

THOMAS HENRY BUCKLE.

THE celebrity of the author of the 'History of Civilisation' is one of the most curious things in contemporary literature. It rests, no doubt, on some true instincts of appreciation, but in other respects it is very unintelligible. He was not in any sense a memorable man. He talked brilliantly, we are told. He wrote, after much study and pains, clear, irreproachable, satisfactory English, not specially picturesque or brilliant so that his writings should be quoted as examples of literary eloquence, but yet good, limpid, and clear. He loved with much quiet domestic devotion one woman, his mother; he was fond of children; he possessed a library of 22,000 books, and had read them all. These were his qualities; and his achievements in this world were comprised in one book, the 'History of Civilisation,' which attracted a great deal of immediate attention, and has survived to this day, and gone through six or seven editions in England besides a great deal of translation and republication abroad. All this is extremely satisfactory to hear of. But it does not justify the innumerable sketches of which Mr. Buckle has been the hero. However ingenious and startling his theories and generalisations, and however clear and occasionally eloquent his style, he was not possessed of striking genius, nor originality of any marked kind. His mind was of the type of the counting-house, though it happened that his life was detached from that natural and hereditary sphere, and diverted into another channel; and he was a somewhat narrow and prim celibate, bearing the evidences of that dry condition in every line of lines as distinctly as the primmest middle-aged lady ever laughed at as an old maid. One thing, however, told powerfully in his favour. He had the luck to be appropriated by the most vigorous sect of the present day—that eager and ardent army which aims at the destruction of religious faith, and has in the meantime secured possession of so many of the heights of society from whence to pour down, not only legitimate lead in the shape of bullets, but buckets of molten metal, hot water, and such like less dignified means of warfare upon us. It is not long since we had to consider the loud and somewhat clamorous claims of Professor Clifford, whose sad but not unexampled fate in dying at thirty, and dying without any hope of a life to come, has been curiously enough made the grand plea in his case for honours seldom awarded to those whose promise, however brilliant, has had but little crown of fulfilment. Clifford was young, and he was unfortunate; he was the very 'Rupert of debate'; a dashing and daring young

soldier, sticking at nothing, and with all the certainty of youth in his conclusions, philosophical or otherwise; and he was the pet of society, furnishing to a great many highly refined people a spectacle more thrilling than any that is now put upon the stage. But the apotheosis of Buckle is more wonderful still, for he had none of these attractions. He was not even thorough in his unbelief, but clung without reason to an emotional faith, the immortal soul and another life, and even to the idea of a God, omniscient if not omnipotent. But whatever the reason of it may be, we cannot but look upon this new attempt to raise the neat prim mercantile figure of the Historian of Civilisation to the pedestal of a hero with a suspicion which we are half afraid to express. Here are, we humbly imagine, the very conditions under which the philosopher himself would have seen the formation of the myth and legends of the old world. To our own vision unassisted nothing can be more clear than the matter-of-fact outlines of Buckle against an ordinary grey English sky, but so much has been said of him, and the air is full of so many confused voices attributing to him the qualities of an intellectual demigod, that, being a modest individual, we begin to distrust our own perceptions. Probably in a few years more, if Mr. Huth's book should come to two or three editions, and be supplemented by some translation and much reviewing, the sober figure will rise to a visionary assumption, with the bewildered mind able to stand up against such a body of authority no more.

While, however, we have some sort of hold upon fact and daylight, we may survey the actual aspect of the philosopher before we lose the use of our faculties in the contagion of a growing creed. Mr. Huth does well for us, but badly for his own ecstatic view, in prefixing to his volumes the two engravings which represent Buckle in youth and maturity, with his smug bourgeois countenance, which is more like the shop even than the counting-house. Photography is a very unfavourable medium, and handsome is as handsome does in all circumstances; but the portrait is curiously unrefined and ignoble beyond the ordinary licence of nature in that way, and could not be hung in any shrine without a great and painful sense of inappropriateness, which the worshippers, we feel sure, would have hard ado to suppress. And the man himself, though good and true, was not much more heroic than his picture. He was self-educated, which is no doubt to his credit, yet not so much to his credit as if he had been a poor man, and there had been an evident necessity for it. Throughout his life he never had that prick of necessity which sharpens so many wits, but which, according to Mr. Buckle, is incompatible with real research and philosophical production. He speaks with a little contempt of the writers who have not his comfortable competency to fall back upon, and of their thriftless habits and defective economical organisation, in a

