The historian as moralist: a study of Edward Gibbon and The decline and fall of the Roman Empire

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PART I: THE HISTORIAN
CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING OF SELF-AWARENESS AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Would it have surprised 'the historian of the Roman empire' to have found himself among the moralists? He neither proposed a philosophy of history nor even stated, except in passing, his own views on morality. But in so far as he followed his model Tacitus,¹ it is important to note the close correspondence between the statements of intention of the two historians. Tacitus said that he was guided in his selection and presentation of material by his 'conception of the first duty of history - to ensure that merit shall not lack its reward and to hold before the vicious word and deed the terrors of posterity and infamy.'² In the same spirit Gibbon defended his practice in the first volume of The Decline and Fall. Writing of the historian's duty he declared: 'Whatever subject he has chosen, whatever persons he introduced, he owes to himself, to the present generation, and to posterity, a just and perfect delineation of all that may be praised, of all that may be excused, and of all that must be censured. If he fails in the discharge of his important office, he partially violates the sacred obligations of truth and disappoints his readers of the instruction which they might have derived from a fair parallel of the vices and virtues of the most illustrious characters.'³ The principle of historical writing here

1. On Tacitus as Gibbon's 'model and mentor' see e.g. David Jordan, Gibbon and his Roman Empire. Illinois, 1971, pp. 172 ff. Readers of The Decline and Fall or the Essai sur l'étude de la littérature, however, need look no further for examples of Gibbon's homage and debt to the Roman historian.


stated is that of Tacitus in contrast to that of Ranke\textsuperscript{1} or of most present-day historians. As a 'philosophic historian' in the Tacitean tradition, Gibbon did not fail to draw his 'philosophic reader's attention to praiseworthy or ignoble actions, to the rightness or wrongness of motives, and to virtuous or vicious rulers, all of which could serve to impart 'instruction'. Indeed we should expect to find a strong moral awareness in an author who shows a deep conviction of 'the judgement of posterity'\textsuperscript{2} by which monarchs and the 'illustrious characters' of history are acquitted or condemned.

When we turn from the ancient to the contemporary writer whom Gibbon emulated and whom he later joined in 'the triumvirate of British historians',\textsuperscript{3} we find that 'the philosophic Hume',\textsuperscript{4} made a broad distinction between 'moral subjects' on the one hand and physical on the other. Under 'moral causes' he included 'all circumstances which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reasons and which render a particular set of manners habitual to us.'\textsuperscript{5} As examples he mentioned some of those matters with which

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Summed up in his famous dictum, 'Ich will bloss sagen wie es eigentlich gewesen ist.'
\item \textsuperscript{2} See e.g. DF, xviii, II, 242 for such an appeal by Gibbon. Cf. also v, I, 137; xxii, II, 440, xxx, III, 396.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Regarding the praise of Robertson and Hume he claimed he had 'never presumed to accept a place in the triumvirate of British historians'. Memoirs, p. 158, but later frankly admitted his great satisfaction and pride at being ranked in this select trio; see Letters, 26/3/1788, III, 100, and Bury's Introduction to Gibbon's Autobiography, p. viii. The Memoirs reference is dated 1776.
\item \textsuperscript{4} Memoirs, p. 2. Gibbon also wrote of 'the impartial philosophy of Hume', as a historian, ibid., p. 120, and in DF referred to him as 'our philosophic historian.' (lxix, VII, 225).
\end{itemize}
Gibbon was very much concerned in The Decline and Fall, 'the nature of government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which people live, the situation of the nation with regard to its neighbours.' And the question of 'motives' to which Hume referred in his definition is central to Gibbon's analysis of character.

In an early essay, 'On the Study of History', which we may assume Gibbon to have read with great interest, Hume pointed out that this study is not only entertaining and improving to the mind but also morally enlightening. 'An advantage in that experience which is acquired by history, above what is learned by the practice of the world' is 'that it brings us acquainted with human affairs, without diminishing in the least from the most delicate sentiments of virtue.' 'Poets', Hume wrote, 'can paint virtue in the most charming colours, but as they address themselves entirely to the passions, they often become advocates for vice. Even philosophers are apt to bewilder themselves in the subtility of their speculations; and we have seen some go as far as to deny the reality of all moral distinctions. But I think it a remark worthy the attention of the speculative, that the historians have been, almost without exception, the true

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1. Gibbon's History deals with 'a series of memorable revolutions' all related to that great 'revolution which will ever be remembered...' (DF, i, I, 1). See e.g. DF, xxxviii, IV, 175-76; ii, I, 47; xxxvi, III, 121, 1, V, 332.


3. Though the two editions of Hume's Essays and Treatises in Gibbon's library are later than 1760, the assumption is reasonable since Gibbon looked up to Hume as his English model and often quoted his essays in DF. Frank Manuel reminds us of 'Gibbon's combing Hume's essays for information as well as spiritual guidance.' ('Edward Gibbon: Historien-Philosophe' in G.W. Bowersock, et.al, Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Harvard & London, 1977, p. 173.)
friends of virtue, and have always represented it in its proper
colours, however they may have erred in their judgements of particular
persons.¹

At the beginning of some 'Hints' jotted down between his return
from Rome and the beginning of work on The Decline and Fall, Gibbon
restated Hume's conclusion in the form of a question and answer
expressing his own complete agreement: 'Historians friends to
virtue? yes - with exceptions.'² And when he came to write his
own History he brought out with great clarity the 'moral distinctions'
of which Hume had written and also applauded what he himself saw
as examples of genuine 'wisdom and virtue'.³ Thus, as Frank Manuel
points out, 'neither Hume nor Gibbon had any doubt that it was the
responsibility of the historian to act as a moral judge.'⁴

In the last period of his life, as the celebrated 'historian
of the Roman empire', Gibbon turned 'with peculiar solicitude and
attention'⁵ to the writing of another history, that of the historian
himself. Both histories are to be seen as 'personal readings of the
past',⁶ and the latter is vital to the interpretation of the former,

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p. 88. Gibbon suggested that 'they incline more to personal
than social virtues.'
³ Lewis P. Curtis has claimed that the whole DF 'revolves around a
formula' expressed in the three words: 'virtue, wisdom, and
power'. ('Gibbon's Paradise Lost', in F.W. Hilles (ed.) The
Age of Johnson. New Haven, 1949, p. 79). See for this charac-
teristic expression, DF, xxxi, III, 376; liii, VI, 94, where
it is paired with its characteristic antithesis 'vice and folly'.
⁵ Sheffield, Advertisement to the First Edition of MW, London,
1796, I, iv.
⁶ See Roger J. Porter, 'Gibbon's Autobiography, Filling up the
Silent Vacancy', Eighteenth-Century Studies, 8/Nr. 1, 1974, p. 6.;
since it traces the historical pilgrimage of the man behind the book.

