

"Sir G. C. Lewis on Early Roman History." *Eclectic Review* 10 [n.s.] (August 1855): 172-90. Rpt. as "On Sir G. Cornwall Lewis's Two Volumes of Inquiry into Early Rome" in *Miscellanies* 5: 32-50.

brought together, wanting the breath which should give them life. There are biographies, like maps, painfully accurate and minute, in which all facts, figures, and names are studiously recorded. There are biographies likewise that are panoramic pictures, in which are life and motion, light and shade,—the objects brought under pictorial treatment, and thrown into their true perspective. But of these volumes we can at least truly say, that there is nothing false in colouring, or repulsive to taste; and we think their author exercised a wise discretion in bringing the materials in his possession before the public.

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ART. IV.—*An Inquiry into the Credibility of the Early Roman History.* By the Right Honourable Sir G. Cornwall Lewis. In Two Volumes. 8vo. London: J. W. Parker & Son. 1855.

It has been said, that a great book is a great evil; this may be true, yet it is sometimes a great necessity. In our tranquil judgment, all that was really needful in the present volumes might have been equally well said in one-tenth part of the length; yet the world in general would not so have judged. When a man of genius and learning writes a huge book, full of erroneous and delusive theories, which can be sufficiently confuted in a mere pamphlet, the prejudices of men will not accept such a confutation, but insist on a bulky work as the reply. The literary duel must be fought out with equal weapons on both sides. Had Sir G. C. Lewis put the substance of these 1100 pages into 100, Niebuhr, if still alive, would probably have thought it enough to reply, that the writer was a 'superficial blockhead;' and the public would argue,—'Niebuhr must no doubt be right, for he is a man of genius; his opponent probably cannot appreciate him,—and at any rate he has shown no learning which can compete with Niebuhr's wonderful erudition.' But when a great work, like the present, appears, filled with marks of diligent research, with elaborate notes and exhaustive text,—then the manes of Niebuhr receive sufficient honour by encountering such a champion. Even to be overcome in the encounter is not inglorious. Besides, it is not worth a bookseller's while to press the purchase of a mere pamphlet. Such an article is apt to drop still-born. Even if it have a great run, the author is well off if he does but lose a few pounds. On the contrary, two respectable-sized volumes may bring pecuniary reward alike to the zealous bookseller and to the

meritorious author ; and at the same time, such a book *mole suā stat.* It obtains its deserved place on the shelves of public libraries, and becomes a κριμα ἐς ἀεί as a witness to truth. So important is it to have material as well as spiritual weight !

Those considerations nearly reconcile us to the elaborate and intrinsically tedious nature of the volumes before us, which do not appear to deserve the charge anticipated in the introduction of being 'either presumptuous or superfluous.' In our youth, we waded through the distressingly difficult volumes of Niebuhr, with a constant sense of discouragement and perplexity at being unable to appreciate his arguments. This we dutifully ascribed to our own ignorance. To our extreme surprise, we found him magisterially passing sentence on the works of authors which have perished, describing their excellences or defects, sometimes with severe remarks, and displaying a most marvellous acquaintance with the sources from which this or that piece of information was gathered by an extant author. One who finds himself unable to follow Niebuhr's reasonings intelligently, is still apt to fancy it is useful and necessary elaborately to digest all his results. When Dr. Arnold came out so strong in allegiance to the surpassing discernment of Niebuhr, a new load was added to the *argumentum ad verecundiam*, which, though it could not wholly hinder a student from thinking for himself, has forced many a one to let out only in whisper and in hesitation his grave distrusts. For fifteen years at least, no man could bluntly express disbelief of Niebuhr without ruining his own credit, except indeed a few eminent persons, who all along were, on occasions, frank and outspoken. In the retrospect, we cannot but think that a serious disservice has been done to students by forcing upon them the painful and difficult process of 'getting up' Niebuhr's volumes, while an ever-increasing chorus of scholars proclaims that Niebuhr undertook an *impossible* problem—viz., positively to reconstruct a lost history ; and that he has done it, not merely arbitrarily, but by methods, to adopt which is an elaborate practice in the art of bad reasoning.

In writing this, we do not intend to express agreement with the practical conclusions of Sir G. C. Lewis, concerning which we have many words ; nor do we intend to say that Niebuhr's works have not, *on the whole*, advanced ancient history. We sincerely judge that they have ; but we believe their benefit has been entirely for historians and professors, not for young students, to whom we are disposed to regard his writings concerning the early age of Rome as rather pernicious. But Niebuhr was a man of great imagination, great memory, great power of combination. He threw his heart into his subject with passion,—as indeed did Mitford ; but with far more learning than Mitford.

