TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

Literary & Historical Society

OF QUEBEC.

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SESSION OF 1863–4.

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PAPER I.—OPENING ADDRESS.

BY JOHN LANGTON, M.A., PRESIDENT.

WE have arrived at that period of the year when we are to resume our regular meetings, and it becomes my duty to open the session by an address from the chair. Nothing of moment, affecting the interests of the society, has occurred since I last addressed you, and since the report of the Council was presented at the commencement of the year. We have expended the amount received on our insurance in the purchase of works of established reputation in the leading branches of literature and science; and though our library is still very imperfect in some departments, and though we have to regret the loss, by the late fire, of many valuable books, which we may never be able to replace, yet, upon the whole, I think that our collection will be found more generally useful than it was before that calamity. It is certain that the library is much more frequently resorted to by members than was formerly the case, which may, to some extent, be accounted for by the more convenient situation of our apartments; but the greater variety of subjects which are now represented on our shelves, and the more modern character of most of the publications, are, no doubt, the chief reasons. The rapidity with which the book on our table is filling up, in which members enter the volumes they take out, is a convincing proof of the usefulness of the library, and I hope that it will induce us, now that a nucleus is once formed, to employ as much as can be spared annually from our funds, in adding to it, from year to year, the latest authorities upon the several subjects which are embraced within the scope of the plan we have laid down for ourselves. We may thus hope that in time the city of Quebec may possess a public library, in which the best books on the most important branches of literature and science may be accessible.

We have also made some commencement towards reconstructing our museum; but a well-selected museum is necessarily of slow growth, and the state of our funds has cramped our means of progress. The collections which may be accumulated both in a library and in a museum are practically infinite, and where the means and the accommodation are limited, the utility of both is very much diminished, unless they are formed upon a well considered plan, adapted to our capacity. In both it is far better to have a limited number of departments, all adequately represented, than to embrace a larger range of subjects, and to leave them all imperfect. But it is much easier to pursue a consistent system of this kind with a library, than with a museum. It is true that, even in a limited number of departments, or even in one department, the books which may be collected are endless; but books of value —the books of real authority—are, after all, not so very numerous. In a great national library it is doubtless desirable to possess everything that has been written; and if the student can extract from a book comparatively worthless a stray fact or a useful illustration, it has not been stored up in vain. But to the general reader the structure, which has been built up by that student from his scattered materials, is of much more importance than the materials themselves; and even a few dozen well selected works, giving the results of the latest researches upon any subject, would be of themselves a valuable possession. But it is not so with a museum, which is essentially a collection of details. A single book may classify or generalize from a multitude of facts, and may nearly exhaust the subject; but a museum contains the facts themselves, and unless we have them tolerably complete, we might almost as well be without the collection altogether. It is necessary, therefore, to lay down a far more restricted plan for the one than for the other; and the limits we have proposed to ourselves are: that our museum should be almost entirely confined to the Natural History, the Geology, and the Archæology and Ethnology of Canada. Such a collection we may, in time, hope to carry to some respectable degree of completeness; but it will require considerable self-restraint in our Curator and Council not to enlarge their plan, for there are few more seductive pursuits than that of collecting a museum.

The small volume of the Transactions of the last session has been placed in the hands of the members. We can hardly say that it contains any very brilliant papers, or any great amount of original research; but we may hope that our increasing number of members may afford us better materials, during the present session, for our next volume; and that we may, ere long, regain the position we once bade fair to occupy—a position worthy of this the most ancient city in America, and of the patriotic men who were the founders of the society.

I believe that I have now laid before you all that I need say upon the business of the society during the past year, and of its plans and prospects for the future. I propose devoting the remainder of this address to some general observations upon one of the subjects, for the advancement of which our society was especially constituted.

We often refer with pride to the astonishing progress which has been made, during the past half century, in almost all branches of physical investigation, and in those practical applications of them, which have been such a convincing illustration of what so called practical men are apt to ignore—that pure science is the true mother of all useful arts. Geology, chemistry, and electricity in all its numerous modifications, hardly date their recognition as sciences beyond the present century; whilst the marvels of photography, the electric telegraph, and the application of steam to locomotion, both by land and water, have arisen during the lifetime of most of us. Since the invention of printing, and its legitimate consequence, that great upheaval of the human intellect, after centuries of thraldom, which resulted, on the one hand, in the Reformation, and, on the other, in that free spirit of enquiry which placed the physical sciences on their present basis, there never has been an era in the history of man, which has been marked by such vast accessions of knowledge and power. But, whilst we render due homage to those philosophers, whose genius has given us this insight into the constitution of the material world, and this command over its resources, we must not overlook the almost equal progress in those sciences which deal more particularly with man and his place in creation. Political economy, as a systematic science, is not more than seventy or eighty years old; and it is within a still later date that archæology and ethnology have been approached in that philosophical spirit, which has removed them from the regions of wild conjecture, and has entitled them to rank as well established branches of sober investigation. The study of languages, of their affinities, and of the laws which regulate their formation, and their gradual change and corruption, is the growth of the present century; and within the same period we have learned to decipher, with more or less confidence, the hieroglyphics of Egypt, and the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria, which had remained sealed books for two thousand years. All these branches of investigation have had a powerful influence upon the study of history, and have given us an insight into the position of the human race in the earlier periods, when written records are scarce, or fail us altogether. But it is to the progress of history, properly so called, that I wish to direct your attention to-night, and to the revolution which has taken place of late years in the spirit in which this study has been pursued; and in doing so, I wish to point out some of the errors, into which I think that an undue zeal for reform has led us to fall, and the directions in which a succeeding generation will probably think that we have overstepped that philosophical caution, which, on the whole, has undoubtedly characterized the historical investigations of the nineteenth century.

The distinguishing characteristic of the study of history, as now pursued, is the same as that which has marked the progress of the physical sciences. We have learned to form an independent judgment, and to disregard mere authority unless it can be proved to rest upon a solid foundation of ascertained fact; we refuse to accept an incident, or a version of events, because it has been so related by an author of celebrity, without a rigorous examination into the means of accurate information which he possessed, and of the authorities upon which he relied. The only ultimate evidence which is admitted as really valid, is that of a contemporary witness, and not even then, unless it can be shown that he had opportunities of personal observation, or was in a position to have intercourse with those who had; and when, as often happens, such witnesses, competent in other respects, disagree, far greater pains are taken than were formerly thought necessary to sift the matter thoroughly, and to examine the party or national bias which may have influenced each, and all the points that may affect the credit to which they are respectively entitled. Historical evidence, in fact, is treated almost as we would deal with the testimony in a court of justice; excepting that, from the nature of the case, we are obliged to admit of hearsay evidence to a greater extent, provided that the reporter be himself entitled to credit for truth and intelligence, and that his informant had the requisite qualifications.

