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INTRODUCTION

Froude had this merit—a merit he shared with Huxley alone of His contemporaries—that he imposed his convictions. He fought against resistance. He excited (and still excites) a violent animosity. He exasperated the surface of his time and was yet too strong for that surface to reject him. This combative and aggressive quality in him, which was successful in that it was permanent and never suffered a final defeat should arrest any one who may make a general survey of the last generation in letters.

It was a period with a vice of its own which yet remains to be detected and chastised. In one epoch lubricity, in another fanaticism, in a third dulness and a dead-alive copying of the past, are the faults which criticism finds to attack. None of these affected the Victorian era. It was pure—though tainted with a profound hypocrisy; it was singularly free from violence in its judgments; it was certainly alive and new: but it had this grievous defect (a defect under which we still labour heavily) that thought was restrained upon every side. Never in the history of European letters was it so difficult for a man to say what he would and to be heard. A sort of cohesive public spirit (which was but one aspect of the admirable homogeneity of the nation) glued and immobilised all individual expression. One could float imprisoned as in a stream of thick substance: one could not swim against it.

It is to be carefully discerned how many apparent exceptions to this truth are, if they be closely examined, no exceptions at all. A whole series of national defects were exposed and ridiculed in the literature as in the oratory of that day; but they were defects which the mass of men secretly delighted to hear denounced and of which each believed himself to be free.

They loved to be told that they were of a gross taste in art, for they connected such a taste vaguely with high morals and with successful commerce. There was no surer way to a large sale than to start a revolution in appreciation every five years, and from Ruskin to Oscar Wilde a whole series of Prophets attained eminence and fortune by telling men how something new and as yet unknown

was Beauty and something just past was to be rejected, and how they alone saw truth while the herd around them were blind. But no one showed us how to model, nor did any one remark that we alone of all Europe had preserved a school of water-colour.

So in politics our blunders were a constant theme; but no one marked with citation, document, and proof the glaring progress of corruption, or that, for all our enthusiasm, we never once in that generation defended the oppressed against the oppressor. There was a vast if unrecognised conspiracy, by which whatever might have prevented those extreme evils from which we now suffer was destroyed as it appeared. Efforts at a thorough purge were dull, were libellous, were not of the "form" which the Universities and the public schools taught to be sacred. They were rejected as unreadable, or if printed, were unread. The results are with us to-day.

In such a time Froude maintained an opposing force, which was not reforming nor constructive in any way, but which will obtain the attention of the future historian, simply because it was an opposition.

It was an opposition of manner rather than of matter. The matter of it was common enough even in Froude's chief decade of power. The cause to which he gave allegiance was already winning when he proceeded to champion it, and many a better man, one or two greater men, were saying the same things as he; but they said such things in a fashion that suggested no violent effort nor any demand for resistance: it was the peculiar virtue of Froude that he touched nothing without the virile note of a challenge sounding throughout his prose. On this account, though he will convince our posterity even less than he does ourselves, the words of persuasion, the writings themselves will remain: for he chose the hardest wood in which to chisel, knowing the strength of his hand.

What was it in him which gave him that strength, and which permitted him, in an age that would tolerate no formative grasp upon itself, to achieve a permanent fame? I will not reply to this question by pointing to the popularity of his *History of England*; the essays that follow will afford sufficient material to answer it. He produced the effect he did and remained in the eminence to which he had climbed, first because his manner of thought was rigid and

of a hard edge; secondly, because he could use that steel tool of a brain in a fashion that was general; he could use it upon subjects and with a handling that was comprehensible to great masses of his fellow-countrymen.

It is not certain that such a man with such interests would have made his voice heard in any other society. It is doubtful whether he will be translated with profit. His field was very small, the points of his attack might all be found contained in one suburban villa. But in our society his grip and his intensity did fall, and fall of choice, upon such matters as his contemporaries either debated or were ready to debate. He therefore did the considerable thing we know him to have done.

I say that his mind was rigid and of a close fibre: it was a mind (to repeat the metaphor) out of which a strong graying-tool could be forged. Its blade would not be blunted: it could deal with its material. Of this character, which I take to be the first essential in his achievement, the few essays before us preserve an ample evidence.