The effect produced by his living voice was much greater than that of his writings, as is manifest in the zeal and love of his immediate pupils. Germany had already reared scholars, who were not, like the Italian antiquaries, mere children of vast memories and fine taste, but men who inquired freely, and who asked not only what did ancient writers assert? but also, how much of it was true? But none of them had such passionateness as Niebuhr, or so intense a belief that truth was attainable; and though his immediate attainment was only a phantom, and his resentment against those who did not bow to his idol an unseemly bigotry, yet this passionateness, joined to his vast learning, had a kindling and electric effect. He did not communicate any great *results* to his pupils (one or two perhaps may be rescued from Sir G. C. Lewis and Rubino), nor any new *method* which can be for a moment approved; but he did communicate to those of them who dedicated their lives to literature his own insatiable thirst for knowledge, and much of his aptitude for combination, and a most ambitious grasp of every subject. His influence has reached far beyond the limits of Roman antiquity. In fact, he was by no means the first to discern the uncertainty of the early Roman history. Perizonius, De Pouilly and Beaufort had elaborately maintained this, and had rejected many narratives as incredible. Niebuhr, however, treated the modest *uncertainty* in which they were satisfied to abide, as a superficial scepticism, and assumed for himself the problem of re-constructing the history, while fully aware that he had often no better source than his own conjectures. Sir G. C. Lewis writes concerning this as follows:—

‘There is no doubt that long habit, combined with a happy talent, may enable a person to discern the truth, where it is invisible to ordinary minds possessing no peculiar advantages. This may be observed, not only in historical researches, but in every other department of knowledge. In order, however, that the truth so perceived should recommend itself to the convictions of others, it is a necessary condition that it should admit of proof which they can understand. Newton might have perceived by a rapid and intuitive sagacity the connexion between the fall of an apple and the attraction of the earth to the sun; but unless he could have demonstrated that connexion by arguments which were intelligible and satisfactory to the scientific world, his discovery would have been useless, except as a mere suggestion. In like manner we may rejoice that the ingenuity and learning of Niebuhr should have enabled him to advance many novel hypotheses and conjectures respecting events in the early history, and respecting the form of the early constitution of Rome. But unless he can support those hypotheses by sufficient evidence, they are not entitled to our belief. It is not enough for a historian to claim the possession of a retrospective second-sight, which is denied to the rest of the world;

of a mysterious doctrine, revealed only to the initiated. Unless he can prove, as well as guess; unless he can produce evidence of the fact, after he has intuitively perceived its existence, his historical system cannot be received.'—Vol. i. p. 14.

In our article on the 'Life and Letters of Niebuhr' ('Eclectic Review,' June, 1852, p. 665), we ourselves briefly noticed this very point, entirely agreeing with Sir G. C. Lewis. We said:—'To go into details is impossible; but we may and must say, that Niebuhr totally mistook the duties of a historian. He supposed it was his place to dogmatize, and *make no attempts to convince the understanding of his reader*, and, if any one made objections, reply that he is an ignorant blockhead and evidently incompetent to judge.' It is indeed peculiarly difficult for a reader of Niebuhr to find out what part of his assertions needs, and what does not need, proof; for he quietly narrates his own theory as if it were attested by some ancient authority, and alleges that we have the 'express testimony' of Dionysius, or some one else, when nobody but himself can find anything of the sort in the passage to which his foot-note refers. He also talks so familiarly about what the ancient annalists recorded, that the reader little suspects that their very existence is a doubtful hypothesis of Niebuhr's own. Sir G. C. Lewis is fully justified in protesting here against adopting hypothesis as fact; nevertheless, we think the doctrine by which he tries to establish pure unhypothetical history must annihilate all history whatsoever. In fact, our difficulty in reviewing the work consists in this, that the reader will not easily believe our representations concerning Sir George to be correct.

That there was no attempt among the Romans at a *continuous history* before Fabius Pictor, a contemporary of Hannibal, is universally admitted. Sir George quotes Livy and two passages of Dionysius in proof, and lays stress on the latter (vol. i. pp. 37, 81, 196) as of first-rate importance, and as totally disproving Niebuhr's belief in the existence of family memoirs, annals, and chronicles. To us they appear to have no such tendency. Fabius was the first systematic historian,—*παλαιότατος τῶν τὰ Ῥωμαϊκὰ συντάξάντων*: how does this prove him to be the first who noted down contemporary occurrences? Such a phrase as 'a man who *compiled* the Roman affairs,' never could be used of one who merely committed to writing notices of passing events, or of his own life. Yet Sir George actually brings these passages (vol. i. p. 196) as sufficient disproof of Niebuhr's belief, and speaks of him as *setting them aside on mere conjecture*. Niebuhr may be right or wrong in his belief of such memorials; but such belief is no more inconsistent with Fabius' being the oldest compiler of Roman history than Sir George's own belief; for Sir

