Hilaire Belloc hinted at the paradoxical nature of Froude's life when he described him as "kneaded right into his own time and his own people . . . in tune with, even when he directly opposed, the class from which he sprang, the mass of well-to-do Protestant Englishmen of Queen Victoria's reign." The sources of opposition were plentiful. From the scandalized outcry that met The Nemesis of Faith to the indignation that succeeded the Life of Carlyle, the chain of controversies forming that life stretched unbroken. And yet the links were forged from issues typically Victorian. Froude's rejection of the Gospel of Newman for the Gospel of Carlyle was a paradigm of the 1840s; that same gospel made his consequent hostility to Liberalism in all its forms conventionally unorthodox in the fifties and sixties. His unabashed support for white Anglo-Saxon supremacy aggravated the sorest points of racial and cultural relativism in the seventies and eighties. As an historian too he was at the center of the ideological storms of his day. By rehabilitating the Tudors, his History of England challenged aspects of the Whig view with an alternative explanation of modern success. As if that were not controversial enough, the popular appeal of his brilliant style and the suspect nature of his scholarship turned Froude into a test case in the definition of professional authority.

There is a tension of paradox in Froude's writing and thinking
about history that shows the stress of intellectual dilemmas widely shared. In history he confronted the conflict between knowledge and wisdom, the need to prove versus the need to believe. He was a dogmatic doubter, both a chastiser and a celebrator of English ways. Although he rebuffed the challenge of opposing beliefs, both theological and scientific, by denouncing all interpretation as fictional, such scepticism actually freed him to argue more forcefully for his own providential fictions. He combined a Macaulayean belief in the overwhelming power of Zeitgeist with a Carlylean worship of heroes; a whiggish justification of past policy by present successes with a Tory conception of the ideal social order. In his historical interpretations, hard-headed English pragmatism fulfilled transcendental ideals. Although he argued eloquently for sympathy with the past, judgment repeatedly subverted sympathy. The vision he projected back in time answered highly personal needs, but it also shaped the Victorians' public identity in important ways.

The impress of Froude's early years on his historical writing was deep and direct beyond comparison with his five contemporaries. After his mother's early death, his stern father and his adored brother Hurrell exercised a predominant influence over his emotional and intellectual life. His father's disappointment and his own humiliation were keen when he failed to follow Hurrell's brilliant academic example. He was brought home from three "wasted" years at Westminster and left to his own desultory studies in his father's library. There, while his brother was emerging as a leader of the early Oxford movement, James Froude was first encountering modern historians like Gibbon and Sharon Turner. His understanding of both the English past and English Protestantism jarred oddly with the historical reversals implicit in Hurrell's Tractarian doctrines.

Froude finally entered Oriel College in 1836, under the shadow of his brother's recent death. The priesthood had always been supposed his ultimate destination, and he took deacon's orders in 1845, convinced that his belief in the general truth of the Gospel outweighed his growing confusion about its proofs. In his early years at Oxford, Froude attempted to resist the "strange fascination" of John Henry Newman by remaining purposefully aloof from the circle in which Newman tried to include him. Nevertheless, he clearly felt the attraction of the Tractarian position in those turbulent forties that called all institutions into doubt. He feared that he might have succumbed to the movement that was "sweeping with it the most brilliant of the
James Anthony Froude

rising generation” had it not been for the countervailing influence of Carlyle and Emerson. Their writings taught him that the basis for religion must be found in “the present reality of our actual life and experience,” rather than in ingenious arguments for the historical continuity of the Church (B, 72).

Ironically enough, Newman reinforced these conclusions by enlisting Froude’s help on “The Legend of St. Neot” for his Lives of the English Saints. Rather than strengthening Froude’s faith, this “excursion among the Will-o’-the-wisps of the spiritual morasses” convinced him of the futility of trying to satisfy the intellect with historical proofs for Christian belief. Instead of following Newman into Romanism to end his continuing “confusion and perplexity” about religion, Froude decided that he had mistaken his profession and began to think how he might escape the legal strictures that bound him to it. He was planning to resign his fellowship at Exeter quietly and take a teaching post in Tasmania when his Nemesis of Faith unleashed a storm of controversy in 1849. The story of a young clergyman who resigns his orders and converts to Roman Catholicism laid bare Froude’s continuing spiritual dilemmas; it also made the authorities question his fitness as a teacher and revoke their offer of a position.

Thus was Froude cut adrift in 1849, in his own eyes a martyr to intellectual freedom, but a pariah at Oxford and once again a disappointment to his family: a prime example of the intellectual and emotional casualties of the 1840s. In light of the catastrophe of his clerical career, his choice of historian as an alternative vocation takes on particular significance; in view of his complicated relationship to the Oxford movement, so does the subject matter of his major work. Having retreated to North Wales with his wife in 1850, he soon settled down to work on a book-length treatment of Elizabeth’s reign. The vocation of historian clearly represented a safe footing in the doctrinal quagmire that had proved so ruinous for him. In beginning the History, Froude wrote, “I had done with speculation over the insoluble problems. I was feeling ground under my feet, and was actively engaged on what promised to be a profession with which I could support myself” (B, 172). An 1853 letter to Charles Kingsley further demonstrates his hope of building out of the factual material of history a bulwark against the dangerous currents of conflicting theory. After scornfully dismissing the theological wrangling that led to F. D. Maurice’s expulsion from King’s College, he defends his own deci-
History as Protestant Apologia

sion to stick to his project, for "at any rate [in writing history] one has substantial stuff between one's fingers to be moulding at, and not those slime and sea ladders to the moon 'opinion,' "4

Like Carlyle caught in the crossfire of conflicting ideologies, Froude sought in history a refuge from scepticism; like him too, he concentrated on periods that could refute the most threatening of those theories. Writing the History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada served emotional needs far more important than the merely economic ones that had led him to take it up. Burrow notes its national recapitulation of Froude's autobiographical pattern: the pilgrim's progress from false to true faith.5 The History allowed Froude once and for all to exorcise the dangerously attractive spirits of Newman and Hurrell by repudiating the Tractarian view of the Reformation. At the same time it served as an atonement to his father, who was convinced by its success not just that Froude's view of Henry was correct, but that good might finally come of his son after all (B, 200). Froude also regarded the work as a formal recantation of his heterodoxy at Oxford. Hoping to be considered for the vacant Regius Professorship of Modern History in 1858, he offered his attempts to "clear the English Reformation and the fathers of the Anglican Church from the stains which have been allowed to gather on them" as proof that "if I ever return to Oxford it will be with the object of defending the Church of England from all enemies within and without" (B, 273). In the History's final pages, written in 1870, Froude still pursued the enemy of Roman superstition—a superstition even more dangerous in the present insofar as it threatened to betray society to the "godless secularity" of modern science by divorcing Christianity from intellect.6 Clearly in writing this history, he found not just an alternative career, but in many respects an alternative creed, one far more useful than the doctrinal orthodoxy he had forsaken.

Despite its controversial interpretations of the Tudors, the History, which appeared in two-volume installments from 1856 to 1870, firmly established Froude's claims as a major historian. His second major work, The English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, appeared from 1872-74 and stirred up a furor on both sides of the Irish Sea for its dogmatic insistence that "might makes right" when dealing with an "inferior race" like the Celts. Froude's biographical studies of Becket, Julius Caesar, and John Bunyan also appeared in the seventies and increased his reputation as a popularizer. All this popu-
lar success made him the target of professional criticism. His scholarship had been subject to attack throughout the sixties; the Becket study only intensified the assaults of his most strident critic, E. A. Freeman, who consistently attempted to make an example of Froude's alleged dilettantism. This did not prevent Froude from succeeding Freeman as Regius Professor upon the latter's death in 1892. Having recently published a follow-up volume to the History, The Divorce of Catherine of Aragon, he produced three more works based on his Oxford lectures during his two short years as Regius Professor: The Life and Letters of Erasmus, English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century, and The Council of Trent. Although Froude made some effort to induct students into the mysteries of manuscript research, his work in the Regius Chair was informed by the same beliefs in the preeminently moral and imaginative nature of history that he had enunciated forty years earlier.

Notwithstanding the relief with which Froude retreated from theology to history, his relationship to historical facts was from the first problematic. His early speculations made him sound like the most sceptical historian of his age. He responded to the dogmatism of both orthodox faith and positivistic science with a "theory of history" that declared all such theories merely projections of what one wished to believe about what one could not know. Lured into a spiritual wilderness by Tractarian claims to provide "objective" validation for the "subjective" truths of religion (SS, 4:227), Froude reacted by denying objective truth to all formulas, religious, political, and philosophical. Like Carlyle he argued that theories "vitiate[d] the observation of fact," that formulas struck "half the life" out of truth. But where Carlyle had tried to transcend the division between the truths of knowledge and the truths of belief, Froude felt he could only disarm the challenge of history to faith by making these two types of truth mutually exclusive. Carlyle had claimed poetic history as the truly real; Froude turned all historical knowledge into fiction.