In the history of more recent times, the change in this respect is not so striking, as when we recede to more remote periods, because the same process had always been followed, though not so systematically as now, and because contemporary reporters are more numerous; but there is a far more strict and conscientious examination of the materials, published and unpublished, from which the true version of the facts must be elicited, and many a universally current story, when traced up to its ultimate authority, has been found to rest upon no solid evidence whatever. The modern historian, indeed, has at his command, for the elucidation of the events of the last two or three centuries, materials which were inaccessible to the writers of the period of which he may be treating. The public archives, and the records of private families have been ransacked, and the most interesting documents have been published; whilst the immense masses of documentary evidence which still remain in manuscript, have been classified, catalogued, and rendered accessible to the historical student. Many entirely new veins of information have been opened, as in the case of the archives of Simancas, and state papers relating to the most interesting periods of history have been now brought to light, the dust upon which had never been disturbed since the day when they were first laid in their repositories. It thus happens, paradoxical as it may appear, when you remember the stress laid upon the importance of contemporary evidence, that a historian of the present day can give a truer account of a distant period, say of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, than could any writer who himself lived at that period. He could only tell us what was currently reported in his day, or at most what the chief actors may have been willing to communicate, or may have wished to have believed;—we, besides possessing his account, are in possession of strictly contemporary materials, which were inaccessible to him;—we have been admitted behind the scenes, and have conferred with the chief actors themselves in their most confidential moments;—we know not only what Cecil, or Walsingham, or their mistress, said of current events, but what they really believed, which is by no means always the same thing; and not only that, but sometimes we know that both what they said and what they believed was untrue, because we have the private instructions of some foreign ambassador to deceive them.

Concurrently with this improvement in the materials from which history is to be constructed, we have had a corresponding change in the outward dress in which it is presented to us, arising, in a great measure, from the altered character of the materials themselves. The great outlines of the events remaining the same, we have accumulated a mass of details, both for explaining and establishing the leading events, and for illustrating the spirit and temper of the times, which, except with this object, would be of no great importance, and would formerly have been considered quite unworthy to find a place in legitimate history. A history of the present day then comes to bear to one of the same epoch, composed a century ago, somewhat the same relation, as does a landscape of the pre-Raphaelite school, which strives to imitate nature by an extreme elaboration of minutiæ, to a grand old picture by Salvator Rosa, which trusts for its effect to bold outlines and large masses of light and shade. The very language has taken a coloring from the substance of which the history is composed. The trivial nature of many of the details and illustrations, which give such a life-like appearance to the whole, has introduced a familiarity of expression, which was formerly only admitted in lighter literature, and forms a striking contrast to the solemn and somewhat ponderous style which was alone thought suitable to the dignity of historical composition. The variety and minuteness of the details call forth the utmost skill of the writer to give the requisite unity to the whole, and all the resources of rhetoric are put in requisition to compound out of the heterogeneous materials a vivid picture of events.

Without entering into the respective merits of the pre-Raphaelite and classical schools, either of painting or writing, I think it will be conceded that our modern historians, as a rule, not only give us a more trustworthy version of the facts, but transport us more completely into the times of which they treat, and make us more thoroughly acquainted with the actors as living men. There are no finer or more life-like specimens of word painting in any literature than some of the eloquent descriptions of Thiers, or

Macaulay, and that magnificent picture—magnificent in spite of its outrageous mannerism—Carlyle's French Revolution. But this *vraisemblance* is not necessarily a proof of perfect accuracy of facts; and the style exposes to temptations, from which the calm historian of earlier date was exempt. Few painters can resist striking contrasts and brilliant colors, even if they are led by them to overstep the modesty of nature; and we may be permitted to doubt whether our writers have not sometimes forgotten the historian in the artist, and sacrificed sober truth to pictorial effect.

But there have been few truths discovered which have not, during the process, brought forth a large amount of error. With poor fallen human nature, the bane and the antidote are inseparable, and you cannot get the good without some share of the evil. Apart altogether from the occasional exaggerations and perversions, which the fascinations of rhetorical style may lead to, the industrious search after new facts has given rise to an abundant crop of very questionable history. So much of the accounts of former times has had to be re-written, as new materials of undoubted authority have been brought to light, and we have had so frequently to alter our estimate of leading characters, as we have gained more insight into their motives of action, that the old landmarks of history have become unsettled, and each new writer thinks that he may parcel it out afresh, like a *terra incognita.* Few men are without some party or other bias, and there is a natural tendency to make a hero or a scoundrel of everybody to whom you specially devote your attention; so that it is not surprising that a few new facts, perhaps, should have formed the original inducement to commence the work, and that an industrious search should then have been instituted for more, with the express object of taking an entirely new view of events. With a really able and conscientious inquirer, even if he has some preconceived bias, the value of his new illustrations will more than compensate for any exaggeration in his results, and a historian like Froude, in spite of his partisanship, cannot but do good service to the cause of truth. But there have arisen a host of inferior writers, whose special object seems to have been to exhibit everything in a different light from what had been generally accepted before; and to such an extent has this been carried, that we should feel no great surprise at finding King John painted as a high-minded personage, much maligned by his barons, or Charles the Second represented as a respectable individual, rather in advance of his age in sobriety and decorum. There would be nothing more strange in such a revised estimate of these characters, than in the recent attempt to rehabilitate the memory of Tiberius. Such little eccentricities inflict no great injury; they are soon forgotten, but in the conflict of opinions truth is elicited, and we may feel confidant that, whilst the errors will perish, the truth will endure.

As we ascend the stream of time, contemporary records become more and more scarce, and the received facts of history, if not less questionable, are at least less questioned, from the absence of materials on which a new theory of events may be founded. A long interval occurs, with respect to which, although much learning and research have been brought to bear upon it, there is no great characteristic which marks a treatment of it peculiar to the present age. But when we ascend higher still, and reach to the extreme verge of contemporary registration, a field of speculation lies beyond, in which it has been the special delight of the great historical authorities of Germany to exercise their critical acumen, and not unfrequently to give the reins to their imagination. Conjecture has been reduced to a science, and historical canons have been laid down, by which we may learn what to believe and what to repudiate, and how to detect the substratum of truth which underlies the mass of falsehood. We have no new materials to guide us. All these had been already collected by the learned industry of the two preceding centuries; but, if fresh witnesses cannot be called into court, the present century has furnished us with a host of interpreters to explain their inarticulate utterances, and it must be acknowledged that it would have been more satisfactory if the interpreters had been better able to agree amongst themselves as to the true meaning which they profess to elicit.

