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## CHAPTER I

THE LIBERAL ANGLICANS AND THE  
PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF PROGRESS

THE years in which the Liberal Anglican idea of history took shape were critical in the social history of modern England. This background of social crisis in the first half of the 19th century, which hardly affected Macaulay's attitude to the past, made a deep impression on the Liberal Anglicans and is a vital factor in the interpretation of their historical thought, as it is also in the historical thought of Carlyle. This means that the search for the origins of Liberal Anglican thought must begin on the plane of ideas and temperament, because the social matrix of Thomas Arnold and his friends was that of Macaulay. Why was the historical outlook of the Liberal Anglicans not typical of the prosperous, rising middle class?

The Liberal Anglicans were in revolt against the 18th century, against that world of optimism, of utilitarianism and individualism which, in the words of Cobban,<sup>1</sup> came finally into its own in England in the 19th century. All the signs of the Romantic revolt against the 18th century are present in the ideas of the Liberal Anglicans: their political thought was in the direct line of descent from Burke and Coleridge; their philosophy was Coleridgean, opposed to the mechanical, materialistic epistemology of the Lockian tradition; they looked to the historians and philosophers of the 'German Movement', rather than to the French liberal thinkers, for inspiration; their religion was not an external form, an affair of 'evidences' and rational proofs, but an inward conviction and belief in God's providential government of the world. In short, they belonged to the 'Germano-Coleridgean' school, as John Mill called it.

It is the Romantic strain in their minds which is significant for the history of history. Whately, it is true, the 'typical Noetic',<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the 18th Century*.

<sup>2</sup> V. F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the 19th Century* (1913), p. 96. Whately 'appreciated the logic rather than the poetry of life'.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE LIBERAL ANGLICAN IDEA OF HISTORY

can hardly be called a Romantic; he, too, alone of the group, remained ignorant of German. He was nevertheless the friend and mentor of Arnold, and he claimed that he was the first to stress the importance of the imagination in the study of history.<sup>1</sup> In Milman also there are obvious marks of the 18th century. His piety was 'rational, articulate, objective, confident, robust . . . neither sensitive nor subtle'.<sup>2</sup> Alone among the Liberal Anglicans he admired Gibbon greatly, in the *History of the Jews* there are traces of what Milman himself called Gibbon's 'covert sneer', [3] and the edition of the *Decline and Fall* which he prepared remained the standard edition until that of Bury. He has been called 'a survivor from the Age of Reason, a kind of Christian Gibbon, without the indecency and without the fun'.<sup>3</sup> But in his poetic youth Milman was compared with Byron.<sup>4</sup> Later, under the influence of the Schlegels, he was attracted to the poetry of India and published a translation of the Mahabharata. What is more to the point, he admired Vico and possessed a copy of the *Scienza Nuova*.

Julius Hare and Thirlwall were the champions of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and translators not only of Niebuhr's *History of Rome*, but of tales by Tieck and Fouqué. Tieck's object, wrote Carlyle, was 'to penetrate into the inmost shrines of Imagination', to seize and adapt to the feelings of modern minds 'the true tone of that ancient time when man was in his childhood, when the universe within was divided by no walls of adamant from the universe without'.

Thomas Arnold was the friend of Wordsworth (politics notwithstanding) and made his home, the beloved Fox How, among the mountains of Cumberland. He was, in a sense, a Lakist, an aspect of the man which has lately received attention.<sup>5</sup> He used to take pupils from Rugby to Fox How, because mountains and dales were, he said, 'a great point in education'. A. P. Stanley was Arnold's pupil and intellectual heir, and his thought is dominated by that of the master. He was a romantic in biblical interpretation,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Correspondence of R. Whately*, vol. II, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Smyth, *Dean Milman* (1949), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Smyth, *Dean Milman*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> See Basil Willey, *Studies in Nineteenth Century Thought*, p. 68. [4]

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF PROGRESS

bringing the Bible to life by the power of his historical sympathy and pictorial imagination,<sup>1</sup> following, in this, the Coleridgean reaction against the abstractions of Rationalist history. For Coleridge had written:

In nothing is Scriptural history more strongly contrasted with the histories of highest note in the present age, than in its freedom from the hollowness of abstractions. While the latter present a shadow-fight of Things and Quantities, the former gives us the history of men, and balances the important influence of individual Minds with the previous state of the national morals and manners. . . . How should it be otherwise? The histories and political economy of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the *product* of an unenlivened generalizing Understanding.<sup>2</sup>

It was the concrete, the pictorial in ecclesiastical history which appealed particularly to Stanley; his delight was in the recreation of the atmosphere of historical scenes. One does not go to Milman, either, for the history of dogma and doctrine. What one gets, in both historians, is rather the climate of opinion, the living atmosphere, in Stanley, of particular scenes, in Milman of whole centuries. Dislike of party-spirit and party-warfare reinforced this romantic method of historical reconstruction, for dogma and doctrine for the Liberal Anglicans meant controversy over essentials.

The Liberal Anglicans, like Carlyle, did not escape the experience of the Everlasting No. Early in their biographies one meets spiritual crisis, doubt, scepticism, pessimism, irony. Stanley in his *Life of Arnold* talks of 'the morbid state of mind into which he was thrown, from various causes, at his entrance on life'.<sup>3</sup> The years spent at Laleham (1819-28) seem to represent in Arnold's life a withdrawal in which he finally overcame all his early doubts, restlessness, and lack of purpose. Thirlwall was described by Carlyle as 'the massive Cantabrigian Scholar and Sceptic',<sup>4</sup> and his biographer talks of his habitual tone of irony. Thirlwall, in fact, made a famous study of irony, in which he distinguished a practical as

<sup>1</sup> Storr, *Development of English Theology*, p. 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Statesman's Manual* (1816), pp. 34-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Thomas Arnold*, pp. 15-16, 340n.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Thirlwall, *Connop Thirlwall*, p. 116; cf. p. 23.

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 Duncan Forbes  
 Excerpt  
[More information](#)

#### THE LIBERAL ANGLICAN IDEA OF HISTORY

opposed to a purely verbal irony, an irony of Providence which evolves good out of apparent evil. It was this irony, inherent in the events, which lent, in Thirlwall's eyes, 'the highest degree of interest to the conflicts of religious and political parties'.<sup>1</sup> In Hare, a certain puritanical, Old Testament strain, like that of Carlyle, was very strong; he denounced the ease in Zion and luxury of too much civilization, pointed sternly to the inevitable end of all non-Christian nations, and appears sometimes in the guise of a prophet alone in the moral wilderness of civilization, with its sophisticated fear of ridicule, its painted ladies, and pickpockets. 'Excitement' was, for Arnold and his friends, the great spiritual danger in what Stanley called an 'overheated' civilization. The growing popularity of novels and other symptoms were viewed as sure signs of decadence.

One result of this hostile attitude to the world which was being created by the industrial revolution and modern science was that the Liberal Anglicans were readier than those who, like Macaulay, gloried in the march of material civilization to feel the full weight of the misery and squalor of the critical years in which their historical thought was taking shape. Their awareness of crisis was as sharp as that of any of their contemporaries, and deeper than most. Even during his phase of youthful Toryism, in 1815, Arnold apparently expressed real feeling about the social state of England.<sup>2</sup> It was to be a perpetual source of anxiety to him in later life. In 1848 Milman wrote of 'the wilderness of our manufacturing world', and of the probability, nay the certainty, that 'the fatal cycle will continue to revolve with more intense force and rapidity—speculation, prosperity, over-production, glut, distress'.<sup>3</sup> Thirlwall, described by his biographer as in the vanguard of social thought, was the only bishop to vote for the repeal of the Corn Laws. The crisis was, for the Liberal Anglicans, not only economic and social, but, as for Coleridge, moral and intellectual also, and this alone would have made for a deeper and wider conception of history than that of their contemporaries, at a time when history was still generally thought of as essentially practical, a conscious relation of past and

<sup>1</sup> *Remains: Literary and Theological*, vol. III, p. 8 ('The Irony of Sophocles').