Writing "A Legend of St. Neot" molded his thinking about both religious and historical knowledge. In its introduction he admitted that hagiography represented not historical fact but edifying myth, a product of the biographer's imagination. Rather than distinguishing religious from secular history on these grounds, however, he went on to hold that the difference between this biography and our own was merely one of degree. "We all write Legends," and all history is "more or less fictitious," insofar as we relate facts not as they really hap-
pened, but as they appear to us. Memory can not retain facts in isolation, so it rearranges them "in a more conceptional order" according to its preexisting prejudices. Just as increasing years modify our interpretations of personal history, so too each age absorbs and fuses and remodels historical facts to suit its own altered perspective. History, he wrote elsewhere, is like "a child's box of letters" (SS, 1:1); we can rearrange its facts to spell whatever message we wish.

Like George Eliot's similar admission that she presented not the facts in themselves, but men and things as mirrored on her mind, Froude's proclamation that "all history is mythic" actually ended by throwing greater weight on the testimony of the myth-maker. As if like Eliot in a "witness-box," the historian was sworn to represent accurately his personal vision. This witnessing depended not on sight but on insight, not on facts but on belief. Far from concluding that legends like Neot's were meaningless because "untrue," Froude argued that their meaninglessness depended on their spiritual message, not on their verifiability. The soundest empirical facts were valueless if their story taught us nothing about moral truth. All interpretation might be based on assumptions, but not all assumptions were for Froude equally valid.

Froude manipulated his sceptical attitude toward historical facts so as to protect assumptions crucial to his own values. He might warn, for instance, that "the most earnest efforts of intellectual sympathy" could but half solve the enigma of history (H, 4:14), or that "no effort of the imagination . . . will ever enable us to place ourselves exactly in the position of any man." Such pessimistic claims were simply maneuvers to deflect a pseudoempiricism that excluded morality from its assumptions about "human nature." Arguing that all historical theories were subjective and all facts malleable not only undercut an untenable fundamentalism, but served equally well to deny the "destructive" conclusions of positivistic science, whose claims had been forcefully established by H. T. Buckle's History of Civilization in England (1857-61). In "The Science of History" (1864), Froude denied Buckle's assertion that historical study could imitate science by arguing that its facts could be neither exhaustively nor accurately determined, let alone repeated experimentally. He had graver objections to Buckle's pretensions to predict future behavior, since such predictions could rest only on the Utilitarian assumption that human action was controlled by a "law" of self-interest. So long as one believed, as did Froude, that moral choice could override material neces-
sity, that man was neither consistently selfish nor consistently noble, there was no adequate science of him: "You will make nothing of him except from the old-fashioned moral—or, if you please, imaginative—point of view" (SS, 1:16).

Although Froude in a sense by-passed facts, he arrived at the same position as did Carlyle—that point at which the moral and the imaginative became one in willed belief, where spiritual truths were transmuted into "the great poem of human history" ("Inaugural," 143). He risked nothing by admitting that this poem's interpretation depended entirely upon one's assumptions about life's ultimate value, because he never doubted the superior truth of his own assumptions. For the believer, one romance formula preempted all other myths. There was no danger of real relativism for a man convinced that "one lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness; that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; . . . it is ill with the wicked" (SS, 1:14). He might describe the past as one endless flux of creeds, opinions, and manners, but he never doubted that "the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity" (SS, 1:18). Just as much as did Carlyle and Arnold, he believed that the student's duty was to determine "the rule under which we are governed by the Almighty Lord of the world . . . to what forms of faith or action is the grace of God most emphatically rewarded." The answer to such questions would allow the student to see through the controversies that had so long perplexed human history to the one truth in their midst.

At times he wrote as if this ideal truth were scarcely attainable in the fallen world of human time. Man would never write "faithful and literal history . . . until perfect knowledge and perfect faith in God shall enable him to see and endure every fact in its reality; until perfect love shall kindle in him under its touch the one just emotion which is in harmony with the eternal order of all things" (SS, 1:369). But in the meantime, the most important facts of human existence were still proof against the onslaught of so-called "scientific" approaches to history and were uncompromised by ephemeral ceremonies and dogmas. Like Carlyle, Froude defined the "fundamental axiom of all real life" in conveniently nondoctrinal terms: holiness, purity, and "obedience to the everlasting laws of duty" (H, 2:44) best served God. Here were goals one needed no controversial theology to reach and that no scientific proofs could suspend.

Froude's distinction between the higher truths of imagination,
creativity, and faith and the lower ones of reason, philosophy, and intellect led him naturally to a poetry rather than a science of history. For all his scepticism, he could not simply dismiss facts. Even while acknowledging the influence of interpretation on data he still admitted that history “depends on exact knowledge, on the same minute, impartial, discriminating observation and analysis of particulars which is equally the basis of science” (SS, 2:462). He tried to resolve the contradictions in his position by making the historian’s ability to perceive such particulars depend on a “high faith” capable of uniting Intellect (which, working alone, was merely destructive) with the “creative faculties—. . . Love, Idea, Imagination” (SS, 1:369). He claimed to avoid the distortion of formula by focusing on “facts” of emotion and action—facts whose integrity could be preserved only by the conditions of art: “If Poetry must not theorise, much less should the historian theorise, whose obligations to be true to fact are even greater than the poet’s. If drama is grandest when the action is least explicable by laws, because then it best resembles life, then history will be grandest also under the same conditions” (SS, 1:23). He found the most perfect history in Shakespeare’s plays, where actors, circumstances, and motives existed as dramatic facts unmediated by interpretation. It is no coincidence that Shakespeare wrote during that epoch whose political and spiritual health it was Froude’s purpose to illuminate. He explicitly linked what he considered a healthy society to an accurate poetic vision. Shakespeare’s “directness of insight” and “breadth of sympathy” would again be possible only when “the common sense of the wisest and best” had replaced the theorizing of factions and when all “speculative formulas” had surrendered to “the few but all-important truths of our moral condition” (SS, 2:487). This, of course, is effectively to prejudge which traits insight and sympathy will confirm as factual and to assign his own assumptions the status of axioms, not theories.

Conceiving history as a stage on which “good and evil fight out their everlasting battle” (SS, 1:16-17) suited Froude’s hero-worshipping purposes in a number of ways. “To myself the object of history is to discover and make visible illustrious characters, and pay them ungrudging honour,” he affirmed in his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor: “The history of mankind, says Carlyle, is the history of its great men. To find out these, clear the dirt from them and place them on their proper pedestals, is the function of the historian. He cannot have a nobler one” (“Inaugural,” 162). To science the individual was
nothing, the species all. Only the conditions of art allowed the indi­
vidual his full weight and dimensions. Only poetry was adequate to
re-create the greatest natures (SS, 1:337). By conjuring up “real hu-
man creatures who would bleed if we pricked them,” the historian
appealed directly to the identification and sympathy necessary for
moral education. By restoring heroes to their full proportions he en-
larged the ethical capacities of every reader:

The address of history is less to the understanding than to the higher
emotions. We learn in it to sympathise with what is great and good; we
learn to hate what is base. In the anomalies of fortune we feel the mys-
tery of our mortal existence, and in the companionship of the illustri-
ous natures who have shaped the fortunes of the world, we escape
from the littlenesses which cling to the round of common life, and our
minds are tuned in a higher and nobler key. (SS, 1:24)

Although Froude was as unequivocal as Carlyle about the impor-
tance of great individuals to history, he allowed more weight to the
spirit of the age, which established the conditions by which the hero’s
achievements were to be judged. Indeed, at times he rivals Macaulay
in the weight he assigns to historical circumstances. He claims that
even the great individual genius of a Shakespeare or a Raphael “is
never more than the highest degree of an excellence which prevails
widely round it, and forms the environment in which it grows” (H,
1:74). Convinced that the Reformation “could never have been
brought about constitutionally according to modern methods” (B,
202), Froude portrayed it from the beginning as the work of the two
powerful sovereigns, Henry and Elizabeth. But he defined Henry as a
“practically effective” leader precisely because he was advanced “only
slightly beyond his contemporaries.” In such leaders “the motive
force which bears him forward is not in himself, but in the great tidal
wave of human progress. He is the guide of a great movement, not the
creator of it, and he represents in his own person the highest average
wisdom, combined necessarily in some measure with the mistakes
and prejudices of the period to which he belongs” (H, 3:71). There is
little opportunity here for the penetrating and molding intellect of
the Carlylean hero. Those leaders who could read the signs of the
times at best rode the crest of the “tidal wave,” those who could not
were left in its wake.

If some of Froude’s metaphors sound Macaulayean, they serve a
significantly different model of change. We find in both men the usual
organic analogies. For Macaulay, however, the individual was
merely a passive receptor of the current of progress; for Froude he was
the instrument of Providence. Macaulay might use the authority of
the natural for rhetorical leverage, but his "nature" served rationalis-
tic ends and argued for an underlying uniformity in human expe-
rience. History was cyclical because without the trimmer's balancing
hand mankind was constantly oscillating between extremes. Like
Carlyle's, Froude's model of change allowed him to stress the unique-
ness of ages unfolding according to a divine, if mysterious, plan.
Froude's particular historical arguments depended upon the sponta-
neity, irrationality, and irreversibility of organic process. He too rec-
ognized cyclical alternation in history: times of increasing knowledge
alternated with periods of consolidation and "moral cultivation" (H,
1:11-12). But unlike Macaulay's, his cycles insured diversity, not uni-
formity. Cyclical change refuted the rationalist's appeal to a law of
averages because it left no two generations exactly alike.