It is not strictly correct to say that we have no new materials, for, besides the partial recovery from palimpsest manuscripts of the works of some ancient authors, as Cicero's Republic, Gaius, and some other fragments, we have the revelations of the hieroglyphics and of the cuneiform inscriptions. Without attempting to pronounce an opinion as to the degree of faith to be attached to the interpretations which are given, I may be permitted to observe, that in both cases we know the language only from its probable resemblance to cognate dialects of later times, and in both we have to discover the character, with a doubt in the case of the hieroglyphics, as to how far it is phonetic writing at all. At first sight it looks almost as hopeless as Pharoah's demand to be told, not only the interpretation of his dream, but the dream itself. I am, however, unwilling to put any bounds to what the ingenuity of men may discover; but I think we may be taught caution in placing undue confidence in the results, from our utter failure to solve an apparently much easier problem. We have numerous inscriptions, some of them of considerable length, in the languages of ancient Italy, and all written in a character with which we are perfectly well acquainted; so that here we have the dream given to us and only require the interpretation. Some are supposed to be in Umbrian and Oscan, and bear a certain analogy to Latin forms; and by the help of a good deal of conjecture, their interpretation has been attended with some success. But the Etruscan inscriptions, though, from the circumstances in which we find them, we know pretty well what they ought to be about, remain absolutely inscrutable. Every known language has been put in requisition; but, with the exception of the proper names, all the researches of modern philology have elicited nothing more, than that the formula RIL AVIL seems to be equivalent to "aged so many years" on a modern tombstone. But they have found interpreters, each as sanguine and confident as the decipherers of the inscriptions of Persepolis or Thebes. Donaldson has read them into Icelandic, Lanzi into a barbarous Greek, and Sir Wm. Betham into classical Irish. But as Sir William construes into the same ancient tongue the Eugubine tables also, which are clearly in a different language, and makes them all relate to the same thing, viz.: the proper course to steer in order to reach Ireland, I should have very little faith indeed in his theory, even if I could suppose it possible that anybody would be at the pains to engrave on tablets of brass such utter nonsense as his version.

I do not wish it to be understood that I look upon the interpretations of Rawlinson or Lepsius as on the same footing with those of Sir Wm. Betham or Lanzi. They belong to an entirely different school of philology, and there appears to be a high degree of probability that we have unlocked the secrets of the cuneiform inscriptions, and to a less extent those of the hieroglyphics; but it is only a probability after all, and much doubt rests upon many important renderings. This should never be lost sight of, when the conclusions drawn from them are made the foundation for corrections of history derived from other sources.

But to return to the modern treatment of ancient history, with which the deciphering of inscriptions has been connected only to a limited extent. No one can more highly appreciate than I do, the untiring research and the varied learning of these reformers of history, and the sagacity with which they have pursued their system of investigation. They have created an entire revolution in our method of dealing with the records of these early times, and in our appreciation of the truth of the accounts which have come down to us, and they have thrown great light upon portions of history which were formerly imperfectly understood. But if they have done much good, it has not been without a counterbalancing alloy of evil. When the mind first emancipates itself from a blind subservience to authority, its efforts to exert its freedom almost always run into exaggeration. The strong conviction, that ancient history rested upon no certain basis of external proof, induced a scepticism, which has probably been carried much too far, and has not sufficiently drawn the line between the uncertain and the untrue; and, on the other hand, the attempt to form a judgment from an independent examination of the internal evidence alone, has led the critics to an over-confidence in their own discernment, and, as may be observed in other forms of scepticism, one idol has been pulled down only to erect another in its place. They have destroyed the foundations of the ancient structure, which, if it was deficient in exact truth, had exercised a real influence in the formation of the characters and opinions of succeeding generations; but their attempts at reconstruction have generally resulted in a fabric as baseless as that which they destroyed.

Until quite recently, an author who undertook to write a history of any ancient period, related the events as they have been transmitted to us, with few indications of his own belief in the greater or less amount of truth with which the several incidents had been handed down, and with no systematic attempt to analyse the evidence, upon which we were called upon to receive them. In the earliest times it would be admitted that we knew but very little, but that little was looked upon, or at least related, as if it were as authentic as our fuller information with respect to later periods. If the earliest accounts differed, some small amount of discrimination became necessary, and greater authority, perhaps, would be attached to one ancient author than to another, both of whom probably lived many centuries after the events which they record. When we came to events of a supernatural or mythical character, a rational explanation of them would be given, a method already largely employed by Thucydides and other ancient authors, and nothing would be discarded which was not grossly inconsistent with historical verisimilitude. This was generally the utmost amount of criticism which was expended upon the subject, and such are the sources from which nine-tenths of the present generation have formed their ideas of ancient history.

The new school pursued a very different course. They closely examined the evidence which has descended to us, with a view of ascertaining how much of it rested upon anything which, even on the most liberal construction, could be regarded as contemporary authority. It was not enough that Livy or Herodotus had so told the story of an occurrence some centuries before their time, but it was necessary to enquire whence they could have learned the facts, and how near to the period in question the certainty, or even the probability, of authentic records could be traced. As judged by this test, a very large portion of the ordinarily received accounts disappeared altogether from the field of authentic history; and however much we might regret to have our faith in the beautiful legends shaken, no one could doubt the advantage of defining what might be looked upon as a true record, and what was based only on uncertain tradition. But as in a court of justice, when ocular testimony cannot be obtained, we admit of circumstantial evidence, or a legitimate inference from previously established facts, so in history mere oral tradition may be accompanied by corroborative proofs, which may entitle it to almost as much credit as is attached to a written contemporary record. Thus two or more independent traditions may concur upon some point common to the two, and may support each other; a state of society within the time of authentic history, may point to a cause in which it must have originated, confirmatory of the traditions; or local customs, monumental remains, and even names of places, and the etymological history of particular words in the language, may afford indications of events, of which we have otherwise no certain proof. Such isolated facts are like the fossils in an ancient stratum, from which a geologist may infer the conditions of life in the remote period when they were deposited. It is evident that researches of this kind involve the necessity for inexhaustible stores of varied learning, and great critical acumen, and that when these are brought to bear under the guidance of an unbiassed judgment, the results obtained may be looked upon with almost as much confidence as we repose in facts externally better authenticated. It is in such investigations as these that the great achievements of the German critics have been obtained; but it is also evident that we are now verging upon delicate ground, and that there is no well defined limit between legitimate inference and unsupported conjecture. A fertile imagination is a necessary qualification for any one who would build up a new science. Unless he be content to tread in the same dull round as his predecessors, he must have the creative faculty in full force; but unless it is tempered and held in check by a sound judgment and an earnest love of truth, he may very easily overstep the limits of sound inductive reasoning. Our critics have been so successful in many of their conclusions, that they have learned to put the most implicit faith in them, and in their methods of interpretation. From the comparison of a number of circumstances, each of which in itself would not constitute a satisfactory proof, they draw an inference possessing a high degree of probability; and then, assuming this as a fact, they deduce from it further inferences which are stated with equal confidence—forgetting that with each succeeding deduction the amount of the original probability is constantly diminishing (1). The result is frequently given to the world without a hint as to the dubious process by which it is arrived at, and the general reader would be apt to take the statements for perfectly authenticated facts, were it not for the entirely opposite conclusions which different authors often draw from the same premises.

