

WILDE OSCAR

ESSAYS AND
LECTURES

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Essays and Lectures:

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Oscar Wilde

Essays and Lectures

PREFACE

With the exception of the *Poems in Prose* this volume does not contain anything which the author ever contemplated reprinting. *The Rise of Historical Criticism* is interesting to admirers of his work, however, because it shows the development of his style and the wide intellectual range distinguishing the least *borné* of all the late Victorian writers, with the possible exception of Ruskin. It belongs to Wilde's Oxford days when he was the unsuccessful competitor for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize. Perhaps Magdalen, which has never forgiven herself for nurturing the author of *Ravenna*, may be felicitated on having escaped the further intolerable honour that she might have suffered by seeing crowned again with paltry academic parsley the most highly gifted of all her children in the last century.

Of the lectures, I have only included those which exist, so far as I know, in manuscript; the reports of others in contemporary newspapers being untrustworthy. They were usually delivered from notes and were repeated at various towns in England and America. Here will be found the origin of Whistler's charges of plagiarism against the author. How far they are justified

the reader can decide for himself, Wilde always admitted that, relying on an old and intimate friendship, he asked the artist's assistance on one occasion for a lecture he had failed to prepare in time. This I presume to be the Address delivered to the Art Students of the Royal Academy in 1883, as Whistler certainly reproduced some of it as his own in the 'Ten o'clock' lecture delivered subsequently, in 1885. To what extent an idea may be regarded as a perpetual gift, or whether it is ethically possible to retrieve an idea like an engagement ring, it is not for me to discuss. I would only point out once more that all the works by which Wilde is known throughout Europe were written after the two friends had quarrelled. That Wilde derived a great deal from the older man goes without saying, just as he derived so much in a greater degree from Pater, Ruskin, Arnold and Burne-Jones. Yet the tedious attempt to recognise in every jest of his some original by Whistler induces the criticism that it seems a pity the great painter did not get them off on the public before he was forestalled. Reluctance from an appeal to publicity was never a weakness in either of the men. Some of Wilde's more frequently quoted sayings were made at the Old Bailey (though their provenance is often forgotten) or on his death-bed.

As a matter of fact the genius of the two men was entirely different. Wilde was a humourist and a humanist before everything; and his wittiest jests have neither the relentlessness nor the keenness characterising those of the clever American artist. Again, Whistler could no more have obtained the Berkeley

Gold Medal for Greek, nor have written *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *The Soul of Man*, than Wilde, even if equipped as a painter, could have evinced that superb restraint characterising the portraits of 'Miss Alexander,' 'Carlyle,' and other masterpieces. Wilde, though it is not generally known, was something of a draughtsman in his youth.

Poems in Prose were to have been continued. They are the kind of stories which Wilde would tell at a dinner-table, being invented on the spur of the moment, or inspired by the chance observation of some one who managed to get the traditional word in edgeways; or they were developed from some phrase in a book Wilde might have read during the day. To those who remember hearing them from his lips there must always be a feeling of disappointment on reading them. He overloaded their ornament when he came to transcribe them, and some of his friends did not hesitate to make that criticism to him personally. Though he affected annoyance, I do not think it prevented him from writing the others, which unfortunately exist only in the memories of friends. Miss Aimée Lowther, however, has cleverly noted down some of them in a privately printed volume.

Robert Ross

THE RISE OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

This Essay was written for the Chancellor's English Essay Prize at Oxford in 1879, the subject being 'Historical Criticism among the Ancients.' The prize was not awarded. To Professor J. W. Mackail thanks are due for revising the proofs.

I

Historical criticism nowhere occurs as an isolated fact in the civilisation or literature of any people. It is part of that complex working towards freedom which may be described as the revolt against authority. It is merely one facet of that speculative spirit of an innovation, which in the sphere of action produces democracy and revolution, and in that of thought is the parent of philosophy and physical science; and its importance as a factor of progress is based not so much on the results it attains, as on the tone of thought which it represents, and the method by which it works.

Being thus the resultant of forces essentially revolutionary, it is not to be found in the ancient world among the material despotisms of Asia or the stationary civilisation of Egypt. The clay cylinders of Assyria and Babylon, the hieroglyphics of the pyramids, form not history but the material for history.

The Chinese annals, ascending as they do to the barbarous forest life of the nation, are marked with a soberness of judgment, a freedom from invention, which is almost unparalleled in the writings of any people; but the protective spirit which is the characteristic of that people proved as fatal to their literature as to their commerce. Free criticism is as unknown as free trade. While as regards the Hindus, their acute, analytical and logical mind is directed rather to grammar,

criticism and philosophy than to history or chronology. Indeed, in history their imagination seems to have run wild, legend and fact are so indissolubly mingled together that any attempt to separate them seems vain. If we except the identification of the Greek Sandracottus with the Indian Chandragupta, we have really no clue by which we can test the truth of their writings or examine their method of investigation.

It is among the Hellenic branch of the Indo-Germanic race that history proper is to be found, as well as the spirit of historical criticism; among that wonderful offshoot of the primitive Aryans, whom we call by the name of Greeks and to whom, as has been well said, we owe all that moves in the world except the blind forces of nature.

For, from the day when they left the chill table-lands of Tibet and journeyed, a nomad people, to Ægean shores, the characteristic of their nature has been the search for light, and the spirit of historical criticism is part of that wonderful Aufklärung or illumination of the intellect which seems to have burst on the Greek race like a great flood of light about the sixth century B.C.

L'esprit d'un siècle ne naît pas et ne meurt pas à jour fixe, and the first critic is perhaps as difficult to discover as the first man. It is from democracy that the spirit of criticism borrows its intolerance of dogmatic authority, from physical science the alluring analogies of law and order, from philosophy the conception of an essential unity underlying the complex manifestations of phenomena. It appears first rather as a changed

attitude of mind than as a principle of research, and its earliest influences are to be found in the sacred writings.

For men begin to doubt in questions of religion first, and then in matters of more secular interest; and as regards the nature of the spirit of historical criticism itself in its ultimate development, it is not confined merely to the empirical method of ascertaining whether an event happened or not, but is concerned also with the investigation into the causes of events, the general relations which phenomena of life hold to one another, and in its ultimate development passes into the wider question of the philosophy of history.

Now, while the workings of historical criticism in these two spheres of sacred and uninspired history are essentially manifestations of the same spirit, yet their methods are so different, the canons of evidence so entirely separate, and the motives in each case so unconnected, that it will be necessary for a clear estimation of the progress of Greek thought, that we should consider these two questions entirely apart from one another. I shall then in both cases take the succession of writers in their chronological order as representing the rational order – not that the succession of time is always the succession of ideas, or that dialectics moves ever in the straight line in which Hegel conceives its advance. In Greek thought, as elsewhere, there are periods of stagnation and apparent retrogression, yet their intellectual development, not merely in the question of historical criticism, but in their art, their poetry and their philosophy,

seems so essentially normal, so free from all disturbing external influences, so peculiarly rational, that in following in the footsteps of time we shall really be progressing in the order sanctioned by reason.