Froude relied on the Carlylean cycle of institutional growth, decay,
and rebirth to justify the Reformation. He too viewed institutions as
but the outward forms of eternal truths, forms that remained vital
only so long as they credibly represented man's relationship to
heaven. While still green and young, the Catholic Church had nour-
ished its people. When it reached the end of its life cycle, as all institu-
tions must, its language became dead, its symbols hollow, its "living
robe of life . . . a winding-sheet of corruption" (H, 2:45). Not just
Henry, but nature herself, decreed its demise. All honorable men,
once they realized that their religion no longer corresponded to truth,
turned away from its dead forms and fell back upon "the naked ele-
mental life" (H, 2:46). The very spontaneity with which discontent
sprang up among Teutonic people everywhere proved that Protes-
tantism was rooted in an appreciation of vital and invincible truths.
Luther's spark only ignited an explosion that, like the French Revo-
lution, fulfilled a higher imperative, consuming away the rotten fruit
and clearing the ground for new growth (H, 2:39). This vindication of
elemental truths was beyond conscious human control: "The genius
of change . . . car[ed] little for human opposition . . . the truth
stole into men's minds they knew not how" (H, 4:441).

Froude's argument for organic necessity actually worked less to
diminish the role of the individual than to celebrate (as did the Whig
view) those who had supported the "right" cause. Its most important
use was to rationalize desired political and social behavior. The Tu-
dors had correctly read the "signs of the times"; the organic as well as
James Anthony Froude

the divine sanctioned their ends and so justified their means. In the *English in Ireland*, the natural “law” that might makes right justified the repression of an inferior people. Since the world was so constituted that man must be ruled by strength, “nature also has allotted superiority of strength to superiority of intellect and character.” Ireland’s inability to win her freedom militarily was proof that she lacked the maturity to justify self-rule. *Julius Caesar* summed up Froude’s tract for the times. Statesmen could not prevent the inevitable decay of outworn institutions, he argued, but could check the progress of the evil by recognizing the symptoms in time. According to his own diagnosis, Victoria’s England shared the ills of Caesar’s Rome: birth had been superseded by wealth, religion by cant, patriotism by party. Popular government had given control of the state to those who could not even control themselves. The lesson was clear: the “forces . . . which control the forms in which human things adjust themselves” would once again make an end of free institutions unless duty and justice replaced pleasure and material expediency as the basis of government. Froude’s “forces” in effect exchanged the materialist necessity of Utilitarianism and Positivism for a moral necessity which, while no less binding, insisted on the importance of self-sacrifice and individual responsibility.

Froude, like Carlyle, used organic change selectively; cycles justified the preservation of an approved status quo and sanctioned the destruction of undesirable institutions. But his conception of change lacked the apocalyptic violence of Carlyle’s. It was more evolutionary than revolutionary. Even movements so clearly propelled by truth as the Reformation coalesced slowly, moved forward hesitantly, and preserved fragments of old and new in glaring contradiction (*H*, 1:161). Froude’s need to justify the Reformation was intensely personal and complex. The influence of this justification on his model of historical change necessarily introduced strain and ambiguity into his argumentation about progress and decline. It was not enough for Froude to vindicate the Reformation by proclaiming that it discarded falsehood for truth. He wanted the extra sanction that subsequent social and intellectual progress gave to the Reformers’ choices. Although he admitted that he found the true interest of the past not in the growth of “material and mechanical civilisation” but in the drama of human emotion (*SS*, 1:17), he used sociocultural evidence no less polemically than Macaulay or Carlyle to reinforce his judgments. Fleshing out the ethnic and economic proportions of the Re-
formation in England provided him with further means of demonstrating its historical importance and inevitability.

Endorsing Victorian conceptions of race, for instance, he presents the new religion as being taken up instinctively by the Teutonic mind, with its "craving for a higher life" (H, 2:39). The Reformation plays a crucial role in the intellectual and material progress that constitute Froude's own version of the march of mind. Because their minds were freed from the old religious superstitions, England's merchants were more receptive to the astronomical innovations revolutionizing sea travel and consequently were able to lay the base for her maritime prosperity and colonial empire. The influx of highly skilled Protestant emigrants fleeing the persecution in Holland and Flanders further strengthened the economy. As a result the English flourished, but because of the "Spaniard's choice" of Catholicism, "his intellect shrivelled in his brain, and the sinews shrank in his self-bandaged limbs"—a fate typical of Celts (H, 8:436). Looking with satisfaction at England's power and influence in the nineteenth century, Froude concluded that the Reformation had been "the root and source of the expansive force which has spread the Anglo-Saxon race over the globe, and imprinted the English genius and character on the constitution of mankind." 16

Although this view of progress lent a brisk argumentative momentum to parts of the History, it deepened inherent contradictions in Froude's position. This march of mind was implicitly out of step with the silent, organic, un- (if not anti-) intellectual growth Carlyle associated with true faith. Making Protestantism the religion of "men of active and original vigour of understanding," while resigning Catholicism to the uneducated, the "imaginative," and the traditional (H, 7:10), undercut distinctions Froude himself maintained elsewhere between the theoretical sophistry of the false faith and the unreflective simplicity of the true. We might attribute these contradictions to Froude's rhetorical opportunism, his willingness to switch from wily Jesuits to superstitious dupes as needed to make his point. Such opportunism does explain many contradictions in his argument. But the very dynamic of that argument is controlled by more profound conflicts that cannot be resolved so easily.

Not the least of the paradoxes of Froude's History is the deeper undertow of nostalgia for a lost world that pulled against this triumphant wave of progress. Although Burrow reminds us that Froude's
enthusiasm for Anglo-Saxon empire glorified a national and not a commercial triumph, it still conflicted with his equally intense enthusiasm for the feudal. The forward thrust of Froude’s Protestant ideal carried him inevitably toward a deeply antipathetic present. It was part of his strategy to make explicit the differences between this present and the past. His most comprehensive examination of economic and social evidence occurs in chapter 1, “The Social Condition of England in the Sixteenth Century.” An obvious parallel to Macaulay’s chapter 3, this discussion seeks not to celebrate the extent of modern advance but to assess its limitations. Froude’s version of Carlyle’s medieval idyll is intended to reconfirm the spiritual choices made by men and masters in the sixteenth century. But Froude had to strike some damaging emotional compromises in order to aggrandize both the wisdom and virtue of the old society and the progress that left this world in its wake.

Froude portrays sixteenth-century England as a society in which the rules of political economy were neglected in order “to bring the production and distribution of wealth under the moral rule of right and wrong” (H, 1:91); a world before labor was looked upon as a market commodity, in which men were held together “by oaths, free acknowledgments, and reciprocal obligations” rather than by the “harsher connecting links of mutual self-interest” (H, 1:26). In his eyes a law that raised the cost of cloth by limiting weavers to two looms was motivated not by a desire to restrict trade but to retain the people “in the condition not of ‘hands’ but of men” (H, 1:63). The guild system existed not to monopolize commerce but to enforce honest dealing in honest goods (H, 1:56). Overlooking their use in controlling scarce labor after the Plague, Froude disposed of the stringent vagrancy laws as legislation that simply “harmonized with the iron temper of the age, and . . . answered well for the government of a fierce and powerful people, in whose hearts lay an intense hatred of rascality, and among whom no one need have lapsed into evil courses except by deliberate preference for them” (H, 1:90). Even when confronted with the palpable discrimination of the forest laws, he professed to believe that “they served only to enhance the excitement [of poaching] by danger” and cited the Robin Hood ballads as evidence of the “warm genial spirit” with which such petty class warfare was conducted (H, 1:72). All in all, in Tudor society “the people were ruled as they preferred to be ruled” by an aristocracy who demonstrated their
fitness as leaders by their self-sacrifice in defense of their country (H, 1:45) and by their submission to the “moral authority” of legislation like the sumptuary laws (H, 1:25).

The essential health of this body politic naturally insured the healthiness of the spiritual choices it made. Demonstrating that the majority of the populace under Henry were “prosperous, well-fed, loyal and contented” at once refuted Whig arguments about Tudor tyranny and forced specific parables on a present dominated by atomistic democracy, buccaneering capitalism, and political economy. But Froude’s is an idyll already dissolving as he contemplates it. He detects the snake of greed and self-interest already stealing into the feudal paradise as the commercial middle classes gain in power under the Tudors. Although he pointedly notes that forced military training was an effective deterrent to “self-seeking tendencies in the mercantile classes” (H, 1:71), he must concede that mammonism soon destroyed the feudal constitution.

