and bad qualities, the virtues and vices, the motives and objects, of every person. But a man of sound judgment, immense learning, great sagacity, extensive experience of men and things, good common sense, and a practical turn of mind, is a slave to no theory, views every fact in every light without a previous predilection for any,—reflects how doubtful and unsatisfactory is the evidence of every event in past times, how little any one can now really know about it,—how much its real character may be concealed, obscured, exaggerated,—how he must depend on the honesty and discrimination of those who wrote the original accounts,—how fallible is every mind, and that even the honestest men will mention those features only which appear to them important, and will omit those which to other men, in other times, are of far greater importance,—how limited must his knowledge be of the secret springs of other men’s actions, and particularly of those who died ages before he was born,—recollects how many events which for

generations were deemed glorious or criminal, have appeared in quite a different light on the discovery of fuller evidence,—considers that every human transaction good and evil are so intimately blended, that it is impossible to characterize it correctly in general terms, and that in every such transaction there are so many contradictory and counteracting circumstances that no general expression will fully and accurately explain and comprise all;—and concludes that his only proper course is to content himself with a plain statement of all the facts, and leave generalizations and theories to those who need them. This Dr. Lingard did, and this is one of the greatest excellencies and beauties of his work. As you read it you are not pestered with any whims or fantasies of the writer; you feel that you are reading what a man of great research and sound judgment believed to be the real facts, and had no motive to misrepresent one way or another; and, in short, you are satisfied that it is history.

The deviations from the former popular practice of viewing history as “philosophy, teaching by” such examples as it thought proper to select, was a bold and novel step on the part of Dr. Lingard. That practice was the last remnant of old systems of philosophy, which, instead of collecting facts and inducting the proper consequences from them, first set up theories, and then, cast about for facts to support them, and of course rejecting all that did not confirm or elucidate them. Thus beginning at the wrong end was the principal cause why natural philosophy remained stationary for so many ages, while so many bright intellects were engaged in starting and solving theoretical quiddities—not more useful, and certainly far less amusing than Chinese puzzles—until its folly was exposed by Lord Bacon, who promulgated the value of induction, and for that exercise of common sense or genius is sure to attain immortality. But though the silliness of the practice was obvious enough, and it had been long exploded from the field of natural philosophy, yet Dr. Lingard was the first who had the courage to scut it from the composition of history, and to do for that moral and political science what Bacon had done for that of natural philosophy. He of course, like other innovators on old usages, was assailed from various quarters, but he soon triumphed over all opposition, and secured his fame more effectually and permanently, by thus bursting through ancient trammels, than if he had rested it on irrational prejudices in behalf of an absurd though long-established system. The more we consider the conduct of Dr. Lingard in this particular, and the temptations which the former practice held out to embellish and popularise his subject, the more we admire the soundness of his judgment—the originality of his views—and that confidence in his own powers, and in the sterling value of his materials, which enabled him to depart from the beaten track, and write the history of his country as it ought to be written.

One quality which Dr. Lingard possessed in an eminent degree above all, who had ever attempted to write the history of

England, was common sense to see the real insignificance, for all modern practical purposes, of all past events. What principle in science, politics, morals, or religion, can be now determined or affected by the conduct of any human being in the first seventeen centuries of the Christian era? Of what earthly consequence was it to him, or any other man of sense, whether the bull of Adrian, transferring Ireland to Henry II, was forged, or genuine; whether Richard II. died at Pomfret or at Stirling; whether it was he or some one like him that was exhibited at St. Paul’s; how many men were engaged at Flodden; & at what particular moment “gospel light flashed from Boleyn’s eyes;” how many years, months and minutes, she continued “chaste as the icicle on Dian’s temple;” whether the Protestant or the Catholic persecutions were the more cold-blooded, relentless, and savage; whether, and how long, Elizabeth lived a maid; whether Cromwell was a hypocrite. Vane a fanatic, Monk a scoundrel, and Charles I. a saint and a martyr. These questions, and a thousand others, though very good subjects for the declamations of schoolboys, have not now the slightest interest for men; and though it had been at one time a good argument against the Catholic claims, to say that Mary burned heretics, that Guy Fawkes was a determined villain, that Popes in ancient times claimed the right of deposing princes, and that James I. was frightened by Dutch troops out of England, for attempting to “subvert the fundamental laws,”—yet before Dr. Lingard began to write, such rhodomontade was confined to old ladies’ coteries and country pulpits. He therefore had no motive—religious, political, or speculative—to misrepresent any transaction; and he accordingly gave the real authentic version of every event, without looking to any object but the elucidation of truth, and with such thorough freedom from every species of partiality, that English critics, accustomed to the former style of writing history, could scarcely believe their own senses, when they saw a book in which “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” was set before them. It is amusing to read the early criticisms on him. Never were there stronger illustrations of the dispositions of the men who

“Willing to wound, but yet afraid to strike,  
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike.”

Every effort of human ingenuity was put forth to express censure, when not an error or misrepresentation could be pointed out,—to create a general belief of his partiality and inaccuracy, without mentioning one tangible ground for shaking his credit,—to raise a prejudice against him on account merely of his being a Catholic and a priest,—and to make even his very impartiality a source of imputation.

Dr. Lingard’s learning and research are so well known and universally celebrated, that it is unnecessary to dilate upon them. To think even of comparing him with any of his predecessors would be doing him an injustice, of the grossness of which no one can have an adequate conception who has not contrasted his history with their compilations.