

intrinsic value by a Christian, the very *essence* of whose religion consists in being crucified to the world; the very *aim* and *end* of whose religion lies in a superiority to all greatness which is to have an end with this life; the very *nature* and *genius* of whose religion tends to prove, that eternal life is the only adequate measure of the happiness, and immortal glory the only adequate object of the ambition, of a Christian?

CHAPTER XI.

English History.—Mr. Hume.

BUT the royal pupil is not to wander always in the wide field of universal history. The extent is so vast, and the time for travelling over it so short, that after being sufficiently possessed of that general view of mankind which the history of the world exhibits, it seems reasonable to concentrate her studies, and to direct her attention to certain great leading points, and especially to those objects with which she has a natural and more immediate connexion. The history of modern Europe abounds with such objects. In Robertson's luminous view of the state of Europe, the progress of society is traced with just arrangement and philosophical precision. His admirable histories of Charles V. and of Mary Queen of Scots, separate from their great independent merit, will be read with singular advantage in connexion with the contemporary reigns of English history. In the writings of Sully and Clarendon may be seen how, for a long time, the passions of kings were contradicted, and often controlled, by the wisdom of their ministers; sovereigns who were not insensible to praise, nor averse from

flattery, yet submitting, though sometimes with a very ill grace, to receive services rather than adulation: ministers who consulted the good rather than the humour of their princes; who promoted their interests, instead of gratifying their vices, and who preferred their fame to their favour.

MR. HUME.

Hume is incomparably the most informing, as well as the most elegant, of all the writers of English history. His narrative is full, well arranged, and beautifully perspicuous. Yet, he is an author who must be read with extreme caution on a political, but especially on a religious account. Though, on occasions where he may be trusted because his peculiar principles do not interfere, his political reflections are usually just, sometimes profound. His account of the origin of the Gothic government is full of interest and information. He marks, with exact precision, the progress and decay of the feudal manners, when law and order began to prevail, and our constitution assumed something like a shape. His finely painted characters of Alfred and Elizabeth should be engraved on the heart of every sovereign. His political prejudices do not strikingly appear till the establishment of the house of Stuart, nor his religious antipathies till about the distant dawn of the Reformation under Henry V. From that period to its full establishment, he is perhaps more dangerous, because less ostensibly daring, than some other infidel historians. It is a serpent under a bed of roses. He does not (in his *history* at least) so much ridicule religion himself, as invite others to ridicule it. There is in his manner a sedateness which imposes, in his scepticism a sly gravity, which puts the reader more off his guard than the vehemence of censure, or the levity of wit; for we are always less disposed

to suspect a man who is too wise to appear angry. That same wisdom makes him too correct to *invent* calumnies, but it does not preserve him from doing what is scarcely less disingenuous. He implicitly adopts the injurious relations of those annalists who were most hostile to the reformed faith; though he must have known their accounts to be aggravated and discoloured, if not absolutely invented. He thus makes others responsible for the worst things he asserts, and spreads the mischief without avowing the malignity. When he speaks from himself, the sneer is so cool, the irony so sober, the contempt so discreet, the moderation so insidious, the difference between popish bigotry and protestant firmness, between the fury of the persecutor and the resolution of the martyr, so little marked; the distinctions between intolerant frenzy and heroic zeal so melted into each other; and, though he contrives to make the reader feel some indignation at the tyrant, he never leads him to feel any reverence for the sufferer; he ascribes such a slender superiority to one religious system above another, that the young reader who does not come to the perusal with his principles formed, will be in danger of thinking that the Reformation was really not worth contending for.

But, in nothing is the skill of this accomplished sophist more apparent than in the artful way in which he piques his readers into a conformity with his own views concerning religion. Human pride, he knew, naturally likes to range itself on the side of ability. He, therefore, skilfully works on this passion, by treating, with a sort of contemptuous superiority, as weak and credulous men, all whom he represents as being under the religious delusion; and by uniformly insinuating that talents and piety belong to opposite parties.

To the shameful practice of confounding fanati-

cism with real religion, he adds the disingenuous habit of accounting for the best actions of the best men, by referring them to some low motive; and affects to confound the designs of the religious and the corrupt so artfully, that no radical difference appears to subsist between them.

It is injurious to a young mind to read the history of the Reformation by any author, how accurate soever he may be in his facts, who does not see a Divine power accompanying this great work; by any author who ascribes to the power, or rather to the perverseness of nature, and the obstinacy of innovation, what was in reality an effect of providential direction; by any who discerns nothing but human resources, or stubborn perseverance, where a Christian distinguishes, though with a considerable alloy of human imperfection, the operation of the Spirit of God.

Hume has a fascinating manner at the close of the life of a hero, a prince, or a statesman, of drawing up his character so elaborately as to attract and fix the whole attention of the reader; and he does it in such a way, that while he engages the mind he unsuspectedly misleads it. He makes a general statement of the vices and virtues, the good and bad actions of the person whom he paints, leaving the reader to form his own conclusions by calling up the balance of the vices and virtues, of the good and bad actions, thus enumerated; while he never once leads the reader to determine on the character by the only sure criterion, the *ruling principle* which seemed to govern it. This is the too prevailing method of historians; they make morals completely independent of religion, by thus weighing qualities, and letting the preponderance of the scale decide on virtue, as it were by grains and scruples: thus furnishing a standard of virtue subversive of that which Christianity establishes. This

method, instead of marking the moral distinctions, blends and confounds them, by establishing character on an accidental difference, often depending on circumstance and occasion, instead of applying to it one eternal rule and motive of action.*

But, there is another evil into which writers far more unexceptionable than Mr. Hume often fall, that of rarely leading the mind to look beyond second causes, and human agents. It is mortifying to refer them to the example of a pagan. Livy thought it no disgrace to proclaim, repeatedly, the insufficiency of man to accomplish great objects without Divine assistance. He was not ashamed to refer events to the direction and control of providence; and when he speaks of notorious criminals, he is not contented with describing them as transgressing against the state, but represents them as also offending against the gods.

Yet, it is proper again to notice the defects of ancient authors in their views of providential interference; a defect arising from their never clearly including a future state in their account. They seem to have conceived themselves as fairly entitled by their good conduct to the Divine favour, which favour they usually limited to present prosperity. Whereas all notions of Divine justice must of necessity be widely erroneous, in which a future retribution is not unambiguously and constantly included.

* If these remarks may be thought too severe by some readers, for that degree of scepticism which appears in Mr. Hume's history, may I not be allowed to observe, that he has shewn his principles so fully, in some of his other works, that we are entitled, on the ground of these works, to read with suspicion every thing he says which borders on religion?—A circumstance apt to be forgotten by many who read only his history.