The subject is an important one in itself, and it has obtained, at the present moment, a further interest from the discussions, which are engaging the public attention, upon the authenticity and credibility of other records, to which the same canons of criticism have been applied, as were first introduced by the modern German school into the study of ancient secular history. I may therefore, perhaps, be excused if I enter into some detail in illustration of it

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(1) In the opening chapter of the second volume of his history, Niebuhr distinctly asserts the validity of this method of reasoning. "If," says he, "we discover the delusive medium by which objects are distorted before the eyes of the acute historian, and can guess what the simple compiler must have heard of, these enigmas turn into valid evidence, *and so form grounds for other results*," page 13. But the danger of relying upon such a process admits of a very simple arithmetical illustration. If we assume a critic's sagacity to be such that it is ten to one that he will draw a true conclusion from established facts—when he reasons from this conclusion as from a fact, and draws a second inference from it, the chances of the latter being true are only five to one; and if he repeats the operation again, they are reduced to three to one. If the original probability in his favor is less, say two to one, at the second inference the probability is already slightly against him, and the chances are about five to two that a third inference is *false*.

Foremost amongst the critical historians of our time stands Niebuhr, both as being the first to bring the new doctrines prominently into notice, and from the mingled boldness and sagacity of his criticisms. He has indeed been equalled in learning, and surpassed in discretion, by some of his followers; and his authority, which perhaps never ranked so high in Germany as it did in England, has been, in a great measure, superseded by later and more judicious commentators. There has even been a reaction since the freedom of his speculations first arrested the attention of Europe, which may sometimes have run into the opposite extreme; but his method of dealing with the system he taught, may be taken as the type—the exaggerated type, perhaps—of its strength and of its weakness, and the new school of history will always be inseparably connected with the name of Barthold George Niebuhr. Subsequent researches may indeed have been followed out with more caution, and their results may have been enunciated with less dogmatism, but the main principles of the school remain the same, viz.: by a strict examination of the internal evidence, and by the application of certain critical canons and rules of evidence, to pronounce upon the authenticity of the narrative under consideration; to discriminate between that which is genuine, and that which has been interpolated; and to offer the reconstructed fabric as a true exposition of the events of the period. For this reason, and because he is better known amongst us, and has had more influence in forming our own historical literature than any of his successors, I shall principally confine myself, in the following observations, to an examination into Niebuhr's mode of treating ancient history. As Roman history was the principal field of his labors, in order to appreciate them properly, we must understand what are the evidences upon which the early history of Rome is based.

The earliest histories we possess are those of Livy and Dionysius, who wrote in the time of Augustus, about 750 years after the date assigned to the building of the city. We have also extant many fragmentary notices and allusions to the earlier events, few of which are of much older date. It is evident that these in themselves would be quite worthless as authorities for occurrences so long anterior to their own time; and it is to be observed, that there is hardly an event mentioned of which we have not two or more wholly irreconcileable accounts. Such authorities can only be trusted in so far as they repeat what was related by other writers before their time, but who are lost to us. Now they tell us, that the earliest histories, of which they knew anything, were those of Fabius and Cincius, who lived a little more than two centuries before them; and that all such imperfect records as there might have been before that time, perished at the sacking of this city by the Gauls, about 160 years earlier still. Greece had a literature of much older date, but the earliest known references in it to the history of Rome extend to no earlier period. They are preserved to us by Plutarch, viz.: Hellanicus of Pontus, who lived at the time, said that a certain Hellenic city called Rome, somewhere near the Great Sea, had been taken by the Hyperboreans; and Aristotle, some fifty years later, added to the account, that it was recovered by a certain Lucius—Camillus's real name, be it observed, having been Marcus. It is much as if our entire knowledge of English history, from the invasion of Julius Cæsar downwards, were derived from some writers about the conclusion of the wars of the Roses, who told us that the earliest accounts which they had seen were those of two chroniclers in the reign of Edward I., and that they related that all written record of earlier times had been destroyed by William the Conqueror. If we further suppose that we had found an allusion to the conquest in an old Italian author, who said that a certain man named Robert had invaded an island in the North Sea, we shall have a very fair representation of the direct sources of early Roman history. But the events of the earlier years are related to us with the greatest minuteness of detail, and almost all those beautiful legends which are so inseparably connected with Rome, belong to the period anterior to the capture of the city, which must be taken as the starting point of anything like contemporary registration.

Such are the materials which Niebuhr undertook to work upon, to extract from them whatever of truth they might contain, and, to use his own words, "to bring into order the chaos of the early times of Rome (2)." It was not enough with him to shew how insufficient, and how contradictory our evidence was. This had been done before his time by Beaufort and others, and has been carried out with much more minuteness in our own by Sir Cornewall Lewis. He was not content to be a mere architect of ruin. It was his aim to restore, and his boast that he had reconstructed a clear and intelligible history, which we might thoroughly rely upon (3). He certainly lacked no faith in his own conclusions, and I doubt if any writer, who records what he himself had witnessed, uses so freely the words "certainly," "undoubtedly," and "without any question," as does Niebuhr with regard to versions of the story which rest only on his own conjecture. He considers that the extant histories are not themselves authentic, but that they contain the true events which it is his business to discover (4), and in doing this he claims for himself, almost undisguisedly, a kind of power of historical divination, or second sight (5). In his lectures on ancient history, he tells his pupils that a familiarity with the method of laying open what is hidden, soon leads to this confidence; and in laying down some of his axioms of historical criticism, he admits that the use of them cannot be taught, as they require a peculiar tact (6). There is no doubt that the habit of such researches, and certain mental characteristics, will give an aptitude to some men, which others can never master; and that they

> "Through old experience, may attain
> To something of prophetic strain."

But if the process cannot be taught or explained, its results, in order to inspire much confidence, must be capable of subsequent verification, which unfortunately, in historical enquiries, is not the case; and in the absence of such proof, we may be excused if we do not place implicit trust in a heaven-born faculty, like that imparted by Minerva to Diomede, of distinguishing gods from men.

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(2) Hist. III., p. 159.
(3) Hist. II., pref. vi., and p. 1.
(4) Lect. Anc. Hist. I., p. 233 (lect. xxi); Hist. II., p. 12.
(5) Hist. I., p. 152, II., p. 14; III., p. 318, 321.
(6) Lect. Anc. Hist. I., p. 228 (lect. xx.); p. 234 (lect. xxi.).

It is quite probable that many events were preserved by traditions of the leading families; and it is possible that some of them may have been reduced to writing in the early times, though there is nothing in any ancient writer to countenance it. We know also that it was the custom to deliver funeral orations over the deceased, reciting their great actions, and some of these *may* have been written out, though the earliest of which there is any mention do not date prior to the second Punic war. But Niebuhr assumes the existence of both of these, as sources of the current history. He has no hesitation in pointing out what parts of each story were derived from them, even with regard to events long before the sacking of Rome by the Gauls, and he discriminates between the trustworthiness of those of different families. He considers the family traditions of the Servilii "worthy of full faith;" and those of the Fabii as "containing matter of undeniable authenticity;" but he thinks those of the Valerii deserving of less credit, and those of the Furii to be shameful falsifications (7).