Thus you will find throughout their pages the presence of that dogmatic assertion which invariably proceeds from such a mind, and coupled with such assertion is a continual consciousness that his dogmas are dogmas: that he is asserting unprovable things and laying down his axioms before he begins his process of reasoning.

The contrary might be objected by some foreign observer, or by some one who had a larger acquaintance with European history than had he. I can imagine a French or an Irish critic pointing to a mass of assertion with no corresponding admission that it is assertion only: such a critic might quote even from these few pages phrase after phrase in which Froude poses as certain what are still largely matters of debate. Thus upon page 144 he takes it for granted that no miracles have been worked by contact with the bodies of saints. He takes it for granted on page 161 that the checking of monastic disorders, and the use of strong language in connection with them, was peculiar to the generation which saw at its close the dissolution of the monasteries. He takes it for granted on page 125 that what we call "manifestations" or what not,—spirit rappings, table-turnings, and the rest—are deceptions of the senses to which superstition alone would give credence.

He ridicules (upon p. 128) the tradition of St. Patrick which all modern research has come to accept. He says downright (upon pp. 186-187) that the Ancient world did not inquire into the problem of evil. On p. 214 he will have it that the ordinary man rejects, "without hesitation," the interference of will with material causes. In other words, he asserts that the ordinary man is a fatalist—for Froude knew very well that between the fatalist and the believer in a possibility of miracle there is no conceivable position. He will have it (on p. 216) that a modern doctor always regards a "vision" as an hallucination. On p. 217 he denies by implication the stigmata of St. Francis—and so forth—one might multiply the instances indefinitely. All Froude's works are full of them, they are part and parcel of his method—but their number is to no purport. One example may stand for all, and their special value to our purpose is not that they are mere assertions, but that they are assertions which Froude must have known to be personal, disputable, and dogmatic.

He knew very well that the vast majority of mankind accepted the virtue of relics, that intellects the equals of his own rejected that determinism to which he was bound, and that the Pagan world might be presented in a fashion very different from his own. And in that perpetual—often gratuitous —affirmation you have no sign of limitation in him but rather of eagerness for battle.

It is an admirable fault or perhaps no fault at all, or if a fault an appendage to the most considerable virtue a writer of his day could have had: the virtue of courage.

See how he thrusts when he comes to lay down the law, not upon what the narrow experience of readers understands and agrees with him about, but upon some matter which he knows them to have decided in a manner opposed to his own. See how definite, how downright, and how clean are the sentences in which he asserts that Christianity is Catholic or nothing:—

". . . This was the body of death which philosophy detected but could not explain, and from which Catholicism now came forward with its magnificent promise of deliverance.

"The carnal doctrine of the sacraments, which they are compelled to acknowledge to have been taught as fully in the early Church as it is now taught by the Roman Catholics, has long been the stum-

bling-block to Protestants. It was the very essence of Christianity itself. Unless the body could be purified, the soul could not be saved; or, rather, as from the beginning, soul and flesh were one man and inseparable, without his flesh, man was lost, or would cease to be. But the natural organization of the flesh was infected, and unless organization could begin again from a new original, no pure material substance could exist at all. He, therefore, by whom God had first made the world, entered into the womb of the Virgin in the form (so to speak) of a new organic cell, and around it, through the virtue of His creative energy, a material body grew again of the substance of His mother, pure of taint and clean as the first body of the first man when it passed out under His hand in the beginning of all things."

Throughout his essay on the Philosophy of Christianity, where he was maintaining a thesis odious to the majority of his readers, he rings as hard as ever. The philosophy of Christianity is frankly declared to be Catholicism and Catholicism alone; the truth of Christianity is denied. It is called a thing "worn and old" even in Luther's time (upon page 194), and he definitely prophesies a period when "our posterity" shall learn "to despise the miserable fabric which Luther stitched together out of its tatters."