George makes concessions quite surprising. He employs the bulk of his treatise, from chapters vii. to xiii. inclusive, to prove his case; and deduces (vol. ii. p. 488), that 'the extant narrative, for the first 472 years, *was not originally framed by contemporary historians,*' . . . which the reader will fancy to mean, *was not originally noted down by a series of contemporary chroniclers*; inasmuch as no historian can live through five centuries, and be contemporary with them all: hence it is difficult to see what else can be meant than the absence of all written contemporary memorials; yet he continues thus:—'but was derived by writers posterior to the events related, though prior to the extant historians, partly from oral traditions, and *partly from written documentary sources, the nature of which is imperfectly reported.*' There is a comprehensive phrase! The extant narrative of nearly five centuries was derived (it seems) by Fabius and Cincius, partly from oral traditions, and *partly from written documentary sources*, about which Sir George does not know much; not whether they were not all contemporary with the events, as we certainly know some to have been. But if there were contemporary documents, what else is the man who wrote them but a contemporary chronicler, annalist, or historian? Evidently in so far as the after history was based on these documents, it is as authentic as any history in the world. The documents may have been few, and in consequence the true history discontinuous and fragmentary; but (except by misinterpretation) not less true and less certain on that account. And this appears to us to be Sir George's pervading fallacy; he treats a fragmentary history as essentially fabulous. If he reply, that oral tradition has mingled fable with truth, and that as we have not the original documents, we can no longer disentangle the truth, we admit the difficulty; but it is not confined to the early history: it infects all history; and *it is the duty of criticism to attempt the separation.* Are we to forget that the exploits of the two Scipios in Spain, in Livy's Hannibalic War, have been discredited since Sir Walter Raleigh's criticism? that Thirlwall, and other very eminent modern Greek historians, reject the Peace of Cimon? that Gibbon has rejected the stupendous Persian victory of Alexander Severus? Oral tradition is liable to err; but so is that which we call history, and which at first sight seems well attested. As to the Roman written documents, Sir G. C. Lewis admits (as everybody must admit) that alphabetical writing was known and was used from the time of the kings,—that international treaties were in the earliest times carved in brass, and came down to later ages,—that Fabius found a continuous list of annual magistrates, more or less complete and authentic, ascending to the commencement of the

consular government,—that from the burning of the city there was extant a series of meagre official annals, kept by the chief pontiffs,—that many texts of laws, including the Laws of the Twelve Tables, were preserved, together with notes of ancient usages and rules of customary law, both civil and religious, recorded in the books of the pontiffs; (to which indeed Dionysius, says he refers as containing *ancient stories* also; Dionys. i. 73: G. C. L. vol. i. p. 89): finally, what is perhaps of great importance, though slightly passed over, he admits that the decrees of the senate were from the very beginning written and carefully kept, and (when it was found that the officers garbled them, in order to cheat the people) they were, from after the Decemvirate, deposited in the temple of Ceres, under custody of the plebeian *ædiles*. Sir George acknowledges that Livy mentions a written record of a decree of the senate, 442 B.C. (vol. i. p. 142); which was fifty-five years before the Gaulish conflagration. At any rate, after the burning of the city, damp and worms were the chief causes of destruction to the decrees of the senate.

To us it appears that these concessions lead to Beaufort's position as the just one; nor does Sir George's reference to Greek history, which occupies his last chapter (69 pages) seem to prove anything else. His conclusion is (vol. ii. p. 551), that 'a *connected account* of the affairs of the principal Greek states begins about a century before the birth of Herodotus; and that a *continuous narrative*' begins from the subjection of the Ionian Greeks to Lydia. Ascending higher, we have first uncertainty, confusion, and at last nearly total darkness. True: but what is this to the purpose? First, a connected account is not identical with a true account; for, as we have said, a fragmentary history, based on contemporary monuments, may be true (seriously, we cannot find whether Sir George consciously means to deny this); next, it is not pretended that the Greek traditions, which plunge us into uncertainty, confusion, and darkness rested on carved monuments and official registers like those of Rome. The entire chapter seems to us gratuitous and misplaced. He has just told us that at Rome there *were* such monuments and registers, only he does not know whether and when and how far they were used; hence he treats it as mere hypothesis (p. 491) to suppose that Fabius learned of the expulsion of Tarquin the Proud from oral tradition, and 'in reducing it to writing *was assisted by some documentary materials* which served to fix the outlines of the transaction.'

We may shortly state his position in the following words:—I admit that there were numerous early written memorials at Rome,—how many I know not; I admit that the memory of a past time is not necessarily lost, *if* oral tradition be fixed and

assisted by official record, private documents,' &c. (vol. ii. p. 492.) I cannot deny that Fabius *may* have rested this or that account on some memorial coeval with the event, but I can never *know* that he did: I have nothing—but internal evidence (which is mere conjecture and hypothesis) to help me to guess when he did and when he did not; hence I have no materials for a solid judgment; I conclude that all is uncertain, that all criticism is vain, and no more books should be written. We must give his actual words:—

‘All the historical labour bestowed upon the early centuries of Rome will in general be wasted. The history of this period, viewed as a series of picturesque narratives, *will be read to the greatest advantage in the original writers, and will be deteriorated by reproduction in a modern dress.* If we regard a historical painting merely as a work of art, the accounts of the ancients can only suffer from being re-touched by the pencil of the modern restorer. On the other hand, all attempts to reduce them to a *purely historical form, by conjectural omissions, additions, alterations, transpositions, must be nugatory.* The workers on this historical treadmill may continue to grind the air, but they will never produce any valuable result.’—Vol. ii. p. 556.

