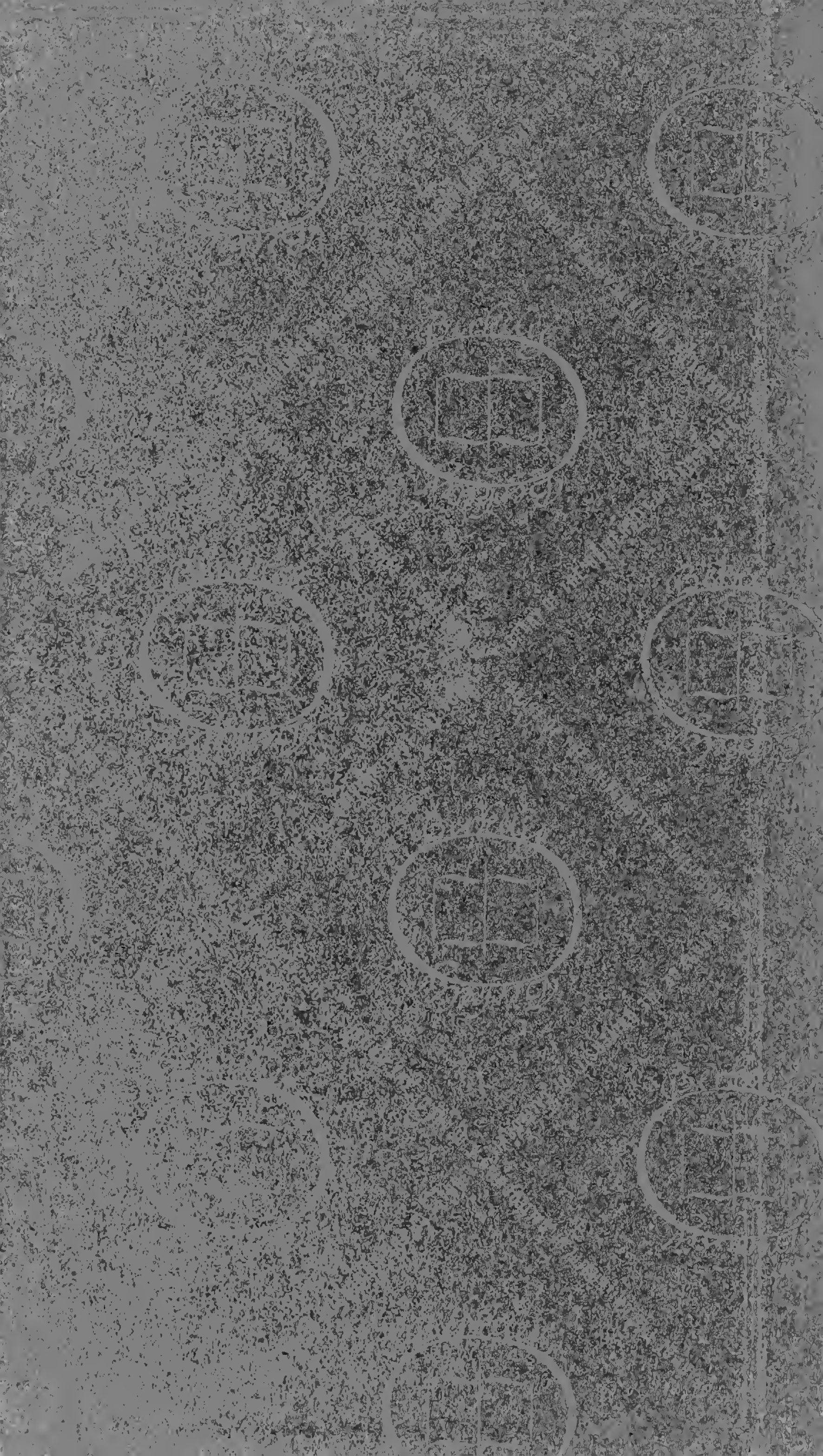

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IS HISTORY PAST POLITICS?[1]

By Herbert B. Adams.