His judgments are short, violent, compressed. They are not the judgments of balance. They are final not as a goal reached is final, but as a death-wound delivered. He throws out sentences which all the world can see to be insufficient and thin, but whose sharpness is the sharpness of conviction and of a striving determination to achieve conviction in others -- or if he fails in that, at least to leave an enemy smarting. Everywhere you have up and down his prose those short parentheses, those side sentences, which are strokes of offence. Thus on page 199, "We hear -- or we used to hear when the High Church party were more formidable than they are," &c.; or again, on page 210, "The Bishop of Natal" (Colenso) has done such and such things, "coupled with certain arithmetical calculations far which he has a special aptitude." There are dozens of these in every book he wrote. They wounded, and were intended to wound.

His intellect may therefore be compared, as I have compared it, to an instrument or a weapon of steel, to a chisel or a sword. It was

hard, polished, keen, stronger than what it bit into, and of its nature enduring. This was the first of the characters that gave him his secure place in English letters.

The second is his universality—the word is not over-exact, but I can find no other. I mean that Froude was the exact opposite of the sciolist and was even other than the student. He was kneaded right into his own time and his own people. The arena in which he fought was small, the ideas he combated were few. He was not universal as those are universal who appeal to any man in any country. But he was eager upon these problems which his contemporaries wrangled over. He was in tune with, even when he directly opposed, the class from which he sprang, the mass of well-to-do Protestant Englishmen of Queen Victoria's reign. Their furniture had nothing shocking for him nor their steel engravings. He took for granted their probity, their common sense, and their reading. He knew what they were thinking about and therefore all he did to praise or blame their convictions, to soothe or to exasperate them, told. He could see the target.

Perpetually this looking at the world from the standpoint of the men around him makes him say things that irritate more particular and more acute minds than his own, but I will maintain that in his case the fault was a necessary fault and went with a power which permitted him to achieve the sympathy which he did achieve. He talks of the "Celt" and the "Saxon," and ascribes what he calls "our failures in Ireland" to the "incongruity of character" between these two imaginaries. He takes it for granted that "we are something which divides us from mediaeval Christianity by an impassable gulf." When he speaks of asceticism he must quote "the hair shirt of Thomas a Becket." If he is speaking of Oxford undergraduates one has "pleasant faces, cheerful voices, and animal spirits," and at the end of the fine but partial essay on Spinoza we have six lines which might come bodily from a leader in the Daily Telegraph, or from any copy of the Spectator picked up at random.

These are grave faults, but, I repeat, they are the faults of those great qualities which gave him his position.

And side by side with such faults go an exceptional lucidity, a good order within the paragraph and in the succession of the para-

graphs. A choice of subject suited to his audience, an excision of that which would have bored or bewildered it, a vividness of description wherewith to amuse and a directness of conclusion wherewith to arrest his readers — all these he had, beyond perhaps any of his contemporaries.

Occasionally that brotherhood in him leads him to faults more serious. You get gross commonplace and utterly false commonplace, of which when he came back to them (if indeed he was a man who read his own works) he must have been ashamed: —

"Persecutions come, and martyrdoms, and religious wars; and, at last, the old faith, like the phoenix, expires upon its altar, and the new rises out of the ashes.

"Such, in briefest outline, has been the history of religions, natural and moral."

Or again, of poor old Oxford: —

"The increase of knowledge, and consequently of morality, is the great aim of such a noble establishment as this; and the rewards and honours dispensed there are bestowed in proportion to the industry and good conduct of those who receive them."

But the interesting point about these very lapses is that they remain purely exceptional. They do not affect either the tone of his writing or the value and intricacy of his argument. They may be compared to those undignified and valueless chips of conversational English that pop up in the best rhetoric if it be the rhetoric of an enthusiastic and wide man.

While, however, one is in the mood of criticism it is not unjust to show what other lapses in him are connected with this common sympathy of his and this very comprehension of his class to which he owed his opportunity and his effect.