History after all, as Bury reminded readers of the Memoirs, 'is in
the last resort somebody's image of the past, and the image is conditioned
by the mind and experience of the person who forms it.' It was, as
Gibbon said, 'to illustrate...the history of my own mind' that he
related the details of one crucial experience, and his phrase applies
in large measure to the Memoirs as a whole. Their value is enhanced
by the fact that though they were put together after the author's
'conversion to the City and Empire' of Rome and the completion of
his great work, they draw upon the journals which the young man
conscientiously kept from the time he began turning over historical
projects in his mind. 'I propose from this day, August 24, 1761,
to keep an exact journal of my actions and studies'. Based on
and incorporating much of the Journals, the Memoirs thus combine
contemporary record and mature reflection on his growth and experience.

1. Autobiography of Edward Gibbon, intr. by J.B. Bury. OUP 1907,
(repr. 1935), xiv.
3. See Christopher Dawson's introduction to Everyman Edition of DF,
London, 1957-60, xi ('His conversion to the Church may have been
transitory and superficial, but his conversion to the City and
Empire was profound and governed his whole life and work.'
5. The various parts are edited as: Gibbon's Journal to January 28th,
(here cited as JA); Le Journal de Gibbon à Lausanne, 17 Août,
1763-19 Avril 1764, Georges Bonnard, Lausanne, 1945 (JB); Gibbon's
Journal from Geneva to Rome (20 Ap. to 2 Oct., 1764), Bonnard,
London, 1961 (JC). Cf. also Miscellanea Gibboniana, which
includes his 'Paris Journal'(JP), pp. 93-101, ed. G.R. de Beer,
At the beginning of a section which introduces a new stage in his life, Gibbon wrote, 'The review of my moral and literary character is the most interesting to myself and to the public; and I may expatiate without reproach on my private studies since they have produced the public writings which alone can entitle me to the esteem and friendship of my readers.' With certain critical safeguards to be noted, the Memoirs may thus be read as a moral paradigmatic account of the historian's personal and literary development.

It was in his fifteenth year, we are told, that his 'free desultory reading' and 'indiscriminate appetite' settled into 'the historic line'. This statement complements one made later in the Memoirs, and recorded in his Journal, 'I know by experience that from my early youth I aspired to the character of an historian.' The assertion looks like a conventional one, but the force of the emphatic 'know' is a personal refutation of a view then current which would disallow Gibbon's claim to a special vocation for history. In the Memoirs we are shown the ripening of this aspiration in his mind and experience and especially so when extracts from the journal reveal his consideration of worthy subjects for a history.

1. Memoirs, p. 89; chapter V in Bonnard's edition, marking his return from Lausanne to England in May 1758.
2. ibid., p. 41.
3. ibid., p. 119; JA, 14 April, 1781.
4. The context is: 'After his oracle Dr. Johnson, my friend Sir Joshua Reynolds denies all original genius, any natural propensity of the mind to one art or science rather than another. Without engaging in a metaphysical or rather verbal dispute, I know by experience...' 'The true genius,' said Johnson in the 'Life of Cowley', 'is a mind of large general powers accidentally determined to some particular direction.' (Lives of the Poets, World's Classics. OUP, 1906, vol. 1, p. 2.)
Gibbon thus perceived in what he later saw as 'this first period of my life', an initial channeling of diffuse interests into a destined course; or, to use his own recurring metaphor, which as we can see places no stress on purely rational elements, a discrimination of his literary 'appetite'. This redirection of interests to the study of history, he attributed, with a mixture of irony and plain truth, to a huge serialised compilation in which he became immersed: 'Since Philosophy has exploded all innate ideas and natural propensities, I must ascribe this choice to the assiduous perusal of the Universal history as the octavo volumes successively appeared.'

This statement links up with that of his knowing by experience his special vocation for history. What Gibbon is saying is that if a new philosophic view will not allow him this vocation, then he must put it down to a voluminous and rather patchy set of books. However, while the reading of such histories might supply facts for the more conventional historian or chronicler of events, this material has later to be recreated in terms of moral experience for one who is to

1. The period before he went up to Oxford; see Memoirs, p. 43 and cf. p. 46, the beginning of a new chapter.
2. The metaphor continues with 'unripe taste', 'greedily devoured', 'devoured like so many novels', 'swallowed with the same voracious appetite', intellectual feast', 'undigested chaos' (ibid., pp. 41-3).
3. An Universal History from the earliest accounts of time to the present appeared first in folio, then in 21 volumes octavo between 1747 and 1754. It was a joint enterprise both on the part of the authors and of the publishers. The edition I have used is dated London, 1779 (vol. I). The subtitle reads, 'Compiled from Original Sources'. Gibbon here refers to the 'Ancient Part'.
4. Gibbon referred to it as 'an unequal work' (DF, xxv, III, 58, n. 142). His references to the 'Modern Part' in DF are often uncomplimentary and harsh, cf. vol. V, pp. 196, n. 433, 339, n. 24, 423, n. 204.
emerge as a 'philosophic historian'. It was clearly to the latter class that Gibbon, the ardent admirer of Tacitus and Hume, aspired. 'The part of an historian', he wrote when pondering his first serious topic, 'is as honourable as that of a mere chronologist or compiler of gazettes is contemptible.'

With the Universal History Gibbon bracketed the Ductor historicus as another of a small group of books which seemed to have turned his feet into a preordained path. This was a treatise by Thomas Hearne, the extraordinary Oxford antiquary. Eccentric, malicious and unsociable, Hearne was a meticulous and indefatigable editor of English medieval historians, the scarcity of whose works Gibbon later deplored when recommending the Scottish historian John Pinkerton for this very task. While Hearne's book was intended as a beginner's guide to historical studies, its second volume gave an account of the writings of the historians of Greece and Rome, together with comments by critics. The significance of these two books is that at an early age they not only confirmed Gibbon's vocation for history, but also launched him on the study of those Greek and Roman historians whose works were available in English translation.

1. 'Hints of some subjects for History', MW, V, 487.
3. 'Address recommending Mr. John Pinkerton', &c., MW, II, 707 ff. Here he wrote that Hearne’s 'editions will always be recommended by their accuracy and use.' (For Hearne see D.C. Douglas, Oxford Scholars 1670-1730, 2nd ed. London, 1951, chap. IX).
4. The work came out in 1701, a 2nd edition (2 vols.) in 1704-5 and others followed. The first book, subtitled, A Short System of Universal History and an Introduction to the study of it might have stimulated Gibbon's early interest in chronology. The second book is An Introduction...wherein an Account is given of the Writings of the Ancient Historians, Greek and Roman, with the Judgement of the best Criticks upon them.
5. See Memoirs, pp. 41-2.
enabled to begin his serious study of history at the beginning, Xenophon, a historian he greatly admired,¹ Tacitus who became his model, and Procopius, on whom he realised so heavily in the middle chapters of The Decline and Fall.²

Before the end of his fifteenth year he reached the second milestone on what he later saw as the road to Rome. It is interesting that each significant stage in the historian's intellectual and moral development is firmly associated with a particular place: Putney, Oxford, Lausanne, Rome. This well-known incident is that of a summer visit to the Wiltshire home of a Tory squire, Mr. Hoare, where the boy found less delight in the beautiful countryside than in his discovery of 'a common book', the Continuation of Echard's Roman History.³ It proved to be, he said, 'my first introduction to the historic scenes which have since engaged so many years of my life.'⁵ This is made clear by the title of the Continuation: from Constantine to...the Taking of Constantinople by the Turks.