<sup>2</sup> Stanley, *Life*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. 78, pp. 385-6.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF PROGRESS

present. That their interpretation of the present was not confined to the level of potential legislative remedy, to the plane of institutions and mere political machinery, as was that of the Utilitarians, of Grote, for example, but plumbed depths of experience hardly recognized to exist by the Utilitarians and their allies, was part cause and part consequence of a deeper understanding of the past. As has been seen, the history of history cannot separate past and present, and it is especially true of the Liberal Anglicans that their attitude to contemporary problems is a clue to their historical thought. Arnold said of his anxiety about the state of the nation: 'Perhaps it comes from my fondness for History, that political things have as great a reality to my mind, as things of private life, and the life of the nation becomes distinct as that of an individual.'<sup>1</sup> The study of the past intensified Arnold's awareness of the present, and vice versa.

Underlying and subtly influencing the approach of their Rationalist adversaries to these contemporary problems, as it seemed to the Liberal Anglicans, was the idea of progress, and to view the Liberal Anglican idea of history as an enquiry into the true nature of progress—somewhat artificial as this proceeding may be—is useful not only for purposes of exposition—because it introduces a unifying principle into the whole—but also because it emphasizes the practical character, as well as the depth and dimensions of their thought, while at the same time illuminating more fully its emotional background.

Progress in 1815 was the faith of Radicals and atheists, a belief still tainted with Jacobinism, with violent revolution and godlessness. Hatred of the Radicals was reinforced by the fear of imminent social conflict. These emotions the Liberal Anglicans shared with the majority of the 'respectable' classes, but the Liberal Anglican dislike of the Radical solution was not grounded on fear and prejudice alone, but on a philosophy of life which was one facet of the great post-war religious movement, whose 'lunatic fringe' looked for the coming of the millennium, and which led ultimately either to Oxford, or to Rome or to the Broad Church. The Liberal Anglicans hated Radicalism as a symptom of the materialism

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10 May 1839.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE LIBERAL ANGLICAN IDEA OF HISTORY

of the age, of the philosophical vacuum which that materialism represented, of the shameful intellectual backwardness of England as compared with France or Germany,<sup>1</sup> and as the heir to the Rationalism of the 18th century, which had learnt nothing from the French Revolution, being still grounded on abstract theory and not on historical experience. They organized themselves intellectually against the Benthamites in the tradition of Burke and Coleridge, and by the time that the unreasoning fear of 'perfectibility' had died away and the idea of progress had become respectable, they had entrenched themselves against it in the study of history, reinforced from the great arsenal (which they had discovered) of German historical speculation. Progress became the *credo* of triumphant Victorianism with the development of the purely material side of civilization, a development which the Liberal Anglicans distrusted in itself, and progress, in becoming respectable, became from the Liberal Anglican point of view more dangerous intrinsically, as well as more widespread, than the revolutionary doctrine of perfectibility had been. The latter was an avowed belief in man to the exclusion of God, the clearly defined faith of a small militant party, while the former could afford to neglect God while still outwardly conforming to a belief in His Providence.

The Liberal Anglican enquiry into the nature of true progress, which had its beginnings in the dislike of Utilitarianism and fear of Jacobinism, was not seriously modified, therefore, when the 'Jacobinical' idea of progress developed in the course of the century into a widespread belief in the inevitable onward march of civilization. By this time, the Liberal Anglicans had arrived at a conception of history which gave the lie to the popular idea of progress as an unbroken course of inevitable material improvement,[5] and which emphasized not the material and exclusively intellectual, but the moral and spiritual aspect of civilization, or, in Coleridge's words, 'cultivation', rather than 'civilization.' Their emotional pessimism of 1815-30 became a 'scientific' pessimism, based on a 'science of history'.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thirlwall's letters to Bunsen (1821) in *Letters*, ed. Perowne and Stokes, pp. 60, 65-6.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF PROGRESS

Progress, being for the Liberal Anglicans, not an unquestioned assumption, but a challenge to their deepest beliefs, provides the logical starting point for an examination of the Liberal Anglican idea of history, because it is a presupposition, but not the absolute presupposition, of their thought. [6] Their absolute presupposition was God's Providence; it is this which they took for granted and which they never questioned or doubted.