This is rather cruel of Sir George. He writes a work of 1100 stout pages on the early Roman history, and then implores other people to write no more on the subject. It a little reminds us of Queen Clytæmnestra, who, as Æschylus tells, hewed down her husband with an axe, and then piously prayed that the house might in future be free from intestine murders. Did Sir George not foresee, that as murder produces murder, so a big book of controversy produces another big book? Well! but we accede to his doctrine, that by no conjectural omissions can we reduce the earliest Roman story to a *purely historical form*, if this mean that in no case can we arrive at certain truth. Only (we must retort) that is no reason why we should not make (what he calls) ‘conjectural omissions.’ May we not omit the miracles which presaged the future greatness of Servius Tullius? Is it ‘an arbitrary hypothesis’ that these miracles are credulous inventions? We think he will grant to us, that they *certainly are not true*; but he will not say, it is *as certainly untrue* that Servius instituted the comitia of the centuries, and divided Rome into four tribes or parishes. We think then he has no right to lay down so strongly that internal evidence is no ground for rejecting one part of a tale positively, and retaining another part,—retaining it, not as certain, but as probable.

If we rightly understand Sir George’s canon, it would lead us to results far beyond those which he seems to contemplate. It is not the habit of the ancients to inform us systematically of their sources. They had no foot-notes and references. How

seldom does even Tacitus tell us whence he learnt this or that! how seldom Plutarch or Dionysius, who means to be most scientific! If we know that a man has *no* sources of information, we of course reject his evidence as a whole; but if we know that he had *many* sources, we do not reject his statements barely because he does not tell us on each occasion what he learned from what. Most witnesses mix up their own hypotheses and inferences with dry fact, and leave us without external means of discriminating; yet many of such witnesses are highly useful, if *due criticism be used*. Sir George appears to us to be making, unawares, a protest against ALL discriminating criticism.

Nor can we concede to him that the narrative ought to be read in the original writers; in fact, we should draw precisely the opposite conclusion from the doctrines which he presents to us. First indeed we might ask—Is no one to read the tale of early Rome who cannot read it in Latin and Greek? Are there to be no cultivated persons, male or female, in England, who do not find it expedient to study these difficult languages? But, dropping this topic, why may we not rather argue as follows?—*‘All the historical labour bestowed upon the early centuries of Rome will in general be wasted.* It is THEREFORE highly inexpedient for the young student to devote his valuable hours to read ten long books of Livy, and the eleven extant books of Dionysius, to say nothing of Diodorus and of certain lives in Plutarch, and the fragments of Appian and Dion Cassius. It is the part of the judicious modern historian to shorten this vast mass of writing into a very narrow compass, proportioned to its slight value. The ancients, who believed all of this to be genuine history, did not grudge elaborate study; but we who cannot so accept it, must naturally decline to wade through lengthy narratives, many of which are undoubtedly fictitious.’

And here we have to speak of the distinction drawn by so many writers, and particularly insisted on by Rubino, between the constitutional history of Rome and the narratives of wars and adventures of celebrated persons. The former is maintained by Rubino to have a far higher degree of credibility than the latter. The laws and treaties were in great measure consigned to writing at a very early period; and even where they were handed down by a merely oral doctrine, were connected with permanent institutions—were kept alive by the proceedings of the senate, the courts of justice, and the popular assembly, and were carefully passed on by statesmen and priests to their successors. The latter, on the other hand, were for a long time left to the exclusive keeping of popular tradition; and from their nature were exposed to the embellishments of fancy, and to the

distortions of national and family pride. Hence the reasons which prove that the later Romans were destitute of an accurate knowledge of the events and circumstances of their early ages, apply almost exclusively to the historical class of traditions, not to those concerning the constitution. Such is Rubino's argument. Sir G. C. Lewis, who is in antagonism, not to Niebuhr only, but also to those who have headed reaction against Niebuhr, differs so vehemently from this, as to avow precisely the opposite judgment. We acknowledge the clearness and force of his argument, though we think it admits of adequate reply :

‘ No such broad line can be drawn between the history of a constitution and historical events, as this distinction appears to assume. Unless we are more or less informed respecting the events of the history of any country, we cannot follow the progress of its constitution. For example, if we take England during the seventeenth century, we cannot treat its constitutional changes *in vacuo*, and as abstracted from all public transactions and occurrences. The constitutional history of England during that period cannot be understood, unless we are informed as to the nature of the struggle between Charles and the Parliament ; the characters of the leaders of the contending parties ; the grounds of the civil war and the manner of its outbreak ; its progress and final issue ; the king's execution ; the Protectorate ; and, lastly, the restoration of kingly government under Charles II. . . . Without knowing the events and facts, we cannot know that constitutional forms retain the same meaning. The forms of a government may be preserved intact, while its essence and operation have undergone a radical change. They may become a mere mask, behind which the real face is concealed. Among a people like the Romans, who attached great importance to legal forms and to the connexion of religion with the state, it was peculiarly likely that constitutional changes, demanded by the altered state of society, and by the increased power of new classes of the community, should be effected with little apparent departure from ancient usage. A constitutional history, written without a knowledge of events and actions and of the forces silently operating through society, might represent Augustus Cæsar as the mere annual magistrate of a free commonwealth, or might suppose that the relations of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria to their respective parliaments were identical.’—Vol. i. p. 126.