'To me', he wrote, 'the reigns of the successors of Constantine were absolutely new. I was immersed in the passage of the Goths

1. 'The sage and heroic Xenophon', he calls him in quoting the Anabasis (DF, xxiv, II, 520, and see note 49: 'This pleasing work is original and authentic.')
2. Mainly chaps. xxxix-xlili. See Gibbon's account of Procopius and acknowledgement of his materials (DF, xl, IV, 224-6). He also wrote, "For the troubles of Africa, I neither have not desire another guide than Procopius, whose eye contemplated the image, and whose ear collected the reports, of the memorable events of his own times." (xlili, IV, 415, n.1).
3. Lawrence Echard's Roman History came out in 5 volumes in the last years of the 17th and the early years of the 18th centuries. Its many reprints attest its popularity so that it could be said to be 'a common book'. Echard wrote the first 2 volumes but only revised the Continuation.
4. Memoirs, p. 42
over the Danube when the summons of the dinner-bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast. In retrospect, the importance of this 'discovery' in the making of 'the historian of the Roman empire' became plain to him and he determined his readers should not miss its significance either. No dinner bell would dispel the irresistible appeal of those 'historic scenes', and the lad purchased without delay whatever books he could find on the Byzantine period. He then embarked on a quest for 'genuine sources' and 'ranged round the whole circle of Oriental history', reading all that was available in English on the Arabs, Persians, Tartars and Turks.

Here in this first period of his life, we find, according to Gibbon's own recollection, all the elements of The Decline and Fall. Indeed this fact has been taken by one of his best-known biographers to show 'how deep was the sympathy that Gibbon had for his subject, and that there was a sort of pre-established harmony between his mind and the historical period he afterwards illustrated.' We see him not only absorbed in 'the historic scenes' and in the peoples which come alive in his History, but also launched on that tireless search for sources which made it an enduring monument to scholarship. 'I have always endeavoured to draw from the foundtain head', he could boast in the preface; 'my curiosity as well as my sense of duty has always

2. ibid., p. 43. See pp. 42-3 for names of some of these books and of maps and chronological works which brought some 'order of time and place' to an otherwise chaotic mass of information.
3. Cotter Morrison, Gibbon. London, 1878, p. 5. Recent interpretations, like Jordan's tend to be more sceptical. The Memoirs 'present a contrived, and sometimes misleading account of Gibbon's life'. (Gibbon and his Roman Empire, p. 7; cf. his chapter in Bowersock, op.cit, p. 7).
4. Preface of 1788, also in Bury, DF, 1909, Pref. xlv-xlvi. Gibbon had once intended a separate collection of the numerous authors from whom he had drawn his materials, but contented himself with repeating this earlier assurance in the 4th volume of the quarto edition.
urged me to study the originals.\textsuperscript{1} What then, beyond a certain maturity of mind and scholarship, could he need? The answer we discover from his letters, journals and Memoirs was a central unifying inspiration, later to be found in his vision of Rome.

Throughout Gibbon's writings we are often aware of argument by antithesis; a kind of internal dialogue or dialectic which appears on the surface in terms of sharpness of contrast. It sometimes related to persons or places in his own experience. Nowhere does this stand out more clearly than in his treatment of the next period of his life, with the strong contrast between barrenness and frustration at Oxford and fruitful growth and development at Lausanne. This element in Gibbon's account merits further analysis, for the light it can throw on the historian as moralist.

The beginning of a new chapter in Gibbon's life\textsuperscript{2} brought neither the necessary maturity nor inspiration. His brief stay at Oxford remained to the end of his life a negative experience, 'the most idle and unprofitable time of my whole life'\textsuperscript{3} and the next step forward did not come till his removal to Lausanne. Why was this? It is perhaps best answered by his own statement, that even though adequate works were now available in all branches of learning, 'there still remains a material difference between a book and a professor.'\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{enumerate}
\item His Vindication (1779) was largely a defence of this claim, 'that I had carefully examined all the original materials that could illustrate the subject.' (MW, IV, 591; and cf. 595).
\item It is in fact a new chapter (III) in version F of the Memoirs. 'My own introduction to the University of Oxford forms a new area in my life.' See Memoirs (ed. Bonnard), p. 46 and facing page.
\item ibid., p. 48.
\item ibid., p. 51.
\end{enumerate}
Books there had been at his grandfather's house in Putney; but his reading had been wild and undisciplined, 'une debauche de lectures', as he snatched from the shelf whatever title attracted his eye, while an indulgent aunt encouraged rather than checked 'a curiosity above the strength of a boy.' This curiosity, still keen when he entered Oxford, had by then turned to history and specifically that of the period which he was to make peculiarly his own. What he now looked for from the university he made quite clear: discipline, a plan of study, personal direction, intellectual and moral guidance. All these Oxford failed to give. It did worse: it chilled the love of reading in this most bookish of men.

Gibbon had entered Magdalen College, as he realised, not without 'capacity or application', and 'in the discipline of a well-constituted academy, under the guidance of skilful and vigilant professors', he would have advanced to the next stage of scholarship. Even 'folly as well as vice', he felt 'should have awakened the attention of my superiors, and my tender years would have justified a more than ordinary degree of restraint and discipline.' Instead, the unpardonable sin against this 'most precious season of Youth' was that he was allowed to waste his time with impunity. It is therefore not surprising that his account of his university days is the occasion for an extended indictment of this ancient seat of learning. He even contemplated a

3. See Memoirs, ch. III, especially pp. 48-57. This was clear enough in retrospect, even allowing for Gibbon's special arrangement of his life for the Memoirs.
4. 'Chilled' in his own word when referring to his renewed love of reading in Lausanne; see Memoirs, p. 71.
5. See Memoirs, pp. 48, 57 and 54.
further criticism of the English universities, not merely to justify his own hostile reaction, but also to express moral indignation at the abuse of learning.

Oxford cheated him of his expectations. It seemed to him to be characterised by professors who failed to lecture and tutors who neglected their students. It represented to Gibbon a dead end; and the antithesis with Lausanne can best be brought out by the juxtaposition of two comments. 'To the University of Oxford I acknowledge no obligation.' 'Such as I am in genius or learning or in manners, I owe my creation to Lausanne: It was in that school that the statue was discovered in the block of marble.' One might almost translate it in terms of 'the two cities' so prominent in medieval historical thought: the city of God and the corrupt earthly city; Jerusalem and Babylon; or in Gibbon's later antithesis, Rome and Constantinople. In this early instance, Lausanne typified everything Oxford should have been. Lausanne stood for a moral approach: for toleration, illumination, progress through diligent study and above all, the guidance of a warm and perceptive tutor; Oxford for corruption and hypocritical Christian values: prejudice, ignorance, stagnation, idleness and negligent teachers. Jesus' indictment of the lawyers of his day could be read as Gibbon's condemnation of the dons of

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1. ibid., p. 48. He supported his remarks about the indolence of Oxford professors by a reference to Adam Smith's comment (Wealth of Nations, Bk V, ch. 1, Part iii, art. ii).
2. ibid., pp. 48 and 86.
4. For his reference to Oxford, see Memoirs, ch. III; for Lausanne, pp. 70, 74 and App. I, p. 209. Of Dr. Winchester, his second tutor, he wrote (p. 56) 'whose literary and moral character did not command the respect of the college.'
Oxford: 'Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves and them that were entering in ye hindered.' To Gibbon, the free use of his grandfather's house had already, 'unlocked the door to a tolerable library.' Once again, on entering Oxford, he admitted, 'a key was delivered into my hands which gave me the free use of a numerous and learned library.' But it did not prove a key to fruitful learning, since books were found to be no substitute for able teachers. Two modes of education are being contrasted: mechanical book learning lacking encouragement and personal direction, and hence without moral value; and guided study which was human, stimulating and challenging.