II

At an early period in their intellectual development the Greeks reached that critical point in the history of every civilised nation, when speculative invades the domain of revealed truth, when the spiritual ideas of the people can no longer be satisfied by the lower, material conceptions of their inspired writers, and when men find it impossible to pour the new wine of free thought into the old bottles of a narrow and a trammelling creed.

From their Aryan ancestors they had received the fatal legacy of a mythology stained with immoral and monstrous stories which strove to hide the rational order of nature in a chaos of miracles, and to mar by imputed wickedness the perfection of God's nature – a very shirt of Nessos in which the Heracles of rationalism barely escaped annihilation. Now while undoubtedly the speculations of Thales, and the alluring analogies of law and order afforded by physical science, were most important forces in encouraging the rise of the spirit of scepticism, yet it was on its ethical side that the Greek mythology was chiefly open to attack.

It is difficult to shake the popular belief in miracles, but no man will admit sin and immorality as attributes of the Ideal he worships; so the first symptoms of a new order of thought are shown in the passionate outcries of Xenophanes and Heraclitos against the evil things said by Homer of the sons of God; and in the story told of Pythagoras, how that he saw tortured in Hell the

'two founders of Greek theology,' we can recognise the rise of the Aufklärung as clearly as we see the Reformation foreshadowed in the *Inferno* of Dante.

Any honest belief, then, in the plain truth of these stories soon succumbed before the destructive effects of the *a priori* ethical criticism of this school; but the orthodox party, as is its custom, found immediately a convenient shelter under the ægis of the doctrine of metaphors and concealed meanings.

To this allegorical school the tale of the fight around the walls of Troy was a mystery, behind which, as behind a veil, were hidden certain moral and physical truths. The contest between Athena and Ares was that eternal contest between rational thought and the brute force of ignorance; the arrows which rattled in the quiver of the 'Far Darter' were no longer the instruments of vengeance shot from the golden bow of the child of God, but the common rays of the sun, which was itself nothing but a mere inert mass of burning metal.

Modern investigation, with the ruthlessness of Philistine analysis, has ultimately brought Helen of Troy down to a symbol of the dawn. There were Philistines among the Greeks also who saw in the ἄναξ ἄδρωv a mere metaphor for atmospheric power.

Now while this tendency to look for metaphors and hidden meanings must be ranked as one of the germs of historical criticism, yet it was essentially unscientific. Its inherent weakness is clearly pointed out by Plato, who showed that while this theory will no doubt explain many of the current legends, yet, if it is to

be appealed to at all, it must be as a universal principle; a position he is by no means prepared to admit.

Like many other great principles it suffered from its disciples, and furnished its own refutation when the web of Penelope was analysed into a metaphor of the rules of formal logic, the warp representing the premises, and the woof the conclusion.

Rejecting, then, the allegorical interpretation of the sacred writings as an essentially dangerous method, proving either too much or too little, Plato himself returns to the earlier mode of attack, and re-writes history with a didactic purpose, laying down certain ethical canons of historical criticism. God is good; God is just; God is true; God is without the common passions of men. These are the tests to which we are to bring the stories of the Greek religion.

‘God predestines no men to ruin, nor sends destruction on innocent cities; He never walks the earth in strange disguise, nor has to mourn for the death of any well-beloved son. Away with the tears for Sarpedon, the lying dream sent to Agamemnon, and the story of the broken covenant!’ (Plato, *Republic*, Book ii. 380; iii. 388, 391.)

Similar ethical canons are applied to the accounts of the heroes of the days of old, and by the same *a priori* principles Achilles is rescued from the charges of avarice and insolence in a passage which may be recited as the earliest instance of that ‘whitewashing of great men,’ as it has been called, which is so popular in our own day, when Catiline and Clodius are

represented as honest and far-seeing politicians, when *eine edle und gute Natur* is claimed for Tiberius, and Nero is rescued from his heritage of infamy as an accomplished *dilettante* whose moral aberrations are more than excused by his exquisite artistic sense and charming tenor voice.

But besides the allegorising principle of interpretation, and the ethical reconstruction of history, there was a third theory, which may be called the semi-historical, and which goes by the name of Euhemeros, though he was by no means the first to propound it.

Appealing to a fictitious monument which he declared that he had discovered in the island of Panchaia, and which purported to be a column erected by Zeus, and detailing the incidents of his reign on earth, this shallow thinker attempted to show that the gods and heroes of ancient Greece were 'mere ordinary mortals, whose achievements had been a good deal exaggerated and misrepresented,' and that the proper canon of historical criticism as regards the treatment of myths was to rationalise the incredible, and to present the plausible residuum as actual truth.

To him and his school, the centaurs, for instance, those mythical sons of the storm, strange links between the lives of men and animals, were merely some youths from the village of Nephele in Thessaly, distinguished for their sporting tastes; the 'living harvest of panoplied knights,' which sprang so mystically from the dragon's teeth, a body of mercenary troops supported by the profits on a successful speculation in ivory; and Actæon, an ordinary master of hounds, who, living before the days of

subscription, was eaten out of house and home by the expenses of his kennel.

Now, that under the glamour of myth and legend some substratum of historical fact may lie, is a proposition rendered extremely probable by the modern investigations into the workings of the mythopœic spirit in post-Christian times. Charlemagne and Roland, St. Francis and William Tell, are none the less real personages because their histories are filled with much that is fictitious and incredible, but in all cases what is essentially necessary is some external corroboration, such as is afforded by the mention of Roland and Roncesvalles in the chronicles of England, or (in the sphere of Greek legend) by the excavations of Hissarlik. But to rob a mythical narrative of its kernel of supernatural elements, and to present the dry husk thus obtained as historical fact, is, as has been well said, to mistake entirely the true method of investigation and to identify plausibility with truth.

And as regards the critical point urged by Palaiphatos, Strabo, and Polybius, that pure invention on Homer's part is inconceivable, we may without scruple allow it, for myths, like constitutions, grow gradually, and are not formed in a day. But between a poet's deliberate creation and historical accuracy there is a wide field of the mythopœic faculty.

This Euhemeristic theory was welcomed as an essentially philosophical and critical method by the unscientific Romans, to whom it was introduced by the poet Ennius, that pioneer

of cosmopolitan Hellenicism, and it continued to characterise the tone of ancient thought on the question of the treatment of mythology till the rise of Christianity, when it was turned by such writers as Augustine and Minucius Felix into a formidable weapon of attack on Paganism. It was then abandoned by all those who still bent the knee to Athena or to Zeus, and a general return, aided by the philosophic mystics of Alexandria, to the allegorising principle of interpretation took place, as the only means of saving the deities of Olympus from the Titan assaults of the new Galilean God. In what vain defence, the statue of Mary set in the heart of the Pantheon can best tell us.

Religions, however, may be absorbed, but they never are disproved, and the stories of the Greek mythology, spiritualised by the purifying influence of Christianity, reappear in many of the southern parts of Europe in our own day. The old fable that the Greek gods took service with the new religion under assumed names has more truth in it than the many care to discover.

