


THE CONTRIBUTION OF E.A. FREEMAN TO VICTORIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY



THE CONTRIBUTION OF EDWARD AUGUSTUS FREEMAN
TO VICTORIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, detailed studies have been made of a number of major figures in Victorian historiography, such as Thomas Arnold, James Anthony Froude, John Richard Green, and others. Edward Augustus Freeman (1823-1892), British historian and controversialist, was regarded during his lifetime as one of Britain's most skilled and formidable historical authorities, yet he has not had his work examined thoroughly and justly by contemporary historians. Freeman's contributions to historical writing and thinking, while admittedly limited, were influential and valuable, yet they have been largely ignored in this century or presented in exaggerated caricature.

This thesis deals with several aspects of the life and work of E. A. Freeman. It does not pretend to be a definitive biographical examination of Freeman's rich and active career. Rather, it is directed toward his historical thought and the influences on the formation and development of that thought. The work is divided into ten chapters, opened by a short review of biographical and bibliographical details of Freeman's career.

Three chapters which follow examine Freeman's historical methodology; how he thought history should be written and how he actually went about executing his own historical design. One chapter reveals Freeman as a crusader for broadening the number of approaches to historical material, including the employment of information and techniques developed in auxiliary sciences such as geography, philology, and numismatics. A second re-evaluates Freeman's devotion to and skill at source criticism, adopting a position somewhat less adulatory than that of his contemporaries and less unsympathetic than most critics of this century. Finally, attention is given to Freeman's own halting attempts to make use of comparative method in his history and to his influence in promoting comparison to younger scholars.

A second section is devoted to analysis of the major features of Freeman's philosophy of history. While Freeman himself often boasted that he had no historical philosophy, his work reveals a relatively coherent body of thinking about history which is here explored. Freeman is shown in the three chapters of this section to believe strongly in the scientific character of historical study, but this apparent streak of positivism was mitigated by his

belief that history was capable of achieving only a limited degree of certainty. History, however, was ultimately only slightly more uncertain than the vaunted physical sciences, themselves far from unerringly certain. Freeman also made a significant contribution to the continuing debate over the place of moral judgments in historical writing. It is clear that while he, with many other historians of his day, made moral and character judgments an important part of his narrative, those judgments were almost always tempered by a profound historical sense and thoughtful personal empathy. Finally, the examination of Freeman's historical philosophy undertakes to clarify this historian's very poorly understood vision of the unity of history. Both the grandeur and limitations of this "magnificent, but appalling doctrine" are explored; and attention is given to the way in which this theory influenced Freeman's own writing and the ways in which it came to influence the work of later historians.

The study takes up the question of Freeman's place in a trans-Atlantic school of "Teutonists." In this examination of Freeman's conception of and work in national history, it becomes clear, for example, that he held dearly a number of suspect theories regarding the origins and character of the English people, especially

before 1066. Yet this analysis of Freeman's serious historical work on the subject indicates that he was neither the blind racist nor the uncritical nationalist that he is often portrayed as being. Indeed, while Freeman's work was a powerful impetus to the study of national history and the search for national origins in both England and the United States, no evidence can be found to indicate that Freeman consciously or seriously distorted history in the service of his cherished vision of the early English people.

Finally, some of the key principles of Freeman's political philosophy are examined. The historian who today is most widely known for his provocative remark that "History is past politics and politics present history" did to some degree permit his political views to give direction to his history. In most contemporary studies, Freeman's complex and unusual political philosophy is only poorly understood and improperly labeled. Furthermore, it was most often the case that Freeman's politics stemmed directly from his historical study and the information and attitudes developed thereby. In fact, it is only by considering Freeman's political stances as the fruit of his historical research that one can find a real coherence in what might seem to be a superficial political faith that

ranges across the spectrum from radical to reactionary.

The study attempts not only to analyze Freeman's history but to place it in the wider context of British and nineteenth-century historiography. A transitional figure, Freeman, by training and temperament a visionary, universal historian of the mold of Niebuhr and Arnold, became an advocate of a more detailed, scientific, and professional type of history-writing. The marriage of the two was not always happy in Freeman's own writing, but he strove to impart a loftier vision and more sober and scholarly methodology of history to both historians and the general public.

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A deep debt of gratitude is due also to Professor Sir Herbert Butterfield, former Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, whose criticism, advice, and support I was privileged to receive throughout this project.

INTRODUCTION

The professional career of Edward Augustus Freeman spanned the most important years in the development of history-writing in the English-speaking world. Before Freeman's time history in Britain was primarily an avocation of public men. The most important historians included clergyman Williams Robertson and Bishop Thirlwall, bankers George Grote and William Roscoe, and lawyers Henry Hallam and H. T. Buckle. For the most part, English history was written from secondary sources, the information rearranged and commented upon to suit the author's particular point of view. And even the best efforts of historians of the calibre of Macaulay and Carlyle were composed as works of literature or justifications for a political philosophy. At Freeman's death in 1892, while British historiography continued to lag behind that of France and Germany in sound original research, British historians were publishing increasing numbers of well-received scholarly monographs, and British universities had at last hired competent historians to train students in scientific historical methodology. E. A. Freeman contributed to this transformation. While his own works are largely ignored today, for nearly a

uncover the history of English institutions and the development of more rigorous standards of historical research.

Before undertaking any thorough analysis of the historical writings of E. A. Freeman, it is necessary to become familiar with the main developments of his life and literary career. In examining Macaulay, for example, John Clive has demonstrated the importance of the "shaping of the historian" in evaluating the final historical product.¹ This is especially so with Freeman, a man whose histories were, perhaps, particularly personal, and who, once set in his ways, was both financially and intellectually independent enough to cleave to them.

Freeman's life can be divided into five fairly distinct periods. His childhood and school years from 1823 to 1841 established the young man as precocious and eccentric, a loner with an unusually deep interest in history and religion. His years at Oxford from 1841 to 1848 form a second stage during which Freeman began to define his political and personal philosophy and to form friendships which would last his lifetime. During the 1850s and early 1860s Freeman established himself as an historian. He

¹John Clive, Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian (New York, 1973), especially chapters 2-8.

began to concentrate his study and writing on historical subjects and to acquire a reputation for accurate scholarship and perceptive analysis. In 1863, Freeman's History of Federal Government, his first major publication, won wide critical acclaim. The period from the late 1860s through the early 1880s marked the zenith of Freeman's career. The publication in 1866 of the first volume of the Norman Conquest proved a literary and critical success, and thereafter the scholarly community in Europe recognized Freeman as one of its most honored members. The general public, too, came to identify new standards of professionalism and accuracy in history with Freeman and his close friend William Stubbs. After his appointment in 1884 as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, however, Freeman came under increasing professional criticism. A decline in health, the frustration of the political causes with which he sympathized, and dissatisfaction with his Professorship troubled Freeman's later years, and the rapid advances in historical scholarship to which Freeman had contributed left his own work dated and unsatisfactory.

Born at Mitchley Abbey, Staffordshire on 2 August 1823, Freeman was orphaned after the deaths of both his parents in November, 1824. He and two elder sisters were taken in by their paternal grandmother, and it has been

argued that Freeman's essentially feminine home life negatively affected his personality and character.² From 1825 to 1829 the family dwelt at Weston-super-Mare, where young Freeman became a favorite of the venerable religious writer Hannah More, a long-time friend of his grandmother. Throughout his life Freeman valued this contact, perhaps because, as he often noted, it gave him a common link with Dr. Johnson and Lord Macaulay. In a letter Hannah More told the lad, "History opens a vast field to the youthful reader. But always inquire the character of the author."³ Perhaps it is only coincidental, but such inquiry became a central feature of Freeman's history.

Freeman's education began at Northampton where he attended a school kept by the Reverend T. W. Haddon. He took an interest in history, winning honors in the subject and getting some early historical doggerel published in local newspapers.⁴ In 1837 Freeman was sent to a less-than-

²"His mind was too much thrown back upon itself, and he suffered permanently from that want of that daily friction which might have . . . smoothed the roughness of his . . . generous character. . . ." E. S. Venables, "Reminiscences of E. A. Freeman," Fortnightly Review 57 (1892):739.

³See W. R. W. Stephens, The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman, 2 vols. (London, 1895), 2:6.

⁴Ibid., 2:7, 10.

distinguished preparatory school at Cheam, where, as in so many institutions of its type, little emphasis was placed upon deep study. A school-fellow, the noted geographer Clements Markham, observed, "I do not think that Freeman learned anything during the two years he was at Cheam, except what he learned by himself. . . ." ⁵ As at Northampton before, Freeman's zeal in academic work, combined with his shyness and personal eccentricities, let him in for a good deal of rough treatment. ⁶ It is not surprising, then, that in 1840 he refused further public-school training and instead became the private pupil of Robert Gutch of Seagrave Rectory, Leicestershire.

Perhaps a product of what G. M. Young called "Evangelical energy", the precocity of the young man manifested itself at Seagrave in a flood of historical poems and Latin and Greek compositions. As well he composed lengthy letters to the Reverend Henry Thompson, the biographer of Hannah More, on the issues raised by the Tractarian movement, to which he became drawn, and other ecclesiastical matters. ⁷ By 1840 he had published an essay "On the Situation of the Inferior Clergy and Laity," in the

⁵ Ibid., 1:19.

⁶ Ibid., 1:26.

⁷ Ibid., 1:22-32, passim.

British Magazine.⁸ After less than a year of study with Gutch, Freeman tried for a scholarship at Balliol College, but he was beaten out by James Riddell, later a well-known classical scholar at Oxford, and Matthew Arnold, the poet, critic, and educator with whom Freeman would often later clash. This set-back, like so many Freeman was to suffer in his academic career, may well have been due, in part, to the independence of his studies and the isolation in which he pursued them. It is possible that his early isolation set a pattern for his entire career. Indulged by his family and lacking the challenge and stimulation of normal youthful relationships, Freeman formed many of his personal and political attitudes on the basis of a limited perspective and allowed them to become rigid.

In June, 1841, however, Freeman won a scholarship at Trinity College, Oxford, beginning an intense academic and religious experience of six years during which he defined his scholarly interests and formed many of his opinions for life. Freeman often rejoiced at his good fortune in being denied the opportunity to study at Balliol while finding a place at Trinity.⁹ It is true, no doubt,

⁸Vol. 58 (August. 1840).

⁹Matthew Arnold, he said, had done him "a great service" in keeping him out of Balliol; Freeman to W. Boyd Dawkins, 20 April 1888, Jesus College, Oxford, MS. Coll. Iesu

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that the latter college, influenced perhaps more than any other by the personalities and doctrines of the Oxford Movement, quite agreed with the temperament of the bookish and deeply religious Freeman. Yet his years at Trinity, in many ways, merely offered further occasion for Freeman to find his own opinions re-enforced more often than they were challenged. After Trinity Freeman remained a High Churchman, insofar as he was classifiable, but this attitude was marked more by his attention to ritual and ecclesiology than to theology, for which, according to his biographer, "he never had any strong taste or aptitude."¹⁰

By the time of Freeman's years at Oxford, English historiography was in the early stage of its nineteenth-century transformation from the amateur's pastime to the life-work of the professional scholar. The foundation in the eighteenth century of the Society of Antiquaries and in 1800 of the Rolls Commission marked a resurgence of interest in serious historical study, yet these organizations did little during the first third of the nineteenth century to make documentary material widely available, and neither

1925. 209.

¹⁰Life and Letters, 1:47.

had any significant influence on the writing of history in Britain. A few pioneers, notably Sir Francis Palgrave, appointed Deputy Keeper of the Rolls in 1838, J. M. Kemble, the English mediaevalist trained at Göttingen, and Henry Hallam translated and published documents and based historical studies on them. And it was to these writers that Freeman was drawn from the first.

If the writing of history was in a primitive state during the 1840s its teaching at the universities was even more dismal. Not only did the curricula at Oxford and Cambridge all but preclude the study of any but ancient history, but the Regius Professorships at both institutions were usually mere sinecures, awarded to men who were neither trained for nor interested in serious scholarship. Thomas Arnold, whose observations on the unity of history deeply influenced Freeman, was, for his less than two years at Oxford, a rare exception to a line of non-residents and nonentities who occupied the most prestigious historical chair at Oxford. Apart from Arnold, Freeman found little at Oxford to further his training as an historian, and it is not surprising that his academic interests were not concentrated in history.

While there is no evidence that Freeman's capacity for academic work slackened at Trinity, his diary shows none of the systematic ordering of his time which marked

his later years.¹¹ This less rigorous work schedule, common in the chaotic Oxford before University Reform, along with his developing interest in the study of architecture, led him to pay less attention than necessary to more basic subjects. He was unsuccessful in a number of competitions for School Prizes, and his examination in Literae Humaniores in the Easter Term of 1845 yielded him only a second-class. Freeman was disappointed but not surprised, for he found it difficult to "read, not for learning, but merely for a Class. . . ."¹² Despite its self-serving ring, this remark reflects a manner of study neither well-rounded nor well-disciplined, and at no time did Freeman ever regard the examination as more than a necessary evil in the educative process.¹³

Notwithstanding a merely satisfactory examination record, Freeman was elected a Fellow of Trinity in May, 1845. Until marriage forced his resignation in April, 1847, Freeman continued his studies in ecclesiastical architecture, contributing papers on a regular basis to a

¹¹John Rylands' Library, Manchester, Freeman Journals in Freeman MSS.; see also Life and Letters, 1:51.

¹²Life and Letters, 1:60.

¹³See his blast against the "craze for examinations" in his article, "The Sacrifice of Education," Nineteenth Century 24 (1888):641-44.

number of archaeological journals.¹⁴ He took up the study of Anglo-Saxon and tutored younger scholars in the subject. Freeman also began working on the history of the Norman Conquest as his subject for the Chancellor's English Prize Essay. While he was denied the prize, his failure stimulated him to further and more thorough study of the subject of his most important work.¹⁵

His tenure at Trinity was a time of indecision as to his future. Freeman's religious devotion and the atmosphere of the College at that time pointed toward his taking Orders and, indeed, he often considered a religious vocation. By 1846, however, he had formed strong convictions as to "the necessity for the clergy to observe celibacy . . . for the avoidance of secularity"¹⁶ and therefore decided to remain a layman. He considered taking up architecture, but his interest was confined somewhat narrowly to ecclesiastical architecture and, as he had little practical knowledge of the profession, to its

¹⁴See Notes and Queries, ser. 8, 1 (1892):512.

¹⁵E. A. Freeman, "A Review of My Opinions", Forum 13 (1892):154.

¹⁶Life and Letters, 1:62.

intellectual and aesthetic elements. A sizeable inheritance received on the death of his grandmother¹⁷ precluded any necessity of Freeman's deciding upon a profession, and in fact, he boasted until becoming Regius Professor in 1884 that he had none. While his financial independence enabled Freeman to take up diverse studies in history, archaeology, and politics, it condemned him even further to a lack of intellectual discipline and severed him from the main centres of his chosen work.

It is clear that many of Freeman's opinions about history, politics and religion were set at Oxford. His closest friendships were formed during these years, notably his friendship with Stubbs who succeeded him as Fellow of Trinity. Writing to his fiancée early in 1846, Freeman deplored the thought of leaving Oxford, citing the friends and associations he had made but "above all, . . . the place itself, the whole idea of Oxford."¹⁸ And while he was to be away from Oxford, with brief exceptions, for nearly forty years during which time the University underwent sweeping changes, Freeman's interest in the religious and

¹⁷It amounted to over £600 per year, derived in part from coalmining interests.

¹⁸Freeman to Eleanor Gutch, 1 February, 1849, Life and Letters, 1:87.

educational developments at that institution remained strong and constant.

It was, however, only after he left the cultured anarchy of Oxford that Freeman was able to work systematically at history and refine his ideas about the discipline. In July, 1848 he retired to country living near Dursley, Gloucestershire. Without the pressure of having to support himself and his family, Freeman gave free play to his many and varied intellectual interests, producing his first major works, a History of Architecture, confined primarily to ecclesiastical architecture in England,¹⁹ and a technically detailed Essay on the Development of Window Tracery.²⁰ He also made a brief and generally unsuccessful venture into poetry, contributing to Original Ballads by Living Authors, edited by his erstwhile correspondent Rev. Thompson, and co-authoring with his Trinity school-fellow, George W. Cox, Poems, Legendary and Historical.²¹ While the poetry itself is mediocre, it reveals Freeman's growing interest in

¹⁹E. A. Freeman, A History of Architecture (London, 1849). E. A. Freeman, Essay on the Origin and Development of Window Tracery in England (Oxford, 1850).

²⁰Original Ballads by Living Authors, ed. Henry Thompson (London, 1850).

²¹E. A. Freeman and G. W. Cox, Poems, Legendary and Historical (London, 1850)

historical subjects, his debt to the historical romance of Scott, Lytton, and Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome, and the roots of his epic style of historical narrative.

During the 1850s Freeman established a reputation as a critic, scholar, and political commentator. He contributed frequently to various periodicals on topics ranging from historical reviews to polemics on the Crimean War, and he became a regular correspondent and reviewer for several London and provincial papers, the most important of which was the Manchester Guardian. As for Macaulay, it was Freeman's ability to establish himself in the periodical press that enabled him to capture the attention of the Victorian reading public.²² While the confidence, erudition, and earnestness of his articles impressed the general reader, Freeman's papers and comments at meetings of archaeological societies made him known among antiquarians and historians. At such gatherings Freeman acquired his reputation as a master of historical knowledge and a devastating critic. Green wrote that Freeman was known as "the Philistine" to many scholars but admitted that "nothing has been of such use to Archaeology as the Archaeological Philistine."²³

²²See Alvar Ellegård, Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain (Göteborg, 1957).

²³J. R. Green Diaries, Jesus College, Oxford,

Freeman also began to take an active part in public affairs. In frequent letters to a number of national newspapers he expressed himself forcefully on current affairs from church rates, which his liberal High-Churchmanship led him to oppose, to the Eastern Question, on which he took a stridently anti-Turkish position. He augmented his interest in the politics and statecraft of past ages and distant lands by public service in his community. During the 1850s he served as a magistrate and alderman in Gloucestershire, and, after moving to Somerset in 1860, served for many years as a Justice of the Peace and sat on several local government boards.²⁴ Here Freeman gained practical political experience of which he was most proud and which he claimed to find quite useful in writing history.²⁵ During the 1850s he also made the first of his unsuccessful and generally half-hearted²⁶ attempts to win a seat in Parlia-

MS. Coll. Iesu, BP 627.

²⁴Freeman's frequent contributions to local affairs are chronicled in the Minutes of the Board of Guardians, the Highways Board, and the Board of Commissioners for the County Lunatic Asylum, available in the Somerset County Record Office, Taunton.

²⁵Life and Letters, 1:109.

²⁶Freeman's political ambitions were often frustrated by his refusal to spend a great deal of his own money on a public campaign, his being offered constituencies in which he had no hope of winning, and, after 1868, his un-

ment, announcing at Cardiff in 1857, and Wallingford in 1859 ~~as an independent Liberal~~, but in both cases withdrawing before the day of the poll.

Freeman retained his connection with Oxford, serving as an Examiner on several occasions and contributing to the stormy debates of the 1850s over University Reform. In 1849 he mounted a vigorous if largely unsuccessful campaign against the introduction of "Modern History" as a subject for degree examinations. Contrary to the view of H. H. Vaughan, the Regius Professor, that such a programme would encourage serious historical study, Freeman believed that such a course would lead to unsystematic dabbling in history and provide only an "education for journalists."²⁷ Before a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the university's affairs he denounced what he thought to be ill-conceived or unnecessary tampering with the Oxford system. For example, against the popular tide in favor of open competition for university scholarships, Freeman argued that such a reform would transform scholarships from aids to disadvantaged students to "mere prizes" for meritorious

willingness to submit himself to the bitter criticism of a campaign for public office.

²⁷ Life and Letters, 1:142.

achievement.²⁸ In the Saturday Review he pressed for the principle of university extension, especially to the middle classes. While he saw little gain in "crowding the University with men whose only recommendation is poverty and good moral conduct," he believed that universities should be open to men of talent, especially those who might take professional training.²⁹

In the late 1850s Freeman began to make annual European tours from which he gathered material for hundreds of travel and architectural articles as well as for serious historical writing. On such travels he found the intellectual companionship so lacking at his country home, visiting Germany with William Stubbs and France and Italy with J. R. Green. He developed other friendships which helped to overcome the intellectual isolation that tarnished his personality and his scholarship. W. Boyd Dawkins, geologist and later professor at Owens College, Manchester, James Bryce, the brilliant young author of the Holy Roman Empire and later civil servant, M.P., and diplomat, and Alexander Macmillan, his publisher, were frequent visitors

²⁸ Report and Evidence Upon the Recommendations of Her Majesty's Commissioners, Presented to the Board of Heads of Houses and Proctors (London, 1853), 138-39; 314-16.

²⁹ [E. A. Freeman], "University Extension," Saturday Review 23 (1867):48-49, 108-09, 133.

and regular correspondents. It was with these five men that Freeman considered himself most at ease and able to speak his mind. All found Freeman a difficult companion at times, but each valued his friendship and admired his historical skill and industry. It is perhaps significant also that Freeman, often accused of being a blind political partisan and a narrow historical scholar, found his closest friends in several walks of life and in various political camps.

This third period of Freeman's life is most important, however, as that during which he was able to concentrate his attention on history and sketch out the major themes of his historical work. The chief occupation of his seven years at Oaklands, his Gloucestershire home, was the reading programme which Freeman had set for himself after his Oxford examination.³⁰ His diary records his systematic study of a considerable part of Western history from the original sources.³¹ He tried to master the sources of Greek and Roman history and corresponded frequently with

³⁰ See Freeman to Eleanor Gutch, 1 February 1846, Life and Letters, 1:87.

³¹ Ibid., 1:164-65.

George Finlay, Scottish expatriate historian of Greece, and Spyridon Trikoupes, the Greek ambassador to London and historian of the 1821 Revolution, to supplement his own research. His first major journal articles were concerned with the history of ancient and modern Greece, which he insisted be read as a single, continuous story.³² He publicized the pioneering work of Niebuhr, Thirlwall, and George Cornwall Lewis and called the attention of scholars to neglected periods in ancient history, such as the Macedonian and late Byzantine periods. Indeed, it was Freeman's familiarity with English and Continental scholarship and his knowledge of historical eras seldom studied by other scholars which kept his articles and reviews in demand. His range of subjects remained exceedingly broad. Late in 1855, for example, he delivered a series of lectures at Edinburgh on "The History and Conquests of the Saracens,"³³ and in the following year

³² See especially Freeman's "Greece in the Macedonian Period," North British Review 21 (1854):425-50; "The Byzantine Empire," North British Review 27 (1855): 343-75; and "The Greek People and the Greek Kingdom," Edinburgh Review 103 (1856):386-422.

³³ E. A. Freeman, The History and Conquests of the Saracens (Oxford, 1856).

he collaborated with his friend, later Archbishop of St. David's, W. Basil Jones, on the History and Antiquities of St. David's.³⁴ He also began, by way of reviews of J. M. Kemble, Francis Palgrave, Augustin Thierry, and others, his first published analyses of the Norman Conquest.³⁵

While these early efforts do not exhibit the awesome learning of Freeman's major study of the subject, they are significant in that they contain the main lines of Freeman's argument for the continuity of English history and culture.

In the summer of 1860 Freeman moved to Somerleaze, near Wells, Somerset, the home which he maintained until his death. Situated on the marchland of the sixth-century West-Saxon kingdom and near the cathedral city of Wells, the house possessed a special appeal to the historically romantic Freeman. There he began work on his first -- and often considered his best -- major study, the History of Federal Government,³⁶ of which only the first volume was

³⁴W. Basil Jones and Edward A. Freeman, The History and Antiquities of St. David's (London, 1856).

³⁵See especially Freeman's "Palgrave's Normandy and England," Edinburgh Review 109 (1859):486-513; and "Palgrave's History of England," Edinburgh Review 121 (1865):1-41.

³⁶E. A. Freeman; History of Federal Government (London and Cambridge, 1863), vol. 1, republished posthumously, edited by J. B. Bury, as The History of Federal Government in Greece and Italy (London, 1893).

ever completed. Published in 1863 during the disruption of the American Union, the book met with wide critical acclaim for its clear exposition of the nature of federalism throughout Western history and for its careful blending of ancient and modern authorities in examining the federal relations of the Achaian League. The book established Freeman as an important figure in English historical writing and ensured a wide readership for his later works. He published relatively little during the early 1860s, but this period was spent in gathering materials for other projected volumes of the History of Federal Government and in preparing early drafts of a never-completed History of Greece for the Clarendon Press and what later grew to be his Old English History for Children.³⁷ In 1863 and 1864, for example, Freeman visited Switzerland in order to observe Swiss federalism and meet with noted Swiss scholars; and in 1865 he toured the old city-states of the Hanseatic League in order to familiarize himself with the League's history.³⁸

³⁷ E. A. Freeman, Old English History for Children (London, 1869).

³⁸ Bodleian Library, Oxford, James Bryce Papers, V, ff. 46-57; see also Freeman's "Hanse Towns," Saturday Review 20 (1865):448-50.

While Freeman gained recognition and respect as a writer and scholar, the two major ambitions of his youth, a university professorship and a seat in Parliament, were frustrated. He was passed over in 1858 for the Regius Professorship at Oxford in favor of his friend Goldwin Smith.³⁹ In 1861 he was defeated for the Camden Professorship of Ancient History, and in 1862, in spite of impressive testimonials from Finlay, Stubbs, Thirlwall, and others,⁴⁰ he lost the Chichele Professorship of Modern History to Capt. Montague Burrows of the Royal Navy.⁴¹ The latter defeat left Freeman hurt and bewildered and made the shy and hypersensitive historian both more desirous of the achievement and more fearful of trying further for it. In 1868 he again decided to stand for Parliament, this time as a Liberal for one of two seats in Mid-Somerset, in strong support of Gladstone and the Irish Church Bill. While both

³⁹ For the details of Smith's remarkable career on both sides of the Atlantic, see Elisabeth Wallace, Goldwin Smith, Victorian Liberal (Toronto, 1957).

⁴⁰ Testimonials in Favour of Edward A. Freeman . . . a Candidate for the Chichele Professorship (Oxford, 1862); see also Freeman MSS. for the originals.

⁴¹ Burrows' chief work was a History of the Foreign Policy of Great Britain (Edinburgh and London, 1895). While never a great historian, Burrows was popular with students and was known as an effective teacher.

Liberals were defeated in the staunchly Tory constituency, Freeman took advantage of the opportunity to plead his favorite causes to the public and gain a deeper insight into the life of a public man. A personal empathy with men in politics, he believed, was an important asset in writing good political history. Freeman continued to covet a place in Parliament, but, to the unquestionable gain of both history and politics, the blandishments of close friends and his own unwillingness to spend money on a campaign put the matter out of the question.⁴²

Freeman's political influence was much greater outside formal politics than it could have been had he become a back-bench M.P. for a rural district. Through his contributions to the periodical press Freeman ensured a wide audience for his passionate and often unpopular political views. In 1870, for example, he welcomed the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. From the first a hostile critic of Louis Napoleon, Freeman cheered the thrashing of the French. After the siege of Paris when public opinion began to swing toward the French, he

⁴²Freeman to Bryce, 28 March 1880, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 234-37; Bryce to Freeman, 13 May [1879], IX, ff. 211-12. In short, Freeman saw both the advantages and disadvantages of a seat in Parliament, but he strongly believed that he deserved a place in that body.

attempted to revive support for the German forces:

. . . I don't like the feeling which seems spreading, of half taking up France and even Buonaparte, simply because they are whopped . . . a kind of worship of failure, less loathsome, but even more silly, than the worship of success.⁴³

This campaign, in part a manifestation of Freeman's Teutonic and anti-Gallic prejudices, developed from an honest conviction that France had traditionally been an aggressor toward divided Germany and that she was now being punished for her historical sins. Freeman also used the pages of Saturday Review and Pall Mall Gazette to promote Home Rule for Ireland, franchise and electoral reform in Britain, independence for Britain's colonies, and closer relations with the United States.

In 1875, after witnessing an insurrection in Herzegovina, Freeman embarked on the most important political crusade of his life. Long sympathetic to the plight of Eastern European Christians under Islamic rule, he believed that British foreign policy should support the national and religious aspirations of European peoples. He travelled up and down Britain addressing rallies to

⁴³ Freeman to Bryce, 23 October 1870, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 264-65; see also [E. A. Freeman], "Sympathy for the Fallen," Saturday Review 32 (1871):364-65.

condemn the pro-Turkish policies of the Disraeli government. He flooded the editors of provincial newspapers and major London reviews with letters and articles on the Eastern Question. He corresponded and planned strategy with pro-Christian leaders from all political factions from Gladstone to the arch-Tory Marquis of Bath, and with Mrs. Freeman he directed a campaign to collect money and clothing for Christian refugees. His political activity no doubt damaged his reputation as a scholar, offending many intellectuals and public men of his time and leading later critics to regard everything he wrote as thinly disguised political propaganda. Yet Freeman never regarded himself as more than a spokesman for the belief, widely held in Victorian Britain, that men should conduct public affairs according to principles of Christian morality.⁴⁴ Thus, while much of the nation was shocked at his boldness, many of his morally earnest countrymen sympathized with Freeman's words at a mass rally in 1878:

⁴⁴ See Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), 239-42.

Let duty come first and interest second, and perish the interests of England, perish our dominion in India, rather than that we should strike one blow or speak one word on behalf of the wrong against the right.⁴⁵

Freeman brought to his scholarly work the same intensity of purpose which marked his political activity. He was concerned to combat falsehood, inaccuracy, and ignorance about the past, and to draw moral and political lessons from his studies. His work appealed, therefore, to an age which believed in the possibility of objective truths about the past and craved didactic teaching. Throughout the 1870s Freeman's reputation as an historian was all but unassailable. Hardly a week went by when the British reading public were not presented with an article, review, or travel sketch from his pen, and few critics could find serious fault with his scholarly work.

From 1870 to 1875 he concentrated on completing the Norman Conquest. This work, with his later study of the obscure but important Reign of William Rufus,⁴⁶ is generally recognized as Freeman's most important history. He analyzed

⁴⁵Freeman to Selborne, 12 December 1878, Lambeth Palace Library, Selborne Papers, MS. 1867, ff. 27-30.

⁴⁶E. A. Freeman, The Reign of William Rufus and the Accession of Henry I, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1882).

the causes and effects of the Conquest in an historical narrative running from the fourth through the thirteenth centuries. Scholars were impressed with the variety of source material which Freeman gathered and the skill with which he evaluated and combined their conflicting testimony. The general public responded to his conclusion that the roots of English democracy lay in Saxon ground, that, with respect to her culture, language, and institutions, England had never been conquered. In 1872 he won recognition as an important contributor to the philosophy of history through his Rede Lecture at Cambridge on the Unity of History,⁴⁷ and in 1873 his lectures at the Royal Institution in London, published as Comparative Politics,⁴⁸ encouraged historians in the use of comparative method and co-operation with other scholarly disciplines. Laymen responded positively to his less detailed studies, such as a work on Disestablishment and Disendowment,⁴⁹ a dispassionate analysis of the historical rights of Church and

⁴⁷E. A. Freeman, The Unity of History (London, 1872).

⁴⁸E. A. Freeman, Comparative Politics (London, 1874).

⁴⁹E. A. Freeman, Disestablishment and Disendowment: What are They? (London and Cambridge, 1874).

Parliament, or his many contributions to the Encyclopaedia Britannica.⁵⁰ He even undertook to edit a series of textbooks, Freeman's Historical Course for Schools, a series of national histories modelled on his introductory General Sketch of European History, which were used widely long after his death.⁵¹

In short, during the 1870s Freeman's history met the most important criteria of the literate public and the scholarly community in Britain. By the standards of his time, Freeman's thoroughness and accuracy were impressive. And to the general reader the characteristic moralizing of his books, the romantic-epic style in which he wrote, and the nationalism, confident but seldom aggressive, which he promoted contributed to his appeal. In recognition of his historical work he was granted an honorary Doctor of Civil Law degree at Oxford in 1870, and in the next few

⁵⁰ Freeman's major contribution was an article on "England to the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century," Encyclopaedia Britannica (Edinburgh, 1884), 7:263-343. Other topics included Alfred, Godwin, Goths, Harold, Nobility, Normandy, Norman, Peerage, and Sicily.

⁵¹ In addition to Freeman's own General Sketch of European History (London, 1874), the series also included volumes by Edith Thompson on England, Mary Macarthur on Scotland, James Sime and A. W. Ward on Germany, J. A. Doyle on the United States, Charlotte Yonge on France, and William Hunt on Italy. Freeman reserved histories of Greece, Rome, and Switzerland for himself, but these were never completed. Freeman's other major contribution to school libraries was his Historical Geography of Europe, 2 vols. (London, 1881).

years he received similar honors at Cambridge and Edinburgh. He had also acquired an international reputation, being welcomed in Germany by Reinhold Pauli and Wilhelm Ihne,⁵² in Italy by the famous historian of Rome, Ferdinand Gregorovius, and in Switzerland by most leading scholars and political leaders of the Federation. In 1873 he was elected an honorary member of the Historical Society of Massachusetts, a reflection of the respect for his work among such American intellectuals as James Russell Lowell, Herbert Baxter Adams, and John Fiske, and in 1876 he was made a corresponding member of the Imperial Academy of Science at St. Petersburg. In Eastern Europe Freeman was honored both for his historical and political work, receiving knighthoods from the monarchs of Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro. On the Continent Freeman was not without critics; German scholars rightly regarded all their British contemporaries as laggards in adopting more rigorous and thorough scholarly methods. Yet the eminent Döllinger, mentor of Lord Acton, commented that Freeman's unique ability to "paint colors with his brain" compensated for

⁵²Ihne's major work in English is Researches into the History of the Roman Constitution, trans. F. Hayward (London, 1853); Pauli was the author of a Life of King Alfred (London, 1852), and Simon de Montfort, trans. V. M. Goodwin (London, 1852).

his methodological weaknesses and entitled him to special recognition.⁵³

Outside England, however, it was in the United States that Freeman's influence was most heavily felt. During the winter of 1881-82 he made a lecture-tour of the United States, visiting over twenty cities from Boston to St. Louis. Andrew D. White, President of Cornell University, and Herbert Baxter Adams, founder of the influential historical seminar at Johns Hopkins University, invited Freeman to America. And it is significant that Adams, trained in Germany and more responsible than anyone for the introduction of more professional standards into American historiography, would choose Freeman, an Englishman and a private scholar, as a model for his students.⁵⁴ Freeman's lectures, stressing the underlying unity of the English people of Britain and America, met with mixed popular response but were welcomed in the academic community and by President Arthur, who received Freeman at the White House. American historians welcomed Freeman's efforts

⁵³ See North Pinder, "The Life and Letters of Edward A. Freeman," Academy (22 June 1895):518.

⁵⁴ See the introductory remarks by Herbert Baxter Adams to Freeman's Introduction to American Institutional History (Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science #1, Baltimore, 1882). It is significant that Freeman was chosen to write the first volume in this important series.

to promote more rigorous standards in historical writing at a time when the discipline in America was becoming an increasingly professional preserve. Furthermore, at a time when most American historians traced their national institutions to Anglo-Saxon roots, Freeman's research provided a valuable support. Thus, long after the turn of professional opinion against his work in England, Freeman remained an important and respected historical authority in the United States.⁵⁵

After his return from America in 1882 Freeman began to suffer from ill-health and bouts of deep depression. Gout and bronchitis interrupted his work. His letters began to reflect increasing sensitivity to personal criticism and to criticism of his history, and he began to express feelings of being deserted by his friends. After one particularly hostile review of his work, he wrote to Bryce:

I don't see that any other scholar or man of learning in any branch is nobbed in the same way. And not a soul speaks up for me.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ For an example, see Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of History," in Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner (Madison, 1938), 43-67, passim.

⁵⁶ Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1884, Bryce MSS., VII, ff. 117-20.

He did not, however, allow his problems to interfere with his public life. He contributed to the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Courts to which he had been appointed by Gladstone in recognition of both his services to the Liberal Party and his extensive knowledge of mediaeval history.⁵⁷ In 1884 he journeyed to Oxford to speak against the establishment of a physiological laboratory, arguing that such an institution at the University would signify its approval of the abhorrent practice of vivisection.⁵⁸

In March, 1884, Freeman was granted one of his two life's wishes, a professorship at Oxford. His friend Stubbs had been appointed Bishop of Chester, and Gladstone wished to recognize Freeman's achievements by appointing him to fill the vacant Regius Chair. The appointment was delayed for some time by the Queen, who still resented Freeman's public opposition to Disraeli, but he was ultimately confirmed in the post.⁵⁹ Freeman was grateful

⁵⁷Freeman to Gladstone, 6 April 1881, British Museum, London, W. E. Gladstone Papers, Add. MSS. 44469, ff. 36-37.

⁵⁸Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1884, Bryce MSS., VII, ff. 117-20.

⁵⁹Freeman to Gladstone, 16 March 1884, Gladstone Papers, BM. Add. MSS. 44485, ff. 299-300.

for the honor, but the position soon appeared to be as much a burden as a reward. New university statutes required more frequent and regular lecturing than in times past. The university had changed substantially from the sort of institution which Freeman remembered fondly,⁶⁰ and at sixty-one years of age the eccentric historian was far too set in his ways and attached to his Somerset home ever to give the post his undivided attention.

With often less than good grace, Freeman did, however, attempt to fulfill his professorial duties,⁶¹ and in October, 1884 he delivered his inaugural lecture, a summation of his views on the Office of the Historical Professor.⁶² He did not wish to serve as a tutor or an examination coach, but he believed that his role was to be "the representative of historical learning" at the university, sharing the fruits of his own research and guiding the research of others. He prepared lectures for the small band of students who were drawn toward him, and he took a leading role in the fight to moderate the scope and degree of reform in the university.

⁶⁰ See Freeman's "Oxford after Forty Years," Contemporary Review 51 (1887):609-23; 814-30.

⁶¹ C. H. Firth, Modern History in Oxford: 1841-1918 (Oxford, 1920), 53.

⁶² E. A. Freeman, The Office of the Historical Professor (London and Oxford, 1884).

In addition to his academic tasks, Freeman lent his support to Gladstone's plans for Irish Home Rule and wrote extensively in opposition to proposed schemes for an Imperial Federation. He also became editor, with his friend Rev. William Hunt, of a series on Historic English Towns, for which he contributed the volume on Exeter.⁶³ He continued to bring out reprints of lectures and travel essays, the most important of which was his Methods of Historical Study.⁶⁴ In this volume of Oxford lectures Freeman set forth his observations on how history should be studied and written by serious scholars. Finally, he began to devote more and more time to his History of Sicily,⁶⁵ a project which although far from completion at his death, has often been named as Freeman's most masterful

⁶³E. A. Freeman, Exeter (London, 1884). Other volumes included:

- William Hunt, Bristol (London, 1887).
- W. J. Lofft, London (London, 1887).
- C. W. Boase, Oxford (London, 1887).
- Montagu Burrows, Cinque Ports (London, 1888).
- E. L. Cutts, Colchester (London, 1888).
- Mandell Creighton, Carlisle (London, 1889).
- Henry Cabot Lodge, Boston (London, 1891).
- Theodore Roosevelt, New York (London, 1891).
- G. W. Kitchin, Winchester (London, 1891).
- James Raine, York (London, 1893).

⁶⁴E. A. Freeman, The Methods of Historical Study (London and Oxford, 1886).

⁶⁵E. A. Freeman, The History of Sicily, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1891-94).

historical study. In 1887, 1889, and 1890 he made three extended tours of the island, gathering materials for what he hoped would be a comprehensive survey of the land which for him most clearly reflected the unity of European history.

The last two years of Freeman's life were troubled by further illness; a number of personal problems, and an emotional dissatisfaction with nearly everything save his Sicilian project. His letters reflect his estrangement from his work at Oxford. He was "utterly weary" of the place, and he often spoke of giving up the position altogether.⁶⁶ He engaged in constant battles with the Delegates of the Clarendon Press over the length and cost of his Sicilian masterpiece.⁶⁷ Yet, in spite of the personal depression which caused him to abandon plans for a second American tour and to curtail his political activities, Freeman continued to plot literary projects, visiting Normandy in 1891 to gather materials for a life of Henry I and expanding his plans for the Sicilian history. This work was cut short, however, by Freeman's death from smallpox at Alicante, in Spain, on 8 March 1892, where he

⁶⁶ Freeman to W. B. Dawkins, 14 February 1891, MSS. Coll. Iesu 192, ff. 246.

⁶⁷ See Freeman's "Memorandum to the Delegates," 30 October 1891, Company Archives, Oxford University Press.

had gone with his family for an historical tour.

Even by the time of his return to Oxford there was evidence that the historical profession in Britain no longer looked to Freeman as an unimpeachable authority. While Freeman contributed a number of provocative articles to the fledgling English Historical Review, a journal for whose creation he had labored, most of the articles in that journal were more exhaustively researched and better prepared than his own. His inability and unwillingness to prepare students for examinations at Oxford and his lack of interest in history beyond the fourteenth century kept his classrooms all but empty. By the late 1880s Freeman's insistence upon original sources, topographic study, comparative method, and a thorough knowledge of all historical periods related to those under study had become commonplace among historians. Innovative and original study was being done by Maitland, S. R. Gardiner, Acton, A. W. Ward, and J. B. Bury, all men who had looked to Freeman for guidance early in their careers and all of whom were to write better history. Although he had received a university appointment, Freeman ignored the resources at his disposal and remained a private scholar. But as the standards of professional scholarship continued to rise, the private scholar could seldom produce satisfactory work, and the

pendulum began to swing toward the specialist, trained in palaeography and with a microscopic knowledge of limited periods, J. H. Round, for example.

Freeman's historical interests were far too diffuse to enable him to become a definitive authority on any one period or adequately to develop any one of the methodological innovations which he championed. Freeman's influence on his age was not the result of any book or series of books, nor of any unique or original contribution to historical methodology or philosophy. Without a university post for most of his career, Freeman was never able to found a "school" of followers in any traditional sense. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that so many British and American scholars would acknowledge their debt to him. It was the very range of his work that left such a profound impression on the Victorian public. A small child might learn his first English and European history from one of Freeman's primers. The Old English History and the Historical Course were adopted widely in schools throughout the English-speaking world, and his more scholarly works were often set as university texts. In an age deeply interested in historical literature, men were schooled to discriminate between accurate investigation and imaginative romance by Freeman's countless reviews,

and they were trained to travel with an eye to the historical significance of the places which they visited. Men of all regions in England learned from Freeman the contributions of their areas to the grand story of the English nation. And men became accustomed to see the historical antecedents of most major political issues traced out, usually accurately and perceptively, by E. A. Freeman.

At Freeman's death scores of journals ran obituary articles, and nearly all agreed that the world had lost one of the greatest historians of the age. An American writer urged a place in Westminster Abbey for the remains of "England's greatest historian" whose voice had been like that of "some ancient prophet trembling through the psalms."⁶⁸ Yet even before his death, Freeman's history was coming under frequent attack,⁶⁹ and it became clear that the movement to professionalize historical study, which he had done so much to promote, had begun to pass him by. The vigorous

⁶⁸Hannis Taylor, "Edward A. Freeman," Yale Review 2 (1893-94):171-72.

⁶⁹See especially the criticisms of J. H. Round, collected in his Feudal England (London, 1895).

old historian, perhaps fortunately, remained unaware of the fact. He had long before learned to dismiss criticism from any but his closest friends¹ or most respected authorities. But while it was not to be long before Freeman's work would be generally ignored, he had helped the discipline of history come of age in Britain. The impress of his powerful writing in history, political polemic, architectural and travel literature, and educational philosophy, along with the humanitarian, crusading spirit of the "Squire of Somerleaze" was, as his obituaries testify, left upon the men of the late nineteenth century.

CHAPTER II

FREEMAN'S USE OF AUXILIARY SCIENCES

Freeman is generally linked in most historiographical surveys with his friends John Richard Green and William Stubbs as part of an "Oxford School" of history. One of the chief aims of this group, it is argued, was to introduce into historical study a more rigorous and exacting methodology, to insist "on the paramount importance of investigating and establishing the truth," and to rescue the study of history "from the hands of antiquarians and romancers."¹ This interpretation has met with challenges in recent years; especially questioned has been the degree to which Freeman can be credited with presaging modern critical methodology in history. Rather, it is claimed, Freeman was but the last representative of an older mode of historical research which belonged more to the eighteenth century than the late nineteenth, a mode that was critical yet limited in its use of sources and in the breadth of subject matter for historical inquiry.²

¹"The Oxford School of Historians," Church Quarterly Review 59 (1904):95-96; see also G. P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1952), 317-74.

²Dale E. Strick, "English Historiography: 1859-90" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, Los Angeles, 1950).

Neither interpretation does justice to Freeman or, indeed, to the state of history-writing in nineteenth-century Britain. While it cannot be denied that English historical scholarship lagged far behind that of France and Germany in the early years of the nineteenth century, neither can it be assumed, as Professor Peardon has demonstrated, that the critical, professional spirit was altogether absent.³ Freeman's place in the development of English historiography must be assessed in this context of a slow but steady development of an historical criticism that was directed toward greater accuracy through a more careful examination of documentary evidence and the employment of auxiliary studies and methodologies.

The approach to historical study made by Freeman was as unusual and idiosyncratic as that which applied to most of his other pursuits. His research habits reflect his devotion to scholarship while revealing his unwillingness to adhere to any but an internally imposed discipline. He did not like to read for a specific purpose unless it was absolutely necessary. He preferred to read widely on

³Thomas P. Peardon, Transition in English Historical Writing: 1760-1830 (New York, 1973).

a number of different topics, extracting ideas and developing hypotheses which more intense reading and research could confirm or modify.⁴ Whenever he embarked upon a special reading programme, he gave himself a set number of pages to be read each day, about half of which would be material read the previous day.⁵ His procedure for literary composition can be viewed either as an example of management expertise or as a chaotic jumble. His major historical studies, his reviews and extended journal articles, weekly periodical contributions and letters-to-the-editor, and his personal correspondence were alike scattered about on different tables in the great library at Somerleaze, and so many hours each day were set aside for each of these projects. W. R. W. Stephens computed from his journals that Freeman spent an average of seven and a half hours each day in reading and writing for various purposes.⁶ The dusty, charming picture of the bulky, shabbily dressed historian rambling about in his massive but cluttered library outside Wells is certainly an object of antiquarian Victoriana to be cherished, but

⁴History and Conquests of the Saracens, xxi-xxii.

⁵Frederick Meyrick, Memories of Life at Oxford and Elsewhere (London, 1905), 18.

⁶Life and Letters, 2:172.

it does not truly represent the remarkable ability of this prolific scholar to organize and deal skilfully with a variety of literary projects at one time.

Freeman's historical methodology, then, should be examined with respect to the three salient features with which it is most often identified by his critics and by the historian himself: the use of auxiliary or "kindred" studies; the application of comparative method to historical study; and the critical reading and weighing of source materials. With varying degrees of success as historian, critic, and educator, Freeman emphasized these three features as the essential criteria for accurate, professional history. In none of these areas was Freeman's contribution totally unique or original; but in each his work served as a powerful impetus toward their development and refinement as methodological tools.

The most complete statement made by Freeman on the place of auxiliary studies in historical work is contained in his Oxford lecture on "History and its Kindred Studies," included in his Methods of Historical Study. The historian need not concern himself with the latest discoveries in pure mathematics or science, he told his audience, but:

. . . any branch of knowledge which deals in any way with the affairs of mankind must be accepted by the historical student as at least potentially useful for his own purposes. The historian may have incidentally to deal with any subject whatever, and the more branches of knowledge he is master of the better prepared he is for his own work.⁷

Yet, even within this framework, Freeman was prepared to distinguish among these auxiliary studies and to classify them, albeit inadequately and chiefly in accord with his own predilections, with regard to their importance to historical study. Kindred studies, ranging from chemistry and geology to art, literature, and law, are those which have "objects apart from ours, [and] . . . are fully worthy of study for their own sake." On the other hand, satellite studies, including numismatics, palaeography, and chronology, while vital to the historian and often possessing their own methodologies, cannot stand apart from history without becoming "little more than matters of curiosity."⁸ Some kindred studies; such as chemistry, can be quite helpful to the historian but only in such an incidental way that a lack of any extensive knowledge in the field may not be

⁷ Methods of Historical Study, 44-45.

⁸ Ibid., 49-50.

considered a great hindrance to his studies. With respect to geology and geography, however, the historian, Freeman believed, "will clearly do his own regular work better for being master of them."⁹

Freeman reflected this belief in his life-long interest in geology, topography, and geography as they related to his own scholarly activities. W. R. W. Stephens notes that Freeman dated his fascination with geography from childhood trips to the top of Worle Hill, near Weston-super-Mare, where he was afforded a majestic view of a good part of the West Country.¹⁰ Whatever the source, Freeman's eye for geographic and topographic detail was employed extensively and perceptively in his own histories and his estimates of other historians. "He was," wrote F. W. Boardman in 1965, "the first British historian to realize the importance of geographical sites and historical remains."¹¹ One of Freeman's earliest productions, his contribution to the History of St. David's, begins with a long and detailed

⁹ Methods of Historical Study, 45.

¹⁰ Life and Letters, 1:3.

¹¹ F. W. Boardman, History and Historians (New York, 1965), 72.

geographical outline of the lonely, rugged site of the Cathedral, carrying the implication that without a proper understanding of the topography and geography of the district the reader's appreciation of the history and architecture of this venerable Welsh church would be incomplete.¹²

In the same vein, some twenty-four years later he told the members of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society that the geological peculiarities of the district of Glastonbury constituted an important key to its history.

Let us, by the help of the other branch of our studies, call up before us the general look of the "aestiva regio." . . . Avalon, larger and loftier than its fellow islands, was a shelter admirably suited either for devout monks or for runaway queens. By Gwrgan's day it had become one of the last shelters . . . of a race which must have seemed to be shrinking up step by step. . . .¹³

In Freeman's grander works, too, the more notable geographic characteristics and peculiarities of the lands with which he deals are sketched out and related to historical developments. Prompted by the participation of his friend W. Boyd Dawkins in discussions for the building of a tunnel beneath the English Channel to connect Great Britain with the continent, Freeman composed "Alter Orbis," one of his more noteworthy journal articles. The piece contained an

¹² History of St. David's, 1-22.

¹³ E. A. Freeman, "Glastonbury, British and English," Macmillan's Magazine 42 (1880):466.

elaboration of Freeman's conviction that the geographical character and position of Britain could not be over-estimated in any analysis of the history of her peoples.¹⁴ Furthermore, the first volume of the History of Sicily, his last major work, contains a sizeable chapter discussing that island's geographical, topographical, botanical, and zoological history as a pre-requisite to any examination of the "past politics" with which Freeman's histories are usually assumed to be concerned. In one of his occasional flirtations with geographic determinism, Freeman asserted of Sicily:

Its geographical position ruled that it should be the meeting-place of nations; its geographical character ruled on what terms they should meet in it.¹⁵

Even though his own expertise in this area was limited, Freeman's concern for the significance of geography and his legendary passion for accuracy led him to seek advice on questionable points from his more knowledgeable friends. A letter to the editor of the British Quarterly

¹⁴E. A. Freeman, "Alter Orbis," Contemporary Review 41 (1882):1041-1060.

¹⁵History of Sicily, 1:419.

Review asks that the printing of Freeman's "The Goths at Ravenna" be postponed until the historian can consult with experts at Oxford about various topographical changes near the Italian city.¹⁶ His description of Harold's landing at Porlock in the second volume of the Norman Conquest was a product, in part, of an exchange of letters with geologist W. B. Dawkins in which the probable topography of the Somerset coastal area in A.D. 1052 was thoroughly discussed.¹⁷ It is evident, too, that Freeman took the same care in the preparation of his sparsely attended Oxford lectures: In 1886, before he began a series of lectures on the writings of Paulus Diaconus, the early mediaeval Italian chronicler, the Professor wrote to his friend Count Ugo Balzani to ask for bibliographic assistance in the study of Italian geography.¹⁸ Two years later, he visited the London map-maker John Bolton to arrange for a special series of maps designed to illustrate his presentations.¹⁹

¹⁶ Freeman to Henry Allon, 22 May 1872, Dr. Williams' Library, London; Allon Papers, MS. 24-110, ff. 134-35.

¹⁷ Freeman to W. B. Dawkins, 7 July 1867; 14 July 1867; 25 July 1867, MS. Coll. Iesu 192, ff. 14-16. See resultant description in Norman Conquest, 2:316-17.

¹⁸ Freeman to Ugo Balzani, 3 January 1866, Life and Letters, 2:341.

¹⁹ Freeman to John Bolton, 11 March 1888, British Museum; Bolton Papers, BM Add. MSS. 46152, ff. 34-35.