Two things, however, came out of Gibbon's abortive experience at Oxford. Ironically, it was the long vacation that gave the opportunity for a temporary revival of his taste for reading, anticipating that permanent revival when he finally quitted the 'English cloister' for the free atmosphere of Lausanne. Yet, to remind his reader that the university had done nothing to mature his mind, he added, 'but it was still the same blind and boyish taste for the pursuit of exotic history.' Frivolous and without moral discernment, his early pursuit of this sort of history had simply resulted in 'vague and multifarious reading' instead of teaching him 'to think,

1. Lk. xi. 52. On Oxford in the first half of the 18th century, see e.g. V.H.H. Green, A History of Oxford University. London, 1974, especially chap. VI, 'The University in Decline', pp. 85-109.
3. ibid., p. 47.
4. In Sketch C of the Memoirs, he wrote that had he remained at Oxford, his 'knowledge of the World would have been confined to an English Cloyster'. (Memoirs, App. I, 209). Cf. his reference (loc.cit.) to 'the monks of Oxford', to the clerical government of the university (p. 49) and its being 'an Ecclesiastical school (p. 57), all signifying narrowness and prejudice; 'Cambridge', he admitted, 'appears to have been less deeply infected with the vices of the Cloyster.' (p. 67).
5. ibid., p. 55.
to write, or to act.' The only illuminating principle he could discern in it was 'an early and rational application to the order of time and place' which he had found in tables of chronology and maps of ancient geography. This introduces an important organisational concept to be faced when he came to write his History and his eventual solution was to favour place and peoples rather than time. Recalling this solution in his Memoirs he wrote: 'It was not till after many designs and many trials, that I preferred, as I still prefer, the method of grouping my picture by nations; and the seeming neglect of Chronological order is surely compensated by the superior merits of interest and perspicuity.' But at this early stage, the boy, overreaching himself in his effort to weigh various rival systems, lay awake trying to reconcile the Septuagint and the Hebrew computations.

With the return of his desire for reading during his university vacation, he was again seduced by a teasing question of Oriental chronology which prompted a premature attempt at historical writing. His title, 'The Age of Sesostris' was, he thought, suggested by Voltaire's Age of Louis XIV which, as he ironically added, 'was new and popular.' Gibbon's description of himself as 'unprovided with original learning, unformed in the habits of thinking,' and his taste in books as 'still blind and boyish' is no doubt by way of explanation as to why he was misled by this 'new and popular' history. And thinking of his wish to meet the author in Lausanne, he wrote, 'whom I then rated above his real magnitude.' It was not in the manner of Voltaire that Gibbon would write his own work.

1. ibid., p. 43.
2. ibid., p. 179.
3. ibid., p. 43.
4. ibid., p. 55. The Siècle de Louis XIV appeared in 1751, an English translation the following year.
5. ibid., p. 83.
Like his Oxford experience as a whole, this chronological essay was a false start. Symbolically and finally it found its way to the fire in a general clearance twenty years later. Though questions of chronology continued to interest him and were taken up in some of his early works, the subject eventually fell into perspective as a sort of scaffolding for his own great reconstruction of a millennium of history. The earlier pre-occupation seen in Sesostris, was mechanical, unproductive, negative. Yet even in a negative way it taught him something in his historical development: both his own unreadiness for writing history and also the danger of trying to link the distant and doubtful chronologies of various ancient nations. 'At a riper age', he wrote, 'I no longer presume to connect the Greek, the Jewish, and the Egyptian antiquities which are lost in a distant cloud.' Then, with a significant comment on his attainment of historical maturity, he added, 'nor is this the only instance in which the belief and knowledge of the child are superseded by the more rational ignorance of the man.' It had become clear to him that moral categories were more enlightening than the temporal ones, which had proved inadequate.

A much more important event, or chain of events, arose out of his reading and reflection at this time. His perusal of Conyers

2. e.g. 'Les Principales Epoques de l'Histoire de la Grèce et de l'Egypte', (1758), a comparative table of Newton's Marsham's and Usher's chronologies, which prefaced 'Remarques Critiques sur le nouveau Système de Chronologie du Chevalier Newton'; 'Mémoire sur la Monarchie des Mèdes' (dated by Sheffield between 1758 and 1763). See MW, III, 150-169; 56-149.
3. Memoirs, p. 56. Yet he considered his solution in Sesostris not 'devoid of ingenuity' for a lad of fifteen, and he looked back with some satisfaction on his treatment in the Essai of 'the early history of Rome and Newton's chronology.' (ibid., pp. 56, 104).
Middleton's *Free Inquiry* into the historical evidence for early Christian miracles, and this author's exposure of saints and fathers, seemed to the young student to border on infidelity. At Oxford, though an infidel or heretic was regarded as a monster, the university took no care to guide its youthful members in the path of faith. It neglected the spiritual as much as the intellectual education of its undergraduates. 'Our venerable Mother had contrived to unite the opposite extremes of bigotry and indifference.' Unarmed against such an assault, Gibbon was left to his own devices. While on the one hand Middleton could not destroy his 'implicit belief' in the continuance of miracles during the early Christian centuries, still on the other, the lad was 'unable to resist the weight of historical evidence' presented by the notorious Oxford controversialist. The tension between these antithetical forces he afterwards expressed by applying to his own dilemma a couplet of Vergil to the effect that Aeneas would find salvation from an unexpected source, a city of the enemy Greeks. This prediction, he said, he would now apply to himself, if he had 'persevered in the communion of Rome.' Thus Middleton, the heretic, was cast in the role of these hostile Greeks, indirectly rescuing Gibbon from what he then saw as the heresy of Protestantism.

In giving his account of the history of his mind throughout this experience, Gibbon felt morally bound to defend himself on two fronts: the one, his espousal of the Catholic faith for which he must offer a

1. *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages through successive Centuries.* London, 1749. (The edition I have used is that in Miscellaneous Works. London, 1752, vol. I).
plausible explanation; the other, the appearance of inconsistency in view of his later abandonment of it. The former could be explained by his own inexperience and the negligence of his alma mater. Given his early fondness for 'religious disputation', as shown by the objections he had raised against those 'mysteries' in which his aunt believed, it was not surprising that the Oxford controversy over Middleton during Gibbon's residence at the university, should have attracted his attention. But it was surprising, he felt, that Oxford, basically 'an ecclesiastical school', should have failed to inculcate in her students 'the orthodox principles of religion'. This almost 'incredible neglect' left young Gibbon defenceless when confronted with historical evidence 'that we have no sufficient reason to believe upon the authority of the Fathers that any such (miraculous) powers were continued to the Church, after the days of the Apostles.'