There have been frequent criticisms of Mr. Freeman's famous definition, "History is Past Politics, and Politics are Present History." The phrase occurs in varying forms in Mr. Freeman's writings,[2] and was adopted as a motto for the Johns Hopkins University Studies in the year 1882, soon after the historian's visit[3] to Baltimore. The motto was printed not only upon the title page of our published Studies, but also upon the wall of our old Historical Seminary. Mr. Freeman kindly wrote for us an Introduction to American Institutional History and, by his long-continued correspondence, gave great encouragement to our work.

Ten years after his visit to Baltimore, Mr. Freeman contributed to *The Forum* a review of his opinions, saying at the close of his article: "It is that chance proverb of mine which the historical students of Johns Hopkins have honored me by setting up over their library, it is by the application which I have made of it both to the events of the remotest times and to the events which I have seen happen in the course of sixty-

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[1] A paper read in Baltimore, November 30, 1894, at the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in the Middle States and Maryland.

[2] For references, see Johns Hopkins University Studies, Vol. I, 12.

[3] For an account of this visit, see Studies, Vol. I, 5–12.

nine years, that I would fain have my life and my writings judged." These were probably the last words addressed to American readers by the historian of Sicily, who died at Alicante, in Spain, March 16, 1892, one month before the appearance of his last magazine article.

A brief review of Mr. Freeman's Philosophy of History will serve to set our chosen motto in a clear light. He regarded Greek politics as the beginning of the world's state life. For him the Achaian League of Greek cities was the historic forerunner of the Federal Union of these United States. For him the real life of ancient history lay "not in its separation from the affairs of our own time, but in its close connection with them." (Office of the Historical Professor, 41.) For him the records of Athenian archons and Roman consuls were essential parts of the same living European history as the records of Venetian doges and English kings. It mattered little to this large-hearted, broad-minded historian of Comparative Politics whether he was writing of free Hellas or free England, of Magna Graecia or the United States. He wrote political articles on the Eastern Question and the Danube provinces for the *Manchester Guardian* or *Saturday Review* in the same spirit in which he wrote historical essays.

Mr. Freeman strongly believed that the main current of human history runs through the channel of politics. In the first published course of his lectures at Oxford, 1884–85, on "Methods of Historical Study," p. 119, he maintained that history is "the science or knowledge of man in his political character." He regarded the State as the all-comprehending form of human society. He used the word "political" in a large Greek sense. For him the Politeia or the Commonwealth embraced all the highest interests of man. He did not neglect the subjects of art and literature. Indeed, he began his original historical work with a study of Wells Cathedral in his own county, and throughout his busy life he never lost interest in architectural and archæological studies. For him Roman art and the Palace of Diocletian were but illustrations

of Roman life and character. Civilized man lives and moves and has his being in civil society. Cathedrals, palaces, colleges, and universities are simply institutions within the State, owing their security and legal existence to State authority.

Mr. Freeman regarded present politics as history in the making. The struggles and conflicts of the present are the results of historic forces. When great problems are settled by war, legislation or diplomacy, the facts are accepted and are added to the great volume of human history. Freeman carried this view so far that he said: "The last recorded event in the newspapers is, indeed, part of the history of the world. It may be and it should be studied in a truly historic spirit."[1]

Such was the comprehensive philosophy of the great English master of history and politics. It has made a profound if not a permanent impress upon the minds of many young Americans. It has entered into their consciousness and into their studies of institutional history. The motto which we have chosen for our published monographs and for our Seminary wall is a good working theory for students engaged in the investigation of laws and institutions of government. No representative of the Johns Hopkins University, however, ever maintained that all history was past politics, but only

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[1] Professor Jesse Macy, in his paper read before the American Historical Association at Chicago in 1893, on the Relation of History to Politics, said: "No other original source of history can be compared in importance with present politics." (See Annual Report for 1893, p. 185.)