Perhaps his most characteristic methodological approach to geography in history, especially to topographical descriptions of historical places, was Freeman's habit of visiting the sites of the events about which he wrote. Once on the spot, he set out on foot to examine as closely as possible the physical features that were described in his source materials. On the need for this sort of preparation for historical study -- he called it "tracing out" the story of an event -- Freeman was emphatic. In urging his friend J. R. Green to undertake an historical examination of the Anglo-Saxon Conquest of Britain, Freeman insisted, "But you must get about and see places. You cannot do it merely by reading books."²⁰ Indeed, the gyratory historian once boasted to his friend and pupil Frederick York-Powell that he had never written in detail of any place that he had not visited, with the exception of Ardres, where, he confessed, he had made a number of mistakes from which he would have been spared by "five minutes eyesight."²¹

²⁰Freeman to J. R. Green, 6 September 1876, Freeman MSS.

²¹Oliver Elton, Frederick York-Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1906), 2:363.

The two most extensive and important applications of this technique appear in Freeman's best known historical works, the Norman Conquest and the History of Sicily. In preparation for the former study, he systematically examined on foot all of the major battlefields on both sides of the Channel. The battlefield at Hastings, or "Senlac" as Freeman insisted it be called, was stepped over at least four times, and he structured his narrative as much upon his own topographical observations as those mentioned in contemporary accounts. He then supplemented his descriptions of the area with the first military ground-plan of the Hastings battlefield ever published. Shortly after his final visit to the site, he prepared this map with the advice and assistance of Professor Dawkins, James Bryce, and a military surveyor and engineer, Captain E. R. James, R.E.²² His Sicilian narrative also was dotted with observations culled from his regular walking tours of major sites in Sicilian history. With a copy of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War under his arm, Freeman

²² Freeman to Alexander Macmillan, 29 December 1868, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 101-02; see also Norman Conquest, 3:v-vi.

carefully checked each statement of the contemporary record against his own findings. Freeman's belief in this type of preliminary examination of historical sites combined with his devotion to the first scientific historian to produce the considered conclusion: "That Thucydides had stepped out every inch of the battle-ground of Syracuse I feel as sure as that I have done so in his steps."²³

Freeman also believed that geographical factors greatly influenced the course of a nation's history and the composition of an elusive but undoubtedly real "national character." An example of this explanatory device is suggested by his remarks above on the determination of the course of Sicilian history by the island's geographical position and topographical character. More specifically, he was one of the first writers to emphasize the unique seismistic character of Sicilian paganism. After an ingenious comparison of the mythology of the Sikels, the earliest inhabitants of the island, with his own random geological observations Freeman concluded "that the old Sikel religion was mainly a cultus of the powers of the nether-world, who bear such sway in this island."²⁴ So

²³ History of Sicily, 2:419.

²⁴ Freeman to Dawkins, 7 April 1889, MS. Coll. Jesu. 192, f. 222. For a more complete working out of these theories, see E. A. Freeman "Sicilian Travel, 1878-89," Contemporary Review 59 (1889):381-96.

too, in his posthumously published fragment "[A Tyrant of the West]", Freeman argued that in considering the history of the Teutonic peoples of the fifth century A.D., scholars must distinguish carefully between the maritime and land-based tribes. The culture of each group was determined in part by these geographical considerations and in part by the varying degrees of contact with the civilizing forces which these considerations allowed. ". . . [T]he German of the sea," he wrote, "had not gone through the same unbroken apprenticeship to Roman ways [as had] the German of the land."²⁵

The most complete application of Freeman's geographical theories, however, is to be found in his Historical Geography of Europe. This work, over which he labored for more than twelve years, is considered by many critics to be his best and most lasting contribution to historical study. The book's primary objective, fulfilled with unusual success, was to provide a guide to the historical changes in the political and demographic map of Europe from the ancient world to the present. Yet perhaps of greater significance is the book's thesis that "geo-

²⁵E. A. Freeman, Western Europe in the Fifth Century (London, 1904), 38.

graphical position," a factor in determining a nation's history, has often had an important role to play in "forming the national character, and in all cases it has had an influence upon it."²⁶ A second volume, comprised solely of fairly detailed maps, permits the reader to follow closely his arguments on this point. The effects of the isolation of the Scandinavian and Iberian kingdoms from the mainstream of European history or the distinctions between the most ancient Greek settlements and those of the "artificial" Greek nation were carefully explained and amply illustrated. Certainly Freeman contended that a key element in the total misapprehension of political and historical questions was an improper appreciation of the map. His contemporaries, for example, could not fully comprehend or sympathize with the movements for national unification of the Italian peninsula without being conscious of the geographical factors which had in the past supported or hindered Italy's national unity.²⁷ And in

²⁶Historical Geography of Europe, 1:ii.

²⁷E. A. Freeman, "The Making of Italy," Chautauquan 11 (1890):129-30.

one of his many published attacks upon various schemes for Imperial Federation, Freeman persuasively argued that even the proposals of Sir John Colomb and others for a "Britannic Confederation" would not be equal to the task of solving the problems inherent in the lack of any physical or geographical base for unity. "It is hard to believe," wrote Freeman -- a man who felt strong sentimental ties to the white dominions -- "that States which are united only by a sentiment, which have so much, both political and physical, to keep them asunder, will be kept together forever by a sentiment only."²⁸ From the most scholarly monographs to the most quotidian political observations, then, Freeman's writing reflects an appreciation of the effects of physical factors upon events, a feature which kept his work in a truer perspective than that of many of his more knowledgeable contemporaries who failed to take these factors into account.

The attention to geographical influences shown by other writers was carefully marked by Freeman as a reviewer. He heartily gave laurels to J. R. Green's pupil, Kate Norgate, in his review of her England Under the

²⁸E. A. Freeman, "Britannic Confederation," Scottish Geographical Magazine 7 (1891):356. Colomb's proposal for union encompassed only the so-called "white dominions": Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa.

Angevin Kings. More than any previous writer on the subject, he observed, Norgate had recognized the importance of geographical influences on Angevin dynastic policy.²⁹ The employment of geographical distinctions in analyzing the political and constitutional development of the United States in John Fiske's Civil Government in the United States received full marks in Freeman's review of the work. Fiske was one of the first to draw a clear connection, Freeman thought, between the geographical and demographical circumstances of the New England and Middle Atlantic colonies and the governmental institutions which developed in those areas.³⁰ On the other hand, failure to comprehend or to take sufficient account of geography met with the critic's wrath. Indeed, this was an element in the intense suspicion with which Freeman regarded the work of J. A. Froude. In justifying his omission of any reference to Froude's work on the history of Exeter in his own account of that city's annals, Freeman argued that, while his adversary

²⁹E. A. Freeman, "Review of Norgate's England Under the Angevin Kings," English Historical Review 2 (1887): 777-78.

³⁰E. A. F[reeman], "Another Study of American Government," Speaker, 18 April 1891, 470.

could tell his story "with some spirit, . . . he seems to have no notion of the topography of the city."³¹ Finally, the importance assigned by Freeman to the employment of these considerations is most evident in his review of the History of Greece by Ernst Curtius. In some ways, he maintained, the work of Curtius must be valued over that of his more distinguished fellow-countryman Theodor Mommsen and that of George Grote, whose political insight into Greek history Freeman always admired, because of its "display of special excellence" in topography and geography.

We never read a more vivid sketch of the aspect of any country. . . . He brings out, as clearly as words can bring out, the physical conformation, the climate, the products of the different countries round the Aegean Sea, and the way in which the course of their history has been influenced by these geographical features.³²

A similar pattern in Freeman's geographical introduction to the History of Sicily indicates that he may have used Curtius' work as a model in its composition. This was perhaps even greater praise for the German historian than the laudatory remarks above and revealed Freeman's recog-

³¹ Freeman to C. W. Boase, 21 March 1887, British Museum, Boase Papers, BM Add. MSS. 35073, ff. 89-92.

³² [E. A. Freeman], "Curtius' History of Greece," Saturday Review 26 (1868):461.

dition of the place of an awareness of physical conditions in historical analysis.

Freeman's own reputation for skill in handling geographical evidence was checkered at best. His introductory geographical outline for the History of Sicily was singled out for special praise by the reviewer for the usually hostile Times as displaying "minute knowledge and critical investigation" and by geographer Clements Markham.³³ After his death a number of commentators marked his skills in geographical and topographical analysis, and in the view of his American disciple, Herbert Baxter Adams, it would be primarily, for his work in historical geography that Freeman would be honored as an historian.³⁴ As is the case in every other aspect of his work, however, Freeman's reliability in geographical matters has been called into question. He often relied upon contradictory information from diverse sources, and he lacked the specialized training to evaluate accurately such material. At times incorrectly projecting contemporary topographical observations into the past, Freeman occasionally fell into error. In a stinging rebuke, Hilaire Belloc charged that in the Norman Conquest:

³³Times, 17 April 1882, 4; Clements Markham to Freeman, 19 September 1890, Freeman MSS.

³⁴Herbert Baxter Adams, "Freeman, the Scholar and

Freeman talks with characteristic stupidity of the "pathless forest of the Andred's Weald," although but a few pages before he has been following the march of the great army right through it at the pace of thirty-three miles a day.³⁵

Yet if Freeman's own application of geographical study to history can be faulted, he must receive credit for his unwavering and sincere advocacy of the use of geographical information in history-writing. He was always open to some new avenue to historical knowledge if its course was clearly explained to him. Thus he wrote to his friend Professor Dawkins, "Your historical zoology is a very taking subject, one of the several which bring your work and mine into partnership."³⁶ What influence he exercised was employed to foster partnership, where applicable, and to promote a cross-disciplinary approach to historical study. In line with this attitude, he lobbied Macmillan, his publisher, to include in Freeman's Historical Course for Schools series a volume by Dawkins

the Professor," Yale Review 4 (1895):238-39.

³⁵ Hilaire Belloc, Warfare in England (London, 1912), 24.

³⁶ Freeman to Dawkins, 20 September 1868, MS. Coll. Iesn 192, f. 28.

or anthropologist E. B. Tylor on prehistoric man, "if only to assert that both Dawkins' matters and Tylor's belong to my range, tho' I may not personally know much about them."³⁷

In addition to geological or geographical expertise, a thorough grounding in archaeology and architectural history was considered a valuable asset. Freeman lamented the divorce between these studies and historical study proper, and, in his writings and personal appearances at countless architectural and archaeological meetings, he attempted to promote a multi-faceted approach to all antiquarian studies. In one of his Oxford lectures on historical methodology, Freeman appraised the contribution of architectural evidence to the historian:

Besides their deep interest in themselves, such studies are really no small part of history. The way in which people built, the form taken by their houses, their temples, their fortresses, their public buildings, is a part of their national life fully on a level with their language and their political institutions. And the buildings speak to us of the times to which they belong in a more living and . . . personal way than monuments or documents of almost any other kind.³⁸

³⁷ Freeman to Macmillan, 29 February 1880, BM Add. MSS. 55052, ff. 82-84.

³⁸ Methods of Historical Study, 235.

No one who is familiar with Freeman's history, especially the architectural excursions in the Norman Conquest or the History of Sicily, can doubt the seriousness with which he applied this dictum.

His interest in the kindred studies of archaeology and architecture dates at least from his days at Trinity College. He was for a time the Secretary of the Oxford Architectural Society and later a founding member of the Brotherhood of St. Mary, an Oxford student group dedicated to the study of ecclesiastical architecture from the perspectives of both history and Tractarian theology. One of Freeman's first major public papers, given in 1845 before the Royal Archaeological Institute at Winchester, dwelt not only on the architectural wonders of the Holy Cross Hospital, but upon its "historic associations" as well. The architectural fabric, the statuary and other relics,

all lead back our thoughts to days when men gave their best to God's honour, and looked on what was done to His poor as done to Himself, and were as lavish of architectural beauty on what modern habits might deem a receptacle for beggars, as on the noblest of palaces.³⁹

As early as 1852 Freeman's efforts in this direction were

³⁹ E. A. Freeman, "On the Architecture of the Church and Hospital of the Holy Cross," Proceedings of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland at Winchester, 1845 (London, 1846), 2.

recognized by Gilbert Way, Secretary of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain, who wrote to thank him for his stress upon the bearing of architectural and archaeological study on history.⁴⁰ An excellent example of this analysis can be found in his Notes on the Architectural Antiquities of the District of Gower in Glamorganshire. In this address, Freeman first drew from his examination of several buildings a number of historical lessons about the character of border districts. He then outlined the grounds for co-operation among historical investigators:

. . . archaeology . . . can clear away difficulties from the path of the historical . . . philosopher. By carefully noticing and recording every peculiarity of language, manners, local custom, or physical conformation which can bear upon the points at issue, the archaeologist may at least accumulate the materials, by dividing and arranging which the historian may be enabled to arrive at the full solution of the deepest questions . . . of the history of Britain.⁴¹

It becomes clear that Freeman, despite the obvious overstatement, had made a positive suggestion to correct the wastefulness of scholars working at cross-purposes.

⁴⁰Gilbert Way to Freeman, 9 December 1852, Freeman MSS.

⁴¹E. A. Freeman, Notes on the Architectural Antiquities of the District of Gower in Glamorganshire (London and Tenby, 1850), 34-35.

Freeman was always ready to defend the study of pre-history against attacks by other historians. In response to the work of Sir Francis Palgrave, he insisted that pre-history was a necessary adjunct to history. At its best, archaeology could hope to "reconstruct a picture of a state of things on which written history, and even tradition itself, is silent."⁴² He was also prepared to weigh archaeological findings with the same care he accorded all other evidence. The possibility of some non-Aryan race, such as the Basques, inhabiting the British Isles was widely discussed in the latter part of the nineteenth century -- a theory which Freeman was particularly loath to believe on personal grounds. Yet he wrote to Dawkins:

I have always said . . . that there is no evidence in Greek and Roman writers to show that Phoenicians ever came here. . . . But if you have archaeological evidence, I shall be quite prepared to listen. . . .⁴³

He was especially keen in searching out archaeological evidence which could be compared with mythological tales, believing that in the process some historical probability could be extracted. In a review of W. E. Gladstone's

⁴²[E. A. Freeman], "The Primeval Archaeology of Rome," North British Review 17 (1894):462.

⁴³Freeman to Dawkins, 18 October 1870, MS. Coll. Jesu 192, f. 58.

Studies on Homer, for example, Freeman pointed to recent archaeological excavations on Crete. Their evidence supported references in the Iliad to a great kingdom on that island as against the comparative insignificance of the area in the narratives of Herodotus and Thucydides. "Legend and archaeology," Freeman concluded, "have kept alive a truth which history has lost."⁴⁴ He was indebted to the German pioneers in this mode of investigation, Carl Bunsen, W. A. Becker and Joachim Marquardt, and Albert Schwegler, and he acknowledged their skills in a review essay on "The Primeval Archaeology of Rome," in which he applied their discoveries to criticize a blind acceptance or rejection of the early legendary history of Rome.⁴⁵

Yet Freeman was not wholly uncritical of the work of archaeological researchers; it seemed to him that too often they failed to show sufficient respect for the canons of historical study. At times this tendency took the form a descent to mere antiquarianism, a practice for which the national and universal historian in Freeman had no use. In 1846, for example, he denounced the treatment and study of archaeological discoveries at the level of curiosities

⁴⁴E. A. Freeman, "Homer and the Homeric Age," in Historical Essays, 4 vols. (London, 1871-92), 2:61-62.

⁴⁵"The Primeval Archaeology of Rome," passim.

as "absurd, unphilosophical, and unartistick."⁴⁶ And it was with great relief that he wrote in 1875 that archaeologists were at last beginning to seek total urban foundations in their excavations rather than particular objects of treasure.

For some centuries men dug, but they dug with hardly any notion other than that of finding statues, . . . it is only comparatively lately that men fully took in that there lay under their feet something more precious than statues . . . namely, the ancient city itself.⁴⁷

This was the reason why Freeman was so intolerant of the widespread nineteenth-century practice of looting ancient sites to fill the exhibition halls of British museums and European palaces. "A museum is a dreary place," he wrote in his "First Impressions of Rome"; for some varieties of artifacts this type of repository may have been necessary for their preservation, "But surely a statue or a tomb should be left in the spot where it is found."⁴⁸ Such remains are stripped of all but their purely aesthetic

⁴⁶ Freeman to J. L. Patterson, 7 September 1846, Life and Letters, 1:96-97.

⁴⁷ E. A. Freeman, "Roman Diggings," Macmillan's Magazine 31 (1875):504.

⁴⁸ E. A. Freeman, "First Impressions of Rome," in Historical Essays, 3:13-14.

significance, he argued, when they are removed from the places to which their historical significance attaches, and for Freeman historical significance was an immeasurably more important consideration. His depth of feeling on the matter led him even to unleash what many of his contemporaries -- and later Freeman himself -- considered an intemperate attack on Lord Elgin for his famous bequest to the British Museum.⁴⁹

The application of architectural evidence in historical narrative is one of the best known features of Freeman's writing. Nearly all of his important histories contain digressions into the architectural history of the sites of his major events. His friends James Bryce and J. R. Green and other writers as well were critical of his consuming interest in architecture to the practical exclusion of nearly all the other fine arts. Indeed, in his survey of the effects upon the arts of the Norman Conquest, the fulness and brilliance of his analysis of the development of English architecture after the Conquest, running some fifty pages, contrasts sharply with the single page devoted to all the other fine arts.⁵⁰ It had, however,

⁴⁹ E. A. Freeman, Preservation and Restoration of Church Monuments (Oxford, 1852), 65.

⁵⁰ Norman Conquest, - 5:598-649.

always been Freeman's contention that architecture, bound up as it was with man's need for shelter, was at once the most basic and the most exalted and inclusive of all forms of art. But beyond the merely aesthetic qualities it displayed, an ancient building was for Freeman a chronicle in stone. A simple painting might, at best, reflect the historical consciousness of a single individual at any given moment, but a church or other public edifice reflected to the trained observer the development of a total culture over the ages. It was rightly said of him by his Trinity classmate Sir George Cox, "Of grandeur Freeman had a deep sense; of beauty apart from real grandeur or historical association he had none."⁵¹ In the preface to a series of sketches of the majestic cathedrals at Ely and Norwich, Freeman asserted, "A great mediaeval church is always an historical study,"⁵² and it can be assumed that, for him, every building had its own special tale to tell of the men who built it, used it, damaged it, and restored it. Architectural evidence had, in one sense, an equal value to inscriptions, documents, and other like muniments, but beyond this purely technical value, it could fire the

⁵¹Quoted in Life and Letters, 1:83.

⁵²E. A. Freeman and Robert Farren, Cathedral Cities: Ely and Norwich (Cambridge, 1883), 14.

imagination of the historian who knew how to interpret it. A sense of this almost mystical inspiration is suggested by Freeman in an address to the Archaeological Institute at Bristol in 1851 in which he claimed that there could be for the historically minded observer no more engrossing exercise than to "have stood among the shattered aisles of Llandalf and St. David's, comparing the vague illusions of chronicle and record with the witness still engraved upon the fabric itself."⁵³ The popularity of his historical and architectural sketches scattered throughout numerous Victorian periodicals indicates that a relatively wide audience shared, if only vicariously, in his enthrallment.

The other two chief studies independent of history, but kindred and vital to it, in Freeman's view, were law and language. Each of these subjects could be viewed as either a trade or a science; and it was only in the latter character, related as it was to historical science, that either could command Freeman's respect. It is only through this distinction that we can understand Freeman's deep love and reverence for English law and its development and his contempt for ~~lawyers~~ and legal compilers like

⁵³ Preservation . . . Church Monuments, 18.

William Blackstone, men who treated the law as a mere tool in their pettifogging trade. No less was his antagonism to "penny-a-line" journalists or other writers who used words a-historically; it was rooted in a special devotion to the English language in its historical development.

There was no doubt in Freeman's mind that the historian must have a thorough grasp of the growth and the modifications of both the laws and the legal processes of the nations which he studies. Yet for the legal fictions that were and are so central to the English legal system, like all fictions, he had little patience. Writing to James Bryce in 1871, he claimed to be struck by the "ignorance shown by the lawyers," who took part in the debates concerning the fate of the Established Church in Ireland. "They seemed not to have got their law historically from the statutes themselves, but wholly from compendiums and such like."⁵⁴ Furthermore, as the methodology of those who studied the law as a mere trade was unsound, the results of such study were misleading or even pernicious. Lawyers were wont to argue from arbitrary and dubious premises and to read their values anachronistically into the past, practices which the historically-minded were under

⁵⁴Freeman to Bryce, 29 November 1871, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 786-89.

an obligation to expose and to set right. The view is perhaps best expressed in the Growth of the English Constitution in which Freeman employs historical records to test the validity of a number of principles and arguments in British constitutional law. His conclusion on the rights and powers of the Crown, for example -- one which both influenced and was influenced by his personal political beliefs -- was that:

the whole ideal conception of the Sovereign . . . is purely a lawyer's conception, and rests upon no ground whatsoever in . . . our early history.⁵⁵

He urged his followers, therefore, to emulate Gibbon and become masters of the general lines of legal history. Yet he was also greatly encouraged by what he perceived to be a new infusion of a critical, historical spirit in the legal profession, one which was not content simply to learn formulae but which sought in historical study the true roots of English legal institutions. This belief stemmed, no doubt, from his extensive correspondence with a number of unusually keen and historically aware lawyers, including Bryce, Albert Venn Dicey, and Sir Henry Maine. Freeman was even called upon himself to make a contribution to the

⁵⁵Growth of the English Constitution (London, 1872), 128-29.

federation of the historical and legal disciplines. His response took the form of an article for the Law Quarterly Review, edited by Sir Henry Maine, on "The Case of the Deanery of Exeter", a judicious application of cartulary evidence to one of the minor ecclesiastical disputes which exercised so many Victorian minds.⁵⁶ This new spirit of co-operation could only result, Freeman was convinced, in setting both history and law on more solid factual ground.

Language study, too, was considered to be essential for the student of history. For the serious scholar translations were a very weak reed upon which to lean, especially when dealing with original materials, and Freeman often lamented when he was forced to read any important volume "in a crib", as he put it. For this reason Freeman worked to master Anglo-Saxon, German, and French in addition to the Latin and Greek which he was taught at school, and he even made occasional attempts to learn the fundamentals of Hebrew and Arabic. In recognition of the importance of facility in languages, Freeman wrote to Green in 1880 to suggest that his study of the English Conquest could not be undertaken profitably without a knowledge of the major German literature on the subject: "How can you do laws

⁵⁶E. A. Freeman, "The Case of the Deanery of Exeter," Law Quarterly Review 3 (1887):280ff.

and customs without a pretty strong dose of Waitz, the Maurers, and several others?"⁵⁷

Freeman also urged his students to become well acquainted with the science of philology, which in his view formed with history and law a sort of "triple alliance" of learning with respect to the study of man in society. The scientific study of philology, refined and popularized by Wilhelm von Humboldt and Jacob Grimm in Germany, came first to Freeman through the writings of one of Grimm's English students, John Mitchell Kemble, whose Saxons in England always remained a treasured source-book for Freeman. From Kemble he learned the special value of philological evidence as a tool for the chronicler of the growth of nations. Language was always considered by Freeman to be a nation's "chief and most distinctive possession," and, as such, it would provide the scholar who fully understood it with a number of clues to that nation's character and institutions.⁵⁸

Beyond his interest in the role of comparative philology in charting national development, however, Freeman was especially fascinated with this branch of language

⁵⁷ Freeman to Green, 2 March 1880, Freeman MSS.

⁵⁸ Growth of the English Constitution, 33-34.

study for its ability to produce internal evidence useful to historians where no other evidence was available. For example, his argument that the ancient German kings were chiefs of a consciously homogeneous people rather than rulers of simple geographical districts was developed from the relationship which he perceived between the word "king" and the word "kin". Philology had provided a clue where documentary and monumental evidence was lacking. So too, the bulk of his argument against Charles Pearson and others in which he denied the survival of Roman civilization in Britain after the Teutonic conquest rested primarily upon philological evidence. And the fact that well over ninety pages of his Norman Conquest were devoted to marking out the philological consequences of continental overlordship in Britain gives some indication of the lofty status which Freeman attributed to language study.⁵⁹ While he was never a master of philological study himself, Freeman gave much of his time to language study, and he repeatedly sought advice on disputed points from more knowledgeable

⁵⁹ E. A. Freeman, "The Alleged Permanence of Roman Civilization in England," Macmillan's Magazine 20 (1870): 221-28; Norman Conquest, 5: 506-97.

friends such as Lord Strangford and F. Max Müller.⁶⁰ The lack of interest in philological evidence on the part of J. R. Green or his weakness in its use was for Freeman a critical drawback in the younger man's history. On the other hand, the expertise of York Powell in both history and language study and his ability to fuse those studies were especially impressive to Freeman, who wrote Gladstone in 1890 seeking advancement for the young student who eventually succeeded him in the Regius Chair.⁶¹

Freeman was aware, however, of the limitations of philological evidence. In his landmark article on "Race and Language," for example, he admitted that linguistic kinship amongst any group could not prove racial kinship and all philological evidence must be compared with and weighed against historical knowledge.⁶² In spite of this recognition, however, Freeman's consuming interest in the

⁶⁰ See Percy Smythe, 8th Viscount Strangford, Original Letters and Papers upon Philological Subjects, edited by Viscountess Strangford, 2 vols. (London, 1869); Strangford to Freeman, 15 April 1865; Freeman to Max Müller, 31 July 1870, Freeman MSS.

⁶¹ Freeman to Gladstone, 2 February 1890, Freeman MSS: 44509, ff. 116-17.

⁶² E. A. Freeman, "Race and Language," in Historical Essays, 3:184-85; 194-95.

possibilities of this line of study was betrayed in an essay on Mommsen applauding the German historian's mastery of comparative philology. His work demonstrated:

. . . how much we may learn from evidence which cannot deceive, of the history of nations for ages before a single event was committed to writing. . . . And its evidence is the surest of all, evidence thoroughly unconscious.⁶³

Notwithstanding the errors and excesses in Freeman's treatment of philological evidence and his often amateurish approach to it, a similar methodological lesson emerges from his history as well.

Supplementing the assistance from history's kindred studies were what Freeman called "satellite" studies of history, subjects such as numismatics, palaeography, genealogy, and others which, while of value as amusements, owed their primary justification to their connection with and service to historical study. If the historian had an antiquarian or avocational interest in these studies, it would be an asset to his work, but he need not possess the skills of the specialist in order to use their findings. Freeman never saw the necessity, for example, for an historian to be burdened with what seemed to be the drudgery of palaeographical study when experts in that field could produce easily readable editions of old chronicles and

⁶³ E. A. Freeman, "Introduction," to Theodor Mommsen, History of Rome, 4 vols. (London, 1868), xv.

documents. While he himself possessed little knowledge of numismatics, Freeman sought help from his friend, John Leicester Warren, later Lord de Tabley, to prepare with the aid of numismatic evidence a catalogue of the cities of the Achaian League for his History of Federal Government. A major feature of his Sicilian history was his employment of numismatic evidence unearthed and largely interpreted by his son-in-law, Arthur Evans.⁶⁴

Ultimately, Freeman's reputation must rest more on his role as prophet of the expanding horizons of history than as a pioneer in them. The eclecticism of the English historian was ridiculed by the eminent French historiographers Langlois and Seignobos:

According to Freeman, the historian ought to know everything; philosophy, law, finance, ethnography, anthropology, natural science, and what not!⁶⁵

Yet this caricature was far from Freeman's own example and contrary to his real message. He was himself somewhat

⁶⁴ See J. B. Leicester-Warren, 3rd Baron de Tabley, Essay on Greek Federal Coinage (London, 1863); and his Copper Coinage of the Achaean League (London, 1864).

See correspondence of J. Leicester Warren to Freeman, 1866-72, Freeman MSS.; correspondence of Freeman to J. Leicester Warrne, Knutsford, Cheshire, Tabley House MSS. See also History of Sicily, 4, passim.

⁶⁵ C. V. Langlois and C. Seignobos, Introduction to the Study of History (London, 1898), 46.

limited in his use of auxiliary sciences for, as Stephens writes, ". . . he would never presume to write about subjects that he did not understand," and he never was disciplined enough to study those subjects for which he did not care.⁶⁶ Despite traces of that traditional intolerance for other disciplines which can be by turns an historian's strength or weakness, Freeman was one of the most enthusiastic exponents of the brotherhood of all sciences. In an address at Manchester in 1884, he related the story of having come upon a general knowledge text-book of 1791, prepared for the girls of Strangeways Hall, a volume which combined history, philosophy, geology, and other studies. While one might be amused, he said, at the attempt to present a survey of all human learning in so short an outline, a valuable principle was being taught; that the barriers between academic disciplines were largely artificial and quite often detrimental to the extension of knowledge, "I hold that we ought to help one another all round as much as we can. . . ", he wrote to Max Müller in 1870.⁶⁷ No one need doubt the sincerity of his belief.

⁶⁶ Life and Letters, 2:109.

⁶⁷ Freeman to Max Müller, 15 November 1870, Freeman MSS. For an account of the address at Manchester, see "Mr. Freeman in Manchester," Manchester Examiner and Times, 12 December 1884, 6.

CHAPTER III

FREEMAN'S USE OF COMPARATIVE METHOD

Freeman's voice was among the earliest in English historiography to be raised in support of comparative methodology in the writing of history. His interest in this type of study was certainly connected with the central tenet of his historical philosophy, the unity of history, of which more will be said below. Freeman's comparative approach to historical events was a far cry from that judicious and circumscribed application that was later suggested in Marc Bloch's famous essay on the possibilities of a comparative study of European society.¹ It was rather a crude, primitive, almost totally analogical methodology. It was essentially an attempt to transfer to historical study the apparent successes enjoyed by comparative philology in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century. While many of Freeman's comparisons have stood the test of time and further study, others have not. Freeman's simplistic argument that "in times and places most

¹Marc Bloch, "A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies," in his Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1967).

remote from one another like events follow upon like causes,"² led him personally into a number of anachronisms and absurdities. Nevertheless, his very attempt to broaden the scope of the historian's thought and to provide additional explanatory tools constitutes one of his most important contributions to English historiography and one which has only recently come to be recognized and refined.

In January and February 1873 before the Royal Institution in London, Freeman delivered six lectures on "Comparative Politics", in which he outlined as fully as he ever did his ideas about the use of comparative method as a tool for the historian. He provided a clear assertion as to the value of this new methodology:

The establishment of the Comparative Method of study has been the greatest intellectual achievement of our time. . . . It has brought a line of argument which reaches moral certainty into a region which before was given over to random guess-work.

Its application in philological science had already been "fully established," he maintained. In other areas of study the comparative method had enjoyed lesser, but none-

393. ²"The Unity of History," in Comparative Politics,

³Comparative Politics, 1.

theless impressive, successes. The study of mythology using the comparative method had not produced the same degree of "conclusiveness" as had been realized in language study, but it had proven to be "one most important solvent among others." Even more recently, he wrote, the attempt had been made with some success, by scholars like E. B. Tylor in England and Fustel de Coulanges in France, to apply comparative method to the study of customs, religious and social institutions, and other elements of cultural development. This discipline, which Freeman's aversion to freshly coined jargon would not permit him to call sociology, while less exact than either comparative mythology or philology, remained an important contribution to knowledge.⁴

It was Freeman's plan to turn this scholarly philosopher's stone which "teaches us facts about which no external proof can be had," to the historical development of political institutions. The task before the comparative political historian was to "note the likenesses . . . between the political conditions of remote times and places," and, not unlike the biological scientist, "to classify [his] specimens according to the probable causes of those likenesses."⁵ To that end, the lecturer chose to limit

⁴Comparative Politics, 10-16.

⁵Ibid., 23.

himself to a comparison of the political institutions of the Greeks, the Romans, and the early Teutonic tribes, not only because his own interests and his personal scholarship did not extend beyond these groups, but also because of his fundamental belief that nearly all of the political and historical life of the European world flowed from these three sources. If other cultures provided examples of political arrangements which approximated or were cast in a completely different mould from those which he considered, they should be studied and classified in a similar manner. Within each of these three widely variant traditions Freeman professed to divine three basic common constitutional elements, "the germs alike of the monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic principles of government," and he devoted a lengthy discussion to each of these principles, describing and contrasting a number of often random examples of these three principles of political organization which ranged from the kings of Heroic Greece to the most recent American president. It seemed that the whole purpose of the exercise was to establish, by determining which governing principles were shared by the dominant peoples of Europe, a definition of the "primitive Aryan constitution" and its basic composition.⁶

⁶Comparative Politics, 23.

In many ways the lectures were an utter failure, and a substantial number of critics thought so at the time.⁷ Freeman asserted confidently early in the work that the most satisfactory proof of a common origin for European political institutions would be the inheritance of a common nomenclature. Yet, in making his generalization of a common political heritage for Europe, he dismissed the fact that the three traditions which he held up for study shared very little in the way of a common terminology. Often Freeman was satisfied to pronounce positively the analogous character of his examples, such as the relationship between the mark and gau of the Teutonic peoples and the gens and tribe of early Roman society, without ever thoroughly explaining or attempting to offer any systematic proof of the resemblance. As the reviewer for the Athenaeum pointed out, the lectures often rambled far from their stated purpose, especially toward the latter part of the book.⁸ At times, it appears as if Freeman was more con-

⁷Alexander Gibson, "Freeman's Comparative Politics," Academy (14 March 1874):277-79; "The Politics of the Aryan Race," Athenaeum (24 January 1874):123-25. Other reviews appeared in Saturday Review 38 (1874):219-20; Nation (8 January 1874):29, and The Scotsman (26 December 1873):6.

⁸"Politics of the Aryan Race," Athenaeum, 124.

cerned to show that contemporary Englishmen had a good deal in common politically with the Greeks and the Romans as well as with their own Teutonic ancestors than to trace the common origins of European political principles.

Alexander Gibson in the Academy complained: "Mr. Freeman drifts through his subject, sometimes stern foremost."⁹

These criticisms, while in the main quite valid, do not in truth do justice to Freeman's contribution in Comparative Politics. As befits the genre, the Royal Institution lectures were designed to be suggestive rather than comprehensive, and they were an exercise to illustrate the possibilities of applying comparative methodology to historical study. Even the book's harshest critics maintained that Freeman's comparisons and analogies were most often well-considered and instructive. In spite of his failure to prove -- if indeed he really wanted to prove -- conclusively that all European political systems derived from a common ancestor, Freeman illustrated some ground-rules by which such hypotheses should be tested and demonstrated. Yet even beyond the attempt to prove any particular theory, Freeman's book must be viewed much more as an endorsement of comparative method in its role as an educa-

⁹Gibson, "Freeman's Comparative Politics," 279.

tional tool, one which could promote new points of view and new lines of approach to historical study. If comparative study could show two apparently dissimilar institutions in a new relationship to one another or to an heretofore unknown source, it would have accomplished one of its most important tasks. Freeman was quite in line with the traditional duty of the historian to provoke more questions than he can ever answer.

Most of Freeman's scholarly productions make use of his comparisons and analogies, though in none is there found as thorough an application of the method as in Comparative Politics. One of his earliest articles, "Mahometanism in the East and West," is devoted in large part to a comparison of the histories of those areas of the old Roman world which fell to Islam in the early Middle Ages with those which did not. Beyond purely military considerations, Freeman identified the degree of assimilation into the classical culture of the Empire in various Imperial provinces as the determining factor in their eventual religious character. The only areas of Greco-Roman civilization which fell completely to Islam, such as Egypt and Syria, were those which were

. . . never thoroughly Romanised, each retained its national language, its national feelings, its national form of Christianity.¹⁰

Standing apart from the mainstream of Imperial culture, these areas were easily subdued and assimilated into the dynamic Islamic culture. In Spain, on the other hand, which was a part of the culture as well as the Empire of Rome, seven centuries of Islamic rule could not achieve the same result. And later in the same article, Freeman compared the Moslem conquest of the Mogul Empire in India to the Islamic advance in the West to illustrate the "likenesses and unlikenesses" of the two.¹¹

In his History of Federal Government, too, Freeman approached his subject via a rudimentary comparative method. At every stage of his narrative, he compared the federal relationships of different political and military leagues of Greek poleis in order to explain their varying degrees of cohesiveness and longevity.¹² An attempt was

¹⁰[E. A. Freeman], "Mahometanism in the East and West," North British Review 23 (1855):244.

¹¹Freeman considered that Islamic rule in the West, sustained by Ottoman Turkish power, was more complete, brutal, and repressive than was Moslem rule, in India, which never displaced Hindooism to any great extent. Ibid., 478-80.

¹²History of Federal Government, 246ff. See, for example, the comparison of the Achaean and Aetolian Leagues.

made in "The Teutonic Conquest in Gaul and Britain" in his Four Oxford Lectures, and later in "The Barbarian Invaders," a fragment in his Western Europe in the Fifth Century, to suggest comparisons of the effects of the settlement of Jutes, Saxons, and Angles among semi-Romanized Britons with that of Goths, Burgundians, and Franks among the sophisticated provincials of a vital Roman culture.¹³ This topic was of such interest to Freeman that he often considered reworking the first volume of the Norman Conquest into a thorough-going comparative study of early Teutonic movements in Europe.¹⁴ Even a rapidly sketched travel article, such as his "French and English Towns,"¹⁵ attempted to explain the differing characters of a number of provincial centres in the two countries by means of a comparison of the developments of the French and English nations and their institutions from the early mediaeval period.

In addition to this relatively contemporary type of comparison, Freeman also indulged in comparing the history and institutions of societies separated by thousands of miles and thousands of years. His explanation of the

¹³E. A. Freeman, Four Oxford Lectures (London, 1888), 88; Western Europe in the Fifth Century, 130-70.

¹⁴Freeman to Bryce, 25 May 1873, Bryce MSS., VI, ff. 37-42.

¹⁵E. A. Freeman, "French and English Towns," Long-

operations of the Athenian Assembly in the History of Federal Government, for example, was effected by means of a direct and detailed comparison of that body with the British Parliament.¹⁶ And he was always prepared to offer comparative illustrations from the American or the Swiss federal systems to enrich his analysis of those of the Greeks. In "The Debt of the Old World to the New," written for the American journal Forum, the colonial expansion of both the British and the Russian Empires was compared respectively with that of the Greek cities of the seventh century B.C. and the Roman Empire in an attempt to classify various general modes of colonial development. The contiguous empire of Russia, won, in Freeman's view, inevitably through a policy of defense against neighboring barbarians, was compared with what seemed to be the similar pattern of Roman expansion. By contrast he characterized British imperialism as a policy of irregular additions of scattered and loosely tied dependencies which mirrored in many ways the colonies of Magna Graecia.¹⁷ Further examples can be cited from most of his major works. The History of

man's Magazine 4 (1884):31-46.

¹⁶ History of Federal Government, 33-37.

¹⁷ E. A. Freeman, "The Debt of the Old World to the New," Forum 4 (1887-88):451-59.

Sicily is larded with comparisons between the Sicilian Greek poleis and the English colonial settlements in North America.¹⁸ In the Reign of William Rufus Freeman is especially free with historical parallels and contrasts, "ever ready," in the words of his reviewer in the Times "to illuminate an event or a law of the eleventh century by others from other lands and at other times."¹⁹

In keeping with his view that politics is, in truth, "present history," Freeman applied his trans-temporal comparisons to contemporary political controversies. In a letter to the Spectator in 1854, he criticized the failure on the part of Greek politicians and European diplomatists to adopt some type of federal relationship in the formation of the Greek Kingdom. His essential argument was that, from the Achaian League to the United States, the federal system was the most successful political arrangement for nations which had come together in wars of independence.²⁰ In his frequent "middles" for the Saturday Review, the journalist-historian often devoted attention to drawing connections

¹⁸History of Sicily, 1:38-41.

¹⁹Times, 17 April 1882, 4.

²⁰Spectator, 21 December 1854.

between current and historical affairs. A sense of Freeman's style of free association through time can be acquired best through reading his presentation of ecclesiastical disruptions in Switzerland during the nineteenth century, which he considered directly comparable to the struggles between Guelph and Ghibelline in mediaeval Italy.²¹ He also undertook a comparative, if not sympathetic, analysis of the analogous historical positions of and attitudes toward European Jews and the Parsees of India, believing that each group had undergone persecution for similar reasons.²² Freeman's comparative examination of history and politics formed the content of his political philosophy as well as influencing its mode of expression. His particular stance on the question of Home Rule for Ireland, for example, was based upon a careful weighing of similar constitutional arrangements and their results no less than upon his notorious prejudice against the Irish generally. And it was his belief, expressed in a letter to Bryce discussing the possibilities and pitfalls of arguments

²¹[E. A. Freeman], "The Ecclesiastical Contest in Switzerland," Saturday Review 37 (1873):245-46.

²²[E. A. Freeman], "The Jews in Europe," Saturday Review 43 (1877):101-02.

from history that:

. . . you may still draw some very sound general inferences from the infinite superiority in life and vigour of every kind of the democratic states over the oligarchies and tyrannies.²³

The comparative analysis of historical events was not merely a device for Freeman; it was one of the central pillars of his historical methodology. His primary object in the General Sketch of European History, he wrote to Alexander Macmillan, was to be "enlarging on the points of connexion in the several countries" whose histories made up his text-book series.²⁴ In all of his works, the predominant value of comparative study for Freeman was to raise questions about or to suggest novel relationships between facts and events on a rather broad scale, much more than, as is the case in more recent historiography, to offer conclusive proof of particular connections among specific events. This unrefined employment of comparison was reflected in a remark to James Bryce about the historian's unusual habit of working so many hours a day, every day, on

²³Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1867, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 22-23.

²⁴Freeman to Macmillan, 4 April 1872, BM Add. MSS. 55050, ff. 22-23.

a variety of intellectual projects: ". . . Vol. ii [of the Norman Conquest] gets on, so does the History of Greece. I do each much better for doing the other."²⁵

Yet if the passion for comparison did not significantly improve any one of Freeman's histories, it did broaden his field of investigation and yield provocative suggestions. The History of Sicily which, when Freeman died in 1892, had not yet reached the Roman conquest chronologically, owed its existence in part to the author's desire to make a comparative study of the Norman kings of England and those of Sicily. He could far better understand the reign of William Rufus, for example, by comparing it with that of the Norman Count Roger of Sicily, but, as he admitted, "I could not do justice to Count Roger without comparing him with all the other counts, conquerors, and deliverers from Dion onwards."²⁶ It is not surprising, then, that Freeman had, at his death, a number of projected scholarly researches as extensive as that which he had already completed.

²⁵Freeman to Bryce, 10 March 1867, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 139-42.

²⁶Freeman to Bryce, 26 February 1887, Bryce MSS., VIII, ff. 13-15.

To broaden the horizons of history was a goal which Freeman set for himself and for others as well. Comparison was to be one of the major tasks of anyone who would claim to be called an historian. He told an American audience in 1881: "We do not rightly understand the great political society unless we compare it with smaller political societies . . . ," making known essential points of likeness and unlikeness, tracing the causes of both, discovering the true analogies and exposing the false ones.²⁷ He constantly preached the value of comparative method to his students and colleagues, and he often pressed comparative topics upon them for their consideration. The co-editor of the Historic Towns series and the author of the volume on Bristol, Reverend William Hunt, was urged repeatedly by Freeman to study that city in comparison with others in the West of England area, such as Bath and Exeter.²⁸ On a far more exalted level, Freeman called publicly upon William Stubbs to expand his Constitutional History into "a study of comparative polity," which would ideally include material on the Romans, the Greeks, and even

²⁷E. A. Freeman, Lectures to American Audiences (Philadelphia, 1882), 909-10.

²⁸Freeman to W. Hunt, 1 August 1886, Life and Letters, 2:349-50; see also Freeman to Bryce, 11 February 1866, Bryce MSS., V, 82-84.

the figures of Olympian mythology.²⁹ He issued a call for some thoughtful scholar to examine the development of English provincial cities comparatively, citing Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool as three highly instructive case studies. He carried his invocation still further, insisting that the development of English cities in general would be studied most profitably in relation to patterns of urban growth in France and the United States.³⁰ According to Freeman's biographer, the foundation of Herbert Baxter Adams' programme of institutional study at Johns Hopkins University was an object of his special interest to him, for it had always been Freeman's belief that the comparison of early American colonial institutions to those of the primitive Teutons and other, primaeval Aryan groups was both the unique opportunity and the special duty of American scholars.³¹ In his own lectures at Oxford, too, Freeman attempted from the first to put his students on the path

²⁹E. A. Freeman, "The Use of Historical Documents," Fortnightly Review 10 (1871):336.

³⁰E. A. Freeman, Birmingham, Borough and City (Birmingham, 1890), 25-26.

³¹Life and Letters, 2:182.

toward comparative study. His initial series of lectures on the writings of Gregory of Tours was set in part to choose the earliest writer belonging to so-called modern history, but also, as he wrote to his friend Bryce, to prepare his students to look comparatively at the Teutonic conquests of Britain and Europe.³²

Yet in spite of his strong advocacy of comparative studies, Freeman was well aware of its limitations. In the hands of an inexperienced and uncritical historian, it could become a dangerous weapon. Privately attacking Henry C. Coote's book, A Neglected Fact in English History, which alleged that many of the laws and customs of Anglo-Saxon England were in large part of Roman origin, Freeman complained that the author seemed to have "no notion of Comparative Philology or politics. Anything like a Roman thing he made come from the Roman thing."³³ In Comparative Politics he warned his audiences that care must be used with this methodological instrument. Unlikenesses immediately apparent to the investigator may, upon deeper examination, be the surest proof of essential likeness; on the other hand,

³² Freeman to Bryce, 7 July 1884, Bryce MSS., VII, ff. 141-46.

³³ Freeman to J. T. Fowler, 18 January 1879, University Library, Durham; Fowler MSS., ff. 17-18.

seeming likenesses may be only superficial. Further, once identified, likenesses may be traced to a variety of causes, including direct transmission from one to the other, conscious or unconscious imitation, like results springing from like causes, derivation from a common source, or, indeed, accident.³⁴

Some writers attempted to force conclusions from comparative methodology which were beyond its limits. In the field of comparative mythology, for example, a certain vogue was enjoyed by the so-called "solar theory" of mythology, posited by Freeman's friends, F. Max Müller and Sir George Cox.³⁵ All myths, so ran this theory, had their origins in the actions of the sun or some other of the physical agents of nature. Freeman was quite unwilling to claim for his study of comparative politics a power of universal solvency. He could not, therefore, accept the sweeping claims of the comparative mythologists. "The sort of events," he complained, "which are held to be specially

³⁴Comparative Politics, 29-30.

³⁵See G. W. Cox, Mythology of the Aryan Nations, 2 vols. (London, 1870).

characteristic of solar legends may be shown to occur often in authentic history, in ordinary fiction, and in the events of everyday life."³⁶ In much the same line, Freeman cautioned his own students in a lecture on "The Nature of Historical Evidence" about the deceptiveness of apparent historical parallels. In simple, dry annals, he warned, the reigns of Henry I and Henry II of England might easily look like quite the same story. Superficially, they bear many resemblances in major political and military events; however a relative wealth of information shows that the details and some of the broader features of the two reigns were utterly different.³⁷ The comparative method could truly produce illuminating hypotheses, but traditional canons of proof could not be disregarded.

In fact, Freeman's personal failure to heed his own warnings lies at the root of the criticism which he received for Comparative Politics. While Freeman repeatedly trumpeted his belief that comparative history "will show us that the Aryans left their first home, not

³⁶E. A. Freeman, "Stray Thoughts on Comparative Mythology," Fortnightly Review, 547.

³⁷Methods of Historical Study, 138-39.

only with a common stock of language and legend, but with a common stock of political institutions," nowhere did he claim that this hypothesis had ever yet been proven by himself or any other researcher.³⁸ His lectures, meant primarily to be provocative and directive, were never reworked into a systematic attempt to plow the ground whose first spade he turned. Yet, notwithstanding his failure to produce any exhaustive application of comparative methodology, his suggestive insights into comparative study were widely recognized. In 1885, for example, Mandell Creighton, Bishop of Peterborough and author of the controversial History of the Papacy, unsuccessfully approached Freeman with a request that he undertake a comparative history of Christianity and Islam. He believed that few other historians could provide the prodigious learning and the ability to distinguish comparable or contrasting characteristics in religion on the broad scale which the study required.³⁹ Sir Henry Maine noted that Freeman's Comparative Politics was widely read and discussed at the Athenaeum Club and that he personally set the

³⁸"Stray Thoughts on Comparative Mythology", 548.

³⁹M. Creighton to Freeman, 16 March 1885, Freeman MSS.

book as a text for his students as providing valuable insights for the comparative study of laws and legal institutions.⁴⁰

There is evidence that scholars abroad regarded Freeman's comparative work with respect. His researches on the Landesgemeinden of several cantons in Switzerland were well-received by Swiss scholars especially as examples of comparative study at its best.⁴¹ The claim, then, for comparative study as a key element in Freeman's methodology rests as much upon his influence upon others, like Sir Henry Maine, as upon any carefully constructed exposition of the method in his own work; as much upon his countless references to the value of comparative study and his employment of comparisons in a number of his minor historical studies as upon his Comparative Politics. If the comparative method was not received by the majority of British scholars as "the greatest advance in knowledge since the fifteenth century," as its advocate claimed, its continued presence in the workshop of British historiography must owe some credit to Freeman.

⁴⁰H. Maine to Freeman, 30 December 1876, Freeman MSS.

⁴¹A. Morlot to Freeman, 14 May 1864, Freeman MSS.; see also Neue Züricher Zeitung (8, 9, 10 October 1863).

CHAPTER IV
SOURCE-CRITICISM IN FREEMAN'S
METHODOLOGY

If Freeman is read today for any but an antiquarian purpose, it is, as mediaeval historian Christopher Brooke once remarked, for his notes and appendices. Time and the pointed criticisms of John Horace Round and other scholars have relegated Freeman to that limbo of unenlightened and superseded writers of history. Nevertheless, the glimpses into the historian's workshop, as Marc Bloch called them, the comparison and criticism of source-materials embodied in Freeman's extended notes, retain their usefulness to contemporary scholars. Perhaps it is well that this is so, for Freeman himself never claimed to be any more than a guide to the original sources of history, nor did he believe that any historian should claim more than that. "He fails in his duty if he ever lets it be forgotten that he is simply the prophet of somebody else, the guide to somebody else."¹ Accordingly, almost a quarter

¹Methods of Historical Study, .273.

of the six volumes of the Norman Conquest and the Reign of William Rufus were given over to critical appendices. A successor in the Chair of Modern History at Oxford said of Freeman's histories that they had "led students to an intelligent study of the documents, in vellum and stone alike, upon which our knowledge of much of the past must necessarily rest."² It is to the theory and practice of source-criticism, therefore, that the historiographer must turn in order to produce a balanced assessment of Freeman's place in English historical scholarship.

It must be recalled, of course, that Freeman's advocacy of a more critical history based upon original sources rested pre-eminently upon the increasing availability of those sources, which, in turn, resulted from the steady development of historical criticism from as early as the age of the great Mabillon and the Bollandists. The publication and classification of source materials enjoyed a remarkable growth in the early part of the nineteenth century. The Master of the Rolls began publication of editions of the Chroniclers in 1857, and the issuance of the Calendar of State Papers was begun in 1862. The first publications of the Historical Manuscripts Commission

²Frederick York-Powell, "E. A. Freeman," Speaker (26 March 1892), in Elton, York-Powell, 2:30.

followed in 1870, and there was an unbroken increase in the materials unearthed by the Camden, Surtees, and Selden Societies in Britain as well as by various foreign societies and journals. To this movement Freeman added his voice and his pen, and to him must go some honor for setting historical study upon a sounder documentary footing.

"The kernel of all sound teaching in historical matters," the Professor told his Oxford audience, "is the doctrine that no historical study is of any value which does not take in a knowledge of original authorities."³ The historian, especially the universal historian, need not, of course, master all original authorities; this task would be impossible. But for some single period the serious historical student must master his sources. For the other periods of history, the "habits of mind" developed in his more specialized study will enable him to evaluate the work of secondary writers with greater care and insight. In a letter to Alexander Macmillan concerning the latter's proposal that Freeman take up a history of more recent times than those in which he specialized, Freeman insisted

³Methods of Historical Study, 156.

that his own mastery of the original source material of early English history invested him with "a certain power of at once grasping the main points, even in parts where I am not well up on details." The work would necessarily involve much mere compilation from other writers, but in Freeman's opinion, "compilation by one who is used to do [sic] original work turns out something different from compilation by one who is used to nothing but compiling."⁴

When speaking of original authorities, it should be remembered that Freeman was concerned chiefly with contemporary historical narratives, without which documents and other so-called "subsidiary" authorities would have little or no meaning. Such authorities were defined by Freeman as "those writers from whom we have no appeal, except to other writers of the same class."⁵ This group is to be divided further into primary and secondary original authorities, that is, those writers who, respectively, wrote wholly or in part from their own knowledge, such

⁴Freeman to Macmillan, 9 September 1874, BM. Add. MSS. 55050, ff. 190-92.

