

**THE STUDY OF
HISTORY:
TWO LECTURES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649419258

The Study of History: Two Lectures by Goldwin Smith

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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GOLDWIN SMITH

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THE STUDY OF HISTORY.

Two Lectures

DELIVERED BY

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Oxford & London :

J. H. AND JAS. PARKER.

1861.

142035

~~F 7371~~
H 4038.61

Harvard College Library
Norton Collection,
26 Sept. 1908

BOUND OCT 16 1909

Printed by Messrs. Parker, Cornmarket, Oxford.



PREFACE.

THE theory of History adopted in these lectures is in accordance with the doctrine of Progress; a doctrine which is so far from being new that it must have been acted on by all who took thought for posterity.

Christianity cannot be said to be opposed to Progress, unless it can be shewn that Christianity forbids or discourages virtue, science, or industry, these being the three elements of which human progress consists.

The great source of Progress is love of our kind; as the great obstacle to Progress is self-love, which perverts our moral activity, turns our intellect to the indulgence of ambition and vanity instead of the pursuit of truth, and destroys, through indolence and vice, the industry which adds to the common store. Love of our kind as opposed to self-love is the cardinal and distinguishing doctrine of Christianity. On this vital point the newest and most daring philosophy has only been able to repeat the Christian precept with a verbal change, or a change which, if more than verbal, is wrong. If "live for others" means more than "love one another," it means total annihilation of self, which is an impracticable dream.

It might have been imagined that the unworldliness which Christianity imposes would prevent men from

making themselves useful to the world. But such is in fact not the case. The greatest statesmen and soldiers have been most fervent Christians. Even enthusiasts, who imagined the world was coming to an end, have displayed great practical energy and wisdom, as well as entire devotion to their cause. This is a paradox which it would be a platitude to explain.

The corporate interests of certain State Churches have indeed been fearfully opposed to the progress of mankind; but they have been equally opposed to the progress of Christianity. State Churches, whatever relation they may bear to Christianity, are not of its essence, any more than sacerdotalism, sacramentalism, dogmatism, or other additions which were unknown to the first disciples of Christ. If Christianity is to be arraigned as an enemy to reason and improvement, we must put ourselves in the position of listeners to the Sermon on the Mount, and regard the religion in its original essence as a new principle of action and a new source of spiritual life.

It has been said that Christianity must be retrograde, because instead of looking forward it looks back to Christ. It is not easy to see why it is more retrograde to look back to the source of a higher spiritual life in Christ than it is to look back to the source of all life in Mr. Darwin's monad.

If indeed there is any passage in the Gospels putting an artificial limit to the improvement of human character, or enumerating certain observances as the

sum of attainable perfection, the case is altered; but the passage must be produced. If it is said that the special type of character exhibited by the Founder of Christianity is the artificial limit, I answer that I see nothing in that type which is special, or which is not of the essence of all goodness and beauty of character; that the imitation of it has, as a matter of fact, issued in endless improvement and boundless variety; and that it is connected with no special observances whatever. But the character of the Founder of Christianity, as well as His doctrine, must be viewed as it is, and not as Eastern Asceticism, Romanism, or any other perversion of Christianity represents it.

Again, Christianity is not opposed to a philosophic view of history, unless it denies the unity of the human race, or teaches that any nation was disregarded by God, and left out of the scheme of Providence. Christianity teaches the reverse of this, whatever may be taught, directly or indirectly, by any Christian sect. "God . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us." Could the unity of the human race, the providential character of all history, or the progress of men towards the knowledge of all that is divine, be enunciated in clearer language than this?

Coleridge, the greatest of English divines, as well

as one of the greatest of English philosophers, propounded most distinctly, and in the same pages with the most fervent Christianity, views of history which are now imagined to be new and startling discoveries, the exclusive property of an antichristian school. In his *Friend* (vol. iii. Essay 10,) he treats all history as an education of the mind of the race, and shews the part which the great nations of antiquity played in the process. "In the education of the mind of the race," he says, "as in that of the individual, each different age and purpose requires different objects and different means; though all dictated by the same principle, tending towards the same end, and forming consecutive parts of the same method." After speaking of the Greeks, he adds, "That I include them as educated under a distinct providential, though not miraculous, dispensation, will surprise no one who reflects that in whatever has a permanent operation on all the destinies and intellectual condition of mankind at large—that in all which has been manifestly employed as a co-agent in the mightiest revolution of the moral world, the propagation of the Gospel; and in the intellectual progress of mankind, in the restoration of philosophy, science, and the ingenious arts—it were irreligious not to acknowledge the hand of Divine Providence*."

* This Essay in "The Friend" may possibly have suggested the idea which has been worked out by Dr. Temple in "Essays and Reviews." He has been confidently charged by antichristian writers with borrowing it from the teachers of their school; and the charge, ignorantly made, has been ignorantly believed.

These few remarks seemed necessary to guard against unfair inferences and deductions.

The first of these two lectures was delivered some time ago—in June 1859, and was then printed for private circulation; but it has been revised for publication.