At the time of the American Civil War, Charles Kingsley, then professor of history at Cambridge, said: "I cannot see how I can be a Professor of past Modern History without the most careful study of the history which is enacting itself around me." Accordingly he proceeded to lecture on American History. Mr. Freeman had the same historical impulse, but he preferred to begin his treatment of Federal Government with the Achaian League. He evidently intended to include the American Union in his system of "Past Politics," for, upon his title-page, he mentioned "the Disruption of the United States" as the final limit of his work; and he always insisted that Secession was Disruption. The Union was badly broken, but it was finally mended and preserved, and is still engaged in politics.

that some history is past politics, and the kind of history that we investigate is chiefly of that order. It is not out of place to observe, with Mr. Freeman's biographer, William Hunt, that "politics are the chief determining forces in a nation's life, in that they control and direct the production and application of wealth, the habits, aspirations, and to a large extent, the religion of a people, and that they are, therefore, the foundation of all sound history." (From the Proceedings of the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society, Vol. XXXVIII: 13.)

While politics and laws are the foundation of the upper strata of history, and while history itself is the deep and eternal substratum of politics, it is well to remember that there are some things in the world which are neither politics nor history. For example, individual and domestic life is neither historical nor political, unless in some important way it affects the common life of society.[1] Here lies the true distinction between biography and history. Froude and Carlyle were champions of the biographical idea in history-writing. In his Inaugural Address at Oxford, Froude said that the function of the historian is to discover and make visible illustrious men and pay them ungrudging honor. He strongly approved of Carlyle's saying: "The history of mankind is the history

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[1] Paul Lindau, in the *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), November 28, 1894, calls attention to the interesting sociological fact that the Bismarckian household exhibited a type of patriarchal family life, curiously surviving in this nineteenth century. In this case domestic life becomes of historic interest. The influence of the late Princess Bismarck was indirectly and unconsciously political because of her relation to the Iron Chancellor in the days of his activity. Lindau says, "She warmed the home with the sunny simplicity of her nature, and when storms were raging wildly without, she afforded her wearied and sorely tried husband a comfortable corner wherein to forget the excitements and trouble of the day and to take innocent pleasure in life amid the home circle, and to collect his strength for renewed efforts. In this way the Princess played indirectly a part in politics that was not unimportant, although she never sought to make her strong personal influence felt in political questions."

of its great men; to find out these, clean the dirt from them, and place them on their proper pedestals, is the true function of the historian." Carlyle thought history the essence of innumerable biographies, but it may be urged that all biographies since the world began would not constitute history, unless they recognize the all-uniting element of civil society and of the common life of men in connection with human institutions. No biography is of the least historical importance unless it treats man in his social or civic relations. This Greek idea of man as a political being, of man existing in an organized community or commonwealth, is absolutely essential to a proper conception of history. Indeed, we may go further and say with Goldwin Smith: "There can be no philosophy of history until we realize the unity of the human race and that history must be studied as a whole." (Lecture on History, p. 46.) This is very different from Froude's doctrines that "what is true of a part is true of the whole" and that "History is the record of individual action," both of which statements are manifestly untrue.

Without ignoring the heroes of Froude and Carlyle, or the obscure annals of American local history, we of the Johns Hopkins University realize that the world is round and are inclined to go even further up the stream of Past Politics than did our friend and patron, Mr. Freeman. We are unwilling to begin our course of historical study with old Greece or Aryan Europe. We seek the origin of more ancient cities than Athens and Sparta. We wish to know the laws and customs of the earliest races of men. We are disposed to recognize primitive man and society as worthy of a place in the study of rudimentary institutions. The village community, the patriarchal tribe, the first communal families, are all worthy of historical attention. Indeed, we are not averse to the discovery of institutional germs, like marriage and government and economy, even in the animal world. We are accustomed to say that history begins with the stone axe and ends with the newspaper. We believe that the beginning and end of history