⁵Methods of Historical Study, 168.

as Thucydides or Ammianus Marcellinus in the ancient world or Gregory of Tours and Lambert of Herzfeld in the medieval period, and those, like the ancient writers Plutarch and Livy, who, while themselves relying upon earlier contemporary writers whose work is now lost, have become the original authorities for us. It is clear that in nearly every case Freeman believed the contemporary historian to be the more trustworthy. While this view is an essential element in modern historical methodology, it was in Freeman's day relatively novel. "Till the time of [Barthold] Niebuhr," Freeman wrote, "none but the solitary skeptic . . . hesitated to give the first decade of Livy a credence as unhesitating as they could have given to Thucydides."⁶

There were other criteria for the definition and evaluation of original authorities as well. Most sought after, of course, was the contemporary witness to the event, and just subordinate to his evidence was the witness to contemporary reports of the event. Alongside these contemporary historians Freeman placed contemporary narrators who wrote their accounts without any specifically historical purpose in mind. The narratives of ambassadors, for example,

⁶"Introduction" to Mommsen, History of Rome, xiii.

written for practical, immediate purposes, "are often among our most valuable historical materials," and the accounts of hagiographers, written for the edification of the faithful, are as well unconscious vehicles of historical literature. As Freeman often took delight in pointing out, the estimates of historical figures given by panegyrists, hagiographers, or publicists are often completely controverted, to the benefit of historical knowledge, "by the facts which those who give the estimates themselves record."⁷ To this classification Freeman adds, interestingly, the Homeric poems and the national epics and sagas of other European peoples. In truth, such literature is not history, nor need it, he argues, even portray real men. These epics portray a picture of life in general and the basic ideology of an age from which no other records survive and, as such, they enjoy a limited status as original authorities.⁸

It was to original authorities that Freeman wanted to go for the foundations of his own history and to which he sought to lead his students. His first systematic work on original sources, W. R. W. Stephens reveals, began in

⁷Freeman to Bryce, 26 June 1883, Bryce MSS., VIII, ff. 229-30.

⁸Methods of Historical Study, 177-78.

1845 during his research for the Chancellor's Prize Essay at Oxford.⁹ His renewed and more intense interest in the subject after he had been defeated for the Prize prompted some thoughtful re-consideration of the fortunes of the early history of England. Its study seemed to be plagued by the neglect or misuse of original authorities by the most prominent secondary writers. It struck the young scholar that ancient history was generally studied through the media of the earliest writers, Herodotus and Thucydides. In English history -- and other national histories to a degree -- original sources were usually not consulted. The reasons for this state of affairs ran the gamut from the existence of a modernist bias among historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the relative inaccessibility of the more fragmented and obscure original sources which characterized early national history, to the lingering on of an Enlightenment-spawned contempt for mediaeval chronicles and hagiography. One of the Enlightenment's classic histories, David Hume's History of England, it should be remembered, retained its influence among the reading public and in the schools well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰ From the outset of his career

⁹Life and Letters, 1:75.

¹⁰Ibid., 1:104.

Freeman labored to secure the availability of the original sources of English history and to promote their employment. In an 1861 review of Benjamin Thorpe's edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, he combined praise and gratitude for the publications of the Rolls Series with a plea for the inclusion of notes to the texts, which were necessary, he believed, if full use was to be made of the documents by scholars. Yet he left no doubt as to the value for study of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle itself. "No other nation has a record -- to a large extent a contemporary record -- of its own early history, written in its own native tongue."¹¹ No history of early England could pretend to accuracy, therefore, which did not make full use of this unique authority. Freeman at all times reserved a prominent place in his English histories for the tale of the unnamed Chronicler. In the original plan for the Old English History for Children, for example, he had resolved to carry the story no further than 1154, at which point, he lamented, he was forsaken by the Chronicle.¹² Moreover, much of the

¹¹[E. A. Freeman], "Thorpe's Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," Saturday Review 11 (1861):564-65.

¹²Freeman to W. F. Hook, 23 December 1865, Life and Letters, 1:334.

vast bulk of the Norman Conquest results from Freeman's efforts to work into his narrative, as far as possible, the maximum amount of contemporary material in the form of laws, charters, and chronicles, very much a departure from the practice of earlier writers.¹³ He was proud of his own account of the life of Aethelred the Unready, he admitted to his publisher, but "nothing can be more living than the Chronicles themselves."¹⁴ This devotion to the value of original authorities remained unbroken throughout his career, and in his Oxford inaugural lecture he announced his belief that the duty of the historical professor was to lead his students to the Quellen. The main thrust of his opposition to the study of so-called "modern" history was, as he told his audience, "that there is as yet no Polybios or Procopius in whom to study it," and without such a vehicle sound learning based upon "the mastery of original texts" was simply not possible.¹⁵

¹³Those who had covered the ground earlier, Thierry and Palgrave, seldom made clear their sources or explained how they arrived at their conclusions from those sources.

¹⁴Freeman to Macmillan, 13 May 1866, BM. Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 47-49.

¹⁵Office of the Historical Professor, 35.

The use of original sources, however, had been complicated in Freeman's opinion by a laxity in the application of any consistent definition of an original source. In the field of classical studies, for example, there had tended to be an unjustifiable neglect of those writers and historians who, in spite of their superior value as historical sources, such as Ammianus Marcellinus, Diodoros, or Dion Cassius, did not measure up to the literary standards of the literature of the classical age. The results of this prejudice were evident, he argued in a review of the pioneering work of George Finlay, in the widespread scholarly ignorance of Byzantine history and culture. This seemed to Freeman to be as much a consequence of the disdain of educated men for the wooden prose of Byzantine writers and sources as of the scornful attitude toward the "Greeks of the Lower Empire" fostered by Gibbon and other European historians. On the other hand, the writers of mediaeval history accepted nearly equally a chronicle or account from the Middle Ages. Other historians were being pilloried beside his French predecessor when Freeman remarked to his students, "To Augustine Thierry it is plain that any book older than the invention of printing was as good as any other."¹⁶ To be sure, no writer could be wholly

¹⁶ Methods of Historical Study, 220.

cast aside. Nearly every account could most likely yield some useful and truthful information to the historian, even if it would be only a sense of the perspective of the age on a category of events. Freeman maintained that even forgeries could prove extremely valuable to the canny scholar as, in many cases, the witness of the forger is "good on all points save the one he is trying to establish."¹⁷ Still, as Freeman noted, too many historians, especially during the revival of interest in the history of the medieval period, had failed to grasp the simple truth "that a statement made by a contemporary gains nothing in inherent value because it is copied over and over again by a hundred writers who are not contemporary."¹⁸

The numberless censures in Freeman's reviews of amateur or marginal scholars, whose familiarity with original sources was minimal or completely absent, are a testimony to his concern for such scholarly principles. During his tour of the United States he campaigned actively for the preservation of the source materials of the young nation's early history. And, while quite impressed with the work of

¹⁷E. A. Freeman, "Aetius and Boniface," English Historical Review 2 (1887):436.

¹⁸Methods of Historical Study, 221.

American historians in institutional studies, Freeman confided to a friend that "too many of them have no notion of original sources."¹⁹ Conversely, his deep respect for the work of William Stubbs was due in large part to the care which the learned churchman gave to the assessment of contemporary, original sources. As early as 1858, in a review of Stubbs' edition of the Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum, he wrote:

In this day of second-hand study -- of crude notions got up from the philosophical school or the picturesque school -- we want a few more such men, who go to the fountain-head and draw for themselves.²⁰

Freeman, then, did no more than to add his voice to the cry for the use of original authorities, but the very ubiquity and intensity of that voice identifies him as one of the more influential figures in that movement.²¹

In spite of the magnified value which he placed

¹⁹Freeman to J. T. Fowler, 20 February 1880, Fowler MSS., ff. 152-54.

²⁰[E. A. Freeman], "Stubbs' Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum," Saturday Review 6 (1858):86-87.

²¹Stubbs, Green, and Round in mediaeval studies and Creighton, Seeley, Acton, and Gardiner in modern history led the way in historical revision based on research in original sources.

upon original narratives to the detriment of other more incidental contemporary materials -- and no one who reads Freeman with Round's critique of his work in this regard can doubt that it is so -- he did not completely neglect the study or employment of what he usually called "subsidiary" authorities. These he divided into two classes: the monumental sources and the documentary sources. In the former category he assigned nearly all unwritten evidential sources, many of which come to the historian from toilers in the auxiliary sciences to history. Skulls, tools and other utensils, earthworks, and dwelling-places, the subject matter directly of the archaeologist or the architectural historian, become valuable source material for the historian. Coins were deemed to occupy the role of a transitional link between monumental and documentary evidence, as they were in themselves monuments which testified to a certain state of affairs, such as the existence of a money-economy, and at the same time they contained inscriptions which had the value of documents. Documentary evidence is thus taken to include all written evidence, whether on paper or in stone, ranging from the Acta of Augustus to the charters of William the Conqueror. In this category Freeman included deeds, the texts of treaties and laws, and, in a lesser regard, manifestos,

proclamations, purely literary works, and other merely persuasive documents. It is very important to understand that Freeman believed that many subsidiary authorities were often much more truthful and complete than some narratives. They were considered subsidiary only in the sense that history cannot be read consecutively in the documents alone.²²

It can be maintained that Freeman, against his own warnings, held to his chosen narratives even when other evidence to the contrary seemed to be more persuasive. But in most of his major work the historian honestly tried to make use of subsidiary authorities in a critical fashion. In his History of Sicily, for example, he supplements the basic narrative of Diodoros with evidence from Sicilian coins, the odes of Pindar and Simonides, and a host of inscriptions and casual references. Similarly, in the Old English History for Children he referred to the "Song of Brunanburh", a vernacular epic of that famous battle of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, - as an important piece of source material and reproduced the song in the text.²³

²²Methods of Historical Study, 226-60.

²³History of Sicily, 2:162-289; Old English History for Children, 155.

Indeed, beyond the emotional appeal of epics or ballads, poetry had no appeal for Freeman except insofar as it was able to supply him with historical facts. He defended the evidence from inscriptions and condemned Benjamin Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, who equated critical reading and deciphering of Greek inscriptions with the amusement of working out puzzles or acrostics.²⁴ There was no source which Freeman thought beneath the interest of the serious scholar. A fragment, a name, an incidental document, or an apocryphal story could be examined for traces of historical significance. As he wrote to his friend Charles W. Boase:

Do not despise miracles; every story tells me something about names, customs, something or other. Dickinson has caught such a document in one of the Chapter-books at Wells, a deed of sale of 1072, . . . fixing the death of Stigand to the first two months of 1072.²⁵

Throughout his career, also, Freeman praised the witness of the Bayeux Tapestry as "the highest authority on the Norman side," and he secured a full-sized copy of the Tapestry for his Oxford lectures. Later historians could point to

²⁴E. A. Freeman, "Jowett's Thucydides," Fortnightly Review 31 (1882):280-81.

²⁵Freeman to Boase, 26 November 1876, BM Add. MSS. 35073, ff. 53-54.

Freeman's blindness toward any number of sources in his writing. But his repeated pleas for the preservation of the sources of history confirm his commitment to the utilization of all manner of subsidiary authorities.

The subsidiary sources, however, had to be approached with as much caution as the primary narratives. Quite authentic incidental evidence could easily mislead the scholar without any intention on the part of the writers of the documents to do so. Laws and treaties, for example, are among the sources of information most useful and of the highest authority in historical work. If they are read, however, without a cautious interpretation of the usage of words during the particular age of the document's origin, the historian can often be led astray. Freeman noted the formal language of a treaty of alliance between the Romans and the insignificant Greek city of Astypalaia; in spite of the vast imbalance of power between the two parties, a thorough equality of the two states is presupposed in the document.²⁶ The failure to take into account the necessarily incomplete and often distorted character of otherwise valid documents made up one of Freeman's most telling accusations against Froude. It seemed that Froude had forgotten Gibbon's warning that the secret motives of princes are not to be found in the documents which they

²⁶ Methods of Historical Study, 268-70.

leave behind. The language of the statute-book supported Froude in his defense of the propriety and legality of the divorces, judicial murders, and ecclesiastical outrages of Henry VIII, but the essential truth of the story was badly distorted by such a purely legalistic interpretation.²⁷ At the same time, Freeman admonished his friends to avoid uncritical dependence upon state-papers and diplomatic reports, and he chastised authors who failed to heed the warning. In a letter to J. R. Green, Freeman expressed his reservations about such sources:

About state-papers &c., surely they are one kind of materials among others, showing one side of things and only one. One class of them shows what things, Ministers, &c. really thought and wished. Therefore, their record can't make history, but doubtless they are an important part of its materials.²⁸

Even subsidiary evidence which was badly flawed or even forged could not be totally dismissed by the critical historian. Legendary elements could creep into documents, records could prove too reliant upon traditional legal formulae to accurately express historical reality, or evidence obviously could be fabricated. Still, some precious knowledge could be yielded up to the questioning

²⁷"The Use of Historical Documents," 521-22.

²⁸Freeman to Green, 28 November 1872, Freeman MSS.

historian. In a letter to Stubbs, Freeman defended his use of certain documents whose veracity was suspect:

I am using them, because; whatever the matter may be worth, the formulae at least are sure to follow the type of genuine ones, and it is the formulae with which I am concerned.²⁹

No one source or genre of sources should be employed to the exclusion of others, but all of the traces must be brought together, weighed, questioned, and most important, made to question one another.

To some extent, Freeman's reputation as an historian rested upon an image, in part self-created, of his thorough mining and evaluation of all available sources. When later critics showed the image to have been largely an illusion, irreparable damage was done Freeman's name. The record indicates, however, that while Freeman was not the meticulous plunderer of archives and graveyards that Round and others thought a serious historian ought to be, neither was he dishonest about just what sources he did use nor inattentive to the necessity of wide-ranging investigation. He was emphatic in his belief that history could not, in general, be written from a single source. In an appendix to the History of Sicily, Freeman attacked Jowett for implying that there was some "special impropriety" in

²⁹ Freeman to Stubbs, 24 November 1872, Life and Letters, 2:64.

combining the work of lesser, later writers with that of the great Thucydides or, worse, criticizing the historical master from evidence provided by less worthy men. Freeman offered a gloomy prediction if the opinions of the Master of Balliol were taken seriously:

There would be an end to all writing of history, almost to all reading of it. We are solemnly called on to shut our eyes to a large part of our evidence. Because one writer stands high above all others, we are bidden to pass by the statements . . . of another writer, doubtless his inferior in many points but whose means of knowledge were, from one side of the story, even greater than his own.³⁰

An historian, Freeman believed, was obligated to consider carefully and respectfully the work of his predecessors. The true scholar must stand upon the shoulders of the men who went before him. Repeatedly Freeman warned that "it is dangerous to follow any one modern guide implicitly." He defended the great historical pioneers of the early nineteenth century, denying the popular belief that they had been superseded. In an obituary for Bishop Thirlwall, Freeman dismissed the notion -- with little success apparently -- that historians must produce definitive works which shut out the insights of earlier writers. The histories of Thirlwall, to be sure, were inferior in many

³⁰ History of Sicily, 3:597-99.

ways to those of George Grote, and the works of both were not equal in some areas to those of German historian Ernst Curtius, but Freeman counseled that "he who would master Grecian history cannot afford to part with any of them." Each, in some part of the total history of Greece, was master of the field.³¹

Freeman's own work reflects his desire to employ a rich blend of secondary sources. The History of Sicily, for example, shows a heavy reliance upon the investigations of earlier German writers, notably Adolph Holm, but Freeman criticizes, compares, and adds a good deal to each in order to produce a narrative of the salient features of Sicilian history. The appendices to the Norman Conquest, the Reign of William Rufus, and Freeman's fragmentary Western Europe in the Eighth Century, as well as the Sicilian history, are masterly displays of erudition and critical expertise with respect to the best known writers on his subject. In spite of his complaint against the lionization of the author of the "last German book," -- Freeman often inquired whether the critics had read the first English book -- the historian tried valiantly to keep

³¹[E. A. Freeman], "Bishop Thirlwall as an Historian," Saturday Review 40 (1875):136-37.

up with continental scholarship. He criticized the Germans for wasting time and effort confuting their colleagues in minor points but admitted that "each one makes some good points you can't afford to lose."³² His interest in the work of foreign scholars dated from the beginning of his career. While researching the History of Federal Government in 1852, Freeman revealed; he saw the need for wider study and "learned [German] with the express object of getting up the German literature of this particular subject."³³ The critical use of Schorn and J. G. Droysen in his history indicates that it was a year well spent.³⁴

Yet, no one was as aware as Freeman, the free-lance scholar living far from the centres of national scholarship, of the difficulties in keeping pace with the welter of monographs that accompanied the revival of interest in historical study in nineteenth-century Europe. His researches into Swiss politics and history, for example, opened his eyes to a wealth of new and valuable material, but it made him aware of the scholar's losing battle for communication.

³² Freeman to North Pinder, 8 October 1882, Life and Letters, 2:260.

³³ Freeman to [?], 1 October 1861, Freeman MSS.

³⁴ History of Federal Government, passim.

The mass of historical learning in Switzerland is something prodigious, and its results are piled up as Alps on their wise men's shelves. But to the outer world, they are simply buried under bushels; . . . people write their essays -- most learned and elaborate ones -- in the transactions of societies which folk in general have no way of getting at.³⁵

It was a serious hindrance to historical study, Freeman maintained as early as 1867, to have such limited access to historical knowledge. He urged Alexander Macmillan, J. R. Green, and others who were contemplating the founding of an English historical review to compare with the established continental journals to reserve part of every issue for "a chronicle of current historical literature, English and especially foreign."³⁶ Finally, Freeman was aware, perhaps more so than most historians, of the value of secondary historical literature as primary source material for its own times. He always cautioned editors of posthumous works against tampering with the literary remains of any departed historian, in part from respect for the individual and his work, but in part also from a belief in the evidential character of any literary or historical

³⁵ Freeman to Bryce, 7 November 1871, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 283-85.

³⁶ Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1867, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 120-23.

account. He told his students that "as a generation of historians pass away like the generations of leaves, they do themselves become part of history," and he reminded them that "the history of opinion about facts is really no small part of the history of those facts."³⁷

Even to this day the most notorious idiosyncrasy of Freeman's methodology and a crucial factor in his condemnation by modern scholars was his well-known aversion to manuscript authorities. On numerous occasions the eccentric country squire boasted that he knew nothing of public libraries or that, while in Oxford, he could hardly bring himself to walk across the Quadrangle to the Bodleian. This cast of mind was, according to his critics, a product of methodological slovenliness, but W. R. W. Stephens marks it up to an intense shyness on the part of the isolated historian.³⁸ The predominant view of Freeman as the last man who pretended to scholarship who did not work with manuscript materials must be qualified. Freeman did make limited use of unpublished charters and documents in his histories of Llandalf and St. David's and in some minor ecclesiological addresses. For the most part, however, Freeman insisted that the bulk of important source

³⁷ Methods of Historical Study, 267.

³⁸ While Freeman was by no means a recluse, it is certain that he was uncomfortable around strangers save when he could appear in some formal capacity. As a private person, Freeman found it difficult to deal with the public at large.

material for his studies had already been printed. Further, in general he did not believe that there was any superior virtue in archival research. Rather, he urged that the Rolls Series and the publications of the Societies be accelerated and expanded in order to have the chief source materials for all periods in print. If he wished to study his favorite author, Freeman told a local gathering:

I do not by choice peruse him in . . . manuscript or even in an edition of the fifteenth century, but . . . the latest new form with which he has been invested by Mr. Murray, Mr. Parker, or the delegates of the Clarendon Press, where he may appear in legible Roman type, with a distinction of large and small characters, and a sufficient blank space between the words of each sentence.³⁹

The reading and deciphering of mediaeval manuscripts was, in his estimation, technical work that should be left to palaeographers who were trained in the art, surely not an unreasonable attitude.

Freeman relied heavily upon the labor of his friends and his children in searching out references and documents. In this way, the results of his refusal to do archival research were somewhat mitigated. In 1863 Freeman wrote to Macmillan assuring his publisher that he could obtain the assistance of foreign scholars in every federal state "save the Argentine Confederation" in preparing the never-realized

³⁹Preservation . . . Church Monuments, 27.

continuation of his history of federalism.⁴⁰ Nearly all of his friends were called upon for references, documents, or merely scraps of information which Freeman could not glean from his own vast library. His papers contain a number of letters discussing Sicilian Greek sources from W. W. Goodwin of Harvard University and others from a variety of Swiss historians about their source materials.⁴¹ To no other individual, however, did he owe a greater debt for research assistance than to Stubbs. Repeatedly he called upon his patient and thorough colleague to check materials for him or to suggest documents of which he might be unaware. Even though his research on the Norman Conquest did lead him occasionally to the Bodleian, he admitted to Green that for the appendices to his masterpiece, "Stubbs has done all the hardest work for me."⁴²

Freeman did not completely exhaust his sources. The shortcomings which Round gloried in pointing out had been

⁴⁰Freeman to Macmillan, 16 October 1863, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 6-8.

⁴¹See packets of correspondence from Goodwin and Swiss scholars Adolphe Morlot and Dr. Thomas Ritterman, Freeman MSS.

⁴²Freeman to Green, 13 February 1876, Freeman MSS.

brought to Freeman's notice by friendly critics for years; Reinhold Pauli's review of the Norman Conquest in Historische Zeitschrift had gently urged the author to more thorough investigation.⁴³ Yet, Freeman's knowledge of source material was, by any standard, enormous, especially when one considers the limitations which he placed on himself. And the scholar who peruses the catalogue for it must be impressed with the vast amount of time and money spent in the stocking of the great private library at Somerleaze.⁴⁴ A certain degree of restraint in pursuance of sources was necessitated by Freeman's isolation and eccentricities, but he always attempted to track down any new source of evidence which was made known to him, and his work never concealed just what he had or had not used in its preparation.⁴⁵

⁴³Cited in "Freeman's Norman Conquest and Reign of William Rufus," Quarterly Review 175 (1892):5, surely the work of J. H. Round.

⁴⁴See Catalogue of the Freeman Library (Manchester, 1894).

⁴⁵Even when he was faced with determined opposition by Longmans' and Company to admitting his sparse employment of manuscript sources in his history of Exeter, he replied that, however detrimental such an admission would be to the book's sales, a disclaimer of scholarly completeness must be made in the preface. See W. Longman to Freeman, 10 January 1887, Freeman MSS.

The use which Freeman made of his sources constitutes a central feature of his methodology. He believed that his duty lay in leading his readers in a comparison of source materials in order to sift fact from falsehood and, thereby, produce the material for accurate historical narrative. The most controversial aspect of Freeman's use of authorities were his inquiries into the character of the author. It was J. H. Round's contention, for example, that "Mr. Freeman misunderstood the twelfth-century writers by assigning to them his own peculiarities."⁴⁶ If that view is somewhat overstated, it is clear that Freeman's familiarity with the chronicles had often led him into an apparent familiarity with the chroniclers, and the relationship affected his assessments. He certainly applied to the writers of the twelfth century standards for credibility that he could easily transpose into the nineteenth. Thus, his suspicions of the Encomiast, a Norman chronicler, are based upon the mediaeval author's "studied obscurity and . . . overdone piety."⁴⁷ William of Poitiers, the Arch-

⁴⁶"Freeman's Norman Conquest and Reign of William Rufus," 10.

⁴⁷Norman Conquest.

° bishop of Lisieux, is similarly to be read with extreme caution, and "allowance must be made throughout for his constant flattery of his master, and his frantic hatred towards Godwine and Harold."⁴⁸ Henry of Huntingdon, on the other hand, an English chronicler, "always represents an independent tradition," and his account, while uneven, rises occasionally to become "minute, poetical, and evidently founded on an accurate knowledge of the spot."⁴⁹ Such assessments are usually dismissed by critics as examples of the blind nationalist prejudice of an historian who could urge his readers to examine an English account of English affairs, then "turn and see what is the Norman perversion of it."⁵⁰

No doubt an exaggerated national sentiment comes into play here, but it was not in the nature of open bias, but rather an unthought predisposition in evaluating arguments and assertions which proved to be unfavorable and unfair to many mediaeval writers. For all of Freeman's attempts to eliminate presentist bias in his work -- "We must trace out effects and causes with the eyes of our own

⁴⁸ Norman Conquest, 2:4n.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:641; 3:721n.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2:4.

day; we must look at the actions with the eyes of when they were done."⁵¹ -- his evaluations of his sources often give the impression of the mediaeval chronicler having been brought before the Victorian West-Country magistrate for cross-examination. Within this context, Freeman can be seen searching for characteristics in the account which may stamp the testimony with the seal of probable accuracy, and his three prime criteria seem to have been balance, contemporaneousness, and simplicity. Thus, the apparent imbalance of the tale of William of Malmesbury in the chronicler's flattery of Henry I is looked on with suspicion, and the alleged impartiality attributed to William because of his mixed Anglo-Norman parentage is cancelled out. The Saxon Chronicles have the virtue of having been written in a vulgar tongue and presenting a picture of popular history in the popular mind and are recommended by a "pathetic simplicity [which] not uncommonly approaches the sublime."⁵² And the Bayeux Tapestry has the advantage of having been wrought soon after the Conquest itself and

⁵¹Western Europe in the Eighth Century (London, 1904), 351.

⁵²"Sir F. Palgrave's History of England and Normandy," 10.

having to tell its tale simply by the very nature of the medium.⁵³ Freeman shared with the French historian Sismondi a suspicion of even those original authorities which date from the invention of printing, a view seemingly based on the assumption that the mediaeval chroniclers, writing for a smaller audience and to a more limited purpose, tended toward greater honesty and reliability.⁵⁴

In all of his major historical works and in many of the lesser efforts as well, Freeman began each chapter with a discussion of his major sources and an outline of how he would use fragments and incidental sources to supplement and criticize his chief sources. Each writer was carefully evaluated according to the author's proximity in time and space to the events, his objects in writing, his stated or subliminal religious or national presentiments, the degree to which his conclusions had been arrived at by other independent sources; then the minor incidental evidence was similarly examined.⁵⁵ With this

⁵³"Sir F. Palgrave's History of England and Normandy," 15.

⁵⁴[E. A. Freeman], "The Reign of Richard III," Saturday Review 13 (1862):442-44.

⁵⁵See, for example, Western Europe in the Fifth Century, 7-12; and History of Sicily, 1:449-58.

Foundation, it became Freeman's task to sift probable facts and interpretation from the conflicting evidence, while constructing a coherent narrative. A casual reading of Freeman's efforts appears to reveal an attempt merely to force the sources into an often unwilling servitude to a preconceived theory, based more on the historian's prejudices and fantasies than on the testimony.

Many hostile critics have charged Freeman with special pleading on behalf of his unusual historical hobby horses -- even his friend A. V. Dicey questioned once whether Freeman exaggerated the virtues of his historical friends as he did those among his contemporaries.⁵⁶ He did become involved with his sources, especially those of the mediaeval period. Once he had decided upon the worthiness of a particular chronicler, the most likely anonymous monk or clerk became a close friend of the isolated Victorian writer. It can be maintained that the fact of Freeman's special pleading -- its occurrence is undeniable -- stemmed less from a personal desire to maintain and publicize pet hypotheses than from a desire to justify the often contradictory statements of the sources to which he felt beholden. Thus, in a letter to C. W. Boase in 1891 he asked for some fresh documentary evidence relating to the

⁵⁶A. V. Dicey to Freeman, 27 July 1891, Freeman MSS.

chronology of the reign of Henry I because ". . . I cannot in 1102-1106 make the Chronicles and Orderic agree."⁵⁷ It was important for him to maintain the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles in chronological matters while not calling into question the factuality of Orderic's account. This habit of mind can be explained in part by the historian's personal eccentricity, but it was also a reaction against the tendency of Hume and other writers of the eighteenth century to dismiss the chroniclers as the most superstitious, illiterate, and most untrustworthy of sources. As often as not, Freeman's methodological excesses were not exercises in scholarly narcissism but in filial devotion to his historiographical ancestors.

All was not excess, however, and Freeman also produced a number of valuable source criticisms. In the preface to an edition of the works of Giraldus Cambrensis, for example, he compares one twelfth-century obituary list with entries in the Domesday Book in order to establish the death-dates of a number of leading citizens of Lincolnshire and to illustrate, by evidence of local nomenclature, the shifting racial make-up of the area.⁵⁸ One of his first

⁵⁶ Freeman to Boase, 23 December 1879, BM Add. MSS. 35073, ff. 83-84.

⁵⁸ E. A. Freeman, "Preface," Opera Giraldi Cambrensis 7 (Vita S. Remigii et Vita S. Hagonis), ed. James F. Dimock (London, 1877), lxxiv-lxxix.

major contributions to the nascent English Historical Review constituted an attempt to correct the account of Aetius and Boniface in the histories of Procopius, "to recover the true story as it may be put together from the annalists, the writings of St. Augustine and other more trustworthy authorities."⁵⁹ Each reference was weighed to determine its degree of accuracy and then compared with other references. Hypotheses were offered which could reconcile contradictions in the sources or impugn the truthfulness of any one or all of them, or merely to establish a common denominator of fact. This approach was employed in Freeman's long excursus in the appendix to the Reign of William Rufus. Here he analyzes and compares the variant versions of the death of the Red King, surely one of the finest examples of the historian bringing wide reading and critical insight to bear upon the interpretation of an historical event.⁶⁰ Where a personal attachment to a particular source was not threatened, Freeman took contradictions more calmly. He would often refer to contradictions in the Gospels, viewing them as merely the results of differing perspectives and, as such, "rather a confir-

⁵⁹"Aetius and Boniface," 423.

⁶⁰Reign of William Rufus, 2:657-76.

mation of the ~~general~~ truth of the narrative."⁶¹

A singular feature of Freeman's history and critical method was the extent of his belief in the possibility of extracting historical truths or probabilities from reliable, if contradictory, accounts and from myths, legends, panegyrics, even palpable falsehoods. His conclusions from these suspect sources were often more limited than his critics will allow. But the very tenuousness of this historical divination led Freeman to certain excesses and hung on him the reputation of trying to write history on the basis of no real evidence at all. His most complete statement on this type of exegesis was made in "The Mythical and Romantic Elements in Early English History," in 1866. Statements in his sources were divided into four categories: a) historical (or pseudo-historical) statements, those accepted as either true or false according to their interpretation by traditional canons; b) romantic statements, those which are exaggerations of real events or apocryphal anecdotes illustrating some characteristic of an historical figure or event; c) traditional statements, those rooted in conscious or unconscious imitation or repetition or transference of real events in popular traditions from different periods; and d) mythical statements, those which

⁶¹Freeman to G. Finlay, 21 March 1858, Life and Letters, 1:238.

conform to "a class of stories which seem to be the common property of mankind," basic storylines which occur in the mythologies of nearly all peoples.⁶²

The historian had the duty to sort out the historical from the romantic, to undo the damage caused by popularizers and romantic novelists. He was also obliged to attempt the recovery of probable history from myth and legend. If we understand the development of Karlomanian mythology from the true history of the first independent Western Emperor, he argued, we should be able, by careful and flexible use of analogy, to recover a probable Greco-Trojan history from the evidence of Homeric mythology. This is a very imperfect sort of history, but to Freeman it was worthy of respect and was an honorable and necessary pursuit for the historian. This was a fairly radical doctrine, more in line with the methods of Barthold Niebuhr and other continental scholars than with the more rigidly empiricist British tradition, represented by men like Sir George Cornwall Lewis.⁶³ As such, it was never received

⁶²E. A. Freeman, "The Mythical and Romantic Elements in Early English History," Fortnightly Review 4 (1866): 641-68.

⁶³See the review of Niebuhr's work in Gooch, 14-23. His work was severely criticized by Cornwall Lewis in Inquiry into the Credibility of the Early Roman History (London, 1855).

by his English critics as more than novel or clever guesswork. This type of evaluation played a visible role in Freeman's history, however, from his early work examining the legendary tales which grew up around St. David's Cathedral to the comparisons in his last writings of the "tales of mystery, miracle, and magic" involving the Sicilian reformer Empedocles.⁶⁴

As critic and educator, Freeman was keenly aware of the cavalier treatment of source material in much historical writing, and he meted out praise or blame accordingly. While he abused Froude for naive and simplistic reliance upon the statute-book, he expressed genuine admiration for Stubbs' edition of Select Charters as illustrating an orderly arrangement of documents, with brief and direct connecting narrative and critical explanatory comment. In the magisterial work of the learned clergyman the legal fictions of professional lawyers which had crept into the writing of English history were cleared away by careful analysis of genuine constitutional documents.⁶⁵ Freeman was irritated by the American historian DuChailu for his uncritical acceptance as a unit of the

⁶⁴History of St. David's, 240-83; History of Sicily,
3:342-56.

⁶⁵"The Use of Historical Documents," 321-26.

chronological patchwork of the Saga of Harold Hardrada.⁶⁶ Yet the critic was stirred by the readiness of Sir Edmund Bunbury, whom he acknowledged as a major influence in his own Sicilian studies, to criticize and cross-examine ancient authorities as rigorously as he did modern commentators.⁶⁷ Freeman, the historian who avoided manuscript sources, respected those writers who dug into archival evidence if, like the American J. L. Motley,⁶⁸ they combined industrious research with a solid general background in their subjects and a willingness to compare critically a wide variety of sources. Froude's work at Simancas, however, was not research but archival rummaging. The author, he contended, did not have sufficient knowledge of previous history to construe his documents accurately, and the result was simply bad history, made worse by its trappings of accurate scholarship.⁶⁹ Neither would

⁶⁶ For his criticism of du Chaillu, see the Times, 17 February 1890, 4.

⁶⁷ [E. A. Freeman], "Review of Bunbury's History of Ancient Geography," Pall Mall Gazette, 1 July 1880, 12.

⁶⁸ [E. A. Freeman], "Holland: Its Martyrs and Heroes," North British Review 25 (1856):376-98.

⁶⁹ [E. A. Freeman], "Froude's Reign of Elizabeth," Saturday Review 17 (1864):80-82.

archival research be of any real value if the results were distorted by bad faith on the part of the interpreter. Thus he attacked writers like Victor Duruy for employing figures and statistics in an unthoughtful and superficial manner.⁷⁰ And he reserved special contempt for those historians, like Froude, who seemed to edit and abridge the extracts which he copied from archival manuscripts in order to alter their meaning.⁷¹

It was this concern for accuracy and openness in using documents which best displays Freeman's intellectual honesty and devotion to his subject. Freeman was intensely concerned that historians try to make a thorough examination of their sources in their major works and lay bare for critical comment and correction the sources employed and the processes by which they were shaped into historical narrative. He could point to the value of a poorly written and poorly argued book like Agnes Strickland's Lives of the Queens of England which "notwithstanding a pervading poverty of style and an equal feebleness of thought," was extremely useful "for the copious extracts" and "the sources of various and often neglected information" which

⁷⁰ Freeman to Goldwin Smith, 19 August 1888, Freeman MSS.

⁷¹ See A. H. Elton to Freeman, 11 December 1860, Freeman MSS.

it contained [redacted] At the same time, he criticized the brilliant work of his friend Green for its paucity of reference to source materials.⁷³ The decision to include massive extracts of source material and elaborate discussions of that material in his own histories was a recognition by Freeman of the controversiality of his interpretations and an expression of his willingness to be corrected or questioned. Stung by a critic in the American magazine Nation who questioned his scholarly integrity, he wrote:

I have given him the same means of judging every other detail that I have of this, so that there is nothing for him to be suspicious of except his own power for testing evidence. . . .⁷⁴

In contrast, he attacked Mommsen for his failure to make clear to his readers the preliminary judgments upon sources which led to the German historian's grander conclusions: "The writer speaks as a master to an audience whose business

⁷²[E. A. Freeman], "Queen Elizabeth and her Favourites," Quarterly Review 95 (1854):215.

⁷³[E. A. Freeman], "Green's History of the English People," Saturday Review 44 (1877):813.

⁷⁴Freeman to Macmillan, 6 February 1870, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 127-28.

it is to accept and not to ~~dispute~~ his teaching."⁷⁵ This was simply not Freeman's style. Even when critics accused him of special pleading, most did acknowledge his willingness to list his sources:

While he is an advocate of a particular theory, he furnishes the means by which those who differ from his conclusions may determine on what basis their own views rest.⁷⁶

This favorable picture does not square with the cowardly caricature drawn by Lytton Strachey in his Portraits in Miniature, which implied that Freeman was intolerant of correction. "I am always living and learning," he wrote when asking that corrections be made in new editions of his works. After finding a deed at Corfu that refuted a statement in the History of the Ottoman Turks, Freeman wrote immediately to Macmillan asking that his publisher correct the mistake as soon as possible.⁷⁷ His passion for continual corrections to the History of Sicily

⁷⁵"Introduction," to Mommsen, History of Rome, xi.

⁷⁶C. K. Adams, Manual of Historical Literature (New York, 1882), 478.

⁷⁷Freeman to Macmillan, 26 April 1877, BM Add. MSS. 55051, ff. 97-99; cf. Lytton Strachey, Portraits in Miniature and Other Essays (London, 1931), 202.

finally drove the Delegates of the Clarendon Press to insist that Freeman begin to assume a portion of the increased printing costs for the book. Freeman reacted by calling the demand "a fine on accuracy, a fine on completeness, a fine on work done to the best of the author's power," and he offered to pay that "fine" if the need arose.⁷⁸ All that he ever asked was to be shown a document of sufficient strength to challenge his views, and he would acquiesce or reformulate his arguments on any issue. In a scholarly controversy over whether William the Conqueror was father to a daughter of his consort Matilda, the amusing "Gundrada controversy," Freeman publicly demonstrated his willingness to accept new documents and new evidence at any time.⁷⁹ When he had made errors, jumbled names, or blindly copied the mistakes of others, Freeman was penitent and prepared to revise his work accordingly. And he actively sought criticism from his friends before having it thrust upon him by adversaries.

⁷⁸"Memorandum to the Delegates," 30 October 1891.

⁷⁹Freeman to C. E. Doble, n.d., Bodleian MS. Autogr. d. 12, ff. 190-209; see also, E. A. Freeman, "The Parentage of Gundrada," English Historical Review 3 (1858):680.

Freeman's passion for accuracy and thorough examination of source material often operated to limit his effectiveness. His scholarly efforts were diffuse and quite difficult to follow without a comparable knowledge of the subject. His insistence upon widespread and frequent corrections caused bitter battles with his publishers. Most unfortunately, this penchant for completeness defeated many of what could have been his most stimulating and delightful projects. Short histories of Greece and Rome, worked at steadily over the years, were finally dropped because of the historian's admitted inability to keep pace fully with developments in continental scholarship on the ancient world. So too, his History of Federal Government was doomed to remain a single-volume fragment because he could not adhere to his original intention to limit his work to a fixed number of sources.⁸⁰ On those occasions when he did publish material that he knew to be based upon limited research, Freeman openly admitted its tentativeness. His History and Conquests of the Saracens, he admitted to George Finlay, was weak, as it had been written as a "purely exoteric and Western view," and without benefit

⁸⁰ See letters from Freeman to Macmillan, 26 November 1882, BM Add. MSS. 55052, ff. 183-86; and 28 January 1883, BM Add. MSS. 55052, ff. 194-96.

of more recent European and Mahometan interpretations.⁸¹

Freeman's reputation for conscientious scholarship, then, was not the result, as Round believed, of mere "mischievous superstition."⁸² When Freeman stood for the Chichele Professorship in 1862, several of his supporters stressed his faithfulness to the evidence. "No historical writer of the day has . . . drawn his facts more conscientiously from the fountain-head," wrote G. L. Craik, and Reverend E. S. Venables credited his skill in dealing with original sources to a "power of distinguishing the worthless from the valuable."⁸³ After his death, most obituaries gave prominence to his acknowledged ability in source-criticism. York Powell and S. R. Gardiner believed that Freeman's teaching on the "use of authorities and the method of reading them," to be his primary contribution to historical study and commented favorably on his willingness

⁸¹ Freeman to Finlay, 1 September 1856, Life and Letters, 1:283.

⁸² J. H. Round, Feudal England (London, 1895), 353.

⁸³ See Testimonials in Favour of Edward A. Freeman, M.A., 9; 23-24.

to have his own work corrected and criticized.⁸⁴ During his lifetime, too, many friends and colleagues wrote to express gratitude to Freeman for his methodological advice. James Bryce, for example, gave credit for the success of his essay on The Holy Roman Empire, a piece still read and valued, to the guidance of the elder historian.⁸⁵ And the call by the Duke of Norfolk for Freeman to prepare an historical brief in the so-called Fitzalan Chapel Case, an involved legal dispute over the ownership of an ancient chapel, is testimony to the national attention commanded by the provincial historian.⁸⁶

The meteoric decline of Freeman's reputation after his death seems hardly warranted by the well-known criticisms aimed at his Norman Conquest.⁸⁷ As is so often the case, the generation which buried Freeman professionally seldom, with notable exceptions like York Powell, Gardiner, Kate

⁸⁴ See S. R. Gardiner to J. Bryce, 31 March 1892, Bryce MSS., IX, ff. 322-27, discussing notes on Freeman by Frederick York-Powell.


⁸⁵ Bryce to Freeman, 28 October 1864, Bryce MSS., IX, ff. 49-50.

⁸⁶ See correspondence on the Fitzalan Chapel Case, Freeman MSS.; Arundel Castle Archives, 1879, Chichester.

⁸⁷ Freeman's over-reliance on the Chronicle of Wace, his failure to consult a number of important sources, his habit of liberal conjecture from slender sources were all criticized in Round's Feudal England.

Norgate, and J. B. Bury, acknowledged their debt to the eccentric genius. They soon forgot the fact, noted by the usually severe critic of the Times in his review of the Reign of William Rufus, that Freeman had helped to make the writing of history from original sources a commonplace.⁸⁸ The same can be said of his work with comparative method and consultation of auxiliary sciences. In spite of the many serious weaknesses in Freeman's work, English history-writing in the generation after his death remained deeply indebted to his methodological teaching.

⁸⁸Times, 17 April 1882, 4.



CHAPTER V

FREEMAN AND THE "UNITY OF HISTORY"

It is difficult to pinpoint the central features of the philosophy of history expressed by an historian who claimed to eschew theories and philosophies in his work. This lack of philosophical rigor in Freeman's work can be explained in part by the subsidiary character of formal British philosophy in general and historical philosophy in particular compared with the great European schools. Beyond that rather broad generalization, however, it is certain that Freeman was particularly uncomfortable with the language of formal philosophy. Even Collingwood would remain impenetrable to the bluff West-Saxon historian. Freeman was always too close to his work, too intimate with his subject matter ever to adopt any dispassionate theories about the movement of history which could not take account of the human drama of historical events as worthwhile in itself. His main concern, he always insisted, was to tell his story as clearly and as accurately as it could be told; abstracting from that story any general theory must be a subordinate undertaking.

It is common knowledge, however, that historians choose their subjects, weigh their sources, and compose

even their most apparently objective narratives with reference to a set of conscious or unconscious presuppositions -- whether this may be worthy of being termed a philosophy of history is problematic -- and Freeman was no exception. Also, most historians at some time or another engage in random reflections and observations which, often contradictory and seldom thought through thoroughly or expressed systematically, nonetheless become part of what may be called their philosophies of history. Freeman's more theoretical expressions on the problems and possibilities of historical study for the most part fall into three categories, each of which has represented a traditional philosophical problem for historians:

a) the unity of history, including the problem of periodization in history, the question of historical cycles and recurrences, and the appearance of recognizable patterns in history; b) moral judgment, including the responsibility of the historian to pass judgments on characters or events from the past and the criteria by which those judgments should be made, and c) the character of history as a scientific discipline, its possibilities for accuracy in fact and for practical instruction or the determination of historical or behavioral laws. Within each of these categories, Freeman's insights are fragmentary, often unsound, and always repetitive, but it is the task of

historical commentators to attempt to impose some order upon them.

"As man is the same in all ages, the history of man is one in all ages,"¹ announced Freeman in "The Unity of History," the Rede Lecture at Cambridge for 1872. In that simple statement lies the basis of nearly all of Freeman's historical philosophy. He believed deeply in what for most historians is no more than a common platitude, that history is a seamless web, and perhaps more than any other British historian he insisted that it be treated as such. Unless European history was read as a single, continuous drama no particular element in its grand sweep could be fully comprehended. The Unity of History, nearly always so capitalized in Freeman's writing, which has influenced modern historical philosophy in its battle against professional specialization, became identified with its ardent champion. H. W. C. Davis, for example, defined the unity of history as "Freeman's magnificent and appalling doctrine that if you read history at all, you should read it as a whole."²

¹"The Unity of History," Comparative Politics, 303.

²Quoted in J. R. H. Weaver and A. L. Poole, H. W. C. Davis: 1874-1928 (London, 1933), 76.

The source of historical periodization and the exaltation of one period arbitrarily above the others dated from the Renaissance. The revival of classical learning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to an over-concentration upon and an over-valuation of Greek and Roman literature of a particular "classical period". "It led men to centre their whole powers on an exclusive attention to writings contained in two languages, and for the most part, in arbitrarily chosen periods of those two languages."³ Such an elitism was damaging enough for the study of language and literature, but for the study of history it was disastrous:

. . . [N]o period of history can be understood in its fulness, none can be clothed with its highest interest and its highest profit, if it be looked at wholly in itself, without reference to its bearing on . . . other periods of history. . . .⁴

Thus no man who restricted himself to the study of the golden ages of history and culture could understand history as a totality; nor could he even penetrate the nature of the period under study. The classical, essentially literary approach to ancient history, tended to blur chronological distinctions among characters and events,

³Comparative Politics, 298.

⁴Ibid., 305.

often to the degree that the "ancients" could be thought of popularly as living together in an idyllic composite polis.

The development of comparative philology and mythology in the early part of the nineteenth century had helped to re-establish a certain sense of unity and development in language study and in the study of the origin and dissemination of legendary tales. In history, however, what seemed to Freeman to be relatively little headway had been made in establishing a mode of thinking which valued all historical periods as worthy in themselves. His interest was fired by the lectures at Oxford of Dr. Thomas Arnold, whom Freeman always recognized as his first and foremost master in history:

It was from Arnold that I first learned the truth which ought to be the center and life of all our historic studies, the truth of the Unity of History. . . . Arnold was the man who taught that the political history of the world should be read as a single whole. . . .⁵

It became Freeman's historical mission to expand upon Arnold's romanticist insight, to arrange the results of his own broad and wide-ranging studies in service to the principle expressed in it, and to employ it as a tool of historical criticism and educational reform.

⁵Methods of Historical Study, 5.

The all-pervasive presence in this historical continuum was the civilization of Rome. Early European civilization coalesced in the Roman Empire, and all later variations in European culture were marked by their contact with or ancestry in Roman culture. Freeman was struck especially by the number of historical survivals in the modern world which dated back to the Roman period and the degree to which all earlier civilization passed to the modern world through the Roman clearing-house. It was true, he said, that our religion came from Palestine and our democracy from Greece, but without the recognition of the adoption and modification of these influences by Roman civilization our understanding of our heritage is severely flawed.

Greece can only reach us by way of Italy; the Athenian speaks to modern Europe almost wholly through a Roman interpreter. We profess a religion of Hebrew origin, but the oracles of that religion spoke the language of Greece, and reached us only through the agency of Rome.⁶

For Freeman the history of the civilized world was Roman, from the annals of those more primitive tribes who were absorbed or exterminated by the growth of Roman power on those who influenced that growth to "the last despatch" which confirmed the survival, however shadowy, of Roman

⁶"Introduction" to Mommsen, History of Rome, vii.

laws, institutions, and traditions.

The significance of Roman survivals as a constant theme in Freeman's conception of European history appears as a red thread throughout his writing. Thus, Freeman laid special stress upon the dominant place of Rome in his General Sketch of European History in 1872, and in the 1887 Oxford lectures on The Chief Periods of European History he delineated the main theme as that of setting

. . . forth the main outlines of European history, as grouped around its central point, the Roman power. The main periods suggested by such a view of things are those which concern the growing and the dying out of that power -- Europe before the growth of Rome -- Europe with Rome in one shape or another, as its centre -- Europe since Rome has practically ceased to be.⁷

Those classicists who neglected the apparently inglorious period of the decline of Roman power in the West or its survival in the Byzantine Empire could not understand the unique character of the society which emerged from the interaction of Roman and barbarian in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. It was a special feature of the great genius of Edward Gibbon, in spite of his depreciation of the Byzantines, to recognize the connections between earlier and later Roman history. The hallowed place which

⁷E. A. Freeman, Chief Periods of European History (London, 1886), vii-ix.

the city of Ravenna held in Freeman's heart was precisely its significance as the meeting-ground of the Goth and the Roman. It was the place, he emphasized, where Greek and Teuton disputed the title of Roman Emperor.

Yet perhaps the best examples of his conception of historical unity are to be found in short essays at either end of his career. In an 1857 assessment of the accomplishments of Alexander the Great, Freeman looked beyond the immediate effects of Alexander's conquests and fearlessly projected the Macedonian warrior-king forward in time as a pioneer of Christianity:

He paved the way for the intellectual empire of the Greek and for the political empire of the Roman. And it was the extent of that empire, intellectual and political, which has marked the lasting extent of the religion of Christ.⁸

After Freeman's death, a fragment in Western Europe in the Fifth Century demonstrated the unchanged perspective. The speech of Atawulf the Goth, quoted by Orosius, in which the barbarian who had dreamed of overthrowing the Roman state assumed the mantle of her protector, seemed to mark off the direction and character of the modern world: "The Gothic Sword wielded on behalf of the laws of Rome. . . ."⁹

⁸E. A. Freeman, "Alexander the Great," in Historical Essays, 2:225-26.

⁹Western Europe in the Fifth Century, 179.

For the historians upon whom this point was lost because of a lack of interest in the period of classical Rome's decline Freeman had nothing but scorn. For those like Bryce, whose Holy Roman Empire stressed the significance to the mediaeval world of its Roman heritage and survivals, he reserved the highest praise.

This identification of all history with the history of Rome made Freeman himself susceptible to a charge of being a narrow classical scholar. Indeed, this charge has merit, but it does not do justice to that sense of history being thoroughly interconnected, spatially and temporally, which dominated Freeman's history and underlay his repeated calls for the destruction of artificial barriers in historical studies. For example, Freeman was one of the first British historians of his age, as his admirer J. B. Bury was the best, to argue clearly the case for the rehabilitation of Byzantine studies as worthy of examination in their own right. Even Gibbon's references to Byzantium in the Decline and Fall as "The Lower Empire" had come to have more than a geographical connotation. Freeman saw the special value of the Byzantine Empire in its role as "the surest witness to the unity of History," at least with respect to the division of the discipline into ancient and modern components:

It will not do to say that "ancient" history ended and "modern" history began in 476, when, for nearly a thousand years later, the whole system of Roman and Greek civilization continued to flourish in . . . the most wealthy and populous part of Europe. . . . Nor will it do to put off the line of demarcation to 1453, when every element of the "modern" world had been in being for centuries.¹⁰

Having established the general lines of Freeman's conception of historical continuity, it might be well to consider both the insights and excesses to which applications of that theory led him in his own work. The wide reading and sense of perspective provided by this means of viewing history enabled him, in an address on the history of the City of Birmingham, to explain the changing character and purpose of urban societies since the Graeco-Roman epoch, as well as to depict the historical peculiarities which kept Birmingham from developing in a similar fashion to other English cities or to the great cities of the Continent.¹¹ In his major histories, too, he stressed the spatial and temporal connections of events which, for him, gave testimony to the richness of the pageant of history. The Norman Conquest owes much of its bulk to the author's belief that only a thorough grounding

¹⁰"The Byzantine Empire," Historical Essays, 3:244-45.

¹¹Birmingham: Borough and City, especially 4-5.

in preceding events could prepare the reader to comprehend the narrative of the Conquest as such. There is even some evidence that Freeman valued the background material more highly than the story itself. In answer to his publisher's expressed concern at the mushrooming expansion of the book, Freeman offered to cut short the latter parts of the history. "Lay the foundation strong and the finish of the roof does not so much matter," he told Alexander Macmillan. "I soon saw that the Norman Conquest would be unintelligible without a good deal of preliminary history, especially the Danish Conquest, which so completely paved the way for the Norman."¹²

The Danish Conquest was indeed given its due as this preliminary bout took up over three hundred pages, and background history of the Duchy of Normandy consumed over a hundred as the first volume of the opus came up twenty-two years short of the actual event. Since, as Freeman could never resist indulging in his passion for tracing historical survivals to their limits or analyzing the full results of the events in his narrative, much of the great work looked to the future, as when, for example, he interrupted his account of the burial of Edward the

¹²Freeman to Macmillan, 13 May 1866, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 47-49.