We accept the challenge here held out. Let it be supposed that the history of the Emperor Augustus were lost, except a few decrees of the senate and people, in which we read such honours as the following: 1. That Caius Cæsar Octavianus shall receive the titles of Augustus and Chief of the Senate and Imperator, with power to assemble the Senate though he hold no magistracy, and a right to lay five propositions before the Senate in priority to the annual consuls. 2. That Cæsar shall possess for his life the power of Censor, of Tribune of the Plebs, and of



think that any of our topics can be otherwise than familiar to him ; in fact, he states with much energy and clearness the mutual action of oral tradition and of documentary memorials ; but as it may not be familiar to the reader, it may be usefully here a little enlarged upon. To fix attention, we will select a single case. In Dionysius (iv. 26) we read as follows :—‘ From the moneys contributed by all the Latin cities, Servius built the Temple of Diana on the Aventine, and wrote out the terms of the treaty between them all, and made enactment concerning the feast and the common celebration. And that no time might obliterate them, he set up a brazen pillar, and carved on it the decree of the congress, and the names of all the cities that took part in it. This pillar *remained till my time* in the Temple of Diana, having characters in such Greek letters as ancient Greece used.’

Let us imagine what a contemporary of even Dionysius, and of course all earlier ages, was able to read. It must have been something considerably longer than the following, though antiquity did not indulge in protocols and lawyerlike verbosity :—‘ Servius Tullius, King of Rome, offers on the part of all the Romans alliance with all the cities of the Latins ; to count the same as friend or as enemy, and to have good and faithful commerce everywhere between Romans and Latins, and redress by law for injuries. The Latins accept the alliance. The names of their cities are herewith inscribed. To commemorate the treaty, the Romans and the Latins have at joint expense built this temple to Queen Diana.’

A short *text*, such as this, would be commented on by oral tradition ; and it affords various fixed points to fasten tradition down, and bridle its flightiness and its tendency to gradual change, growth, and perversion. It yields a small number of positive facts, which are as trustworthy to the hundredth generation as to the second. Such are—1. That there was a king of Rome named Servius Tullius ; 2. That Rome under him dealt in public treaty as on a par with the Latin cities collectively ; 3. In fact, the Latins yielded primacy to Rome, in agreeing that the temple be built at Rome, and the inscription set up there ; 4. The treaty virtually united Rome and Latium into a single military power ; 5. It made Rome the centre and head of that power, since no single city of the Latins could compete with her, when she competed with them collectively.—Surely we need not press how the memory of the character and events of Servius’s reign must have been stimulated by the existence of such a document. We will not venture on any general doctrine, that the human memory is more tenacious in countries which make little use of writing ; for we think this depends upon  *motive*

and developed tendencies. But we know that the ancient Romans were intensely attached to precedent; and they are the first people known to us who had family surnames and a hereditary policy in families; which strongly suggests a careful constitutional and historical teaching from father to son.

‘A nation which held so strictly to legal and constitutional precedent in the administration of public affairs, and to an established course of practice, must have possessed an accredited, if not an authentic and true tradition respecting its past transactions; respecting its former successes, dangers, and reverses; respecting its great men and their great deeds; respecting the origins of the political forms, the military regulations, and the religious institutes round which their patriotic feelings clustered, and which, in their belief, were the sources of their power and greatness. The leading families of the state, in whom the high and important offices, civil and religious, were almost hereditary, who furnished a succession of consuls, prætors, censors, quæstors, and pontiffs to the Roman people, and who successively contributed members to the dignified Roman Senate, were doubtless the depositories of a traditional belief respecting the past ages of the city.’—*Ib.* p. 83.

Thus the historical consciousness was not merely born; it was active and eager. The Roman nobility lived *in* and *for* their polity; the knowledge of the past was with them the foundation of morals, the source of power, the means and strength of administration. Law and morals were alike historical; and can we doubt that historical teaching was cultivated and historical monuments valued? After books of continuous history had been produced, these were read, and the brazen pillars and linen books were comparatively neglected; but before systematic books were written, Sir George, we think, will allow, that young men who aspired to become senators, would necessarily read all public documents of antiquity, including decrees of the senate, and glean up oral comments upon them. ‘Who was this Servius?’ would each young Roman, after reading the treaty with the Latins, ask his father. ‘He was the last good King of Rome; a Latin by birth, and highly acceptable to the Latins; he it was who established the now existing parliaments, though they were temporarily destroyed by the usurper and tyrant who murdered him.’ If this reply was true, surely it is one which oral tradition (aided by the treaty) was competent to preserve, not for two generations only, but for as long time as there was no social revolution and breach of continuity in Rome itself.

But let it further be remembered, that while even one such monument as this of Servius would greatly aid tradition, it would hardly be the only one, and we know it was not. Sir G. C. Lewis admits that the treaty of Tarquin the Proud with

the Galjii, and of the same with the Sabines, existed till the days of Horace. Every such additional document, *where the historical effort has developed itself*, is of ever increasing importance in fastening down tradition; just as two fixed points give to a body more than double the fixity of one fixed point, and three fixed points make a mechanism actually immovable. Documents which are neglected, of course go for nothing; but in patrician Rome, no important document of antiquity could be *neglected*, though it was sometimes purposely *falsified*, to damage the plebeian order. Thus even allowing to Sir G. C. Lewis that there were no written family memorials, biographies, partial chronicles, other than the pontiff's books; allowing further (though we hold this most unreasonable) that *all the decrees of the senate* had perished before the days of Fabius; still, oral tradition, based on public monuments, was by no means a despicable source of knowledge.