Gibbon's problem was the perennial one of finding an infallible guide as the custodian of absolute truth; one whose claims could be verified. Here Protestant rationality failed him. Neither the reasoning of Middleton nor that of his less convincing opponents provided a satisfying solution. For Gibbon the central question was

1. ibid., p. 57. Gibbon thought of Oxford as 'an ecclesiastical school' both because of its clerical foundation and its continuing government by the clergy (see p. 49); and also because of the religious test and obligations required of its students (57). Thus he referred (p. 52) to 'the fellows or monks of my time'. See also above note 1 p. 10.

2. Even to the point of refusing offers to remedy the situation. A note added by Gibbon explains: 'Ignorance, religious of undergraduates, who are soon ordained - complaint of Dr. Prideaux - Dr. Busby offered to endow two catechists - rejected by both Univers.' (The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon, ed. J. Murray. London, 1897, p. 83, note 22).

3. Part of the lengthy title of Middleton's Inquiry.

4. Gibbon referred to 'the two dullest' champions of primitive miracles being 'crowned with academic honours by the University of Oxford'. These were William Dodwell and Thomas Church, both awarded the D.D. for their answers to Middleton's Inquiry. See Memoirs, p. 58.
that of miracles. These seemed to be the test of truth, and the institution attested by miracles must surely have the truth. It was along these lines that he sought to vindicate his conclusion against the charge of absurdity. The evidence for subapostolic miracles was that of the saints and fathers. For this reason Middleton had given particular attention to exposing the character of these witnesses.¹ Young Gibbon, for his part, retained a reverence for what he thought to be the character, but what he later recognised as merely the names of these venerable persons. The only weapons he could oppose to Middleton's elegant style and free use of argument were prejudice and 'implicit belief'. But he was forced to concede, on Middleton's evidence, that the first four or five centuries, the period of these disputed miracles, saw the adoption of the main Catholic doctrines and practices. Since he accepted the miracles, he felt compelled to embrace the faith and practices that accompanied them: celibacy, monastic life, holy oil, invocation of saints and worship of relics, those very things which were later to provoke his moral indignation and which he exposed with such scorn in The Decline and Fall as superstitions and frauds.

In his present crisis of thought, however, the answer came in a very different form. He was offered by a fellow student translations of two of Bossuet's works, An Exposition of the Doctrine of the Catholic Church and The History of the Variations of the Protestant Churches. Bossuet was convincing to Gibbon at this stage, just as Bayle was a little later. The bishop applied a reductio ad absurdum to contradictory

¹. Part III is outlined as follows in the plan of the Inquiry: 'To illustrate the particular characters and opinions of the Fathers, who attest these miracles.'
Protestant opinions just as Bayle's 'universal pyrrhonism' did to all religious opinions. More than half a convert already, Gibbon was fully persuaded by Bossuet and, as he afterwards admitted, 'I surely fell by a noble hand.' This is indeed high praise from the author of The Decline and Fall, but it is also a shrewd defence of his own fall.

When the fame of this work had, as he said, made his own name as notorious as that of Middleton, Gibbon felt that an additional justification of his youthful lapse was appropriate. After all it was a matter of moral consistency that was involved. Nowhere was this more so than at Oxford, the home of his most trenchant critics. Sensitive to the fact that his 'character stood exposed to the reproach of inconstancy,' he feared merciless treatment from these opponents who could add to his hated infidelity the rumour 'that the historian had formerly "turned Papist".'

What was his second line of defence? It was simply to introduce at this point in his Memoirs, short sketches of two fellow travellers, Chillingworth and Bayle, who like himself, 'afterwards emerged from superstition to scepticism.' By tracing the development of these events

2. ibid., p. 59.
3. ibid., p. 61. G.B. Hill suggested in his edition of the Memoirs (London, 1900), p. 73, n.4, that the reference may be to Boswell's record of a conversation with Johnson, 20 March, 1776 (Hill-Powell ed. of Life of Johnson, London, 1934, 6 vols., ii, 447-8) where the phrase 'turned Papist' is used of Gibbon. However, Gibbon may have heard from friends that his case was still much talked of at Oxford.
4. Memoirs, p. 62; see also pp. 62-5 for the account of Chillingworth and Bayle.
two eminent free thinkers, he could claim to be in good company.

If his own earlier conversion could be shown to have been understandable and excusable, his ultimate solution of the two antithetical positions, could like theirs, also be seen to be a reasonable synthesis. Furthermore, there was even a touch of pride in the thought that his conversion to Catholicism had meant 'an honest sacrifice of interest to conscience.' And though in after years it seemed to him incredible that he should ever have believed in transubstantiation, yet this was no cause for shame, since the same sophistry which had deceived him in his callow youth, had also ensnared the mature minds of Chillingworth and Bayle.  

In describing the process of his religious conversion, Gibbon stressed books and rational argument rather than any sense of spiritual or moral inadequacy, though, as he admitted, his life was marked by 'folly as well as vice.' The conversion involved merely a 'sincere change of speculative opinions' without any 'lively sense of devotion or enthusiasm.' On the one occasion that he spoke of the matter to his close friend Lord Sheffield, he attributed this change to the writings of the Elizabethan Jesuit Robert Parsons, 'who, he said had urged all the best arguments in favour of the Roman Catholic religion.' We may well ask why Gibbon named Parsons in conversation with Sheffield but Bossuet in the Memoirs. Were both responsible in different ways?

1. ibid., pp. 61-2. Also Sheffield's note in the Memoirs: 'He described the letter to his father, announcing his conversion, as written with all the pomp, the dignity, and self-satisfaction of a martyr.' (MW, I, 63).
3. ibid., p. 68. Gibbon emphasised (pp.60-1) that there was no proselytism or even any conversation with a priest 'till my resolution from books, was absolutely fixed.'
4. Sheffield's note to this effect follows the words 'fell by a noble hand', MW, I, 62n.
If so, why omit Parsons from his account and give all the credit to Bossuet? Perhaps the best explanation is along these lines. Parsons, like Chillingworth and Bayle, also a convert from Protestantism, would again seem to parallel Gibbon's own case up to this point. An Oxford man of brilliant, logical mind, who left his College position for conscience sake, Parsons was not only a prolific author but above all a daring adventurer and a potential martyr. Such a personality behind the polemical writer would surely appeal to the young seeker after truth, ready to risk fortune and even safety, which Gibbon sketches for us at this stage. There is a similar sense of alienation from his milieu common to both men. Even Gibbon's letter to his father seems 'to reflect the influence of Parsons rather than of Bossuet.'

Parsons, unlike Gibbon and his two intellectual prototypes, had 'persevered in the communion of Rome.' This would not help when the story of the reconversion at Lausanne was to be explained. Whatever the relative importance of the various influences at Oxford, the outcome was decisive.