Confessor to digress upon the later history of Westminster Abbey and the subsequent translation of the royal corpse.¹³

In the History of Sicily, too, the attempt to write history as a piece determines the whole nature of the work. Even before the publication of this landmark study Freeman had hinted at the character it was to bear in a series of sketches of Sicilian travel, done for Macmillan's Magazine in 1879:

No land is better fitted than Sicily to cure men of narrow devotion to particular periods of history or particular forms of art. . . . They may even learn that their own subject is imperfectly understood, unless they take in some kindred subject as its needful supplement.¹⁴

The island of Sicily had undergone conquest by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Normans, Spaniards, and finally, Italians, and these groups had left both historical and aesthetic monuments to their ascendancy. The discerning historian of this cosmopolitan island must, however, not merely chronicle the shifting fortunes and successive subjections of the land, but he must relate them one to another in an attempt to grasp the totality of its historical character:

¹³Norman Conquest, 2:501-15.

¹⁴E. A. Freeman, "Sketches from Eastern Sicily: I -- Messina," Macmillan's Magazine 38 (1878):433.

Sicilian history is the history of deliverances; but in the history of Sicilian deliverances, Timoleon must not shut out Roger nor Roger shut out Timoleon, and both must be taught to lead up to the crowning fame of Garibaldi.¹⁵

It staggers the imagination to project the total length of the study, when one considers that, at the author's death, four massive volumes took the story no further than the Roman conquest. Yet all of the published volumes reveal Freeman's total vision of Sicilian history.

The unitarian theme was also to be the central feature of Freeman's Historical Course for Schools, that collection of national European histories written by younger scholars and related to the grand design by the master's editing and by his General Sketch of European History. The individual volumes were to bring out the particular characteristics of the nations, while maintaining some sense of Europe's underlying unity. In the General Sketch, however, Freeman announced that his organizing principle was "that of enlarging on the points of connexion between the several countries."¹⁶ In the national histories as well, the editor hoped that a sense of temporal con-

¹⁵E. A. Freeman, "Sketches from Eastern Sicily: I -- Messina," 433.

¹⁶Freeman to Macmillan, 4 April 1872, BM Add. MSS. 55050, ff. 22-23.

tinuity would also be emphasized. The proposed volumes for the series dealing with Greece and Rome, which Freeman had reserved for himself but which were never completed, would no doubt have demonstrated the model which he had in mind.¹⁷

Freeman was quick to form judgments of other historians on the basis of their grasp of the unity of history. One of Froude's most unforgivable transgressions was, in his estimation, the failure to connect thoroughly for his readers or in his own mind the events and movements about which he wrote with their historical roots or later consequences. In his review of the third volume of Froude's Reign of Elizabeth, Freeman, in condemning the insubstantial and hurried treatment of constitutional history in the book, implied that Froude would have been incapable of improving it. Accusing Froude of "total ignorance of all history before the sixteenth century," Freeman contended that even his ability to make the fullest sense of his own research was severely limited.¹⁸ In contrast, the work of

¹⁷They would be done, he wrote Macmillan, as an illustration of the unity of history, "from an oecumenical, and not from a beggarly classical point of view." Freeman to Macmillan, 10 November 1878, BM Add. MSS. 55051, ff. 160-61.

¹⁸[E. A. Freeman], "Froude's Reign of Elizabeth," Saturday Review 22 (1866):81.

James Brewer, editor of the Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII, came in for special laurels from the Saturday Reviewer precisely because of the author's superior command of the historical periods surrounding his subject. Unlike Froude:

Mr. Brewer began his work with that familiarity with the historical records of various ages, that thorough apprenticeship to historical composition, without which no man can successfully grapple with the history of any particular time and place.¹⁹

In spite of what he conceived to be Green's weakness for an "excess of brilliancy" or his imbalance toward social history, the older historian was always impressed, not only with the breadth of Green's interests and his knowledge, but also by his ability to sustain a high quality of work from the early Teutonic migrations to the age of Gladstone. Freeman also had great respect for the continental scholar whose historical philosophy he deemed in many ways to be correspondent to his own. He referred to "the great name of Ranke" and expressed his admiration for "the author of a 'Weltgeschichte,' who is not shut up within any narrow bounds of specialism, but has his feet set in a large room."²⁰

¹⁹[E. A. Freeman], "Brewer's Letters and Papers of Henry VIII, v. III," Saturday Review 18 (1864):161-62.

²⁰Western Europe in the Eighth Century, 401.

Freeman likely would not have disputed Ranke's contention that all ages were equal in the eyes of God, but in view of his own less-than-divine character, the Englishman could not maintain an equally ardent devotion to all periods as aspects of universal history. Most of Freeman's books, articles, and lengthier reviews which attempted to cover the whole landscape of European history were doomed to be grossly out of proportion, with the bulk of the works being given over to earlier history. His General Sketch, for example, was heavily weighted toward ancient and mediaeval history, and the more recent sections appeared to be hastily and sketchily written. His history of the city of Exeter similarly reflected wide reading and deep sympathy with his subject up to the sixteenth century and then seemed to be transformed into a less satisfactory, often barren, work of compilation. Often, as in the case of a proposed article on the whole of English history which he agreed to do for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Freeman begged off from completing the history, mistrustful of his own knowledgeability and erudition in post-sixteenth century history.²¹ The post-Reformation period did not stir him,

²¹S. R. Gardiner to J. Bryce, 23 June 1892, Bryce MSS., IX, ff. 333-34.

and the eighteenth century in English and European history was especially unattractive to him. An article for the American journal, the Chautauquan, on "England in the Eighteenth Century" is surely one of Freeman's least perceptive ventures into history-writing. It was for him a dull age, unaware of history and one unable to produce either native music or architecture worthy of consideration! As he confessed to Macmillan, "The Georges must be dull; Macaulay himself would only have saved them by bits here and there. And happily they come at the end, with more interesting things before them."²²

If Freeman was outspoken in his preference for one age over another, he further betrayed his personal interest in only certain groups and geographical areas in history. The only occasions on which he ventured beyond purely European history in his own writing were in the course of his public lectures on the History and Conquests of the Saracens and the Ottoman Power in Europe, both of which he developed from his highly partisan and Euro-centric

²²Freeman to Macmillan, 2 July 1871, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 198-99. See also E. A. Freeman, "England in the Eighteenth Century," Chautauquan 13 (1891):639-43.

interest in the Eastern Question, and in a few early review articles. Yet even in these instances a thoroughly European slant and outlook predominate. He restricted his General Sketch to purely European history, and he insisted to his publishers that his Historical Course for Schools must be confined to European studies. "Origin of the Nations," replied Freeman to Macmillan's suggestion for an alternate title for the series, would "take in niggers and Cherokees, who are no part of my subject."²³ He was simply unable or unwilling to concern himself with nations which lay beyond Europe unless they had in some way influenced European developments. "I confess my ignorance of Egyptian history," he wrote to the globe-trotting and cosmopolitan Bryce in 1873, "only is there anything to be ignorant of? But I will not believe that Egypt had any effect on Greece."²⁴

In spite of these personal limitations, Freeman maintained the unity of history as a philosophy and an ideal approach to study. Indeed, any type of developmental study he believed must adopt this principle of continuity. Just as his own conversion to faith in this perspective on history was owed, in part, to the predominant thinking in

²³ Freeman to Macmillan, 11 August 1870, BM Add. MSS. 55049, ff. 165-66.

²⁴ Freeman to Bryce, 20 April 1873, Bryce MSS., VI, ff. 30-36.

philological studies, so Freeman urged other groups of scholars to approach their subjects as a totality. In his "Origin and Growth of Romanesque Architecture" he insisted that the history of architecture "cannot be studied to any profit or with any intelligent results, unless it be looked upon as a continuous whole, each state of which has its influence on the stages which came after it."²⁵ The Grecian or Gothic styles in building had been, he thought, studied incompetently for lack of attention to the Romanesque style which was a bridge between them. Similarly, when Freeman was called upon to make a recommendation for the Merton Professorship of English at Oxford, he adhered to his opposition to scholarly specialization:

I want, if possible, a man who is neither a mere Teutonic scholar, nor still less a mere chatterer, but one who could go write on end from Beowulf to now.²⁶

Notwithstanding his personal sympathies and antipathies toward certain historical periods, Freeman did like to think of himself as a universal historian, and he groped his way toward a philosophy of universal history, albeit faulty and incomplete. He never suggested that the universal historian must be equally well-versed in all periods;

²⁵E. A. Freeman, "Origin and Growth of Romanesque Architecture," Fortnightly Review 12 (1872):373.

²⁶Freeman to Bryce, 28 March 1885, Bryce MSS., VII, ff. 155-56.

rather he posited a difference between primary, or specialist knowledge and secondary, or general knowledge and insisted that the true scholar would hone his primary knowledge finely in a particular area and work to expand his general knowledge in surrounding periods and areas. As he put it to Bryce:

. . . I have the vaguest possible notion of the internal history of Lithuania, and a notion anything but clear of the internal history of Sweden; but I believe I know the position of Lithuania and Sweden in European history.²⁷

The historian who approached his work in this manner would find, Freeman believed, that he could become a more thorough master of both varieties of knowledge. From the new vantage point afforded by a universal approach to history events would take on a wholly new character, and individuals would be invested with the mantle of destiny. It was not, for example, any one battle or any one sacking of Rome which determined the collapse of Roman power in the West, but rather the general pressures of Gothic advances in outlying areas which forced Imperial legions to evacuate

²⁷ Freeman to Bryce, 25 May 1873, Bryce MSS., VI, ff/ 37-42.

Britain and other extreme positions.²⁸ From this viewpoint, too, Freeman could insist to a puzzled public:

We can hardly doubt, whether we look back toward the past or onwards to the future, that the fall of the Pope's temporal power is really a greater event than any possible result of the war between Germany and France.²⁹

No matter that he often stood alone in this sort of position. Had not the truly perceptive universal historians of all ages been able to assess accurately and lastingly the events which swirled around them in a manner that most of their fellows could not approach? It is not surprising, then, to find in Freeman a deep reverence for Polybius, second only to that which he felt for Thucydides himself:

Polybios and Polybios alone fully knew the place of his own generation in the general history of mankind. He alone wrote the history of his own times as part of the general history of all time. He alone wrote . . . from a point of view from which we have no need to shift, even after the wider experience of two thousand years.³⁰

Universal history is, above all, a grand vision, and if Freeman often had only an imperfect perception

²⁸Chief Periods of European History, 83.

²⁹Ibid., 180-82.

³⁰E. A. Freeman, "Some Neglected Periods of History," Contemporary Review 45 (1884):669.

of the trees, it may have been due in part to an inordinate preoccupation with the forest. In a short sketch of the Adriatic port of Durazzo, the sleepy Turkish-Albanian town was recalled as the site of a battle between a group of Normans under Robert Wiscard and a number of exiled English warriors in the service of the Byzantine Emperor.³¹ Freeman wrote his more general histories on the same principle. In a letter to Green in 1875, the historian defended his neglect in the General Sketch of the intrigues of the French and Spanish alliances of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in favor of concentration upon the expansion of Russia in that era:

I grant the former is the characteristic thing of the time; but, except in very indirect results, it has no bearings beyond its own time. But the rise of Russia is a bit of universal history. Czar Peter is a bridge between the ninth century and the nineteenth.³²

As Peter the Great appeared to Freeman to be deserving of this accolade in light of subsequent developments, the historical assessment of the Sicilian dynast Hieron during his reign from 478 to 467 B.C. had to be made on the basis, not of his cruelty and tyranny, but of his role as a

³¹E. A. Freeman, Sketches from the Subject and Neighbour Lands of Venice (London, 1881), 317-19.

³²Freeman to Green, 4 August 1875., Freeman MSS.

protector of Hellenic culture in Sicily.³³ Without the ability to see an individual, a state, or an event in both its immediate and universal aspects, Freeman believed, the historian could easily fall victim to shallow theorizing and inept generalization on one hand or narrow, blinkered antiquarianism on the other.

This all-embracing philosophy expressed itself also in Freeman's particular concern for the preservation or restoration of historical artifacts. It would not do to destroy documents or buildings or monuments to which historical associations attached, simply because they did not date from a particular period or because they did not seem aesthetically superior. Just as he was reluctant to dismiss those historians and chroniclers who had fallen into neglect due to their peculiar or plodding styles of writing, so too he refused to countenance the destruction of any old building with a claim to historical significance without regard to its aesthetic merits.³⁴ This extreme

³³History of Sicily, 2:232-56.

³⁴"I am so conservative that I don't like pulling anything down," he wrote concerning the proposed destruction of some modest monastic buildings at Rome. "The monastery of Araceli is nothing much, but it forms part of a whole with the church, and shares its history. Let it stay. Keep everything: history has no beginning and no ending." Freeman to Ugo Balzani, 3 January 1866, Life and Letters, 2:341.

sensitivity to the historicity of objects led Freeman to the question of what an introductory logic class calls the problem of George Washington's hatchet. He argued, in one of his few flights to the metaphysical plane, that a "moral identity" inheres in an object or building through its continuous use, whether any particular element which makes up the object or building has had a continuous existence.

The Bucentury that bore the last Doge may have had no plank or nail identical with those which witnessed the first espousal of the Adriatic; but the physical transformation had in no sort affected the moral identity; it still remained . . . one and the same, symbolizing the immortality of the most ancient of Christian states.³⁵

To restore what had fallen into disuse to a previous condition of an arbitrarily chosen time was similarly to tamper with the process of history's unfolding. Historical objects still in use, he believed, should be repaired insofar as such repair was necessary for their continued use as symbols of historical unity. He upbraided Sir Edmund Beckett for his eccentric restorations of St. Alban's and other churches:

³⁵ Preservation . . . Church Monuments, 39.

It is not our business to try to bring them back to the state in which we may fancy them to have been 400 years back, or 500 years, or any other date that may best suit our private tastes.³⁶

Neither would he allow religious or political prejudices to come before his devotion to the preservation and recognition of history as it had happened. In a series of letters to the Times and the Academy Freeman attacked the Greeks for their "restoration" of the Acropolis, which involved the destruction of a Turkish minaret and a Venetian tower. No student of history, he argued, could admit the preservation of the symbols of one period and not those of another. In spite of his own Turcophobe feelings, he had no sympathy for those who made war on the past for the causes of the present, and he lamented: "What if some pre-historic student should propose to get rid of the innovation of Perikles, to get a better knowledge of the hill as it stood in the yet more venerable days of Theseus."³⁷ The unity of history simply did not allow the documents or monuments of universal history to become the captives of any single period.

³⁶Times, 2 January 1885, 8.

³⁷Times, 23 February 1889, 5.

His universal approach to historical study enabled Freeman to take account of cyclical patterns in history as well as to identify historical survivals in their true character. It also facilitated the employment by the historian of analogies and comparisons across widely variant times and places. Implicit in this view, of course, is the belief that human nature is always and everywhere the same, and so Freeman believed, as he made clear throughout the Rede Lecture. Only with a grasp of the full run of history could men analogize correctly, but Freeman's personal confidence that he had grasped the totality of history through his studies issued forth in his comparison. He had no difficulty, then, in drawing analogies in his Sicilian histories between Timoleon of Syracuse and George Washington of Virginia, men who seemed alike to be colonial deliverers of the same stamp, or between the institutions of Athenian democracy and those of parliamentary democracy in nineteenth-century Britain. Methodology was the same for both ancient and modern history; the historian approached each in the same fashion, and the thoughtful craftsman could extract instructive analogies from any period. For this reason, Freeman could never understand the objections raised by his critics to his comparisons of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to the classical

Tyrants of Greece and Sicily or between the constitutional oratory of Earl Godwine and that William Ewart Gladstone. He believed that his views were only confirmed by the development of new European societies, especially in America and Australia, "when the work done of old in one land has to be done again in another."³⁸ And as the experience of the past aided the Europeans of the sixteenth century in their struggles with the new land, their experiences could help modern men better understand the work of their forefathers. In fact, part of the almost paternal interest he took in the growth of the Johns Hopkins School was his belief that their researches into primitive American institutions would prove that the responses of Englishmen in America in the so-called modern era, when faced with the problems of conquest and settlement of a new homeland, did not differ significantly from the responses of Englishmen soon after the conquest of Britain.

The unity of history was further emphasized, it seemed, by the cyclical recurrence of analogous events and by the survivals of ancient practices into the modern world.

³⁸ "The Debt of the Old World to the New," 459.

In this category of event Freeman took great delight. The whole tone of his History of Sicily was designed to emphasize the cyclical character of the Sicilian past, and while Freeman's account never got beyond the third century B.C. his readers were explicitly prepared to see each ancient conquest or deliverance of the island as a precursor to every other such conquest and deliverance up to the confrontation between the Spanish Bourbons and Garibaldi's Thousand. Keenly aware of the actual historical value and power of symbols, facades, and even forgeries, Freeman was able to point to examples of myth becoming, by what can only be seen as the cunning of history, reality. "As names and shadows are not without influence in human affairs," he noted in his Historical Geography of Europe, "the creation of a sham Italy [by Napoleon] was no unimportant step towards the creation of a real one."³⁹ His whole conception of the development of English constitutional law was one of a unity marked by cyclical patterns of emphasis but held together, even at the most disruptive times, by a web of legal fictions. The great outlines of the constitution, in his view, had been drawn

³⁹ Historical Geography of Europe, 1:255.

in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but had been perverted from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries:

William of Orange takes up the work of Henry of Bolingbroke. The Yorkist, Tudor, and Stewart reigns become a long time of unlaw, during which little more than the forms of elder days were left; but, because the forms were left, it was possible again to breathe life into them in the later days.⁴⁰

The effects of the legal fictions employed by William the Conqueror to consolidate his hold over England effectively preserved ancient legal principles and institutions, and the special character of the tyranny of Henry VIII was "one form of the homage which vice pays to virtue," in that every perverse and despotic use of Parliament to sanction his crimes "was in truth a witness to the abiding importance of Parliament."⁴¹ As a universal historian, he dismissed as tangential the peculiar characteristics of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and boldly asserted that the event was essentially a return to the principles of 1399 when Parliament deposed Richard II and proclaimed Henry IV and that both were true to the principles of 1066 when William employed an assembly to legitimize his conquest. In the same way he planned to emphasize in the

⁴⁰ Lectures to American Audiences, 370-71.

⁴¹ E. A. Freeman, William the Conqueror (London, 1888), 198-99.

never-published Swiss volume of the History of Federal Government the continued existence, albeit as a skeleton, of a federal tie among the Swiss cantons which was able to be revived in his own age.⁴² Those who did no more than focus on particular periods could not be aware of such cycles or survivals and, therefore, often misinterpreted events or principles as novel, without recognizing their clear historic roots. Thus he urged his former school-fellow Canon Frederick Meyrick, who was composing a history of Christianity in Spain: "Please to beat into people's heads that the Gothic and Vandal Arians . . . were not Nonconformists or Freethinkers, or any such thing, but men who stuck to the first thing they had been taught."⁴³

Without an awareness of the whole course of European history, neither could men understand the position of their own age. In his Chief Periods of European History, after a masterful exercise in demonstrating the survivals of Roman influence through history, Freeman's concluding lecture on "The World Romeless" interpreted the contemporary world as in many ways a return to an age which lacked "a visible and acknowledged centre." Whoever failed to grasp,

⁴² Freeman to Bryce, 30 October 1864, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 15-18.

⁴³ Freeman to F. Meyrick, 20 December 1891, Life and Letters, 2:448.

this characteristic of the nineteenth century was doomed never to understand "how strange and memorable an age it is in which he is walking."⁴⁴

It follows then that Freeman would apply his sense and understanding of universal history to the more immediate issues of his own day. He could no more abide the systematic ignorance of history by politicians and reformers than by narrow or ill-read historians. He was particularly incensed, therefore, by the attack of fellow Liberal Robert Lowe upon franchise reform proposals on the basis of examples from the Tudor period. He wrote to Bryce, "How I should have like [sic] to be in the House to pitch into Lowe. Reactionary dog, going to the reactionary 15th Century instead of 13th or 17th & no one to take him up."⁴⁵ Only a consideration of proposed reforms in the light of the unity of history could provide any trustworthy guide to their historical justifiability. Those who saw the Irish Church Bill as a dangerous departure from English constitutional tradition should, he in-

⁴⁴Chief Periods of European History, 180-85.

⁴⁵Freeman to Bryce, 29 April 1866, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 92-95.

sisted, look first to the Suppression of Alien Priors by Henry V. Questions of morality or efficacy could be debated on ahistorical grounds, but the universal historian could not allow his discipline to become the servant of men who did not respect its totality. His judicious discussion

Disestablishment and Disendowment: What are They?

for example, defended as a matter of sovereignty the right of Parliament to introduce any change in law or status it wished, but he refused to admit that the continuity of Church history had ever been broken by a systematic endowment which it was Parliament's duty to reverse:

The Church Establishment has just the same history as the House of Commons or Trial by Jury. It is the creation of the law, but it is not the creation of a single law, but of the general course of our law, written and unwritten.⁴⁶

Arguments of this sort were important in clearing the air of a conflict of equally incorrect conceptions of history, but Freeman, to the detriment of his reputation, often allowed his particularly historical arguments to blind him to other important aspects of ongoing political questions. This tendency to see issues almost exclusively in their historical character often led Freeman, an otherwise intuitive observer, into ridiculous positions. Thus he ex-

⁴⁶Disestablishment and Disendowment . . ., 42.

pressed his opposition to Roman Catholicism in the following terms: "I have always wanted people to see that the Pope is just the shadow of the Emperor, and that, now there is no Emperor, there need not be any Pope."⁴⁷ And he dreamed of attending the entrance into Paris in 1871 of German troops to witness them "doing what was left undone in 976."⁴⁸ Yet as odd as these statements sound to contemporary ears, they cannot be dismissed as simply the products of a superficial prejudice of a provincial Englishman but must be seen rather as the issue of a mind captivated and, in many ways, controlled by its own historical philosophy.

This philosophy of universal history, while never rigidly determinist, did imply directly causal connections between historical events, turning-points in the path of history, and the emergence of recurrent or eternal themes and patterns. Carried to excess as it often was in his work, it led Freeman often to gross over-simplification of causal factors or disregard of important exceptions or qualifications in the explanation of events. The central theme behind every line of Freeman's history is the

⁴⁷ Freeman to Henry Allon, 24 March 1881, Allon MSS., f. 175.

⁴⁸ Freeman to Bryce, 20 February 1871, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 269-70.

distinction of European civilization from those civilizations which surrounded it. In a letter to the editor of the Contemporary Review, Sir Percy Bunting, Freeman expressed clearly what he held to be "the leading truth of all history; . . . the eternal opposition between Greek and barbarian, European and Asiatic, or whatever you please to call it."⁴⁹ It was not really important to determine the color of hat worn by each side, but the essential pattern of world history, enunciated first by Herodotus himself, appeared to him in the light of his studies to be a timeless truth. His interest in the annals of Sicily as the repeated battle-ground for this titanic struggle determined his approach to the island's history.

To his contemporaries and to later critics this preoccupation was often thought to be racially or religiously motivated, and, to be sure, personal prejudices re-enforced what appeared to be the plain facts of history in Freeman's work. But race, as will be discussed below, was an essentially fluid and historical categorization

⁴⁹ Freeman to P. Bunting, 13 February 1888, University of Chicago, Sir Percy Bunting MSS., Box V, file 4.

for which no iron-clad rules could be developed. And religion, as he wrote in an early article on "Mahometanism: East and West," was no more than that latest garb in which the eternal struggle appeared. "It is just the old internecine war between the East and the West," a struggle "which had been waged for ages before the coming of either faith, and whose commencement has to be looked for in times far beyond the reach of authentic history."⁵⁰ It often seemed as though Freeman's sense of Aryan and Christian superiority was grounded in the fact that Aryan peoples professing the Christian faith had come to be identified with European civilization. It can even be argued that Freeman's historical studies were a central prop in his whole religious philosophy. The conversion to Christianity of the Roman Empire, he wrote to his former class-mate J. L. Patterson, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Emmaus, was the lynch-pin in his Christian faith: ". . . for Caesar Augustus to be led to worship a crucified Jew was a greater miracle than the cleaving of rocks or the raising of the dead."⁵¹

⁵⁰ "Mahometanism, East and West," 243.

⁵¹ Freeman to J. L. Patterson, 12 November 1888, Life and Letters, 2:389-90.

Of course, once a general reading of history had formed this type of framework for universal history, particular events and individuals in the past emerged respectively as turning-points and heroic figures. Thus in Freeman's eyes, the repulsion of the Saracen advance on Constantinople in A.D. 717 by Leo the Isaurian, "by preserving Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire, preserved Christianity and civilization."⁵² The fame of Charles Martel, who merely repelled "a plundering expedition" or that of Richard Coeur-de-Lion, "a blood-thirsty savage," must pale beside that of the Emperor who, for a time at least, saved the city which embodied "law and literature, and theology, all that distinguishes the Christian West from the Mahometan East." And with respect to purely Western developments, he portrayed the thirteenth century, the age of the decay of the Western Empire into a number of nascent national states and of the effective destruction of Byzantine power, as Europe's pivotal age and perhaps the only point at which he could accept a division between ancient and modern history. This manner of thinking and writing about history is emotionally stirring and intellectually provocative, but it can lead to a distorted view of causal connections, overstatement of the role of

⁵² History and Conquests of the Saracens, 92.

individual events or persons, and an insensitivity to the place of accident or coincidence in history. The limits to which Freeman pushed his causal line of thinking were revealed in a letter to the banker and amateur historian, Thomas Hodgkin, in 1884:

I am maintaining a thesis, that the two great periods in history are -- A. Second century B.C. B. Fourth and fifth century A.D. A. settles that when Roman political headship is broken up . . . it still shall go on as influence. Then just before A., the question comes, Shall Rome be stopped from accomplishing A. by Hannibal? Before B. comes question, Shall B. be hindered by Rome conquering too much? Scipio settles one question and Arminius the other. . . . Hence the world that now is.⁵³

This statement forms the basis for an article in the Contemporary Review, "Some Neglected Periods of History,"

in which the historian did not scruple at insisting:

"Now it is hardly too much to say that all that comes before, between, after these two ruling periods is but the making ready for them or the results that come of them."⁵⁴

Further, while stating the obvious that "had things turned the other way" at either of these momentous turning-points, "the history of the world would have been other than what it has been," Freeman is completely without a sense that these general trends in universal history can operate

⁵³Freeman to T. Hodgkin, 3 February 1884, Life and Letters, 2:317-18.

⁵⁴"Some Neglected Periods of History," 669.

over and above any single pivotal event. Unaware of the contradiction in singling out specific events as essentially decisive or determining accidents, he could tell an American audience in 1882 that the first American hero was Arminius. Even excusing the desire of the lecturer to shock his listeners to attention by some striking paradox, one cannot but be astounded at the conception of causation which underlay his assertion, "In the blow by Teutoburg Wood was the germ of the Declaration of Independence, the germ of the surrender of Yorktown."⁵⁵ Even in his efforts at more scholarly narrative history, this causal perspective, dictated in large part by his particular vision of universal history, led Freeman to the same sort of immoderate statements. As a critic in the Edinburgh Review observed of the Norman Conquest, it contained too many linkages of distant and apparently unrelated events in causal patterns; Freeman's causal connections were "in a certain sense true, but the thing becomes overdone." The critic mused:

⁵⁵Lectures to American Audiences, 37, 116-17.

In Mr. Freeman's judgment it was Swend's conquest which made the conquests of both Cnut and William possible. But surely we may, with quite as much truth, say that the conquests of Aelle and Cerdic made the conquest of Swend possible, and that the conquests of Aelle and Cerdic were in turn rendered possible by the weakening of the Roman Empire; . . . we must go on . . . until the process loses all meaning unless we propose to write another essay on the education of the world.⁵⁶

Looked at in a more positive light, Freeman's concept of causation, his sense that in history everything has its place, usually protected him from reading contemporary movements anachronistically into the past. He criticized the Italian historian Luigi Amari for his inability to understand the lack of a movement for Italian national unification in the fifth century.⁵⁷ The man who was pilloried himself for his exaggerated belief in the continuity and relative changelessness of parliamentary government in England was strongly critical of his contemporaries, whose understanding of British political institutions was insensitive to their development and transmutation. In such a debate, Freeman believed, both the supporters and detractors of any historical institution unconsciously assume that the body was designed from the

⁵⁶ "Freeman's Norman Conquest, vols. I & II," Edinburgh Review. 180 (1869):198.

⁵⁷ Freeman to Boase, 29 November 1878, BM Add. MSS., 35073, ff. 73-74.

beginning to work as they see it working at any one time.⁵⁸ Freeman would hotly dispute any charge of determinism in his history. The satisfaction which he often expressed with the moral and material progress of European man in the nineteenth century, for example, did not for a moment stem his lamentations for the sweeping away of institutions and customs in that progress which still had some purpose in the contemporary world. Rather, it seems, Freeman's desire to accentuate the importance of causal factors which other historians had overlooked or minimized brought him to disregard at times both the complexity of causal relationships and the element of accident in historical events. Counter-factual speculation, a source of many fruitful new approaches to actual history, was then even more than today considered at best an object of clever amusement, not the business of serious historians. As such, it is not surprising that Freeman's historical explanations tended to over-value particular causal factors. And if history could be reduced to little more than accident, an unspoken fear of all historians, its relevance to and didactic purpose for modern man, in which Freeman believed, would be destroyed.

⁵⁸See S. R. Gardiner to Bryce, 26 May 1892, Bryce MSS., IX, ff. 330-32.

The successes and limitations of Freeman's unity of history were recognized and debated widely by his contemporaries. C. K. Adams, in his Manual of Historical Literature singled out the General Sketch of European History as "preferable to all others" in providing a clear vision of universal history. The book offered a fresh approach to school history, omitting what seemed to be "unimportant facts," emphasizing fuller accounts of truly great events, and pointing out at length the connection of events in time. The General Sketch, Adams believed, "might be called the physiology and hygiene of history instead of its mere anatomy."⁵⁹ Freeman's work in rehabilitating in the study of Greek history the neglected Achaian and Byzantine periods delighted scholars like Sir George Cornwall Lewis and George Finlay, and his emphasis upon the centrality of Roman institutions in universal history profoundly impressed the young Frederick Jackson Turner. For the historical technician like J. H. Round, on the other hand, Freeman's universal history was unsubstantiated, if not dishonest. The Professor's prescriptions "as actually taught . . . make . . . any really scientific

⁵⁹ Adams, Manual of Historical Literature, 66.

study of history impossible."⁶⁰ Others simply could not sustain the degree of interest in all historical periods which Freeman's theory required. This attitude met the Professor when he attempted to apply his philosophy in lectures at Oxford on the history of Sicily from the Greek settlements to the liberation of the island by Garibaldi. "But he never got farther than Frederick of Hohenstaufen," Sir Charles Oman explained, "because no continuous audience could be found."⁶¹

Bishop Stubbs adopted a somewhat more even-handed position toward his friend's chief hobby-horse. In his Seventeen Lectures Stubbs dismissed the view "that there are no new points of departure in human history, that modern life is a continuation of ancient and mediaeval history, by a continuity that is in all points equally important, of the same consistency in fact."⁶² The clerical historian adhered more to the potential and voluntary unity of human history implied in the Christian message in opposition to

⁶⁰J. H. Round, "Historical Research," Nineteenth Century 44 (1898):1011-12; see also F. J. Turner, "The Significance of History," 43-67.

⁶¹Sir Charles Oman, On the Writing of History (New York, 1939), 237.

⁶²William Stubbs, Seventeen Lectures on Mediaeval and Modern History and Kindred Subjects (Oxford, 1900), 84.

Freeman whose own vision of historical unity referred to continuities which were actual and all but mechanistic. In the words of Duncan Forbes, Freeman's theory is better described as "a uniformity of history, corresponding to the uniformity of the processes of the science of history."⁶³

The chief criticisms of twentieth-century historians involve the limitations which Freeman himself put on his doctrine of historical unity. In the estimation of many scholars, Freeman's almost exclusive concern with political and constitutional history has done much to damage his claim to be a universal historian. Even while he lived, Freeman was aware of this objection to his work. Morlot, his Swiss correspondent, warned him as early as 1864 that he must give more attention to social, economic, and cultural history.⁶⁴ Green also belabored his friend for not broadening his field of investigation, but Freeman did not believe that he was bound to engage in social analysis. Far from desiring to minimize the value of social, economic,

⁶³ Duncan Forbes, Liberal Anglican Idea of History (Cambridge, 1962), 149.

⁶⁴ A. Morlot to Freeman, 4 June 1864, Freeman MSS.

religious, or cultural history, Freeman simply wished these tasks upon others.

My mission is to fix boundaries and names, work out constitutions, and describe battles now and then for a treat. Why may I not be left to do what I can do without being bullied for not doing badly what you can do much better.⁶⁵

In the twentieth century, the age of the "new history" of J. H. Robinson and the de-emphasizing of purely political history, Freeman's complaint has had a hollow ring.

Further, the historian's refusal to incorporate into his concept of universal history the annals of lands which lay beyond the fringes of European civilization has, with the growth of interest in the histories of non-European peoples, increasingly tarnished the reputation and mooted the usefulness of his vision of the unity of history.

Often Freeman expressed contempt toward non-European history. In an address at Liverpool, he told his audience that an historian need not bother himself about the Zulus or Cherokees, as they had no historical lessons to teach European man.⁶⁶ This attitude, not at all uncommon even today, has been criticized recently by F. J. Teggart as "an artificial distinction and an improper

⁶⁵ Freeman to Green, 1 November 1872, Freeman MSS.

⁶⁶ E. A. Freeman, How the Study of History is Let and Hindered (Liverpool, 1879), 15.

limitation to research, and, indeed, the greatest obstacle to the scientific study of history. . . ."67 Freeman probably would not have maintained his Euro-centrism to the same degree had he been aware of the discoveries of non-Western history. As has been noted, he encouraged the study of comparative politics beyond his own comparisons of Aryan and Semitic peoples, and his remarks in praise of archaeological study as demonstrating the essential unity of the human race indicate that he could accept the study of non-Western peoples as being related to his own interests. Yet, to be fair to Freeman, as his concept of historical unity was one of demonstrable continuity and connection of events, the history of the Zulus or that of the Cherokees played no part in his studies.

It is more useful to compare Freeman's historical philosophy with those of his more revered countrymen, Macaulay and Carlyle, in order to discern its distinctive character. The personification of the Whig historian, Macaulay, was contrasted with Freeman by Samuel R. Gardiner:

⁶⁷F. J. Teggart, Theory and Processes of History (Berkeley, 1960), 247.

. . . . When Macaulay wants to make you understand a thing, he compares it with that which existed in his own day. Freeman traces it from its origins. He testifies to its growth.⁶⁸

This organic sense of history as a living thing placed Freeman in some ways nearer the archetypical Tory Romantic, Carlyle. On the other hand, Freeman's philosophy owed nothing to intuition or metaphysical speculation, but was based rather upon what seemed to be the proof of interconnection which literally leaped from the pages of history themselves. Carlyle's vision is striking:

For the present holds in it both the whole past and the whole future -- as the Life-tree Igdrasil, wide-waving, many-toned, has its roots down deep in the Death-Kingdoms, among the oldest dead dust of men, and with its boughs reaches always beyond the stars; and in all times and places is one and the same Life-tree.⁶⁹

Freeman dismissed this statement as "unintelligible rant" and bridled at any comparison of his own views and those of Carlyle.

Freeman's works reflect his efforts toward an historical philosophy which combined the insights of the

⁶⁸S. R. Gardiner to Bryce, 26 May 1892, Bryce MSS., IX, ff. 330-32.

⁶⁹Quoted in Edith C. Batho, Art of History (London, 1915), 26.

Romantic with the Empiricist's insistence upon a thorough grounding in demonstrable fact. And if his contributions to modern historical thought seem to have faded, it may be due to our own failure to grasp historiography organically. J. B. Bury, in his Science of History, reminded those who dismissed Freeman's historiographical importance:

[To Freeman], perhaps more than to any other teacher, we owe it that the Unity of History is now a commonplace in Britain. It must indeed be carried beyond the limits within which he enforced it, but to have affirmed and illustrated that principle was not the least useful of Mr. Freeman's valuable services to the story of Europe.⁷⁰

⁷⁰J. B. Bury, Science of History (London, 1903), 11-12.

CHAPTER VI

FREEMAN AND MORAL JUDGMENT IN HISTORY

The question of the propriety of moral judgments by historians has always shadowed the discipline and its practitioners. Philosophers of history, metaphysical and analytical, have struggled with theoretical concepts surrounding the possibility of moral and ethical analysis which does not distort the historian's primary goal of factual narrative. They have debated the possibility of avoiding some form of moral assumptions, if not moral judgments, in the construction of historical narrative. In recent years psychologists and sociologists have spawned doubts about the possibility of value-free historical literature. This lively debate within humane letters, represented best in our age by Sir Herbert Butterfield and Sir Isaiah Berlin, over the need for moral judgment in an humanitarian, rather than a scientific, discipline, is an indicator of the continuing relevance of the question.¹ Most historiographers refer to the classic confrontation over the place of moral pronouncements in history between

¹See Isaiah Berlin, Historical Inevitability (London, 1954); and Herbert Butterfield, History and Human Relations (London, 1951).

Bishop Mandell Creighton and Lord Acton at the end of the nineteenth century.² Less critical or informed observers usually fall back upon a simplistic scheme of the steady erosion of a misguided sense of "Victorian morality" which plagued the discipline in its early days. In fact, the question of whether to mete out moral approbation or condemnation and, if so, within what guidelines to do so, exercised nearly every serious nineteenth-century historian and can be assumed to concern serious historians today.

Freeman was no exception. Indeed, his work is noted for its moralistic and value-laden tone. But it would be a mistake to conclude that his ethically didactic digressions were the products merely of personal prejudices or ill-considered impressionistic and moralistic observations. Rather they emerged from Freeman's deep respect for truth, justice, and human decency, and only after a consideration of the personalities involved in an historical event with respect to the received morality of the age and to their place in the sweep of universal history. Even in professional circles in nineteenth-century Europe, truth had yet to shed completely its traditional connection with morality and human values, and it is not surprising that Freeman's

²See Frederick Engel-Janossi, "The Acton-Creighton Correspondence," Cambridge Historical Journal 6 (1940):307-21.

pursuit of historical truth would include consideration of historical morality. But he attempted to consider such morality very broadly and sympathetically, if not always successfully and without glaring short-sightedness.

The importance of religion and morality during the formative years of Freeman's life cannot be minimized when considering his later historical judgments. Perhaps the overwhelmingly feminine piety which characterized his early household contributed to his rather stiff moralism; and his inability to get on easily with other children drove him further to religious study. In school he was, as Clements Markham remembered, "severely orthodox, and any notion which seemed to contradict the Bible met with no mercy at his hands."³ At Oxford, his attendance at Trinity during its greatest captivation with the Tractarian spirit surely accentuated his already deep feeling for monastic virtues and his adherence to a rigorous moral code. Stephens reveals that the young man had grave reservations about accepting the bequest of an income derived in part from coal-mining interests while the collieries remained exploitative and dangerous for miners.⁴ This preoccupation with moral and ethical questions entered even into Freeman's earliest

³Quoted in Life and Letters, 1:18-19.

⁴Life and Letters, 1:53.

serious scholarship, his essay on the Norman Conquest of England for the Chancellor's Prize in 1845. While his published history of the Conquest did not reach a similar conclusion, his undergraduate essay took a profound interest in the effects of the Norman victory in reforming the morals of the English people, characterized by William of Malmesbury as intemperate and profligate.⁵

It is not surprising, then, that the high-minded young scholar would take to heart the sense of history's moral purpose expressed by Dr. Thomas Arnold in his Oxford lectures and by Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian War. These two men Freeman always acknowledged as the two most significant influences in the formation of his total conception of history. Just as he had adopted from Arnold his sense of the unity of history, the belief that history unfolded as a series of moral as well as political lessons "instructive to the statesman and the citizen" was taken from the learned divine. "In moral character," ran Arnold's condemnation of Julius Caesar, "the whole range of history can hardly furnish a picture of greater deformity;" and the judgments of his unknown pupil were often to carry a similar ring. Similarly, the young historian's

⁵Life and Letters, 1:76.

attraction to Thucydides stemmed in part from the Greek writer's balanced and convincing moral and political judgments.⁶ The very sense of the unity of history and the timelessness of its most critical lessons must dictate to the historian his duty to make moral and ethical statements in his analyses. It seemed improper for the historian who would crusade for a sense of Christian morality in domestic politics, church affairs, and foreign policy, and who repeatedly asserted the essentially unchanging moral and political character of men in all ages, to abdicate the moral ground in discussing affairs of the past. Just as Freeman was unable and unwilling to separate history as past politics and politics as present history, neither could he separate the necessity of making moral judgments and choices in the contemporary world of politics from a similar process in analyzing historical situations. History was never as much of a crusade for Freeman as it was for Arnold. He did recognize that accurate description was of greater significance than moralizing at the expense of accuracy; but as descriptive language is in fact almost always morally charged, the most basic of an historian's duties inevitably involved judgments and statements of value.

⁶Life and Letters, 111, 179.

Even having allowed for the necessity of some degree of moralizing in history, it cannot be denied that Freeman's history was "deeply, often stridently moralistic. His attachment to and knowledge of the Old Testament reinforced and, indeed, often supplied the phraseology for his calling down wrath upon the unrighteous. His Christianity always remained that of the proselyte and not the pluralist, and his attachment to standards of right and wrong was never shaken by that sense of Christian humility so eloquently expressed by Butterfield or the suspicion of the ultimate relativism of all moral values which became a watchword in American historiography of the twentieth century. "The spirit," sneered Lytton Strachey, "not only of the school but of the Sunday school, was what animated those innumerable pages, adorning with parochial earnestness the heavy burden of research."⁷ Freeman would not have understood the contempt. History was for him the best of schools and perhaps the most profound and meaningful of Sunday schools.

There are countless examples from nearly all of Freeman's major writings of digressions to analyze and comment upon the moral character of the personages in his

⁷ Strachey, Portraits in Miniature, 200.

history and their actions. Acts which the historian found morally reprehensible he felt it his responsibility to denounce. Elizabeth I, for example, came under criticism in an early article for her encouragement of blood-sports, her personal fondness for bull-baiting and other forms of animal torture, and her opening up of England to the slave-trade. Yet Freeman could recognize the political gain from these actions while being appalled at the moral character of the monarch, a woman especially, who would permit them. Thus the Faery Queen could be analyzed only as possessing "two wholly distinct characters, in one of which she was greater than man, and in the other less than woman."⁸

In his History of Federal Government Freeman gives an account of the harshness and cruelty of warfare in the ancient world that is set against that of "a viler kind" which he perceived in later human annals. No Athenian army, he asserted, "would ever have been guilty of the long horrors of plunder, outrage, torture, and wanton mockery which were the daily occupation of the soldiers of Bourbon

⁸"Queen Elizabeth and her Favourites," 249.

and of Alva."⁹ While never a pacifist, and often sympathetic to the violence of what he considered righteous vengeance, Freeman's distaste for deception and intrigue colored even his evaluation of violence and murder. He especially deplored poisoning, "a crime . . . which admitted of no defence; and which could be cloaked by no self-delusion."¹⁰ He reserved special contempt for judicial murder, which not only was calculated, but which transferred the responsibility of the execution from the individual to the community. In a letter to J. R. Green concerning the betrayal of Thomas Seymour he wrote, "When a man procures his brother's death, it must either be a great crime or an heroic act -- when it is done by bill of attainder, I venture to think it is a great crime."¹¹ It is noteworthy that the actions which most aroused Freeman's sense of moral outrage were those which smacked of hypocrisy and bad faith. Thus Freeman expressed his shock at the collusion of the Venetian Republic and the Papal States under Pope Sixtus IV with the Infidel in allowing Saracen

⁹History of Federal Government, 46.

¹⁰M. E. Bratchel, Edward Augustus Freeman and the Victorian Interpretation of the Norman Conquest (Ilfracombe, 1969), 11.

¹¹Freeman to Green, 21 September 1873, Freeman MSS.

occupation of Otranto in 1480.¹² And in a letter to Dean W. F. Hook the historian expressed concern over how that learned church scholar would treat the career of Thomas Cranmer: "Was it not odd that up to Henry's death, he should persecute anyone who denied transubstantiation, and directly after, persecute everybody who believed it? I cannot stand a reformer persecuting."¹³

By the same token Freeman believed that history had a duty, similar to that of the epic, to praise great men. Thus his writings mete out praise and reverence as well as condemnation. The Gracchi, for example, were characterized in his early history of federalism as "the purest of popular leaders," and in his History of Sicily the paean to Timoleon crowns his fourth volume: "The moral greatness of the victory of Timoleon cannot be surpassed; no battle was ever fought or won in a purer cause," he wrote of "the man of the worthiest fame in the whole story of Sicily, the man who thought it enough to deliver others and who sought nothing for himself."¹⁴

¹²Sketches from the Subject . . . Lands of Venice, 325.

¹³Freeman to W. F. Hook, 23 December 1865, Life and Letters, 1:334-35.

¹⁴History of Federal Government, 582; History of Sicily, 4:325-32.

Critics of Freeman's attachment to certain heroes and his disparagement of history's villains usually cite his most simplistic, biased, and emotion-laden character analyses, and they overlook, thereby, his more reflective and considered judgments. He maintained his essential impartiality and sympathy in a letter to Dean Hook:

I can generally see good and bad on both sides, and I can constantly see good on opposite sides, so I can never be a partisan. It is only when one gets out of questions of opinion into the region of sheer wickedness, the land tenanted by Buonapartes and Palmerstons, that I get fairly in a rage.¹⁵

When he could avoid that rage his assessments were often judicious and helpful. In the Norman Conquest, for example, if one looks past the cloying praise for Godwine and Harold and the indignation at the treachery of Tostig, he may discover Freeman's attempt to rehabilitate partially the damaged character of Macbeth. Literature had popularized the Scottish monarch and his wife as moral ogres, and the historian's duty, Freeman believed, was to recognize the peace, good government, and public charity of a reign which admittedly was born of murder.¹⁶ In his attacks on

¹⁵ Freeman to W. F. Hook, 7 January 1866, Life and Letters, 1:335.

¹⁶ Norman Conquest, 2:54.

Froude, the crimes of Oliver Cromwell were roundly condemned by Freeman, but his judgment of the Protector himself was more moderate. He compared him to a Byzantine Emperor: ". . . intellectual sharpness enough to see what is right, a kind of languid wish to do so, but no moral purpose really to do it."¹⁷ On the other hand, a consideration of a number of polemical biographies of St. Thomas à Becket brought Freeman to the defense of a man he praised for his moral purpose, even if it was misdirected.

Henry . . . appears as the statesman of wider and clearer vision; but Thomas deserves the higher moral praise for sticking firmly and manfully to the principles which he conscientiously believed to be right.¹⁸

Adoration and obloquy, of which the Saint had had more than his share over six centuries, were equally out of place. So too, the "mere contempt" of so great an historian as Macaulay toward Archbishop Laud was troubling to Freeman. The Archbishop seemed to be offensive to many of his contemporaries, yet he was an enlightened and eager patron of learning: "Depend upon it, he is a complex study with many

¹⁷ Freeman to Green, 28 November 1878, Freeman MSS.

¹⁸ E. A. Freeman, "St. Thomas of Canterbury and his Biographers," in Historical Essays, 1:113.

sides to him -- not to be daubed off in a hurry by either friend or foe."¹⁹ Even in dealing with men and issues which most touched the areas of his prejudice, Freeman made an honest, if somewhat faulty attempt to give balance and justice to his judgments. His History and Conquests of the Saracens, for example, provides a number of examples of Freeman's sincere efforts to recognize the moral worth of men whose faith, politics, and values differed sharply from his own. Unlike older controversialists, he did not attack the character of Mahomet, but he stressed the admirability of the Prophet's early asceticism, his moral regeneration of the Arab peoples, and the relative mildness of his conquests: "Few men have arisen from a private station to sovereign power, with so noble an end before them, and with so little of recorded crime."²⁰ And Freeman does not fail to pay respect to the conduct of other Infidel conquerors: "The conduct of Omar at the surrender of Jerusalem is perhaps the most signal instance of good faith

¹⁹ Freeman to H. Allon, 22 January 1880, Allon MSS. 24-110, f. 174.

²⁰ History and Conquests of the Saracens, 40-41.

that history records."

Only in ignorance, at times a wilful ignorance, could Freeman maintain convincingly an unreasonable prejudice for or against an historical figure. Often, to understand meant, in fact, partially to forgive. His well-known assessments of William, for example, show a real appreciation for the nobler and the baser aspects of a great leader. The justice and beneficence of his early reign were duly reported, and Freeman noted that the young Duke had been thoroughly influenced by his religion, such that he "set an unusual example of a princely household governed according to the rules of morality. . . ." Whatever flaws there were in his character were only fully revealed after William yielded to the temptation of territorial aggrandizement. Then William is viewed as a tragic figure: "Wrong, as ever, was punished by leading to further wrong."²¹

The most characteristic sketch he ever drew, however, was Freeman's portrait of Lucius Cornelius Sulla in National Review in 1862. He developed his assessment beyond the mere reprehension expressed by Thomas Arnold over Sulla's massacres and personal immorality; yet he

²¹William the Conqueror, 18-19.

would not join with Mommsen in proclaiming the rightness of whatever actions proved ultimately to be politically successful. To be sure, Freeman notes Sulla's private vices -- " . . . he was a man given up to every kind of foul and unnatural debauchery" -- but he also bears witness to his attempt to bring about the regeneration of the Roman aristocratic state. Freeman gave full play to the proscriptions and mass murders ordered during Sulla's Dictatorship; yet he was careful to note the absence of passion or personal satisfaction in these massacres. All of Sulla's excesses were committed with a public purpose, a fact which in no way justified them, but which marked them off from the "ferocious revenge of Marius," and "the bloody madness of Caius or Nero." Indeed, in bringing home to posterity the frailty of human morality, the deliberate crimes of the brilliant and thoughtful scholar, soldier, and statesman are far more telling than those of madmen: "That such a man should have done such deeds puts human nature in a far more fearful light than it is put by the frantic crimes of silly youths whose heads were turned by the possession of absolute power."²² Throughout his analysis

²²E. A. Freeman, "Lucius Cornelius Sulla," in Historical Essays, 2:325-61.

Freeman made every attempt to view the actions of Marius and Sulla through the eyes of their contemporaries, making certain allowances for moral standards of an age far removed from his own. He was critical of other historians whose praise or condemnation was time-bound, unsympathetic, or rooted in ignorance of available contemporary sources. Yet he remained keenly aware that moral and religious values are factors in the motivation of an individual to certain actions and in the assessments formed by his own and later ages of those actions.

Freeman's approach to history, direct and twined inextricably with his approach to the present, demanded that he adopt a moral stance toward his historical acquaintances. He could not compartmentalize his attitudes toward actions and controversies belonging to the past and those of more immediate concern, and, as he believed it to be a man's duty to speak out against wrong and infamy, the suggestion that historians should set aside totally their moral sentiments when writing about the past would have been meaningful only as an immoral prescription itself. In his contemporary public and political life Freeman ever appeared as a severe and outspoken moralist. His arguments for university reform, for Home Rule in Ireland, and for a pro-Slavic British policy in Ottoman Europe stemmed from moral concerns and were couched in moral terms. For men

whose politics were chiefly Machiavellian and selfish, such as Disraeli, Freeman reserved the full fury of his vehemence, and he looked suspiciously at political figures, especially amongst his Liberal fellow ~~wh~~ whose perceptions of the moral nature of politics were ~~ne~~ either as keen nor as immediate as his own. He refused, for example, to cast a vote in the 1878 by-election for one of the Oxford University seats. He was unable to support the Tory candidate and, as he indicated to Reverend Henry P. Liddon, believed that to vote for H. J. Smith was to support a Liberalism that was "too academical to care about questions of right and wrong."²³ In spite of his well-known antipathy to colored people, Freeman was quick to condemn the brutalization of any people. The white-wash of the crimes of Governor Eyre of Jamaica in Britain by Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley, and others was considered as great an affront to morality by the historian as the Governor's murderous and repressive policies. "I am told," he wrote, "the Mr. Eyre has all manner of agreeable personal qualities; very likely he has; but he none the less put a man to

²³Quoted in J. O. Johnston, Life and Letters of Henry Parry Liddon (London, 1905), 247.

death unjustly."²⁴

The Eastern Question, however, was always the main object of Freeman's moral outrage. The support of Disraeli's government for Turkish oppression of the Christian majorities of Southeastern Europe provoked Freeman's most virulent attacks on the morality of public policy and the public figures who made it. The sacrifice of co-religionists in favor of temporary political or diplomatic advantages he deemed to be immoral in itself, but his visits to Dalmatia and to Greece in the 1870s and his correspondence with journalists and officials familiar with the brutality of Turkish overlordship heightened his sense of moral disgust with British policy. The role which Freeman took in the agitation against the Bulgarian atrocities in the mid-1870s has been recounted admirably in Professor Shannon's thoughtful study of that movement.²⁵ Yet this agitation was only a part of the unbroken crusade against Turkish misrule in Europe which Freeman waged throughout his life. His had been one of the few voices raised in opposition to the Crimean War in 1854, and every further episode in the struggle called forth a response from Freeman. The action of Lord Derby during a revolt in

²⁴E. A. Freeman, "Public and Private Morality," Fortnightly Review 13 (1873):425.