Sir George knows all these topics as well as we do; he himself furnishes both facts and arguments, and then draws precisely the opposite conclusions from us.

'It is impossible to say we have been able to discover any solid or stable foundation for the history. . . . The narrative is principally composed of events which we can trace to no *determinate* source. We can scarcely *place our finger on any fact*, and affirm with reasonable confidence that it was taken from the *Annales Maximi of such a year*, that it was derived from the memoirs of *such a family*, or from the funeral orations of *such a man*, that it was founded on *such a ballad* or poem, or on an oral tradition preserved in *such a district*, in *such a college* of priests, in *such a line* of public officers, or in *such a family* or *gens*. If, therefore, we require that a historical account *should rest on the testimony of known and assignable witnesses, whose credibility can be scrutinized and judged*, we shall find ourselves compelled to WITHHOLD OUR BELIEF from the history of Rome, down to the landing of Pyrrhus in Italy.'—Ib. pp. 264, 265.

We have at last, after long floundering through these volumes, got our eye fixed on the sentence which sharply marks the point on which we and Sir George part company. '*If we require*,'—he says: but we do not require it. We cannot require it, without rejecting contemporary narrative; for instance, without rejecting the accounts in Thucydides, or in Tacitus, who are esteemed the most anxiously correct historians of antiquity. We open Thucydides at random, in order to test a passage by Sir George's canon. We read:—'The Bœotians instantly sent for darters and slingers from the Melian Bay; and since, after the battle, 2000 heavy armed Corinthians, &c., came to help them; they marched against Delium, and attacked the fortifications,' &c.

Hereupon we ask. Was Thucydides in person at Delium at that time? He does not say so, and if any modern suspects that he was, it is an *unsupported hypothesis*, in our opinion improbable. Who then told Thucydides of the facts? Is the witness *known and assignable*? Produce him, that we may *scrutinize and judge of his credibility*. May he not have been a liar? &c. But you cannot produce him. You cannot *lay your finger* on any single incident in the siege, and say, Thucydides learned it from *such* a general, from *such* a spy, from *such* a deserter, from *such* a sailor, from the note-book of *such* a foot traveller, of *such* a merchant, &c.

Sir George of course will reply, that we must *assume* Thucydides to have used his means of information diligently and wisely, although he does not tell us distinctly *who* were his informants on each separate occasion; that human witnesses are not immortal, and could not be produced, so as to enable us to judge of their credibility; that it suffices for us to know *in general* that Thucydides *had* means of knowledge, and to presume that he was willing and able to avail himself of those means; that we are free to criticize his works, to judge of his capacity, but must not claim to rehear his witnesses;—a claim which obviously overthrows all history. This is true: but it is Sir George's own canon which enacts the overthrow.

No contemporary author of antiquity gave his authorities in detail; and we are always satisfied to accept them in the lump. But do therefore no errors arise? Are all narratives of contemporaries equally trustworthy? Surely we discriminate one narrator from another, testing their trustworthiness in various ways, by external or by internal evidence. All the same applies to narratives of earlier events. Lapse of time is not the sole difficulty in the way of ascertaining truth, nor are the safeguards against error different in principle whether time or space be our difficulty. A speech printed in a newspaper, and attributed to an English minister in Parliament, is unhesitatingly believed at the ends of the earth, though the reporter, the press, the very name of the journal, happen to be unknown. The same speech, if attributed to the same man in the Privy Council, will be disbelieved, *until* it be shown how the reporter got access, and other accessory proof be given. Just so Sir G. C. Lewis disbelieves speeches recorded by Livy (or Fabius) in the Carthaginian senate, though Fabius was a contemporary. We thus see clearly that the main condition for credibility of *details* lies in a *general* belief that sources of knowledge are open to reporters. Without this, we not only do not give credence (as, to a history of affairs in the moon), but we do not even criticize. Sir George remains in this same posture, unless, farther, we know

what particular original witness guaranteed each particular statement. *How*, for instance, did Fabius know that Tarquin the Proud did not die on the throne of Rome? In what particular family was there an oral tradition to this effect? On what particular written memorial was this grounded? Was it positively asserted in some decree of the senate which Fabius had read? We cannot answer: we *know* absolutely nothing: there is therefore nothing even to criticize, says Sir George. This, we avow, annihilates all history whatever. We maintain, that where intelligible sources of truth are conceded to have been open, a narrative is *primâ facie* admissible for criticism, and may in the result be firmly believed, even if we can in no one instance lay our finger on a fact, and state on what particular information it was first recorded.