Having now traced the progress of historical criticism in the special treatment of myth and legend, I shall proceed to investigate the form in which the same spirit manifested itself as regards what one may term secular history and secular historians. The field traversed will be found to be in some respects the same, but the mental attitude, the spirit, the motive of investigation are all changed.

There were heroes before the son of Atreus and historians before Herodotus, yet the latter is rightly hailed as the father

of history, for in him we discover not merely the empirical connection of cause and effect, but that constant reference to Laws, which is the characteristic of the historian proper.

For all history must be essentially universal; not in the sense of comprising all the synchronous events of the past time, but through the universality of the principles employed. And the great conceptions which unify the work of Herodotus are such as even modern thought has not yet rejected. The immediate government of the world by God, the nemesis and punishment which sin and pride invariably bring with them, the revealing of God's purpose to His people by signs and omens, by miracles and by prophecy; these are to Herodotus the laws which govern the phenomena of history. He is essentially the type of supernatural historian; his eyes are ever strained to discern the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters of life; he is more concerned with final than with efficient causes.

Yet we can discern in him the rise of that *historic sense* which is the rational antecedent of the science of historical criticism, the *φυσικὸν κριτήριον*, to use the words of a Greek writer, as opposed to that which comes either *τέχνη* or *διδασχῆ*.

He has passed through the valley of faith and has caught a glimpse of the sunlit heights of Reason; but like all those who, while accepting the supernatural, yet attempt to apply the canons of rationalism, he is essentially inconsistent. For the better apprehension of the character of this historic sense in Herodotus it will be necessary to examine at some length the

various forms of criticism in which it manifests itself.

Such fabulous stories as that of the Phoenix, of the goat-footed men, of the headless beings with eyes in their breasts, of the men who slept six months in the year (*τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνδέχομαι ἡν ἀρχήν*), of the wer-wolf of the Neuri, and the like, are entirely rejected by him as being opposed to the ordinary experience of life, and to those natural laws whose universal influence the early Greek physical philosophers had already made known to the world of thought. Other legends, such as the suckling of Cyrus by a bitch, or the feather-rain of northern Europe, are rationalised and explained into a woman's name and a fall of snow. The supernatural origin of the Scythian nation, from the union of Hercules and the monstrous Echidna, is set aside by him for the more probable account that they were a nomad tribe driven by the Massagetæ from Asia; and he appeals to the local names of their country as proof of the fact that the Kimmerians were the original possessors.

But in the case of Herodotus it will be more instructive to pass on from points like these to those questions of general probability, the true apprehension of which depends rather on a certain quality of mind than on any possibility of formulated rules, questions which form no unimportant part of scientific history; for it must be remembered always that the canons of historical criticism are essentially different from those of judicial evidence, for they cannot, like the latter, be made plain to every ordinary mind, but appeal to a certain historical faculty founded

on the experience of life. Besides, the rules for the reception of evidence in courts of law are purely stationary, while the science of historical probability is essentially progressive, and changes with the advancing spirit of each age.

Now, of all the speculative canons of historical criticism, none is more important than that which rests on psychological probability.

Arguing from his knowledge of human nature, Herodotus rejects the presence of Helen within the walls of Troy. Had she been there, he says, Priam and his kinsmen would never have been so mad (*φορENOβλαβεῖς*) as not to give her up, when they and their children and their city were in such peril (ii. 118); and as regards the authority of Homer, some incidental passages in his poem show that he knew of Helen's sojourn in Egypt during the siege, but selected the other story as being a more suitable motive for an epic. Similarly he does not believe that the Alcmaeonidæ family, a family who had always been the haters of tyranny (*μισοτύραννοι*), and to whom, even more than to Harmodios and Aristogeiton, Athens owed its liberty, would ever have been so treacherous as to hold up a shield after the battle of Marathon as a signal for the Persian host to fall on the city. A shield, he acknowledges, was held up, but it could not possibly have been done by such friends of liberty as the house of Alcmaeon; nor will he believe that a great king like Rhampsinitus would have sent his daughter *κατίσαι ἐπ' οἰκήματος*.

Elsewhere he argues from more general considerations of

probability; a Greek courtesan like Rhodopis would hardly have been rich enough to build a pyramid, and, besides, on chronological grounds the story is impossible (ii. 134).

In another passage (ii. 63), after giving an account of the forcible entry of the priests of Ares into the chapel of the god's mother, which seems to have been a sort of religious faction fight where sticks were freely used (*μάχη ξύλοισι καρτερή*), 'I feel sure,' he says, 'that many of them died from getting their heads broken, notwithstanding the assertions of the Egyptian priests to the contrary.' There is also something charmingly naïve in the account he gives of the celebrated Greek swimmer who dived a distance of eighty stadia to give his countrymen warning of the Persian advance. 'If, however,' he says, 'I may offer an opinion on the subject, I would say that he came in a boat.'

There is, of course, something a little trivial in some of the instances I have quoted; but in a writer like Herodotus, who stands on the borderland between faith and rationalism, one likes to note even the most minute instances of the rise of the critical and sceptical spirit of inquiry.

How really strange, at base, it was with him may, I think, be shown by a reference to those passages where he applies rationalistic tests to matters connected with religion. He nowhere, indeed, grapples with the moral and scientific difficulties of the Greek Bible; and where he rejects as incredible the marvellous achievements of Hercules in Egypt, he does so on the express grounds that he had not yet been received among the

gods, and so was still subject to the ordinary conditions of mortal life (*ἔτι ἄνθρωπον ἐόντα*).

Even within these limits, however, his religious conscience seems to have been troubled at such daring rationalism, and the passage (ii. 45) concludes with a pious hope that God will pardon him for having gone so far, the great rationalistic passage being, of course, that in which he rejects the mythical account of the foundation of Dodona. 'How can a dove speak with a human voice?' he asks, and rationalises the bird into a foreign princess.

Similarly he seems more inclined to believe that the great storm at the beginning of the Persian War ceased from ordinary atmospheric causes, and not in consequence of the incantations of the *Magians*. He calls Melampus, whom the majority of the Greeks looked on as an inspired prophet, 'a clever man who had acquired for himself the art of prophecy'; and as regards the miracle told of the Æginetan statues of the primeval deities of Damia and Auxesia, that they fell on their knees when the sacrilegious Athenians strove to carry them off, 'any one may believe it,' he says, 'who likes, but as for myself, I place no credence in the tale.'

So much then for the rationalistic spirit of historical criticism, as far as it appears explicitly in the works of this great and philosophic writer; but for an adequate appreciation of his position we must also note how conscious he was of the value of documentary evidence, of the use of inscriptions, of the importance of the poets as throwing light on manners and

customs as well as on historical incidents. No writer of any age has more vividly recognised the fact that history is a matter of evidence, and that it is as necessary for the historian to state his authority as it is to produce one's witnesses in a court of law.