²⁵R. T. Shannon, Gladstone and the Bulgarian

Crete in 1866, forbidding his consular officers to assist in the evacuation of refugees, characterized the complicity of the British government in Turkish massacres, and Derby was never forgiven:

No blacker page in the history of England, no blacker page in the history of human nature, can be found than the deed of the man, who, for fear of being misconstrued in this way or that, . . . could write letters forbidding any further help be given to those who were simply seeking to save their lives from their destroyers.²⁶

The controversies stirred by Freeman's constant and bitter attacks on British policy -- his sanity was called into question as often as was his patriotism -- led him to set out in a number of articles the central features of his views on the moral and ethical standards to which nations and public figures should adhere. Not every political issue, he admitted in an 1889 article in Universal Review, could be equated with a moral cause. Indeed, he believed that every political question contained a moral question, for, in a characteristic Victorian truism,

Agitation, 1876 (London, 1963).

²⁶E. A. Freeman, Ottoman Power in Europe (London, 1877), 208.

"there is a right and wrong in everything;" yet nearly every political question "comes under Sir Roger de Coverley's rule that there is much to be said on both sides." Also, it was merely the play of circumstances that determined which side any individual might favor. Thus it was out of place for combatants to place too much emphasis on the moral aspects of such questions as Church Disestablishment, Irish Home Rule, Protection, or Women's Suffrage, questions over which men of good will, fully in possession of all pertinent facts, might disagree heartily. At the same time, however, it was even more inappropriate to speak of clearly demonstrable moral questions as though they were no more than the result of divergent political perspectives. Freeman was appalled that so many journalists characterized the sincere outcry of the British public against their Government's support of Turkish misrule as no more than a political difference and counted the popular sentiment for Christian rebels as the result of mere provincialism. He was well aware of the dangers to society when, as in the seventeenth century, the most elementary political questions were regarded as religious or moral issues of eternal importance. Yet he feared the spread to the wider public, through the cool cynicism of the London press, of the selfish and relativist morality which he perceived in the

diplomatic trade.²⁷

Freeman's well-known aversion to falsity in any form underlay his anger at diplomats who shrouded their actions in legal fictions, protocols, and ambiguous subtleties, and he regularly held such practices up to scorn and ridicule. In general, he believed that, with few exceptions, the morality of states and national groups should square with that of individuals. He argued that, leaving aside the question of the evolution of moral standards from age to age, in any age all civilized nations are agreed upon a common moral code and that national differences in this code are more apparent than real. The question of whether a particular act can be classified as an example of a particular vice is problematic; yet:

We must reach quite another stage before we are entitled to say that two men or two societies hold a different moral standard, or that one of them holds no standard at all. . . . Strict morality looks on duelling as murder; but a society of duellists is not a society of Thugs. The duellist persuades himself that duelling is not murder; the Thug holds that murder is a virtue.²⁸

²⁷ E. A. Freeman, "Political Differences and Moral Crimes," Universal Review 4 (1889):324-40.

²⁸ E. A. Freeman, "National Morality," Princeton Review 2 n.s. (1878):641-42.

Given the existence of a basic supra-national moral code, relations among states should be governed by the same principles as those among individuals. Of course, the lack of any recognized arbiter or magistrate in international relations was clear to him.

Universal arbitration is a dream; it can come only when men have become so virtuous that neither individuals nor nations have anything to arbitrate about.²⁹

War must remain as a final recourse for a nation, but Freeman argued that the grounds for the international violence of war should not be defined more loosely than those for private recourse to force. The chief danger to society was the wide-spread belief that acts committed by men in authority could be judged differently from those of private men. Not only was such an attitude detrimental to "wholesome" international relations, but it had become an internal cancer:

All this paltering with moral evil must have a bad effect on the general moral standard of a people; . . . every conventionality, every formality which tends to weaken the senses of trust and right has a demoralizing effect.³⁰

²⁹"National Morality," 646.

³⁰Ibid., 671.

Freeman once made a list of his likes and dislikes, his heroes and villains. Sham and falsehood he explicitly denounced, and hypocritical tyrants, e.g. Louis Napoleon, were chief among the villains.³¹ One of his heroes was Isaiah, and with Micah, the great prophet served as a model for Freeman. In most cases, the historian's language was as strong and his sentiments as simple as those of the prophets. He believed that evil was loose in the world and that such evil was not to be dealt with in parliamentary language. He strongly objected to Gladstone's acquiescence in "this queer notion of . . . European concert . . . as if their conspiracy had some moral force."³² Similarly, he was distressed at the public tributes heaped upon Lord Beaconsfield after his death:

I cannot understand why, because a man is dead, one should be expected to tell lies, and to speak as one did not speak a few days before and as we shall be expected to speak a few months hence.³³

³¹"Likes and Dislikes," Freeman MSS. (undated).

³²Freeman to Bryce; 17 April 1886, Bryce MSS. VII, ff. 214-15.

³³Freeman to H. Allon, 1 May 1881, in Albert Peel, Letters to a Victorian Editor (London, 1929), 151-52.

The acknowledgment of Disraeli's achievements by Liberal papers, Spectator and Pall Mall Gazette, distressed him, and the graciousness of Gladstone he could understand only as the product of court intrigue.³⁴ Freeman was never so blind as to fail to see that the legislator or the public man might have to compromise with immorality in certain circumstances if it could be shown that some incidental public good is gained by such compromise, but the moralist could not afford the luxury of such latitude. Thus his joy at the final unification of Italy was boundless, but he found it "something very low" that Italy had to find her freedom in a conspiracy among several European despots and Gladstone.³⁵ Freeman had no respect for talent used in evil causes. George Canning's reputed diplomatic skill was of little consequence; rather the Foreign Secretary was revered by Freeman for forming policy dictated as much by "reason and humanity" as by British interests. "I don't value skill or bravery," he wrote W. R. W. Stephens, "any more than height, strength, or beauty, unless they are used to good purpose."³⁶ 0

³⁴ Freeman to H. Allon, 1 May 1881, in Peel, Letters to a Victorian Editor, 151-53.

³⁵ Freeman to Bryce, 4 October 1887, Bryce MSS., VIII; ff. 29-33.

³⁶ Freeman to W. R. W. Stephens, 8 March 1880, Life and Letters, 2:198-99.

Along these lines he formed his elementary and correspondingly feeble denunciation of that proto-Nietzschean morality of honor or success which crept into historical writing and journalism in the late nineteenth century. To some historians the belief that "whatever was, was right" came to color their views of historical subjects. The worst offenders, he believed, were writers like Froude, partisans who distorted facts or made apologies for criminal and immoral behavior. Thus, in a review of Froude's English in Ireland, Freeman expressed his disappointment "in dealing with . . . a writer who stands forward as the apologist of oppression, torture, and murder."³⁷ He was ill at ease also with writers like Theodor Mommsen who seemed to accept blindly the rectitude of whatever individuals or policies proved successful. The notorious Caesar-worship of Mommsen made Freeman recoil from a man whose knowledge and erudition he never tired of praising. He referred to Mommsen as "that beast" in a letter to Bryce.³⁸ And he believed that the German's

³⁷ [E. A. Freeman], "Froude's English in Ireland," Saturday Review 38 (1874):121.

³⁸ Freeman to Bryce, 19 July 1865, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 41-43.

History of Rome in the hands of the new student would be dangerous and misleading, for "almost every page is disfigured by the writer's unblushing idolatry of mere force."³⁹ While he never brought this charge against Creighton, Freeman ~~did~~ anticipate Acton's criticism of the Bishop's History of the Papacy, expressing surprise and dismay at finding Alexander VI and his sons "instead of abnormal monsters, men a little worse than the average of their contemporaries."⁴⁰

Freeman held men responsible for their most basic moral actions and judgments. This principle greatly determined his distrust of professional military men. "I believe I hate the British army more than any institution in being," he wrote to W. R. W. Stephens, comparing it unfavorably to conscript armies. In the latter a man serves in obedience to the law, and any participation in an unjust war is the fault of those who send him. "But in our army every man, officer and private, is there by his own choice."⁴¹ Freeman was even careful to limit the degree to which men could evade moral responsibility for

³⁹[E. A. Freeman], "Mommsen's History of Rome," Saturday Review 25 (1868):422.

⁴⁰Freeman to Bryce, 14 October 1888, Bryce MSS., VIII, ff. 61-64.

⁴¹Freeman to W. R. Stephens, 8 March 1880, Life and Letters, 2:198-99.

acts committed under the orders of superiors. In another reference to the notorious Eyre case, Freeman argued to his fellow Somerset magistrate, F. H. Dickinson, that Eyre's subaltern should have refused the Governor's order to court-martial and hang his colored political rival, for the mere command of a superior can never justify an illegal act.⁴² Freeman was aware that these nostrums covered situations where ethical and legal choices were clear-cut and that doubt often clouded men's judgments. Still he urged caution and abstention from dubious acts, holding that "it is a plain law of morals that we ought never to do a thing unless we are convinced that it is right."⁴³ The religiosity of the age heightened the historian's awareness of sin and the ease with which men were drawn to it.

While Freeman adopted this somewhat rigid ethical stance in his basic moral philosophy, in dealing with particular events or individuals in his own life or in his histories, he regularly made allowances for circumstances. Even when his own moral ideal clashed with those of others, he often made an effort, if not to excuse, then to under-

⁴² Freeman to F. H. Dickinson, 22 February 1867, Life and Letters, 1:377-78.

⁴³ "National Morality," 671.

stand and explain inexcusable actions. In a highly unpopular stand in favor of the German annexation of Alsace and Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, he seemed to retreat from his general belief that men should not be ruled against their consent, insisting that in areas of mixed population the question was not a strictly moral one. He wrote that "annexation is not something inherently wicked, but something which may be right or wrong according to circumstances."⁴⁴ Neither was he above discussing the political expediency and, indeed, the beneficial effects in the long run of a policy of extermination after a foreign conquest, although he could not accept the morality of such actions; ". . . politically speaking, not morally," he replied to Wilhelm Ihne's anti-Czech fulminations, "if you go into other people's countries at all, you should eat them clean up; if you do it by halves they bother you."⁴⁵

Freeman's active involvement in the Eastern Question and various other movements of national liberation in Europe

⁴⁴Times, 18 February 1871, 4.

⁴⁵Freeman to W. Ihne, 30 July 1880, Life and Letters, 2:209.

often placed him in the classic dilemma of moralist liberalism: when do violence and killing become justifiable? He refused to levy any moral sanctions against violence in rebellion or other regular military action against the forces of an oppressing power; indeed, such action he believed to be just and righteous. He wrote in 1875 to Margaret Macarthur, author of the History of Scotland in his Historical Course, that "there are times when one must heal with one hand and slay with the other," and in reference to a current hunting expedition in India, "if he would only shoot Turks instead of elephants, he would be doing some good in his generation."⁴⁶ He was also ready, in line with the biblical and classical influences on his moral code, to justify the assassination of usurpers and despots. He admitted keeping a blank space in his book of photographs "opposite Garibaldi, waiting for the next man who kills a tyrant or otherwise delivers any place."⁴⁷ He stopped short of justifying massacre, but his religious and political sympathies made him somewhat more understanding

⁴⁶Freeman to M. Macarthur, 18 December 1875, Life and Letters, 2:128-29.

⁴⁷Freeman to Finlay, 7 October 1863, Life and Letters, 1:289.

of the excesses which occur in human relations.⁴⁸

Freeman was even more circumspect in passing judgments on the actions of men in the past. As a university student writing for the Chancellor's Prize in 1845 he was aware of the need to look at each age on its own terms:

We are not called upon to condemn the Middle Ages because they resemble not our own ways, nor yet to undervalue our own position because we live not among the chivalrous devotion of earlier times.⁴⁹

In his more mature writing, Freeman urged historians not to allow their assessments to be bound by narrow contemporary prejudices. "A man wins approval in one time and place for acts which would not win him approval in another. . . ."⁵⁰ He maintained that an historian must adopt as a general principle in evaluation the selflessness of the individual acting in accord with the standards of his own age. Thus, while both Hannibal and Napoleon I were men of surpassing military genius, each acted from quite different motives:

⁴⁸See the Times, 28 November 1877, 4.

⁴⁹Quoted in Life and Letters, 1:113.

⁵⁰E. A. Freeman, "How to Grow Great Men," Universal Review 1 (1868):202.

"Hannibal fought for Carthage; Buonaparte fought for himself."⁵¹ Freeman urged that the historian "be charitable in [his] judgment of past men and past generations." A presentist contempt for ages past displayed "utter shallowness of thought," in its ignorance of the developmental nature of history.⁵²

Yet neither was Freeman so out of tune with the Victorian ideal of progress that he sought the total regression of society to an earlier age -- "No rational man will wish to go back to any past time, and . . . he cannot do so." While maintaining a firm belief, then, in the general superiority of the modern world and its institutions to those of the past, and while affirming that the historian was competent to judge the progressive or regressive character of the deeds of men, Freeman believed that "every age must be judged according to its own lights and its own opportunities."⁵³ Thus Freeman would not tolerate the glib and facile criticisms of previous ages made by self-satisfied contemporaries.

On these grounds Freeman complained that Froude

⁵¹Comparative Politics, 371.

⁵²E. A. Freeman, "On the Study of History," Fortnightly Review 29 (1881):332.

⁵³Ibid.

inaccurately portrayed Becket and his times, lapsing into a modernism that "cannot understand that people did not do the same kind of things and use the same kind of phrases in the twelfth century which they do in the nineteenth."⁵⁴

Many of the charges levelled against Becket would not be perceived as at all offensive by his contemporaries.

Freeman also knew that exclusive concern for moral judgment when dealing with distant ages and cultures could be misleading, irrelevant, or even ridiculous. In 1858 he criticized Gladstone's Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age for its lengthy criticism of the morals of the Olympian deities. In spite of his reverence for Gladstone and his classical scholarship, Freeman could not take seriously an attempt to criticize the gods of ancient, semi-oriental polytheism by the standard of modern, Western Christianity.⁵⁵ In his Old English History, written originally for his children, he trod carefully over the moral aspect of the Teutonic conquest of Britain. He re-assured his young readers that it was truly cruel

⁵⁴E. A. Freeman, "Mr. Froude's Life and Times of Thomas Becket," Contemporary Review 32 (1879):118.

⁵⁵E. A. Freeman; "Homer and the Homeric Age," in Historical Essays, 2:54, 80-81.

and wicked "to come into the land of another people, and to take the land to themselves, and to kill or make slaves of the men to whom it belonged," but he reminded them that the Angles and Saxons were heathen barbarians and that "it is not fair to judge our fathers by the same rules as if they had been either Christians or civilized men."⁵⁶

There are men, however, who do sink beneath the received morality of the time, and these deserved to be taken to task. His strong condemnations of the characters and deeds of Charles I and James II of England were not related to their failure to rule "according to the controversial understandings which have been established since their time," but rather to their "trampling underfoot the written law which had been established long before their time."⁵⁷ It was more difficult to analyze men of mixed character, he admitted to Spyridon Trikoupes, than "pure and unmixed heroes" on one hand or "utter rascals and traitors" on the other. The essential dilemma of the evolutionary historical moralist is, of course, how to assess those figures of questionable morality who

⁵⁶Old English History, 29.

⁵⁷Lectures to American Audiences, 175.

have, in fact, wrought some lasting good for mankind. Freeman admitted that "you may look with contemptuous scorn upon Elagabalus or Gian Gastone de Medici, but you cannot make game of William the Conqueror. . . ." ⁵⁸ So too the historian must deal gently with the Trimmers, who are but hypocrites to both sides in historical disputes but who may be men of perfectly honorable character. He expressed interest to J. T. Fowler, for example, in one William Morley, a Vicar of Winterton in the sixteenth century, as one who did not selfishly and wantonly adjust his fundamental beliefs for personal gain or survival but "simply conformed to the law, . . . not feeling that anything was touched which was worth being burned or embowelled for." ⁵⁹ In every case, Freeman took seriously the role of moral critic, which he held to be proper for the historian, to extend sympathetic understanding to other men of past times without ever descending to utter

⁵⁸ Freeman to S. Trikoupes, 19 January 1862, Life and Letters, 1:273; E. A. Freeman, "The Court of Lewis XV," Bentley's Quarterly Review 2 (1859):246.

⁵⁹ Freeman to J. T. Fowler; 8 February 1885, Fowler MSS., ff. 259-51.

relativism.

expected other critics to be similarly cautious. After reading Thomas Hodgkin's Italy and Her Invaders, he wrote to the author suggesting that he had been too hard on Justinian, commenting that "if either you or I had been in his place, either you or I would have done as he did."⁶⁰ Freeman's concern for a fair and accurate assessment of an historical character surpassed on most occasions his own partisan sentiments. It is easy to dismiss Freeman's criticisms of Froude as simply partisan, but such an evaluation is not borne out by an examination of other of his reviews. In 1867, for example, Freeman scolded his friend Adolphe Morlot for painting too black a picture of Philip II of Spain, a man for whom Freeman had no great respect.⁶¹ On the other hand, an 1862 review of St. John's Four Conquests of England was critical of the author for being over-zealous in his defense of the character of Earl Godwine, even to the point of misreading the authorities.⁶²

⁶⁰ Freeman to T. Hodgkin, 20 September 1885, Life and Letters, 2:339.

⁶¹ See Morlot to Freeman, 8 November 1867, Freeman MSS.

⁶² [E. A. Freeman], "St. John's Four Conquests of England," Saturday Review 13 (1862):47-49.

The complexity of the moral question in history led him to investigate the morally paradoxical characters of historical persons and institutions. He contended, for example, that Roman diplomacy was often marked by gross treachery, but that:

. . . it must not be forgotten that Roman vices and Roman virtues sprang from the same source, and that the men who sacrificed the rights of other nations to Rome were often equally ready to sacrifice themselves and all that they had in the same cause.⁶³

Freeman regularly attacked the superficial moral judgments of partisan popular histories, and, as he wrote to Bryce, "I take a malicious pleasure in setting forth the times when the Saint is eager to kill people left and right, and only the sinners . . . hinder him."⁶⁴ There were times, of course, when Freeman allowed his political or historical hobby-horses to carry him beyond the strictures of scholarship or even good taste. His defense of Earl Godwine prompted one critic to remark that the account was marred by "the passion of a biographer for his favorite hero."⁶⁵ And his pro-German sympathies during

⁶³History of Federal Government, 533-34.

⁶⁴Freeman to Bryce, 17 November 1867, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 174-78.

⁶⁵Charles H. Pearson, A Short Answer to Mr. Freeman's Strictures in the "Fortnightly Review" on The History of England during the Early and Middle Ages (London, 1868), 15.

the Franco-Prussian War led him into a number of moral and logical contradictions in defense of the forcible annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and the undue violence on the part of the invaders.⁶⁶ When Freeman did decide upon unequivocal praise or blame, his rhetoric was often carried to extremes, but the general tone of his discussions of moral character was marked by a sense of balance, fairness, and sympathy.

An attachment to truthfulness in writing usually overbalanced his biases, and when it did not, Freeman's defenses were totally lacking in that characteristic fervor and commitment which he usually brought to his writing. Indeed, he believed that the completely open and honest recording of fact would have a far more telling effect than would preaching or polemic. As an editor of the Historic Towns series, Freeman urged his writers to refrain from partisan attacks, an admonition doubly reinforced when the book was being done for schools. "[Do] not directly abuse very modern people," he wrote J. R. Green, who eventually refused co-operation in any of Freeman's

⁶⁶Times, 18 February 1871, 4; see also E. A. Freeman, "Saarburg and Saarbrücken," Macmillan's Magazine 27 (1872):29-40.

series, "even those whom I most hate. There is a time for reviling tyrants, but not in a little book."⁶⁷

Similarly, he opposed any extensive discussion of contemporary politics in William Hunt's History of Italy:

"I hold that the facts, without comments or epithets, are enough to brand all tyrants."⁶⁸

In general, however, Freeman did believe that historical study must, to some degree, force moral judgment. For Acton, history was a branch of ethics; for Freeman, it was rather the other way round. In the preface of his History of Federal Government he acknowledged:

I am conscious of holding strong opinions on many points of both home and foreign politics; for historical study does more than anything else to lead the mind to a definite political creed; but at the same time, it does at least as much to hinder the growth of any narrow political partizanship.⁶⁹

Yet no honest man, he argued, especially the historian, could write in similarly colorless terms about a man of differing opinions and the tyrant "whose very being implies the overthrow of right." If a man did not believe he could sufficiently separate his political or religious

⁶⁷ Freeman to Green, 10 October 1873, Freeman MSS.

⁶⁸ Freeman to Macmillan, 14 September 1873, BM Add. MSS. 55050, ff. 150-51.

⁶⁹ History of Federal Government, xv.

opinions and those of a more basic moral nature, he should eschew the history of those periods where such a confusion would damage his work. Thus, Freeman himself always trod lightly over the seventeenth century, in part because of his doubts as to his own perspective on the religious controversies of that turbulent epoch. Further, the historian's moral judgments must always be open to revision. To cleave to a morally discredited figure against all evidence reduces the historian to a courtesan.

Freeman's own attachment to historical figures was obstinate, but, if pressed with new facts, he would relent. He wrote in 1872 to William Floyd, who was revising the traditional interpretation of the relations between King Henry and Simon de Montfort, warning, "I suspect that it will be hard work to pull down my idol of Lewes and Evesham. I hope however that I am open to truth on any matter."⁷⁰

Moral or ethical questions were of unusual importance to Freeman. His involvement in controversies over blood-sports or vivisection at the universities were animated by the same moral sentiments which lay behind his concern for refugees and the oppressed. His deep

⁷⁰Freeman to W. Floyd, 1 December 1872, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales MS. 3763 C.

interest in law was connected in part with a belief that society can retain its cohesiveness only so long as its most basic moral sentiments, its religious values, and its legal prescriptions are in essential concord. Many of his contemporaries, including some close friends, believed him intolerant of those who differed on moral questions. Hook, for example, echoed the criticism of Pall Mall Gazette that "all people with you are either Angels or Devils," and if this was unjust to Freeman, his style of writing did encourage such observations.⁷¹ Perhaps a more accurate assessment appeared in Quarterly Review in 1895, that "he often thought that what convinced him must be self-evident to all men, and charged his neighbours with breaking a moral law when they really denied its existence."⁷²

While Freeman could prate at the thought of "a decent parson's daughter fiddling and play-acting," he also touched on questions of crucial significance to society. The American historian Hannis Taylor likened

⁷¹W. F. Hook to Freeman, 21 June 1871, Freeman MSS.

⁷²"Freeman, Froude, and Seeley," Quarterly Review 182 (1895):286.

his voice to that of an "ancient prophet trembling through the Psalms," and attributed part of his appeal to the "utter moral conviction" of his history.⁷³ Bryce counted as one of Freeman's greatest merits "a clear view of and loyal adherence to the permanent moral standards" and, in the long run, a tolerance of "everything but perfidy and cruelty."⁷⁴ These remembrances would have pleased Freeman, who himself revered men for their moral and ethical vision. In an address at Cornell University in 1881, Freeman spoke warmly of his friend Goldwin Smith as a man "worthily renowned as a scholar, [and] yet more worthily renowned as a champion of a moral right."⁷⁵ As an historian Freeman was aware that the spade-work of history, the digging after facts and the questioning of texts was essentially a scientific task in which men must not allow moral sentiments to hinder investigation. But he also held that to write history properly, as the first historians had done, required a sense of moral judgment. He was not himself unworthy of that accolade.

⁷³Hannis Taylor, "Edward A. Freeman," 172.

⁷⁴James Bryce, "Edward Augustus Freeman," English Historical Review 7 (1892):503.

⁷⁵Cornell Era, 11 November 1881, 2.

CHAPTER VII

HISTORY AS A SCIENCE AND AS A TEACHER

Closely related to Freeman's belief in the unity of history was his contention that the subject could be studied scientifically. Further, this scientific examination of historical events could have a didactic purpose, providing men with a guide for future actions in politics, morals, and all other forms of human relations. In his adherence to these views, Freeman was but one in a whole movement of nineteenth-century historiography toward a methodology modeled after those of the physical sciences. The influence of Ranke and other German historians should not be under-estimated in leading their British counterparts to a new respect for the apparently scientific, technical aspects of historical research. Freeman, while never making the extreme claims to identify history and the physical sciences current during his time, nonetheless strongly held that English historical writing needed more rigorous scientific methods.

The century's flirtation with positivism was tied closely to its worship of science and its pretensions. The attempt by Auguste Comte to use history to discover eternal laws of human behavior was echoed in a modified

form by a number of important historians and philosophers of history in the nineteenth century, most notably Herbert Spencer, H. Thomas Buckle, and Hippolyte Taine. Freeman was not unaffected by this trend, but he resisted its full implications. The didactic character of his own writings was of a far more tentative nature, owing less to St.-Simonian or Comtian models of social science than to the educative models of classic historians.

Lacking the interest in and perhaps the aptitude for speculative thought about the nature of reality or the possibility of objectivity, Freeman never made any significant contribution at this more subtle level of historiographical debate. He was never troubled by doubt that such a thing as Truth existed and that it was the moral duty of men, and the specific professional duty of the historian, to seek it out and proclaim it. To a certain degree in the History of Federal Government and explicitly in Comparative Politics, Freeman tried to put aside his customary style of historical narrative in favor of a classificatory scheme for political institutions which would be free of political or moral value-judgments. His success in doing so was always questioned, and Freeman himself ultimately acknowledged that his

classifications must be of a much broader and more tentative nature than those of other scientists.

Without doubt, however, Freeman, impervious to the logical difficulties later pointed up by Carl Becker and others, believed in facts and their place as the building blocks of historical narrative and political science. Without constant reference to demonstrable facts, political and historical studies amounted to no more than intuitive speculation. He wrote that "an abstract science of political man, founded on theory and not on experience, would be little worth indeed," and argued that "its teaching must be grounded on history; its conclusions must be deduced from the facts of history."¹ He exhibited little patience for historians who disagreed. He was distressed, therefore, when reviewers found his books dry and criticized them for "want of philosophy." "What does that mean," he retorted, "to talk about solidarities and eventualities and not to know one's facts."² Once the historian had demonstrated what events and accounts were generally agreed to be factual and had explained all sides

¹ Methods of Historical Study, 119.

² Freeman to Bryce, 19 January 1872, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 1-4.

of controversies surrounding those in dispute, then he could offer his own conjectures as to the meaning of their relations. Thus he criticized even his friend and disciple J. R. Green for his more impressionistic and metaphorical writing. "Johnny . . . wants," he wrote, ". . . to leave out facts and dates, & have only ideas. I want to get the ideas out of the facts."³ In his own work, this often made for unbearably long and dull prose excursions, but Freeman feared this fate far less than he did glib superficiality.

Even admitting the existence of historical facts, however, history's claim to sit among the sciences has been disputed at every turn. Freeman was never so blind to the imperfect and approximate nature of historical methodology to insist, like the extreme positivist historians, on the identity of social and physical science. Yet he would never acquiesce in the view that history as a branch of science or knowledge was one degree less valid or important than any other. "We claim no superiority over other branches of knowledge; only we confess no inferiority."⁴ Freeman was aware that, in comparison

³Freeman to Bryce, 16 July 1871, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 275-76.

⁴Methods of Historical Study, 154-55.

with some other sciences, history often fell far short of any pretense to absolute certainty about its propositions. In a February 1886 lecture at the London Institution, Freeman compared the work of the historian and the geologist:

The geologist may err in interpreting the witness of the rocks; but the rocks themselves can neither err nor lie. Now not only may the historian err in interpreting the witness of records, but the records themselves may either err or lie.⁵

This was, however, only a very superficial difference between history and the disciplines of physical science outweighed by important similarities. As early as 1849 Freeman composed his most eloquent apologia for historical study as a science, Thoughts on the Study of History, the essential outlines of which he never abandoned. The interest in history which flowered in the early part of the century he believed to be connected with the attention given to the physical sciences. "In some points the study of history approaches more nearly to them than does any other branch of mental and moral science." Indeed, history's direct concern was with mind rather than matter, "but it is with mind in its most material aspect; mind definite, tangible, practical, surrounded with the conditions and accompaniments of physical existence." Further,

⁵Times, 6 February 1886, 4.

in contrast to higher philosophy, history "does not deal with abstractions; . . . it has primarily to deal, like the physical sciences, with outward facts or phenomena." For this reason he believed that there were unlimited possibilities for co-operation with scholars from the most diverse scientific disciplines and his own, one of "the most progressive sciences."⁶

His life-long repetition of this theme reflects his disappointment, often bitter disappointment, at the public and official exaltation of newer physical sciences over history. Greater respect, he believed, was accorded to the chemical or physiological scholar than to the historical scholar. At the universities the largesse bestowed upon the physical sciences for construction of laboratories dwarfed the amounts of money grudgingly granted to historical science. He told the noted geologist, W. B. Dawkins, that "being an ology, you are more likely to be listened to than any of us who are not ologies."⁷ At times, his exasperation with the rage for science at Oxford was expressed humorously, as when he complained to

⁶E. A. Freeman, Thoughts on the Study of History, (Oxford, 1849), 5-9.

⁷Freeman to Dawkins, 8 November 1887, MS. Coll. Iesu 192, f. 203.

George Macmillan:

The University gives £50 to explore in Asia Minor, and £700 to cut up dead bodies. . . . I am thinking of describing myself Professor of Politicology and Practical Tyranatomy, then I might get something.⁸

At other times his complaints reflected his frustration at the paucity of official patronage for history. In 1884 he spoke in Convocation at Oxford against the expenditure of £10,000 for the establishment of a physiological laboratory, objecting to the "vast and lavish expenditure which would certainly not be thought of on behalf of any other study."⁹ He was unimpressed by arguments that physical sciences needed more substantial investments in facilities than did his own branch of study. If, indeed, all scholarly disciplines were co-equal then no one of them should receive a disproportionate amount of public money.

He also found most nettlesome the widespread assumption that history was less a specialist's subject than the physical sciences. This supposition, as prevalent and pernicious today as it was in Freeman's time, leads men to believe that only the physician is competent to

⁸Freeman to G. Macmillan, 7 June 1891, BM Add. MSS. 55053, ff. 134-55.

⁹Quoted in Life and Letters, 2:276-77.

discuss medical questions while nearly any one can pass himself off as a student, teacher, or an authority on history. "To question your neighbour's knowledge of history," he wrote lightly, "is nearly as bad as doubting his orthodoxy, or disparaging his discrimination in wine."¹⁰ It troubled Freeman that historical fiction and inaccurate popularizations of history flourished beside and often beyond serious study, a situation unthinkable in the other sciences. He told the Birmingham Historical Society in 1890:

The general public . . . is right in believing that astronomy is a science which a man can not learn without study; and in which therefore those who have not studied must be satisfied to listen to those who have. [It] does wrong in [its] belief that history is not a science, and that one man has as much right to be listened to about it as another.¹¹

Part of the reason for this lack of respect for historical scholarship lay, he believed, in this discipline's lack of its own vocabulary. "History is the least technical of all studies," he told the Liverpool Institute in 1879, "it has absolutely no technical terms . . . words arbitrarily invented for the purposes of science."¹² Men were therefore more apt to treat history still as no more

¹⁰[E. A. Freeman], "Damaged History for Popular Consumption," Saturday Review 11 (1861):635.

¹¹"On the Study of History," 327-28.

¹²How the Study of History is Let and Hindered, 22.

than a branch of literature in which the pretty story may be preferred to the true story, and the conjecture of the impostor is treated with the same respect as the labored research of the expert. When history did take pains with accuracy of nomenclature, such an effort was put down to mere pedantry. The historian objected to what he perceived as intellectual discrimination against his discipline, and he was vehement against the physical scientists who fostered that discrimination. They were men, he argued, who hid behind their obscure terminology and adopted a patronizing attitude toward the public and toward other scholars. Enraged at an article by Sir Michael Foster condemning anti-vivisectionist campaigners with a barrage of technical language, Freeman dashed off a strongly worded rebuttal. Although the piece was rejected by Macmillan's Magazine, its central complaint was registered in another place. The most that historians could be charged with in their most professional work was adopting either technical terms from other disciplines or using terms no longer in common usage. Foster and his colleagues, he charged, "talk a gibberish of their own devising, which they ought to keep to themselves."¹³

¹³Freeman to A. Macmillan, 22 February 1874, BM Add. MSS. 55050, ff: 168-77.

Freeman never denied that there were significant differences among various sciences with respect to methodology and especially to the degree of probability which might attach to their conclusions.

As has been noted above, the very tentative character of historical evidence made it much more difficult to achieve the accuracy claimed by the physical sciences. Even within the historical discipline, the confusion over source materials was obviously greater for historians like Freeman who were forced to rely upon the most fragmentary and contradictory materials. Most troublesome, however, was the fact that some of the most important elements in historical explanation and analysis were not easily definable, tangible, or quantifiable.

In an 1874 article on the Home Rule question, Freeman pointed out that the historian had to take account of the "sentimental grievances" of a people as often of far greater importance in explaining a particular problem than any rational or easily measurable causes.¹⁴ His histories were always attentive to the vital importance of men's myths, hopes, delusions, and memories in motivating them

¹⁴E. A. Freeman, "Sentimental and Practical Politics," Princeton Review 3, n.s. (1879):317-20.

to action. Obviously, such things could not be quantified easily or accurately. To be sure, Freeman's confessed weakness at figures and his overriding interest in epic narrative obscured attention to the legitimate use of quantification in history. "Why start with figures?" he asked Green, in comment on a manuscript, "Bother them."¹⁵


But while Freeman can be faulted -- along with most other British historians of his age -- for neglecting a valuable source of evidence, he realized that quantifiable factors were ultimately peripheral to his grand conception of history. In "Race and Language," for example, one of his most widely known articles, Freeman argued that while race was an undeniable influence in the history of human affairs, no scientifically accurate definition or test of race had been or could be devised. The presumption of a distinct racial community was possible only within the less rigorous standards of historical science; but he insisted that it was a valid concept "if only we do not insist on proving such physical community

¹⁵Freeman to Green, 24 February 1876, Freeman MSS.

of blood as would satisfy a genealogist."¹⁶ Freeman was further aware that he could not, as could the physical scientist, defer any judgment on his data until additional information was brought to light. This approach would be over-cautious and ultimately destructive to history-writing in itself. If the historian could make clear to his readers the factual information of his witnesses; if he could clearly set apart what was no more than conjecture and that which is substantive evidence, he would have met the canons of scientific investigation, even if certain answers could not be provided.

In spite of what might seem to the physical science community like an unacceptable lack of precision in historical science, Freeman defended his discipline as being ultimately no more contingent than other sciences and more accurate, in certain ways, than many of them. The historian was freer, for example, than the legist or other social scientists to deal, not with formulae or generalizations only, but with factual events whose occurrence could be satisfactorily demonstrated. With respect to physical science, Freeman believed that the differences of degrees of certainty between the two types

¹⁶ "Race and Language," 196-97.



of inquiry had been much exaggerated. In 1883 he complained to Professor J. T. Fowler:

All those scientific bodies . . . [think] they can understand everything. Now I know that I don't understand a great many things. You can't in theology -- or in history -- reach the full certainty of geometry; but you may reach that degree of certainty on which you act in all human affairs, & that is enough.¹⁷

This point of view was expanded upon in the professorial lectures on the Methods of Historical Study. The historical scientist, he contended, must humble himself before the unpredictability of the actions of men:

"[T]hat with which we have to deal, that course of human affairs which when present, we call politics, and which, when past, we call history, does depend on the human will and is therefore uncertain." Any pretence, then, to mathematical certainty was groundless, but "we can reach that high degree of likelihood which we call moral certainty, that approach to certainty on which reasonable men are content to act even in the gravest concerns of life." He told his students that he could not prove to them that he was Regius Professor of Modern History -- Her Majesty's signature could have been a forgery --

¹⁷Freeman to J. T. Fowler, 10 December 1883, Fowler MSS., ff. 208-09.

yet both he and they were content to carry on as if he were. Truly, Freeman fell short of the subtlety of Descartes in his argument, but he tried to show clearly that men must accept the validity of proper historical inquiry, for by it "we can gain a vast mass of knowledge, of knowledge that is pleasant in itself, of knowledge that disciplines the mind, of knowledge that is of no small practical use."¹⁸ Beyond this, however, he sought to modify the claims to accuracy and certainty of the other sciences. It seemed that, at most, the physical sciences could offer in some areas a higher degree of likelihood than historical science. "Complete certainty," he wrote, "is the possession of very few, some say of none," noting that he had been warned that "even the truths of geometry are dependent on our present conditions of being, and that there might be a world . . . in which two and two should make five."¹⁹ Freeman repeatedly emphasized the experimental, and therefore contingent, nature of physical science. With David Hume, he held that our experience of the daily rising of the sun is no proof that

¹⁸ Methods of Historical Study, 151-55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

it always has or it always will rise. Further, the natural scientist truly only offered a scheme of contingent causation. Making deductions from experience, the scientist can demonstrate relationships between events, but he cannot, in fact, supply causes. "He can give us immediate cause after immediate cause; but if pressed to tell us the ultimate cause he can only say it is Force;" Freeman was surely unaware of the Continental discussions of a First Cause in the works of Spinoza, Leibniz, and Descartes, but he was sure that scientists could not explain how and why their laws operated; "That is really only a philosophical way of saying that he does not know."²⁰

Historical science, he fancied, could make certain claims for its own superiority among branches of knowledge. He argued that the human will is of paramount importance in the affairs of men, and, as such, the historian, being able to discourse more fully on the human will than could the scientist on Force, was better equipped to understand "the real causes" of facts. The relatively recent development of history as a scientific pursuit held out even greater possibilities for adding to men's store of knowledge about themselves. Not only could history

²⁰ Methods of Historical Study, 146.

claim a rough equality with the physical sciences in a methodological sense, but it was Freeman's contention that in a philosophical sense history was a more exalted science than its fellows:

The study of History remains the protest of mind against matter in a material age. It is an acknowledgement that there are other objects of pursuit worth an intelligent constitution, besides the discoveries which have done so much to realize the views of those philosophers who regard time and space as non-entities.²¹

Freeman was struck by the ability of historians to perceive relationships between men and events hidden from the eyes of the participants themselves: "[W]e who see from afar, often see . . . causes and effects of which the actors themselves could hardly have been aware."²² In contrast to his mediaeval ancestors, modern man had regained and refined his sense of the past as something of extrinsic value and should therefore be able to approach historical study in a scientific fashion.

Freeman never thoroughly grappled with the problem of bias or unconscious prejudice which could mar the historian's work. He understood how easily writers of history could be influenced in their judgments and narrative relationships by various prejudices, but he

²¹ Thoughts on the Study of History, 8.

²² Ibid.

always believed that they could be overcome. Religious partisanship had dominated early modern English history so that, as he wrote to Dean Hook in 1874, "If I told my story of sixteenth century to a mixed mob of Romans, Anglicans, and Puritans, how they would with one accord stone me."²³ And he firmly believed that this would augur well for the accuracy of the story. Freeman also recognized the strong pull of national prejudices and campaigned for their suppression in historical study. In an early archaeological address, Freeman lamented that his discipline suffered from mutual ignorance on the part of English and Welsh scholars: "But there has been worse than mutual ignorance. . . . History has been approached under the influence of strong national enmities; and truth has been sacrificed . . . to a vain point of national honour."²⁴ He urged, therefore: "It is high time for scholars and historians to make up the quarrels of the predatory chieftains of old." Historians must struggle, he believed, to overcome the passions surrounding their subjects which

²³Freeman to W. F. Hook, 20 December 1874, Life and Letters, 2:87.

²⁴Notes on . . . the District of Gower in Glamorganshire, 32-33.

could obscure the rational examination of historical events.

The strong passions aroused by contemporary affairs, then, compromised the validity of contemporary history. The detachment necessary to a scientific approach was not possible in contemporary history. This did not mean that the historian must keep silent on important issues of the day:

Let him, if he will, write pamphlets or articles on matters of immediate pressure. But let him not attempt to write the history of matters which are still food for "Our Own Correspondent."²⁵

Freeman enjoyed taking sides in writing his histories. The sense of the epic in his character was roused if he could take the part of one group of historical characters against another. "Tis a relief," he wrote to Edith Thompson, "to fly to the thirteenth century, and shout for . . . Earl Simon without any misgivings."²⁶ This predisposition notwithstanding, Freeman made an effort to overcome his biases in dealing with contentious issues or, when he lacked confidence in his ability to do so, to

²⁵ [E. A. Freeman], "Creasy's History of the Ottoman Turks," Saturday Review 2 (1856):62.

²⁶ Freeman to Edith Thompson, 10 January 1892, Life and Letters, 2:450.

leave the field to abler hands. He never accepted the idea that his discipline could not share the mantle of science, and he reserved a particular distaste for those writers of history who did not recognize the scientific nature of their calling. In 1882, for example, he wrote to Sir Percy Bunting, expressing a desire to write against "some of the extreme sceptical views of historical evidence," especially those preached by historians.²⁷

It is certain that Froude's doubts as to the possibility of treating history scientifically were a most sore point between the two historians. It was not merely the nature of Froude's partisanship that angered Freeman so mightily but the suspicion that Froude did not believe that history could or should rise above partisanship. Freeman placed moral philosophy and metaphysics above history as sciences which dealt directly with eternal and supernatural questions, but among all worldly studies Freeman considered history to be unique and, perhaps, the best bridge between the physical and the metaphysical.

Yet just as Freeman mistrusted those historians who refused to accept history's scientific claims, he was

²⁷ Freeman to P. Bunting, 22 September 1882, Bunting MSS., Box V, file 4.

equally suspicious of those who pressed them too far. Historical determinists of any variety, or even writers who attempted to impose theoretical models upon the recalcitrant facts of history, were alike anathema to Freeman. Part of this opposition was, of course, that Freeman respected metaphysical speculation, but he had no personal aptitude for it and he was intolerant of its importation into secular and scientific analysis. "And Hegel? not the hard Hegel surely?" he replied to a question about the breadth of his reading in historical philosophy, "You would not set me on that."²⁸ Metaphysics and moral philosophy were indeed "higher and purer intellectual studies," but they provided less of direct value to the historian than the collections of antiquaries. For the latter group was able "to collect facts, accumulate references, and start a variety of questions which set the historian thinking and examining," while philosophers provided only "fascinating theories" built on an absence of fact.²⁹ Still, Freeman could tolerate his fellow

²⁸ Freeman to C. W. Boase, 19 December 1875, BM Add. MSS. 35073, ff. 50-51.

²⁹ E. A. Freeman, "Cox's Antient Parliamentary Elections," Fortnightly Review 3 (1868):339-42.

historians' philosophizing so long as it was done modestly, responsibly, and with constant reference to known fact. But he objected to being criticized for his own inattention to high philosophy: "Why can't these philosophers let one alone? I don't review a treatise on the Unconditioned & complain that there is nothing in it about Harold or William."³⁰

Freeman was not prepared, however, to reduce history to mere chronicle; it was, no less than physics, a science of causes and effects. A keen eye for patterns and paradoxes in history, a trait which encourages historical speculation, was one of Freeman's strengths. Yet he seldom pushed such discoveries or intuitions forward as more than striking, interesting curiosities which might carry some deeper meaning. He was fascinated by what seemed to be the cyclical character of Sicilian history, but he drew from this fascination no more grand theory than that the relationships between islands and their neighboring mainland districts have always been marked by contentiousness. He was taken by the paradox that "the early disunion of France led to her later centralization [while] the early

³⁰ Freeman to Bryce, 14 February 1872, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 1-4.

union of Germany hindered Germany from ever becoming centralized,"³¹ but this was no more than a paradox, rooted in peculiar circumstances. Freeman believed that "history [does] ever repeat itself," yet he insisted that one could argue equally validly that "history never repeats itself at all." The chronological character of history logically makes every result at least one of the causes of all later results, forbidding any exact historical reproduction. He did not abandon his insistence that "like causes produce like effects," but he stressed that this rule must be applied tentatively.

The historical scientist did not operate in a laboratory under controlled conditions, and Freeman recognized that fact:

In this way, even when a present set of causes seems to be, as nearly as the nature of things will allow, the same as a past set of causes, it would still be very rash positively to predict that the same results will follow. For the causes which we know of may be counter-worked by other causes which we do not know of, and may thereby in truth cease to be the same causes.³²

³¹History of Federal Government, 626-30.

³²Lectures to American Audiences, 211.

Freeman had a sense of the irony of great historical events following upon what seemed to be the most insignificant causal factors, but he warned that this made for charming theories or adages but for very suspect history:

A certain type of mind, one which is more concerned with gossip . . . than with real history, delights in telling us how the greatest events spring from the smallest causes, how the fates of nations and empires are determined by some sheer accident, or by the personal caprice or personal quarrel of some perhaps very insignificant person,

This shallow approach, however, is to mistake literature for history, and to consider history scientifically it must be recalled:

It is only in a state of things where predisposing causes are already tending toward the great event that trifling accidents can at all affect the course of events.³³

For this reason Freeman criticized those historians who developed the "personal" or "heroic" theory of history, attributing the course of all historical development to the actions of a handful of great individuals. Carlyle and F. D. Maurice were perhaps the best known exponents of this style, characterized by Carlyle's biography of Frederick the Great. Charles Kingsley, however, was singled out for Freeman's wrath against the "personal style." Kingsley,

³³Lectures to American Audiences, 212-13.

Froude's brother-in-law, had carried hero-worship to extremes in a review of Froude's Reign of Elizabeth. Freeman noted that, in addition to the natural tendency to glorify heroes, a serious weakness of the heroic style was its failure to recognize the limits placed upon even the most dynamic individuals by their surroundings. Contemporary experience, Freeman argued, indicated "how easily any one would be misled who explained a whole period of history, . . . by attending only to the acts and sayings of some great men. . . ." ³⁴ The historian who sang the praises of Harold and Alfred and other heroes with the skill of the epic poet realized the importance of biography in history, but he knew that history must be more than biography. No man makes history as he will:

The greatest man after all is but a man . . . liable to weakness, liable to failure, whether . . . due to his own fault or to circumstances over which he had no control. ³⁵

Freeman asked readers to consider the degree to which great men have been defined primarily by their circumstances:

³⁴ [E. A. Freeman], "Personal Theory of History," Saturday Review 17 (1864):10-11.

³⁵ Lectures to American Audiences, 215.

A hero may become a little out of place when there is nothing stirring in his own line. We welcome St. George when there are dragons to be slain; we should hardly know what to do with him at other times. If there is a nation to be delivered by a strong arm, Garibaldi is the man, but when there are no Sicilies to deliver, Garibaldi does well to keep quiet in his own island.³⁶

While Freeman insisted upon the intellectual flaccidity of the "personal theory" of history, neither was he comfortable with any form of impersonal determinism; ". . . we must not deem that the course of history is so governed by general laws, that it is so completely in bondage to almost mechanical powers, that there is no room for the free agency of great men and small men too."³⁷ All of the so-called Oxford school of historians rejected any theory of scientific history which denied the existence and importance of acts of free-will. In considering the divergent constitutional histories of England and other European nations, Freeman argued in 1860, no "grand scientific law" could be applied fruitfully:

³⁶"How to Grow Great Men," 203.

³⁷Ibid.

We confess that we are not up to the last lights of the age; we have not graduated in the school of Mr. Buckle. We still retain our faith in the existence and the free-will both of God and of man.³⁸

Rather a multiplicity of factors, demonstrable and unknown, produced the rich varieties of history. History was for Freeman a constant interaction of the collective and the individual. To stress one to the detriment of the other was to miss the real significance and dynamic of history. Both the actions of the collective body and those of the individual were not the results of "mechanical forces, but . . . a real, though often unconscious exercise of the human will."³⁹ The treatment of men as helpless automata was dangerously misleading, and he insisted from the first that Buckle was an "ignorant windbag."⁴⁰ This positivist philosophy was deemed even more pernicious in men who had not even Buckle's knowledge of history. The work of Herbert Spencer, in Freeman's

³⁸E. A. Freeman, "The Continuity of English History," in Historical Essays, 1:50.

³⁹Lectures to American Audiences, 216.

⁴⁰Freeman to Bryce, 11 July 1875, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 96-99.

view the "most pretentious fool and the emptiest since the world was freed of Buckle," especially distressed him. Not only did Spencer generalize wildly from limited evidence and arrogantly proclaim the discovery of "laws" of human behavior, but he couched it all in the most vague and convoluted language. Freeman wrote angrily to Percy Bunting, whose Contemporary Review had carried some of Spencer's work while delaying pieces submitted by Freeman. Would his work have been more acceptable if:

. . . instead of solid facts and inferences from them one wrote about "natural causation as displayed among human beings socially aggregated." I can only guess that H.S. has no learning (which I am fully aware of) and no practical experience (which I should have guessed), & so despises both and talks jargon instead.⁴¹

The historian was not bound to eschew phrases like laws of history, spirit of the age, or national character. "They all denote undoubted facts; but they must not be mistaken for unchanging physical forces, over which personal human agency has no control."⁴² His chief objection, then, was to those writers who used generalizations too sweepingly, who held to theories too rigidly, or who confused the clear

⁴¹Freeman to P. Bunting, 24 June 1884, Bunting MSS., Box V, file 4.

⁴²Lectures to American Audiences, 216.

statement of a theoretical conjecture with an adequate demonstration of support for it. An historian cannot rely too heavily upon logical presuppositions about human nature. Men often fail to act according to their instincts or the rational calculation of their interests, and ignorance of that fact made for bad history. Freeman saw history as containing "great streams of tendency," but unlike Hippolyte Taine -- whose contempt for Freeman was matched by a mutual disregard -- the Englishman refused to believe that men were locked in such tendencies. Rigid definitions of class, race, or nationality, he argued, dissolve when they are applied historically. One can show, for example, how certain nations came together or split asunder, but "it is quite impossible to make a theory which will square with all facts," and it is similarly impossible to predict on what terms future national unions or disruptions will occur. One can use the phrase "general laws" as long as it is clear that they are no more than rough and ready guides, based on experience, which may be "sometimes thwarted, sometimes guided, sometimes turned aside."⁴³ The historian may extrapolate general rules, but he must be equally attentive to the exceptions. Freeman shared with

⁴³"On the Study of History," 330.

Goldwin Smith a mistrust of history written from general laws. In an 1861 review of Smith's Oxford lectures, Freeman expressed his fear of determinist history:

The reduction of history into a science of necessary laws is, in fact, in the want of philosophical discrimination, and in the ambition and impatience which it betrays, the exact parallel of the scholastic solution of physical facts by metaphysical ideas; and . . . like that great mistake, it may retard the truth for centuries.⁴⁴

If history could not produce for men a series of iron-clad laws of human behavior and development, it was not wholly without didactic value. Freeman imbibed the view of historical study as a valuable tool for political instruction as well as moral instruction from Thomas Arnold. But it may be that his reading of Thucydides, the greatest teacher of political wisdom, was a more lasting and profound influence. He considered the nineteenth century the golden age of historical study, and with Arnold he noted its role in "the instruction of the statesman and the citizen." In his work Freeman tried to enunciate the political lessons which he believed the facts made explicit, and he urged his readers to study history in order to be

⁴⁴[E. A. Freeman], "Professor Goldwin Smith's Lectures," Saturday Review 11 (1861):48.

instructed. The whole plan of the History of Federal Government was to investigate the nature of federalism through the characteristic federal unions of history. In the History of Sicily Freeman drew his readers' attention to the relations between Corinth and her colonies in Magna Graecia in part to instruct those entrusted with Britain's imperial responsibilities. The Greek city drove her colony at Korkyra (Corfu) to rebellion while Syracuse, founded at the same time, was always accepted as an independent, co-equal state. No wonder then that:

Among the colonies of Corinth, among the colonies of all Hellas, while Syracuse stands forth as the model colony, while Corinth, in her relations to Syracuse, stands forth as the model metropolis, the tale of Corinth and Korkyra is one of undying bitterness and hate.⁴⁵

It is plain that Freeman believed this lesson applicable to the British case, regretting, for example, the American War of Independence -- he often called the Korkyran rebellion a War of Independence -- and arguing that Britain must take a lesson from history. Similarly, after examining the development of democratic national institutions in Britain, Switzerland, and the United States from traditions of local independence, he argued that the centralization of government

⁴⁵E. A. Freeman, Sicily: Phoenician, Greek, and Roman (New York, 1892), 42.

at an early stage in France retarded the growth of free national government. This was a valid lesson produced by historical inquiry and one freely offered to the Greeks, Italians, and to other developing nation-states.