Macaulay and Green were able to maintain the forward thrust of the Whig view by allying Protestantism to the expansion of middle class power. They could celebrate the development of modern intellect, industry, manners, and politics as analogous manifestations of one unified current of progress. For Froude the course of history was divided against itself. The energy of the new religion propels him forward, the decay of the social system drags him back. The progress that he had needed to label inevitable for the sixteenth century left him longing for the harmony of the past and explaining away the disharmonies of the present. Carlyle was saved from escapism by his ability to universalize his heroes and project them into the present. Froude’s heroes were too thoroughly controlled by the spirit of their age. His own struggles with faith and doubt had left him overawed by the mutability of ideals. A willed transcendence was for him more a hope than a possibility. Despite his discipleship, he could never comfortably adopt Carlyle’s decisive voice. History itself had taught him that it was impossible to predict the future: “We should draw no horoscopes . . . we should expect little, for what we expect will not come to pass” (SS, 1:18). Arguing that change worked in mysterious ways was for him more a defense against the unknowable than a defiant assertion of faith. His calls for reform hold out only warning of punishment, not a vision of a reformed world. He tried to evade modern political and economic realities by abandoning progress itself as mythic and seeking refuge in the permanently true. Duty, self-
sacrifice, and self-control were verities sufficiently nonsectarian to offer a key to all mythologies, but they left too many troubling details still in need of interpretation. Much of what struck Froude's contemporaries as paradoxical in his writings resulted from his unwillingness to trust either facts or ideals completely. Even the most universal truths at times needed a pragmatic rationale; even the most practical means required the extra sanction of providential ends. Building myths out of an all too fallible reality required constant, often unacknowledged, compromise.

II

For Arnold and Carlyle, identity itself rested upon the historian's ability to retrieve the truth about the past. Froude, on the other hand, had conceded that even "our knowledge of one another is mythic . . . for in every act of perception we contribute something of our own" ("Inaugural," 153). Far from following this conclusion into solipsism, however, Froude arrived at what was at least superficially a considerably more "scientific" conception of contemporary documentation and a notably more historicist point of view. Precisely because he considered it impossible to reach an objective understanding of the past, he argued that readers must either accept the impressions of events formed by contemporaries competent to judge them or "give up history in despair."18 Far from scorning "parchment Chartularies" as did Carlyle, Froude looked to them for the real life of the past. He advocated studying the statute books of the sixteenth century because in them one found "the deliberate expression of [our ancestors'] collective thought, on the high questions of faith, and life, and law, and duty"—a glimpse of the "inner side" of human experience, of the secret passions and motives that alone made intelligible the "outward" history of wars and politics ("Teaching History," 73). The language itself exhaled an atmosphere in which "the forms of departed things rise up and take shape before you" ("Inaugural," 159). Nor was it only the imaginative value of primary sources that Froude prized. His Carlylean defense of fact against formula led him to defend the pedagogical importance of texts in terms strikingly similar to those Freeman used while debating the first reforms at Oxford. Froude scorned the "universal knowledge" purveyed by London University, and he argued that unless teaching in the new school of Modern History at Oxford were to fall to the level of Gower Street or the popular press, the close reading of manuscript sources for limited
periods must replace the cramming of epitomes and historical compendia "philosophised into unity" by the theories of modern speculators ("Teaching History," 57).

Moreover, Froude practiced what he preached far more thoroughly than did Freeman. He made exhaustive studies of manuscripts at the newly opened archives in Simancas, Spain, as well as consulting documents in the archives of Paris, Brussels, and Vienna, at Hatfield House, the British Museum, and the Rolls House. In order, he claimed, to enable his readers to form their own opinions, he swelled the History with copious extracts from original documents and manuscript sources in which "the principal actors unfold their character and motives in their own language." Convinced that history would be "but a dumb show of phantoms" without some investigation of the daily life beneath the official events, he also amplified his research with a range of sociocultural evidence. His first chapter employs statistical projections of population to gauge the country's material growth (H, 1:13), inventories of country homes and banquet menus to suggest genteel life styles (H, 1:47-52 n.), and comparisons of wages and prices with modern buying power to determine the relative standard of living enjoyed by workers (H, 1:28-35). Like other historians working under romantic influences, he also paid particular attention to evidence of the popular mind—the literary, the legendary, the irrational.

In actual practice it was neither historicist sympathy nor "scientific" objectivity that Froude was after in his devotion to contemporary evidence, but support for a particular kind of polemic. Objectivity was no part of his historian's responsibility. He freely admitted that he considered "moderate views . . . but the husk of history; the real grain is beaten out before they can be manufactured." A student left adrift in noncommittal studies was likely to become hopelessly confused or, worse yet, fall into "a somewhat trenchant scepticism as to the credibility of any history whatsoever" ("Teaching History," 59). This end Froude feared as much as did Arnold and Carlyle. Impartiality was not only foreign to human nature but also, where great questions were at issue, was "but another name for an unworthy indifference" ("Teaching History," 78). Looking back at the History in The Divorce of Catherine of Aragon, Froude claimed no such impartiality: "I believe the Reformation to have been the greatest incident in English history . . . . I am unwilling to believe more evil than I can help of my countrymen who accomplished so beneficient a work,
James Anthony Froude

and in a book written with such convictions the mythical element cannot be wholly wanting."20

As we have already seen, it was not all theorizing about the past that Froude objected to, but theorizing that disagreed with his own "myths" about history and human nature. Carlyle had feared that the sceptical, utilitarian mentality of the 1840s would render incomprehensible a period of genuine faith like the seventeenth century; Froude professed similar anxieties about the Reformation. He identified the salient trait of modern historians as a talent for depreciation, for reducing the stature of great men to fit the limited moral and intellectual understanding of the general reader.21 He doubtless had in mind Macaulay's contemptuous dismissal of Cranmer when he singled him out as being especially guilty of taking "mean and low views of men, and of human nature" (B, 544). Modern political economists similarly considered human nature incapable of the self-sacrifice and moral character Froude assumed in the Tudor aristocracy. The prevailing fashion of interpreting the past, he complained, was to seek the causes of great movements in the whims and caprices of mean minds and thus to reduce merry old England to "the nursery of everything most pitiful, most base, and most contemptible" ("Teaching History," 71). Froude claimed that by using contemporary documents, he could rescue the reputation of Reformation leaders from the cynicism of modern "philosophers" as well as from the calumnies of Catholic fanatics.

Froude's own sympathies prove to be as selective as those he criticizes. For instance, he accepts the evidence of the popular mind only when it corroborates his point of view. He cites popular ballads to establish the outcry of a "high-minded people" against ecclesiastical corruption (H, 1:190) or quotes street ballads to create a sense of widespread indignation over what he has presented as the cold-blooded murders of Darnley and Murray (H, 9:83; 9:590 n.). He might be more respectful than Macaulay of religious belief, but only if it revered a living truth and not a dying sham. Catholicism is usually the religion of the weak-minded in his pages. Reports of signs and portents illustrate the "fevered imaginations" of Catholic fanatics at the return of Mary Tudor (H, 5:308) or at the death of Edward (H, 6:15). The craving after prophecies in the 1530s is not just symptomatic of intellectual revolution, but the logical result of a religion built on superstition; it is particularly to Henry's credit that he remained proof against such madness (H, 2:192). Froude examines at length the Nun of
Kent's jeremiad against the divorce, only to dismiss her as a young woman of bad health and irritable nerves, whose success exemplified merely the charlatanism of the Church and the perennial insatiability of human credulity (H, 1:295). His prejudgments stunt empathy almost as thoroughly as did Macaulay's.

What appeared to be an effort at historicist reconstruction in the History usually became a not-so-subtle form of special pleading. Froude chose to take state papers at face value because their self-serving pronouncements affirmed his own assumptions about the righteousness of the Reformation. The Statute book presented events as originating not in the venality or caprice of self-interested individuals, but as "rising out of the national will, and expressing the national judgment" ("Teaching History," 66)—in other words, as a spontaneous flowering of the spirit of the age. It was hardly any wonder that Froude found that "the story of the Reformation as read by the light of the statute book is more intelligible and consistent than any other version of it, doing less violence to known principles of human nature, and bringing the conduct of the principal actors within the compass of reason and probability" (H, 3:355 n.). Indeed, it would have violated his conception of "human nature" to assume that "statesmen engaged in so magnificent an enterprise" as the Reformation "would make themselves accomplices in enormous crimes, the complacent instruments of a licentious and capricious tyranny." He fell back on false dilemmas to establish guilt or innocence: if Anne Boleyn were not guilty then one would have to assume that English noblemen and gentlemen had degraded themselves in inventing the heinous charges against her; if Mary Stuart had not masterminded Darnley's murder, then Elizabeth and her advisors must be condemned for imprisoning her.

The latter conclusions were simply inadmissible for one who had in effect already determined on his own "Whig view" of Reformation history. The legislation of Henry VIII was to Froude no less than "the Magna Charta of the modern world." It allowed England to accomplish peacefully what had been achieved in Europe only by long and bloody wars. The Reformation in England represented for Froude what the Glorious Revolution had for Macaulay: in both "the stake played for was the liberty of mankind." Once concede that the choices of the sixteenth century had been vindicated by the nineteenth and writing history became a simple matter of selectively reconstruct-
James Anthony Froude

ing events so that they anticipated future success. This method con­veniently conflated past motives with present results, allowing Froude to press for agreement on the grounds that "if the present law of England be right, the party in favour of the divorce was right" (H, 1:118 n.).