That progress was not a Liberal Anglican assumption is a distinguishing mark of their historical thinking, representing, historically, a decisive and fundamental break with the whole spirit of Rationalist history in England. The 'philosophical history' of the Rationalists, as represented, for example, by Condorcet, took progress for granted. Its task was to describe the stages in the inevitable process of the 'March of Mind'. Progress in this sense was the presupposition of the Scottish school of 'conjectural history', as Dugald Stewart called it, the 'natural history of society' as studied by Millar, Adam Ferguson and others. James Mill, as an historian, belonged to this tradition. His primary object in the famous second book of his *History of British India* was not to describe the culture of India, but to fix it in the scale of progressive civilization. In other words, for these historians, civilization was a question of degree. Such a view assumes that 'civilization' is inevitable and a good thing in itself, and begs the whole question of its value and of its inevitability. The Liberal Anglicans refused to think of progress as 'civilization' in this sense, and were repelled by the spiritual and imaginative poverty of the conception of the 'March of Mind'. 'How baseless and delusive is the vulgar notion of the march of mind as necessarily exhibiting a steady regular advance within the same nation in all things', said Hare.<sup>1</sup>

'O trust not in the efficacy of Civilization! there is no baser, more senseless idolatry. If things are at all better to-day, it is not Civilization that has bettered them. As for any charm in Civilization to preserve us from cruelty there is none such: if Civilization of itself could anywise soften the heart, it would only be by weakening and unmanning it. . . . When Civilization is severed from moral principle and religious doctrine, there is no power in it to make the heart gentle.'<sup>2</sup>

'What', he asked, 'is the great blessing of a very general state of

<sup>1</sup> *Guesses at Truth* (2nd ed., 2nd series), p. 15.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* (1827 ed.), vol. II, pp. 306-9.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE LIBERAL ANGLICAN SCIENCE OF HISTORY

civilization? That there are no highwaymen and . . . plenty of pickpockets,<sup>1</sup> and he pointed to the fact that effective resistance to Napoleon was found on the fringes of civilization, in Spain and Russia.<sup>2</sup> ‘Civilization’ and the ‘March of Mind’ were assumptions which the Liberal Anglicans could not accept, because they dispensed with God’s Providence. Progress in the Rationalist sense, too, was part of a conception of history (*histoire raisonné*) which from the point of view of Romanticism was lacking in fulness and depth. The Rationalists held, in words used by Gibbon and quoted with approval by James Mill, that ‘aux yeux d’un philosophe, les faits composent la partie la moins intéressante de l’histoire’.<sup>3</sup> Such an idea of progress as that of the Rationalist historians, related, as it was, to an individualistic conception of society, was unsatisfactory to men whose interest was stirred by the contemplation of the concrete and particular, and for whom the state was a growing organism, not a collection of atomistic individuals.

On the other hand, such history as was written by Romantics in the first three decades of the 19th century in England could not have seemed satisfactory to men for whom history was nothing if not practical. It was not philosophical enough. It conformed too closely to Aristotle’s definition, almost wholly immersed in the particular, as it was, and not rising to any kind of useful generalization about the development of society, nor making any contribution to the critical problems of the social condition of England. Lingard, for example, in whom, according to Fueter, the opposition to the historiography of Rationalism in England is first clearly seen, rejected the ‘philosophical’ history of the 18th century, but sought to transform the historian into a mere reporter of events.<sup>4</sup> And it is worth noting that Scott, as a philosophical historian—a title to which he may justly lay claim—wrote altogether in the tradition of the Rationalist historians.<sup>5</sup> The chapter in the *Tales of a Grandfather*, for instance, which treats of the progress of society, is pure ‘conjectural’ history (Scott had been a pupil of Dugald

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18. [7]<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 307.<sup>3</sup> *History of British India* (1817), vol. 1, p. xix n.<sup>4</sup> Fueter, *Histoire de l’Historiographie Moderne* (1914), p. 640; Gooch, *History and Historians*, p. 290; Peardon, *Transition in English Historical Writing*, pp. 282–3.<sup>5</sup> A. W. Benn, *History of English Rationalism in the 19th Century*, vol. 1, p. 310.



Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF PROGRESS

Stewart),<sup>1</sup> and Master Little John, for whom the book was written, showed himself more of a Romantic than Scott in this respect by heartily disliking this chapter.

For men like Arnold, urgently seeking a science of society which could be applied effectively, but repudiating the Rationalist route to the same end, the great fault of this Romantic view of history in England was that it was too close to mere antiquarianism or too imaginative to be brought to bear with weight on present problems. It gloried too much in the past for its own sake. Arnold attacked this sort of history, which Taine described as 'poetical history', as unpractical, and because it tended to bring the serious study of history into disrepute with practical men, a disastrous development from his point of view.

The pictures thus produced, [he wrote] were striking and beautiful indeed, but nothing practical could be learnt from them since they displayed a world as unreal as the fantastic creations of romance. Indeed if their brilliancy ever excited a wish to imitate them the result was . . . mischievous, when attempts were made to force the character and practice of modern nations from their proper growth and course, in the vain hope of making them resemble a pattern purely imaginary. . . . We may hope that the folly is gone by of painting the manners, institutions and events of ancient times in colours most strongly contrasted with everything which we know from our own experience.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover although its national outlook (Turner's desire to arouse by his History a 'patriotic curiosity' about the Anglo-Saxons is an example)<sup>3</sup> was an improvement on the soul-destroying cosmopolitanism of the Rationalist historians, which was bad because 'unnatural' in Romantic eyes, this was, from a practical point of view, from the point of view of a science of history, a narrowing outlook, and to be deplored if it buttressed the sort of chauvinistic patriotism which the Liberal Anglicans denounced whenever it raised its head. Liberal Anglican thought, indeed, represents a reaction against parochialism in the form either of Romantic nationalism or in that of Rationalist Europocentricism

<sup>1</sup> See Lockhart's *Life of Scott* (1837), vol. 1, pp. 171-4. In an essay on the feudal system submitted to Dugald Stewart, Scott 'endeavoured to prove that it proceeds upon principles common to all nations when placed in a certain situation'.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Review*, vol. 32, pp. 77-8.

<sup>3</sup> Peardon, *Transition in English Historical Writing*, p. 224.

Cambridge University Press

0521026113 - The Liberal Anglican Idea of History

Duncan Forbes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## THE LIBERAL ANGLICAN IDEA OF HISTORY

—for Rationalist history, which had begun with Voltaire's protest against the theological Europocentricism of Bossuet, had substituted a Europocentricism based on the idea of progress—and this is seen, for instance, in F. D. Maurice's *Religions of the World*, which was for Stanley the sign of a new era in the relations of Christianity with the whole world.<sup>1</sup>

Rationalist history was practical; it related past and present; was concerned with causes and general laws; but although claiming to be universal in outlook, its conception of history was limited and superficial. Romantic history delighted in the fulness and complexity of the past, but even when it traversed many ages and many societies (as in Southey) was not universal in outlook, at least in England, nor practical in nature, being content to describe the particular, and not attempting to argue from the particular to the general.

What the Liberal Anglicans, concerned as they were with the practical problems of the condition of England, and loyal to the tradition of Wordsworth and Coleridge, required, therefore, was the practical character of Rationalist history in alliance with history seen in all its fulness and depth; a philosophical history concerned with general laws, but based on the concrete individuality of the nation's life-course; the subjection of the idea of progress to the test of the real facts of history, that is, the facts of history seen in their wholeness.

A conception of history which was practical, yet not Rationalist, which was philosophical, but not in the 18th-century sense of 'philosophical' history, which was Romantic, yet concerned with general laws and based on critical scholarship, which was related to an organic conception of the state, and which was deeply religious, the Liberal Anglicans discovered in the German historical movement, and in Vico who stood behind it.

The nature of the revolution which this discovery worked in their minds is revealed by a remark of Sterling, the pupil and friend of Hare, who said that Niebuhr's *History of Rome* 'was the first help I had in getting out of the slough of Benthamism'.<sup>2</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> See Stanley's *Essay on the Theology of the 19th Century*.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Hare (1829), Hare's 'Life of the Author', *Essays and Tales of John Sterling*, vol. 1, p. xxix.