With his 'reason subdued', Gibbon decided immediately to enter the Church of Rome. It is very much a historian's conversion, the protagonists being Middleton and Bossuet, with Bayle retrospectively added for moral support. Church history was the field on which his own mental struggle was fought out. Since the episode in the Memoirs was introduced as illustrating the history of his own mind, we might expect the emphasis on intellectual and rational elements. In the same way he ascribed his reconversion to his maturer reading and

2. See Memoirs, p. 58 and page 17 above.
3. Memoirs, pp. 63-5, where a condensed account of Bayle's career follows that of Chillingworth's.
4. ibid., p. 58.
reasoning. This is what the author of the Memoirs wished to bring out, in his account of the making of the historian. His primary aim here, however, was apologetic. As a raw youth, untaught in religious matters, he sought answers to honest doubts; he found Bossuet at the critical moment and 'fell by a noble hand.' Nothing to be ashamed of in that. If later he could refer to the episode as his 'religious folly', it was still a step on that same road to enlightenment taken by other men of intellectual eminence and moral courage. But he also described it as 'my childish revolt against the religion of my country.' What, asks Jordan, was he actually revolting against? 'Gibbon was not a pious man, nor had he ever had a strong Protestant faith to lose. It was, I think, a revolt against his father, against Oxford, even, perhaps against English society.' It was, in fact, a mark of alienation.

Lausanne brought Gibbon into touch with the philosophes and it is their precursor Bayle whose career is read back into his account of his Oxford conversion. Thus the goal of Bayle's development is summed up for Gibbon in a saying he quoted at this point, 'I am most truly a protestant; for I protest indifferently against all systems, and all sects.' Here is a hint of the sort of 'protestantism' Gibbon was to arrive at soon afterwards in Lausanne. Thus, in his

1. ibid., p. 86.
5. ibid., pp. 73-4; cf. his reference to Bayle, p. 78 and Bonnard's notes, pp. 266-7. Concerning Gibbon's statement that Bayle 'balances all the false Religions in his sceptical scales', Bonnard comments, 'for Gibbon all religions were equally false, but by using this adjective he may have calculated that his readers would instinctively think he made an exception for the Christian religion and spare him their criticism.'
apologia, the Memoirs, he felt obliged to play down the Catholic conversion experience at Oxford and stress the new and antithetical experience at Lausanne, preparing his reader for that ultimate and all important synthesis in Rome. But the Oxford conversion contained an element of continuing significance. It had led him to a study of church history and this survived his progress through 'superstition to scepticism.' 1 Readers of The Decline and Fall can be thankful. Fascinated by his descriptions of heresies and Church Councils, they can appreciate Newman's assertion that Gibbon was 'the chief, perhaps the only English writer who has any claim to be considered an ecclesiastical historian.' 2 Nor did Newman merely assert this; his own use of frequent and lengthy quotations from Gibbon shows how fully he believed this critical judgement. 3

Gibbon's mature education began with his banishment to Lausanne, which he gradually came to see as a liberating and germinal experience. It marked his deliverance from the 'port and prejudice' of 'the monks of Oxford' and from 'a knowledge of the world confined to an English cloister.' 'The path of learning' was now 'enlightened by a ray of philosophic freedom', 4 as he entered a new world of lumières, philosophic historians, moralists, and genuine scholars dedicated to teaching and research. He would later claim that the useful and

1. ibid., p. 62 and see above, p. 20.
systematic studies of his first eighteen or twenty months stood out in after years as the foundation of all his future improvements.¹

His love of reading returned, he knuckled down to the unwelcome stringencies which were even turned to good effect, and he had already gone a long way towards mastering the French language. Making allowance for a possible overemphasis in the Memoirs on the importance of Lausanne, this claim is attested by the solid reading recorded in the Journal and by the habits of independent study which were soundly established well before he began his Essai early in 1758. Apart from the purposeful plan of self-education into which his kindly tutor led him, he was aware of a broadening of outlook and a correction of prejudice.

'I insensibly lost the prejudices of an Englishman', he later wrote. There are signs that he even then began to recognise some of the advantages of his 'seclusion from English society', as he became aware of his progress in French and also of the removal of temptations to idleness which would have come from socialising with his fellow countrymen.²

It was, in fact, an extended extract he made of a book with the significant title, Histoire de l'église et de l'empire, that seemed to him to mark the watershed between his childish and his adult studies.³

The book is significant because the author, le Sueur, saw the importance of 'joining the history of the empire with that of the church' for the early centuries, a practice Gibbon was later to adopt. It was even more significant in our consideration of the historian as moralist because of its emphasis on decadence and corruption in church and

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3. Gibbon originally wrote, 'rational studies' but altered it to 'manly studies'; see Memoirs, p. 71 & n. 4.
empire alike, and the stress it laid on moral decline. But there is a significance also in the way Gibbon described his attitude to the exercise. It was 'a copious voluntary extract', and in a writer as word-conscious as Gibbon and in a work as carefully revised as the Memoirs, that it surely intended to draw our attention to the importance of this new stage in his moral growth. He was not unwillingly driven by his tutor into this lengthy assignment. It was his own choice to embark on this type of disciplined study of which his Extraits provide copious evidence. And the fact struck him as a first sign of maturity.

His father's first concern in entrusting his erring son to the care of the Swiss pastor, Pavillard, was to remove him from the scene of his dangerous lapse and reclaim him 'from the errors of Popery'. The letters the pastor wrote to Mr. Gibbon reported on this matter as well as on the boy's academic progress and general well being. But

1. Jean le Sueur's long annalistic history, 6 vols., Geneva, 1672-9, was re-edited with a continuation to A.D.1100 in the Amsterdam edition of 1730 which was in Gibbon's library. (See Keynes, op.cit.) See also S. Mazzarino, The End of the Ancient World (Eng. tr. London, 1966), pp. 110-2.

2. 'Extraits raisonnés de mes lectures, recueil de mes observations et pièces détachées &c.' eventually ran to 335 pages of the 1814 edition of MW (V, 209-544).

3. It was dangerous, because, as Gibbon pointed out from Blackstone (Memoirs, p. 61), it amounted to high treason.'

4. Memoirs, p. 73. Daniel Pavillard, which Gibbon nearly always spelt 'Pavilliard', taught Latin and ancient history at the 'college' and history at the 'Académie' (now the University of Lausanne).
Pavillard never tried to force the issue and it was for his moderation as also for his friendship and guidance that Gibbon remembered him with affection in after life. He was also marked by a warm humanity, clear headedness, and a real skill in teaching, born of long experience.

'His innate benevolence', Gibbon felt, 'had assuaged the spirit of the church; he was rational because he was moderate.' He also had a sound, if superficial knowledge of most branches of literature.

With Pavillard's help, Gibbon was enabled to work out a programme of fruitful study so that, in sharp contrast to Oxford, he felt himself at each step, 'invigorated by the habits of application and method.'

So revolutionary was this change in attitude, that he even found early rising 'a salutary habit' by which to extend his time for study.

At the end of a year and a half the result was evident. Though his learning deepened considerably during the remainder of his stay in Lausanne, yet the latter half of this initial period always stood out in his mind as 'the period of the most extraordinary diligence and rapid progress.'