Thus he is either so careless or so hurried as to use — much too commonly — words which have lost all vitality, and which are for the most part meaningless, but which go the rounds still like shining flat sixpences worn smooth. The word "practical" drops from his pen; he quotes "in a glass darkly," and speaks of "a picture of human life"; the walls of Oxford are "time-hallowed"; he enters a church

and finds in it "a dim religious light"; a man of Froude's capacity has no right to find such a thing there. If he writes the word "sin" the word "shame" comes tripping after. It may be that he was a man readily caught by fatigue, or it may bet it is more probable, that he thought it small millinery to "travailler le verbe" At any rate the result as a whole hangs to his identity of spirit with the thousands for whom he wrote.

To this character of universality attach also faults not only in his occasional choice of words but in his general style.

The word "style" has been so grossly abused during the last thirty years that one mentions it with diffidence. Matthew Arnold well said that when people came to him and asked to be told how to write a good style he was unable to reply; for indeed it is not a thing to be taught. It is a by-product, though a necessary by-product, of good thinking. But when Matthew Arnold went on to say that there was no such thing as style except knowing clearly what you wanted to say, and saying it as clearly as you could, he was talking nonsense. There is such a thing as style. It is that combination of rhythm, lucidity, and emphasis, which certainly must not be consciously produced, but which if it arise naturally from a man's pen and from his method of thought makes all the difference between what is readable and what is not readable. If any one doubt this let him compare the French Bible with the English—both literal and lucid translations of the same original; or again let him contrast the prose phrases of Milton when he is dealing with the claims of the Church in the Middle Ages with those of Mr. Bryce in the same connection.

Now I say that just as the excellences of Froude's prose proceeded from this universality of his so did the errors into which that prose fell, and it is remarkable that these errors are slips of detail. They proceed undoubtedly from rapid writing and from coupling his scholarship with a very general and ephemeral reading.

A few examples drawn from these essays will prove what I mean. On the very first page, in the first line of the second paragraph we have the word "often" coming after the word "experience," instead of before it. He had written "experience," he desired to qualify it, and he did not go back to do what should always be done in plain

English, and what indeed distinguishes plain English from almost every other language—to put the qualification before the thing qualified; a peculiarly English mark in this, that it presupposes one's having thought the whole thing out before writing it down.

On page 3 we have exactly the same thing; "A legend not known unfortunately to general English readers." He means of course, "unfortunately not known," but as the sentence stands it reads as though he had meant to say, somewhat clumsily, that the method in which English readers knew the legend was not unfortunate.

He is again careless in the matter of repetitions, both of the same word, and (what is a better test of ear) of rhymes within the sentence: we have in one place "which seemed to give a soul to those splendid donations to learning," and further on in the same page "a priority in mortality."

On pages 34 and 35 you have "an intensely real conviction." You are then told that "the most lawless men did then really believe." Then that the American tribes were in the eyes of the colonists "real worshippers" of the Devil, and a few lines later we hear of "the real awfulness of the world."

The position of the relative is often as slipshod as the position of the qualificative; thus you will find upon page 37 that the pioneers "grayed out the channels, and at last paved them with their bones, through which the commerce and enterprise of England has flowed out of all the world." This sentence is quite deplorable; it has a singular verb after two nominatives, and is so framed that one might imagine the commerce and enterprise of our beloved country to have flown through those hollow interior channels, with which, I believe, our larger bones are provided, and in which is to be discovered that very excellent substance, marrow.

It is singular that, while these obvious errors have excited so little comment, Froude should have been blamed so often and by such different authorities for weaknesses of the pen from which he did not suffer, or which, if he did suffer from them, at least he had in common with every other writer of our time and perhaps less than most.

Thus, as an historian he has been accused of two faults which have been supposed by those who are ill acquainted with the history of letters to be correlative: a straining for effect and an inaccuracy of detail. There is not one of his contemporaries who less forced himself in description than Froude. Often in Green, very often in Freeman and always in Carlyle you feel that your author is deliberately exciting his mind and your own. Violent colours are chosen and peculiar emphasis—from this Froude was free. He was an historian.

To the end Froude remained an historian, and an historian he was born. If we regret that his history was not general, and that he turned his powers upon such a restricted set of phenomena, still we must rejoice that there was once in modern England a man who could sum up the nature of a great movement. He lacked the power of integration.