While, however, we can discern in Herodotus the rise of an historic sense, we must not blind ourselves to the large amount of instances where he receives supernatural influences as part of the ordinary forces of life. Compared to Thucydides, who succeeded him in the development of history, he appears almost like a mediæval writer matched with a modern rationalist. For, contemporary though they were, between these two authors there is an infinite chasm of thought.

The essential difference of their methods may be best illustrated from those passages where they treat of the same subject. The execution of the Spartan heralds, Nicolaos and Aneristos, during the Peloponnesian War is regarded by Herodotus as one of the most supernatural instances of the workings of nemesis and the wrath of an outraged hero; while the lengthened siege and ultimate fall of Troy was brought about by the avenging hand of God desiring to manifest unto men the mighty penalties which always follow upon mighty sins. But Thucydides either sees not, or desires not to see, in either of these events the finger of Providence, or the punishment of wicked doers. The death of the heralds is merely an Athenian retaliation for similar outrages committed by the opposite side; the long agony of the ten years' siege is due merely to the want of a good

commissariat in the Greek army; while the fall of the city is the result of a united military attack consequent on a good supply of provisions.

Now, it is to be observed that in this latter passage, as well as elsewhere, Thucydides is in no sense of the word a sceptic as regards his attitude towards the truth of these ancient legends.

Agamemnon and Atreus, Theseus and Eurystheus, even Minos, about whom Herodotus has some doubts, are to him as real personages as Alcibiades or Gylippus. The points in his historical criticism of the past are, first, his rejection of all extra-natural interference, and, secondly, the attributing to these ancient heroes the motives and modes of thought of his own day. The present was to him the key to the explanation of the past, as it was to the prediction of the future.

Now, as regards his attitude towards the supernatural he is at one with modern science. We too know that, just as the primeval coal-beds reveal to us the traces of rain-drops and other atmospheric phenomena similar to those of our own day, so, in estimating the history of the past, the introduction of no force must be allowed whose workings we cannot observe among the phenomena around us. To lay down canons of ultra-historical credibility for the explanation of events which happen to have preceded us by a few thousand years, is as thoroughly unscientific as it is to intermingle preternatural in geological theories.

Whatever the canons of art may be, no difficulty in history is so great as to warrant the introduction of a spirit of spirit *θεός*

ἀπὸ μηχανῆς, in the sense of a violation of the laws of nature.

Upon the other point, however, Thucydides falls into an anachronism. To refuse to allow the workings of chivalrous and self-denying motives among the knights of the Trojan crusade, because he saw none in the faction-loving Athenian of his own day, is to show an entire ignorance of the various characteristics of human nature developing under different circumstances, and to deny to a primitive chieftain like Agamemnon that authority founded on opinion, to which we give the name of divine right, is to fall into an historical error quite as gross as attributing to Atreus the courting of the populace (*τεθεραπευκότα τὸν δῆμον*) with a view to the Mycenaean throne.

The general method of historical criticism pursued by Thucydides having been thus indicated, it remains to proceed more into detail as regards those particular points where he claims for himself a more rational method of estimating evidence than either the public or his predecessors possessed.

‘So little pains,’ he remarks, ‘do the vulgar take in the investigation of truth, satisfied with their preconceived opinions,’ that the majority of the Greeks believe in a Pitanate cohort of the Spartan army and in a double vote being the prerogative of the Spartan kings, neither of which opinions has any foundation in fact. But the chief point on which he lays stress as evincing the ‘uncritical way with which men receive legends, even the legends of their own country,’ is the entire baselessness of the common Athenian tradition in which Harmodios and Aristogeiton were

represented as the patriotic liberators of Athens from the Peisistratid tyranny. So far, he points out, from the love of freedom being their motive, both of them were influenced by merely personal considerations, Aristogeiton being jealous of Hipparchos' attention to Harmodios, then a beautiful boy in the flower of Greek loveliness, while the latter's indignation was aroused by an insult offered to his sister by the prince.

Their motives, then, were personal revenge, while the result of their conspiracy served only to rivet more tightly the chains of servitude which bound Athens to the Peisistratid house, for Hipparchos, whom they killed, was only the tyrant's younger brother, and not the tyrant himself.

To prove his theory that Hippias was the elder, he appeals to the evidence afforded by a public inscription in which his name occurs immediately after that of his father, a point which he thinks shows that he was the eldest, and so the heir. This view he further corroborates by another inscription, on the altar of Apollo, which mentions the children of Hippias and not those of his brothers; 'for it was natural for the eldest to be married first'; and besides this, on the score of general probability he points out that, had Hippias been the younger, he would not have so easily obtained the tyranny on the death of Hipparchos.

Now, what is important in Thucydides, as evinced in the treatment of legend generally, is not the results he arrived at, but the method by which he works. The first great rationalistic historian, he may be said to have paved the way for all those

who followed after him, though it must always be remembered that, while the total absence in his pages of all the mystical paraphernalia of the supernatural theory of life is an advance in the progress of rationalism, and an era in scientific history, whose importance could never be over-estimated, yet we find along with it a total absence of any mention of those various social and economical forces which form such important factors in the evolution of the world, and to which Herodotus rightly gave great prominence in his immortal work. The history of Thucydides is essentially one-sided and incomplete. The intricate details of sieges and battles, subjects with which the historian proper has really nothing to do except so far as they may throw light on the spirit of the age, we would readily exchange for some notice of the condition of private society in Athens, or the influence and position of women.

There is an advance in the method of historical criticism; there is an advance in the conception and motive of history itself; for in Thucydides we may discern that natural reaction against the intrusion of didactic and theological considerations into the sphere of the pure intellect, the spirit of which may be found in the Euripidean treatment of tragedy and the later schools of art, as well as in the Platonic conception of science.

History, no doubt, has splendid lessons for our instruction, just as all good art comes to us as the herald of the noblest truth. But, to set before either the painter or the historian the inculcation of moral lessons as an aim to be consciously pursued, is to miss

entirely the true motive and characteristic both of art and history, which is in the one case the creation of beauty, in the other the discovery of the laws of the evolution of progress: *Il ne faut demander de l'Art que l'Art, du passé que le passé.*

Herodotus wrote to illustrate the wonderful ways of Providence and the nemesis that falls on sin, and his work is a good example of the truth that nothing can dispense with criticism so much as a moral aim. Thucydides has no creed to preach, no doctrine to prove. He analyses the results which follow inevitably from certain antecedents, in order that on a recurrence of the same crisis men may know how to act.

His object was to discover the laws of the past so as to serve as a light to illumine the future. We must not confuse the recognition of the utility of history with any ideas of a didactic aim. Two points more in Thucydides remain for our consideration: his treatment of the rise of Greek civilisation, and of the primitive condition of Hellas, as well as the question how far can he be said really to have recognised the existence of laws regulating the complex phenomena of life.