way which, however permissible in an ordinary lay critic, is ungenerous and almost unpardonable in a man who had the *feu sacré* and fifteen hundred a year to keep it up upon. Even with that income he had occasion to practise the greatest economy, his biographer assures us, though he was a spare celibate, without chick or child, or—so far as appears—even the sting of a poor relation to remind him of an ordinary man's liabilities. What then should we do, who have not perhaps fifteen hundred pennies to procure fuel for that sacred flame? Extinguish it, probably Mr. Buckle would have said, instead of using it to keep the domestic fire alight and cook our humble victuals. But we fear that the world would suffer a good deal in instruction, and a great deal more in amusement, if only those writers exercised their gifts who could prove themselves able to command beforehand, and keep out of debt upon, an income of fifteen hundred a year. His education was not so good as his circumstances. The young philosopher at eighteen knew nothing but those 'three R's' which we have been so long accustomed to hear of as the sum of rustic acquirement. But he took to letters, like the poor Scotch scholar,

when his ain deevil bade,
And wi' learning the laddie had maistly gane mad.

How it was that this impulse came we are nowhere informed. His father placed him at seventeen in his own office, but his death shortly after released the boy, who knew no language but his own, and as little literature, so far as we can make out, as it was possible for a lad of his years to know. He then went abroad with his mother and sister, learned (apparently) all the modern languages on his travels, and, returning, leapt at once, without preface or interval, into his great work. 'I am determined,' he says, 'from this day to devote all the energies I may have solely to the study of the History and Literature of the Middle Ages;' an idea afterwards modified into the book which is the single achievement of his life. 'I am led to adopt this course' (he explains, *etat.* 21) 'not so much on account of the interest of the subject—though that is a great inducement—but because there has been, comparatively speaking, so little known and published upon it. And ambition whispers to me the flattering hope that a prolonged series of industrious efforts, aided by talents certainly above mediocrity, may at last meet with success.' Thus the young economist made his calculation with admirable seriousness and steadiness. He did not like the office when he was there, having been all his life a spoiled child, trained to do what he liked, but the atmosphere of the office was in his very soul. A more distinct commercial programme was never drawn out. With a little change it would do for one of the circular compositions with which we are all familiar. There is an evident public want which, by industrious effort and talents

certainly above mediocrity, the newly established merchant in literature hopes to make a successful speculation in, 'by strict attention to business, and punctuality in executing commissions.' If our linendraper does not say that 'Ambition whispers' any 'flattering hope,' he at least flatters himself that his business qualities and excellent goods will gain our support, and enable him to 'meet with success.' The coincidence is amusing at least.

The spirit and strength of the 'industrious efforts,' upon the success of which he thus calculated, may be estimated by an entry in his diary ten days later, in which he announces that "The sketch of the History of France during the Middle Ages" has occupied me just ten days, so that I think on an average I may say eight days will suffice in future for each history.' It is true that he describes this as 'a hasty and superficial' survey, to be followed afterwards by more elaborate reading, but it is hardly possible to imagine that this first rapid view did not more or less determine the opinions of a mind entirely fresh and new to study, and possessing that unbounded confidence in itself which belonged to him by nature, and which had been promoted by the whole scope of his training, or rather of his non-training. There are some kinds of high intelligence to which education is, we venture to say, of but little importance comparatively. Genius of the poetical and imaginative kind—do we dare to add?—may be occasionally better without it. Had Shakespeare been a great scholar, we should probably, instead of 'Hamlet' and 'Lear,' have been forced back upon 'Edipus' and 'Orestes,' and bound to one little round of highly illuminated yet extinct existence as the only sphere of poetry, which, indeed, is a condition to which some highly cultured poets of the present race would reduce us if they could. But in the treatment of historical and philosophical subjects, and in the long argument upon the ways of God to man, or—as it changes in form with the progression of the ages—of man to nature, and the intellectual forces and all the problems of life, education becomes of the first importance. These are subjects which demand something more than mere knowledge and 'talents certainly above mediocrity.' That important part of education which is not learning, which gives tolerance not in theory but in feeling, and modifies the certainties of the understanding by the doubts of experience, can scarcely be got in the closet of the book-worm under the most favourable circumstances. And Buckle's circumstances were not favourable. He must have been more or less trained to consider himself from his childhood a being above ordinary laws. Other boys are compelled to study, but with him there was no such necessity; yet his mother, who was his highest authority, expected him to be able with his unassisted and undisciplined faculties to do something great, and no doubt he was thus educated into the conviction that he was not as others were, and encouraged to feel a certain impatience and contempt for them and

their common modes of instruction. The Universities, of which necessarily he knew nothing, he treated with a lofty disdain; 'places where innumerable things are still taught which no one is concerned to understand, and which few will take the trouble to remember,' he says, as if these venerable institutions were scarcely worth even the compliment of an epigram—in the very same strain of untrained and unsympathetic individualism which inspires his contempt as a well-to-do and comfortable citizen, with no debts and a good balance at his banker's, for the hasty labours and frequent impecuniosity of the literary class. 'See me, how calm I am!' says Mrs. Hardcastle, when her niece's jewels are lost. 'See me, how well off I am; how well-informed; how learned! without going to the university, or writing books in a hurry to pay my way,' is the sentiment of the philosopher.