The signs of intellectual and moral growth can be observed in another set of contrasts. On the physical plane, the move to Lausanne at first appeared like an expulsion from Eden: leaving the ease and elegance of his Oxford apartment for a small, poorly furnished room,

1. ibid., p. 72. Gibbon described Pavillard as 'a Calvinist Minister' (p. 69), but 'Calvinist' as Bonnard points out, here means no more than 'protestant', since 'Calvinism had long ceased to be the doctrine of the Canton of Berne,' (Notes, p. 270).

2. 'C' text as printed by Sheffield adds, 'His prudence repressed and dissembled some youthful sallies; and as soon as I was confirmed in the habits of industry and temperance, he gave the reins into my own hands.' (see note pp. 72-3 in Bonnard's edition.)

3. Memoirs, pp. 70, 74. He refers to 'the last eight months of the year 1755.'
unattractive and cold; the 'stately pile' of Magdalen College for 'an old inconvenient house' in 'an unhandsome town'. A touch of the dramatic clung to his first impression of the Oxford walks, which had suggested to him the shaded Attic banks frequented by Plato's disciplines. Over against this background was the romantically depressing picture of the 'narrow street' in Lausanne which was to be the scene of his exile. Yet in later life this city, not Oxford, became his Athens for which he had developed 'that tender regard which seldom fails to arise in a liberal mind from the recollection of the place where it has discovered and exercised its growing powers.'

That sentiment, however, had still to develop as the young man's mind discovered 'its growing powers'. At the start, the contrasts with Oxford life could only be felt as a reduction to straitened circumstances. Most humiliating for him was the fact that whereas his entry to Oxford had raised him 'from a boy to a man', Lausanne meant that, 'from a man I was again degraded to the dependence of a school-boy.' The mark of this dependence was the meagre pocket money, now handed to him by his tutor. At Oxford, he had enjoyed a very liberal allowance and an indefinite amount of credit among local shopkeepers; but this liberality, he came to see, had also proved a 'dangerous latitude'. In retrospect he was able to

1. ibid., pp. 70 and 47.
2. The reference is to the Emperor Julian who 'preserved for Athens that tender regard...’&c (DF xix, II, 270). 'Gibbon', says Low, 'clearly reveals his own long-cherished aspiration in these words, and now that he had come back to his own Athens, he only discovered new causes of gratitude.' (Edward Gibbon. London, 1937, p. 299).
3. The references here are to pp. 46 and 70 of the Memoirs. In the latter instance Gibbon had first written 'reduced' but later changed it to 'degraded'.
4. ibid., p. 47.
appreciate that had he been sent to Europe with a similar lavish provision, appropriate to his father's fortune, he might, as he later ironically put it, 'have returned with the same stock of language and science as our countrymen usually import from the Continent.'\(^1\) He could be grateful for the indigence and constraints which forced him into a proper and profitable use of his time, as he served his apprenticeship under Pavillard. In this way he learnt to balance the mental and moral gains against the physical and material losses. In the new scale of values Lausanne began to establish itself as the scene of his greatest improvements.

What were the real credits which outweighed the apparent debits? Perhaps of first importance was to find an experienced supervisor who understood his pupil and won his affection; above all, one who knew just how far to lead him and when to let him find his own way. This was an inestimable benefit for which Gibbon was always grateful. In this situation so conducive to learning, he began to find his feet on the path of education. His private study of logic, here according to the system of de Crousaz, seems to have made him aware of yet another contrast with Oxford. There he had lamented the difference between a book and a professor, which had left him largely untaught. Here, at Lausanne, he found that, 'the book as well as the man... contributed the most effectually to my education.'\(^2\) We can take this contrast a step further. Oxford had been marked by a lack of modern and relevant learning and by the presence of professors who failed to teach. In the Lausanne academy Gibbon found 'a professor of some learning and reputation' lecturing on a subject of great

\(^1\) ibid., pp. 70-71.
\(^2\) ibid., p. 73.
importance to him, namely, logic. Yet he discovered that he now preferred, as he said, to study 'in my closet, the lessons of his masters and my own reason.' He was thus beginning to look beyond the professor to the primary sources, in this case Grotius and Puffendorf, and he was testing them against his own reason and experience.

In his Lausanne apprenticeship Gibbon had thus entered upon an entirely new system of education. In fact, he later saw it as consisting of two educations, one coming from teachers, the other more personal and more valuable, the product of his own efforts. This twofold education into which Lausanne initiated him, he held to be the experience of every man who rises above the common level. And, he added, borrowing the language of religious experience as a metaphor of intellectual enlightenment: 'He will not, like the fanatics of the last age, define the moment of grace; but he cannot forget the area of his life, in which his mind has expanded to its proper form and dimensions.' The moment of grace' Gibbon did later venture to define when he told how the future 'historian of the Roman empire' discovered his great theme in 'the eternal city'; but that moment of illumination was not yet.

The expansion of his mind meant an escape from the narrowness and traditional nature of his former education within an orthodox Christian mould, and an initiation into more deistic morality and

1. The professor was Beat-Philippe Vicat, professor of law, who had written and lectured on 'le droit naturel'. His 'masters', Grotius and Puffendorf Gibbon mentions with a critical comment (p. 78).
tolerant humanism. Moderation and rationality he found in Pavillard; de Crousaz, he saw, 'had the rare merit of diffusing a more liberal spirit among the clergy and people of the Pays de Vaud.' Not only had he turned out several generations of students able both to think and to write, but his teaching had rescued the academy of Lausanne from Calvinistic prejudice.' Gibbon leaves us in no doubt that his own rescue from prejudice was a major part of his progress at Lausanne. He recognised the benefits of his removal from the prejudices of Oxford and of English society, but he still had a long way to go. Even after philosophic duels with his friend Allamand, whom he described as a most skilful master, he still found himself 'the slave of education and prejudice.' Yet the process of liberation had begun. His close study of de Crousaz's logic introduced him to the art of reasoning and thus gave him 'the free command of an universal instrument.' This instrument he soon felt ready to apply to his 'Catholic opinions'.

The next stage in Gibbon's mental and religious development, he later maintained, stemmed largely from the application of these logical

1. ibid., p. 73. Apart from his philosophic work, Crousaz was known in England for his Commentary upon the Pope's Four Epistles, printed in translation by Currl, London, 1738 (Garland reprints, 1975).
3. Memoirs, p. 82. This philosophic 'fencing' partner, Francois-Louis Allamand, was the minister at Bex.
4. In the Journal entry for 17 December 1975 (JA), Gibbon wrote: 'But what I esteem most of all from the perusal of De Crousaz's logic, I not only understood the principles of that science but formed my mind to a habit of thinking and reasoning I had no idea of before.'
principles he had imbibed and was thus, like his Oxford conversion, essentially an intellectual process. In his Memoirs, he was to use the earlier experience to illustrate the history of his mind; so in this case he wrote from Lausanne, though primarily to reassure a favourite aunt, 'I have in all my letters taken notice of the different movements of my mind, entirely Catholic when I came to Lausanne...and at last fixed for the Protestant'.¹ The change came about, he claimed, mainly through his 'private reflections', and in particular through his 'discovery of a philosophical argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation.' The Catholic creed, he said, 'disappeared like a dream' and he came to rest in a sort of minimal protestantism. It was 'protestant' in being not 'Romish',² but was in fact, the next step towards a broad and tolerant deism.³ But for the present, according to his own account, 'I suspended my religious inquiries,'⁴ acquiescing with implicit belief in the tenets and mysteries which are adopted by the general consent of Catholics and Protestants.⁵