So also we know that there were certain official registrations, some of which may have been preserved in the Temples of the Capitol from before the time of the burning of the city. As far as we can judge of their contents from the accounts we have received, they seem to have consisted of the most meagre lists of magistrates, and formal records of prodigies, and other matters connected with their religious observances. They do not seem to have borne any resemblance to detailed history, though, as far as they were preserved, they would form a most valuable foundation for the determination of dates. Yet upon no further evidence Niebuhr has assumed the existence of regular annals, and in spite of the direct assertion of Dionysius, that Fabius and Cincius were the first historical writers, and of the almost as precise testimony of Cicero and Livy, he maintains that "a variety of popular books must have grown up," "must have spread very widely," and must have become "great favorites" at an earlier date (8). Having thus inferred the existence of these annals by his own peculiar method of reasoning, he constantly refers to them with as much confidence, as if they lay open before him, as authority for certain events, while other circumstances are attributed to poems and funeral orations (9). He even distinguishes between faithful and less trustworthy annalists, and in some instances he quotes the very words which he supposes the hypothetical annalist to have used, and maintains that subsequent historians have misunderstood the meaning of the passage (10).

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(7) Hist. II., p. 3-5.

So it is also with what he supposes to have been the other great source of Roman history, the poems. We have the authority of Cato, the elder, for the fact, that it was the custom at banquets to sing poems on the great feats of celebrated men; but no poem on a historical subject appears to have been known to the ancients, anterior to that of Nævius, about the time of the second Punic war, and we have the express testimony of Cicero that none of the poems alluded to by Cato were extant. This is the whole foundation upon which Niebuhr has built his superstructure of an immense mass of legendary poetry, a fact not in itself improbable, but unsupported by any ancient authority. Having thus created the poems, Niebuhr furnishes a detailed scheme of their subjects. The reigns of Romulus and Tullus Hostilius were each the subject of a continuous epic, while of the reign of Numa there were only detached lays. Then we have the lay of the Tarquins, the lay of Coriolanus, &c., &c. With two such sources of history as the poems and the annals at his command, Niebuhr has no difficulty in accounting for all inconsistencies, and in pointing out what event was interpolated from the poems, and what had been narrated in the genuine annals (11). Nay, in his account of the battle at the lake Regillus, which closes the lay of the Tarquins, he undertakes to restore the true form of the lay itself, which had been distorted by the historians who borrowed from it. In his history he maintains that in the lay, Tarquinius himself must have been killed, though the historians represent him as escaping with a wound, and that "most unquestionably" Spurius Larcius must have fallen there also in the poem, though he is not mentioned. In his lectures in later life, he repeats the conjecture in these words, which form a good example of his way of speaking with absolute certainty of things entirely unknown: "The legend undoubtedly related that Tarquinius and his sons were likewise slain, and the statement that the king was only wounded arose from the record in the annals that he died at Cuma. The introduction of the dictator Postumius was certainly a pure interpolation, and the poem undoubtedly mentioned Sp. Lartius, who could not be wanting there any more than M. Valerius. * * * * This battle forms the close of the lay of the Tarquins, as the lay of the Nibelungen ends with the death of all the heroes. I am as strongly convinced of this now, as I was eighteen years ago" (12).

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(8) Hist. II., p. 7.

(9) Hist. II., p. 41, 104, 198, 249, 255, 263, 264; III., p. 117, &c.

(10) Livy altered the formula, Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 42 (lect. iv.); Livy misunderstood *classis, ibid.*, p. 88 (lect. viii.); Cicero *minor natu, ibid.*, p. 108 (lect. x.); Livy *minores*, Hist. I., p. 328, and II., p. 114; Livy *populus*, Hist. I., p. 530; Livy quotes without understanding, Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 121 (lect. xiii.); Livy and Dionysius did not comprehend the expressions they preserved, *ibid.*, p. 83 (lect. vii.); Festus did not understand the author he abridged, *ibid.*, p. 45 (lect. iv.); persons have handed down statements without understanding them, Hist. II., p. 13.

But it was not always that Niebuhr could look back with undiminished confidence to his earlier conjectures. In the first edition of his history he repudiated the idea of an Alban colony, and contrary to antiquity, maintained the Etruscan origin of Rome. Before his second edition, however, he saw reason to change his opinion, and he then expresses a pretty strong conviction that Tarquin himself, whom all authorities make an Etruscan, was really a Latin. But in the passage in which he makes his recantation, there is more diffidence exhibited than can usually be found in his writings, and he admits, that in attacking error, men naturally run into exaggeration. He even pronounces the judgment, "If any pretend that he is able to decide in questions of such obscurity, let none listen to him" (13). But as time advances, his confidence is restored, and in his lectures he asserts that it is "historically certain" that Tarquinius was a Latin, and he thus corrects the errors of antiquity (14). "The Romans described Servius Tullius, who was an Etruscan, as a Latin of Corniculum, and made Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, who was a Latin, an Etruscan." But a couple of years later, in another part of his lectures (15), he gives very good reasons for considering Servius to have been a Latin after all, as the Romans had always made him. The whole subject reads rather confusedly in Schmitz's edition, where the lectures, as given in different years, are amalgamated together; but this appears to be the course of Niebuhr's change of opinion,—and the reason for the change is sufficiently characteristic. The grounds for making Servius an Etruscan were a fragment of a speech of the Emperor Claudius, preserved in an inscription at Lyons, in which he says that the Etruscan records made him a man of that nation, whose original name was Mastarna; and Niebuhr maintains that "the most credulous adherents to what commonly passes for a history of the early ages of Rome, could not decline the challenge to abide by the decision of Etruscan histories" (16). But, in the meantime, a few fragments of two Etruscan historians were discovered in some palimpsest scholia on Virgil, which, in Niebuhr's opinion, "immensely reduce the estimate of the value of Etruscan books for the early times." (17) "It appears," says he, "that just as the Romans misunderstood the ancient Latin history, and substituted the

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(11) Hist. II., p. 475, 484, &c.; Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 112 (lect. xi.); p. 115 (lect. xii.); p. 245 (lect. xxix.), &c.

(12) Hist. I., p. 558; Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 124 (lect. xiii.). So also he speaks of restoring the original Lay of Camillus, Hist. II., p. 475, and he says that the Lay of Cincinnatus may be restored "with indubitable certainty," Hist. II., p. 264.

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(13) Hist. I., p. 387.

(14) Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 52 (lect. v.).

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 99 (lect. ix.).

(16) Hist. I., p. 381.

(17) Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 100 (lect. ix.).

Tyrrhenian in its place, so the Etruscans adopted the traditions of the Tyrrhenians, whom they subdued, and represented Tarchon as the founder of their empire from Tarquinii." In other words, their account directly contradicts Niebuhr's unsupported theory, that the Tyrrhenians and Etruscans were not one and the same nation, as all antiquity had made them.

In contrast to this final conclusion of Niebuhr, which recognizes no Etruscan element in Rome at all, it may be interesting to see what the view of another great authority is, with regard to the reigns of the three last kings. Müller does not, indeed, admit any of them to be real personages, but he supposes them to represent the ascendency of certain Etruscan cities. Thus the two Tarquins shadow forth the pre-eminent influence of Tarquinii, and the intermediate reign of Servius, that of the rival city of Volsinii, secured by the invasion of Mastarna; while the expulsion of the Tarquins is supposed to be effected by Porsena, who established the ascendency of Clusium. These accounts evidently differ from each other even more than they both depart from anything which the Romans themselves believed of their early history.