Privately, we are told, he was by no means without the genial gift of sympathy, but was kind and patient, and loved his neighbours as well if not better than the ordinary man. But with the general mass of men he had no sympathy, nor any patience for habits and methods unknown to him. Buckle had a great respect for the doubts of the mind and its scepticism and questionings, but he had no understanding of that scepticism of experience which springs from a knowledge of men and their ways, and which makes it as difficult for some to accept a statistical record as infallible, as it is for others to believe in the Pope, or as it was for himself to give any faith to a religious creed. For his own part, he held the theory of toleration in its fullest sense—with this condition, however, that while he was happy to allow men any latitude in *not* believing, his power of putting up with those who did believe was much more limited—but practically, he was unable to perceive those infinite shades and gradations of life which modify the absolute, and make the pure fact so difficult of attainment, and often, with all precautions taken, so little like the thing it assumes to be. It is always the temptation of the recluse to ignore these—indeed, they are ignored for him by the very circumstances of his existence, the habits which make books much more real to him—shut up within the four walls of the library in which they are indeed the only inhabitants—than men. The current idea in England is that this tolerant temper, this scepticism as to facts, this perpetual sense that there is another side to the question, and something to be explained, is best acquired by what we call 'knocking about,' and becoming acquainted with other human beings. It is a state of mind which we recognise as one that is largely promoted by public education; and more difficult to acquire by lonely study than any other; and it is quite possible that we exaggerate its importance in ordinary cases. But Buckle's exact and unsympathetic mind was of all others the one to which it was most necessary. And he was as entirely shut out from all opportunity of acquiring it as if he had been born in a prison.

The great work which he determined on at twenty-one was not completed until he had reached the full maturity of life, fifteen years after. During this time experience had taught him several very unavoidable truths—one of which was, that life was not long enough for all the work he had given himself. And thus his scheme dwindled from a universal history of civilisation to that of a history of civilisation in England, and finally to an introduction to that history, which is all that remains to us. The labour he went through during the composition of the work was great, not perhaps enough to have frightened a humble literary hack working for his living, and ‘getting up’ an infinite number of subjects in so large a slice of life, but enough to make a profound impression upon the mind of Buckle’s friends, and not less upon his own. He must have read about three volumes a day, his biographer says with awe, and no doubt he found many strange things in them. To subject history to the same rules as those which govern science; to find out the natural laws which—apart from any idea of supernatural direction or interference; all of which are entirely set aside as imaginations—direct mankind; to trace the action of these laws, invariable and certain, as those which have formed the stratifications of the earth or guide the movements of the stars, was the object he proposed to himself. The reader will no doubt remember several of the statistical calculations by which Mr. Buckle satisfied himself that the human race was a sort of big machine, and its motions and actions as mechanical as the rotation of tides or any other perpetually recurring physical phenomena. That the same number of murders and suicides occur every year, nay, that, as near as possible, the same number of people misdirect their letters, or put them blank into the post-office, or neglect to sign their cheques, were triumphant proofs of this theory. And when he gave up statistics, he was driven back upon arguments less cut and dry to account for the fact that all men in all places did not advance with equal regularity in the paths of civilisation, and that in some places that process was arrested while in others it flourished. Buckle’s grand proposition as to the origin of the influence which is in his philosophy what the Antichrist was to the early theologians, that great enemy of the human race, called superstition, is tolerably certain also to have remained in the memory of most readers. A more curious piece of reasoning was certainly never propounded by mortal man. Having first set forth as a certain fact, that the majestic and awful aspect of nature as found in certain southern countries is the direct cause of superstition, he finds himself confronted by the very different fact that Civilisation rose to its very highest pitch in these same countries at one period of their history; and adds with instant readiness and a subtle skill which would claim the applause of any casuist, that the excitement of the imagination due first to nature’s convulsions, and secondly to the gloom and

mystery of superstition consequent on that, produced—Art:—and triumphantly proves his statement by the assertion that ‘earthquakes and volcanic eruptions’ being ‘more frequent in Italy and the Spanish and Portuguese peninsula than in any other of the great countries of Europe,’ it follows as a natural result that ‘all the greatest painters, and nearly all the greatest sculptors, modern Europe has possessed, have been produced by the Italian and Spanish peninsulas.’ Thus the divine art of Raphael, calmest and most heavenly sweet of earthly things, and all the patient elaboration of the old masters in their peaceful craft, come of nothing less than volcanic action and the fury of the elements. The philosopher forgot that Naples, which is the volcanic corner of Italy, was not the home of Italian genius, as she ought to have been according to this argument; and he forgot that the most stolid and steady-going people in the universe, without either superstition or imagination, dwell under the shadow and amid the ravines of the Alps. In the same way the wild scenery of Scotland, ‘the darkened sky flashed by frequent lightning, the peals of thunder reverberating from mountain to mountain, the dangerous hurricane, the gusts sweeping the innumerable lakes with which the country is studded, the rolling and impetuous torrents flooding the paths of the traveller,’ are taken for granted as the causes of the infatuated superstitious zeal of the Covenanters and their more modern and very lowland successors, of whom, in the days of their prime and vigour, not a man had ever crossed the Highland line. This curious conclusion, however, does not give a more strange contradiction to fact than does the opinion about war which the philosopher gave forth with quite as much certainty.