To be sure, Froude's reassessment of the period served some useful functions. By stressing the political significance of Henry's various marriages, he toned down the portrait of the capricious Bluebeard and revealed a monarch driven at least as much by policy as by personal inclination. More often, however, his historicist arguments were undermined by double standards. For instance, he conceded that Catholics and Protestants were alike guilty of persecution, and that given the spirit of the age, it was unreasonable to expect either to have acted differently (H, 10:251). Catholics, however, he blamed for lacking the humanity that could have overriden the political logic of their position (H, 1:165); Protestant persecution, on the other hand, was but "the natural resource of a vigorous government placed in circumstances of extreme peril." Had Elizabeth's ministers "been embara­ssed with modern scruples" about "outrooting . . . truth" through torture, her government would have come to a swift end (H, 10:293-94).

Froude was caught in a dilemma: he wanted to mount a Macaulayean argument for pragmatism while retaining for his favorite causes a Carlylean purity of purpose. He called awkwardly on Providence to justify executions that Macaulay could have accepted as mere expediency. Froude chooses to see an "even hand of justice" at work repaying Catholics for the persecution of heretics (H, 2:328) and excuses even "needless cruelty" as "an instance of the wide justice of Providence, which punishes wrong by wrong, and visits on single men the offences of thousands" (H, 3:270). Providence exacted Catherine Howard’s execution as well, in a rather selective retaliation against those who had disfigured its high ends by mixing them with "worldly intrigues" (H, 4:139). Although growing ever wearier with the machinations of Reformation politics, Froude chose to believe that "the good remained, the corrupt perished"—that the higher morality of the ends justified and ultimately overrode the question­able morality of the means. In short, his apparent historicism and relativism were argumentative ploys. He drew upon the contempo­rary justification of events because it provided a self-validating view of the transactions in question. He did not so much judge the past on
History as Protestant Apologia

its own terms as choose the rationalization most consistent with his
own beliefs. Viewing the English Reformation through the long
perspective of three hundred years of Protestant success, he confused
his enthusiasm for its effects with a just assessment of its causes.

Froude set out consciously to revise history. Taking fiction and
drama as his models, he aimed quite as frankly as Macaulay at popu­
lar success, for he realized the power of art as an instrument of conver­
sion. In keeping with his pronouncement that history was “only a
stage on which the drama of humanity is acted out” (“Inaugural,”
162), he framed much of the action as theater: the divorce is a “great
drama” unfolding act by act, Cromwell the protagonist in a lesser
“tragedy” (H, 2:443; 3:474). In line with his argument that the truest
art was based on unmediated facts and taught best when it taught
least, much of his “characterization” consists of long quotations (or
paraphrases presented as direct quotations) from the letters, speeches,
and papers of public figures and from contemporary views of col­
leagues. Anne Boleyn’s ravings in her cell, he points out, are “as
touching as Ophelia’s” but claim a higher authority: they are not just
a poet’s invention, but the actual words of a suffering fellow mortal
(H, 2:467). At times Froude goes beyond mere quotation, condensing
documentary evidence into dramatized dialogues. Thus we see the
Emperor Charles “wincing” and “muttering” at Paget’s plain
speech; we attend court as Henry accuses the heretic Lambert in per­
son; and we witness Mary Stuart’s confrontation with John Knox
tal evidence if it could offer an authentic insight. He records a stray
letter from an English gentleman because it kindles “a small spark of
English life” during the visitation of the monasteries (H, 2:418), and
includes the story of Dalaber’s persecution which, in its “minute
simplicity, brings us face to face with that old world, where men like
ourselves lived, and worked, and suffered, three centuries ago” (H,
2:54). For Froude as for George Eliot, the testimony of eye witnesses
“like ourselves” pleaded for the sympathy and understanding based
on recognition of a shared humanity. Froude accorded these dramatic
truths of emotion and experience an authority he denied to other
kinds of historical interpretations.

Froude’s other means of restoring credibility and human interest to
history lay in his novelistic talent for clothing abstractions in a fabric
of concrete particulars. He rivaled Macaulay in his ability to indivi­
ualize the experience of the past and to suggest the way change permeated the daily reality of an entire society of people "like ourselves":

Every parish pulpit rang with the divorce, or with the perils of the Catholic faith; at every village ale-house, the talk was of St. Peter's keys, the sacrament, or of the pope's supremacy, or of the points in which a priest differed from a layman. Ostlers quarreled over such questions as they groomed their masters' horses; old women mourned across the village shopboards of the evil days which were come or coming. (H, 1:291-92)

Froude's was less Carlyle's eye for symbol than Macaulay's eye for the startling antitheses that revealed social cleavage. The disorder produced by great intellectual change springs vividly to life in the "peasant theologians" who come to blows as they dispute the mysteries of justification over their ale, or in the lawyer who lifts a small dog in derision as a priest lifts the host (H, 3:341, 343). Froude employs similar economy of detail to establish the full ignominy of superstition's overthrow in an Oxford where "the divinity schools were planted with cabbages" and "laundresses dried clothes in the School of Arts" (H, 5:255).

The situation Froude portrays, when extremes of Protestant and Catholic fanaticism threaten to rend the social fabric, fits a peculiarly Macaulayean pattern. However, Froude's interest is less in exploiting sensational polarities than in transmuting them into something more closely resembling that "galvanic mass" of forces Carlyle saw moving chaotically toward revolution. In the early stages of reform, Froude tells us, "each separate human being . . . was whirled along the rapids which formed the passage into a new era" (H, 3:219). To capture the confusion of change in progress he passes before our eyes a series of fleeting images like the "pictures in a magic slide"—representative events that convey us with a present-tense immediacy into both sides of the conflict. First we view a friar mendicant condemning heresy in a local village. "The friar disappears. A neighbour of the new opinions . . . takes his place, and then begins an argument" denouncing him (H, 3:219-20). "The slide again moves" and "we are in a village church" where a groom from the court scornfully challenges the sainthood of Becket, depicted there "in a window gorgeously painted." "We are next at Worcester, at the Lady Chapel, on the eve of the Assumption," where a citizen publicly mourns the desecration of the Virgin's statue (H, 3:222). By the time this slide show
ends, the contradictions of England's movement forward, "rocking and reeling" into the new age, have been effectively captured in Froude's kaleidoscopic vision. We have been made to sympathize with both the loss and victory entailed in this "under-current of the war of opinions, where the forces were generated which gave to the time its life and meaning" (H, 3:219).

For all his special pleading, there is a degree of impartiality and wonder in Froude's re-creation of the past that Macaulay could not claim. It is not just that he was willing (like Carlyle) to invite the reader to "call his imagination to his aid, and endeavour, if he can, to see the same object in many shapes and many colours, to sympathize successively with those to whom the Reformation was a terror, and with those to whom it was the dearest hope" (H, 3:61). Froude's own imaginative eye was keen to the nuance and detail that authenticated empathy. Despite his distaste for Catholicism, he pities its mutilation in terms that make us share the pain: "It was no light thing to the village peasant to see the royal arms staring above the empty socket of the crucifix to which he had prayed" (H, 5:64). He helps us feel the baldness of loss in chapels after the statues had crashed from their niches by imagining the sunlight that "stared in ... on the whitened aisles" and the commandments written on whitewashed walls "where the quaint frescoes had told the story of the gospel to the eyes of generation after generation" (H, 5:47). He finds heroic virtues, "courage and self-sacrifice" beautiful in enemy and friend alike; martyrdom, so long as it was "nobly borne," is worth our witnessing whether in those who "bought England's freedom with their blood" or those who were tinged with the sunset glory of an old faith (H, 2:338-39).

Yet nostalgic sentiment is finally no match for prejudice. Despite Froude's encouragement that we judge and feel for ourselves the positions of both sides, his partisanship controls our sympathy, and his judgments limit our experience of the past. Froude held to the righteousness of his cause with a Carlylean tenacity and indignation. Truth vindicates itself with a relentless inevitability that truncates empathy. Change is a tide whose flow cannot be turned, a seed forcing relentlessly through the soil, a clock inexorably counting down to the hour of reckoning:

Slowly the hand had crawled along the dial-plate; slowly as if the event would never come; and wrong was heaped on wrong; and oppression cried, and it seemed as if no ear had heard its voice; till the measure of
the circle was at length fulfilled; the finger touched the hour, and as the strokes of the great hammer rang out above the nation, in an instant the mighty fabric of iniquity was shivered into ruins. (H, 1:193)

He never permits the imaginative interest of history's pageantry to carry us away from the judgment exacted by God. Witnesses to Thomas More's execution, we are allowed to find uplifting the cheerful faith with which he meets his death. But More's own eloquence is swiftly drowned out by the voices of Protestant martyrs "crying underneath the altar" for vengeance from "the throne of the Most High" (H, 2:377). The cosmic righteousness of retribution for Catholic wrongs necessarily trivializes our sympathy for More the man.

