

II. Of Civil History

(1) For civil history, it is of three kinds; not unfitly to be compared with the three kinds of pictures or images. For of pictures or images we see some are unfinished, some are perfect, and some are defaced. So of histories we may find three kinds: memorials, perfect histories, and antiquities; for memorials are history unfinished, or the first or rough drafts of history; and antiquities are history defaced, or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time.

(2) Memorials, or preparatory history, are of two sorts; whereof the one may be termed commentaries, and the other registers. Commentaries are they which set down a continuance of the naked events and actions, without the motives or designs, the counsels, the speeches, the pretexts, the occasions, and other passages of action. For this is the true nature of a commentary (though Cæsar, in modesty mixed with greatness, did for his pleasure apply the name of a commentary to the best history of the world). Registers are collections of public acts, as decrees of council, judicial proceedings, declarations and letters of estate, orations, and the like, without a perfect continuance or contexture of the thread of the narration.

(3) Antiquities, or remnants of history, are, as was said, *tanquam tabula naufragii*: when industrious persons, by an exact and scrupulous diligence and observation, out of monuments, names, words, proverbs, traditions, private records and evidences, fragments of stories, passages of books that concern not story, and the like, do save and recover somewhat from the deluge of time.

(4) In these kinds of unperfect histories I do assign no deficiencie, for they are *tanquam imperfecte mista*; and therefore any deficiencie in them is but their nature. As for the corruptions and moths of history, which are epitomes, the use of them deserveth to be banished, as all men of sound judgment have confessed, as those that have fretted and corroded the sound bodies of many excellent histories, and wrought them into base and unprofitable dregs.

(5) History, which may be called just and perfect history, is of three kinds, according to the object which it propoundeth, or pretendeth to represent: for it either representeth a time, or a person, or an action. The first we call chronicles, the second lives, and the third narrations or relations. Of these, although the first be the most complete and absolute kind of history, and hath most estimation and glory, yet the second excelleth it in profit and use, and the third in verity and sincerity. For history of times representeth the magnitude of actions, and the public faces and deportments of persons, and passeth over in silence the smaller passages and motions of men and matters. But such being the workmanship of God, as He doth hang the greatest weight upon the smallest wires, *maxima è minimis, suspendens*, it comes therefore to pass, that such histories do rather set forth the pomp of business than the true and inward resorts thereof. But lives, if they be well written, propounding to themselves a person to represent, in whom actions, both greater and smaller, public and private, have a commixture, must of necessity contain a more true, native, and lively representation. So again narrations and relations of actions, as the war of Peloponnesus, the expedition of Cyrus Minor, the conspiracy of Catiline, cannot but be more purely and exactly true than histories of times, because they may choose an argument comprehensible within the notice and instructions of the writer: whereas he that undertaketh the story of a time, specially of any length, cannot but meet with many blanks and spaces, which he must be forced to fill up out of his own wit and conjecture.

(6) For the history of times, I mean of civil history, the providence of God hath made the distribution. For it hath pleased God to ordain and illustrate two exemplar states of the world for arms, learning, moral virtue, policy, and laws; the state of Græcia and the state of Rome; the histories whereof occupying the middle part of time, have more ancient to them histories which may by one common name be termed the antiquities of the world; and after them, histories which may be likewise called by the name of modern history.

(7) Now to speak of the deficiencies. As to the heathen antiquities of the world it is in vain to note them for deficient. Deficient they are no doubt, consisting most of fables and fragments; but the deficiency cannot be holpen; for antiquity is like fame, *caput inter nubila condit*, her head is muffled from our sight. For the history of the exemplar states, it is extant in good perfection. Not but I could wish there were a perfect course of history for Græcia, from Theseus to Philopœmen (what time the affairs of Græcia drowned and extinguished in the affairs of Rome), and for Rome from Romulus to Justinianus, who may be truly said to be *ultimus Romanorum*. In which sequences of story the text of Thucydides and Xenophon in the one, and the texts of Livius, Polybius, Sallustius, Cæsar, Appianus, Tacitus, Herodianus in the other, to be kept entire, without any diminution at all, and only to be supplied and continued. But this is a matter of magnificence, rather to be commended than required; and we speak now of parts of learning supplemental, and not of supererogation.