Niebuhr's treatment of the story of Coriolanus is a very good specimen of his method. He does not deny the existence of Coriolanus, or that he was banished in consequence of his attempt to abolish the Tribunate. He does not deny that the Senate had corn (respecting which the quarrel originated), but he disputes its having come from Sicily. He believes that he took refuge with the Volscians, but that he went to Attius Tullus of Antium, the particular Volscian leader mentioned in history, he considers apocryphal; and that he was commander of a Volscian army he looks upon as pure fabrication. He places the whole story at a much later date, but what is evidently his favorite emendation is his discovery of the true meaning of the female embassy, which induced Coriolanus to remove his army. He supposes him to have been at the head of a band of Roman exiles, of whom no mention is made in the history as it has come down to us, and to have been supported by a Volscian army. "The Republic," he says, "invited him to return, and the entreaties of his mother and wife can have had no other meaning than that he should return alone, and not bring with him that terrible band" (18). In another place he says, "These, his companions in misfortune, Coriolanus demanded should be recalled as well as himself: this is as indubitably certain as if every historian attested it" (19). The whole story, as related to us, is certainly full of many inconsistencies and improbabilities, and it has doubtless been a good deal embellished by tradition; but if we are called upon altogether to deny the authenticity of the account we have, and to reconstruct it from pure imagination, I confess that I prefer the poetical falsifications to the critical ones.

The most important researches of Niebuhr are those connected with the constitutional history of the early republic. The character of the constitutional changes which may have occurred, rests upon a somewhat different foundation, as to evidence, from most historical events. The latter are generally isolated facts, and if they have been misrepresented, we have no means of recovering the true account. But a change in the institutions of a country leaves its traces through many succeeding generations; and in a nation which laid so much stress upon constitutional precedents as did the Romans, tradition would probably not depart very far from the truth, as long as the institution itself retained its existence. The accounts, however, as handed down to us, are often not very intelligible, and Niebuhr has done better service in this department of his researches, than in any other. Yet even here his habitual self-confidence leads him to maintain with certainty theories which, however plausible they may be, and however generally they may have been adopted from him, rest, really, only upon conjecture. The most noticeable of these is the meaning he assigns to the word *populus*, as implying the patrician order only, a meaning in which it was never understood by any writer, ancient or modern, until he discovered it. As many of our authorities, including Fabius, the earliest known even to Livy, wrote in Greek, Niebuhr suggests that the lack of a precisely equivalent term led to its being translated δῆμος, and to its being thought to include the whole people; and he maintains that in the later ages of the republic, the old constitutional forms had become obsolete, and the true meaning of the terms forgotten. It certainly would be strange if the Romans of Cicero's day had entirely misapprehended the meaning of the word *populus*, involving as it does the political significance of the *comitia curiata*, and the whole constitutional system of the early days of the republic, and that it should have been reserved for a German of the nineteenth century to discover it, and that too from their own words, which they had failed to understand themselves. The interpretation of the hieroglyphics even would seem a less wonderful achievement. Yet this is what Niebuhr confidently asserts that he has done. He admits that Livy or Cicero did not understand the word as he does, when they used it; but that in speaking of the early history, before the *curiæ* had degenerated into a mere ceremonial form, they copied the words of some old annalist who did understand what he meant, and that from these quotations he, Niebuhr, is able to deduce the correct view of these hypothetical annalists. (20) This proposition is distinctly stated, over and over again, in many passages of his history, and his lectures; but it evidently rests upon three perfectly gratuitous assumptions: 1st, that the authors who have come down to us quoted the exact words of the older authors, which they nowhere profess to do; 2nd, that they misunderstood the words they quoted, although, besides other sources of information which we do not possess, they had the context of the passages to guide them, which we have not; and 3rd, that there were any old authors to quote, who did not themselves live three or four centuries after the times of which they are speaking.

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(18) Lect. R., Hist. I., p. 190 (lect. xxiii.).

(19) Hist. II., p. 240.

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(20) Hist. I., p. 412; 427, note; 608 note—in which latter passage he says he re-translates Dionysius into what he had read in the authentic notices. See also instances referred to in note 10.

I must apologize for the length to which these remarks have extended, but it was impossible to give any just idea of the characteristics of the modern German school of criticism, without exhibiting them in a few instances, and these could not be made intelligible to a general audience, without entering into some detail. Neither should I have felt myself justified in expressing a doubt as to the trustworthiness of the history as reconstructed by so great a man as Niebuhr, without giving a full explanation of what I look upon as the weak points of his method, with a reference to particular instances in illustration of them.

You may very fairly ask—if the received history of these early times is shewn to rest on no authentic evidence, and if the revised accounts, which have attained currency of late years, are based upon still less—what are we to believe? We appear like the poor dove after the deluge, which wandered over the world of waters without finding a solitary point where a firm footing could be obtained, and returned from its search with the intelligence that all was void.—I do not think that our position is quite so hopeless; and I have a good deal of faith in the general truth of early history, and more especially of early Roman history.

Admitting to the fullest extent our deficiency in contemporary records, and entertaining great doubts as to the existence of those other written sources of history, upon which Niebuhr has founded many of his arguments, I think that the power of oral tradition to transmit a substantially correct statement of facts, is very much underrated. We are apt to look upon the subject from a modern point of view, when all important events and all opinions of men of intelligence are committed to writing, and oral tradition is left altogether in the hands of the illiterate. When writing was little practiced, and writing materials were scarce and difficult to use, much more reliance must have been placed on the memory, and the recording in it the great deeds of men, and the events in which they took a part, must probably have become a sort of profession, as with the λογιοι of Greece, and in other nations. We can hardly understand the extent and accuracy to which the exercise of a trained memory can be carried. An instance of this is afforded to us, at the present day, in India. The existing manuscripts of the Vedas are all of very modern date, but the books themselves are universally allowed to be of great antiquity, some of them reaching probably to one thousand years before the birth of Christ. Of this high antiquity there are many independent proofs; but the whole of this literature has been carried down by oral tradition, if not alone, yet concurrently with written records of it. At the present day, we are told that what we may call candidates for orders commit the whole of the Rig Veda to memory, not from manuscripts, but from the oral teaching of a Guru, and that in this training they spend all their youth, from the eighth to the thirtieth year; and a Chinese traveller, whose work is referred to the seventh century, gives exactly the same account of what they did in his time. The result is said to be, that if you take down in writing a hymn of the Rig Veda from the mouths of two Brahmins in distant parts of India, neither of whom ever saw a manuscript, you will not find a word of difference in the two versions.