III

The investigation into the two great problems of the origin of society and the philosophy of history occupies such an important position in the evolution of Greek thought that, to obtain any clear view of the workings of the critical spirit, it will be necessary to trace at some length their rise and scientific development as evinced not merely in the works of historians proper, but also in the philosophical treatises of Plato and Aristotle. The important position which these two great thinkers occupy in the progress of historical criticism can hardly be over-estimated. I do not mean merely as regards their treatment of the Greek Bible, and Plato's endeavours to purge sacred history of its immorality by the application of ethical canons at the time when Aristotle was beginning to undermine the basis of miracles by his scientific conception of law, but with reference to these two wider questions of the rise of civil institutions and the philosophy of history.

And first, as regards the current theories of the primitive condition of society, there was a wide divergence of opinion in Hellenic society, just as there is now. For while the majority of the orthodox public, of whom Hesiod may be taken as the representative, looked back, as a great many of our own day still do, to a fabulous age of innocent happiness, a *bell' età dell' auro*, where sin and death were unknown and men and

women were like Gods, the foremost men of intellect such as Aristotle and Plato, Æschylus and many of the other poets ¹ saw in primitive man ‘a few small sparks of humanity preserved on the tops of mountains after some deluge,’ ‘without an idea of cities, governments or legislation,’ ‘living the lives of wild beasts in sunless caves,’ ‘their only law being the survival of the fittest.’

And this, too, was the opinion of Thucydides, whose *Archæologia* as it is contains a most valuable disquisition on the early condition of Hellas, which it will be necessary to examine at some length.

Now, as regards the means employed generally by Thucydides for the elucidation of ancient history, I have already pointed out how that, while acknowledging that ‘it is the tendency of every poet to exaggerate, as it is of every chronicler to seek to be attractive at the expense of truth,’ he yet assumes in the thoroughly euhemeristic way, that under the veil of myth and legend there does yet exist a rational basis of fact discoverable by the method of rejecting all supernatural interference as well as any extraordinary motives influencing the actors. It is in complete accordance with this spirit that he appeals, for instance, to the Homeric epithet of ἀφνειός, as applied to Corinth, as a proof of the early commercial prosperity of that city; to the fact of the generic name *Hellenes* not occurring in the *Iliad* as a corroboration of his theory of the essentially disunited character of the primitive Greek tribes; and he argues from the line ‘O’er

¹ Plato’s *Laws*; Æschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*.

many islands and all Argos ruled,' as applied to Agamemnon, that his forces must have been partially naval, 'for Agamemnon's was a continental power, and he could not have been master of any but the adjacent islands, and these would not be many but through the possession of a fleet.'

Anticipating in some measure the comparative method of research, he argues from the fact of the more barbarous Greek tribes, such as the Ætolians and Acarnanians, still carrying arms in his own day, that this custom was the case originally over the whole country. 'The fact,' he says, 'that the people in these parts of Hellas are still living in the old way points to a time when the same mode of life was equally common to all.' Similarly, in another passage, he shows how a corroboration of his theory of the respectable character of piracy in ancient days is afforded by 'the honour with which some of the inhabitants of the continent still regard a successful marauder,' as well as by the fact that the question, 'Are you a pirate?' is a common feature of primitive society as shown in the poets; and finally, after observing how the old Greek custom of wearing belts in gymnastic contests still survived among the more uncivilised Asiatic tribes, he observes that there are many other points in which a likeness may be shown between the life of the primitive Hellenes and that of the barbarians to-day.'

As regards the evidence afforded by ancient remains, while adducing as a proof of the insecure character of early Greek

society the fact of their cities ² being always built at some distance from the sea, yet he is careful to warn us, and the caution ought to be borne in mind by all archæologists, that we have no right to conclude from the scanty remains of any city that its legendary greatness in primitive times was a mere exaggeration. 'We are not justified,' he says, 'in rejecting the tradition of the magnitude of the Trojan armament, because Mycenæ and the other towns of that age seem to us small and insignificant. For, if Lacedæmon was to become desolate, any antiquarian judging merely from its ruins would be inclined to regard the tale of the Spartan hegemony as an idle myth; for the city is a mere collection of villages after the old fashion of Hellas, and has none of those splendid public buildings and temples which characterise Athens, and whose remains, in the case of the latter city, would be so marvellous as to lead the superficial observer into an exaggerated estimate of the Athenian power.' Nothing can be more scientific than the archæological canons laid down, whose truth is strikingly illustrated to any one who has compared the waste fields of the Eurotas plain with the lordly monuments of the Athenian acropolis. ³

On the other hand, Thucydides is quite conscious of the

² Somewhat in the same spirit Plato, in his *Laws*, appeals to the local position of Ilium among the rivers of the plain, as a proof that it was not built till long after the Deluge.

³ Plutarch remarks that the *only* evidence Greece possesses of the truth that the legendary power of Athens is no 'romance or idle story,' is the public and sacred buildings. This is an instance of the exaggerated importance given to ruins against which Thucydides is warning us.

value of the positive evidence afforded by archaeological remains. He appeals, for instance, to the character of the armour found in the Delian tombs and the peculiar mode of sepulture, as corroboration of his theory of the predominance of the Carian element among the primitive islanders, and to the concentration of all the temples either in the Acropolis, or in its immediate vicinity, to the name of ἄστν by which it was still known, and to the extraordinary sanctity of the spring of water there, as proof that the primitive city was originally confined to the citadel, and the district immediately beneath it (ii. 16). And lastly, in the very opening of his history, anticipating one of the most scientific of modern methods, he points out how in early states of civilisation immense fertility of the soil tends to favour the personal aggrandisement of individuals, and so to stop the normal progress of the country through 'the rise of factions, that endless source of ruin'; and also by the allurements it offers to a foreign invader, to necessitate a continual change of population, one immigration following on another. He exemplifies his theory by pointing to the endless political revolutions that characterised Arcadia, Thessaly and Boeotia, the three richest spots in Greece, as well as by the negative instance of the undisturbed state in primitive time of Attica, which was always remarkable for the dryness and poverty of its soil.

Now, while undoubtedly in these passages we may recognise the first anticipation of many of the most modern principles of research, we must remember how essentially limited is the range

of the *archæologia*, and how no theory at all is offered on the wider questions of the general conditions of the rise and progress of humanity, a problem which is first scientifically discussed in the *Republic* of Plato.

And at the outset it must be premised that, while the study of primitive man is an essentially inductive science, resting rather on the accumulation of evidence than on speculation, among the Greeks it was prosecuted rather on deductive principles. Thucydides did, indeed, avail himself of the opportunities afforded by the unequal development of civilisation in his own day in Greece, and in the places I have pointed out seems to have anticipated the comparative method. But we do not find later writers availing themselves of the wonderfully accurate and picturesque accounts given by Herodotus of the customs of savage tribes. To take one instance, which bears a good deal on modern questions, we find in the works of this great traveller the gradual and progressive steps in the development of the family life clearly manifested in the mere gregarious herding together of the Agathyrsi, their primitive kinsmanship through women in common, and the rise of a feeling of paternity from a state of polyandry. This tribe stood at that time on that borderland between umbilical relationship and the family which has been such a difficult point for modern anthropologists to find.