The coronation of Anne Boleyn reveals a similar antagonism between sympathy and judgment. There is something distinctively Carlylean in this set piece that grafts the immediate onto the symbolic and turns brilliant spectacle into a sermon on the vanity of human wishes. Froude spares no effort in bringing back to life "the blazing trail of splendour" that once filed down London streets, now so "black and smoke-grimed," but then "radiant with masses of colour, gold, and crimson, and violet" (H, 1:424-25). The rich costumes, the glittering jewels, the fountains running with wine, the monuments and tributes, all coalesce in an extravagant pageant at whose center we find "fortune's plaything of the hour, the Queen of England—queen at last— ... breathing the perfumed incense of greatness which she had risked her fair name, her delicacy, her honour, her self-respect, to win" (H, 1:425). Froude poses Anne as both symbol and victim of the social earthquake convulsing her society: a "poor silly soul" tempted into moral chaos by the fatal gift of greatness. We are inclined at least to pity, if not to sympathize with her, when Froude clouds the sunshine of her triumph with a foreshadowing of that day three years hence when she would leave the Tower "a poor wandering ghost, on a sad tragic errand, from which she will never more return" (H, 1:426). In the long run, however, Froude knows we cannot sympathize with both Henry and Anne, and at the moment of her coronation he exacts at her expense the indignation for Catherine's treatment that he would not allow us to direct against the King. When Anne was anointed Queen, he asks,

Did any vision flit across her of a sad mourning figure which once had stood where she was standing, now desolate, neglected, sinking into the darkening twilight of a life cut short by sorrow? Who can tell? At such a time, that figure would have weighed heavily upon a noble mind. . . .
But Anne Boleyn was not noble and was not wise,—too probably she
felt nothing but the delicious, all-absorbing, all-intoxicating present.
ent. (H, 1:429)

He tries to manipulate our pity into disgust at the callous vanity of
the other woman in this maudlin melodrama, and to prepare us for
the adulteress' further outrages against womanly feeling. In the pro­
cess, however, his Carlylean grip on transcendent truths slips and the
heavy-handedness of the special pleader takes over. Froude's censo­
riousness makes his sympathy for her seem condescending and
insincere.

This need to judge and justify constantly intervenes between us and
Froude's characters. He might aspire to create an "overmastering
human interest" in history that "transcends explanation," but in
practice he does not trust human interest alone. In analyzing Henry's
marriages, for instance, he maneuvers the reader through a maze of
double standards. While commending Henry for letting political ex­
pedience override sentiment in divorcing Catherine, he blames Pope
Clement for letting "worldly prudence"—in the person of Emperor
Charles—enter into his deliberations on the divorce. He applauds
Henry's decision to force the dispute to an issue by marrying Anne
Boleyn and yet condemning her for acquiescing to such an equivocal
position. He argues that the personal feelings of Catherine and Mary
should not be allowed to obstruct a national good, but summons up
considerable pity for Henry's personal dislikes and domestic unhap­
iness in order to justify his divorces.

Froude in effect wants to make a Carlylean hero out of Henry—a
hero who acts rather than talks, who defends order against chaos, who
instinctively separates sham from truth. Although he blames the
"barren disputings" in which Henry entangles himself on his early
theological training, Froude is clearly embarrassed that it took the
King so long to trust to his "instincts as an English statesman" and
affirm the simple truth in his heart rather than entering into a "legal
labyrinth" to justify the divorce (H, 1:268-70). Froude is obviously
relieved when Henry is forced to defy the Pope openly. In contrast to
the distracted Clement who snivels and fawns, falls back on "Italian­
ate cunning" when flattery will not serve, he can pose Henry as a
Frederick the Great, a general in a state of war, with no time to mince
words in his swift commands for swift obedience (H, 2:295-36). In the
end Froude argues that Henry's "honest inconsistency," the trait of
"men of practical ability in times of change," was in fact the key to his
James Anthony Froude

ultimate success. It allowed him to bring the nation through “the hardest crisis in its history” without revolution and to lay the foundations of modern England (H, 4:490, 492). Guided by common sense rather than theory and exonerated by time, Henry is, as Burrow suggests, a distinctively whiggish hero—notwithstanding Froude’s efforts to endow him with Carlylean grasp on transcendent truths.26

Froude needed villainy as much as heroism to maintain the tension in his “mythic” view of the Reformation. If Henry is the incarnation of the silent truths of Protestantism, Mary Stuart is the epitome of Roman Catholic duplicity. Froude is wary of the sentimental and sensational appeal she traditionally had for English readers. By exaggerating rather than blunting the drama of her life he makes its obvious theatricality proof of all the falsehood for which she stands. She is from the beginning never more than a wily hypocrite and consummate actress, a genius that thrived only in the “uncertain twilight of conspiracy” (H, 8:83). Her religion would have been enough to condemn her in his eyes, but he will not allow her sincerity even in that. Elizabeth’s equal in intellectual gifts, Mary lacked her ability to feel “like a man an unselfish interest in a great cause” (H, 7:368). She cared only for the gratification of her own selfish passions, and “sacrificed her own noble nature on the foul altar of sensuality and lust” (H, 9:44). To be sure, she gains a certain stature in her very villainy. Froude accords her grudging admiration for her physical courage and singlemindedness, both of which contrast markedly with Elizabeth’s ambivalence and vacillation. Scenes in which she figures most prominently—the murders of Rizzio and Darnley, for instance—are among the most lively in the second half of the History. But Froude allows us to appreciate them only because we know they are virtuoso performances by a woman who sins with full knowledge of her guilt. When facts are missing, invention makes his cause. He encourages us to sympathize with Darnley’s growing fears by suggesting that Mary’s plan to remove him to the isolated Craigmillar “had an ominous sound. The words were kind, but there was perhaps some odd glitter of the eyes not wholly satisfactory” (H, 8:365). He makes her assumed complicity in Darnley’s murder even more appalling by imagining that she went to bed, “to sleep, doubtless—sleep with the soft tranquility of an innocent child,” after leaving Darnley to his fate (H, 8:370).

Froude controls our point of view to the end. It is not enough that we merely witness Mary’s execution: its “human interest” derives
from our "knowing" that it was all a charade. In Froude's eyes there is no doubt of this: "It would be affectation to credit her with a genuine feeling of religion." Mary's insistence that she died as a martyr to her faith rather than as a conspirator against Elizabeth's life was but a last desperate gesture at a revenge that might outlive her (H, 12:352). Her very effrontery earns her his back-handed compliment: her fortitude in the face of death was all the more noteworthy because it could not spring from devotion to a higher cause (H, 12:353). The "elaborate care" with which she prepared to encounter her end provides evidence of how skillfully she stage-managed her last performance. She exchanges the plain grey dress for a sumptuous black satin hung with crucifixes and paternosters, her false hair veiled in white. She resorts to tears in order to wheedle permission for some of her own people to witness her death: she could not, after all, leave in the hands of Puritans responsibility for reporting the "religious melodrame" she contemplated. She sweeps into the execution chamber "as if coming to take a part in some solemn pageant," and drowns out the prayers of the Anglican dean with her own "powerful deep-chested tones," interspersing English with Latin so the audience might be sure in which faith she left the world.

Lest we miss the point, Froude punctures her piety with trenchant irony: "She prayed for the Church which she had been ready to betray, for her son, whom she had disinherited, for the Queen whom she had endeavoured to murder. She prayed God to avert his wrath from England, that England which she had sent a last message to Philip to beseech him to invade. She forgave her enemies, whom she had invited Philip not to forget" (H, 12:358). The black dress is removed to reveal a blood red costume that, he surmises, must have been carefully studied for the appalling "pictorial effect" it would create as she stood on the scaffold, surrounded by black figures. He turns the final action into a ghastly symbol of her own duplicity and of the degeneration of the Church she represents: "The coif fell off and the false plaits. The laboured illusion vanished. The lady who had knelt before the block was in the maturity of grace and loveliness. The executioner, when he raised the head . . . exposed the withered features of a grizzled, wrinkled old woman" (H, 12:361). Froude allows the brilliance of the acting but cuts short "the admiration and pity which cannot be refused her." He sternly reminds us that "she was leaving the world with a lie upon her lips. She was a bad woman, disguised in the livery of a martyr" (H, 12:362). Misplaced sympathy for her tragic end had
James Anthony Froude

obscured the fact that her execution, far from being the one blot on Elizabeth's reign, had been instrumental in paralyzing Catholic resistance and allowing the Queen to meet the Armada at the head of an undivided nation.