(8) But for modern histories, whereof there are some few very worthy, but the greater part beneath mediocrity, leaving the care of foreign stories to foreign states, because I will not be *curiosus in aliena republica*, I cannot fail to represent to your Majesty the unworthiness of the history of England in the main continuance thereof, and the partiality and obliquity of that of Scotland in the latest and largest author that I have seen: supposing that it would be honour for your Majesty, and a work very memorable, if this island of Great Britain, as it is now joined in monarchy for the ages to come, so were joined in one history for the times passed, after the manner of the sacred history, which draweth down the story of the ten tribes and of the two tribes as twins together. And if it shall seem that the greatness of this work may make it less exactly performed, there is an excellent period of a much smaller compass of time, as to the story of England; that is to say, from the uniting of the Roses to the uniting of the kingdoms; a portion of time wherein, to my understanding, there hath been the rarest varieties that in like number of successions of any hereditary monarchy hath been known. For it beginneth with the mixed adoption of a crown by arms and title; an entry by battle, an establishment by marriage; and therefore times answerable, like waters after a tempest, full of working and swelling, though without extremity of storm; but well passed through by the wisdom of the pilot, being one of the most sufficient kings of all the number. Then followeth the reign of a king, whose actions, howsoever conducted, had much intermixture with the affairs of Europe, balancing and inclining them variably; in whose time also began that great alteration in the state ecclesiastical, an action which seldom cometh upon the stage. Then the reign of a minor; then an offer of a usurpation (though it was but as *febris ephemera*). Then the reign of a queen matched with a foreigner; then of a queen that lived solitary and unmarried, and yet her government so masculine, as it had greater impression and operation upon the states abroad than it any ways received from thence. And now last, this most happy and glorious event, that this island of Britain, divided from all the world, should be united in itself, and that oracle of rest given to ÆNeas, *antiquam exquirite matrem*, should now be performed and fulfilled upon the nations of England and Scotland, being now reunited in the ancient mother name of Britain, as a full period of all instability and peregrinations. So that as it cometh to pass in massive bodies, that they have certain trepidations and waverings before they fix and settle, so it seemeth that by the providence of God this monarchy, before it was to settle in your majesty and your generations (in which I hope it is now established for ever), it had these prelusive changes and varieties.

(9) For lives, I do find strange that these times have so little esteemed the virtues of the times, as that the writings of lives should be no more frequent. For although there be not many sovereign princes or absolute commanders, and that states are most collected into monarchies, yet are there many worthy personages that deserve better than dispersed report or barren eulogies. For herein the invention of one of the late poets is proper, and doth well enrich the ancient fiction. For he feigneth that at the end of the thread or web of every man's life there was a little medal containing the person's name, and that Time waited upon the shears, and as soon as the thread was cut caught the medals, and carried them to the river of Lathe; and about the bank there were many birds flying up and down, that would get the medals and carry them in their beak a little while, and then let them fall into the river. Only there were a few swans, which if they got a name would carry it to a temple where it was consecrate. And although many men, more mortal in their affections than in their bodies, do esteem desire of name and memory but as a vanity and ventosity,

“Animi nil magnæ laudis egentes;”

which opinion cometh from that root, *Non prius laudes contempsimus, quam laudanda facere desivimus*: yet that will not alter Solomon's judgment, *Memoria justi cum laudibus, at impiorum nomen putrescet*: the one flourisheth, the other either consumeth to present oblivion, or turneth to an ill odour. And therefore in that style or addition, which is and hath been long well received and brought in use, *felicis memoriæ, piæ memoriæ, bonæ memoriæ*, we do acknowledge that which Cicero saith, borrowing it from Demosthenes, that *bona fama propria possessio defunctorum*; which possession I cannot but note that in our times it lieth much waste, and that therein there is a deficiency.