Freeman did not jump at lessons from history nor did he apply those he perceived in an indiscriminate manner. The decay of the Roman Republic and its transformation into a despotic empire should not, he maintained, be scavenged for lessons about the nature of republicanism or imperialism generally. Rather, as Léon Homo was later to demonstrate so brilliantly, the chief lesson to be drawn from this volatile period was the unfitness of municipal institutions effectively to meet the obligations of a distant imperial structure.⁴⁶ He also warned that men must not assume that the successful operation of certain political forms in one place will necessarily guarantee their value in another. Cabinet government, for example, was in Freeman's view a very successful experiment in England, rooted in English traditions and suited to her people. Yet "it by no means follows," he wrote, "that it can be successfully transplanted whole into other countries, or even into our own colonies."⁴⁷ In fact, he believed that it was especially

⁴⁶"Introduction" to Mommsen, History of Rome, xxviii. Cf. Léon Homo, Roman Political Institutions (London, 1906).

⁴⁷History of Federal Government, 52.

unsuited to the white Dominions, and, in the terms in which he understood parliamentary government, he was not far wrong.

Freeman was sensitive to the abuses to which the "argument from history" was open, especially at the hands of religious or political partisans. In response to a speech by Lord Redesdale arguing that England's prosperity and colonial expansion were due primarily to her national Protestantism, Freeman posited that as good, if not a better, case could be made that the theological change was a by-product of an anti-foreign political movement to which England owed both her prosperity and her religion.⁴⁸ Similarly, he reacted against the shallow pundits who sought to glorify Britain's unitary, monarchical government by arguing the historical inferiority of federal or republican constitutions. He could not understand, he wrote Macmillan in 1864, how the military success of the southern confederacy in the American Civil War against northern federal forces could prove anything about the nature of federal systems.⁴⁹ While he confessed that in general

⁴⁸[E. A. Freeman], "National Prosperity and the Reformation," Saturday Review 26 (1868):220-21.

⁴⁹Freeman to Macmillan, 31 July 1864, BM Add. MSS. 55049, 23-25.

democracy seemed historically to offer a higher form of political life than oligarchy or tyranny, he was reluctant to pronounce dogmatically on the question. Further, he had no patience with those popular writers who, due to misreading or not reading their history, "think that every republic must be a democracy and that every democracy must be a government of the mob."⁵⁰

It was precisely Freeman's acknowledgement of the breadth and richness of historical experience which led to his caution in drawing lessons from history too directly and which set him apart from his counterpart at Cambridge, Sir John Seeley. The two men are often lumped together for the connection which both perceived between politics and history -- "politics without history has no root; history without politics has no fruit" ran Seeley's dictum. The Cambridge professor's proposal that the history-schools should be primarily trade-schools for politicians, statesmen, and diplomats was at complete variance with Freeman's cherished notions about history. Seeley viewed history as a tool or weapon for the rough-and-tumble of politics, while Freeman's vision of an historical science placed strict limits on this practice. Unlike Seeley, observed a contemporary,

⁵⁰Freeman to Bryce, 31 December 1871, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 290-93.

. . . when Freeman did touch on a controversial question, he did not wholly succeed in keeping clear of party issues, but he at least saw plainly that, if history is to be of value as an educational instrument, it must be kept free from political controversy. . . .⁵¹

The whole Oxford School rejected Seeley's utilitarian view that history's value lay in political training. For Freeman, Seeley's argument that the discipline justified itself only "by giving due precedence in the teaching of history to the present over the past," was a pernicious and false doctrine. The response from Somerleaze to Seeley's inaugural lecture was incredulous: "This man is opposite to Balaam; he is paid to bless the study of history, and lo he turneth about and curseth it."⁵²

Freeman would have no part in turning history into a trade-school. Its scientific study provided important lessons and insights, but they were of a general, circumscribed, and philosophic nature. He told the Historical Society in Birmingham that historical study was of great benefit to men of business, not because its lessons could be directly applied to commerce, not because it would fill their pockets, but because it could give them a general

⁵¹"Freeman, Froude, and Seeley," 300-01.

⁵²Freeman to Bryce, 8 May 1870, Bryce MSS V, ff. 244-47.

sense of how the past often explains and at times confounds the present. Freeman never believed in the Coketown image of English entrepreneurs, and he was heartened by the large number who took an interest in practically edifying study.⁵³ A respect for the past; for its achievements and influences, and for the common humanity of its citizens were among the vital lessons of history. Even when no new knowledge was produced, when the result of research provided no more than a paradoxical portrait of events long established, such an effort was worthwhile. He scorned what he called "the strange craving after 'etwas neues'" on the part of German critics; "some small fact grubbed up in some corner" did not exhaust the range of valid historical literature. Indeed, he believed that a discipline whose chief didactic purpose lay in broadening its students' intellectual perspectives must not limit itself to such narrow investigation.⁵⁴

It is not surprising that history's lessons were for Freeman of the most broad, universal, and, ultimately, religious nature. While he did not like Hegel before him profess to have divined the meaning and purpose behind all

⁵³"On the Study of History," 319-20.

⁵⁴Freeman to Bryce, 18 December 1889, Bryce MSS. VIII, ff. 100-02.

human history, neither did he confess, as did H. A. L. Fisher after him, to see no purpose or meaning in history whatsoever. Rather, he believed that history had a divine inspiration which it demonstrated, but that one could no more classify or prove such a belief than one could analyze or predict the divine will. In one of his earliest discourses on historical study, Freeman noted that history allowed men to contemplate the manifestations of God's will:

And we may add that History has been selected by Revelation itself as the chosen vehicle of its teaching in a manner which can be asserted of no other human pursuit; we may fairly say that it has set on it the especial stamp and seal of Divine approbation: a portion of history is given us on the highest sanction, as a sample of the true and religious treatment of the whole.⁵⁵

In part, Freeman saw his studies as confirmation and illustration of revealed religion. In an 1889 article attacking the popular connection of scientific inquiry with religious skepticism, Freeman declared that he found nothing in historical study to refute the essential features of Christian doctrine. Moreover, he believed that the relative peacefulness among men throughout history was a meaningful phenomenon. "The wonderful thing is not that there has now and then been a Slave War or Jacquerie, but that there has not been one never ending Jacquerie from

⁵⁵ Thoughts on the Study of History, 10-11.

the beginning of things."⁵⁶ Further, the impact of the small and relatively weak upon the strong and powerful seemed to confirm the historical pattern affirmed by St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians.⁵⁷ Most important, however, was the universality of history in delineating its relationship with religion. The historian recognizes, he argued, the vital importance of every individual in making up the world that has come to be, even if he assigns a more exalted place to some over others. The short and simple annals of the poor and powerless were equally important sources for the universal historian. Also, the process of historical study, because of its very tentative nature and incompleteness was perhaps the most scientific and educative aspect of the discipline.⁵⁸ It was said that "Freeman regarded any historical subject . . . as containing in it the potentiality of all historical knowledge. . . ."⁵⁹ Far more important, then, to the

⁵⁶E. A. Freeman, "Christianity and the Geocentric System," Contemporary Review 55 (1889):555.

⁵⁷I Corinthians, 1:27.

⁵⁸Methods of Historical Study, 154-55.

⁵⁹Times, 28 March 1892, 4.

investigator was not what subject he chose, not what positive conclusions or lack thereof at which he arrived, but rather the development of an historical sense and an historically critical approach to phenomena, which made men exalted in their insights and humble before their ignorance.

Most obituaries and later assessments of Freeman's work emphasize approvingly or otherwise his belief in the possibility of a scientific history. Even critics who condemned his lack of impartiality recognized his attempts to justify that partiality according to honest and responsibly scientific procedures. In the Times it was concluded that Freeman's highest service to the discipline was "to transfer the study of history from the domain of literature to that of science, to make it part of the great movement of European thought towards positive knowledge and exhaustive research."⁶⁰ Much of the positivist ring to Freeman's historical science stems from his unqualified universalist assumption that human nature is everywhere and all the time the same. The general run of critical and historical literature of his age, of course, demonstrates that Freeman was not out of step with his contemporaries

⁶⁰Times, 28 March 1892, 4.

in that assumption. However, the disfavor into which that view has fallen has done much to discredit this historian who did indeed associate himself with it. Yet too little attention is paid to Freeman's refusal to define too strictly just what that single human nature was and how it operated. As has been shown above, his deep respect and awe for the human will in its struggle with nature and human instincts precluded any absolute pronouncement on the workings of human nature.

Freeman was not afraid and he urged his students not to fear if historical investigations led to no further knowledge or even if they compounded man's ignorance with respect to any given subject. With respect to ultimate and absolute knowledge, Freeman insisted that ignorance was the mother of devotion, and he took comfort and theological re-assurance from man's inability to know all things.⁶¹ Further, he would not demean historical study by using it merely as a magazine selectively to provide ammunition to support his ideological fantasies. The Pall Mall Gazette in 1883, for example, urged its readers to compare the historical work of Freeman with that of Buckle and to "see the difference between a profound intelligence which has studied things in the concrete and those who spin spiders'

⁶¹Freeman to J. L. Patterson, 12 November 1888, Life and Letters, 2:389-90.

were out of their own brains. . . ."62 It is clear, then, that there is little in Freeman's writing that could make up a systematic philosophy of history on any grand scale. Rather, what emerges from Freeman's work is a deeply felt conviction that historical study itself, regardless of subject matter, conducted according to the canons of scientific method and recognizing the universality and unity of historical experience, was the best vehicle by which men might obtain what imperfect knowledge they could about themselves and their place in Creation.

⁶²Pall Mall Gazette, 3 August 1883, 4.

CHAPTER VIII
TEUTONISM AND NATIONAL HISTORY

When the historiographers of this century think of Freeman at all, it is primarily as a national historian, a Teutonist, and one of a number of Victorian writers who verged on pan-Germanism and who were tinged with racism.¹ Yet it is clear that his work in local history, ancient history, and history of a more universal cast displays other aspects of the prolific historian. It may be questioned, as well, to what degree Freeman fits, in all particulars, the Anglo-Saxonist caricature which he has been given. All of his major writings on the history of mediaeval England display affirmation of the essentially Teutonic character of the English people and their institutions. Freeman also considered race and national character vital factors in shaping historical events, and his observations in this area are a rich mine for those who enjoy being amused or outraged by the prejudices of the Victorians.

¹See L. P. Curtis, Anglo-Saxons and Celts (Bridgeport, Conn., 1968), especially Chapter VI.

The reputation for dogged adherence to views which modern scholarship deems incorrect is truly borne out by the facts of Freeman's life and letters. In details and shadings, however, the nature of Freeman's history is inadequately served by this portrait. His English history was profoundly nationalist, told with an open preference for his own people, yet based on the conviction that all known facts tended to bear out his point of view and that he was open to recognize equally any established fact which did not. It can be argued that Freeman's Teutonism was, at bottom, more limited and reflective than that of many of his contemporaries, and that it was based upon the best available research of the age. Further, the racialism which is often perceived in Freeman's work plays a relatively small part in his historical writing, and, apart from the characteristically blunt manner in which he expressed it, his perspective on race was probably more judicious and considered than that of most Englishmen of his day.²

Freeman was by no means the first English historian to undertake an investigation of the history of Anglo-Saxon England. As early as the sixteenth century, Matthew

²See, for example, Thomas Carlyle's "The Nigger Question," (1849) in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, 5 vols. (New York, 1896-1901), 348-83; or Charles Kingsley, His Letters

Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, began gathering scattered Anglo-Saxon manuscript materials -- even printing Asser's Life of Alfred the Great -- and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries limited work was done toward the recovery of the sources of early English history.³ It was not until the early part of the nineteenth century, however, that the revived taste for historical study and the intense search for national origins and character combined to kindle in England an interest in Anglo-Saxon studies which grew steadily through most of the century. At the turn of the century, Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons promoted a limited public interest in the subject and called the attention of scholars and antiquaries to the bounty of Old-English materials available for study.⁴

and Memories of His Life, ed. Fanny Kingsley, 2 vols. (London, 1877), 2:222-23. For a general survey of scientific opinion, see H. H. Odom, "Generalizations on Race in Nineteenth Century Physical Anthropology," Isis 58 (1967):11-18.

³See V. J. K. Brook, A Life of Archbishop Parker (Oxford, 1972), 329.

⁴Sharon Turner, History of the Anglo-Saxons from Their First Appearance Above the Elbe to the Norman Conquest, 7th ed., 3 vols. (London, 1852).

Turner's work is also recognized as one of the first major histories to attempt the demonstration of an unbroken racial and cultural link between Britain's Teutonic conquerors and its modern inhabitants and to stress the unique genius for art, science, war, justice, and political liberty inherent in the race.

Serious acceptance of these arguments, however, came only after the Anglo-Saxons were taken up in German universities by the great Continental historians of institutions. Romance and science were blended in J. N. Lappenberg's History of England Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings⁵ and the philological studies of the Brothers Grimm,⁶ and their work was received enthusiastically in England. But it was the study of English scholars in the European seminars and their carrying of the gospel of Teutonic unity back to their homeland that determined the intellectual milieu in which the history of early England would be

⁵ Johann Martin Lappenberg, History of England Under the Anglo-Saxon Kings, trans. Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols. (London, 1845).

⁶ Especially treasured was the Deutsche Grammatik (1826-40). Freeman often insisted that "Grimm's Law" be made the basis for all language study from the schools to the University.

written in the nineteenth century. Benjamin Thorpe, a student at Copenhagen, produced his influential Ancient Laws and Institutes of England in 1840, popularizing the discoveries of the German masters, and he went on to edit a number of important Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.⁷

Even more important were the essays of John Mitchell Kemble, a pupil of Jacob Grimm at Göttingen, entitled The Saxons in England, which were based on his own six-volume collection of the Codex diplomaticus aevi Saxonici.⁸ In this work, Kemble imported the theory of the mark, a vague conception that the Teutonic notion of liberty and community rested on early tribal possession of common or folkland, from the Aufklärung historian Justus Möser. This theory, never well defined and based on the most fragile documentation, clearly held the field among nearly all respected German and English mediaevalists of the nineteenth century.

⁷ Ancient Laws and Institutes of England, ed. B. Thorpe (London, 1840). Thorpe also produced an edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1861.

⁸ John Mitchell Kemble, The Saxons in England, 2 vols. (London, 1849). Kemble was also the editor of the Codex diplomatici aevi saxonici, 6 vols. (London, 1839-48).

It is not surprising, then, that Freeman, whose brilliance was seldom marked by originality and who displayed a special reverence⁸ for his teachers, would fall quite naturally into the dynamic and most impressive movement in the discipline of that time. While Freeman's formal education was, typically, almost solely in classical studies, the young scholar had always taken an interest in English history. It is likely that his early studies in religion and ecclesiastical architecture promoted this attachment through the development of a sense of belonging to an independent national Catholic church with a distinctive ecclesiological character. Whatever the background, in 1845 he chose to write on the Norman Conquest for the Chancellor's Prize Essay. The opinions formed during that early study, while in some respects modified and in others refined, were never essentially altered. Basing his work on the solid, if plodding history of John Lingard,⁹ the romantic account of Augustin Thierry,¹⁰ and the ingenious re-interpretation of Sir Francis Palgrave,¹¹ as well as

⁹ John Lingard, A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans, 4th ed., 13 vols. (London, 1837-39).

¹⁰ J. N. Augustin Thierry, History of the Conquest of England by the Normans, trans. C. C. Hamilton, 3 vols. (London, 1825).

¹¹ Sir Francis Palgrave, History of Normandy and

contemporary annalists, Freeman adopted his life-long contention that the foreign conquerors of England were in all important respects absorbed by the English with only gradual modifications in English law, language, and institutions. In 1846 he began systematic study of Anglo-Saxon grammar, and he kept up his attention to mediaeval English study equal to his classical inquiries. In this intellectual atmosphere, then, the appearance of Kemble's Saxons in England surely made a profound impression on the youthful historian.

Freeman was deeply impressed with the learning in Kemble's book and with the writer's contention that the strength, justice, and stability of English society during the turbulence of the Revolutionary era were owing to the genius of England's Anglo-Saxon constitution, balancing private and communal property in a system of organic customary law. This interpretation suited the spirit of the self-confident age, yet it was not beyond plausibility, and it remained a far more sophisticated perspective on English history than had been developed to that time. The young Freeman was similarly impressed, though not entirely convinced, by the pioneering work of Sir Francis

England, 4 vols. (London, 1851-64): For Freeman's estimate of Palgrave's work, see his reviews of the work in Edinburgh Review 109 (1859):486-513, and 121 (1865):1-41.

Palgrave on pre-Conquest England and Normandy. Kemble's work, however, was incomplete and imprecise as to the processes of Teutonic survivals and adaptations. That of Palgrave was erratic, questionably argued and documented, and unjustifiably weighted toward the belief in a high degree of Romanization of the northern Teutonic tribes. An important principle had been established in any case: the national histories of England and other northern nations were as worthy of pursuit as those of the more traditional classic cultures. In his eloquent pamphlet, Thoughts on the Study of History, Freeman noted:

We have at last awaked to the fact that Greece and Rome do not exhaust the world's stock of wisdom and greatness . . .; that the soil of Teutonic Christendom has brought forth as deep and enduring systems, as glorious works of art and genius, as mighty deeds of national and individual greatness, as aught that southern heathendom can boast. We have at last . . . learned that we owe not more to Athenian forms of beauty, to Roman laws and government, than to those seeds of liberty and glory which the "despised barbarian" planted in his German forest or on his Scandanavian rock.¹²

This paean was a reaction to the neglect of English history in the universities, but Freeman asked only that the history of nations be studied on the same basis as the classics and that it be related to the history of the ancient world.

¹²Thoughts on the Study of History, 13.

The proof of the "claim which we are so fond of preferring" had yet to be produced, the history of Teutonic institutions in England had yet to be written, "and neither newspaper declaimers nor learned antiquaries have as yet belted on very far towards it."¹³ The study of that history in its proper role as a part of universal history was a task that the young Freeman set for himself.

While Freeman is commonly regarded as an ethnocentric historian -- to a degree, rightly so -- he did not confine his study to national history, nor did he ever claim the superiority of the Teuton over the Roman or the Greek. Rather, it was his contention that each of these major branches of Indo-European man had come to play a pre-eminent role in the history of European civilization and that each had incorporated some of the best features of those whom they had displaced. This is essentially the argument contained in Freeman's lectures in 1873 on Comparative Politics, often considered the historian's most broad and important statement of the Teutonist thesis. Indeed, Freeman stated at the beginning of his crucial second lecture that the history of European man, especially Aryan man in Europe, stood out above that of other racial

¹³Thoughts on the Study of History, 14.

groups.¹⁴ He believed that European history was a pageant of "the moral greatness" of western commonwealths and, as such, was intrinsically more edifying and interesting than the physical size, power, or technical capacity of the Eastern despotisms. Perhaps Freeman was mistaken as to the character of Oriental government and institutions, but certainly he was in the company of the best and brightest of his age.¹⁵ It is important to remember that Freeman never denied that there might have been, at some distant time, a common racial or political heritage of Aryan and non-Aryan peoples. It was an open question; but historical study seemed to demonstrate that the nations of Europe had organized themselves according to different political principles than the peoples of the East.¹⁶ Roman, Greek, and Teuton, originally kindred, had come in turn to dominate European political life, but with constant adaptations: "Each in his turn has reached the highest stage alike of power and civilization that was to be had in

¹⁴ Comparative Politics, 38-39.

¹⁵ See Christine Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race (London, 1971), 178-200, passim.

¹⁶ Comparative Politics, 60.

his own age, and each has handed on his own store to be further enriched by successors who were at once conquerors and disciples."¹⁷

It is an error to view these issues more simplistically than Freeman himself did. Certainly he was aware that the religious tradition of European civilization was Semitic in origin; "But before a Semitic faith could have become the faith of Rome and Europe, its dogmas had to be defined by the subtlety of Grecian intellect, the constitution of its organized society had to be wrought into shape by the undying genius of Roman rule."¹⁸ The role of other races was acknowledged in what detractors find a proof of his prejudice, but what seemed to him simply observation of fact: both Slavs and Celts had played a part in the development of European institutions but in a less demonstrable way. "The Celt in his own person, speaking his own tongue, lingers only in corners here and there, one degree only more visible than the Iberian whom he dislodged."¹⁹ In terms of the definition of existing

¹⁷ Comparative Politics, 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., 50, 358-59.

European culture, the direct contribution of Celtic and Slavic laws, languages, and distinctive institutions was secondary. However, Freeman did not claim that this was anything more than a fairly accurate generalization from recorded facts, not a racially determined or pre-determined outcome. "The development of the Slavonic nation is perhaps yet to come," he noted, but its coming would depend primarily on their ability, historically, not racially determined, to fuse their particular culture to the wider culture of Europe in some higher synthesis.²⁰

Positive objections can be made to Freeman's more specific claims in Comparative Politics, but his errors stem from inadequate knowledge of some source material and over-reliance upon others rather than intentional racialist special-pleading. His observations on the manse as "the lowest territorial and political unit to be found alike in India, Greece, Italy, Germany, and England," were taken from his reading of Grimm, Waitz, Kemble, von Maurer, Sir Henry Maine, and others.²¹ Never did Freeman attempt to pass off these interpretations as anything more or less than what seemed to be convincing arguments of scholars

²⁰Comparative Politics, 49, 354-55.

²¹Ibid., 407-12; see also Norman Conquest, 1:89-91.

who had worked more closely at particular sources than he. His argument for the existence of an elective monarchy among the early Teutonic tribes was inferred from passages in Bede, Tacitus, and the Peterborough Chronicle.²² And Freeman's particular contribution was the development of explanatory hypotheses from these widely accepted, at best definitive, accounts. For example, he considered that the city-centred cultures of ancient Greece and Italy produced brilliant, isolated, and short-lived political institutions, and that the development of a national culture in the absence of a preceding urban influence, while slower and more lack-lustre, had produced stability and relative permanence.²³ The preference for these qualities, for modern national life over that of the ancient world is in some sense a bias, but one from which few historians in any age have shaken free. Freeman praised the national ideal which he believed England best, but not solely, to represent. It was far better, he contended, that,

²² See Norman Conquest, 1:76-81.

²³ Comparative Politics, 115-16.

. . . instead of a single city bearing rule over subject cities and provinces, we have a political work more lasting, . . . more just and free . . . , the nation which knows no distinctions among its members, and which gives equal rights to the dwellers in every corner of its territory.²⁴

It is germane to question the accuracy of Freeman's boast that England enjoyed the most direct descent from primitive Teutonic civilization. Yet, leaving aside its accuracy, the claim was not one of an unmixed blessing for "the very cause which enables us to make it shuts us out from any claim to represent the general march of the Teutonic element in European affairs."²⁵ To charge, then, as does L. P. Curtis, that "to English or Anglo-Saxon culture Freeman attributed all that was most worth preserving and emulating in the affairs of civilized man,"²⁶ fails to do justice to the universal character of Freeman's historical vision.

The chief element in Freeman's Anglo-Saxonism, however, did lie in his belief that there was a continuity between the Englishmen of his own day and the heathens who manned the keels of Hengest and Horsa. This conviction and the tenaciousness with which he maintained it was the sub-

²⁴ Comparative Politics, 126-27.

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

²⁶ Curtis, Anglo-Saxons and Celts, 50.

ject of a number of scholarly controversies in which Freeman became involved and underlay all of his writings and speeches on English history. In an echo of Bishop Butler, Freeman often summarized his case by insisting: "In plain words, we are ourselves, and we are not somebody else. We, the English of the nineteenth century, are the same people as the English of the fifth and sixth centuries, and not some other people."

The very bluntness of this statement lends credibility to those critics who see in Freeman's views belief in the ethnic purity of the English nation in contradiction to the facts of British history.²⁷ It is difficult to defend Freeman against this charge, for he indeed held an unwarranted personal belief in the relative purity of English Teutonism. And he often carried his scholarly claims farther than his evidence would justify. But a balanced assessment of Freeman's work must give scope to the reservations and qualifications which he placed upon his theories. One of the earliest extended presentations of his views on this matter came in a series of lectures on

²⁷This is certainly the view expressed by Curtis in his assessment of Freeman's place in Anglo-Saxonist historiography; Anglo-Saxons and Celts, 79-81.

"The Origin of the English Nation," delivered before the Literary and Philosophical Institution at Kingston-on-Hull early in 1870.²⁸ From the first Freeman denied that the English were purely a Teutonic people; rather they were an essentially Teutonic people. He offered the analogy of a church which, from time to time, was altered in various ways without changing the essential portions.

So it is with our English nation, with our laws, our language, our national being. It is a Teutonic fabric and, in all that forms the personal identity of the fabric, it remains a Teutonic fabric to this day.²⁹

He did not deny that a good deal of inter-marriage occurred among the so-called Low-Dutch conquerors of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. and Britain's Welsh inhabitants or that Welsh language and culture made an impact upon the conquerors. But these influences were not co-equal; they were not sufficient to alter the basic character of English laws, language, and institutions. Even Roman influences, he insisted, had been assimilated with no great disfigurement of the Teutonic culture. This was due, in part, to the racial relationships of the island's later conquerors:

²⁸E. A. Freeman, "The Origins of the English Nation: Three Lectures," Macmillan's Magazine 21 (1870):415-31; 21 (1870):509-26; 22 (1870):31-46.

²⁹Ibid., 424.

The Dane hardly needed assimilation; he was little more than another kindred tribe coming later than the others. And even the Norman was a disguised kinsman; he was a Dane who had gone into Gaul to get covered with a French varnish, and who came into England to be washed clean again.³⁰

Unlike the Teutonic conquests on the continent, the conquest of Britain entailed an overthrow of existing institutions. Roman influences were re-imported to Britain by the missionaries, but they did not survive as an equal element in a new synthetic culture as was the case in continental Europe.

Freeman tried to rebut critics who had misrepresented or exaggerated his views in order to dismiss them. Contemporary references to his work, however, show that little heed was paid to these rebuttals. He did not deny the infusion of a large number of Celtic words into the English language after the English Conquest or an even larger Romance infusion after 1066. But he believed that the tongue remained essentially Teutonic and that this philological fact justified a "presumption" that the people remained a Teutonic people.³¹ Critics misinterpreted his statement that the original Celtic population of Britain was "in those parts of Britain which had become English at the end of the

³⁰"The Origin of the English Nation: Three Lectures," 429.

³¹Ibid., 35.

sixth century . . . as nearly extirpated as a nation can be." He did not believe that the whole Welsh population had been exterminated. In fact, his argument was limited only to certain parts of the island, at a certain time, and it never implied anything more extreme than the displacement of the Celts as a coherent nation, to such a degree that the Teutonic character of the invaders was not significantly altered.

In response to criticisms of scientists that no nation could claim to be racially pure or that recent phrenological evidence proved the existence of many different racial groups in different parts of England, Freeman replied that this was not the plane of his argument. In an Oxford lecture of 1887 he repeated that it was impossible to prove an original community of blood in any race or nation; yet even if such could be proved, "adoption, intermarriage, and the like, have always taken place to such an extent as to destroy any claim on the part of any nation to physical purity of blood."³² Further, he maintained that the greater contact which any group had with other nations, the more likely it would be to experience these phenomena. Yet neither this fact nor the discovery of

³²E. A. Freeman, Four Oxford Lectures, 77;

Iberian or British skulls in England's graves affected his portrait of the practical and historical English nation.

In "Race and Language,"³³ which he himself called "the keenest bit of reasoning" he had done, Freeman worked out his definition of a nation, the definition on which his so-called Anglo-Saxonist theory turns. The historical nation may be in large measure formed artificially. Adopting to his own purposes Sir Henry Maine's research on kinship in history, Freeman noted that all societies have grown by means of both natural and artificial kinship. The best model was the Roman gens, originally related by blood, but coming in time to be an artificial family, swelled by the legal fiction of adoption, but no less kindred. He then applied this model to the development of the modern English nation, and, having often traced the development of the artificial Greek nation from its original Hellenic stock, he did not find this at all far-fetched. There was a place in any nation for naturalization, and there was little or no distinction to be drawn between Englishmen who had become naturalized to English character, culture, and institutions. At times, to be sure, Freeman allowed his personal and political prejudices to get the

³³"Race and Language," 176-234:

better of his judgment in making remarks in contravention of this belief. But for scholarly purposes he always maintained that the term nation or race had meaning really only when defined according to strict canons. By such a definition, he maintained, his nation had enjoyed a continuous national existence time out of mind.³⁴

These views embroiled Freeman in a number of scholarly controversies almost to the day of his death. In a number of articles he strenuously denied the claims of men like Henry Coote, Charles H. Pearson, and Luke Owen Pike that the civilization of Roman Britain lived on through the English Conquest. It was, of course, his own belief that what few remnants of Roman civilization had survived after the departure of the Imperial legions had been swept away by the barbarians. The permanence of Roman culture in Britain, he argues, would surely have produced a situation far more similar to that in Gaul than existed. Using primarily philological evidence, he claimed that the displacement of Celtic and Roman nomenclature by Teutonic names indicated the totality of the Conquest.³⁵ The insis-

³⁴"Race and Language," 195-98.

³⁵"Alleged Permanence of Roman Civilization in England," 211-28:

tence by these writers that similarities existed between certain legal and political institutions of the Romans and the English seemed to Freeman to display an insensitivity to universal and comparative history where it was often shown that similar institutions and procedures developed without reference one to the other.³⁶ And even though contemporary scholars would not agree unreservedly with Freeman on this matter, it is clear that the theory of Roman permanence is even more a Victorian relic. As late as 1890 the old warrior attacked an American, P. B. Du Chaillu, for his contention that the early English were really Scandinavian Vikings, not Angles and Saxons at all.³⁷ And he criticized Frederick Seebohm's more formidable thesis that Roman manorialism was continued in the Anglo-Saxon agricultural system.³⁸ Stripped of the occasional excesses of language, Freeman's historical arguments for the continuity of an English and primarily Teutonic nation as compared with the national experiences of the continental

³⁶"Alleged Permanence of Roman Civilization in England," 227-28. See also Freeman to Bryce, 8 May 1870, Bryce MSS., V, ff. 244-47.

³⁷E. A. Freeman, "The Latest Theories on the Origin of the English," Contemporary Review 57 (1890):36-51; cf. P. B. Du Chaillu, The Viking Age (London, 1889).

³⁸See Frederic Seebohm, The English Village Community (London, 1889).

peoples has stood up fairly well.³⁹

Less enduring, however, has been the other pillar of Freeman's Teutonism, the belief that English political institutions displayed an unbroken continuity from their first appearance on British soil to his own day. The message was preached constantly and worked out in specialist studies on the House of Lords and other institutions. It was a pivotal point in his history of the Norman Conquest that the English constitution developed organically from the glorious constitution of the pre-Conquest English nation and was not significantly different from it. Further, with his friend Stubbs, he believed that, of all modern Teutonic peoples, the English had best preserved an uninterrupted political heritage.

Always fascinated by political-or legal-survivals from earlier ages, Freeman, like many Teutonists, had a special reverence for the annual Landesgemeinden, the direct popular assemblies held in the cantons of rural Switzerland. His attendance at these exercises in 1863 and 1864 affected him deeply. He wrote after returning to England that the experience was "the realization of a dream" of "all that

³⁹See G. O. Sayles, The Mediaeval Foundations of England (London, 1950), 20, 277.

has been the object of the fondest imagination," for he believed that he had seen a remnant of the Teutonic constitution described in the Germania of Tacitus.⁴⁰ Yet while the Swiss assemblies provided the most direct images of ancient democracy, Freeman believed that they were primarily "relics," little more than district assemblies. For the institutions of the English, however, he claimed "the most unbroken descent from the primitive Teutonic stock," for,

alone among the political assemblies of the greater states of Europe, the parliament of England can trace its unbroken descent from the Teutonic institutions of the earliest times. There is absolutely no gap between the meeting of the Witan of Wessex which confirmed the laws of Aelfred . . . and the meeting of the first Great Council of the Nation which will come together in a few days within the precincts of the home of the confessor.⁴¹

In the Swiss assemblies, the germ of the Teutonic constitution was preserved; in the 'annals of the British parliament its flowering could best be traced.

Freeman never made a systematic study of the English constitution. He chose rather to rely largely on the work of Stubbs and Hallam. In 1872, however, he gave a series of popular lectures later published as The Growth of the English Constitution, his most ringing

⁴⁰ [E. A. Freeman], "The Landesgemeinden of Uri and Appenzall," Saturday Review 17 (1864):622-24.

⁴¹ Comparative Politics, 47.

and least judicious paean to national history. On the continent, he claimed, Teutonic freedom, save in small corners, had died out; but in the island kingdom, "the continental national life of the people, notwithstanding foreign conquests and internal revolutions, has remained unbroken for fourteen hundred years."⁴² He did not intend to imply that English political institutions had not been altered during this period, nor did he profess a crude Whiggism, suggesting that the constitution had advanced from strength to strength until it had reached its nineteenth-century pinnacle.⁴³ Rather, he advanced an essentialist argument that the primitive constitution was, in essence, a balanced system, with political rights and privileges for a king, a nobility, and the common people, with ultimate sovereignty reposing in the people. In spite of foreign conquest or successful usurpation, the essence of this constitution remained, dormant perhaps, but always vital in theory, without a break since the time it accompanied the Saxon conquerors.⁴⁴

⁴²Growth of the English Constitution, 19.

⁴³See Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (New York, 1965), 1-8.

⁴⁴Growth of the English Constitution, passim., especially 158-59.

Freeman sought to describe the evolution of the constitution in terms of a continuous revival of first principles, in forms designed to meet novel political realities, those principles becoming more hallowed with each revival. He noted that the pre-Conquest era had been characterized by a growth of royal power, the replacement of a traditional aristocracy of birth by a new aristocracy of personal service to the Crown, and the diminution of the prerogatives of the freeman as the nation grew in size. The Norman Conquest did not sweep away, but affirmed this constitution, altered as it may have been for William's purposes. The ancient Witenagemot lived on in the House of Lords as a theoretically popular, but practically restricted assembly. In 1265, however, the summoning by Simon de Montfort of a House of Commons restored in a more glorious fashion the latent principle of popular sovereignty. In the same way, by the sixteenth century, Parliament had become little more than a rubber-stamp for the tyranny of Henry VIII. Henry's scrupulous regard for the niceties of constitutional government, however, strengthened the very principles which his reign seemed to mock. It was thus "easier for another and happier generation again to kindle the form into its ancient spirit and life: . . . the very degradation of our ancient constitution was a step to its revival with new

strength and in a more perfect form."⁴⁵

Freeman concluded that the nineteenth century was witnessing a further restoration of a number of ancient constitutional practices which "cast aside the legal subtleties which grew up from the twelfth century to the seventeenth."⁴⁶ The Reform Act of 1867, for example, had re-established the principle, wittingly or no, that the life of Parliament was independent of the life of the sovereign, thus bringing nineteenth-century practice into line with that of the eleventh century. So too, the folk-land or public property which had, after the Norman Conquest, become part of the reigning monarch's personal wealth was given over to be disposed of by Parliament for the common weal. Freeman even claimed to see a cyclical reform in the Act of Settlement, which, "by direct operation of Law" made by a free Parliament, made the monarchy of William and his descendants the gift of the English people.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Growth of the English Constitution, 106-07.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 154-55.

At times Freeman's descriptions of constitutional development come perilously close to the metaphysical tone which he abhorred. He proclaimed that a national "spirit" of popular rights was revealed in the support of the English assembly for Earl Godwine in the eleventh century and the drafting of the Petition of Right in the seventeenth.⁴⁸ It would be wrong, however, to attribute any metaphysical speculation to Freeman. Part of his ambiguity stems from his tendency to write in the style of the national epic, a tendency encouraged by his writing popular lectures. His analyses often turn on loose definitions of the English "constitution" or "spirit" which he drew from diverse historical events. The ancient Teutonic constitution he believed to be at one with contemporary political reality in England. The continuous existence in English history of a belief in personal liberty and popular sovereignty, however much submerged, constituted the English "spirit."⁴⁹ However elusive these concepts are in themselves, never would Freeman have con-

⁴⁸Life and Letters, 1:125; Norman Conquest, 5:333-35.

⁴⁹Growth of the English Constitution, 12-15.

ceived of a "world-spirit" or "national-spirit" as an active agent in history, moving history either consciously or by an unconscious process like the cunning of reason. English history had revealed a cultural tradition of "love of Liberty ;" such a spirit did not operate independently of men, nor was its existence inevitable or eternal. Rather, even though the English were a Teutonic people with what Freeman believed to be a characteristic love of freedom, accident and good fortune were equally important in preserving the constitution. That constitution had, after all, been interrupted in Teutonic Europe. There is a striking paradox in Tudor despotism helping to guarantee the preservation of popular institutions, but this was not inevitable. In spite of the bluster which came so easily to Freeman on the platform, he believed that the facts of English history demonstrated that the libertarian spirit in England was primarily a cultural tradition, based more on immemorial precedent than on abstract theories.

Freeman's reputation as a Teutonist is also based on the expressions of mutual admiration between himself and a whole generation of American Teutonist historians, notably Herbert Baxter Adams of Johns Hopkins University.⁵⁰

⁵⁰See Adams, "Freeman, the Scholar and the Professor," 231-45.

In the winter of 1881-82 the Englishman toured the United States. In his popular lectures he insisted that the essential character of the American people was English, and, by extension, Teutonic:

. . . the institutions of the American states form a natural and important part of the institutions of the Teutonic race, and specially the English branch of it.⁵¹

Freeman refused to be called a foreigner by his American hosts, insisting upon their common Englishry, and denying claims that the War of Independence had created a new "nation."⁵² The United States, while not yet the polyglot society she was to become, was still a far more ethnically mixed people than the British. Yet to the distinguished visitor it seemed that "though the infusion of foreign elements has been large, yet it is the English kernel which has assimilated the foreign elements." He believed that, analogous to the Romance cantons which united with the older Swiss cantons, a "wholly distinct people had adopted the

⁵¹ Introduction to American . . . History, 15.

⁵² See below, pp. 306-07.

history and legend of the body into which it has been itself adopted."⁵³

Freeman encouraged the belief of American Teutonists⁵⁴ that American experience demonstrated the aptness of Teutonic institutions for a spacious and newly settled country. Americans had adopted institutions which were part of a common political heritage. The two countries enjoyed a community of law and language. Freeman delighted American audiences, accustomed to hearing their speech disparaged by Britons, by positive comment on American adherence to older, simpler forms and recognition of American dialects as a part of the richness and diversity of English national culture.⁵⁵ In American courts, too, "the real life of English law and justice, . . . all the essential principles [and] . . . forms are there."⁵⁶ The

⁵³Introduction to American . . . History, 18-19.

⁵⁴E.g., Herbert Baxter Adams, John Fiske, J. A. Doyle, and students of the Hopkins Seminar, including Woodrow Wilson.

⁵⁵E. A. Freeman, Some Impressions of the United States (London, 1883), 52-54.

⁵⁶Ibid., 93.

heritage of pre-Revolutionary commonlaw and the respect shown for English decisions even after independence seemed to confirm the common legal foundations of the two English societies.

Freeman's lectures were welcomed enthusiastically by American Teutonists and institutional historians who were dragging American historiography toward the methodological standards and more universal perspective of European historiography. He advised a number of young American historians personally, including Hannis Taylor,⁵⁷ who journeyed from Mobile to St. Louis just to see him. And the buildings and publications of the Johns Hopkins Seminar, one of the hot-beds of American Teutonism, were graced with his name, motto, and portrait, while he was hailed by its director "as the founder of our new walls."⁵⁸

Freeman's Teutonism runs through nearly all of his writing on English history and much of his writing on general history. In the Old English History, for example,

⁵⁷Hannis Taylor, an American lawyer and scholar, was the American Minister to Spain from 1893-97 and the author of The Origins of the English Constitution.

⁵⁸H. B. Adams, to Freeman, 12 January 1885, Freeman MSS.

after telling his young readers a stirring tale of the bravery of Caradoc and Boadicea, he reminded them, ". . . it is right that you should know about them and care for them. But you should care for Arminius a great deal more, for though he did not live in our land, he was our own kinsman, our bone and our flesh," for, without the victory at Teutoburg, "Perhaps we should not be a nation at all."⁵⁹ The halting of Roman culture, he claimed in another place, kept northern Teutons from becoming part of the mass of artificial Romans; ". . . we should have been civilized before our time, we should have had our national being civilized out of us; or rather we should have been civilized to death before we reached the stage of having a national being at all."⁶⁰ He encouraged Teutonic studies on both sides of the Atlantic, taking special interest in the comparative studies of John Fiske⁶¹ and Icelandic studies of Vigfusson's student Frederick York Powell,⁶²

⁵⁹Old English History, 22.

⁶⁰Lectures to American Audiences, 117.

⁶¹"Another Study of American Government," 470.

⁶²See Elton, Life of York Powell, 1:141.

and paying due homage to work of his friend Stubbs. "Never," he wrote of the Constitutional History, "was the true Teutonic character of the English nation and its institutions more fully and clearly put forth as it is by Mr. Stubbs."⁶³ And in one of his many calls to Oxford to reform itself, the Regius Professor in 1887 deplored what he called not merely "passive neglect or ignorance of Teutonic studies," but "a positive dislike to them," to Freeman just another symptom of "the Englishman's wonderful fancy for turning his back on himself and wishing to make himself out to be anything rather than himself."⁶⁴

One of the better known facts about Freeman's work is that he resolved to make the fullest possible use of Anglo-Saxon words as opposed to those of Latin origin, with mixed results for his style. Behind this apparent idiosyncrasy, however, lay a fundamental belief that by straying too far from its Teutonic vocabulary the English language had deteriorated. Contrary to the fashion of the age, he assured Englishmen of the beauty, strength, and facility of their tongue and reviled those journalists

⁶³[E. A. Freeman], "Mr. Stubbs' Constitutional History," Saturday Review 38 (1874):214.

⁶⁴E. A. Freeman, "Literature and Language," Contemporary Review 52 (1887):577.

and men-of-letters who were incapable of writing "plain, straightforward English," maintaining that only he, a few other scholars, and the mass of English plough-boys remained faithful to the national tongue.⁶⁵ While Matthew Arnold was characteristically mistaken in his observation that Freeman "saw all things in Teutonism as Malebranche saw all things in God,"⁶⁶ the historian extended his Teutonism to his architectural writings. He entered into a dispute over whether to re-build the British Foreign Office in the Classic or Gothic style, saying that the work of architect George Gilbert Scott, a long-time correspondent, was "purely and nobly Teutonic," that "Gothic architecture is the architecture of the Teutonic race," and that in a Teutonic country the choice should be obvious.⁶⁷

A number of developments have played a part in discrediting nineteenth-century Teutonist historiography. Freeman himself and a host of less cautious writers often slipped from the mere description and explanation of

⁶⁵Address to the London Institution, 6 May 1875, reported in the Times, 8 May 1875, 13.

⁶⁶Times, 17 March 1892, 5.

⁶⁷[E. A. Freeman], "The Foreign Office: Classical or Gothic," National Review 10 (1860):45.

cultural differences among European nations to blind racial animosity. Others adopted racial or cultural factors as exclusive or over-balanced explanatory tools, or they used them in a slovenly fashion.⁶⁸ Racial and cultural influences ~~came under~~ some suspicion within the discipline as being impossible to define with any accuracy, or when defined as carefully as Freeman did, so vague and general as to be useless. It can be argued, however, that no development in the scholarly world did as much to discredit Teutonism as did the semi-permanent state of war which existed between Germany and Great Britain for nearly half a century.⁶⁹ Reflecting what must have been a common sentiment in England during the First World War, Edith Thompson, author of the History of England in Freeman's Historical Course for Schools, wrote with concern to her publisher:

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Goldwin Smith, Irish History and Irish Character (Oxford, 1861), 3-20, *passim.* or J. A. Froude, The English in the West Indies (London, 1888).

⁶⁹ P. M. Kennedy, "Decline of Nationalist History in the West, 1900-70," Journal of Contemporary History 8 (1973):77-100.

I am troubled with the question, how far am I at liberty to modify the Teutonic views of my dear master E. A. Freeman. I do not think it is merely their present unpopularity that weighs with me. Events have proved that, if we are Teutonic, our Teutonism is very different than that of the Germans.⁷⁰

But at no time did Freeman ever claim the contrary. He had always insisted that Englishmen had more in common racially and culturally with the Frisians, the Flemings, the Dutch, Danes, and even the Normans than with the so-called High-Dutch of Prussia who dominated the German Confederation.⁷¹ Freeman's theory of a general unity of Teutonic peoples came almost solely from his understanding of the primary and leading secondary sources of ancient and mediaeval history, and he always stood ready to modify his conclusion in the face of convincing evidence. Freeman, and indirectly his biographer, contributed to the exaggeration of his Teutonism. In his private and polemical public remarks, Freeman often dispensed with his cautious and reasoned observations on Teutonic unity and stated them quite crudely. These "indiscreet obiter

⁷⁰Edith Thompson to Sir F. Macmillan, 30 August 1916, BM Add. MSS 55078, ff. 78-79.

⁷¹"Origins of the English Nation," 422-28.

dicta" as L. P. Curtis calls them,⁷² and not the historian's formal scholarship have been the basis for most historiographical comment on Freeman's Teutonism.

It cannot be doubted, however, that the spirit of nationalism which infused the work of writers from Michelet to Macaulay to Manzoni touched Freeman also. If he over-represented the nationalist fervor of the unlettered masses, he certainly understood the depth of national feeling among educated Europeans of his day. For this reason he considered the history of the West a far superior course of study than Oriental history. Whereas the latter he perceived as no more than "the history of a mere succession of empires and dynasties," the former was a study of nations in their truest sense, "the history of the people. . . . the history of man in his highest political character."⁷³ In the despotic empires of the East history seemed to be no more than the annals of great men and their submissive, anonymous subjects, while in the nations of the West, the nation as a whole made its history with great men appearing only as they were needed.

⁷²Curtis, Anglo-Saxons and Celts, 81.

⁷³General Sketch of European History, 2-3.

Freeman's conception of what constituted a nation was roughly hewn. "The ideal nation then," he explained in the Scottish Geographical Magazine in 1891, "is to be found where a continuous territory is inhabited by a people united under one government, and all of them speaking the same language, a language which is not spoken by any other people."⁷⁴ The test of language he admitted to be only a partial and practical one. Race was, to be sure, often an important factor, but it was one which "works in such silent and uncertain ways that we cannot reckon on it as an element in our calculations." He conceded that this definition was an abstract and general one, that perhaps none of the great nations of the civilized world answered to it, but that the nearer a state approached these criteria, the more likely it was that a sense of national unity would develop.⁷⁵ Neither were these the only prerequisites for a sense of nationhood. National sentiment could arise from a rational calculation of political interest which could unite even the most

⁷⁴"Britannic Confederation," 347.

⁷⁵Ibid., 346.

heterogeneous elements, as in Switzerland. The common and exclusive sympathies which define a nation could also be the result of what J. S. Mill called the "identity of political antecedents," the sense of common fellowship in the events of the past, in a common political, cultural, or religious heritage.⁷⁶ No one factor could be called necessary and sufficient, but combinations of these elements in varying proportions had resulted in producing a self-evident national being, as with the Greeks who, in spite of a large admixture of foreign blood and being scattered throughout the Mediterranean and Asia, retained a sense of common nationhood.⁷⁷

The glorification of the nation is nowhere more apparent than in the strong and, occasionally, strident national pride which Freeman displayed toward his own people. By no means did he wish to suggest that English or any other national history could be examined in isolation, but he believed that there was a need for scholars who

⁷⁶ [E. A. Freeman], "Nationalities," Saturday Review 13 (1862):49.

⁷⁷ [E. A. Freeman], "The Later Greek Nation," British Quarterly Review 68 (1878):172.

could give "the devotion of a life" to specialist study and to relating English history to Western civilization.⁷⁸ Freeman's was a familiar voice in calling for the editing and printing of the most important English source materials as quickly as possible. Conscious that other hands might be better suited to specialist study in English history, he prodded his colleagues and students to write on the subject. In 1863 he wrote to the learned antiquary Edwin Guest: "How I do wish you would put all these detached papers together into a 'History of the English Conquest of Britain.' It would surely be the greatest work on British history ever put forth."⁷⁹ Stubbs, Bryce, J. R. Green, William Hunt, Kate Norgate, and others received similar exhortations from Somerleaze. And even the historical fiction of Bulwer-Lytton was singled out for special praise for its role in raising the level of English historical and national consciousness.⁸⁰

To this task Freeman turned his own talents as

⁷⁸"St. John's Four Conquests of England," 49.

⁷⁹Freeman to E. Guest, 27 February 1863, Bodleian Misc. Eng. Letters, e. 30, ff. 175-76.

⁸⁰Thoughts on the Study of History, 12; see also Poems, Legendary and Historical, 167.

well. The "Songs of Conquest" in his early volume of poems presented in ballad form the fruits of research into English history "to make the picture more vivid in the eyes of the historical student" and to edify the general reader.⁸¹ The heroic roll-call included Waltheof "for England's right and freedom / He knelt him down to die" and Harold, "Britain's mightiest lord" who bore "the crown a free-born people gave." But it was the English people who were the heroes of his epic; while the "sons of Godwin" fell for English national freedom, the nation preserved its heritage:

We have conquered, we have conquered,
 Though not on tented plain,
 But the laws and tongue of Alfred,
 We have won them back again.
 The boasted might of Normandy
 For aye is laid to rest,
 But the name of Saxon freedom
 Still warms each faithful breast.⁸²

The national pride expressed in such doggerel also infused the historian's scholarly prose as well. And in the Old English History Freeman sought to foster in his own and all English children a deep pride in their nation's popular history. His account of the reigns of Aethelred

⁸¹Poems, Legendary and Historical, 165-66.

⁸²Ibid., 198.

the Unready and Edmund Ironside is designed to demonstrate the wisdom and valor of the English people, willing and able to resist the invasions of the Danes in spite of treason, misfortune, and inadequate leadership.⁸³ And in another place the development of the Reformation in England was ascribed to the character of the "free, enterprising, and dominant nation" whose movement for national independence "incidentally became a theological one."⁸⁴

Freeman took for granted that every man should revere his own nation and its history. Yet he firmly believed that the English people and their historical experience were unique in the West. Sheltered in their island fortress, the English received less Roman influence and received it later than did their continental brethren. He considered that Britain's insular position was one of the central determinants in her history and made her a uniquely independent nation. Thus, the thought of a tunnel link with France was a most disheartening prospect, truly

⁸³Old English History, 232.

⁸⁴"National Prosperity and the Reformation," 221.

selling one's birthright for a mess of pottage.⁸⁵ Unlike jingoes Carlyle and Kingsley, Freeman cared little for even military or imperial glory compared to the preservation of England's independent historical and political heritage:⁸⁶ He sought to awaken his countrymen to the continuity of English history, "the contrast between the steady course of freedom in England and its fitful rises and falls in France," for this he believed to be a mark of English genius. "It is this sort of bit-by-bit reform which has saved us alike from magnificent theories and from massacres in the cause of humanity."⁸⁷ In this way, when Freeman portrayed the heroes and villains of English history, it was with an eye to their "English spirit" and to their role with respect to the preservation of English independence and insularity. The Confessor was pilloried in the pages of the Norman Conquest for gathering

⁸⁵"Alter Orbis," 1041-60.

⁸⁶See, e.g., Kingsley's Westward Ho! (London, 1855), or Carlyle's Past and Present (1843) (London, 1897), Book IV, Chapter 3.

⁸⁷E. A. Freeman, "The Continuity of English History," in Historical Essays, 1:45.

"French favourites" about the throne, and Henry III was criticized as "the only king [of England] who habitually conspired with the Pope against his own people."⁸⁸ Simon de Montfort, on the other hand, a native of France, was hailed as "the founder of the later liberties of England," and was revered as the man who brought Normans and English, nobles and commons, clergy and laity together in defense of national freedom.⁸⁹ There is even grudging admiration paid by Freeman to the "reactionary" Tudors. Henry VIII, whatever his immoral motives, secured English religion in its traditional form and its independence of papal authority. Elizabeth I, "vain, irresolute, mean, cruel, jealous," and "coarse and savage in her personal tastes," earned Freeman's respect for enhancing England's prosperity and independence and realizing "that the sceptre of the old Bretwalda was a nobler prize than shadowy dreams of continental aggrandizement."⁹⁰ Freeman sensed in these two monarchs a conspicuously national character. Both Henry and Elizabeth:

⁸⁸E. A. Freeman, The History of the Cathedral Church of Wells (London, 1870), 105-06.