But at Rome, for the first three or four centuries, all the great offices of state seem to have been held, with very few exceptions, by a very limited number of leading families, and it is natural to suppose that this would facilitate the transmission of such traditions, at least, as principally affected their respective ancestors. And if family vanity did, as is not at all improbable, unduly magnify the achievements of some Valerius, or Furius or Fabius, the concurrent traditions of the rival houses would keep them in check, as far as related to the main events which concerned the Republic at large. We have here a very probable explanation of the numerous discrepancies of the details which have come down to us, with a great general correspondence as to all important events. Moreover, there was from very early times, how early is it impossible to say, a system of official registration, very meagre no doubt, and very imperfect, as the discrepancies in the lists of consuls as related to us show, but still it was a written record; and there were besides, monuments, inscriptions, treaties, and other written documents of great antiquity known to the ancients, some of which have even descended to our own time. Now, several independent concurrent traditions, with a thread, however meagre, of recorded fact, appear to me to form no contemptible foundation for a substantially genuine history.

Then we have the constitutional forms, the state of society, and the political position of Rome in Italy at the time when undoubtedly authentic history commences, which is fixed by Sir Cornewall Lewis at the time of the war with Pyrrhus; and almost all the leading events of the earlier times point to, and something not very dissimilar must necessarily have been the precursor of, the state of affairs we find actually existing. This does not indeed vouch for the details, but it does afford a proof of the substantial truth of the traditional account of the leading events, unless we carry our scepticism so far as to suppose them to be arbitrarily forged to account for the acknowledged facts.

In this respect the Roman traditions present a marked contrast to many of the early Greek myths, which have no bearing on the better ascertained portions of the history; and still more so to those legends which have obtained currency in later times, and which have sometimes been produced as illustrations of pure falsehoods, becoming recognised in their day as worthy of universal belief. Brut the Trojan and his mythical successors, although a man like Milton did not think it safe altogether to reject them, connect themselves in no way with any acknowledged fact in English history, or with any possible ethnological theory. There may have been a Welsh prince called Arthur, and an Irish king named Dathy, but what is related of them is inconsistent, not only with the authentic history of other nations, but with the state of society in their own country when we first obtain true indications of it. So also, although Turpin's romance was admitted to be a genuine history in the middle ages, and is even said to have been declared to be such by Pope Calixtus II., yet the feats of Charlemagne and his Paladins could be shewn to be inconsistent with the state of Europe in the following century, even though we had not the true account of his reign by his own secretary. But it is very different with the early traditions of Rome. Almost every story is so inseparably interwoven with its constitutional history, and its gradual preëminence amongst the nations of Italy, that if we are to suppose them arbitrary inventions, it would imply an artistic skill in the fabricator, which no forger of any other age or nation has been able to approach to.

If, in the absence of external attestation, we look to the internal evidence of the history itself, we are treading upon dangerous ground. If I were to point out any conclusion to which that internal evidence seems most clearly to lead, it would be to the presumption of the composite origin of the received history—a union of several independent oral traditions, with a core of authenticated facts. We have the greatest precision upon dry and utterly unimportant details, which may be taken from an authentic register, with the poetical amplifications, and the vagueness and incoherence of the events characteristic of traditional legends, and the constantly recurring discrepancies in the details which point to several independent traditions. We hear of a fall of meteoric stones, of a severe winter when the Tiber was frozen over, and of a wolf which was killed in the Forum; but we have the most misty information as to the varying political relations which Rome had with the neighboring Latin cities. We know almost to a certainty the day of the month on which the city was captured by the Gauls, but whether they were bought off by a ransom, or retired of their own accord with their plunder, or were utterly routed and destroyed by Camillus, he would be a bold man who would determine.

In dealing with internal evidence, the critics appear to me to have often thrown an undue amount of doubt upon the credibility of the history. The numerous and irreconcileable discrepancies in the narrations certainly shew that several different versions prevailed, and we can only, by conjecture, affirm one to have greater probability, or greater coherence than the other; but the existence of these very discrepancies, upon some points, is an argument in favor of the correctness of those, upon which all agree. Sir Cornewall Lewis, who carries his scepticism to the highest degree, seems to doubt the whole of a story because the details were differently related; whilst Niebuhr will seize upon a fact from one version as indubitably historical, and from it build up a result differing from everything that has been handed down to us. But modern history is not without irreconcilable versions of the same event. If we can suppose any portion of history, say the wars of Napoleon, to be as destitute of direct evidence as the history of Rome, and that our only knowledge of them was derived from three historians, Thiers, Alison, and Sir Walter Scott, and if we were to judge each event by a rigorous comparison of the three accounts, I doubt whether it would stand the test much better than many parts of Roman history. A critic of one turn of mind might pronounce the whole a fiction, and another might construct out of it a scheme of events entirely inconsistent with any of them.

Niebuhr is particularly severe upon the military achievements of the Romans, and accuses them of magnifying, or entirely fabricating victories, and of concealing defeats, or, if they have to be acknowledged, of always following them up by a compensating victory. Now, although there is a tendency in this direction with all nations in relating their wars, and the Romans, no doubt, were not entirely exempt from it, yet their historians very candidly acknowledge the disaster of Cremera, the defeat at the Allia, the surrender of Caudium, and other minor reverses; and it must be admitted that, as Rome was almost constantly at war, and had risen from a petty state to be the greatest military power in Italy, when we first see her by the light of contemporary history, she must have gained victories, and must have recovered from defeats.

There is one peculiar kind of internal evidence which is very abundant in Roman history, and which I have before alluded to, and compared to the fossils in a geological stratum,—such are monuments, or temples, said to be erected to commemorate certain events, particular customs and ceremonies maintained till later times, and the names of places in Rome, which are said to have had a similar origin. These relics of a former age are exceedingly numerous, and meet us at every step in the histories. Now, at first sight, they appear to be valuable evidence as to the events commemorated, but it is also possible that the legend was invented to account for the names, instances of which are to be found in modern times, and we often have two or three different stories of the origin. But Sir Cornewall Lewis almost invariably adopts the interpretation subversive of the history. (21) The very fact that there was a monument, or custom, or a name, said to have had its origin in a certain event, is sufficient with him to stamp the event as a fabrication, a legend devised to account for the existence of the monument or the custom. Almost the only instance which I remember, of a contrary conclusion, is the fact, that when the public contracts were given out, the first contract was always for the food of the sacred geese of Juno, which seems to be admitted as a corroboration of the story of the geese saving the capitol. This appears to me to be a very unphilosophical proceeding, and that in most cases the presumption lies the other way. The name or the custom must have had an origin, and unless some good reason to the contrary can be assigned, the generally accepted origin is the most probable; and the currency of the supposed derivation is at any rate a proof that the event itself was the subject of general belief. In the hands of Niebuhr, such facts, as might be expected, become a a two-edged sword,—they are a proof of the event, or an ætiological legend worthy of no credit, just as the course of his argument may require.