He was not an artist. But he possessed to an extraordinary degree the power of synthesis. He was a craftsman, as the modern jargon goes. There is not in the whole range of English literature as excellent a summary of the way in which the Divinity of our Lord fought its way into the leading brains of Europe, as appears upon page 192 of this book. It is as good as Boissier; there runs all through it knowledge, proportion, and something which, had he been granted a little more light, or been nurtured in an intellectual climate a little more sunny, would have been vision itself:—

"The being who accomplished a work so vast, a work compared to which the first creation appears but a trifling difficulty, what could He be but God? Who but God could have wrested His prize from a power which half the thinking world believed to be His co-equal and co-eternal adversary? He was God. He was man also, for He was the second Adam—the second starting-point of human growth. He was virgin born, that no original impurity might infect the substance which He assumed; and being Himself sinless, He showed in the nature of His person after His resurrection, what the material body would have been in all of us except for sin, and what it will be when, after feeding on it in its purity, the bodies of each of us are transfigured after its likeness."

There's a piece of historical prose which summarises, teaches, and stamps itself finally upon the mind! Froude saw that the Faith was the summit and the completion of Rome. Had he written us a summary of the fourth and fifth centuries—and had he written it just after reading some dull fellow on the other side—what books we should have had to show to the rival schools of the Continent!

Consider the sharp and almost unique judgment passed upon Tacitus at the bottom of page 133 and the top of page 134, or again, the excellent sub-ironic passages in which he expresses the vast advantage of metaphysical debate: which has all these qualities, that it is true, sober, exact, and yet a piece of laughter and a contradiction of itself. It is prose in three dimensions.

That pedantic charge of inaccuracy, with which I have already dealt in another place, in connection with another and perhaps a greater man, is not applicable to Froude. He was hasty, and in his historical work the result certainly was that he put down things upon insufficient evidence, or upon evidence but half read; but even in his historical work (which deals remember, with the most highly controversial part of English history) he is as accurate as anybody else, except perhaps Lingard. That the man was by nature accurate, well read and of a good memory, appears continually throughout this book, and the more widely one has read one's self, the more one appreciates this truth.

For instance, there is often set down to Disraeli the remark that his religion was "the religion of all sensible men." and upon being asked what this religion might be, that Oriental is said to have replied, "All sensible men keep that to themselves." Now Disraeli could no more have made such a witticism than he could have flown through the air; his mind was far too extravagant for such pointed phrases. Froude quotes the story (page 205 of this book) but rightly ascribes it to Rogers, a very different man from Disraeli— an Englishman with a mastery of the English language.

Look again at this remark upon page 20, "The happy allusion of Quevedo to the Tiber was not out of place here:—the fugitive is alone permanent." How many Englishmen know that Du Bellay's immortal sonnet was but a translation of Quevedo? You could drag

all Oxford and Cambridge to-day and not find a single man who knew it.

Note the care he has shown in quoting one of those hackneyed phrases which almost all the world misquotes, "Que mon nom soit fletri, pourvu que la France soit libre." Of a hundred times that you may see those words of Danton's written down, you will perhaps not see them once written down exactly as they were said.

So it is throughout his work. Men still living in the Universities accuse him vaguely of inexactitude as they will accuse Jowett of ignorance, and these men, when one examines them closely, are found to be ignorant of the French language, to have read no philosophy between Aristotle and Hobbes, and to issue above their signatures such errors of plain dates and names as make one blush for English scholarship and be glad that no foreigner takes our historical school seriously.

There is always left to any man who deals with the writings of Froude, a task impossible to complete but necessarily to be attempted. He put himself forward, in a set attitude, to combat and to destroy what he conceived to be—in the moment of his attack—the creed of his countrymen. He was so literary a man that he did this as much by accepting as by denying, as much by dating from Elizabeth all we are as by affirming unalterable material sequence and the falsity of every transcendental acceptance. His time smelt him out even when he flattered it most. Even when he wrote of the Revenge the England of his day—luckily for him—thought him an enemy.

Upon the main discussion of his life it is impossible to pass a judgment, for the elements of that discussion are now destroyed; the universities no longer pretend to believe. And "free discussion" has become so free that the main doctrines he assailed are no longer presented or read without weariness in the class to which he appealed and from which he sprang.