is man in society. As Colonel William Preston Johnston well said in his paper published by the American Historical Association (1893, p. 47): "Man is the first postulate of history. He is the beginning and the end of it. He enacts it; he tells it; he accepts it as a message or gospel for guidance and self-realization. Man, mind, phenomena, memory, narrative—and history is born." Man in the State, Man as a Social Animal, Man living and moving in institutional groups,—this historical conception, which is as old as Aristotle, we of the Johns Hopkins Historical Seminary regard as truly scientific and as practically modern. Its revival is due to the Renaissance of Greek and Roman politics in this nineteenth century.

Let us now inquire from what historical source Freeman derived his notion that "History is Past Politics." The historian of the Norman Conquest received his inspiration from Dr. Thomas Arnold, the father of modern studies in the schools and colleges of England. The Headmaster of Rugby not only revolutionized the public school life of our mother country in educational and moral ways, but he carried his Greek ideas of history into the University of Oxford, from which they have gone forth through England and America in one of those great intellectual movements so characteristic of modern university influence.

In his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1884, on the Office of the Historical Professor, pp. 8–9, Mr. Freeman said: "Of Arnold I learned what history is and how it should be studied. It is with a special thrill of feeling that I remember that the chair which I hold is his chair, that I venture to hope that my work in that chair may be in some sort, at whatever distance, to go on waging a strife which he began to wage. It was from him that I learned a lesson, to set forth which, in season and out of season, I have taken as the true work of my life. It was from Arnold that I first learned the truth which ought to be the centre and life of all our historic studies, the truth of the Unity of History. If I am sent hither for any special object, it is, I hold, to proclaim that truth, but to proclaim

it, not as my own thought, but as the thought of my great master."

From Arnold, more than from any other teacher or writer, Freeman learned that history is a moral lesson. In this strong conviction Freeman, in one respect at least, stands upon common ground with Froude, who said of history: "It is a voice forever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. . . . Justice and truth alone endure and live. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes at last to them, in French revolutions and other terrible ways." In death the two great historians of England are now united. Their ethical views of human history are essentially the same. Freeman said of the historian of Rome, one of his predecessors at Oxford: "In every page of his story, Arnold stands forth as the righteous judge, who, untaught by the more scientific historical philosophy of later days, still looked on crime as no less black because it was successful, and who could acknowledge the right even of the weak against the strong." Throughout his entire career as a publicist and as an historian, Freeman was the champion of liberty against oppression, of down-trodden Christian nationalities against the unspeakable Turk.

It was from Thomas Arnold that Freeman learned the great lesson that the history of Greece and Rome is really nearer to the modern world than are many chapters of mediæval history. In his lectures at Oxford, p. 62, Arnold had said "what is miscalled ancient history" is "the really modern history of the civilization of Greece and Rome." He maintained that the student finds, upon classic ground, "a view of our own society, only somewhat simplified," like an introductory study. (Lectures on Modern History, p. 220.) Arnold looked on old Greece as the springtime of the world, and upon Rome as the full political development of classical ideas of state life. The world is still moving along the imperial lines laid down in Church and State by the eternal city. Freeman regarded Rome as the source of all modern politics, the great

lake from which all streams flow. In his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford, p. 10, Freeman said: "Arnold was the man who taught that the political history of the world should be read as a single whole. . . . That what, in his own words, is 'falsely called ancient history,' is, in truth, the most truly modern, the most truly living, the most rich in practical lessons for every succeeding age."

Dr. Arnold conceived of ancient history as living on in present society. Modern history has preserved the elements of earlier civilizations and have added to them. (See Lectures on Modern History, 46.) For Arnold, past politics were embryonic forms which, in modern society, have reached their maturity. His idea of historical politics resembles Dr. Wm. T. Harris' idea of education, which, for every well-trained scholar, should repeat the intellectual experience of his predecessors, including the Greeks and Romans, whose culture endures in our so-called liberal arts or fair humanities. Dr. Arnold once said that he wished we could have a history of present civilization written backwards. This kind of historical knowledge would certainly be welcome to practical statesmen and contemporary sociologists.