The poetical character, and the greater or less probability of an event, are in themselves no sufficient criteria as to its reality; but these features are very strongly insisted upon in deciding what we may accept as genuine in the narratives under consideration. The rapid extension of Mahomedanism, the romantic incidents of the Crusades, and the championship of Joan of Arc, are in themselves highly improbable, but they are, nevertheless, undoubted facts. The suddenness with which the French Directory, and the restored monarchy of the Bourbons melted away on the appearance of a single man, not flushed with victory, but reappearing after disasters, is, to the full, as astonishing as that the character of the war with the Volscians should be entirely changed by the transference of Coriolanus from the one side to the other. There is nothing in the whole series of the Roman wars, as related to us, which is so marvellous as the suppression of the Indian mutiny.—One can imagine how a critic could point out the exceeding improbability of a mere handful of men, scattered over a vast empire, recovering their ascendency amidst a hostile population, and against overwhelming numbers as well armed and disciplined as themselves, and reducing the stronghold of the rebellion before any reinforcements could reach them from without; and how utterly impossible it would appear that this should mainly be effected through the loyalty of the Sikhs, who, a few years before, were our most determined enemies, and who had only just been pacified after a dangerous revolt. We find even minor incidents which are held to stamp a fabulous character upon the ancient narratives, curiously reproduced in modern days. The throwing of loaves of bread into the enemy's camp from the besieged capitol, has its parallel in the siege of Haarlem, where the same thing was done,—not with a view of deceiving the enemy into a belief that plenty reigned within, but in the bitter mockery of despair at the exhaustion of all their resources. So also the feat of Horatius Cocles, whom Niebuhr regards as only a symbolical representatives of one of the tribes in a poem, is almost exactly repeated in the same Dutch wars. John Haring, of Horn, alone held a narrow part of the dyke, between the Diemer Lake and the Y, against the whole Spanish force, until his compatriots had effected their retreat over the gap, and then, like Cocles, he plunged into the water and escaped uninjured. Even the supernatural appearance of the Dioscuroi at the battle of Lake Regillus does not prove that battle to be, as Niebuhr maintains, a poetical invention, for something similar has been reported of several battles in purely historic times. Even as late as the sixteenth century, St. James, of Compostella, mounted on a white horse, appeared at the head of the Spanish forces at the battle of

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(21) Lewis. Cred. Rom. Hist., II., p. 10, 20, 34, 37, &c.

Otumba, and led them on to victory. I say that he appeared, because we have the undoubted authority for it of Bernal Diaz, who was in the battle himself. It is true that Diaz says that it did not appear to him to be St. James, but rather one Francisco da Morla, with whom he was well acquainted; but then he adds, that it probably was St. James himself after all, only that he, miserable sinner that he was, was not thought worthy to recognize the saintly presence. We may probably put more faith in Diaz's first impression than in his subsequent conviction, but it would never enter into our thoughts to doubt the reality of the battle, on account of the reported supernatural incident.

For these and similar reasons, I am inclined to the belief that the general credibility of early Roman history has been considerably underrated; but with the utmost latitude of evidence which can be permitted, it must still be acknowledged that there is very little of it indeed, upon which we can look with any certain confidence in the accuracy of the details. If we merely preserved that which we could shew to rest upon a satisfactory basis of proof, we should have nothing left but a nerveless and lifeless skeleton of no practical utility, and of no æsthetic value. Even with regard to the capture of Rome by the Gauls, the first event for which we have any contemporary evidence at all, all of proved fact that Sir Cornewall Lewis has been able to extract may be briefly summed up thus,--That on the 16th of July, in some year between the three hundred and eighty-seventh and three hundred and ninetieth before Christ, a battle was fought and lost about ten miles from Rome on the Allia, a stream which no subsequent topographer has been able to identify; that the city was captured and the capitol besieged; that the geese did give the alarm on the occasion of a midnight assault; and that the Vestal virgins, whilst making their escape over the Sublician bridge, were picked up in the wagon of a man named Albinius (22).

If, on the other hand, we follow the German critics, and endeavor to re-construct a perfect history, we involve ourselves in an ocean of doubt and uncertainty. With such a maxim as that laid down by Niebuhr, "that the inversion of a story into its opposite is a characteristic of legendary history;" (23) so that a statement directly militating against a hypothesis, may become a testimony in its favor; with ætiological legends which may be made at will to prove or disprove an event, and with an etymological alchemy which can recognise in "*Danai*" only another form of "*Latini*" (24), it is evident that anything can be destroyed, or anything established. Whatever be the learning expended in the investigation, the whole system resolves itself into conjecture; and as no two men will take the same view, we have as many histories as we have historians. There is no firm point upon which you can take your stand; all around you is shifting, unstable, and uncertain—like a feverish dream in which everything, as you try to grasp it, suddenly becomes something else—or like the mirage of the desert, which, from every different point of view, assumes an altered aspect.

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(22) Lewis. Cred. Rom. Hist., II., p. 355.

We can neither accept nor reject everything in these early tales: but whether it be attempted to decide *ex cathedra* what is true and what is untrue, or whether it be sought to reconstruct from the *disjecta membra* a new version of events, I would fall back upon Niebuhr's *dictum* in one of his soberer moments, and acknowledge it as the only safe principle which can govern us: "If any pretend that he is able to decide in questions of such obscurity, let none listen to him." We must take the legends as they stand, with all their faults and with all their beauties. We may call attention to their inconsistencies, but we cannot reconcile them; we may point out their improbabilities, but we cannot separate the true from the false. But amidst all this doubt one thing is certain—that, whether true or untrue, they were believed in by great nations of antiquity, and they thus form an integral portion of the better authenticated history of the race. We can no more arrive at a true conception of a Greek or Roman of historic times, without the knowledge of their earlier legends, than we can imagine an ear of wheat without the grain from which it sprung. If all the heroes and all their exploits were fictitious, the very formation of the fiction had its origin in a state of society, in a tone of thought, and in a moral and intellectual condition, of which it is itself the best exponent. The legends may not contain a veritable history of events, but they are an important contribution to a true history of the human mind. They are even more, for the firm belief in them reacted upon the national character, and through the Greeks and Romans this influence has extended down to us, and will leave its impress upon the literature, the thoughts and the actions of the latest posterity.

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(23) Hist. I., p. 40.

(24) Lect. Ant. Hist. I., p. 249 (lect. xxii.).

I cannot close these remarks more appropriately than in the words of Grote, the safest and most philosophical of our historians. They apply more particularly to the mythological periods of Grecian history, but they embody the only useful method of treating the first dawn of the history of any nation. "I describe the earlier times by themselves, as conceived by the faith and feeling of the first Greeks, and known only through their legends, without presuming to measure how much or how little of historical matter these legends contain. If the reader blame me for not assisting him to determine this,—if he asks me why I do not withdraw the curtain and disclose the picture,—I reply in the words of the painter Zeuxis, when the same question was addressed to him on exhibiting his masterpiece of imitative art: 'The curtain *is* the picture.' What we now read as poetry and legend was once accredited history, and the only genuine history which the first Greeks could conceive or relish in their past time: the curtain conceals nothing behind, and cannot by any ingenuity be withdrawn.—I undertake only to show it as it stands,—not to efface, still less to repaint it." (25).

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(25) Pref. p. vii.