

"Voltaire's view developed into a French school of history, which made its way to England and took a philosophical form. Natural science had shown that Law acted uniformly through all creation, organic and inorganic. The sole exception was in man, in what was called free will. But was there any such thing as free will? Was it likely that the harmony of universal nature was broken by such an inexplicable anomaly? Was not man after all like other animals, only differing from them by larger capacities? Every event had a cause; every action a motive. The brute not being able to accumulate experience, followed his immediate impulses. Man, by possessing knowledge, could foresee consequences, and thus had a choice of motives. But always the motive strongest at the moment did and must prevail, and thus the notion of free will was merely an illusion rising from inattention to determining causes. Wise action, therefore, depended on correct understanding. The more a man knew, the better he would act. History exhibited merely nothing but the actions resulting from imperfect knowledge under the influence of surrounding circumstances. Circumstances became less powerful as the mind became more enlightened, but the law of cause and effect could be traced through the whole of it; and history might be reconstructed on this principle into an exact science.

"Mr. Buckle was the English prophet of this school. He was a man of vast information. His book was ingenious. It fell in with the temper of the times.

"There were difficulties, however; and I, for one, could never completely believe. Leaving out the free-will puzzle, science must have ascertained facts to go upon, and where was it to get them? In the physical sciences single instances are not enough; several specimens must be examined,

exceptions scrutinised, and hypotheses tested by experiment. In history we have a record of things which happened once, or were said to have happened, but which, once passed, are gone forever. Verification is impossible. Our evidences are in books which we cannot cross-examine in the witness-box. The writers on whose authority we depend, shared, we can see, in the illusions of their age. They have been partisans, and their beliefs have followed their sympathies. The hero or sage to one party is a knave and idiot to another. We may gather a general idea of events which happened, but of how they happened and why, we have small means of judging.

"Laws and literature give us some thing more substantial; but even they not very much. We cannot understand a law till we know the circumstances which it was intended to meet. Literature gives us the opinions or sentiments of particular persons at particular times, and cannot give us more. Both are useful and instructive if we are contented with modest probabilities. But such materials are too frail for science, especially as the philosopher has weaknesses of his own to mislead him. He is fond of his hypothesis; he selects the facts that suit him and drops the rest.

"But there is a graver objection to treating history as a science. In science properly so called, the individual is nothing; the species is everything. The individual is an accidental phenomenon, existing for a few days or years in space and time and then swept away to make room for others of a similar kind. The individual part of all things, Schopenhauer says, is mortal. The immortal part is the type which survives when the phenomenon is gone. This is perfectly true of the rest of creation. To the infinite millions of living