We do not blame him for his conviction that ‘the practice of war,’ that ‘barbarous pursuit,’ was ‘in the progress of society steadily declining,’ for such was the opinion to which men in general, at least on this side of the Channel, had attained at the time he writes. He had, however, the boldness to point to this and to the causes of it in illustration and proof of his theories, and especially of his grand theory, that all progress of the world is due, not to moral influence, but to intellectual. All the moral evils of war were ‘as well understood and as universally admitted in the middle ages, when there was never a year without war, as they are at the present moment, when war is deemed a rare and singular occurrence,’ he says, and proceeds to prove, or at least to assert, that ‘every important addition made to knowledge increases the authority of the intellectual classes,’ who are the natural antagonists of the military class; and that, accordingly, ‘as the intellectual acquisitions of a people increase, their love of war will diminish.’ He wrote at a moment when the Crimean war, which was the reopening of the new cycle of battles, was in progress; but this does not discourage him in his convictions—he notes it as ‘a very significant fact’ that ‘it is a war produced, not by the conflicting interests of

civilised countries, but by the rupture between Russia and Turkey, the two most barbarous monarchies now remaining in Europe.' It was, therefore, an exception which proved the rule, settling beyond all questions this principle, that war was becoming impossible wherever the intellect was cultivated. What would he have said if he had lived to see the two most highly cultivated countries in Europe falling foul of each other like a pair of savages, and all the alarms of war, and military preparations, deafening the ear wherever we turn, which have followed? Mr. Buckle ends with a description of the state of affairs in the early ages, before the invention of gunpowder, which he takes to have been the first great discouragement to the warlike spirit. In those days, he says, every man was a soldier; 'the only exception was the ecclesiastical profession, and even that was affected by the general tendency.' What, we repeat, would the philosopher have said had he lived to see, notwithstanding gunpowder and a hundred other inventions, and all the spread of knowledge and advance of intellect, the very same position of affairs returning again?—every man in all the great continental nations of Europe made, willy-nilly, into a soldier, and even the clerical profession startled by the threat that ere long the priest himself will be allowed no longer to escape the conscription. 'The barbarous nations' have by this time got their hands in once more; but it was not the quarrel between the Muscovite and the Turk which has lighted the fire in Europe by which all the world is kept uneasy, and which from day to day, one cannot tell at what moment, may again put the whole world in a blaze.

This mistake, however, though it goes sadly against his own dogma, and proves rather how little than how much power there lies in high intellectual development and knowledge to restrain human passion and ambition, is one which belonged to the time in which Buckle wrote. No doubt it is by that very fact all the more true a test of those principles upon which he professed to place the science of history, and which ought to have made him, if they were worth anything, superior to the common prejudice of his time, and able to form a more intelligent estimate of dangers so near at hand. It was not, however, any such statement as this, in which for the moment all the world concurred, nor was it his doctrine of averages, nor his curious suggestion that bad kings are on the whole better than good ones for the progress of their kingdoms, or any other of the paradoxes upon which Buckle rode with triumphant gravity into the marketplace, so to speak, defying all objectors, which raised the chief storm of criticism and produced the crowd of assailants who have done so much to keep his book fresh before the eyes of the public. His grand principle, that it is intellectual and not moral force from which all progress springs, was a theory indeed which naturally raised great opposition, especially from men to whom the power of religion appeared the only hope of the world; but when