Every student of the early Roman history feels a strong conviction that it is a real world, not a fiction, with which he is dealing. To have *invented* such a history, would have been an achievement of first-rate genius. To use Sir George's own phrase, the inventor must have been a 'Roman Defoe,' endowed with a perversely applied faculty, aiming to overthrow precedent, law, tradition, everything in which a Roman nature prided itself, by obtruding on his countrymen ingenious fiction. In vol. ii. p. 444, speaking of the controversy between the dictator Papirius and Fabius his lieutenant, Sir George writes: 'The whole of this remarkable transaction is narrated by Livy in great detail. It contains nothing improbable, and it is highly characteristic of the Roman notions respecting the maintenance of military discipline; but as it *could not* have been recorded by any contemporary historian' [annalist? chronicler? memorialist?] 'we are at a loss to know from what authentic source Livy could have derived his circumstantial account.' *Could not!* This is rather strong, when all that he has a right to say is,—We have not been informed from *what* contemporary writing it was derived. Perhaps Niebuhr might reverse the argument by saying: 'So circumstantial an account obviously *must* have come from an old annalist contemporaneous to the event.' But neither would we justify that inference. A continuous narrative, impressing the imagination and illustrative of Roman discipline, may well have been traditional, and amplified in later times. A far stronger argument for Niebuhr in proof of 'memoirs' is based on the petty isolated facts which we often meet in the pages of Livy, exactly such as are chronicled in an almanac, but such as no rhetorical historian invents, and no enthusiast could believe himself inspired to state. Niebuhr is wrong in *resting* anything at all on his hypothetical annalists; but the more we think of Sir George's decisive *disproof* of their existence, the more it surprises us,

from one who lays down positively that Dionysius was aiming at truth. This historian complains (i. 6) that Fabius and Cincius, who 'wrote accurately the events at which they were present, ran summarily over the ancient events;' which is Dionysius's reason for giving those ancient events at great length. Yet Sir George (vol. i. pp. 37, 81, 196) produces the passage as proof positive that Dionysius knew of no written sources for history earlier than Fabius. Hence Dionysius is made to say: 'Since Fabius has written in so meagre a style, and I have no other materials than the work of Fabius, I propose to narrate the history in full.' Surely, Niebuhr may reply; the truer view of Dionysius's argument is: 'Since Fabius, hurrying to his own times, has neglected to use many written documents which still exist, I intend to avail myself of these to fill out the history.' This would be the right interpretation, if Dionysius were Hallam. But we do not think he understood what are the conditions of truth: we believe rhetoric to have been his chief aim, and that, like Niebuhr, he trusted his own insight to reconstruct in fulness a history preserved only in outline. To us the passages in Dionysius seem to be wholly neutral, neither proving nor disproving Niebuhr's 'annalists.'

If we know a tale to have been worked up out of a poem, the rule is absurd which directs to drop whatever is marvellous and believe all the rest. The residue thus obtained has no more *primâ facie* title to be accepted as history, than the marvels which we have dropped. But when a tale has been made up like that of early Rome, by a studious effort to recover the past, even if from mere traditional explanations, orally transmitted, of treaties and monuments, it is, *à priori*, *probable* that there will be some truth in it. Hence, when that part which ministers to national or patrician arrogance or to the love of the marvellous is dropped, it is not unreasonable to esteem the residue,—not indeed as ascertained truth, but as an approach to truth, which is to be received until disproved. We have tried to find a point of reconciliation with Sir George in a rigid interpretation of the word *history*. He wants to get rid of *hypothesis*. He is sarcastic against the word *perhaps*. He aims at actual certainty. But he will never get it thus. Every human utterance which intends to state fact is blended with inference: the very judgments of sense are full of inference. Speculation and hypothesis dominate in the reports of the most simple-minded. The word *perhaps* honestly warns the reader not to mistake a speculation for a fact; and after all, to know that a speculation is a speculation secures that it shall not deceive, even if it be erroneous. Nothing could be more unendurably slavish than to *commit to memory* the old Roman tales without believing them, and with-

out speculating how much of them is credible; without venturing on 'conjectural omissions' or 'hypothetical reconciliations.' To set young people to such work, would be ingenious torment. Much better were it to burn all the books at once. We do not read them as beautiful poems; but first, because the Romans believed them, and we are thus aided in understanding their minds; next, because we think that they contain *some* historical truth. 'How much?' is of course more or less hypothetical, whether Sir George likes it or not. Nor only so; but the memory refuses to retain a load of wholly isolated events. We must be allowed to string them together by some hypothesis; and this, however unproved, we say is harmless, so long as its nature is distinctly remembered.

But Sir George forbids our revising the moral judgments of antiquity! Here again, we think his reaction against Niebuhr and the whole modern school to be extravagant. Livy tells us that a Roman knight, Spurius Mælius, hoping to become elected to the consulship, distributed corn freely to the people in time of dearth. The aristocracy took the alarm, and appointed a dictator to control him. The dictator sent his master-of-the-horse, Servilius, to command Mælius to come before him. Mælius, not relishing martial law, refused, and invoked the judgment of the people; whereupon Servilius killed him on the spot, and the dictator justified the deed. Since it was not pretended that there was any difficulty in arresting Mælius and bringing him to trial, if he was engaged in a conspiracy to make himself tyrant, the moderns regard this imputation as an after-invention of the patricians to justify an atrocious murder; especially since the imputation is intrinsically improbable, and is almost stultified by Livy's addition that the tribunes were in the plot. Yet, because all the ancient writers uniformly treat Servilius as a patriot, Mælius as a criminal, Sir George C. Lewis tells us that we must not think of reversing their decision in the deficiency of our information. Nay, but the facts, *as deposed by them*, show their judgment to have been perverted, here, as so often beside, by unjust patrician sympathies.