The ancient authors, however, are unanimous in insisting that the family is the ultimate unit of society, though, as I have said, an inductive study of primitive races, or even the accounts

given of them by Herodotus, would have shown them that the *νεοττιὰ ἴδια* of a personal household, to use Plato's expression, is really a most complex notion appearing always in a late stage of civilisation, along with recognition of private property and the rights of individualism.

Philology also, which in the hands of modern investigators has proved such a splendid instrument of research, was in ancient days studied on principles too unscientific to be of much use. Herodotus points out that the word *Eridanos* is essentially Greek in character, that consequently the river supposed to run round the world is probably a mere Greek invention. His remarks, however, on language generally, as in the case of *Piromis* and the ending of the Persian names, show on what unsound basis his knowledge of language rested.

In the *Bacchæ* of Euripides there is an extremely interesting passage in which the immoral stories of the Greek mythology are accounted for on the principle of that misunderstanding of words and metaphors to which modern science has given the name of a disease of language. In answer to the impious rationalism of Pentheus – a sort of modern Philistine – Teiresias, who may be termed the Max Müller of the Theban cycle, points out that the story of Dionysus being inclosed in Zeus' thigh really arose from the linguistic confusion between *μηρός* and *ὄμηρος*.

On the whole, however – for I have quoted these two instances only to show the unscientific character of early philology – we may say that this important instrument in recreating the history

of the past was not really used by the ancients as a means of historical criticism. Nor did the ancients employ that other method, used to such advantage in our own day, by which in the symbolism and formulas of an advanced civilisation we can detect the unconscious survival of ancient customs: for, whereas in the sham capture of the bride at a marriage feast, which was common in Wales till a recent time, we can discern the lingering reminiscence of the barbarous habit of exogamy, the ancient writers saw only the deliberate commemoration of an historical event.

Aristotle does not tell us by what method he discovered that the Greeks used to buy their wives in primitive times, but, judging by his general principles, it was probably through some legend or myth on the subject which lasted to his own day, and not, as we would do, by arguing back from the marriage presents given to the bride and her relatives.⁴

The origin of the common proverb 'worth so many beeves,' in which we discern the unconscious survival of a purely pastoral state of society before the use of metals was known, is ascribed by Plutarch to the fact of Theseus having coined money bearing a bull's head. Similarly, the Amathusian festival, in which a young man imitated the labours of a woman in travail, is regarded by him as a rite instituted in Ariadne's honour, and the Carian adoration of asparagus as a simple commemoration of the

⁴ The fictitious sale in the Roman marriage *per coemptionem* was originally, of course, a real sale.

adventure of the nymph Perigune. In the first of these *we* discern the beginning of agnation and kinsmanship through the father, which still lingers in the 'couvee' of New Zealand tribes: while the second is a relic of the totem and fetish worship of plants.

Now, in entire opposition to this modern inductive principle of research stands the philosophic Plato, whose account of primitive man is entirely speculative and deductive.

The origin of society he ascribes to necessity, the mother of all inventions, and imagines that individual man began deliberately to herd together on account of the advantages of the principle of division of labour and the rendering of mutual need.

It must, however, be borne in mind that Plato's object in this whole passage in the *Republic* was, perhaps, not so much to analyse the conditions of early society as to illustrate the importance of the division of labour, the shibboleth of his political economy, by showing what a powerful factor it must have been in the most primitive as well as in the most complex states of society; just as in the *Laws* he almost rewrites entirely the history of the Peloponnesus in order to prove the necessity of a balance of power. He surely, I mean, must have recognised himself how essentially incomplete his theory was in taking no account of the origin of family life, the position and influence of women, and other social questions, as well as in disregarding those deeper motives of religion, which are such important factors in early civilisation, and whose influence Aristotle seems to have clearly apprehended, when he says that the aim of

primitive society was not merely life but the higher life, and that in the origin of society utility is not the sole motive, but that there is something spiritual in it if, at least, 'spiritual' will bring out the meaning of that complex expression *τὸ καλόν*. Otherwise, the whole account in the *Republic* of primitive man will always remain as a warning against the intrusion of *a priori* speculations in the domain appropriate to induction.

Now, Aristotle's theory of the origin of society, like his philosophy of ethics, rests ultimately on the principle of final causes, not in the theological meaning of an aim or tendency imposed from without, but in the scientific sense of function corresponding to organ. 'Nature maketh no thing in vain' is the text of Aristotle in this as in other inquiries. Man being the only animal possessed of the power of rational speech is, he asserts, by nature intended to be social, more so than the bee or any other gregarious animal.

He is *φύσει πολιτικός*, and the national tendency towards higher forms of perfection brings the 'armed savage who used to sell his wife' to the free independence of a free state, and to the *ἰσότης τοῦ ἄρχειν καὶ τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι*, which was the test of true citizenship. The stages passed through by humanity start with the family first as the ultimate unit.

The conglomeration of families forms a village ruled by that patriarchal sway which is the oldest form of government in the world, as is shown by the fact that all men count it to be the constitution of heaven, and the villages are merged into the state,

and here the progression stops.

For Aristotle, like all Greek thinkers, found his ideal within the walls of the *πόλις*, yet perhaps in his remark that a united Greece would rule the world we may discern some anticipation of that 'federal union of free states into one consolidated empire' which, more than the *πόλις*, is to our eyes the ultimately perfect polity.

How far Aristotle was justified in regarding the family as the ultimate unit, with the materials afforded to him by Greek literature, I have already noticed. Besides, Aristotle, I may remark, had he reflected on the meaning of that Athenian law which, while prohibiting marriage with a uterine sister, permitted it with a sister-german, or on the common tradition in Athens that before the time of Cecrops children bore their mothers' names, or on some of the Spartan regulations, could hardly have failed to see the universality of kinsmanship through women in early days, and the late appearance of monandry. Yet, while he missed this point, in common, it must be acknowledged, with many modern writers, such as Sir Henry Maine, it is essentially as an explorer of inductive instances that we recognise his improvement on Plato. The treatise *περὶ πολιτείων*, did it remain to us in its entirety, would have been one of the most valuable landmarks in the progress of historical criticism, and the first scientific treatise on the science of comparative politics.

A few fragments still remain to us, in one of which we find Aristotle appealing to the authority of an ancient inscription

on the 'Disk of Iphitus,' one of the most celebrated Greek antiquities, to corroborate his theory of the Lycurgean revival of the Olympian festival; while his enormous research is evinced in the elaborate explanation he gives of the historical origin of proverbs such as *οὐδεὶς μέγας κακὸς ἰχθῦς*, of religious songs like the *ἰῶμεν ἐς Ἀθήνας* of the Botticean virgins, or the praises of love and war.

And, finally, it is to be observed how much wider than Plato's his theory of the origin of society is. They both rest on a psychological basis, but Aristotle's recognition of the capacity for progress and the tendency towards a higher life shows how much deeper his knowledge of human nature was.