the philosopher proceeded to place the Church and the clergy in the forefront of the enemies and destroyers of the human race, and to show, or attempt to show, how civilisation was kept back and progress stunted wherever they retained any special power and influence, it is scarcely necessary to say that he roused against him a most energetic and impassioned band, who carried his book high upon that tide of angry and hostile interest which is almost as good for a writer as enthusiasm. Buckle himself had a true mercantile understanding of the value of this. 'If men are not struck down by hostility, they always thrive by it,' he says. Of religion itself he says no particular harm, treating it rather as a sort of fine art. But the institutions of religion, and all creeds, and above all priests of every kind, are the objects of his remorseless and fierce pursuit. He denounces the clergy and their influence, wherever he finds them, with a concentrated bitterness which is strangely like the bigotry he professes to condemn. We are not quite sure of the exact moment when the modern freethinker ceased to claim toleration, and found himself strong enough to refuse it. Time was when honest doubt was spoken of with respect; but scepticism had not yet laid claim to the mantle of the Inquisition. This last and most violent development of intolerance, however, is found in full swing in Buckle's second volume. It inflames him to the extent of passion. He can see no extenuating circumstances, allows no moral compensation for the crimes of this malignant army of evil beings banded together for the ruin of mankind. The critic who is not heated by any special enthusiasm for the other side can scarcely look but with a certain amusement, mingled with graver feelings, at this virulence of enmity towards the clergy, which all philosophers of Mr. Buckle's way of thinking share. Can it be, he asks, that it is because the position of the two is more or less alike that the sceptical thinker cannot contain himself when his eye falls upon the priest? When two of a trade disagree we know proverbially that their collision is something terrible; and what are Mr. Buckle and his class but the clergy of a new system, the privileged teachers of a proselytising sect, the all but infallible interpreters of mysteries, high priests of truth, and as confident in their mission as ever was the most complaisant recipient of Apostolical Succession? And it cannot be said that the new prophets do not fully verify their own estimate of the prophetic office by the unrelenting rancour with which they pursue the old ones, hunting them down in every book, and cursing them from every platform to which they have access. Clerical against divine, new prophet against old priest, we think we should be disposed to back the philosopher for temerity and power of continual invective and anathema. It is a melancholy spectacle enough as showing how little the strongest theoretical principle affects a man when it comes in the way of his prejudices or passions, but is also somewhat comical to the looker-on who cannot

help perceiving the repetition in the assailant of the very views he is so firmly inveighing against.

It is curious to remark, however, that the priesthood of scepticism is on the whole much less harsh in their treatment of their Catholic rivals than of the Protestants. The latter are more near them, perhaps more like them; they cannot burn any more than their accusers ever do, but both can curse, and the new artists have on the whole the best of it in this rivalry, for the old clericals are restrained by public opinion, and a sense that cursing is now fully recognised to be inconsistent with Christianity, whereas the new are joyfully free of all bonds, and can do what they like, and snap their fingers at Bishops and Presbyterians alike. Scotland, for example, far more than Spain evokes in Buckle this spirit of cursing. His very voice trembles as he pours forth with hysterical solemnity his accusations against a country, which, with all its faults, has borne a fair character, and maintained its credit, and never broken out into painting and sculpture as superstitious countries used to do. It is almost inconceivable, or would be had we not so many instances, how a man possessing in a high degree the reasoning faculty, and surrounded by books, even though ignoring life, should be able to maintain his own idea, formed, no doubt, in accordance with his peculiar doctrines as to what such a country ought to be in the face of fact and reality, which a twelve hours' journey would at any time have revealed to him. In the face of all that anecdotal history of Scotland, which we are sorry to say displays a great deal more jovial profanity than sacerdotalism, and of all the obstreperous rural gaiety which shows through the poetry of Burns and many lesser indices of popular feeling, this philosophical thinker and reader of three volumes a day solemnly asserts that not even the brilliant Scotch literature of the eighteenth century could touch or modify the slavish superstition in which the country was plunged. The 'aversion to innocent gaiety, the sour and fanatical spirits' engendered by those 'repulsive and horrible notions advocated by the Scotch clergy and sanctioned by the Scotch people'—Habakkuk Mucklewrath was rampant in the unfortunate country, quite unmoved by David Hume or Adam Smith, still less by Walter Scott and Robert Burns. But these two names were not, we suppose, known in Mr. Buckle's library, as they certainly are not referred to. Our brother-contributor the accomplished 'Shirley' gave to the readers of 'Fraser' in last month's number a sketch of a Scotch minister of the period which we fear would not impress those readers much with any idea of strait-laced views, either theological or moral. Scotland, as a matter of fact, was neither pious nor intolerant in those days when religion was 'moderate,' when the Edinburgh lawyers played high jinks, and the little Scotch towns were full of the rude, hard-drinking, and utterly irreverent cleverness of men such as those who first brought Burns out of the less objectionable dissipations of his peasant life. It is no credit to

Scotland that she should have been full of the rude free-thinking of the French Revolution period, or perhaps even that her clergy should have contributed so largely to the popular *répertoire* of fun and humour. But all this exuberant store of national character and life, so easily attainable by anybody who will study it, so entirely known to all who are acquainted with the country, makes the fancy-picture of Mr. Buckle too ludicrous even for serious discussion. It is, we suppose, an example of what strange inventions the philosophical historian is capable who forms his idea of an existing race according to what he considers the natural sequence and regularity of those laws which determine history, without taking the trouble either to examine it personally or cast a single glance upon the real records of its life.