⁸⁹Growth of the English Constitution, 70-71.

⁹⁰"Queen Elizabeth and Her Favourites," 209.

. . . whatever else they were, good or bad, were thoroughly English offspring of English parents, identified in every point of language, habits, and feelings with the common mass of their people, who saw in their ruler only the most exalted of their own number, and did not abhor the despotism of one who was felt to be the true impersonation of national character.⁹¹

For the man who spoke of the officially-sainted Prince Albert as "the meddling foreigner to whom we pay such high wages," such a national character no doubt counted for a great deal.⁹²

All too often, however, a sense of the individuality of one's national history can be a prelude to national chauvinism, and, all too often with Freeman, it was. He never shrank from his belief in the superiority of English character and institutions. Even his chief criticism of Theodor Mommsen was that the German scholar "does not understand living things like an Englishman."⁹³ Yet Freeman tried to maintain a sense of respect for the history and

⁹¹"Queen Elizabeth and Her Favourites."

⁹²Joan Evans, Time and Chance (London, 1943), 205.

⁹³Freeman to Bryce, 12 March 1883, Bryce MSS. VIII, ff. 76-80.

character of other nations. He made a sincere attempt in his General Sketch of European History and Historical Geography of Europe to relate the histories of all European nations in the proportion which general and universal history required. He took great interest in the histories of other nations and urged his students to be mindful of the varieties of national culture. He displayed a deep admiration for the Swiss achievement of forging a multi-racial, multi-lingual nation against terrible odds. And he marveled at the sense of national unity and purpose which he perceived in the Dutch people in their struggles against foreign dominance and physical disadvantages. As he wrote in a review of J. L. Motley:

. . . the sublime thing about Hollanders is that they have created a country for themselves. . . . Never has there been a contest, . . . comparable to that war of liberation. . . . It was a fight of patriotism and piety against tyranny and superstition. It was the fight of a little nation against the greatest nation then existing. And it was fought single-handed.⁹⁴

Freeman tried to adopt a Mazzinian respect for the customs of other nations. He believed that, while an historian could make qualitative aesthetic judgments about the cultural achievements of different nations, it must be recognized that all such achievements were "equal in the

⁹⁴"Holland: Its Martyrs and Heroes," 380.

eye of piety" and important enough to "national feeling" to make that a paramount feature in their evaluation.⁹⁵

No one would take serious issue with the contention that Freeman's history is, with respect to its Teutonism and nationalism, dated and unsuitable for contemporary historical study. It is not clear, however, that his work is without merit, especially with respect to other histories of the period. Teutonism has largely been discredited in the discipline, and artless and vocal writers like Freeman were easy targets for literary ridicule, as when G. K. Chesterton quipped most unfairly: "A man who loves England for being English will not mind how she arose. But a man who loves England for being Anglo-Saxon may . . . end by maintaining that the Norman Conquest was a Saxon Conquest."⁹⁶ Yet Freeman denied that he ever "pandered to the rant and cant about the great Anglo-Saxon race,"⁹⁷ and he seldom carried his largely derivative Teutonic theories to conclusions for which he could not find support. In contributing to the investigation and

⁹⁵E. A. Freeman, Remarks on the Architecture of Llandalf Cathedral (Tenby, 1850), 47.

⁹⁶G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (London, 1909), 127-28.

⁹⁷Preservation . . . of Church Monuments, 55.

employment of a particular explanatory theory according to the hallowed canons of historical criticism and encouraging others to do likewise, Freeman may have done a good deal toward the overthrow of his own operating assumptions. If so, his work in this area accomplished all that he or any other serious historian ever wished. Sir Frederick Pollock recognized the importance of Freeman's work, indicating that before Freeman and Stubbs had published their researches, "men wrote about the 'mark system' as if they thought it was an idol or fetish carried in procession on a long pole and worshipped by the Witan. . . ." ⁹⁸

It is an easy matter to find evidence of nationalist excess in Freeman's writing, but it would be a mistake to think that he would countenance slanting one's judgements on national grounds. He once attacked Charles Kingsley for his contention that to judge Elizabeth I as avaricious was legitimate for a "republican" author like J. L. Motley but not for an Englishman like J. A. Froude. Freeman's reaction was emphatic:

⁹⁸F. Pollock to Freeman, 27 April 1884, Freeman MSS.

[Kingsley's] main criterion of historical evidence is, apparently, to ask what is the truly English view to take. As Englishmen are loyal, it is truly English to interpret everything in favour of their great monarchs; and as the English are intensely Protestant, it is truly English to connect the greatness of their monarchs with their Protestantism.⁹⁹

Carried to its logical conclusion, Kingsley's ideal seemed to Freeman to make history a hand-maiden to nationalism, religion, and political ideology. When writing about Elizabeth, then,

. . . a good Englishman will swear by her thick and thin. A Republican will naturally see faults in her, because he does not care about Queens, and a Catholic will justifiably suspect her of atrocious crimes, because she preferred being a heretic. Quot homines, tot historici -- a dismal prospect for readers, and one that makes us think that, after all, something may be said in favour of the dull plan of writing history according to the balance of evidence.¹⁰⁰

For all the intensity of his national feeling, Freeman consciously tried to limit the effects of such feeling in his history, and, by comparison to writers like Kingsley and Froude in England, Thiers, Michelet, and even Duruy in France, and Droysen and Treitschke in Germany, he succeeded relatively well. Indeed, the Norman Conquest was written,

⁹⁹"Personal Theory of History," 11.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

as R. W. Church commented, "from a passionate affection for one side, yet with a conscientious impartiality. . . ." ¹⁰¹ Of course, nationalism colored and narrowed Freeman's vision in ways perhaps unknown to him, but it was most often guarded against, and it did inspire important contributions to English historical writing. The Old English History, for example, was recognized in a pre-publication report as meeting an important educational need. "It is not too much to say that this is the first time in which the great Foundation Period of our history has had anything like justice done to it in any manual." ¹⁰² It is of the greatest importance, then, to see Freeman as a nationalist but not a propagandist. Even his most elementary histories encourage historical study and criticism rather than silent acquiescence in what purported to be a definitive narrative. Sir Adolphus William Ward once wrote to Freeman, noting with admiration and thankfulness "the spirit which you more than any other man have

¹⁰¹R. W. Church to Freeman, 18 September 1869, Freeman MSS.

¹⁰²See BM Add. MSS. 55931, ff. 79-81

infused into the present generation for the study of our early history. . . . Your books, great and small, are becoming living influences."¹⁰³ If this be true, over a long period, then, the fruits of Freeman's nationalist and European enthusiasms may best be evaluated in the pages of later English scholars and in the continued popular interest in the historical discipline.

¹⁰³A. W. Ward to Freeman, 20 June 1871, Freeman MSS.

CHAPTER IX
FREEMAN'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Analyses of Freeman's life and thought customarily characterize this historian's political activities as those of a strident, but essentially uncritical follower of William Ewart Gladstone and adherent of the Liberal Party. Some view Freeman as a political Radical who, with most Radicals of his age, found shelter within the rambling philosophical rooming-house that was the Liberal Party.¹ Any close scrutiny of Freeman's political ideas, however, reveals a number of distinctly anti-Radical and anti-progressive positions and attitudes. It may be argued that these discrepancies are not more than the contradictions and incoherencies that accompany the political thinking of most of us who are not trained political philosophers, or they might be attributed to personal eccentricities or unreasoned ad hoc pronouncements.

¹See Strick, English Historiography: 1859-90, passim; J. M. Davidson, Eminent English Radicals in and Out of Parliament (London, 1880), 288-300. For an examination of the relationship between Gladstone and the Radical wing of his Party, see Michael Barker, Gladstone and Radicalism (Brighton, Sussex, 1974), passim.

Perhaps a more reliable clue to Freeman's often strange but stirring political philosophy is provided by James Bryce in an obituary for his friend and mentor, noting that Freeman's politics were bound up with his conception of history. This connection was not merely intellectual, but at times was almost total, in what Bryce called "this habit of living in an atmosphere in which the past was no less real to him than the present. . . ." ² In bandying about Freeman's characteristic dictum, historiographers often concentrate their attention upon the first part, that "history is past politics," an aphorism which they have marked out for demolition. It may be more enlightening here to consider his belief that "politics is present history," a belief held so thoroughly that, as Bryce recalls, Freeman's addresses to the rural voters of Somerset in his unsuccessful campaign in the election of 1868 were larded with references to Ptolemy Euergetes and to the Landesgemeinden of Uri and Appenzall. ³ Freeman wrote no political philosophy as such; generalization about his political philosophy can be drawn from short remarks in his histories, tracts, and letters. His ad hoc political writings swelled his literary output, and while much of it

²Bryce, "Edward Augustus Freeman," 505.

³Ibid.

is ephemeral and repetitive, the passions and convictions of the historian are made quite explicit. And Freeman did not confine his political activities to the armchair or the study, occasionally issuing written thunder-bolts from Somerleaze. He was an indefatigable (if at times fatiguing) orator and preacher who would travel far afield to address a crowd for a favorite cause or a friend seeking office. From these sources the historiographer may gain some sense of Freeman's general political principles and the way in which those principles bore constant reference to his conceptions of universal morality and historical continuity.

A source of confusion to those who would try to categorize Freeman's political sympathies on the basis of any number of scattered pronouncements on certain subjects is the variety of both positive and negative judgments on nearly all legitimate political forms which can be found throughout his writings. It would not be difficult to put down one book, secure in the belief that the author's sympathies were decidedly republican, only to find that the next selection from Freeman examined would reveal as great a satisfaction with monarchy or an admiration for aristocratic government. This historian of federal government and very staunch defender of that constitutional arrangement whenever it came under attack after the civil wars in

Switzerland and the United States, was aghast at the prospect of a federal system in the United Kingdom, and he wrote extensively and with force in opposition to such a notion.

There can be no charge of confusion or fickleness, however; indeed, a far truer maxim concerning Freeman's thought in any area is that, having come to a decision on a matter of principle and its application in a particular area, he held to it doggedly. In fact, a thorough study of all that Freeman left indicates a very high degree of coherency and consistency.

It is not unfair to say that his most cherished sympathies were republican.⁴ His letters from Switzerland reflect an exhilaration at being in a republican state, and his sketches of the venerable Republic of Ragusa and the Republic of Venice in the modern era and the Roman Republic

⁴Freeman's republicanism was completely unrelated to any serious republican political activity in Victorian Britain. The rural scholar had no contact with working-class republican organizations -- in fact, he had little contact with any urban workingman's organizations -- and his reaction to the middle-class republicanism of Dilke and Bradlaugh was lukewarm. He had a certain sympathy for their ideas, but he thought them impractical for Britain in the nineteenth century.

in the classical era are explicit in their praise of republican government. In 1862 he wrote to fellow Hellenophile George Finlay to discuss the widely mooted proposal that Gladstone be named King of Greece. Freeman was hesitant to become deeply involved in the scheme despite his personal respect for Gladstone as a man and as a student of Greek affairs: ". . . I am afraid I am too republican to urge anybody's kingship with a really good heart."⁵ It is most likely that this sentiment came not from any study of republican theoreticians nor from associations with radical political reformers of his own day; he had no taste for political theory, and none of his acquaintances even approached the type of radical perspective he brought to his political thinking.⁶ In any case, Freeman was far too independent in such matters ever to make himself a follower of any theorist. Rather, his infatuation with republicanism was rooted in his study of the ancient world,

⁵Freeman to G. Finlay, 12 November 1862, Life and Letters, 1:283.

⁶Of all Freeman's correspondents, Goldwin Smith was perhaps the most outspoken. Other friends, like Bryce and A. V. Dicey, were too much involved in practical politics to adopt the uncompromising positions which Freeman expressed. Even W. T. Stead, for whom Freeman had expressed deep admiration in the early years of Stead's Northern Echo, drew the historian's ire for moderating his criticism of British foreign policy.

especially the more glorious periods of the Greek and Roman commonwealths. The rich political life of the ancient free-states was revered by the historian. Thus, it is not surprising that the institutions of kingship and hereditary nobility seemed a regression and that the relatively closed political society of his own day seemed to be a pale reflection of the dynamic polities of the past. From Geneva in 1863 he wrote to Finlay:

Truly it is comfortable to be here and breathe the air of a republic for a season. I really feel myself nearer to my Achaians here than you are. . . . Pray forgive this democratic ebullition, but I never was in a republic before, and I feel in a sort of paradise. I venerate every bill on the wall which has "Republique" at the top. . . .⁷

In Switzerland, the conception of republicanism forged in studying the pages of Thucydides, Polybius, and Livy seemed to be given a new life and to confirm that this venerable system had a practical value unchanged since the early history of European man.

The Romans drove out their kings and launched a political experiment that proved to be pivotal to all

⁷Freeman to Finlay, 26 April 1863, Life and Letters, 1:285; see also Freeman to Finlay, 7 October 1863, ibid., 289, where he writes that his visit to Switzerland "quite knocked up what little notion of royalty I had left."

European history. The regression from popular rule, however necessary in an age of anarchy, seemed to Freeman to be in no way a sign of political advancement either in the first century B.C. or in succeeding ages. For this reason Freeman argued that the settlement of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 was not merely a partial restoration of the status quo ante but rather a reaction of revolutionary proportions.

The princes . . . respected antiquity, they were moved by traditional sentiment whenever so to be moved suited their purpose. They trampled underfoot when antiquity and tradition stood in their way. They took care to restore the Pope, the kings, the dukes; they forgot to restore the commonwealths.⁸

Such commonwealths, like the Republic of Venice, were to Freeman the guardians of a vital aspect of Western political tradition, the liber homo, through the darkest ages of tyrannical or primitive political rule and misrule. Beside such ancient glory, the transitory military strength of a Bonaparte or the upstart claims of the Duke of Austria seemed to pall.

Yet not only was popular and republican rule hallowed by time, it seemed to Freeman to produce statesmen of the highest order, to encourage a true nobility in its

⁸Four Oxford Lectures, 14-15.

magistrates. In the History of Federal Government Freeman reflected on the Achaian leader Aratos, expressing his admiration for a man who, like Pericles also, could command by virtue of persuasiveness, skill, and honest devotion rather than by birth, force, or corruption. He was not blind to the faults⁶ in Aratos, but even "in times of his worst errors, we can still see the difference between the pure gold of the republican chief and the tinsel of the kings and courtiers with whom he is brought in contact."⁹

The republican chief was a man of common birth, like Freeman himself, whose exaltation above his fellow citizens was effected only through personal merit and the trust of his countrymen and limited by the legal terms of the office which he held. It seemed to Freeman that leadership could be better guaranteed in this system than in one where despotic powers were entrusted to one whose legitimacy rested upon the accident of birth. As he wrote to Bryce in 1873, ". . . free Dittmenschen, if one could get it, is worth all the Kings and Dukes put together."¹⁰

Practicality and frugality seemed also to be better provided for in republican governments, where the magistrate

⁹History of Federal Government, 290.

¹⁰Freeman to Bryce, 24 August 1873, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 43-50.

was deemed to be responsible to the citizenry for the guardianship of its wealth rather than being, in himself, the theoretical fountain of all property and wealth itself. The private lives, whims, tastes, and excesses of a people's governors were their own business and their own responsibility. In a sarcastic reference to the widespread public concern over the illness of the Prince of Wales in 1872 and the other affairs of royalty, Freeman expressed to Edith Thompson a preferential admiration for the Executive Council of the Swiss Republic; "The Bundesrath is never born, never marries, never dies, never recovers from sickness. Think what a saving of time and money!"¹¹ In Switzerland the people ruled themselves; their executive officers were installed in a responsible fashion, and they were subject to dismissal in the same way. In the Swiss system an incompetent individual was limited in his ability to mislead or defraud the nation. "Many people tell me," he wrote of one Swiss politician, "that Fazy is a rascal; still they seem to go on very well, without any such bother and tomfoolery as you see in Paris or even London. Surely princes are a very costly luxury."¹²

¹¹Freeman to E. Thompson, 10 March 1872, Life and Letters, 2:54.

¹²Freeman to Finlay, 26 April 1863, ibid., 1:287.

Despite his clear preference for republican government, at no time did Freeman ever seek to alter the constitutional settlement in the United Kingdom, nor did he ever lend support to that small band of republicans who soldiered on against the overwhelming popularity of the Great Queen. In this course, Freeman acted neither from timidity or a sense of impotence nor from concern for his personal advancement. Rather he believed that republicanism was not practical in his country and that it was not suited for every people in every age. As he wrote to Dean W. F. Hook in 1866, "I am a republican in theory, but I should not go about preaching republicanism, because people don't seem fit for it."¹³ This was an unfortunate state of affairs, he wrote, in that it seemed at the time to prove only that his own people somehow lagged far behind the Swiss in political wisdom.¹⁴ Later in his life, however, Freeman adopted a more mature and judicious view of the lack of progress toward republican feeling in Europe. Having more fully and deeply developed his sense of

¹³ Freeman to Hook, 19 December 1866, *ibid.*, 346.

¹⁴ Freeman to Finlay, 7 October 1863, *ibid.*, 289.

historical unity, he came to hold that, while popular rule was a most urgent goal for the nations of Europe, the republican form was not essential, where its adoption might run too much against the nations' traditional and sanctioned political processes. The problems and unstable histories of republican constitutions in France and Spain prompted a re-thinking of the general desirability of commonwealths. In an article on "The Difficulties of Republicanism in Europe," Freeman posited an organic conception of republican institutions.

I hold that, of all follies in political matters, the greatest is to set out with any cut-and-dried theory on behalf of any form of government, be that form what it may, as abstractedly the best in all times and places. . . . The best form of government for any particular country will commonly be found to be that which the events of its history have given it. Governments which are the creatures of theory do not commonly last. Governments which have sprung out of the history of the nation do commonly last.¹⁵

The French Republic seemed to him the bastard child of republican theory and monarchic traditions, doomed not only to ineffectuality and inconsistency, but also being the

¹⁵E. A. Freeman, "The Difficulties of Republicanism in Europe," International Review 2 (1875):377. The radicalism of the Paris Commune of 1871 and what Freeman saw as the lack of sympathy for republicanism in the administrators of the Third Republic led him to believe that the French were incapable of maintaining a commonwealth.

perpetuator rather than the healing agent for the nation's deep political wounds.

We came to see the strange sight of a land where the government was in name a republic . . . but where for a man to be called a Republican was held to imply that he was disloyal to the existing republic, . . . whose chief magistrate was confessedly a stop-gap, a stalking-horse, in his best form an Interrex, holding a provisional power till it was agreed at the feet of which king or tyrant the nation should again throw itself.¹⁶

In England, on the other hand, the passage of time and the piecemeal constitutional reform which accompanied it seemed to provide all of the most vital guarantees of popular liberty and practical, if not theoretical, popular sovereignty, so that particularly republican forms certainly did not seem urgent or even necessarily appropriate. Constitutional monarchy, he wrote, was "firmly fixed in the hearts of the people" by the circumstances of their history. "And no reasonable person will seek to disturb an institution which, like other English institutions, has grown up because it was wanted."¹⁷

¹⁶"The Difficulties of Republicanism in Europe," 379; see also, E. A. Freeman, "The Power of Dissolution," North American Review 129 (1879):153-70. His skepticism toward French republicanism never abated. In spite of the increasing stability of the republican structure, the historian always believed that the French only united on a republic for fear of the alternatives.

¹⁷Growth of the English Constitution, 232, 157; Freeman took issue with Walter Bagehot, who posited the

Freeman was open to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of kingship. When the Crown, through its Ministers, was responsible to the sovereign people represented in Parliament and when those Ministers could be turned out at any time by parliamentary vote, the arrangement was perhaps more satisfactory than a republicanism which entrusted its chief executive with power for a fixed term which could be taken away only through a cumbersome impeachment process.¹⁸ The key, of course, for Freeman was the ability of the parliamentary system to bring the monarchical power under some form of popular control. Indeed, he recognized that a republic could well be far more closed politically than a constitutional monarchy. He observed to Bryce, "People are misled by the words monarchy and republic; in truth, we are much nearer democracy than Switzerland (save in the Urschweiz) was up to 1798 or 1836."¹⁹ The exclusion of vast numbers from the political process as in Switzerland or in the Venetian Republic made

absolute superiority of constitutional monarchy or other systems. Freeman felt, for example, that a presidential system was preferable for the United States and even some of the Dominions; see Bagehot to Freeman, 25 November 1864, Freeman MSS.

¹⁸This is, of course, the classical statement of the advantages of the British parliamentary system of government over the American model, a statement far more justifiable in Freeman's time than it is today.

¹⁹Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1867, Bryce MSS V, ff. 107-24.

it clear that no hard and fast judgment on the subject could be made. Further, the historian was not blind to those cases where the republican form of government had decayed to the point that the practical results of its maintenance amounted to tyranny and where monarchical power grew naturally from the ruins. This explains in part his interest in the "imperial idea" of both the ancient and mediaeval Roman Empires; as he wrote to George Finlay in 1858:

"Democrat as I am, I confess . . . the Romanorum Imperator semper Augustus impresses me with considerable awe -- wherefore I have the more loathing for those miserable pseudo-Caesars in Austria and France."²⁰

Freeman's true monarchical ideal, however, was the elective monarchy. Not only did this model square with his own sentiments about the reward of merit and provide a genuine link between the monarch and his subjects; it also seemed to him to be at one with the earliest monarchical principles of the primitive European cultures, especially the Teutonic peoples. This principle caught Freeman's imagination as a student, and during his years of study and reflection upon the hereditary system of kingship it became even more deeply held. In 1846 he wrote to his fiancée, Eleanor Gutch:

²⁰Freeman to Finlay, 25 January 1858, Life and Letters, 1:237.

My ideal of succession, though it would hardly do now, is election from among the Royal Family by the great prelates and nobles of the kingdom, as was done in Saxon times. As the family -- at least up to the times of Henry VIII, since which time it has evidently been withering away in body and mind under the curse of sacrilege -- would be likely to contain at least one qualified for the office, we have all the prestige about the line, the being descended from elder monarchs, &c., without the absurdity of entrusting the destinies of a whole kingdom to a weak or wicked person merely because he is the next in succession.²¹

The Norman Conquest and the Growth of the English Constitution both show Freeman placing special emphasis on those incidents in English history when Parliament deposed a reigning monarch or chose a new one, from the election of King Harold in 1066, to the legal fiction of the Conqueror's election, to the invitation in 1689 of William of Orange. Indeed, while Freeman admitted that elective monarchy would be anachronistic in England of the nineteenth century, he adhered closely to the principle, maintaining that Victoria reigned by no less a right than Alfred the Great or Harold -- "the will of the people, embodied in the Act of Parliament which made the crown . . . hereditary in her ancestors."²²

²¹ Freeman to E. Gutch, 24 March 1846, Life and Letters, 1:88. Freeman was not unaware of the historical weakness of elective monarchy in Poland and in the Empire, but he did not believe that they proved the case against the system itself.

²² Growth of the English Constitution, 159.

In spite of this formal popular sanction for the monarchical system, the historian still shuddered at the contingencies of the hereditary system, especially as Queen Victoria grew older. "I am fairly satisfied with kings (or rather queens)," he wrote to James Bryce in 1890, "if only they would not make princes."²³ Kingship recommended itself to Freeman only in the annals of those monarchs who truly were placed at the head of the family or the nation by their virtue as leaders and model citizens. It was, therefore a grim prospect to look forward to the succession of the irresponsible and dissolute Prince of Wales. Further, even the restriction of the crown to members of a single family lost much of its raison d'être in any theologically sound Christian theory of kingship which could not admit of any special relationship between God and a certain race or family of men.²⁴ His mistrust of hereditary monarchy was increased by the airs of importance which the British royal family tended to gather about itself. He spoke out forcefully in an interview with the New York Herald in 1881 on the subject of his countrymen's

²³Freeman to Bryce, 21 September 1890, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 28-29.

²⁴Comparative Politics, 166-69.

preoccupation with royalty: "I do not believe in prince-worship and such tom-foolery. I may be prepared to worship the Queen, but I should object to worship the Prince of Wales."²⁵ And he delighted in penning pungent lampoons of journalists and court-followers whose business it was to keep the masses apprised of every royal movement, as in a classic piece in the Pall Mall Gazette in 1874 on the publicists of royal visits.²⁶

Statesmen like Gladstone, or popular political and military leaders like Giuseppe Garibaldi, played the roles for which kings had in the past been useful, and few European princes of Freeman's day seemed to approach the merit of such men. Thus he wrote to Spyridon Trikoupes, the Greek Minister to England, about the Greek request that Prince Alfred of Saxe-Coburg become the new King of Greece, "I confess that the national wish for an inexperienced boy is something to me wholly unintelligible." If the nation wanted a king at its head, he should at least "be a man, and not a prince," preferably a Greek or some other Southeast European, but, if an Englishman was truly wanted, surely "some man who has had real experience in government," like Gladstone, or Lord Stanley, or the

²⁵"Mr. Freeman at Home," New York Herald, 8 October 1881.

²⁶[E. A. Freeman], "The Coming Gush," Pall Mall Gazette, 19 January 1874, 10.

Colonial Governor of New Zealand, Sir George Grey. In Greece, Freeman saw "the most glorious opportunity for throwing aside all the wretched and caste-traditions of Royalties and Highnesses," and putting a worthy leader at the head of the nation.²⁷ This concept was weighted in favor of a king who took an active role in national affairs and who did not hide behind a cabal of nameless and irresponsible advisors. "I wish you could get rid of your court," he wrote to George Finlay at Athens, "If you must have a king, you should have got a hard-working, everyday king, open to break stones or shoot a Turk with his own hands."²⁸ For the historian whose conception of monarchy was formed around the models of Alfred the Great, Carolus Magnus, or the Byzantine Basil II, nineteenth-century royalty took on even more the character of a cast from a comic-opera, and it is not surprising that the Vladikas or warrior-kings of Montenegro were among the few royal personages for whom Freeman held much respect. Still, he never wavered

²⁷ Freeman to S. Trikoupes, 18 February 1863, Life and Letters, 1:284-85. This letter was written before Freeman turned against Stanley (later Lord Derby) for his refusal of aid to Greek Christian refugees.

²⁸ Freeman to Finlay, 14 March 1859, Life and Letters, 1:243-44.

from his rule that the general form of government, monarchical or republican, must logically flow from the history and traditions of the particular country itself.

Readers of Freeman's work also fall into confusion over what seem to be conflicting preferences for aristocratic or democratic government. A source of this confusion is, of course, the necessity of trying to establish the historian's political philosophy from his observations on the political systems of the past, as Freeman did himself. He could not help but revere the narrowly aristocratic government of Venice at the zenith of her republican glory as a commercial and cultural giant and the guardian of European civilization; yet he was intoxicated by the exercise of direct democracy in the golden age of Athens or before his eyes in the Swiss cantons. It seems, however, that his deepest sympathies were democratic. A sense of humanistic egalitarianism emerged from his Anglo-Catholic religious convictions -- all men should recognize their brotherhood in Christ -- and provided one of the chief theoretical components of his total political philosophy. He further believed that the people of any nation, to be truly free men, should have a sense of direct involvement with the political processes under which they are governed. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Western culture, he believed, was the desire of men, whether in representa-

tive parliaments, complex direct democracies, or in the clashing of spears in tribal assemblies, to rule themselves. Beyond that, however, he believed that democratic government in general had proven to be the most practically effective form. His examinations of the Greek poleis left him convinced of "the infinite superiority in life and vigour of every kind of the (democratic state over the oligarchies and tyrannies."²⁹

Against the many Victorian critics of democracy Freeman was a most effective spokesman, arguing from historical cases the sober, enlightened, and essentially conservative character of democratic government. When the Times or Robert Lowe sought to condemn the democratic principle on the basis of some unfortunate experience in the United States or Australia, he was able to call upon examples from ancient Athens and contemporary Bern to refute their "baseless theories." As he wrote to James Bryce:

These people are constantly saying that in a democracy any stable government is impossible, that "Australian ministries change every week." But this is not so in Switzerland. The federal executive of Switzerland is the Bundesrath, a council of seven . . . since 1848 . . . at any

²⁹Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1867, Bryce MSS. V, ff, 107-24.

of [six elections at] which the whole Bundesrath might have been turned out of office, . . . only twice has a member of the Council who sought for re-election failed to obtain it. . . . Can any monarchy show anything so stable? What ministry in England or elsewhere has kept in for nineteen years?³⁰

It is crucial to any understanding of the radical pro-democratic stance of this essentially conservative historian to appreciate the degree to which he believed democracy to be a conservative and stable political system. The practice of the Swiss direct democracies, and the tendency of Athenian democracy regularly to return men like Pericles and Phokion, and the strong democratic element in early monasticism convinced him that it was absurd to argue generally against the placing of the good of the commonwealth in the hands of its citizens and that it was democratic government, especially direct democratic government, that was most consistent with a cautious approach to change and respect for tradition. It is clear that Freeman believed that representative democracy was a less desirable system than direct democracy, but that representation was "the natural and necessary result of establishing a free commonwealth in an extensive country."³¹ Representative systems,

³⁰ Freeman to Bryce, 3 February 1867, Bryce MSS V, ff. 107-24. See also "Landesgemeinden of Uri and Appenzall," 622-24.

³¹ Freeman to R. E. Bartlett, 27 August 1854, Life and Letters, 1:169.

often discriminate against minority opinions by their very nature and can not possibly provide the citizenry with the thorough political education and awareness which he witnessed in Switzerland and imagined at Athens. Perhaps of greatest importance, however, was Freeman's consistent belief that even the most perfect political model might well not be portable. The test of any system, he wrote, is whether it was likely to be good or bad in the particular time and place,³² and that test was intimately connected with the question of whether the system was imposed arbitrarily or had evolved steadily through history.

While Freeman was, in general, pledged to democratic ideals, there is no doubt that he believed that the execution of the popular will of a commonwealth could best be accomplished by an aristocratic leadership. Taking the term quite literally, he wrote that "the rule of the best" was the ideal government, "only 'tis a thing that never was and never will be." Of all things which were within the realm of possibility, democracy, "as defined by Pericles and Athenagoras," was the best, while oligarchy, no more than the "base counterfeit" of aristocracy, he held

³²"How to Grow Great Men," 197.

to be the lowest.³³ The attachment to the aristocratic ideal and, almost certainly the source of that attachment, is revealed in Freeman's characterization of republican Rome as the nearest approach to true aristocracy in world history:

If the rule of the best was ever reached in any political community upon earth, it surely was in the commonwealth which strove against Hannibal and overthrew him, . . . in those brightest days of the Roman commonwealth, when the elder distinctions of patrician and plebeian had passed away, and when the later distinctions of rich and poor had not yet begun to show themselves.³⁴

Less stirring morally, the republics of Venice, Genoa, and Bern also offered approximations to true aristocracy. Indeed, Freeman maintained "that it is only in a republic that a real aristocracy can exist," for as narrow and selfish were the family compacts which controlled those republics, "those houses at least knew how to rule, and to hand on the craft of ruler from generation to generation."³⁵ His historical study taught that the aristocratic republics could produce good government, and for all the injustices which were part of those republics, they seemed preferable to those monarchic states where a

³³Freeman to Dickinson, 31 January 1874, Life and Letters, 2:82.

³⁴Comparative Politics, 78-79.

³⁵Ibid., 266-67.

privileged class maintained its privileges by cringing subservience to a powerful monarch or those nominally democratic states where wealth had become the sole qualification for political leadership. "Is there not a good side to an 'aristocracy', " he wrote to Bryce in 1882 in commenting on the corruption which he saw in American politics, ". . . that it sets the example of serving the country, for whatever motive, yet at least not for mere money. . . . Birth &c. is not the best standard, but it is better than mere wealth."³⁶ In fact, as he complained during the election campaign in England in 1874, "It is plain that the battle is to the rich, which I take to be the lowest state that a commonwealth can come to."³⁷

Of course, Freeman was not blind to the state of petrification into which aristocracies often fall and to the corrupt misrule that had come to republics like Venice

³⁶ Freeman to Bryce, 12 November 1882, Bryce MSS. VII, ff. 57-59. This comment was expressive of a more reflective and historical position. Indeed, he complained in 1880 that Gladstone had burdened himself with "heavy earls" and filled his Cabinet with "wooden Hartingtons" and "courtly Granvilles". Freeman to Bryce, 28 March 1880, Bryce MSS. VI, ff. 234-37.

³⁷ Freeman to Dickinson, 31 January 1874, Life and Letters, 2:82.

and Bern when such came to pass. Perhaps his most complete and compact statement concerning aristocratic rule came in an article for the Encyclopaedia Britannica on "Nobility." Historically, he wrote in 1884, aristocracies:

. . . do really seem to engender a kind of hereditary capability in their numbers. Less favourable than either monarchy or democracy to the growth of occasional great men, they are more favourable than either to the constant supply of a succession of able men, qualified to carry on the work of government. Their weak point lies in their necessary conservatism; they cannot advance and adapt themselves to changed circumstances, as either monarchy or democracy can. When, therefore, their goodness is gone, their corruption becomes worse than the corruption of either of the other forms of government.³⁸

In spite of this danger, however, Freeman's attachment to the democratic principle was limited by a sense of pragmatism, a respect for traditions, and the fear that what was often passed off as democratic reform was merely a dodge to do no more than slightly alter the ruling class. Thus in 1888 he wrote to Goldwin Smith about Salisbury's County Government Bill, which would institute an elected county authority in place of the traditional appointive magistracies; that he favored extensions of the democratic principle, but only cautiously and only when a spirit of

³⁸E. A. F.[reeman], "Nobility," Encyclopaedia Britannica (Edinburgh, 1884), 18:528.

democratic responsibility was evident: "I have said a hundred times, set up a democracy, if you can, but don't upset a better oligarchy to set up a worse."³⁹ This dual attachment to democratic and aristocratic principles, formed in historical study, was a key factor in his fascination with the Swiss model. In it he perceived the embodiment of egalitarian aristocracy, where the whole people solemnly entrusted their government to the best men in the commonwealth, just as he thought had been done at Athens and at Rome. The custom of deference in a democracy he deemed to have positive features in its encouragement of favored families to raise their children as leaders and in its encouragement of individuals to remain worthy of their elected offices.⁴⁰ He also sought some guarantee that the electorate would be trained for their roles as citizens. For this role it is somewhat difficult to

³⁹Freeman to G. Smith, 25 April 1888, Cornell University Library Goldwin Smith Papers. (Microfilm), Reel 4, segment 1.

⁴⁰Growth of the English Constitution, 26-27.

establish exactly the whole range of qualifications which he thought to be sufficient and necessary, but an important one was literacy. In 1874, for example, he remarked favorably on the Italian electoral system which required that voters demonstrate the ability to read and write before being certified. While such a rule might not be the best procedure in all cases, he defended the requirement as a restriction which was not oligarchic and unreasonable, but one which had an aristocratic bias and which could be rationally supported.⁴¹ Freeman wanted stable government conducted by men of merit, and the democratic selection of such men by a united, patriotic, informed, and politically educated citizenry was, he believed, the best guarantor of such government.

Bound up with his ideas on government, and perhaps the overriding concept, was a Burkean concern for governmental legitimacy. As an aptitude for abstract political theory did not run deep with Freeman, this usually meant historical legitimacy. Of course, Freeman did hold that legitimacy must ultimately rest on popular sovereignty.

⁴¹[E. A. Freeman], "An Italian Election," Pall Mall Gazette, 16 November 1874, 14.

"In all times and in all places," he wrote in Comparative Politics, "power can have no lawful origin but, the grant of the people." But he was quite prepared to entertain as legitimate many narrowly oligarchic or only nominally constitutional political systems which could be shown to have evolved from an original granting of power by the nation in some form. In England, for example, he conceived that even the House of Lords and the judiciary had evolved from primitive primary assemblies.⁴² Freeman's political thinking on liberty and legitimacy came clearly from the Greeks. He employed the word "tyrant," not in any popular or journalistic sense in either his historical writing or his polemics against contemporary tyrants like Louis Napoleon, but in the Greek sense of "unlawful usurper." And no one, he believed, could truly understand liberty without some reference to the Athenian model: ". . . yet all who would be free / From thee [Athens] must learn of freedom's earliest day."⁴³

It is clear, too, that Freeman considered this concept of liberty an ideal for all political systems and

⁴²Comparative Politics, 242-43.

⁴³Poems, Legendary and Historical, 19.

its absence a deficiency in any system from the empire of Alexander to that of Francis Joseph. Still, he was quite willing to accept the concept of "schooling" a people for freedom. "The only way to acquire the virtues of freedom," he wrote, "is by the practise of freedom."⁴⁴ Yet that practice could legitimately come only gradually. The success of constitutional government in Norway, for example, he attributed in part to Danish rule over the Norwegians which "acted, in many respects, as a school-master to bring them to freedom."⁴⁵ Further, he was apt to regard simple despotism, as in this model of Denmark and Norway, as less repugnant than tyranny. The former condition implied rule over a people who had yet to emerge from or who had sunk back to political immaturity such that absolutism, while deficient, was justifiable. In the latter case, as in Bonaparte's Second Empire, an absolutist system was irregularly forced upon a constitutional commonwealth. To be sure, he was prepared to admit, as did the Greeks, that tyranny could bring with it beneficial effects, but it could never be legitimate. He was prepared, also, to

⁴⁴E. A. Freeman, The Eastern Question in its Historical Bearings (Manchester, 1876), 13.

⁴⁵Freeman to Finlay, 21 March 1858, Life and Letters, 1:240.

defend tyrannicide with the arguments developed by the Greeks when it was clearly established that a tyranny on the Greek model in fact existed.⁴⁶ Yet it also seems clear that even tyranny had to be regarded as a higher political state than mere anarchy. In 1891 he wrote to Edith Thompson of his bewilderment at Oscar Wilde's "Soul of Man Under Socialism": "How are you to do with no government? Oscar is bigger than I; I must have some king or president or something to keep him from punching my head."⁴⁷ Certainly one of his favorite points in attacking the Ottoman domination of south-eastern Europe was that it was anarchic, inconsistent, and little more than loosely organized brigandage.

This last model is especially important, for it illustrates that, for Freeman, while political legitimacy was bound up with a nation's history, it was not solely dependent upon the passage of time. Turkish rule over Christian nations of Europe had been no more able to legitimize itself in five hundred years than in a day.

⁴⁶History of Federal Government, 297-300.

⁴⁷Freeman to E. Thompson, 8 February 1891, Life and Letters, 2:427. Freeman did not know Wilde, but he regarded the writer as an example of the decadence of London society.

Most important to legitimacy was that a thorough accomodation with the history and traditions of the nation be made. Freeman agreed with Edmund Burke, for example, that the ideological revolutionaries of 1789 forfeited any claim to legitimacy by their failure to reform France along the lines of ~~traditional~~ native principles; yet he conceived as no less illegitimate those ideological reactionaries who sought to restore the status quo ante without any attempt to adapt to the altered circumstances up to 1815. The strength and legitimacy of the English system sprang from "the application of ancient principles to new circumstances," the ability to meet unforeseen political exigencies without damaging the traditional political fabric of the society. In this way the deposition of James II was seen not as a revolutionary or unprecedented act, but as a legitimate exercise of rarely exercised rights.⁴⁸ According to this principle, Freeman offered a limited defense of the revolutionaries of 1830 and 1848 in France against the charge of reckless innovation against a venerable state of affairs. In some ways they appeared so; "But they were not a whit more reckless, not a whit more

⁴⁸ Growth of the English Constitution, 57-58; 40-41.

revolutionary than the princes against whose work they rose." The settlement of 1815 had divided up the small states of Europe among the victors of the Napoleonic Wars and trampled traditional rights at will, so to be "as truly revolutionary . . . as any change which the Corsican 'stupor mundi et immutator mirabilis' had wrought before them [or] . . . which the men of . . . 1860 sought to work after them."⁴⁹ European legitimists usually appealed to a vague and religiously based concept of divinely instituted authority, but Freeman's conception was rooted in the living and changing, yet immemorial, English idea of law. Unlike the alleged conservatives of his own day for whom, he argued, "it is taken for granted . . . that the private interest must prevail over the public," he looked rather to the ideals of the ancient Greek and mediaeval Italian commonwealths whose law was made with the consent of the citizenry and was obeyed by each citizen as if it were his own.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Four Oxford Lectures, 13-15.

⁵⁰"Public and Private Morality," 410-11. Freeman clearly perceived the shift of Toryism from idealizing paternal care for the mass of men to a more business-oriented philosophy.

While legitimacy could, strictly speaking, rest upon popular sovereignty and organic evolution from the political traditions of the people involved, Freeman posited a higher international legitimacy which rested upon political morality. Nations which refused to recognize the rights of other nations were no better than outlaws, for they even called the whole concept of nationhood into question. Political systems which repressed political activity were similarly suspect as antithetical to Western ideals: Thus, the Roman Empire, he wrote in an essay on the Flavian Caesars, in spite of its power and glory "was in itself a wicked thing, which, for so many ages, crushed all national and nearly all intellectual life in the fairest regions of "three continents." He was at one with Goldwin Smith in assessing any despotism or imperialism as, in itself, an evil thing from which, to be sure, the greatest historical good might come.⁵¹ And even if he found Austria

⁵¹In short, Freeman believed that Britain had no business interfering in the lives of even the most backward peoples. The conquest of the New World, displacement of the aboriginal peoples, and European settlement was an historically legitimate act, no more nor less objectionable than the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain. But European domination and exploitation of a majority nation, as in India, constituted unwarrantable imperialism. In 1857 Freeman strongly criticized Dr. Tait, Bishop of London, for publicly praying for victory during the Mutiny. If such prayers were in order, he wrote, the nation should also "confess the national sins which have brought this scourge upon us." Evening Star, 12 August 1857, 2. The historian constantly

a dangerous enemy and Russia a friend to his own dearest causes, he maintained that Austrian and Russian imperialism and despotism were, at bottom, no less wicked things.⁵²

To attain this higher legitimacy, nations and political movements had to adopt certain universal moral standards. Thus, while he recognized that arbitration of international disputes held out only slim hopes for unbroken peace, he believed that "no nation should go to war without at least an attempt at arbitration." Further, he condemned as immoral any state which went to war over issues which could not be seen by individuals as causes for dispute.⁵³ As far as possible, Freeman sought to make the adherence to a personal moral standard a test of true legitimacy in government. Thus, he maintained that people should not be ruled against their consent nor should they be handed back and forth between greater powers without

urged his countrymen to eschew imperial expansion and to rid themselves of their overseas possessions, save Teutonic Heligoland.

⁵²E. A. Freeman, "The Flavian Caesars," Historical Essays, 2:390-91.

⁵³"National Morality," 646-47.

their consent, even though he conceded that there were times when peace and order in the world overrode this principle. The institution of slavery, even when it employed those colored peoples whose humanity Freeman was loath to admit, he condemned doubly on political and moral grounds.⁵⁴ Freeman expected governments and political forces to be highminded and moral, and he personally shunned any connection with those Oxford political organizations which he branded as "too academical to care about questions of right and wrong."⁵⁵

It is also clear that a central feature in Freeman's ideal of governmental legitimacy and, indeed, in the total framework of his political philosophy was his glorification of the nation. Just as his history had been marked by the tracing out of the birth and development of national sentiment, his political thinking was dominated by the relation of concepts and principles to the facts of nationality and the aspirations of national life. In fact, even questions of morality, at times, seemed to be made dependent upon their national context. Freeman's idealization of the


⁵⁴ Sicily: Phoenician, Greek, and Roman, 324-25; see his views on the Eyre controversy, "Public and Private Morality," 423-26.

⁵⁵ Johnston, Life and Letters of H. P. Liddon, 247.

national commonwealth seems to have much in common with that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and, although he never read the French genius, both writers took their conceptions in common from the Swiss and the Greek models. Both idealized the small, compact, unified, and purposeful nation. Such small states seemed historically to be the most stable, yet most politically advanced. Freeman first considered the special nature of small commonwealths in his introductory essay to the History of Federal Government. In such states, he argued, the political education of each individual citizen was raised to the highest possible level. And against those critics who insisted that classical Athens placed too great a trust in those unfit to rule, Freeman answered that it would be truer to say that ". . . Athenian democracy made a greater number of citizens fit to use power than could be made fit by any other system," including the one under which he lived.⁵⁶ The advancement of the politically gifted individual was much easier in the small state. And as T. B. Macaulay had previously noted, the sense of national pride and patriotism was far more intense in smaller states than in larger ones.⁵⁷ There is

⁵⁶ History of Federal Government, 29.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 38; see also T. B. Macaulay, History of England (London, 1849), 1:350ff.



no doubt that Freeman was attracted by the totalitarian aspects of the small classical or Teutonic commonwealths;⁵⁸ yet he clearly saw some of the historical disadvantages to such states. It seemed to him, for example, that the very intensity of life in such commonwealths was a factor in their destruction. Most, like the great Athenian model, were short-lived. While the small state "calls forth every power and every emotion of man's nature . . . ; it is tempted to constant warfare," often of a cruel nature; "it is tempted to ambition and acquisition of territory" more than the larger state, and, while civil strife can and does occur in a small state, "party hatred becomes at once more bitter and more enduring" than in a larger state.⁵⁹

Yet perhaps more important than the unfortunate political or cultural disadvantages of the small state was the special moral position which Freeman attributed to it.

⁵⁸The term "totalitarian" does not imply, as in its more common twentieth century connotation, governmental or community control of the individual. It refers rather to the inextricable bond of individual, family, and society which characterized the ancient commonwealths, the characteristic which formed the basis for the Antigone of Sophocles. This "totalitarian" intellectual and emotional involvement of the individual with his community, expressed in the eighteenth century by Rousseau and Kleist, was the ideal which Freeman preached to his countrymen.

⁵⁹History of Federal Government, 49.

From the earliest times, when the small Greek communities were able to preserve Western civilization from destruction by the hordes of Darius and Xerxes, it was to small states "that we look in almost all ages for the real advances in politics, in art, counting even the military art in the higher sense," and for "moral greatness." Returning to his favorite Biblical passage, Freeman asserted: "Surely the strong were never more fully confounded by the weak, . . . than when a village on a low hill by the Tiber brought [into] her own substance, the cities . . . of the whole Mediterranean world."⁶⁰ For these reasons he took a special interest in the history and politics of small commonwealths, generally finding in his studies confirmation of the views which he formed from his classical models. He was greatly attracted to Frederick York Powell's Icelandic studies, and his own work included articles on the independent Hanse towns, the Republic of Ragusa, the Grand Duchy of Finland, and the principality of Montenegro. Indeed, a frequent theme in Freeman's writing was that the advance of technology in the nineteenth century held out the hope of raising large states to the lofty political and moral

⁶⁰"Christianity and the Geocentric System," 556-57.

level of small ones. A new synthesis was envisioned in which modern nations, possessing all of the advantages which could come with national unity and vast physical size, could for the first time approach the characteristic advantages of the polis.

The steamer, the railway, the telegraph, are wholesome and necessary institutions . . . in order to hinder man's intellectual and political life from being crushed by mere physical extension. They allow the England of our day to come nearer to the Athens of Perikles than the England of a hundred years . . . or fifty years back.⁶¹

From these models comes much of Freeman's nationalist sentiment, and his practical nationalist ideas stem from the same source as well. One of his chief criticisms of his own age was that the Europeans of the nineteenth century did not seem to be as patriotic as their ancestors. In spite of the great national revivals which were going on around him, he wrote, ". . . we have not, as a rule, that living feeling of the State, as something ever present to our thoughts, as something demanding of us constant efforts and constant sacrifices, which the loyal citizen of the

⁶¹Chief Periods in European History, 184-85; for York Powell's support on this issue, see York Powell to Freeman, 5 April 1889, Freeman MSS.

ancient or mediaeval commonwealth certainly had."⁶² The state, Freeman believed, should be a personal being, a "living parent" to every citizen in his historical ideal. These words which ring so hollow in our own totalitarian century had a far nobler ring to the previous age. The statism of which Freeman spoke presupposed national unity and purpose and a universal involvement in national political life. It was a reaction, not against individualism and liberty, but against personal despotism and the theories which sprang from it. The radical character of Freeman's statism is revealed in his belief, for example, that the return of Crown land to Parliamentary disposal must not be considered an act of the Sovereign's bounty, but merely the recognition of the national ownership of land.⁶³ Similarly, the historian's whole notion of

⁶²"Public and Private Morality," 405-06. Freeman believed that ancient and mediaeval patriotism appealed both to the emotion and to the intellect, producing the admirable leadership of Pericles or a Salutati, not the charismatic charlatanism of a Louis Napoleon or his twentieth century counterparts.

⁶³Growth of the English Constitution, 148.

loyalty, even in a monarchical state, was based upon its etymological root of legalitas, the submission to law made by consent, rather than a mere personal loyalty to one person or one family. Any critic who would imagine Freeman as a precursor of the fascist variety of statism should consider his vehement opposition to Bonapartism, especially that of the Second Empire, as that perversion of national loyalty which revered the person above the office which the person occupied. And lest his idealization of one-party government is taken to imply no more than the hegemony of a faction, his assessment of the political situation in Norway should make his position clear: "In Norway there are [no parties]. All men are of one party -- Radical-Conservatives so to speak -- lovers of the existing democracy. The questions to be decided will be practical, financial, and such like. . . ." ⁶⁴ Freeman's ideal was, in fact, non-partisan government, totalitarian, in a sense, in that all citizens would be subscribers to fundamental law and constitutional principles.

As with Rousseau, however, and most other political thinkers, one of the knottiest problems in Freeman's

⁶⁴ Freeman to Finlay, 21 March 1858, Life and Letters, 1:240.

political vision was the definition of who could be considered a citizen. In Comparative Politics he criticized Greek concepts of citizenship as far too narrow, especially in the refusal of the Greeks to admit foreign residents, even after several generations, to full rights, while the Roman franchise had been extended indiscriminately and without the necessary reforms in the structure of government to accommodate the new citizens. Similarly, the restrictions upon full citizenship rights for new settlers to particular cantons in Switzerland seemed to him to be unduly restrictive and fraught with possible evils.⁶⁵

Freeman favored the granting of full rights of citizenship to all residents who chose to become part of the nation, with special preference shown to those who were, by birth, members of the national group and special restrictions upon those whom he believed could not or should not be assimilated. During his visit to the United States, he considered the citizenship question with regard to the flood of immigrants that had been coming into the country and to the enfranchisement of former slaves. "I am sure no people ever made a greater mistake," he wrote to his

⁶⁵ Comparative Politics, 94-99; see also [E. A. Freeman], "ΜεΤΟΙΚΟΙ in Switzerland," Saturday Review 33 (1876):114-15.

son-in-law, "than when the niggers were made citizens. . . . [T]reat your horse kindly; but don't make him consul."⁶⁶ Eventually Freeman came to modify somewhat this extreme and naïve proposal, but it serves as an illustration of his fear of a racially and culturally pluralist society as a foundation upon which to build a democratic government.

Freeman's utopia was also a nation bearing arms. Once again this theory was grounded in the study of classical and mediæval history and strengthened by his observations of the contemporary world. He was inspired by the character and purpose of the armies of the Roman Republic, superior to the large, mercenary hosts of Hannibal, yet not men of blood by trade, but rather simple citizens who fought in the defense of their community. Modern standing armies, on the other hand, followed the path of the armies of Imperial Rome, regularly giving their loyalty, for good or ill, primarily to a personal commander rather than to the state or the nation itself: "William the

⁶⁶ Freeman to T. S. Holmes, 7 January 1882, Freeman MSS. Freeman's views on race lacked the venom of those of Carlyle and Kingsley. He had no desire to exterminate or civilize colored peoples or even to rule over them. Yet he was insistent that they had no place in the governing of white peoples. See Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race, 75-108.

Norman led English troops to the siege of Exeter, and men of Slavonic birth marched at the bidding of Francis Joseph to overthrow the chartered rights of Crivoscia." Standing armies, "make men soldiers first and citizens afterward."⁶⁷ Freeman had from the earliest been able to support only defensive wars, and while his definition of defensive wars often took on a questionable and partisan coloration, it seemed that a citizen army was far less likely to engage in imperial adventures. Also, with the authors of the American Bill of Rights, Freeman saw the armed nation not as a threat to public peace and order, but as the best guarantor of responsible government. Again, in Switzerland he found the nearest approximation of his ideal, as he suggested to George Finlay in 1865; "What can Greece want with an army? Surely Switzerland is the model for a country in that sort of position; no army, but every man a soldier."⁶⁸ While it did not share the long-established democratic institutions which made Switzerland such a model, the principality of Montenegro

⁶⁷E. A. Freeman, "The House of Habsburg in South-Eastern Europe," Fortnightly Review, 45 (1889):845.

