

must have definite limitations, to prevent its becoming despotic; that its tendency is to absorb other powers to its own centre? From the history of states. How do we know that republicanism is better than despotism? From history. How do we know that presbyterianism is more favorable to true Christianity than prelacy? How do we know that prelacy tends to beget arrogance in the higher and obsequiousness in the lower clergy? How do we learn that prelacy inclines to popery? How that heresy begets moral corruption, and moral corruption social ruin? All these are the obvious lessons of church history, not perhaps of history written in learned folios, but of the record of past events, written in the experience, the traditions or the books of the age. If we extend the definition of history a little, so as to embrace, not only those past events of which we learn from the testimony of others, but those also which have happened under our own limited observation, then the statement will be literally true, that to the lessons of history we owe all our experimental knowledge of human affairs.

And except that limited knowledge which our own observation conveys to us, we are indebted to the same source for all our acquaintance with human nature. There are two remarks to be made, which show the importance of that part of our knowledge of human nature and affairs which we receive from the past. If we knew nothing of the transactions of past ages, we should only know those phases of man's nature, and should only have an experimental acquaintance with those affairs which fall under our own limited observation. What a mere patch is this in the great field of life! He who knows but this, must be a man of most narrow mind. And again: that experience which comes from our own observation is only obtained in any completeness after the observation is finished; that is, after our race is run, and experience is too late to help us. It is the knowledge of the past which gives to the young man the experience of age. While yet he retains the energy and enterprise of youth, and it is not too late for action, history guides his activity with the prudence and wisdom of venerable infirmity. It is hers to unite the attributes of both seasons in one person. In private and personal affairs, the force of these observations may not be so distinctly illustrated, because the field is limited, the results of steps taken are near at hand, and the agent himself is the

person most concerned. Here the narrow but increasing experience of the young man, united with caution, may protect him from all ruinous errors. But public institutions or influences, whose operations are far-reaching, whose right conduct involves the welfare of many passive persons subject to them, should never be committed to any man who has not gained a wide experimental knowledge of similar institutions in all former times. The man who undertakes to teach, to legislate, or to govern, either in church or state, without historical wisdom, is a reckless tyro. His wicked folly is like that of the quack who should venture upon the responsibilities of the physician without having either seen or read practice. For, a series of human generations constitute but one lifetime of a political or ecclesiastical institution. The incidents of one human lifetime, or one era, constitute but a single "case," a single turn of the diseases of society. And no man has experience of those diseases who has not studied the symptoms and results through many generations.

In this connection no more is needed than to point briefly to the fact that the best arguments against bad institutions are drawn from their history. The readiest way to explode unreasonable pretensions is to display their origin. Such an auditory as this need only be reminded that the battle against popery in the Reformation was fought on scriptural and historical grounds. Many of the most mortal stabs which Luther gave to mischievous popish institutions were by simply telling the ignorant world where and when they arose. And when the two hosts were regularly marshalled for controversy, there speedily came forth that great work, the parent of Protestant church history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*. This work, which was little more than a digest of the annals of ecclesiastical events, proved a grand historical argument against popery, and its effects were so deeply felt that Rome put forth her utmost strength in opposition to it, in the annals of Cæsar Baronius. And now there is no better argument against popery than a simple history of its growth. There is no better confutation of the exclusive pretensions of episcopacy than a history of the English Reformation. Often there is no way so practical and so efficacious to disarm a modern heretic as to prove that his pretended improvements are substantially the same with the errors of some schismatic who