When we leave this world of philosophisings and those curious galvanic inventions of theory which are so different from the inventions of the imagination, and return to the real man—so much as there was of him—we find that the melancholy climax of poor Buckle's life had happened between these two volumes of his history. He had by this time attained his thirty-sixth year, that time of complete maturity for which Dante has furnished everybody with so ready a description. In the midst of the journey of his life he too had to enter into a passage which was dark and bitter. He lost his mother, love for whom formed almost the sole ideal of his life. And his sorrow came just as the power he had so longed for was attained, and spoilt it for him, and turned his triumph into mourning. How strange a twilight life must that have been which owed its sole point of light to this natural loss, and knew no brightness save in the fading smile of the mother! The helplessness of the child, and its dismayed contemplation of the lonely world around it (in which, however, it will find so many alleviations), have a singular effect upon us when we meet its helpless gaze in the eyes of a matured and full-grown man. But, such as it is, this is the philosopher's sole story of the affections. Mrs. Buckle lived to see his first volume published, and all the fame it brought: but the introduction of her fading figure, sick and worn out, yet holding on to life till she should see the result of her son's labours, is by far the most striking portion of Buckle's biography. 'Surely God will let me live to see Henry's book,' she said. She had taken the responsibility upon herself of the strange training which, according to all that we are told, saved his life as a child, and which it must have been doubly important to her to see justified by success: at last the prayer was heard, and she lived to see the work, which she had followed through step by step of its progress as if it had been her son's child, fairly lunched upon the world with a tender dedication to herself, which half killed her with the tender sweetness of it when it was put into her hands—the only words, Miss Shirreff tells us, for which she was unprepared. We may add that this affecting picture is entirely the contribution of Miss Shirreff, and is quoted in Mr. Heath's large book from the brief

memoir prefixed by Miss Helen Taylor to her collection of Buckle's miscellaneous works, and published in 1872.¹

Next to Miss Shirreff's sketch, which is very short, the most human portion of the narrative is in the chapter by Mrs. Huth, where we have really a lively and lifelike picture of the prim philosopher. Perhaps because of his devotion to his mother, perhaps because of his partly feminine nature, he would seem always to have been most at home and understood by women. And there is a gentle laugh suppressed in this lady's story which gives us a very good idea of the aspect of the great man, half pope, half pedagogue, never weary of teaching nor unprovided with an explanation, who felt it only natural that he should be referred to for information on all subjects, and was *bon prince*, fully recognising that it was his mission to furnish knowledge to all that asked. Mrs. Huth describes their early intercourse as follows:—

I kept a notebook, from which I was prepared categorically to question him whenever I knew he was coming; and the kindness, patience, care, and sympathy with which he answered greatly astonished me. It was a rule with him never to pay more than one visit a day among his friends—on acquaintances he only left cards—and his visits, when they happened to be to me, generally lasted about twenty minutes.

But if on any subject on which we happened to be talking I was not yet quite clear, he went on combating my arguments point by point, and never moved from his chair until he had made it perfectly plain to me. But no sooner had I grasped it than he took up his hat, said goodbye, and hurriedly left.

This sketch of the universal instructor, prepared at a moment's notice to expound any subject at any time, not only laying down the law but condescending to make everything plain to the gracious disciple whose interest was as much about himself as the subject he talked of, and who made her own little curious half-amused observations while she allowed herself to be convinced, is very entertaining. The absolute gravity of the teacher, who only wanted that turn of the handle conveyed in the asking of a question to flow forth in mild round strains of knowledge, irrigating every corner of the domain before him; and the attentive pupil, somewhat *maliciosa*, not so reverential but that she could make little private notes of his expectant entrance, his measured visit, and hurried departure when his object had been fulfilled, and as much instruction conveyed as was desirable for the moment, appear before us like a picture. We may be sure that he had not a notion of that lurking laughter in the lady's eyes, and indeed it is quite probable that in the affecting circumstances of their later connection and her grateful enthusiasm for his kindness to her sons she may have ceased to remember any of the lighter phases of observation which enlivened the beginning of

¹ Buckle's *Miscellaneous and Posthumous Works*. Longmans & Co.