2. As proof of this, and as he told his aunt Porten in the letter referred to, he received the sacrament in the Church of Lausanne on Christmas Day 1754.
3. It is impossible from the brief indications in the Memoirs to be precise about the degree and type of deism Gibbon may have reached at this point in his career. He had certainly moved in the direction of Bayle's position as already defined. See above, p. 23, n. 4 & 5 and notes 4 & 5.
4. In an additional paragraph in the 'C' text, Gibbon wrote that his acquiescence in the common creed of protestantism continued till the latter part of 1759, when a reading of Grotius' De Veritate Religionis Christianae 'first engaged me in a regular tryal of the evidence of Christianity.' In this way he arrived at a position very much that of the historian of The Decline and Fall. For this paragraph, see Memoirs, App. I, p. 211.
5. ibid., p. 74. He first wrote, 'which were adopted by the general consent of the Christian World.' (see notes 2 & 3 on that page).
This tolerant acquiescence was, however, disturbed by a visit to the famous pilgrimage attraction of Einsiedeln during a tour of Switzerland with Pavillard in the autumn of the following year.

The Abbey was romantically set as if by magic in the middle of a wild and mountainous region. Gibbon's comment in the Memoirs is that it was indeed erected by magic, 'the potent magic of religion.' This comment stems from his impression recorded at the time in what he referred to as 'a French journal, which I dispatched to my father as a proof that my time and his money had not been misspent.'

The almost unparalleled riches and superstition of Einsiedeln made the greatest and most lasting impression on the young traveller. The place abounded in stories of miracles and even the historical guide book from which he drew much of his account for his father, seemed 'en un mot...le comble de Superstition.' The prodigious pilgrimage trade on which the fame and fortunes of the Abbey rested, enriched both it and its banker in Zurich. There was so much to record that Gibbon asked his father's pardon for his lengthy despatch, but, as he said by way of excuse, 'on ne trouve pas a chaque pas des lieux qui sont a la fois le comble de la Superstition, le Chef d'Oeuvre de la Politique Ecclesiastique et la honte de l'humanité.'

1. 1755. See Memoirs, pp. 80-81.
2. ibid., p. 80. 'Journal de mon Voyage dans quelques endroits de la Suisse' is included in Miscellanea Gibboniana ed G.R. de Beer, et.al, Lausanne, 1952. See. pp. 28-33 on Einsiedeln. (Gibbon spells the name Einsidle in the Swiss Journal and 'Einsidlen' in his Swiss History and the Memoirs.)
4. ibid., p. 33.
In the account of this visit one discovers many of those religious antipathies so characteristic of 'the historian of the Roman Empire': pilgrimages, miracles, monks, martyrs, \(^1\) adoration of the Virgin, ecclesiastical government, and the commercialisation of religion resulting in a lavish display of treasures, with an apparent indifference to surrounding poverty. It has been plausibly suggested that Pavillard, who seems to have been careful never to force protestant views on his young pupil, may have included this visit in their itinerary 'for reasons of propaganda.' \(^2\) If so, the result was highly successful and enduring. Twelve years later this Einsiedeln experience supplied 'material for one of the liverlier notes' in Gibbon's Swiss History. \(^3\) The core of this note is: 'Le contraste de ses bâtiments magnifiques avec le pays affreux qui les entoure fait naître l'idée des palais enchantées qui paroissaient tout à coup au milieu des déserts. Le magie d'Einsidlen est celle de la superstition...'

The reaction at Einsiedeln thus forms an instructive supplement to the account of Gibbon's 'religious inquiries' at Lausanne. When he came to record it in his Memoirs, he recalled his 'astonishment at the profuse ostentation of riches in the poorest part of Europe', while 'the magic of superstition' then became that of religion itself. His final thrust was: 'The title and worship of the Mother of God

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1. 'Martyrs', around the time of the 9th century, Gibbon explains, included all ecclesiastics who met a violent death. (ibid., p. 28).
2. H.S. Offler, 'Edward Gibbon and the Making of his "Swiss History", Durham University Journal, XLI, 1949, p. 71. Gibbon's break with the Catholic Church had, of course, been made the previous year; see above, p. 32 note 1. He attributed it to his own 'private reflexions (Memoirs, p. 73), but Pavillard's role, though quiet and unobtrusive, does seem significant.
provoked my indignation; and the lively naked image of superstition suggested to me, as in the same place it had done to Zuinglius, the most pressing argument for the reformation of the Church.'¹ How far these sentiments corresponded with those felt at the time of the original visit we cannot say, but in The Decline and Fall the 'indignation' is transferred to Nestorius when Gibbon examines the fifth-century controversy associated with that patriarch: 'The Blessed Virgin he revered as the mother of Christ, but his ears were offended with the rash and recent title of mother of God...a word, unknown to the apostles, unauthorised by the church, and which could only tend to alarm the timorous, to mislead the simple, to amuse the profane, and to justify, by a seeming resemblance, the old genealogy of Olympus.'² Finally, both these accretions, miraculous relics with other trappings of the ecclesiastical system, and the concept of 'the Mother of God', come up again in a chapter concerned with the Paulicians, who in their simplicity of worship and belief rejected them. Using once more the very phrase that had first recorded his reaction to Einsiedeln, Gibbon wrote: 'The objects, which had been transformed by the magic of superstition, appeared to the eyes of the Paulicians in their genuine and naked colours.'³

The Einsiedeln experience was thus impressed on Gibbon's mind and his writings from the earliest journal through his History to the closing autobiography. It encapsulates a permanent aspect of the moralist's stance: indignation at the abuse of religious power and

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1. Memoirs, p. 80. There is also a thrust at Einsiedeln in his 'Antiquities of the House of Brunswick', MW, III, 508.
2. DF, xlvii, V, 119-120.
3. DF, liv, V, 119.
the exploitation of popular superstition. The moralist's education had begun. This fact might have been only partly perceived by the youth of twenty, but his willing and active co-operation in the process, which at first seemed humiliating and distasteful, clearly shows that he was not by any means unaware of it. Even if we discount much of the carefully arranged picture presented in the Memoirs, regarding it as a tendency to read back into these early scenes what was in fact the wisdom of the mature man, there is still the contemporary evidence: Pavillard's letters reporting on his pupil's progress, his own letters to his family, and the journal entries. Above all there is the evidence of young Gibbon himself on his arrival home in May 1758. His development in the awareness of himself, of moral values and of the quality of human relationships, testifies to a steady progress during the years in Lausanne. Before he could qualify as a moralist, he needed to deepen his human understanding and to develop as a humanist. His sojourn in Switzerland during his formative years played a vital part in this process. Despite one or two minor revolts and partial failures, he could see at least the beginning of enlightenment.

1. He had already (Memoirs p. 79) in his reading of Giannone's Civil History of Naples, encountered as Low puts it, 'the seamy side of ecclesiastical history.' (Gibbon's Journal, Introduction, lxiii).