The sects, then, against which he set himself are dead: but upon a much larger question which is permanent, and which in a sort of groping way he sometimes handled, something should be said here, which I think has never been said before. He was perpetually upon the borderland of the Catholic Church.

Between him and the Faith there stood no distance of space, but rather a high thin wall; the high thin wall of his own desperate conviction. If you will turn to page 209 of this book you will see it said of the denial of the Sacrament by the Reformers and of Ridley's dogma that it was bread only "the commonsense of the country was of the same opinion, and illusion was at an end." Froude knew that the illusion was not at an end. He probably knew (for we must continue to repeat that he was a most excellent historian) that the "commonsense of the country" was, by the time Ridley and the New English Church began denying the real presence, and turning that denial into a dogma, profoundly indifferent to all dogmas whatsoever. What "the common-sense of the country" wanted was to keep out swarthy men, chivalrous indeed but imperialists full of gold who owned nearly all the earth, but who, they were determined, should not own England.

Froude was fond of such assertions, his book is full of them, and they are more than mere violence framed for combat; they are in their curious way definite expressions of the man's soul; for Froude was fond of that high thin wall, and liked to build it higher. He was a dogmatic rationalist—one hesitates to use a word which has been so portentously misused. Renan before dying came out with one of his last dogmas; it was to this effect, that there was not in the Universe an intelligent power higher than the human mind. Froude, had he lived in an atmosphere of perfectly free discussion as Renan did, would have heartily subscribed to that dogma.

Why then do I say that he was perpetually on the borderland of the Catholic Church? Because when he leaves for a moment the phraseology and the material of his youth and of his neighbourhood, he is perpetually striking that note of interest, of wonder, and of intellectual freedom which is the note of Catholicism.

Let any man who knows what Catholicism may be read carefully the *Essay on the Dissolution of the Monasteries*, and the *Essay on the Philosophy of Christianity* which succeeds it in this book, but which was written six years before. Let him remember that nothing Froude ever wrote was written without the desire to combat some enemy, and, having made allowance for that desire, let him decide whether one shock, one experience, one revelation would not have

whirled him into the Church. He was, I think, like a man who has felt the hands of a woman and heard her voice, who knows them so thoroughly well that he can love, criticise, or despise according to his mood; but who has never seen her face.

And he was especially near to the Church in this: that having discussed a truth he was compelled to fight for it and to wound actively in fighting, He was an agent, He did, He saw that the mass of stuff clinging round the mind of wealthy England was decaying, He turned with regret towards the healthy visions of Europe and called them illusions because they were not provable, and because all provable things showed a flee other than that of the creed and were true in another manner. He despised the cowardice — for it is cowardice — that pretends to intellectual conviction and to temporal evidence of the things of the soul. He saw and said, and he was right in saying, that the City of God is built upon things incredible.

"Incredibilia nec crederim, nisi me compelleret ecclesiae auctoritas"

H. BELLOC.

The following is a list of the published works of J. A. Froude. "Life of St. Neot" ("Lives of the English Saints," edited by J. H. Newman), 1844. "Shadows of the Clouds" (Tales), by Zeta (pseud.), 1847. "A Sermon (on 2 Cor. vii. 10) preached at St. Mary's Church on the Death of the Rev. George May Coleridge," 1847. Article on "Spinoza" (Oxford and Cambridge Review), 1847. "The Nemesis of Faith" (Tale), 1849. "England's Forgotten Worthies" (Westminster Review), 1852. "Book of Job" (Westminster Review), 1853. "Poems of Matthew Arnold" (Westminster Review), 1854. "Suggestions on the Best Means of Teaching English History" ("Oxford Essays," &c.), 1855. "History of England," 12 vols., 1856-1870 "The Influence of the Reformation on the Scottish Character," 1865. "Inaugural Address delivered to the University of St. Andrews, March 19, 1869," 1869. "Short Studies on Great Subjects," 1867, 2 vols., series 2-4, 1872-83 (articles from Fraser's Magazine, Westminster Review, &c.). "The