their friendship. All the witnesses agree that Buckle was brilliant in conversation, and there is no gift which so entirely charms society. He was thought to be 'terribly conceited' by people who met him for the first time, and his confidence in himself never seems to have been subject to the heats and chills which beset more sensitive imaginations. But it was a fact that he had a great deal to say, and that what he said was worth listening to; and he was aware that it cost him a great deal, and that day by day for the previous fifteen or twenty years he had been pouring so much into himself that reason itself vouched for the certainty that there must be a great deal to come out. His confidence in his own wisdom and accuracy was never interrupted. 'Once for all,' he asserts, 'I may say that I have made no assertion for the truth of which I do not possess ample and irrefragable evidence.' From his own point of view no doubt he was right, his error being that the evidence on which he founded was sometimes untrustworthy, and not corrected either by observation or by the larger action of a mind impartial. Everybody knows how unsatisfactory are the 'proofs quoted which can be got out of books, from Scripture downwards, of any given doctrines, how difficult it is not to strain here and there the meaning of a word, or to exaggerate the importance of an insignificant witness whose testimony is very pat, to the point. But, on the other hand, a man has naturally much more respect for the evidence which he has quarried out of the most unlikely quarters than he has for those sources of information which are open to everybody. And knowing, as he did, how hard he had worked for it, and from what distant and unthought-of corners he had brought his knowledge, how can any mortal man, conscious of corresponding weakness, wonder at the philosopher's strong sense of his own infallible convictions and well-informed views on every point? A man does not read three volumes a day with impunity, any more than he can commit other excesses. Where was the other man who could say as much, who had done so much to prove his theory or make his information complete? As for an anonymous creature in a review, who wrote for the necessities of the moment, perhaps for bread and butter, as wretched *littérateurs* so often have to do, Thomas Henry Buckle brushed him away as he would have done a fly. What was he in comparison with one who knew that he was right, and said so composedly? It was not a thing which admitted of a doubt; there was no peradventure in it. Pope Pius himself, his infallible contemporary, was in all likelihood, could we have learned his personal sentiments, not half so sure.

Besides the two volumes of the history, only one or two small pieces of work came from his hands. He delivered a lecture on 'The Influence of Women on the Progress of Knowledge,' in the Royal Institution, and as this was done in the very first flush of his popularity, that part of the fashionable world which concerns itself with literary lions crowded to hear him. Of this he tells his publisher a short time after that 'I have received the most gratifying letters

from men of influence as to the effect produced by my lecture—all regarding it as an epoch.’

Another production was a tremendous philippic against the late Mr. Justice Coleridge, in respect to the case of a certain poor blasphemer to whom that judge had given an exceptionally severe sentence. Buckle seems to have been in the right in his objections; but we can scarcely help a faint suggestion that if Voltaire had not made himself so famous in the Calas case, Buckle might have overlooked poor Perley. Perhaps this is unfair, but there is just a little whiff of plagiarism about the whole business. In one or two other respects we cannot help thinking Buckle kept half an eye upon Voltaire, and would have liked to be like him.

When he had got to the end of the second volume his strength, both physical and moral, seems to have been entirely exhausted. He was obliged to give up his books, both reading and writing. ‘How can a man help being dull when he neither reads nor thinks?’ he asks in one of his letters. It was the complete prostration of this exhausted state which made him take up the idea of that journey to the East which was to be so fatal. He seems to have resolved upon this more out of a languid sense that to do something was necessary than from any strong personal inclination. But it was made pleasant to him by the sudden fancy of taking with him two boys with whom he had made acquaintance at a school kept by one of his friends, the sons of Mr. Henry Huth, with whom and his accomplished wife (whose contribution to the biography we have just quoted) he had lately formed a warm friendship. The idea would seem to have been a sudden one, but Buckle appears always to have been delightful with children.

He left England for Egypt in October 1861, and the expedition proved so successful and delightful that the party went on to Syria and the Holy Land. There things did not go so well; Buckle became ill, and was so much weakened that various people he met advised him to give up his further journey; but his heart was set on seeing Damascus, and he pushed on in spite of everything. The last part of the journey seems to have been gone through in that feverish confusion of increasing illness which resolves everything into a long and painful dream, penetrated here and there by the glory of a landscape, a sudden gleam of beauty and splendour penetrating the rising mists. One or two such broke the attention of those feverish days of half-stupefied progress and unrefreshing rest. When he came in sight of Damascus he was sufficiently roused to exclaim, ‘This is worth all it has cost me.’ He kept up with a wonderful tenacity, riding and walking, with broken bits of repose where it was possible, until at last he reached that dream-city which he had longed to see all his life. He reached it only to die. Of course there is something said about wrong treatment and incompetent doctors, as was inevitable in the circumstances; but he would seem to have been involved in the fatal mesh of typhoid fever, with all the delusive changes of its

earliest stage, from the time he left Jerusalem. The day after he arrived at Damascus he had an attack of partial delirium, which he attributed to the laudanum which had been given to him under the supposition that his attack was chiefly choleraic. In this Mr. Glennie reports that he cried out, 'My book! my book! I shall never finish my book,' as if for the first time the idea had invaded his heretofore composed and confident mind that his journey and his labours might be interrupted. In ten or twelve days after he was dead, the interval being full of fever and delirium, with now and then intervals of intelligence and calm. Mr. Huth records no allusion to the book; but just before his death he asked for the poor children who were thus about to be left in unimaginable desolation. 'Poor little boys!' he said, as he kissed his helpless fellow-travellers. These tender words are the last recorded of him before he disappeared into that awful gloom where we know no longer what is done or felt or said. Though he was not a Christian, he had always believed devoutly that he should find there what he had lost.