In imitation of these two philosophers, Polybius gives an account of the origin of society in the opening to his philosophy of history. Somewhat in the spirit of Plato, he imagines that after one of the cyclic deluges which sweep off mankind at stated periods and annihilate all pre-existing civilisation, the few surviving members of humanity coalesce for mutual protection, and, as in the case with ordinary animals, the one most remarkable for physical strength is elected king. In a short time, owing to the workings of sympathy and the desire of approbation, the moral qualities begin to make their appearance, and intellectual instead of bodily excellence becomes the qualification for sovereignty.

Other points, as the rise of law and the like, are dwelt on in a somewhat modern spirit, and although Polybius seems not to

have employed the inductive method of research in this question, or rather, I should say, of the hierarchical order of the rational progress of ideas in life, he is not far removed from what the laborious investigations of modern travellers have given us.

And, indeed, as regards the working of the speculative faculty in the creation of history, it is in all respects marvellous how that the most truthful accounts of the passage from barbarism to civilisation in ancient literature come from the works of poets. The elaborate researches of Mr. Tylor and Sir John Lubbock have done little more than verify the theories put forward in the *Prometheus Bound* and the *De Natura Rerum*; yet neither Æschylus nor Lucretias followed in the modern path, but rather attained to truth by a certain almost mystic power of creative imagination, such as we now seek to banish from science as a dangerous power, though to it science seems to owe many of its most splendid generalities.⁵

Leaving then the question of the origin of society as treated by the ancients, I shall now turn to the other and the more important question of how far they may be said to have attained to what we call the philosophy of history.

Now at the outset we must note that, while the conceptions of law and order have been universally received as the governing principles of the phenomena of nature in the sphere of physical science, yet their intrusion into the domain of history and the life of man has always been met with a strong opposition, on

⁵ Notably, of course, in the case of heat and its laws.

the ground of the incalculable nature of two great forces acting on human action, a certain causeless spontaneity which men call free will, and the extra-natural interference which they attribute as a constant attribute to God.

Now, that there is a science of the apparently variable phenomena of history is a conception which *we* have perhaps only recently begun to appreciate; yet, like all other great thoughts, it seems to have come to the Greek mind spontaneously, through a certain splendour of imagination, in the morning tide of their civilisation, before inductive research had armed them with the instruments of verification. For I think it is possible to discern in some of the mystic speculations of the early Greek thinkers that desire to discover what is that 'invariable existence of which there are variable states,' and to incorporate it in some one formula of law which may serve to explain the different manifestations of all organic bodies, *man included*, which is the germ of the philosophy of history; the germ indeed of an idea of which it is not too much to say that on it any kind of historical criticism, worthy of the name, must ultimately rest.

For the very first requisite for any scientific conception of history is the doctrine of uniform sequence: in other words, that certain events having happened, certain other events corresponding to them will happen also; that the past is the key of the future.

Now at the birth of this great conception science, it is true,

presided, yet religion it was which at the outset clothed it in its own garb, and familiarised men with it by appealing to their hearts first and then to their intellects; knowing that at the beginning of things it is through the moral nature, and not through the intellectual, that great truths are spread.

So in Herodotus, who may be taken as a representative of the orthodox tone of thought, the idea of the uniform sequence of cause and effect appears under the theological aspect of Nemesis and Providence, which is really the scientific conception of law, only it is viewed from an *ethical* standpoint.

Now in Thucydides the philosophy of history rests on the probability, which the uniformity of human nature affords us, that the future will in the course of human things resemble the past, if not reproduce it. He appears to contemplate a recurrence of the phenomena of history as equally certain with a return of the epidemic of the Great Plague.

Notwithstanding what German critics have written on the subject, we must beware of regarding this conception as a mere reproduction of that cyclic theory of events which sees in the world nothing but the regular rotation of Strophe and Antistrophe, in the eternal choir of life and death.

For, in his remarks on the excesses of the Corcyrean Revolution, Thucydides distinctly rests his idea of the recurrence of history on the psychological grounds of the general sameness of mankind.

‘The sufferings,’ he says, ‘which revolution entailed upon the

cities were many and terrible, such as have occurred and always will occur as long as human nature remains the same, though in a severer or milder form, and varying in their symptoms according to the variety of the particular cases.

‘In peace and prosperity states and individuals have better sentiments, because they are not confronted with imperious necessities; but war takes away the easy supply of men’s wants, and so proves a hard taskmaster, which brings most men’s characters to a level with their fortunes.’

IV

It is evident that here Thucydides is ready to admit the variety of manifestations which external causes bring about in their workings on the uniform character of the nature of man. Yet, after all is said, these are perhaps but very general statements: the ordinary effects of peace and war are dwelt on, but there is no real analysis of the immediate causes and general laws of the phenomena of life, nor does Thucydides seem to recognise the truth that if humanity proceeds in circles, the circles are always widening.

Perhaps we may say that with him the philosophy of history is partly in the metaphysical stage, and see, in the progress of this idea from Herodotus to Polybius, the exemplification of the Comtian Law of the three stages of thought, the theological, the metaphysical, and the scientific: for truly out of the vagueness of theological mysticism this conception which we call the Philosophy of History was raised to a scientific principle, according to which the past was explained and the future predicted by reference to general laws.

Now, just as the earliest account of the nature of the progress of humanity is to be found in Plato, so in him we find the first explicit attempt to found a universal philosophy of history upon wide rational grounds. Having created an ideally perfect state, the philosopher proceeds to give an elaborate theory of the complex

causes which produce revolutions, of the moral effects of various forms of government and education, of the rise of the criminal classes and their connection with pauperism, and, in a word, to create history by the deductive method and to proceed from *a priori* psychological principles to discover the governing laws of the apparent chaos of political life.

There have been many attempts since Plato to deduce from a single philosophical principle all the phenomena which experience subsequently verifies for us. Fichte thought he could predict the world-plan from the idea of universal time. Hegel dreamed he had found the key to the mysteries of life in the development of freedom, and Krause in the categories of being. But the one scientific basis on which the true philosophy of history must rest is the complete knowledge of the laws of human nature in all its wants, its aspirations, its powers and its tendencies: and this great truth, which Thucydides may be said in some measure to have apprehended, was given to us first by Plato.

Now, it cannot be accurately said of this philosopher that either his philosophy or his history is entirely and simply *a priori*. *On est de son siècle même quand on y proteste*, and so we find in him continual references to the Spartan mode of life, the Pythagorean system, the general characteristics of Greek tyrannies and Greek democracies. For while, in his account of the method of forming an ideal state, he says that the political artist is indeed to fix his gaze on the sun of abstract truth in

the heavens of the pure reason, but is sometimes to turn to the realisation of the ideals on earth: yet, after all, the general character of the Platonic method, which is what we are specially concerned with, is essentially deductive and *a priori*. And he himself, in the building up of his Nephelococcygia, certainly starts with a *καθαρὸς πίναξ*, making a clean sweep of all history and all experience; and it was essentially as an *a priori* theorist that he is criticised by Aristotle, as we shall see later.