Arguments for political expedience notwithstanding, in this case Froude's eloquence backfired. Even readers with no illusions about Mary's innocence were repelled by the violence of his rhetoric and found his gloating triumph over her final humiliation in questionable taste. Froude would perhaps not have strained so hard to blacken Mary had the contrasts between her and Elizabeth been sharper. His "mythic" view of the Reformation had dictated perspectives hard to maintain without some artificial heightening of the background. The heroine he needed to satisfy his melodrama formula dissolved in his hands, leaving only the crassest of pragmatists to embody the "good" cause. He originally conceived Elizabeth as a plain-dealing Tudor foil to Mary's caricature of Stuart fraud. She was to be a solitary heroine "braving and ruling the tempest" of Reformation politics (B, 172). She starts out as the perfect daughter to her manly and straightforward father: here was a queen who "rode, shot, jested, and drank beer; spat, and swore upon occasions; swore not like 'a comfitmaker's wife,' but round, mouth-filling oaths, which would have satisfied Hotspur" (H, 11:17-18). But he found Elizabeth's plain-dealing as hard to sustain as her heroism. As he delved deeper into archival evidence, Froude became more and more convinced that Elizabeth's greatness had actually been that of her advisors, and that she had been the champion of the Reformation in spite of herself.

At the outset he had refused to believe of Elizabeth what he so easily credited in Mary: that one exposed to great personal risk as leader of a country in crisis could be heavily influenced by personal motives. Further research revealed disquieting similarities between the two women, however. Having distinguished Mary from Elizabeth by the former's indulgence in her own licentious pleasures, he had with some embarrassment to account for Elizabeth's extended dalliance with Sir Robert Dudley, "technically honourable" though it might have been. He can rely only in part on our sympathy for the loneliness of the young queen with no one to guide her choice of friends, or for the isolation of the mature woman concealing the emotional emptiness of her life by idling with her human playthings. He tries shifting the blame to Anne Boleyn, arguing that Elizabeth's great and sovereign nature must have been "dashed with a taint which she inherited
with her mother’s blood” (H, 7:88). Nevertheless, one can trace his growing impatience as she trifled with half the crowns of Europe, too infatuated with Dudley to marry any, until it gathers to the final condemnation:

Queens do not reign for their own pleasure, and the ignoble passion which had prevented her from making an honourable marriage when she was young, with a prospect of children, was no justification of her barren age which [in 1580] threatened the realm with convulsions. Individuals may trifle at their foolish will with character or fortune; sovereigns, on whom depends the weal of empires, contract duties from their high places, which their private humours cannot excuse them for neglecting. (H, 11:185)

His claim that Elizabeth’s “unselfish interest in a great cause” allowed her to resist the personal temptations to which Mary succumbed also falters as evidence accumulates. He attempts at first to excuse a dishonesty and unscrupulousness equal to Mary’s own by arguing that Elizabeth’s “object in itself was excellent, and those who pursue high purposes through crooked ways, deserve better of mankind . . . than those who pick their way in blameless inanity” (H, 11:27-28). As he proceeds, however, he must more frequently acknowledge that her only object was to protect her throne and that she furthered the Reformation only insofar as it helped accomplish this end. Although wearied by repeated instances of her deceit, at the beginning of volume 12 he still defends her: dishonesty that would have irretrievably compromised a man’s honor, deception that if pursued for a personal object would have been called “detestable treachery,” might be “half pardoned for the general rectitude of her purpose,” as well as for the inherent weakness of her sex (H, 12:25-26).

His final analysis affords only the most qualified praise, nonetheless. Vacillation must be expected from one who had no theological convictions. Elizabeth had realized (like the young Froude) that “the speculations of so-called divines were but as ropes of sand and sea-slime leading to the moon,” but she had no larger or deeper convictions with which to replace them. If her insight were keen and her mind sharp, she lacked the “intellectual emotions which give the human character its consistency and power” (H, 12:583). Her personal bravery and economy hardly redeemed the grotesqueness of her vanity and affectation. In the end what was a powerful claim for Henry has faded to grudging acquiescence: “The greatest achievement in English history . . . was completed without bloodshed under
Elizabeth's auspices, and Elizabeth may have the glory of the work" (H, 12:587). One cannot help feeling that it was really Froude's disil­lusionment with his badly tarnished heroine that convinced him to end his study at the Armada rather than follow her life out to its close as originally planned.  

This *History of England* is preponderantly a drama of palace intrigue. We get out of the court and stateroom periodically to the vil­lage, the battlefield, and the high seas, but we still miss that deep responsiveness to place that triggered the "imaginative archaeology" of Arnold and Carlyle and allowed even Macaulay to make cityscapes as real as his people. The battle of faith and its defenders carries for Froude much more weight than battles of men and ships. Granted, the materials for military history were disappointing. The vacillation and stinginess that were Elizabeth's trademarks told most heavily on her army and navy. The military chronicle of her reign offers an almost unremitting tale of ignominious defeats and ambiguous victories (e.g., H, 7:236, 529; 8:25). The heroism of English soldiers is repeated­ly undercut by the pusillanimity of their commander-in-chief. Notwithstanding Froude's contempt for the Irish, their very barbarity informed their wars with an unqualified bravery and singleminded­ness that inspires a lyric intensity he seldom could muster for the English (e.g., H, 8:429).

Luckily the Armada's defeat provided an unambiguous victory of surpassing historical importance. "It is all action," he wrote, "and I shall use my materials badly if I cannot make it as interesting as a novel." He closes his massive work in a "blaze of fireworks" (B, 310) that illuminated a moment of national triumph and solidarity. From the start Froude establishes his claim over the patriotic sympathies of his readers by presenting Spain's challenge as essentially political. By brushing aside theological issues, he treats England's response as a spontaneous outpouring of the national will—a rallying to the de­fense of age-old traditions of British freedom and independence that sets aside all differences of religious opinion. The spark of resistance flares first in the coastal towns, where news of the Spanish approach sets off saddling and arming and sends musters flocking to the ports. As it penetrates every corner of the country, the tidings set on fire "the patriotic heart of England" (H, 12:488). In the heat of this passion, chivalry is born anew and the commonplace is apotheosized into the heroic as all classes join in mutual support: "from Lyme, and Wey­mouth, and Poole, and the Isle of Wight, young lords and gentlemen
came streaming out in every smack or sloop that they could lay hold of, to snatch their share of danger and glory at Howard's side; if their strength was negligible, their presence proved to the crews that "the heart of England was with them" and thus "transformed every common seaman into a hero" (H, 12:489). Heroism and fortitude are needed all the more because of the government's inadequate support of its own troops. Froude's growing disgust with the Queen who "clung with the maddened grasp of passionate avarice" to the Burgundian diamonds while her navy starved, and niggled over every grain of powder while her admiral lay with empty magazines before an enemy twice his strength, is obvious. If it undercuts his portrait of national solidarity, this added disadvantage serves only to make the navy's final triumph over such great odds the more impressive.

Although himself an avid seaman, Froude viewed the action with the eye of the novelist rather than of the admiral. Precise, if largely imagined, details of weather and terrain place the reader on the scene: the early summer sun "shining softly on the white walls and vineyards of Coruña" as the majestic Armada drifted out on the purple waters, the "gibbous moon" that revealed to the Spanish the approach of the first English opposition, the "wild west wind" and "rolling breakers of the Atlantic" that wreck the remainder of the Armada on the Irish coast. We understand why the superstitious Spaniards view the English fireships, sent to force them away from Calais, as "some terrible engines of destruction," because Froude restores the scene as it would have appeared to them in all its shocking detail: "Certain dark objects which had been seen dimly drifting on the tide where the galleons lay thickest, shot suddenly into pyramids of light, flames leaping from ruddy sail to sail, flickering on the ropes and forecastles, foremasts and bowsprits a lurid blaze of conflagration" (H, 12:499). Major engagements are sketched in with sharp picturesque strokes: the Spanish ships moving like "Thames barges piled with hay" are never any match for the sharp low English ships, which shoot away "as if by magic in the eye of the wind" (H, 12:482). The decisive British attack pours "one continuous rain of shot" into the Spanish fleet, driving them into a confused and helpless mass; they are "hunted together as a shepherd hunts sheep upon a common" and herded onto the Flanders coast (H, 12:503). As the galleons heeled over, "their middle decks were turned into slaughter-houses, and in one ship blood was seen streaming from the lee scuppers" (H, 12:504).
The taunts of the Spanish crews, daring the “Lutheran hens” to board, proved only “an idle bravado.” The proud Castilian spirit was broken, and the remainder of the Armada chose to slink home via the Orkneys and Ireland. Froude drives home the ignominy of defeat by tracing out the grisly scenes of Spanish destruction as the survivors are savaged equally by the elements they had believed God controlled in their favor and by the Irish whose religious camaraderie dissolves under the lure of plunder. Regardless of their position on the theological issues at stake, all readers could join in appreciating this brilliant celebration of English victory and proudly accord the History a place among the English classics.

From the beginning Froude’s work was better received by the general public than by the critics. And yet his brilliant style, unorthodox interpretations, and questionable accuracy would have made him no more controversial an historian than Carlyle or Macaulay had it not been for the much wider debate about the historian’s function that crystallized around his career. His success crested at a time when the definition of “serious” history had begun to shift under the imposing pressures of a mass market and an emergent professionalism. Although his work supplied “scientific” scholars with ammunition against a popularization that they felt both challenged and undermined their standards, the general reader defended it as an eloquent testimony to the moral and imaginative power that the specialist would deny to history. Except among his staunchest supporters, Froude’s revisions of sixteenth-century history converted few readers. But even many who disagreed with his interpretations paid tribute to the brilliance of his style and to the skill with which he brought to life actors in a thrilling historical pageant.