It was undoubtedly from Arnold that Freeman derived his conception of history as past politics. Arnold was thoroughly imbued with the old Greek idea of the State as an organic unity. He defined history "not simply as the biography of a society, but as the biography of a political society or commonwealth." (Lectures, 28.) For him the proper subject of history is the common life of men, which finds its natural expression in government and civic order. He once said that the history of a nation's internal life is "the history of its institutions and of its laws." Under this latter term the Greeks included what we call institutions. The Republic and the Laws of Plato and Cicero represent the classical beginnings of modern political science.

Thomas Arnold, the editor of Thucydides and the historian of Rome, was largely influenced by his classical studies, but

his own historical work was determined by the views of Barthold George Niebuhr,[1] who may be called the real founder of the modern science of institutional history. Niebuhr laid little stress upon individual characters and individual action in Roman history, but great emphasis upon Roman laws, institutions, and public economy. He found significance in Roman farming and land tenure as well as in Roman conquest. He was one of the first among modern scholars to recognize the importance of the historic state and its constitutional development. He lived in the period following the French Revolution, before which time men had endeavored to construct history from their own imaginations and to reconstruct society upon preconceived principles or so-called philosophy. Niebuhr based his treatment of Roman history upon actual research and careful criticism. He too had a moral conception of the historian's task and endeavored to bring all the lessons of old Roman courage, fortitude, energy, perseverance, and manliness to bear upon the education and regeneration of Prussia and New Germany. The foundation of the historico-political school was laid by Niebuhr, Eichhorn, Savigny, Baron vom Stein, George Pertz, and Gervinus during the period of Germanic reconstruction in Europe after the downfall of Napoleon.

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[1] Arnold in a letter to Chevalier Bunsen, thus expresses his profound indebtedness to Niebuhr for pioneer labors and critical suggestions in the field of Roman history: "I need not tell you how entirely I have fed upon Niebuhr; in fact I have done little more than put his first volume into a shape more fit for general, or at least for English readers, assuming his conclusions as proved, where he was obliged to give the proof in detail. I suppose he must have shared so much of human infirmity as to have fallen sometimes into error; but I confess that I do not yet know a single point on which I have ventured to differ from him; and my respect for him so increases the more I study him, that I am likely to grow even superstitious in my veneration, and to be afraid of expressing my dissent even if I believe him to be wrong. . . . Though I deeply feel my own want of knowledge, yet I know of no one in England who can help me; so little are we on a level with you in Germany in our attention to such points." (See Stanley's Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, p. 269.)

The whole modern school of German and English historians was influenced by the critical and institutional methods of Niebuhr. In Germany, Otfried Müller applied Niebuhr's principles to the study of Dorian tribes and Hellenic states. Boeckh turned his attention to the public economy of Athens. Curtius, the greatest living historian of old Greece, recognizes his debt to Niebuhr. Ranke, the greatest of all historians, whether ancient or modern, spoke thus warmly of Niebuhr's example: "The greatest influence upon my historical studies was exerted by Niebuhr's Roman history. It afforded a powerful stimulus in my own investigations in ancient history, and it was the first German historical work which produced a profound impression upon me." ("Aus Leopold von Ranke's Lebenserinnerungen," Deutsche Rundschau, April, 1887, p. 60.) Ranke extended to modern and universal history the principles of historical criticism which he had learned from Niebuhr's Rome.

