

*FREEMAN'S "METHODS OF HISTORICAL STUDY."\**

WE are rather late in noticing Dr. Freeman's Lectures on "The Methods of Historical Study." They are, it is needless to say, rich in instruction and vigorous in style. Their author is the soundest and the surest to live of all the English historians of our day. His goodly array of volumes will hold their place with Gibbon, Thirlwall, Grote, and Arnold, on the shelf of honour when romances which ignorance now reads with ecstasy shall have been forgotten, or be remembered only as warnings of the ultimate fate of imposture. In that period of history of which he is the special master, it is hardly possible that he should ever be superseded.

The first of these lectures is inaugural, and deals with the history and functions of the chair. The Chair of Modern History at Oxford, with that at Cambridge, was founded by the Government of George I. for the purpose of training students for the public service, and in the hope probably, at the same time, of conciliating the Universities. Jacobite Oxford was not conciliated; and the foundation succumbed, like everything else, to the torpor which reigned in the University during the last century. It was awakened to activity and importance by the appointment of Arnold, whose lectures were crowded; and the appearance of the mighty form of the great Liberal in Puseyite Oxford will never be forgotten by any one who was a student in those days. Arnold's successor, Henry Halford Vaughan, is, by Dr. Freeman, passed over in disdainful silence; yet pathos, at all events, attaches to his history. He closed the other day, in obscure, probably in morbid, seclusion, and without result except a ponderous commentary on Shakespeare, a life which his contemporaries expected to be fruitful of the highest achievements. He was undoubtedly a man of powerful, gifted, and comprehensive mind. The son of an eminent judge, he had been destined for the Bar, the drudgery of which his philosophic spirit spurned; and his father having set him, as an exercise, to draft a judgment in a great case, wept to think what a lawyer would be lost in his son. A work on moral philosophy, embodying an entirely new system which he was known to have written, and the appearance of which was expected with the greatest eagerness, was thrice accidentally burned, or perhaps arrested on the eve of publication by a sensitiveness on the part of its author which bordered on disease, though it could scarcely have had a physical source, since he was a man of powerful build and a great fox-hunter. His own taste was curiously perceptible in his sympathy with the Norman passion for the chase. What was the real value of his Lectures on the Norman Conquest, as they were not published, we cannot pretend at this distance of time to say, but certainly they showed research, had an ethical interest, contained very eloquent passages, and were largely attended. The last two Professors, Dr. Stubbs and Dr. Freeman, have raised the chair to a level in importance and renown with any chair in Europe.

In any general survey of the subject Dr. Freeman could not fail to enforce his view of the continuity of history against those who divide history into Ancient and Modern, if indeed any of those depraved sectaries still linger in existence. Continuous, history is, as Dr. Freeman has often and irresistibly proved; perhaps some day we shall be reminded that it is universal and not confined to the basin of the Mediterranean. But a sound doctrine may have been pressed a little too far. There is a reason after all, for B.C. and A.D. The "Year One" of the French Republic was effaced by the next wave of opinion; the "Year One" of Christianity remains an irremovable landmark. From that era a change came over the spirit of humanity and history, though the vesture, political, social, and economical, did not undergo, nor was it possible that it should undergo, any sudden transformation. The survival of the Roman Empire again is a sound and fruitful doctrine; it has shed much light on history, and students of history owe gratitude for it to Palgrave and to Freeman. But we submit that it is capable of overstatement. Karl, saving in name and forms, was no more a Roman Emperor than Akbar. Christianity was not the religion of the Roman Empire: it had its origin in the East, and in a province which was the least Romanized of all; it combated and supplanted, socially as well as theologically, the Paganism which had its centre in the capital, and its triumph coincided with the termination of the Roman Principate and the commencement of the despotism of Constantinople. The separation of the spiritual from the temporal power, which is the grand characteristic of the Papal Middle Ages, stands in the sharpest contrast to the Pontificate of the Cæsars. Feudalism has been traced to the Empire. But of its two essential parts, the delegation of territorial jurisdiction and Commendation, both are the sheer necessities of a state of

things such as followed the irruption of the barbarians, in which there was no centralized administration, and in which, law affording no sufficient protection to life or property, the personal protection of the powerful was indispensable to the weak. The veterans of the Roman Empire received grants of land, but the grants conveyed no jurisdiction. Delegation of territorial jurisdiction is as marked a feature in the Persian or Turkish Empire as in the Frankish Kingdom; but it did not exist under the Roman Empire, which was an administrative monarchy of the most highly centralized kind.