Froude’s accuracy found fewer defenders. The difficult work of deciphering and translating hundreds of manuscripts would have been a formidable challenge to any scholar. Froude proved an exceptionally careless copyist who compounded his errors by failing to make clear where he substituted paraphrases within quotations or excerpted without ellipsis marks. Goldwin Smith and E. A. Freeman were among the first to take him to task for factual errors in sixteenth-century history, and in later years T. Rice Holmes and W. S. Lilley found his Caesar and Erasmus similarly marred by misreadings, mistranslations, and mistakes. Most reviewers recognized that his gravest errors concerned not accuracies of fact but accuracies of judg-
ment—strong prejudice, not intellectual dishonesty, led him into so many misstatements and distorted emphases. But the same claims had been made against Macaulay, without branding him "essentially a rhetorician and not an historian," as A. V. Dicey said of Froude.52

When all is said and done, Froude's inaccuracy alone was not enough to disqualify him as a serious historian as defined by the standards of the 1870s and 1880s. It was certainly not enough to have turned "Froude's disease" into a byword for "constitutional inaccuracy" by the turn of the century had not more been at stake than errors alone.53 As Freeman's attack makes clear, Froude served as a lightning rod for those who promulgated a new definition of the historian. Freeman's Anglican and Liberal sympathies were powerful sources of antipathy toward Froude, but professional jealousy was even stronger. Freeman resented the overwhelming popular success of a writer who ignored what he considered professional standards. The fact that Froude had undertaken far more primary research than Freeman did not absolve him of "original sin"; Freeman still claimed that he had tried to write about "a very difficult period of history without any proper apprenticeship to historical writing."54 Froude's errors were "just the sort of things which superficial writers care nothing about, just the sort of things which superficial readers think it hypercritical to complain of; but . . . just the sort of things by which scholars judge whether a book is to be trusted or not."55 Freeman and others attributed Froude's failings as much to the very nature of "literary" history as to the man himself. Goldwin Smith found it natural to find inaccuracy in a writer consumed by the desire for "pictorial effect."56 He was joined by other commentators who worried about the way Froude's "historical romances" might warp the judgment of unsophisticated readers.57

Many reviewers blamed the readers themselves for encouraging unprofessional standards. As Henry Reeve put it, a "fiery spirit of partisanship" might be incompatible with justice and truth, but it "only renders the work more interesting and attractive to the reader."58 William Donne unwittingly corroborated this charge by asserting that Froude's enthusiasm for the Protestant cause was a "better element in an historian's composition, than cold negation and apathy."59 The tremendous vogue of historical writing of all sorts had, in the eyes of its critics, created an audience that was not just undiscriminating, but that actively preferred an entertaining style to
solid scholarship, “pictorial effect” to accuracy. Frederic Harrison and Andrew Lang simply confirmed attitudes widely held at the turn of the century when they argued that it was impossible to combine the histrionic effect, sweeping judgments, and compelling narration essential to “literary” history with the cool objectivity, meticulous scholarship, and “infinite complexity of circumstance” demanded by scientific scholars.  

And yet, if some professionals believed they could uphold professional standards only by rejecting both the claims and methods of “literary” history, others were moved by the very violence of the attack against Froude to reaffirm the importance of imagination to full historical truth. Nonprofessionals rallied in overwhelming numbers to support Froude, and by doing so to reaffirm the human and patriotic importance of history. Even Harrison admitted that the most meticulous scholarship was valueless if it never reached the public. Better that the general reader be beguiled into too lenient a view of the Tudors than that he “should feel no interest at all in them as men with purpose, brain, and courage.”

T. Rice Holmes, like many readers, preferred the flawed diamond to the perfect crystal—the literary masterpiece that stirred the pulse and braced the patriotism of all who read to the scholarly omniscience that left them cold. Even the Saturday Review, Froude’s old nemesis, came to his defense in the nineties, affirming that minute accuracy was only “the small game of history,” and that Froude’s literary genius constituted adequate qualification for a Regius Professor. If late Victorians acknowledged valid distinctions between a good historian and a good historical scholar, they still preferred the former as their public spokesman. Politics had much to do with Froude’s appointment as Regius Professor, but so did the belief, still strong at the end of the century, that eloquence was at least as vital as scholarship—that it was as important to keep history alive in the imagination and in the heart as to satisfy the reason with cold hard facts and an austere objectivity.

Froude stands as one of the last great Victorian amateurs. Adopting the historian’s vocation played a crucial role in his recoil from doubt into dogmatism. It gave him a way of legitimizing himself both professionally and ideologically. History was to him, as it was to Carlyle and Macaulay, a terrain reconstructed so as to make the present intelligible. He had found it necessary to free divine will and human purpose from their dependence on conflicting orthodoxies in order to
protect the core of faith. In the long perspective of time, the doctrinal tides that had nearly shipwrecked him appeared as so many eddies on a stream whose course for the good was never turned aside. It is true that in order to vindicate this ultimate benevolence he felt he needed to find an historical refutation of specific doctrines. But his particular interpretations of the past were less important to his audience than his conviction that history taught morally and politically uplifting lessons and his genius at impressing these on the heart by way of the imagination.

In addition to endorsing Carlyle's political and social doctrines, Froude followed his example in the primary tenets of his historical faith as well: in his conviction that the elemental truths of the universe were manifested in the cyclical growth of beliefs and institutions, that man's nature was divine and its development consistent with moral law, that God's will was revealed in "the one great Bible which cannot lie": the history of the human race. Like Carlyle he preserved historical truth from the corrosive effects of rationalism by locating it in the imagination, not the reason, and by declaring it accessible to poetic insight, not analytic proof. He too rejected "theories of history" as the tools by which ideologues manipulated this truth to legitimize their own world views, although he somewhat more forthrightly acknowledged the extent to which his own "myths" did the same. For both men history was a dramatic spectacle in which heroes and heroines were to enlarge our moral capacities by their example. Froude chose those heroes and heroines on the assumption that they would reinforce certain ideals, and like Carlyle with Frederick, he confronted difficult dramatic problems when he found them unequal to their task.

Despite this close affinity with Carlyle, in other respects Froude's artistic temperament had more common with Macaulay's. He lacked Carlyle's visionary power. His genius was narrative rather than metaphorical, better adapted to vivid outlines than to complex symbolism, and was never more brilliantly displayed than when engineering the melodramatic exposure of criminal queens and other traitors to the cause. His special pleading makes his characters seem more often paradoxical than complex. If he did not share Macaulay's cynicism and his insensitivity to the spiritual, he allowed his partisanship to determine which actions were consistent with "human nature" and which beliefs could be brushed aside as "mere" superstition. His
James Anthony Froude

casuistry, too, incurred charges that he was morally insensitive and/or intellectually dishonest, when in fact he was simply too convinced of the righteousness of his cause to recognize that what he saw as right and wrong others saw as a double standard. His investigation of manuscript sources, like Macaulay’s immersion in popular literature, broke important ground in historical research, even while his mishandling of these materials discredited him as a serious scholar.

A family friend once described Froude as a man “apparently contradictory, almost inconsistent, because of his profound reverence for essential truth, and unsparing effort to arrive at it.” In his own intellectual journeying, Froude never seemed to find a secure resting place between Macaulay’s sceptical reserve and Carlyle’s leap of faith. For Macaulay truth was obvious because it was so limited. He never questioned whether his vision of reality was true—logic and common sense assured him it was. As for moral absolutes, it was enough to say that they were absurdly unfitted to guide practical behavior. For Carlyle truth was obvious because it dissolved all appearances. Moral absolutes were the only reliable reality. When Froude looked through facts he was overwhelmed by the fictionality of appearances but not by the reality of unified truth behind them. He posited the existence of such truth, but lacked the visionary power to sweep away all intellectual obstacles to reaching it. His strategy was one of compromise, not of transcendence. At times he placed truth beyond the reach of reason, but at others he appealed to reason to refute false truths. His scepticism was sometimes a weapon, sometimes a defense. If his struggle to arrive at truth led him into paradox, the journey was still necessary. Even readers who criticized him appreciated his willingness to undertake that journey for them.

The unprecedented amount of controversy over Froude’s reputation does not indicate that he was below the standard of Victorian historiography so much as that he stood on the border line between conflicting definitions of what the historian should do and be. The very vigor of that controversy underlines the seriousness with which Victorians viewed the issues involved. Despite his scholarly failings, Froude became something of a patriotic fixture to a nation willing to overlook the eccentricities of his historical creed for his service in immortalizing great moments of the national past. To Frederic Harrison, the very fact that Froude was “attacked, admired, and condemned” by his readers was proof that at least his work would not be
"put upon the shelf."

If he would always remain a talented amateur, a "popular writer of history" rather than a great historical scholar, still his narrative abilities served a vital purpose by nurturing the popular commitment to history's moral and imaginative functions at a time when the rise of professionalism was already beginning to fragment the audience for historical writing and to realign its priorities.