Throughout all Buckle's intellectual career his power of ignoring or not seeing what does not agree with the immediate strain of his thoughts is very evident. Nobody could be more sure of such facts as struck him than he was. He says I know, at all times, in the largest capitals; asserting his certainty in some cases, and those exactly the cases in which he had no personal knowledge, with something like passion. It is the claim of the present school of Freethinkers—we take the epithet as that of their own choice, and as the easiest, not as granting their pretension that they alone have full freedom of thought—that they assume nothing they have not proved, and that they are entirely and nobly superior to the intolerance which is natural to every class of religionists. Buckle did not, like Professor Clifford, proclaim his belief that murder was an incident of ordinary occurrence, and to be expected in Catholic countries like Spain; but with much more serious certainty he announced the logical sequences of events in that country, and in the kindred realm of Italy, to be, firstly, an awful and imposing aspect of nature, accompanied by earthquakes and volcanic disturbances; secondly, a gloomy reign of superstition; thirdly, art. Now the most of us know something about Italy, at least, and some of us know something about art. There are two great volcanoes in Italy, but neither Naples nor Sicily has produced either painter or poet fit to take his place among the highest. On the other hand, the greatest of Italian artists was bred among the soft Tuscan hills, those gentle elevations that figure in so many pictures, and make us understand the tender Hebrew image of 'the little hills like lambs.' Not all the ranges of the Apennines held such a volcano as was that Florentine. As Dante is of all Italians, so Buonarotti is of all Italian painters, the son of mystery, the type of an imagination to which we could well attribute a volcanic parentage. Had the

one come from the slopes of Vesuvius, and the other from under the sovereignty of Etna, we agree that there would have been a great poetical appropriateness in it; but they were Florentines, from a land flowing with milk and honey, with oil and wine. Buckle, however, did not think it necessary to note anything of all this. Nor did it occur to him that Switzerland, where nature is far more grandiose, imposing, and terrible than in any part of Italy, where accidents of the most sudden and appalling kind are common, and half the year is often passed in forced abstinence from outdoor labour (which, he tells us in another place, always produces fickleness of character), is neither superstitious nor imaginative nor fickle, nor anything but the most stolid, sordid, tenacious, and commonplace country on the face of the earth. What kind of wisdom is there in the argument which throws terror and tempest upon the soft heights where Fiesola looks down upon Florence, or makes the wooded hills of Umbria overcome the human soul which keeps its stolid steadiness under the shadow of Monte Rosa and Mont Blanc? We are fain to allow that the philosopher never professed to know anything about art, though he has not stinted to lay down the law upon the subject of its origin; but, with all these facts left out in his summary verdict, we cannot but ask what right any man had on this point to say I know.

Buckle in fine understood books, and believed them to afford all that was necessary for the just calculation of human affairs, as the books in a counting-house are the only rule for the affairs of a mercantile firm; but he did not apprehend the difference between the concerns of that firm and those of the race, and would never agree that individual minds were of a different order and more difficult to deal with than the choses of an inventory at law. To see this slim and feeble figure erecting itself against the dull walls of his library, with only one opening to the daylight world, and making its boast of irrefragable evidence and absolute knowledge, is a strange spectacle; but it is pathetic to watch the forlorn struggle of the lonely man toiling across those blazing Eastern ways, going blind with fever into the old splendour of the great Arabian city which he had so longed to see, dying with a gasp of surprise that such an unthought-of thing as death should have stopped him and his book and his mentorship, which was so confident yet so kind. In all his narrow harshness of theory and rigid Puritanical incapacity to understand any fashion of being different from his own, it is with a sigh at least, if not a tear, that we see him laid away, all his knowledge lost for this world, under the monstrous mass of stone which his friends, after a long interval of indifference, put on his resting-place. He should have been a good man of business, exacting punctual work but giving liberal pay, going to church twice every Sunday, cultivating all the middle-class punctilios of life, and appearing at his office at the same hour every morning for sixty or seventy years. The influence, whatsoever it was, that crossed this

narrow, respectable, commercial strain with the alien current of philosophy and speculation, putting a kind of eloquence into the thin utterance, and a kind of inspiration into the orderly and rigid soul, must answer for the result. Buckle was not the ideal philosopher, much less the guide and instructor of mankind; but in his suppressed and parsimonious way, with no life to speak of, he was neither an ignoble nor an unlovable man.