But while we resist what appears to us an extravagant prohibition on the part of Sir George, we here also see the extreme in Niebuhr, and indeed in Arnold, from which he is justly receding—viz., the omniscience with which they seem to decide concerning the moral characters in that early era, and the passionate censure in which the former indulges. When we consider how hard it is to learn certainly the character and motives of living statesmen in our own country, the accurate acquaintance of Niebuhr with early Romans seems to us to border on the ridiculous. Sir George, indeed, appears to laugh in his sleeve at Niebuhr's

knowledge where this and that ancient historian had gained his information. We also commend the following sensible remarks to the reader's attention :—

‘With respect to the indifference about remote antiquity which Niebuhr attributes to Polybius, it may have arisen from a belief that all labour in investigating it will be lost; and it is certain that if he had attempted to penetrate the obscurity which enveloped the primitive history of the Italian nations, his endeavour would have been fruitless. The history had not been written, and the traditionary memory was long since extinct. This censure of Polybius for not informing himself about the history of a period for which no authentic materials existed, may be compared with a similar censure cast on him by Dr. Arnold for his ignorance of geography [the geography of the Alps]: the fact being, that geography had, in the time of Polybius, been very little cultivated; that there were no accurate maps or geographical treatises; and that no means existed of acquiring an accurate idea of the geography of any country. It was, therefore, just as impossible to Polybius to be a good geographer as to be a good astronomer or a good chemist.’—*Ib.* p. 130.

Let us now endeavour to sum up the distinct positions assumed at different stages in this whole subject.

The first is, to believe everything which was written by antiquity; and when ancient writers contradict one another, to revere both alternately, and try to believe both.

The second, to believe all that is narrated unanimously, but select by our own preference, or by some kind of criticism, where there is variety.

The third, to take the additional liberty of rejecting whatever is miraculous, or otherwise strongly opposed to *a priori* probabilities.

The fourth, to inquire what evidence was present to the first writers, and to reject whatever they tell beyond the sphere in which we think they had information.

The fifth, to examine the internal growth of society and of the constitution, and on the *assumption* of internal congruity and continuous development, allow of speculative remark or judgment, negative and positive, which tends to bind the history together; but at the same time carefully and sharply separating between ancient statement and modern speculation.

The sixth, to demand to know on what *particular* evidence each *particular* statement was made by ancient writers; and on finding it is impossible to answer, pronounce that all belief is groundless, all speculation vain, all preference of one part to another gratuitous, all historical writing a grinding of the air; all moral criticism a foppery :—*yet*, exhorting people to read (and remember ?) on the subject, the ample volumes of the ancients.

We stop short in the fourth and fifth stages; Sir G. C. Lewis would bring us into the sixth. Niebuhr practically modifies the fifth as follows:—

Fifthly, on the *assumption* of a peculiar development discerned by Niebuhr's insight, and by divining strange misinterpretations of lost writers made by Livy and Dionysius, to reconstruct the history speculatively, and take all possible pains to make the reader unaware, *when* he is receiving ancient statement, and *when* modern speculation.

Sir G. C. Lewis has not, in our opinion, added anything of argumentative importance to what many have written against Niebuhr; but as a *protest*, his work has much moral weight. It will be felt in England. It will not (as he wishes) hinder the writing of the early Roman history; but it will lead to writing it far more concisely and less ambitiously than by Niebuhr and Arnold.

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ART. V.—*A Memoir of the Rev. Sydney Smith.* By his Daughter, Lady Holland. With a Selection from his Letters, edited by Mrs. Austin. In Two Volumes. 8vo. London: Longman & Co. 1855.

A MORE delightful book than this has rarely fallen under our notice. When the great causes of civilization, humanity, and freedom walk, as John Bunyan would say, 'in silver slippers,' we are apt to forget those great and good men who laboured for their promotion amidst disadvantage and obloquy, and only to remember those whose heroic self-sacrifice was crowned with the honours of martyrdom. Even some of these exist but as *nebulae* in our maps and catalogue of the historical firmament, and 'their ashes flew no marble tells us whither.' For two reasons the memory of Sydney Smith will be exempt from these conditions. The first is, that he eventually obtained as much of wealth and fame, of patronage and distinction, as could be embraced within the limits of an innocent ambition; and the second is, that his qualities of mind, whether intellectual or moral, appeal irresistibly to those sympathies which can never decay while human nature continues in a civilized and especially in a progressive condition. A finer intellect, embellished with more varied accomplishments, a wit more original, exuberant, and refined, a more comprehensive appreciation of human rights, a more generous and tender heart, were perhaps never seen than