To proceed to closer details regarding the actual scheme of the laws of political revolutions as drawn out by Plato, we must first note that the primary cause of the decay of the ideal state is the general principle, common to the vegetable and animal worlds as well as to the world of history, that all created things are fated to decay – a principle which, though expressed in the terms of a mere metaphysical abstraction, is yet perhaps in its essence scientific. For we too must hold that a continuous redistribution of matter and motion is the inevitable result of the nominal persistence of Force, and that perfect equilibrium is as impossible in politics as it certainly is in physics.

The secondary causes which mar the perfection of the Platonic ‘city of the sun’ are to be found in the intellectual decay of the race consequent on injudicious marriages and in the Philistine elevation of physical achievements over mental culture; while the hierarchical succession of Timocracy and Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny, is dwelt on at great length and its causes analysed in a very dramatic and psychological manner, if not in

that sanctioned by the actual order of history.

And indeed it is apparent at first sight that the Platonic succession of states represents rather the succession of ideas in the philosophic mind than any historical succession of time.

Aristotle meets the whole simply by an appeal to facts. If the theory of the periodic decay of all created things, he urges, be scientific, it must be universal, and so true of all the other states as well as of the ideal. Besides, a state usually changes into its contrary and not to the form next to it; so the ideal state would not change into Timocracy; while Oligarchy, more often than Tyranny, succeeds Democracy. Plato, besides, says nothing of what a Tyranny would change to. According to the cycle theory it ought to pass into the ideal state again, but as a fact one Tyranny is changed into another as at Sicyon, or into a Democracy as at Syracuse, or into an Aristocracy as at Carthage. The example of Sicily, too, shows that an Oligarchy is often followed by a Tyranny, as at Leontini and Gela. Besides, it is absurd to represent greed as the chief motive of decay, or to talk of avarice as the root of Oligarchy, when in nearly all true oligarchies money-making is forbidden by law. And finally the Platonic theory neglects the different kinds of democracies and of tyrannies.

Now nothing can be more important than this passage in Aristotle's *Politics* (v. 12.), which may be said to mark an era in the evolution of historical criticism. For there is nothing on which Aristotle insists so strongly as that the generalisations from facts

ought to be added to the data of the *a priori* method – a principle which we know to be true not merely of deductive speculative politics but of physics also: for are not the residual phenomena of chemists a valuable source of improvement in theory?

His own method is essentially historical though by no means empirical. On the contrary, this far-seeing thinker, rightly styled *il maestro di color che sanno*, may be said to have apprehended clearly that the true method is neither exclusively empirical nor exclusively speculative, but rather a union of both in the process called Analysis or the Interpretation of Facts, which has been defined as the application to facts of such general conceptions as may fix the important characteristics of the phenomena, and present them permanently in their true relations. He too was the first to point out, what even in our own day is incompletely appreciated, that nature, including the development of man, is not full of incoherent episodes like a bad tragedy, that inconsistency and anomaly are as impossible in the moral as they are in the physical world, and that where the superficial observer thinks he sees a revolution the philosophical critic discerns merely the gradual and rational evolution of the inevitable results of certain antecedents.

And while admitting the necessity of a psychological basis for the philosophy of history, he added to it the important truth that man, to be apprehended in his proper position in the universe as well as in his natural powers, must be studied from below in the hierarchical progression of higher function from the lower forms

of life. The important maxim, that to obtain a clear conception of anything we must 'study it in its growth from the very beginning,' is formally set down in the opening of the *Politics*, where, indeed, we shall find the other characteristic features of the modern Evolutionary theory, such as the 'Differentiation of Function' and the 'Survival of the Fittest' explicitly set forth.

What a valuable step this was in the improvement of the method of historical criticism it is needless to point out. By it, one may say, the true thread was given to guide one's steps through the bewildering labyrinth of facts. For history (to use terms with which Aristotle has made us familiar) may be looked at from two essentially different standpoints; either as a work of art whose *τέλος* or final cause is external to it and imposed on it from without; or as an organism containing the law of its own development in itself, and working out its perfection merely by the fact of being what it is. Now, if we adopt the former, which we may style the theological view, we shall be in continual danger of tripping into the pitfall of some *a priori* conclusion – that bourne from which, it has been truly said, no traveller ever returns.

The latter is the only scientific theory and was apprehended in its fulness by Aristotle, whose application of the inductive method to history, and whose employment of the evolutionary theory of humanity, show that he was conscious that the philosophy of history is nothing separate from the facts of history but is contained in them, and that the rational law of the complex

phenomena of life, like the ideal in the world of thought, is to be reached through the facts, not superimposed on them — *κατὰ πολλῶν* not *παρὰ πολλά*.

And finally, in estimating the enormous debt which the science of historical criticism owes to Aristotle, we must not pass over his attitude towards those two great difficulties in the formation of a philosophy of history on which I have touched above. I mean the assertion of extra-natural interference with the normal development of the world and of the incalculable influence exercised by the power of free will.

Now, as regards the former, he may be said to have neglected it entirely. The special acts of providence proceeding from God's immediate government of the world, which Herodotus saw as mighty landmarks in history, would have been to him essentially disturbing elements in that universal reign of law, the extent of whose limitless empire he of all the great thinkers of antiquity was the first explicitly to recognise.

Standing aloof from the popular religion as well as from the deeper conceptions of Herodotus and the Tragic School, he no longer thought of God as of one with fair limbs and treacherous face haunting wood and glade, nor would he see in him a jealous judge continually interfering in the world's history to bring the wicked to punishment and the proud to a fall. God to him was the incarnation of the pure Intellect, a being whose activity was the contemplation of his own perfection, one whom Philosophy might imitate but whom prayers could never move, to the sublime

indifference of whose passionless wisdom what were the sons of men, their desires or their sins? While, as regards the other difficulty and the formation of a philosophy of history, the conflict of free will with general laws appears first in Greek thought in the usual theological form in which all great ideas seem to be cradled at their birth.

It was such legends as those of Œdipus and Adrastus, exemplifying the struggles of individual humanity against the overpowering force of circumstances and necessity, which gave to the early Greeks those same lessons which we of modern days draw, in somewhat less artistic fashion, from the study of statistics and the laws of physiology.

In Aristotle, of course, there is no trace of supernatural influence. The Furies, which drive their victim into sin first and then punishment, are no longer 'viper-tressed goddesses with eyes and mouth aflame,' but those evil thoughts which harbour within the impure soul. In this, as in all other points, to arrive at Aristotle is to reach the pure atmosphere of scientific and modern thought.

But while he rejected pure necessitarianism in its crude form as essentially a *reductio ad absurdum* of life, he was fully conscious of the fact that the will is not a mysterious and ultimate unit of force beyond which we cannot go and whose special characteristic is inconsistency, but a certain creative attitude of the mind which is, from the first, continually influenced by habits, education and circumstance; so absolutely modifiable, in

a word, that the good and the bad man alike seem to lose the power of free will; for the one is morally unable to sin, the other physically incapacitated for reformation.

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