

to find this out, it is necessary to examine the materials which serve as the elements and evidences of history, by the test of sound criticism. These materials are of two kinds: I. *Public Acts and Records*, such as medals, inscriptions, treaties, charters, official papers; and in general, all writings drawn up or published by the established authorities. II. *Private writers*, viz. authors of histories, of chronicles, memoirs, letters, &c. These writers are either contemporary, or such as live remote from the times of which they write.

Public acts and official records, are the strongest evidences we can possibly have of historical truth; but as, in different ages, there have been fabricators of pretended acts and writings, it becomes necessary, before making use of any public document, to be assured that it is neither spurious nor falsified. The art of judging of ancient charters or diplomas, and discriminating the true from the false, is called *Diplomatics*; 'in the same way as we give the name of *Numismatics* to the art of distinguishing real medals from counterfeit. Both of these sciences are necessary in the criticism of history.

It will not be out of place to subjoin here some rules that may serve as guides in the proper selection of historical documents.

1. The authority of any chartulary or public act is preferable to that of a private writer, even though he were contemporary. These public registers it is always necessary to consult, if possible, before having recourse to the authority of private writers; and a history that is not supported by such public vouchers must in consequence be very imperfect.
2. When public acts are found to accord with the testimony of contemporary authors, there results a complete and decisive proof, the most satisfactory that can be desired, for establishing the truth of historical facts.
3. The testimony of a contemporary author ought generally to be preferred to that of an historian, who has written long after the period in which the events have happened.
4. Whenever contemporary writers are defective, great caution must be used with regard to the statements of more modern historians, whose narratives are often very inaccurate, or altogether fabulous.
5. The unanimous silence of contemporary authors on any memorable event, is of itself a strong presumption for suspecting, or even for entirely rejecting, the testimony of very recent writers.
6. Historians who narrate events that have happened anterior to the times in which they lived, do not, properly speaking,