⁶⁸Freeman to Finlay, 31 October 1865, Life and Letters, 1:334.

impressed Freeman as well. "In Montenegro, as in prae-historic Greece, every man goes armed [but] he can turn either to his spade or to his pen." The warrior-nation showed little inclination to be themselves oppressors of other peoples, and, in the epic thinking of the historian, they had stirred the world by their ability "to maintain their independence by their own right hands."⁶⁹

The crowning glory of Freeman's ideal nation was a national church. His writings abound in praise of national ecclesiastical independence and condemnation of interference by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Much of this attitude was simply a reflection of his own Anglican up-bringing, but it owes just as much to his historical study of ancient cultures. He was no less aware than his contemporary Fustel de Coulanges and other scholars of the intermingling of religion and politics in the classical world and the contribution of that close relationship to the general cohesion of societies. The total identification, for example, of Byzantine society and its successor national cultures with the Orthodox Church he took to be

⁶⁹E. A. Freeman, "Montenegro," Macmillan's Magazine 33 (1876):279.

a crucial factor in the survival both of the faith and the national lives of the peoples who adhered to it. Roman Catholicism in the West had not adapted to the growth of European nations, but he still looked back fondly to the perhaps mythical days when Latin Catholicism was rather the national church of a respublica Christiana, the second sword in Gelasius' or Dante's vision of a unified European society.

The emergence of national cultures, however, seemed to Freeman to call for national churches tied closely to the secular arm. Writers as diverse as Robespierre and Samuel Taylor Coleridge had written on the desirability of a national church, but there is little evidence that Freeman was familiar with their arguments or based his belief on other than his own reading of European history. The Liberal Freeman had no patience with persecutors of dissenting faiths; yet he often expressed his belief that a society which professed one faith was capable of greater political development than a cosmopolitan state. In an essay on "The Normans at Palermo," Freeman recognized the brilliant cultural advances which took place in Sicily under the benevolent and tolerant despotism of Count Roger, but, in a state "inhabited by men of so many races and creeds, there could be no national unity, no national

life."⁷⁰ His own tolerance stemmed from a personal morality and lack of aptitude for theological disputes, but he often made clear his preference for a religious settlement that would more nearly reflect a more primitive state of affairs. Looking back to Old-English practice, he wrote:

The King was the Supreme Governor of the Church because he was the Supreme Governor of the Nation. The Church and the Nation were absolutely the same; the King and his Witan dealt with ecclesiastical questions and disposed of ecclesiastical offices by the same right by which they dealt with temporal questions and disposed of temporal offices.⁷¹

For this reason Freeman always attached unusual importance to the ecclesiastical side of civil ceremonies, such as the anointing of the monarch at his coronation. And he remained personally a defender of the Established Church in England, urging its leadership toward reform in the direction of making the Church a truly national and popular institution.⁷²

⁷⁰E. A. Freeman, "The Normans at Palermo," in Historical Essays, 3:48-81. The strength of Dissent in England made tolerance and equality the only honorable policy. Yet Freeman was not an advocate of religious pluralism.

⁷¹Growth of the English Constitution, 72.

⁷²See Freeman to Eleanor Gutch, 24 March 1846, Life and Letters, 1:88, and History of the Cathedral Church of Wells, 160. By the same token, Freeman favored the disestablishment of the Irish Church as it could never have be-

In short, Freeman sought to re-capture as much of the communitarian spirit of the classical polis or the Teutonic tribes as altered historical conditions would allow. This is crucial in understanding that while Freeman tended to oppose pluralism within communities, he sought to preserve a plurality of communities. To facilitate this, he looked either to federation as a creative response to the weaknesses of small commonwealths or to increased localism and self-government or autonomy within unitary states. While he never admitted the History of Federal Government to be any more or less than an impartial analysis of the subject of federalism, he clearly wrote sympathetically of that form of government. When the American Union came under strong criticism in Britain during the War between the States, Freeman defended the record of American federalism; ". . . looking over the whole field of history, it is a very great matter to have given such a great territory eighty years of combined peace and freedom, such as I do not see how any other form of government could have done."⁷³ In spite of the bloody war which

come a truly national church. For practical political reasons, Freeman was prepared to accept Church Disestablishment in England but not to support it.

⁷³ Freeman to Finlay, 8 January 1861, Life and Letters, 1:270. Freeman was torn by the American Civil War. An abolitionist, he had little use for the Confederate

so shocked Europeans, Freeman believed that federalism was also a force for peace; as opposed to a collection of independent states, a federal settlement, at worst, "substitutes a smaller number of civil wars for a greater number of foreign wars." On the other hand, the attempt to form a consolidated state would, by definition, have to force decisions on a number of contentious issues at once, heightening the likelihood of political violence.

In consolidated France you have a whole series of horrible civil wars, ending in the destruction of the weaker side. In federal Switzerland you have a civil war once in a century, ending, under the present constitution, in a real religious equality and mutual toleration.⁷⁴

Freeman was also keenly aware of the limitations of federalism. No federal state could be formed from nations which were rivals, having no common interests or aspirations, save mutual dislike; he insisted on ruling out the idea of a federation of Slavs and Turks, for

"nigger-drivers." On the other hand, he despaired of the prospect of maintaining a federal union by force. As the tide of war turned in favor of the North, Freeman came to quiet support of the Union cause.

⁷⁴ Freeman to Finlay, 4 April 1864, Life and Letters, 1:292.

example.⁷⁵ No federal system could ensure justice on a national scale when, as in the American South, local officials would permit lynchings to go unpunished or other perversions of the nation's legal fabric.⁷⁶ Yet it seemed to Freeman that the federal system offered the best guarantee for the preservation of the distinctive characters of smaller political entities and that such distinctiveness was well worth preserving. He was quite astounded by the highly centralist federal design for British North America drafted in 1867, believing that such a plan perverted the federal concept: "What a perverse thing that so-called Federation in Canada is, a Federation turned bottom upwards. All powers not granted to the states are reserved to the Union!!!! How Aratos and Hamilton would have stared."⁷⁷ The real liberalism of Freeman lay in his belief that the political community, however it was to be defined, should be permitted, as far as possible, to develop as it saw fit. Such development might be in-

⁷⁵ Ottoman Power in Europe, 226-27.

⁷⁶ Freeman to C. H. Hart, 17 May 1891, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Library, Charles Henry Hart Papers.

⁷⁷ Freeman to Bryce, 23 May 1886, Bryce MSS. VII, ff. 234-35. Freeman shared Goldwin Smith's continentalism, but he was less eager than Smith to force the Dominions to independence. Still, he had little respect for Canadians, a people, he believed, who did not have the courage to be independent.

efficient or irrational; but it would be natural, organic, and free.

Even in a consolidated state Freeman urged tolerance of distinct local institutions and practices. In a country whose history had left a legacy of diversity, national unity and loyalty would best be served by the preservation and recognition of that diversity. He was particularly content with the government of rural England, of which he was a part, as true self-government. Magistrates were filled from among those citizens who could afford to assume them, and Freeman strongly recommended the system as a model to other nations to adapt to their own specific conditions.⁷⁸ While a unitary state did not have to suffer the "dark side" of local independence and could guarantee more rights to all citizens, Freeman urged that the role of national governments in local matters be self-limited. Reform was always more sure, stable, and permanent, he argued from historical examples, when it developed from local initiative. Once again, Freeman confirmed the organicism central to his whole political philosophy, an organicism coming directly from his appreciation of classical, English, and universal history.

⁷⁸ Freeman to Finlay, 14 January 1863, Life and Letters, 1:284.

It is clear that, in his theoretical political conceptions and motivations, Freeman cannot be categorized easily in terms of Liberalism, Conservatism, or as an individual libertarian or advocate of complete statism. Elements of each point of view may be picked from the historian's writings. It may be argued that his political philosophy was eclectic because it was incoherent, that his thinking on politics was an unsystematic jumbling of a number of partial philosophies. Yet a closer examination of Freeman's work reveals a real tension among conflicting principles and a sincere attempt, if often a less than glorious one, to construct a coherent philosophy. For example, he thought of himself as very much a pragmatist and a realist, while at the same time he took pride in being a major spokesman for moral idealism in national and international politics. At times the tensions between these two visions troubled Freeman, as when in 1866 his support for German imperial expansion ran up against his sympathy for the trampled rights of the Danes of Sleswig; yet during his most intense writing on the Eastern Question he became convinced that, in the long run, moral or sentimental politics are really the most practical politics. The advocates of Realpolitik were perhaps the most myopic of observers, failing to see the aspirations, capabilities, and potential of the men around them and the real impact

of those factors.⁷⁹

Freeman was an adherent of the Liberal Party throughout his adult life, a supporter of "Gladstone and Bright and no mistake,"⁸⁰ but his Liberalism differed radically from that of the Party at large over a number of important issues. In his youth Freeman knew primarily Tory surroundings, and his school-boy writings reflect that milieu. But he once remarked at a political meeting at Bradford: "When I was a child I was a Tory, but when I became a man I put away Toryism and all other childish things."⁸¹ The scriptural phraseology, however, conceals the far more plausible explanation that the principles and ideals which the young Freeman imbibed came to be shunned by the Tories and taken up by many members of the amorphous Liberal Party. Rev. Henry Thompson, a faithful correspondent of Freeman during the historian's school and college years, chided his protégé in 1857 after he detected what seemed to be a change in his political views: "So the Peelite has developed into the 'gentleman of advanced

⁷⁹"Sentimental and Practical Politics," 311-20.

⁸⁰Freeman to Sir Edward Strachey, 15 February 1880, Taunton, Somerset County Record Office, Strachey MSS. C. 2480, DD/SH f. 17.

⁸¹22 January 1872, quoted in Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, Works (London, 1891), 6:424-5.

liberal principles'. . . !" ⁸² It is more likely, however, that Freeman perceived a shift in the direction of the Tory Party towards a less truly national, more class-ridden, and essentially less conservative point of view, a change culminating in the leadership of the radical and "oriental" Disraeli. ⁸³ In a leading article stridently critical of Freeman in 1877, the Wrexham Guardian observed:

Some men have the courage of their convictions, and are true to their principles, and amongst them is Mr. E. A. Freeman. What is it to him that the views which he holds are unpopular? He sticks to them just the same. What does he reckon that his ideas are a year out of date? He holds them none the less tenaciously, as some ladies preserve last year's costumes, in the belief that they will come in fashion again.

Such an analysis, while somewhat overstated, is largely true and one with which Freeman himself would concur. ⁸⁴

Time and again, when asked for an ideal foreign policy for England, the Liberal historian looked back to the time of the Tory Foreign Secretary George Canning, and he used

⁸²H. Thompson to Freeman, 30 March 1857, Freeman MSS.

⁸³To Freeman, Disraeli was a devious politician who governed according to no lofty principle. With respect to his foreign policy, Freeman felt Disraeli a dangerous and irresponsible militarist who sought to provoke a war with Russia.

⁸⁴"Mr. Freeman's Craze," Wrexham Guardian, 1 September 1877, 4; see also "Review of My Opinions," 155-56.

his understanding of that policy as a yardstick against which to measure the policies of both Liberal and Conservative governments and with which to rap the knuckles of each.

Not only did Freeman's political philosophy develop relatively little and remain unusually rigid in its basic principles, but it was relatively limited in its scope. Like his history, it tended to be concerned with formal institutions and processes with very little attention given social and psychological phenomena. Even his long-standing commitment to Irish Home Rule was based on his scholarly reflection that the Irish were a nation unto themselves and thus deserved their own independent national institutions.⁸⁵ It is too harsh a judgment, however, to say, as did the Quarterly Review in 1895 that "Freeman's views belonged to that rather sterile type of Liberalism which concerns itself with political machinery, and very little with the detailed and concrete results which that machinery has to effect."⁸⁶ Politics -- and Freeman used the term

⁸⁵ See especially Freeman's "Some Aspects of Home Rule," Contemporary Review 49 (1886):153-68, and his "Parallels to Irish Home Rule," Fortnightly Review 46 (1889):293-98.

⁸⁶ "Freeman, Froude, and Seeley," 288.

in its Aristotelian sense -- was the action of men in their highest character and a subject which the historian found anything but sterile.

If for nothing but his recognition of the dynamics of national sentiment, Freeman must be evaluated as more than a builder of mechanical political institutions for responses to human problems. It is true, however, that his concern for particular political principles usually transcended his concern for particular social problems and their detailed remedies. In 1870, for example, he noted that as Forster's Education Act did not transgress any major political principle he held and as he did not think himself an expert in the field of primary education, he was content to follow Gladstone blindly on the issue.⁸⁷ In an age when the majority of his Party was beginning to envision an expanded role for government in the solution of public problems, Freeman decried what he thought to be over-legislation, and he suggested that a positive innovation would be to "leave people to mind their own business."⁸⁸ If any characteristic, however, marks

⁸⁷ Freeman to Bryce, 25 March 1870, Bryce MSS. V, ff. 239-41.

⁸⁸ [E. A. Freeman], "Mediaeval London," Saturday Review 7 (1859):691.

off Freeman's political thinking from that of his contemporaries, it is the degree to which it was tied to his perception of the events of the past and to his vision of the unity of history. Speaking of institutional reform in 1872 he expressed his creed "that the true way to reform is to go back to the first principles of the institutions, making such changes as either the examples or the warnings of later times may suggest to us."⁸⁹ Only by properly appreciating this attitude can the historiographer make sense of both the radical and conservative characters of Freeman's political thought. Any political decision had to be thought through with whatever aids history could supply in order to be an informed and truly practical one.

Diplomatists, for example, who seek to draw boundaries between two states should consider, among other things, historical patterns of settlement, culture, and conflict.⁹⁰ Beyond these directly practical applications, however, Freeman's history colored the whole character of his thinking. To Freeman, one of the superior qualities of the Swiss political constitution was its approximation of the

⁸⁹E. A. Freeman, "The Cathedral Churches of the Old Foundation," in Essays on Cathedrals, J. S. Howsom, ed. (London, 1872), 164-65.

⁹⁰Freeman to Captain (afterwards Sir Richard) Burton, 10 November 1876, Life and Letters, 2:141.

glorious classical states. In his view, the essential problems and principles of politics had not changed significantly since the days of Thucydides; and the history of ancient Greece could be seen as "the history of the world in a small space."⁹¹ Freeman did not limit himself, however, to forming only his general or governing political principles from historical models. His positions and arguments on contemporary political questions were formed largely by historical study. It is this fact which, more than any other, accounts both for the apparent contradictions in Freeman's political philosophy and its relatively changeless character.

⁹¹General Sketch of European History, 47.

CONCLUSION :

Hardly anyone reads the historical works of E. A. Freeman anymore. A few specialists look occasionally into his History of the Norman Conquest and History of Sicily, but this is largely to consult Freeman's lengthy and learned notes and appendices. Some Victorianists look to Freeman from time to time as an example of some of the worst excesses of nineteenth-century historical prose.¹ Students of historiography may know that it was Freeman who said "History is past politics, and politics present history," but they likely consider the remark as little more than a convenient aphorism by which to categorize Victorian history-writing in general, a quaint summation of a narrow historical perspective top-heavy with political and constitutional concerns.

Yet, in his own time, Edward Augustus Freeman was regarded as a titan of historical scholarship and a formidable political spokesman. He was a prophet and a

¹Strachey, Portraits in Miniature, 200. Strachey contended that Freeman's histories "were remarkable for their soporific qualities," a judgment which few critics have challenged.

popularizer in both new fields of history and new historical methods, and his ultimate success led to his own work being surpassed rapidly by those whose work he influenced.²

Given to provocative overstatement, especially in his more popular writings, Freeman has had his reputation as an historian tarnished by critics who have seized upon certain inaccuracies or excesses in his work and belabored them, ignoring the degree of caution which he displayed most of the time in most of his scholarly exercises. A strange and often difficult man who lived and stayed far from England's major social and intellectual centres, he never built up a large, organized scholarly following which could either assist him in his history-writing or effectively perpetuate his memory in the academic world. Critical reflection, however, upon the life's work of this remarkable scholar, critic, and public man must lead historiographers to revise their estimates of Freeman.

When Freeman began his literary career, the study of history as an academic discipline did not exist in

²For example, while Freeman was a major influence on J. B. Bury, Bury's Byzantine studies have remained much more popular than Freeman's work on the Eastern Empire. Similarly, while Bryce acknowledged a debt to Freeman for the Holy Roman Empire, it is Bryce's work that has become a classic.

England, save as a component in a classical education. Professor Peardon notes that at the time of Freeman's coming up to Oxford "the situation of historical studies in England, as contrasted with contemporary activity on the Continent, was felt to be a national disgrace."³ At both major universities in England the most prestigious chairs of history were sinecures, usually given to men of little or no historical learning. In Germany, on the other hand, the universities had provided an arena for serious historical study from the end of the eighteenth century; and from the 1830s Ranke and Georg Waitz and their students constantly improved the quality of professional training in history. In France the critical work of the Bollandist and Maurist fathers of the seventeenth century was carried on after 1821 in the secular Ecole de Chartes, and by mid-century Victor Duruy and Gabriel Monod had begun to introduce German methods of historical study. The German scholars of the first half of the nineteenth century were without question the leaders in every area of historical scholarship, the editing of texts, the historical study of law, and the comparative study of language. In Britain, however, history remained until late in the nine-

³Peardon, Transition in English Historical Writing, 309-310.

teenth century the work of untrained or self-trained amateurs. Even the Swiss regarded British scholarship as hopelessly laggard.⁴ It is perhaps illustrative of the gap between Continental and British historical study that by 1823 Georg Pertz had begun to shape the Monumenta Germanicae Historica into an international model for the scientific editing and criticism of sources, while in 1836 the Historical Record Commission in England had to admit that more records had been destroyed in the Commission's thirty years of work than in the previous four centuries.⁵

By the time of Freeman's death in 1892 British historical scholarship continued to lag behind that of the Continent, but the gap had begun to close somewhat. While the British retained their admiration for gifted amateur writers of history, the discipline was, by the turn of the century, dominated by professional scholars. After

⁴See Adolphe Morlot to Freeman, 5 April 1865, Freeman MSS.

⁵Peardon, Transition in English Historical Writing, 307.

the almost perverse appointment of J. A. Froude to succeed Freeman as Regius Professor at Oxford, most major posts in history at British universities were reserved for recognized scholars. Students of history at the older universities and especially at the rigorous Victoria University of Manchester received training and practice in all facets of historical method. The English Historical Review, long delayed for want of a publisher who would take on the economic risk of a serious scholarly journal, was launched in 1886 with the encouragement of, among others, E. A. Freeman. The Review was in no respect the equal to its prestigious model, the Historische Zeitschrift -- its contributors, Freeman among them, showed comparatively less skill, for example, in the employment of manuscript sources -- but the journal improved substantially with every year. The English never produced "schools" of history on the German model, those tightly disciplined teams of scholars and their pupils such as gathered about Ranke, Mommsen, Sybel in Germany and Herbert Baxter Adams in the United States; English historians resisted such organization and pursued their studies in comparative independence. Yet by the beginning of the twentieth century England could claim a significant number of historians, Acton, Maitland, Round, and C. H. Firth, whose work commanded international attention. Finally, scholarly communication across

national boundaries, which in Freeman's youth had been informal and haphazard where it existed at all, was being promoted at the end of the nineteenth century by the International Congress of Historical Sciences and in later years by the Union Académique Internationale.

To Freeman, as the most prolific British historical writer of his age, is due a measure of credit in this transformation of historical study in his country. In the more general context of European historiography, Freeman cannot be regarded as an innovator in historical philosophy or methodology. During his lifetime British scholarship attempted to catch up to its German counterpart largely by conscious adoption or independent discovery of methods long established on the Continent. It is not surprising then that Freeman's contributions to historical method and interpretation seem derivative; in this respect he did not differ from any of his professional contemporaries. The improvement of historical standards in Britain, by any means, however, was no easy task. History was regarded by the general public and by a significant part of the learned classes more as a branch of literature than as a nascent science. Critical work on sources was done primarily by amateur local antiquarians, and the titans

of early nineteenth-century history-writing in England, Hallam, Macaulay, and Carlyle, remained practically oblivious to the advanced critical standards of the German universities. In modern history English scholarship received relatively little influence from the Continent until the time of Lord Acton.

Freeman, however, was trained and deeply interested in ancient history, the one area in which German scholarship had an early influence in Britain. He became familiar with the work of B. G. Niebuhr and his school, in part through Arnold, Grote, and Bishop Thirlwall. From Niebuhr, for example, he learned to blend folk-tales, myths, and philological evidence with more traditional sources in the reconstruction of an historical event. Later, with his friend Stubbs, Freeman helped to popularize in England the methods and findings of German-trained mediaevalists J. M. Lappenberg and J. M. Kemble. From the Germans Freeman adopted not only a methodology and a number of interpretations but a desire to study national institutions and to study them by tracing them to their roots, as he did in his popular articles on the House of Lords in the Manchester Guardian.⁶ While he never conducted a "seminar"

⁶Revised and reprinted in Historical Essays, 4:480-502.

at Oxford in the manner of the great German professors, Freeman recognized the superiority of the Continental universities in initiating young men into the historical discipline. Before he became Regius Professor in 1884, students at Oxford received little training or practice in research or methodology. During his tenure Freeman became the first Regius Professor to give a series of lectures on the "Methods of Historical Study", and he gave his encouragement and assistance to those students engaged in primary research. He was almost universally respected among British scholars of his day, and his work was regarded in Europe as being of higher quality than that of most of his countrymen. Most British historians of the generation which followed his death acknowledged a great debt to Freeman's teaching, even though his works rapidly became outdated.

Freeman's major contribution, however, may have been in changing popular attitudes toward historical scholarship in Britain. He was above all a teacher to the British public of a new perception of history as a scientific discipline. In part this contribution stemmed from the fact that Freeman's histories were read more widely than those of most of his intellectual and scholarly superiors. Round, Stubbs, Vinogradoff, Seebohm, and other contemporaries outshone Freeman in the quality of their research,

but their contributions were almost solely in the form of technical monographs. Freeman, on the other hand, was, like Ranke before him in Germany, a pioneer in England in blending the critical use of historical documents with the writing of readable and exciting narrative history. His effectiveness in transforming popular attitudes toward history was due also to his stature as a reviewer and lecturer who had a wider public exposure than any serious British historian of his time. At mid-century most Victorian reviewers were not experts in the areas about which they wrote; in history they were especially undereducated and unaware of international trends in scholarship. Yet it was from the numerous popular reviews of the period that many, if not most literate Englishmen absorbed their ideas about history.⁷ Through his forty years as a reviewer Freeman held up popular works of history to comparison with the advanced work of British and foreign scholars, stimulating at once a demand for more learned critics, the production of better works of history, and the development of a more aware and critical reading public. While the study of history was regarded on the Continent as a serious professional pursuit, in England Rev. Charles Kingsley, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, demeaned "book-worms" in historical research;

⁷Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, 140.

and in an address to students at St. Andrew's University Froude deemed historical study to be relevant only to "the amusement of your leisure hereafter."⁸ In his writing and teaching Freeman attacked these views with such effectiveness that by the time of his death his own work was being dismissed as less well-researched and less seriously argued than professional standards allowed.

Through these contributions to the development of historical study as an independent, scientific discipline, the undertaking of which demanded adherence to high, professional standards, Freeman played a key role in establishing the modern historical profession in England. Few critics of the twentieth century, however, have recognized the nature or extent of his contribution. This neglect may be explained in part by the fact that little of Freeman's historical philosophy or methodology was original or that his work compares poorly to that of many of his European contemporaries. Yet the importance of Freeman's work in English historiography has been obscured by harsh criticism to which his work was subjected in the years immediately following his death.

There is no doubt that Freeman's reputation for

⁸Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, 140.

careful and accurate scholarship was severely damaged by the merciless dissection of the Norman Conquest by the brilliant historical technician, J. H. Round. A mere glance at the index of Round's collected attacks on Freeman and his defenders, Feudal England, reveals the ferocity of Round's criticism:

Freeman, Professor: unacquainted with the Inq. Com. Cart. 4; ignores the Northamptonshire geld-roll 149; . . . his contemptuous criticism . . . when himself in error; . . . his "undoubted history"; . . . his "fact"; . . . his bias; . . . his pedantry; . . . misconstrues his Latin; . . . his supposed accuracy; . . . his confused views; . . . his failure; . . . his special weakness; . . . his wild dream; . . . the necessity of criticising his work. . . .⁹

In the chapter "Mr. Freeman and the Battle of Hastings," Round ridicules Freeman's re-naming of the Battle's site "Senlac" after the fashion of Orderic and makes his famous sally against Freeman's belief, drawn from the account of Wace and the Bayeux Tapestry, that the English forces fought behind hastily constructed palisades.¹⁰ These and other criticisms of Freeman's work -- his failure to consult certain sources, his over-reliance upon one writer or source over another -- seemed to bring low the Regius

⁹Round, Feudal England, 580-81.

¹⁰Ibid., 332-98.

Professor's almost legendary reputation for minute accuracy. Round's attacks were made on a dead man, and the defense of the deceased historian was taken up in part by non-academic antiquarians¹¹ who foolishly tried to answer Round on his technical charges. Few critics have fully analyzed Round's assault on Freeman, and fewer still have given adequate attention to the basic political dispute which underlay the scholarly disagreement over the history of the Norman Conquest. Freeman's inaccuracies of detail form the bulk of Round's ammunition, but it is clear that Round's chief complaint was that Freeman glorified the extent of English liberty before the Conquest. Rather, in the view of arch-Tory Round, the English suffered from an "almost anarchic excess of liberty."¹² If Freeman saw in Earl Godwine the image of William Ewart Gladstone,

¹¹T. A. Archer, "Mr. Freeman and the Quarterly Review," Contemporary Review 63 (1893):334-55. Archer spoke eloquently in defense of Freeman's character if not his complete reliability as an historical authority: "To Mr. Freeman 'truth' was the one object of historical study, and he would never have borne a grudge against those who pointed out his mistakes. His only antagonism was towards the arrogance of ignorance that tried to pass itself off for knowledge.", 354.

¹²Round, Feudal England, 353.

Round concurred, but with a radically different estimation of the Earl.

The character of Round's criticisms of Freeman is pertinent because it reveals the degree to which historiographers must be wary in evaluating what are apparently technical historiographical controversies. It cannot be disputed that much of the professional obloquy heaped upon Freeman before and after his death stemmed from political partisanship on the part of his critics, a fate which Freeman's own reputation for partisanship encouraged. Round's attacks also bear the mark of personal bitterness, born of his failure to find suitable outlets for his criticisms while the Professor was still alive. Indeed, "the very point" of his work, he claimed, was "that the mischievous superstition of Mr. Freeman's unfailing accuracy must be ruthlessly destroyed lest others should be taught, as I was, to accept his authority as supreme."¹³ Doubt must be cast upon the sincerity of Round's critical spirit and upon the degree to which he ever, in fact, disproved any of Freeman's central historical theses. Yet, for reasons connected largely with Freeman's own career, Round's attacks were widely accepted at face value and even

¹³Round, Feudal England,* 395.

today form a significant part in historiographical assessments of Freeman's work.¹⁴

In part, the savagery of Freeman's own critical reviews of other writers contributed to the rapidity with which his political and professional enemies publicized his errors. The influential and popular J. A. Froude followed Freeman into the Regius Chair, and it was not forgotten that Freeman had dismissed this clever writer with the contemptuous comment:

If history means truth, if it means fairness, if it means faithfully reporting what contemporary sources record, and drawing reasonable inferences from their statements, then Mr. Froude is no historian.¹⁵

The sarcasm which Freeman poured out over writers who sacrificed accuracy in favor of a more readable, striking, or paradoxical narrative or for partisan purposes was turned back upon him to the delight of those who had been stung by his criticism or those who (like Freeman himself) enjoyed seeing the proud humbled and shown to have feet of clay.

¹⁴See, for example, H. A. Cronne, "E. A. Freeman: 1823-92," History 28 (1943):78-92.

¹⁵E. A. Freeman, "Mr. Froude's Life and Times of Thomas Becket," Contemporary Review 33 (1879):240-41.

Beyond the political and scholarly partisanship of the late nineteenth century, however, it was the very success of Freeman's own crusade for a broader, more accurate, critical, and "scientific" history which contributed most to his own work being so rapidly superseded. He made significant contributions to the development of an historical profession which in a short time came to criticize his methodology, eschew his philosophy, and ignore the subjects and concerns with which he was most involved. The effort which Freeman devoted to promoting the employment of auxiliary sciences in historical investigation is pale indeed beside the work of James Harvey Robinson and others of this century. But what cannot be measured exactly is the contribution of men like Freeman to this interest in interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary work. In all of his scholarly histories and in countless articles and reviews, Freeman made use of the results of geographical and philological studies in constructing an historical narrative, and he regularly encouraged his colleagues to do the same. Even specialist studies like numismatics or heraldry could yield important historical information. And if in some areas Freeman remained stubbornly blind to the extent to which certain other disciplines could be used by the historian, in others he served as a

pioneer and visionary.

Freeman's own use of comparative method was primitive, sketchy, and often unsatisfactory. However, his lectures at the Royal Institution in 1872 demonstrated the value for historical scholars of cross-social comparison in forming and testing hypotheses. Having been introduced to the use of comparative method by reading Grimm, Max Müller, and other philological scholars, Freeman's use of that method was often too rigidly tied to the philological mode of inquiry. Still, his was one of the first major voices in English historiography to campaign consistently for the use of comparison. It fell to other scholars, chiefly on the Continent, to expand the use of the method. English historiography was never able to match the thorough and incisive use of comparison achieved by Bloch and the scholars of the Annales school. Yet even in his narrow application of comparative method Freeman served as a beacon to younger scholars.

Furthermore, if Freeman's own work in source criticism was open to question in some places and utterly unsatisfactory in others, it was his emphasis on the importance of a careful weighing and questioning of primary sources which helped lead to the discovery and correction of his errors. As critic, teacher, and popular

spokesman for a more scholarly and precise school of history, Freeman urged his audiences to develop those methodological habits which ultimately revealed the defects in his own work. York Powell, a successor in the Regius Chair, was aware of the serious errors that could be found in Freeman's history, but he reminded the public of his predecessor's painstaking method and openness to constructive criticism:

He planned out his work with great care, thought out the details, and noted carefully any authority he could get at before he wrote. . . . He verified every reference, and he went over his proof-sheets with minute care. . . . He was -- often excessively -- annoyed by criticism that he thought unfair or careless; but no man welcomed more earnestly any real rectification of his words or views. His care in revising his work was continual and scrupulous. He was eager to seek information from every quarter and he would spend hours in searching for any detail . . . bearing on any opinion or statement he had made.¹⁶

Even Frederic Harrison, long a critic of Freeman's alleged pedantry, revealed that he cared not "a scat or a scilling" about the question of palisades at Senlac and that the Professor was "a consummate historical scholar" who had given the world "most interesting and valuable books."¹⁷

D. E. Strick, in an attempt to revise the estimate

¹⁶ Cited in Elton, Life of York Powell, 2:33.

¹⁷ Frederic Harrison, The Meaning of History (London, 1894), 139.

of Freeman made by G. P. Gooch in his influential History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century, contended that he was not a member of any truly new school of historical scholarship. He placed Freeman instead as one of the last amateur historians of a variety common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ It misses the mark, however, to evaluate Freeman as merely a vestige of an earlier and out-dated style of history-writing or as the leading exponent of a radically novel historical school. As David Douglas wrote, "Freeman developed many of the worst elements of the tradition he inherited,"¹⁹ such as his narrowly political conception of history and his preference for an epic narrative style. On the other hand, he also developed and popularized the best elements in a newer, more scientific historical tradition, such as cross-disciplinary dialogues between history and philology or geography, insistence upon the use of original sources and their critical but respectful treatment, and the rudiments of inter-social comparison. Freeman should be considered more as an historiographical conservative in the same sense that he can be considered as a political conservative; that is, he had no wish to see history-writing shed the primarily political and narrative

¹⁸ Strick, English Historiography, 1859-1890, 1-7.

¹⁹ D. C. Douglas, Norman Conquest and British Historians (Glasgow, 1946), 21.

character which it had been given by Thucydides, yet he fervently desired to see traditional history based on a more scientific methodology. Freeman was too attached to the character portraiture of Macaulay and the didactic political analysis of Gibbon and Grote to support an historical literature consisting solely of the technical monographs so typical of nineteenth-century Continental scholars. Yet he sought to refurbish traditional English history-writing and put it on a broader and sounder scholarly footing.

Similarly, the philosophy of history which can be constructed from Freeman's scattered writings on the subject and from analyses of his historical narratives is today either completely out of favor or open to serious question. Indeed, many critics seldom comment on Freeman's philosophy of history in the mistaken view that none such existed. The keystone of his historical philosophy, the unity of history, certainly made a profound impression on the scholars of his own age. Bury acknowledged a debt to Freeman for revealing to him the importance of Byzantine study in establishing the links of ancient and modern culture, and Bryce paid homage to Freeman in his emphasis on the survival of ancient ideas and forms in the Holy Roman Empire. Today, historians ritually decry specializa-

tion and proceed with it apace. They tend to deride writers like Toynbee, who, with whatever imperfections, sought to emulate Freeman in his attempt to grapple with history as a totality.

It is likely that Freeman's strictest interpretation of the unity of history would require of a scholar an amount of raw content knowledge beyond the reach of any human being. When Freeman himself moved away from his own periods he was often very shallow and unsure in his writing. Yet his was a powerful voice in opposition to a tendency in literary and educational milieux to confine research and study to a few favored periods, to tread over familiar ground wearing blinkers to shut out valuable linkages to other periods and societies. He recognized the importance of history's "golden ages", but he also stressed the importance of the transitional periods between them as interesting in themselves and crucial to understanding the eras which they joined. The response of the history schools in the nineteenth century was to do little more than to expand their horizons to include specialized study of more recent and popular periods. Few historians during the century tried to model themselves in the image of the traditional universal historian, and it is clear that Freeman's own attempts at comprehensive universal history were plagued by the very immensity if not impossibility of

the task. Yet Freeman remained perhaps the most outspoken advocate of a non-metaphysical universal approach to the study of history in his time.

He was ever ready to battle those who rigidly compartmentalized history in strictly defined periods, often determined by criteria more applicable to other disciplines. Historical periods could be conceived of only loosely, and their understanding depended on the knowledge one had of the periods which came before and after. Indeed, one of the greatest shortcomings which Freeman saw in Froude was his apparent weakness in mediaeval history which caused him to misinterpret the events of the sixteenth century.²⁰ Any historian, no matter how specialized his work, needed to base his research and judgments on an underlying vision of the total sweep of history. Unable to view the past as a coherent, organic entity, Froude could not confidently decide the importance of particular events, persons, or aspects of various ages for historical investigation.

Freeman believed that, methodologically, any historical event was a valid topic for research -- every event could contain within it the possibility of all

²⁰E. A. Freeman, "Last Words on Mr. Froude," Contemporary Review 35 (1879):216.

historical knowledge; yet he maintained that all historical research should be evaluated on the basis of its universal implications. With respect to local historians, for example, Freeman was both a critic and an inspiration. The most obscure work of the antiquary was a valuable contribution to the field of history, but it would be of little value in itself until some more reflective writer connected the particular manifestation to the universal pattern or trend. Thus, reviewing the work of the constitutional antiquarian, Homersham Cox, he acknowledged the accuracy and value of Cox's research but complained:

Where Mr. Cox fails is in not grasping the greater and broader facts of history, and those great abiding and animating principles which underline alike the facts which he brings forward and the facts which he passes by.²¹

By turns the meaning which Freeman found in history seemed to confirm the miraculous and powerful attraction of the Christian faith, the political and cultural superiority of small, communitarian states, the folly of permanent colonial domination, or the existence of an eternal and irreconcilable conflict between occidental and oriental culture. Stated in the bold, often polemical manner which

²¹"Cox's Antient Parliamentary Elections," 339.

characterized Freeman's writing, these conclusions have struck later historians as simplistic or unreliable. Many historians have despaired of ever finding any clear patterns in history. Carl Becker spoke for a whole generation of relativists in denying even the existence of an historical reality beyond the mind of the individual historian.²² The debates of analytical historians about the existence of patterns in history and the possibility of historians discovering them literally would have given Freeman a headache. Like most people who have taken a personal interest in history, Freeman believed that historical study enabled men to draw certain conclusions about their own human natures, their limits and possibilities, and to perceive some purposiveness in man's earthly existence.

Freeman's oft-stated belief that history must be considered a science like any other has contributed to a popular conception of him as part of the positivist tradition of the nineteenth century. His concern for the accurate establishment of factual materials and intemperate criticism of writers who fell short of his own standard of

²²Carl Becker, Everyman His Own Historian (New York, 1935), 233-55.

accuracy tended to support that conclusion. It should be clear, however, that Freeman's perspective on the scientific character of history accords far more with that of present-day historical opinion than might first be supposed. He never adopted the extreme Rankean position that historical facts, appropriately catalogued and arranged according to universally self-evident criteria, would speak for themselves. He recognized, and was criticized for recognizing, that historians from different ages, national groups, political persuasions, and scholarly interests might tell their tales differently. The popularity of the radical objectivist view was reflected in the decision of the editors of the Cambridge Modern History to plan a work in which the contributions of different authors should be indistinguishable as the work of separate hands. For Freeman, history may have been a seamless web, but historical narrative was not. He realized that every writer brought his own particular perspective to the objective reality of the past. In line with most twentieth-century historians, Freeman claimed no more for history than that it could -- as nearly as most sciences -- establish factual information. The presentation of that information constituted the art of the individual historian. It was this perspective on the nature of historical science that enabled the drum-and-trumpet historian to appreciate

even the social history of J. R. Green. Freeman's own work was full -- critics like Round believed too full -- of conjecture and interpretation, but only occasionally did the author blur the lines which separated opinion from commonly accepted fact.²³ And if Freeman's conjectures were often too broad and too bold for contemporary historical tastes, his criteria for establishing fact were as strict as any common today.

To most contemporary readers, no less than to Lytton Strachey, Freeman's history is objectionable in part because of the avowed moralism with which it is infused. In many respects, the consistency and fairness of his particular judgments rightly have been questioned. He could be a most unsparing moral critic of certain historical figures, while displaying sympathy and sensitivity toward others. Even more unsatisfactory to modern readers is the fact that Freeman often made his moral and ethical assessments of historical figures according to a relatively narrow, time-bound, and class-bound moral code. In "The Court of Lewis XV," Freeman's condemnation of the reign rests nearly as much on the monarch's adultery as

²³Occasionally Freeman admitted that a conjecture could not be proven; yet he would go on to speak as if it were fact or to build other conjectures upon it. The habit was confusing, and it obscures the care which Freeman took

his political perfidy and incompetence.²⁴

For the most part, however, Freeman's moral judgments were provocative and thoughtful. There have been powerful arguments presented both for and against the inclusion of moral judgments -- or the possibility of completely avoiding them -- in well-written history. During Freeman's life, however, an historian who abstained from moral judgment would have been a rarity. Unlike many of his generation,²⁵ Freeman was mindful of the historical fluidity of ethical standards and seldom defined heroism or villainy in terms wholly inappropriate to their setting. He was open to discuss extenuating circumstances surrounding particular immoral actions, but he was completely unwilling to adopt an attitude of tout comprendre, tout pardonner. Freeman never believed that the historian had a special duty to expose or condemn criminal or sinful acts, or to

when introducing an interpretation to claim for it only what the sources permitted.

²⁴Freeman, "The Court Of Lewis XV," 250-54; cf. Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, 368-69.

²⁵See Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, 137-38; 146-47.

act as God's special prosecutor of historical malefactors. Instead it was the duty of every Christian, every ethically upright human being, not to let evil and treachery (or piety and heroism) be discussed in neutral tones. To do so, he believed, would in some way make the writer an accomplice in the wrong-doing. More defensibly, he realized that scrupulously to avoid all moral commentary in historical writing is to rob the narrative of much of its spirit and passion. In gathering his materials, establishing factual validity, in trying to develop a coherent and accurate chronology of events, Freeman strove for the alleged moral neutrality of the scientist. In relating the tale which his investigations had pieced together, Freeman assumed rather more the style of the dramatist, the epic poet, or the Biblical prophet.

The adoption of this particular style made Freeman's work difficult reading for many of his contemporaries as well as for modern students. Many critics have unkindly suggested that Freeman's hostility to Froude stemmed from jealousy of the popularity of Froude's polished literary style.²⁶ This argument does not take account of the fact that Freeman admired the stylistic

²⁶ See Herbert Paul, The Life of Froude (London, 1905), 147-98, passim, and T. Rice Holmes, "Mr. Froude and His Critics," Westminster Review 138 (1892):174-89, passim.

excellence of Gibbon, Macaulay and others. He did not believe that good history had to be ponderous, allusive, or dull. But the literary presentation of historical research, while important to Freeman, was secondary to the accuracy of the research. His advice to historical students was precisely that given in this century by V. H. Galbraith:

In describing history as a science . . . , we are doing no more than stating an ideal, to which we must cling, however unattainable in practice. . . . Between [history and literature] there is no essential connection, however much and long they have been associated. By all means write like Macaulay and Gibbon -- if you can -- but . . . the basic aim should be to arrive at the bare truth. Truth and rhetoric are bad bed-fellows.²⁷

It was this injunction which he believed that Froude had ignored. And it was Freeman's own passion for clearly presenting all sides of the scholarly questions on which his interpretations turned which caused his best work to be disfigured by tangential wanderings and burdened with massive notes and appendices. Beyond even the duty which style has to pay to scholarship, Freeman's writing does reflect an earlier literary style which went into eclipse

²⁷ V. H. Galbraith, Introduction to the Study of History (London, 1964), 3.

in the late Victorian era and has yet to re-emerge. His wide vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon words and constructions, while in part the result of an idiosyncratic desire to "purify" the English language, reflected a preference for an epic style exemplified in Shakespeare and the King James Bible. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the historian's attempt to "spin his yarn in plain English" appeared to most critics as odd and out-dated.

It is not only Freeman's language or style which has kept his historical merits from being fully recognized in this century. The nationalist and allegedly racist implications of the Teutonist school of history with which he is usually associated are unacceptable to modern historians. R. Allen Brown, for example, considered Freeman's Teutonism an embarrassment to the contemporary English scholar.²⁸ Yet, if Freeman often allowed a Teutonist mythology to cloud his historical judgments or permitted national pride to distort his portrayal of past events, this is not remarkable in an English historian of the Victorian era. What is perhaps more remarkable is the

²⁸R. Allen Brown, The Normans and the Norman Conquest (London, 1969), 2.

degree to which he resisted the temptations of his own powerful prejudices in the writing of history.

Freeman relied seldom upon race and national character as pre-eminent explanatory factors. These concepts were employed as further supports for conclusions already demonstrated by more substantial means. Scholars like Professor Allen Brown may be embarrassed by Freeman's reference to Duke William as "Norman to the back-bone"²⁹ or his use of phrases like "Norman lies and slanders"³⁰ in reference to certain source materials, but these are more literary excesses than serious methodological faults. Freeman criticized his sources on their merits for the most part rather than on their national origin. During his lifetime Freeman received surprisingly little criticism for his Teutonism and nationalism, perhaps because his views were acceptable to the bulk of British and American scholars of the age. Even a Carmarthen newspaper, The Welshman, defended the Teutonist historian against charges of Celtophobia bias, insisting that his arguments

²⁹William the Conqueror, 41.

³⁰Old English History, 308.

were rooted in sound historical research.³¹ He never cared if some religious or national group was offended by his work -- he often boasted that partisan disapproval showed the mark of good history -- but, as he revealed in his attack on Froude's English in Ireland, to intentionally demean or belittle a national group and to distort historical truth to do so was unconscionable.

The cultural nationalism which underlay much of Freeman's writing occupied the middle ground between the sense of racial brotherhood for all Europeans and a narrower nationalism, more akin to patriotism, based on mere geographical factors. Like most of Freeman's political and personal philosophy, it owed less to contemporary thinking than to his own historical study. His work on the unity of the English people was animated far more by his conception of the national feeling of the scattered Greek peoples of antiquity than by Continental theories of nationalism. His open pride in the history and accomplishments of the English people is today considered a serious weakness in his history. Yet he cannot be accused of consciously distorting his findings to glorify falsely Englishmen of the past or present. To be sure, Freeman's interpretation of the Norman Conquest as

³¹The Welshman, 11 May 1883, 4.

a preservator of English institutions and liberties puts the best possible face on foreign conquest, but the interpretation found support in the sources. Freeman held no brief for any nationalist history which took insufficient account of all available facts or which dismissed as unworthy those periods or events which did not show a nation in its best light. He was thus appalled at Greek historians who countenanced the destruction of Turkish relics at Athens. Historical facts cannot be changed, nor should men try to change them. Nationalism and Teutonism, then, were for Freeman the result of tenable conclusions drawn from factual information. And in an age of radically chauvinistic history and literature, Freeman tried to reconcile and relate national and universal history as honestly as his values, prejudices, and methodological weaknesses permitted.

The tendency to evaluate particular historical events as part of a grand historical vision extended to Freeman's political philosophy. His political views were not the product of mere Liberal partisanship but derived primarily from his historical study. Thus Freeman's political outlook, like most of his thought, underwent relatively little change during his adult life. His slogan of "Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform", put to the electors of Wallingford in 1859, could have remained as his

political motto until the day he died. His rigid adherence to his political principles often kept him at odds publicly with the Liberal Party and at times made him an embarrassing thorn in the side of his political allies. While he played an active role in partisan and non-partisan politics throughout his life, he remained utterly blind to the actual dynamics and operation of parliamentary government. To his friends as well as his enemies, Freeman's political thought often seemed hopelessly quixotic. Yet this apparent naivety made him a stern and effective critic of governments which sacrificed political principle to political expediency.

Round and other Tory critics read Liberal bias into Freeman's history,³² and many passages in his writing seem to support that view. Yet conscious bias would be inconsistent with Freeman's most cherished scholarly values. If Freeman wrote with any bias it was a Thucydidean bias, attempting in his own work to emulate the achievements of the great Greek writer in gathering historical data, constructing a coherent narrative, and drawing therefrom

³²Round, Feudal England, 302; see also Bratchel, Victorian Interpretation of the Norman Conquest, 35, and Sir John Marriott, Memories of Fourscore Years (Glasgow, 1946), 60.

important political conclusions of a general nature. Victorian Liberals were deeply divided on such issues as democracy and imperialism, but in his treatment of these issues Freeman adopted the perspective of Thucydides and acknowledged his debt to him. It is only when the historiographer recognizes the degree to which Freeman strove to imitate the Thucydidean model can he grasp the way in which Freeman conceived that politics was present history, the contemporary development of principles long ago identified and analyzed by Thucydides, Polybius, and other ancient writers.

Yet even after popular and critical misconceptions about Freeman's history are corrected or challenged, even after he is recognized as a pioneer in the development of a modern, orderly, and professional -- if not scientific -- history, why the modern historiographer or general student of history should still read Freeman is an open question. For the historiographer, the squire of Somerleaze who became the Regius Professor at Oxford can be taken to represent in one career the general shift of historical writing from an amateur to a professional basis. His criticisms and exhortations pointed the way to a more technically proficient style of historical research, although he never mastered that style himself. James Westfall Thompson wrote that "for learning and mental power" Freeman "stood

next to Bishop Stubbs in his generation."³³ With Stubbs and a host of younger followers, Bryce, Bury, Gardiner, Green, Nongate, and York Powell, Freeman helped to transform history in Britain from a study thought of primarily as a pastime for literary dabblers, however able, into a discipline worthy of a place in the pantheon of serious sciences. This transformation was accomplished in part by Freeman's own work, but perhaps an even more important contribution was the interest which he took in the promotion of sound historical study at all levels.

He struggled from 1849 to his death to reform historical study at Oxford, to make the history school a centre for genuine scholarship, not just a "school for rich young men." While he was never an active reformer in schools below the university level; his Old English History and the Historical Course were influential attempts to instill in the youth of the English-speaking world a sense of the importance of accuracy in historical study and the inter-relationship of all European history. In countless articles and addresses Freeman attempted to bridge the gap between the local antiquary and the historical profession.

³³Thompson, History of Historical Writing, 2:318.

He urged local historians to adopt more rigorous standards and explore topics that would interest historical scholars whose fields of research were broader. Even on largely honorific occasions, addressing a group of Birmingham businessmen or passing out school prizes, Freeman sought to kindle the interest of his nation in history and teach them to appreciate professionally researched and written history.

The student of British intellectual history should find in Freeman an exemplar of much of the best and the worst of educated mid-Victorian thought. While his uniqueness and eccentricity set him apart from most men even in his own time, and while many of his political and philosophic perspectives were formed internally during private historical study, Freeman shared with most Englishmen of his time a number of essential articles of faith. His Teutonism and concern with moral judgment in history, his belief in history as a scientific endeavor and a didactic tool for mankind reveal a man in the mainstream of mid-Victorian thinking.³⁴ A free-trader, a nationalist

³⁴See Houghton, Victorian Frame of Mind, 239-42; 14-15; 170n; see also John Lester, Journey Through Despair, 1880-1914 (Princeton, 1968), 25-27; 77.

who supported German and Italian unification and the revolt of Eastern Christians against the Turks, a follower of Gladstone on most issues, Freeman found that his political views, while provocatively expressed, were essentially those of a significant part of his nation. More striking, however, was the historian's unshakable belief in human progress and improvement. In spite of the fact that he often recalled the glory of past history, Freeman always insisted that his own century was the greatest in history, that European man had significantly progressed morally as well as technologically, and that technology would enable man to improve still further. Believing that improved communication and transport could enable large, modern states to develop a political culture similar to that of the Greek poleis, he was sure that Europe stood on the threshold of a new golden age. The opposition which he provoked in some segments of society no less than the honor he received from others indicates Freeman's importance as a controversialist and tribune of public opinion. And as his views were taken seriously by Englishmen of all parties, within and without the scholarly world, it is meet and proper that he not be overlooked by modern Victorianists.

It is to the general student of history, however, that Freeman's work may be most valuable. It is in his vision of history as a unity and the untempered spirit which he brought to that vision that Freeman should serve

still as an inspiration to historical students. He sought to write history within a framework of scholarly rules and yet retain the passions which gave that study life and appeal from the days of Herodotus to those of Macaulay. Froude won followers through his ability to turn clever phrases and develop striking historical paradoxes; Round impressed his readers by careful, thorough, and precise, if stolid, historical research. In Freeman, however, an earnest passion for truth for its own sake, an enthusiasm for helping men of the past tell their story to men of the present gained him the respect, not only of a large part of the reading public, but also some of the most brilliant young historians of his day.

History was never for Freeman an academic or literary exercise. It was human drama, an objective reality worth speculating about, researching, and making an admittedly hopeless attempt to grasp in its fulness. Sir Alexander Macmillan once wrote that Freeman knew more history than any man alive.³⁵ But while his encyclopaedic

³⁵Alexander Macmillan to Henry Allon, 15 March 1867, Letters of Alexander Macmillan, ed. George A. Macmillan (Glasgow, 1908), 222.

historical learning was awesome by any standard, it is not of itself sufficient to justify a re-examination of the historian today. The mediaevalist Frank Barlow, in a partial rehabilitation of the eminent Victorian, refers to Freeman's "width of vision" and notes that scholars in his specialty have begun to recognize this quality.³⁶

It is perhaps this width of vision which enchanted his young followers and may come to attract a renewed interest in his life and work. Like Toynbee, whose work is in many ways strikingly similar, Freeman is open to criticism for conclusions which appear appallingly overdrawn, even bizarre, for the grave lacunae found in his work. At times, obstinate prejudices and dreadful blunders mar Freeman's narrative, and his language becomes tedious and repetitive. But historiographers must be overwhelmed by the range of knowledge ingeniously employed. They must be fascinated by the boldness and audacity of his total conception of history, the passionate faith in its purpose and meaning. Round and succeeding generations of specialists have exposed and analyzed the flaws in his work. Twentieth-century scholars, standing in part on

³⁶ Frank Barlow, "The Effects of the Norman Conquest," in D. Whitelock, D. Douglas, C. Lemmon, and F. Barlow, The Norman Conquest (London, 1966), 127.

Freeman's shoulders, have revealed the degree to which his history reflects and is limited by the spirit of the age in which it was written. Yet whatever flaws are found in Freeman's stitchwork, the grandeur of the tapestry constitutes his greatest contribution to Western historiography.

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N.B.: During the course of research, well over one hundred "middles" and reviews in this journal were ascribed to Freeman through internal evidence or references in letters. The number of articles is too great and their importance too small to include them as well as those attributed to Freeman in Bevington's history of Saturday Review.

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