The subject of Ranke's Inaugural Lecture at the University of Berlin in 1836 was "The Relation and the Difference between History and Politics." He clearly recognized that the continuity of history appears pre-eminently in States. One generation of men succeeds another, but States and institutions live. He cited the example of Venice, whose State life endured uninterruptedly from the decline of the Roman empire to the time of Napoleon. He recognized that nothing historic really perishes from the earth. Old institutions are merged into higher and more perfect forms. A new life appears, with a new series of historical phenomena. He too saw the intimate relations between past politics and present history. He said: "A knowledge of the past is imperfect without a knowledge of the present. We cannot understand the present without a knowledge of earlier times. The past and the present join hands. Neither can exist or be perfect without the other." (Ranke: Abhandlungen und Versuche, p. 289.)

Ranke believed in the unity and the universality of history as strongly as did Freeman himself. "History is in its very

nature universal," said Ranke. His friends say that he never wrote anything but universal history. He treated individual countries, Germany, France, and England, not as isolated nations, but as illustrations of world-historic ideas of religion, freedom, law, and government, expressed or realized by individual European States. For Ranke as for Abelard, that master mind of the Middle Ages, the universal could be discerned in the particular. Even local[1] history may be treated as a part of general history. Ranke's first book, on the History of Latin and Teutonic Peoples, was really a contribution to universal history. The last work of his life, on "Weltgeschichte," was begun at the age of ninety, and was but a natural supplement and philosophical rounding-out of all that he had done before. There is, therefore, a perfect unity between the beginning and end of his life-long task.

Ranke saw in history the resurrection and the immortality of the past. He regarded it as the historian's duty to revive and reconstruct past ages or past events from apparently dead records. In this pious labor he found the greatest joy. He once said: "He needs no pity who busies himself with these apparently dry studies, and renounces for their sake the pleasure of many joyful days. These are dead papers, it is true; but they are memorials of a life which slowly rises again before the mind's eye." Ranke is the best type of the truly scientific historian, for his principle was to tell things exactly as they occurred. He held strictly to the facts in the case. He did not attempt to preach a sermon, or point a moral, or adorn a tale, but simply to tell the truth as he understood it. He did not believe it the historian's duty to point out divine providence in human history, as Chevalier Bunsen endeavored to do; still less did Ranke proclaim with Schiller that the history of the world is the last judgment, "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht." Without presuming to be a moral cen-

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[1] A good illustration of this fact may be seen in Howell's study of Lexington in his "Three Villages."

sor, Ranke endeavored to bring historic truth in all its purity before the eyes of the world and to avoid such false coloring as Sir Walter Scott and writers of the romantic school had given to the past.

The conception of history as politics survives in Germany as it does, and will do, in England and America. William Maurenbrecher, in his Inaugural Address on History and Politics at the University of Leipzig in 1884, maintained that history relates more especially to politics, to men and peoples in civic life. While recognizing that there are other fields of historical inquiry beside the State, such as religion and the church, art and science, he urged that history proper is political history, which he calls the very flower of historical study. Without law and order and good government, there can be no art or science or culture within a given commonwealth. All the finer forces of society live and move within the limits of civil society. The bands which unite history and politics cannot be broken. History reaches its goal in politics and politics are always the resultant of history. The two subjects are related like our own past and present. The living man preserves in memory and his own constitution all that has gone before. No tendency in politics can be called good which does not take into account the historical development of a given people. Whoever will understand the political situation of any State must study its past history.

These are the views of one of the best modern academic leaders of German youth, of a man now dead, but his spirit lives in his pupils. Gustav Droysen is also dead, but his principles of historical science, translated into English by President Andrews, of Brown University, have become a *Vade Mecum* of American teachers. Droysen has perhaps the highest of all conceptions of history, for he calls it the self-consciousness of humanity, the Know Thyself of the living, advancing age. But he too recognizes that History is Past Politics, for he says, "What is Politics to-day becomes History to-morrow."

