

BUCKLE  
AND HIS CRITICS

*A STUDY IN SOCIOLOGY*

BY

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## PREFACE.

THE following chapters are the outcome of a beginning in the way of vindicating Buckle which did not go beyond a few columns of a weekly journal. Begun before I had read Mr Huth's "Life of Buckle," with its able defence and exposition of his doctrine, my essay was continued by way of covering further portions of the ground and meeting other lines of attack. The inquiry began, I think, impartially enough. Every argumentative writer, however great, it cannot be too often repeated, is open to exposure in respect of blunders; and if Newton's physics and Darwin's biology are alike laden with fallacious cosmic philosophy, the admirer of Buckle cannot be surprised to find his teaching strongly accused of error. But it has seemed to me from first to last that Buckle has in general been attacked unjustly and unreasonably, blamed where he is right, and (in England at least) let pass where he is wrong. For one fair charge against him, I have met five which were either mistaken or disingenuous. To read Buckle's detractors is an education in the knowledge of human perversity, fallibility, and profligacy of blame. Again and again, indeed, I have wondered whether I was possessed by a deluding prejudice which made me see misrepresentation or reckless error in critique after critique coming from men of good repute. But after using all the vigilance of which I am capable, I remain convinced that the common depreciation of Buckle in recent years is in large measure the result of slovenly reading and slatternly thinking on

the part of men wont to sit in judgment on their fellows ; and that even of the animadversions of able and scrupulous men on his book, much is to be dismissed as misconception, fallacy, and prejudice.

The task, too, has been in some ways so instructive to myself that I have been led to hope its result may do more for others than merely remove from their minds mis-judgments and misconceptions of the work of a great and true historian ; though I shall be sufficiently rewarded if it does that much. If the facts of the case in hand are as I see them and have set them forth, they are discreditable to the literary class, considered as a body of seekers after ascertainable truth, and compared with the students of the physical sciences. The more one reads, certainly, the less one is disposed to be persuaded by a criticism of an unread author ; and the less readily respectful one grows of individual judgments. But no writer, certainly not Gibbon, who has undergone detraction in every European language, has to my knowledge had proportionately so much one-sided criticism as Buckle. A fresh critical survey of the case may perhaps tend somewhat to alter the proportions. In any event, the sufficient reason for this book is that there are some dozens of essays and treatises extant in which the work of Buckle is more or less seriously mis-stated, and more or less unjustly disparaged ; and that vital truths are thus in a measure obscured.

For references to a number of the criticisms dealt with I have to thank the excellent bibliography appended to Mr Huth's "Life of Buckle" : others I have come across in general reading. No doubt I have missed some of importance. Needless to say, however, many reviews and criticisms of Buckle have struck me as needing or deserving no notice. As it is, I fear most readers will reckon it a

fatiguing business to go through so much of controversy, even if they share to some extent my estimate of the writer I have sought to vindicate. I can only hope that some of the discussions, such as those on the criticisms of Mill, Mark Pattison, Lange, and Mr Venn, and that on Buckle's view of intellectual "protection," will do a little to clear up some disputed points in historical and moral philosophy; and that at least some of the discussions on concrete fact may separately interest different readers.

It remains to express here my earnest thanks to the subscribers—about a hundred and fifty—who by undertaking in advance to purchase this book, after seeing a conspectus of its contents in the *Free Review* of May last, have made possible its printing and publication.

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