Another point respecting which we are disposed to be captious is Dr. Freeman's tendency to level the Classicist with the Byzantine and Mediæval writers, and indeed, to flout the idea of a classical literature altogether. It is true that the language in which a Byzantine historian writes is philologically identical with the language of Thucydides: and it is true that the language in which a monkish chronicler writes is philologically identical with the language of Tacitus; but it is also true that the language of the Byzantine or the chronicler, that of the chronicler especially, is a debased and hideous jargon; while those of Thucydides and Tacitus are the noblest organs of human thought. Nor is the disparity in the value of the writers, both as historians and as educators, less than the disparity in the language. The monk can be made valuable for the purposes of mental training only by being read under the auspices of such a teacher as Dr. Freeman, who, out of the stores of his own comprehensive learning gives life to the dry bones, while his criticism separates what is authentic from the miraculous and the fatuous. Classical education is now apparently about to give place to something more scientific, and no man of sense, whatever may have been his own training, wishes to oppose himself to the change. But as a thing of the past, at all events, let it be rightly understood and have its due. It was a study of Man through the medium of a body of historians, philosophers, poets, dramatists, and orators, unrivalled as a whole, and forming, especially when well illustrated, a most comprehensive as well as a most compact and manageable curriculum. It formed, at the same time, by far the best school both of taste and of linguistic training. It would have been utterly ruined in every respect by taking in a rabble of low-caste writers, such as the Byzantines and the monks. A professed scholar must, of course, read the monkish chronicler in the original. But, as we are on the safe side of the Atlantic, we will dare to say that the ordinary student may just as well read him in a crib. He will learn pretty much all that is to be learned, and will escape spoiling his Latin. Does not Dr. Freeman read Jewish history in a translation?

We would venture to add a word of caution to Dr. Freeman when he recommends Macaulay as an authority. Macaulay's period does not come within Dr. Freeman's special domain, and we suspect that he has not undergone, like Mommsen or Thierry, the Professor's critical examination. Of his brilliancy, so marvellously sustained, or his almost unequalled gift of narration, it is needless to speak. But as a historical authority he has two faults, one considerable, the other almost fatal. The fault which is considerable is a lack not of knowledge of history, but of mastery of the subject as a whole. The period which he treats in the annals of a single nation is never regarded by him as a part of a European and a universal drama; the consequence of which is the total absence of the light which the more comprehensive view would afford, and of the limitations which it would suggest. The fault which is almost fatal is an indulgence in rhetorical exaggeration for the sake of pictorial effect, so unbridled that when he is in that vein it is hardly safe to trust anything that he says. Probe his rhetorical passages where you will, and this weakness will appear. He does not, like some pretended historians, garble quotations, suppress evidence, or seek by sly and artful insinuation to produce effects which he knows to be false. But he does so overpaint, run riot in generalization, and even draw on his imagination, that the reader taking the rhetoric as literal fact will be very seriously misled. Let Dr. Freeman read Sir James Stephen's "Story of Nuncomar." Macaulay is there in the hands of a very friendly critic who does his best to extenuate, and pleads that the Essay on Warren Hastings was a mere review article carelessly thrown off, and not to be taken as a specimen of the writer's serious work. But a man who, being of mature age and in a responsible position, carelessly throws off, in a first-rate review, a tissue of monstrous and slanderous fiction to tickle and dazzle his readers, is surely to be read with caution when he assumes the part of a historian. It is to be noted, too, that some of the facts which show the charges made against Sir Elijah Impey in the Essay on Warren Hastings to have been groundless, such as the all-important fact that he did not preside alone at the trial of Nuncomar, but with three colleagues, were distinctly brought under Macaulay's notice in the defence of Impey by his son, and were by Macaulay in the subsequent republications of the Essay deliberately suppressed. Once more we would say, Let Dr. Freeman read the "Story of Nuncomar."

\*"The Methods of Historical Study." Eight Lectures read in the University of Oxford, in 1884, by Edward A. Freeman, D.C.L., LL.D., etc. London and New York: Macmillan and Company. Toronto: Williamson and Company, 1886.