Niebuhr's ideas of political history were transmitted to England through Arnold, Freeman, Goldwin Smith, and J. R. Seeley,[1] all of whom hold to the view that History *is* Past Politics. Niebuhr's ideas of institutional history were eagerly caught up by that enthusiastic lover of liberty, Francis Lieber, who, returning penniless from his private expedition to Greece in the time of her Revolution, lived for a time as a tutor in Niebuhr's family at Rome. By Niebuhr's advice he emigrated from reactionary Prussia, first to England and then to America. The ripened fruit of Niebuhr's teaching may be seen in Lieber's writings on Civil Liberty and Political Ethics. Lieber's ideas of liberty were widely removed from the fantastic, philosophical dreams of the eighteenth century, and are based upon an historical study of English self-government. For him civil liberty meant institutional liberty.

Francis Lieber represents the first beginnings of the historico-political school in American colleges and universities, where he always maintained that history and politics belong together. In South Carolina College he taught both of these subjects, together with Say's Political Economy. In his plan for the reorganization of Columbia College in New York City, he recommended the intimate association of historical, political, and economic subjects. When he was called to Columbia College from Columbia, South Carolina, in 1857, the following branches of the tree of knowledge were assigned to the new professor: Modern History, Political Science, Interna-

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[1] Professor J. R. Seeley, in his "Expansion of England," pp. 1, 166, thus states his practical and political views of history:

"It is a favorite maxim of mine, that history, while it should be scientific in its method, should pursue a practical object. That is, it should not only gratify the reader's curiosity, but modify his view of the present and his forecast of the future.

"Politics and History are only different aspects of the same study. . . . Politics are vulgar when they are not liberalised by history; and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to practical politics."

tional Law, Civil Law, and Common Law. This was about as comprehensive a scheme of instruction as that projected in the University of Michigania in 1817, when a Scotch Presbyterian Minister, John Monteith, was given six professorships, in addition to the presidency, and when Gabriel Richard, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Michigan Territory, was allowed the six remaining chairs in the faculty! But Francis Lieber was right in his large conception of a new school of History, Politics and Law as a desirable unit in academic administration. Modern Columbia, under the influence first of Professor John W. Burgess, and now of President Low, has discovered the ways and means of developing a great School of Political Science, in which Economics, History, and Sociology find their proper place, all in perfect harmony with the interests of a special faculty of Law.

In the reorganization of the departments of History, Politics and Economics at Cornell, Harvard, Michigan, and Wisconsin Universities, these subjects have been intimately associated. At the Johns Hopkins University, from the beginning in 1876, they have never been divided. They are still harmoniously grouped together, both on the graduate and undergraduate sides of instruction, for greater educational efficiency and for department unity. History, politics and economics,—these, together with historical jurisprudence, form the chief elements of our system of graduate study in the three years' course for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. We shall doubtless retain our motto, "History is Past Politics and Politics are Present History," as a convenient symbol of the essential unity of all political and historical science, and as a pleasant souvenir of Mr. Freeman.

In the attempts of college and university men to deal with present problems of political, social, and educational science, we must all stand together upon the firm ground of historical experience. Mere theories and speculations are unprofitable, whether in the domain of pedagogics, sociology, finance, or governmental reform. In the improvement of the existing

social order, what the world needs is historical enlightenment and political and social progress along existing institutional lines. We must preserve the continuity of our past life in the State, which will doubtless grow like knowledge from more to more.

Frederic Harrison, in an essay maintaining that "The Present is ruled by the Past," well says: "The first want of our time is the spread amongst the intelligent body of our people of solid materials to form political and social opinion. To stimulate an interest in history seems to me the only means of giving a fresh meaning to popular education, and a higher intelligence to popular opinion." He asks us what is this unseen power, this everlasting force, which controls society? "It is the past. It is the accumulated wills and works of all mankind around us and before us. It is civilization. It is the power which to understand is strength, to repudiate which is weakness. Let us not think that there can be any real progress made which is not based on a sound knowledge of the living institutions and the active wants of mankind. . . . . Nothing but a thorough knowledge of the social system, based upon a regular study of its growth, can give us the power we require to affect it. For this end we need one thing above all—we need history, hence its pre-eminent worth in social education."

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