(10) For narrations and relations of particular actions, there were also to be wished a greater diligence therein; for there is no great action but hath some good pen which attends it. And because it is an ability not common to write a good history, as may well appear by the small number of them; yet if particularity of actions memorable were but tolerably reported as they pass, the compiling of a complete history of times might be the better expected, when a writer should arise that were fit for it: for the collection of such relations might be as a nursery garden, whereby to plant a fair and stately garden when time should serve.

(11) There is yet another partition of history which Cornelius Tacitus maketh, which is not to be forgotten, specially with that application which he accoupleth it withal, annals and journals: appropriating to the former matters of estate, and to the latter acts and accidents of a meaner nature. For giving but a touch of certain magnificent buildings, he addeth, *Cum ex dignitate populi Romani repertum sit, res illustres annalibus, talia diurnis urbis actis mandare*. So as there is a kind of contemplative heraldry, as well as civil. And as nothing doth derogate from the dignity of a state more than confusion of degrees, so it doth not a little imbase the authority of a history to intermingle matters of triumph, or matters of ceremony, or matters of novelty, with matters of state. But the use of a journal hath not only been in the history of time, but likewise in the history of persons, and chiefly of actions; for princes in ancient time had, upon point of honour and policy both, journals kept, what passed day by day. For we see the chronicle which was read before Ahasuerus, when he could not take rest, contained matter of affairs, indeed, but such as had passed in his own time and very lately before. But the journal of Alexander's house expressed every small particularity, even concerning his person and court; and it is yet a use well received in enterprises memorable, as expeditions of war,

navigations, and the like, to keep diaries of that which passeth continually.

(12) I cannot likewise be ignorant of a form of writing which some grave and wise men have used, containing a scattered history of those actions which they have thought worthy of memory, with politic discourse and observation thereupon: not incorporate into the history, but separately, and as the more principal in their intention; which kind of ruminated history I think more fit to place amongst books of policy, whereof we shall hereafter speak, than amongst books of history. For it is the true office of history to represent the events themselves together with the counsels, and to leave the observations and conclusions thereupon to the liberty and faculty of every man's judgment. But mixtures are things irregular, whereof no man can define.

(13) So also is there another kind of history manifoldly mixed, and that is history of cosmography: being compounded of natural history, in respect of the regions themselves; of history civil, in respect of the habitations, regiments, and manners of the people; and the mathematics, in respect of the climates and configurations towards the heavens: which part of learning of all others in this latter time hath obtained most proficience. For it may be truly affirmed to the honour of these times, and in a virtuous emulation with antiquity, that this great building of the world had never through-lights made in it, till the age of us and our fathers. For although they had knowledge of the antipodes,

“Nosque ubi primus equis Oriens afflavit anhelis,
Illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper,”

yet that might be by demonstration, and not in fact; and if by travel, it requireth the voyage but of half the globe. But to circle the earth, as the heavenly bodies do, was not done nor enterprised till these later times: and therefore these times may justly bear in their word, not only *plus ultra*, in precedence of the ancient *non ultra*, and *imitabile fulmen*, in precedence of the ancient *non imitabile fulmen*,

“Demens qui nimbos et non imitabile fulmen,” &c.

but likewise *imitabile cælum*; in respect of the many memorable voyages after the manner of heaven about the globe of the earth.

(14) And this proficience in navigation and discoveries may plant also an expectation of the further proficience and augmentation of all sciences; because it may seem they are ordained by God to be coevals, that is, to meet in one age. For so the prophet Daniel speaking of the latter times foretelleth, *Plurimi pertransibunt, et multiplex erit scientia*: as if the openness and through-passage of the world and the increase of knowledge were appointed to be in the same ages; as we see it is already performed in great part: the learning of these later times not much giving place to the former two periods or returns of learning, the one of the Grecians, the other of the Romans.