

THE CANADA  
EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY  
AND SCHOOL CHRONICLE.

JULY—AUGUST, 1879.

ON BUCKLE'S THEORY OF HISTORY.

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"There is a mystery in the soul of States  
Which hath an operation more divine  
Than our mere chroniclers dare meddle  
with."\*

YEARS have passed by since Buckle first gave to the world his views upon the true method of historical enquiry, and, as yet, no one has been bold enough to take up the task which he began and to push the principles he enunciated to their legitimate conclusion. I propose in this paper to state shortly what his leading views and principles were, to enquire into the sufficiency of some of the grounds upon which his method has been attacked, and to give such a sketch of the plan of his great work as may prove of interest to those who have not had an opportunity of reading it themselves.

The first volume of the "History of Civilization in England" appeared about 1857, and as this struck the key-note of Buckle's system, we may say that his theory has awaited a general acceptance at the hands of the civil-

ized world for nearly a quarter of a century. That key-note consisted in the bold assertion that blind chance baffles itself in attempting to influence the career of nations, baffles itself by continually counteracting and neutralising its own operations, even as the element of uncertainty in tossing up a coin becomes eliminated if we repeat the experiment often enough. But if chance is removed from the equation, as an unimportant and self-cancelling factor, a clear field is evidently left for the manifestation and consequent detection of those widely extended laws which have ever been silently at work, however hidden by the outward drapery, so to speak, of current and unimportant events, the external glitter of which has attracted our attention from the really vital processes of nature that underlie them.

To revert a moment to our illustration. If after a thousand spinnings of our penny in the air we found a small, but still a marked, excess in the number of times head came up over the number of times that tail was

\* "Troilus and Cressida," Act 3, sc. 3, as altered by Coleridge.