

Gibbon's Fortunes

BY JOHN N. MORRIS

I.

AS USUAL, Lytton Strachey is almost right. "Happiness," he says, "is the word that immediately rises to the mind at the thought of Edward Gibbon: and happiness in its widest connotation—including good fortune as well as enjoyment. Good fortune, indeed, followed him from the cradle to the grave in the most tactful way possible; occasionally it appeared to fail him; but its absence always turned out to be a blessing in disguise." What is wrong here is the tone. To speak of Gibbon's good fortune as following him "in the most tactful way possible" raises a smile, no doubt; but for the sake of that momentary effect it reduces an essentially accurate perception to triviality. For Gibbon's life was not quite as Strachey describes it, a happy, easy progress from joy to joy. Gibbon's own notion of the matter, at any rate, was quite different. To him it seemed that his good fortune consisted less in successes achieved than in disasters avoided. I sug-

gest that his autobiography, in which he records this estimate of his experience, is for us a source of knowledge not only about Gibbon but, indirectly, about the modern life of the mind.

In a sense, of course, Gibbon's autobiography does not exist, or it exists as a co-operative venture only very recently completed. The book that for a century and a half has passed for his *Memoirs* is, as is well known, a compilation by his literary executor, John Holroyd, Lord Sheffield, from some six drafts and additional fragments that Gibbon composed between 1788 and 1793. In general, Lord Sheffield's procedure was the only sensible one. Where versions overlapped he chose the one that treated a given period most fully. Thus the first third consists largely of version F, written in 1792-3. The next third consists of version B, and the last is made up of part of version C and much of version E. He did not, however, carry out his own plan mechanically. For instance, he imported into the text from version C the famous "I sighed as a lover; I obeyed as

a son," rightly believing it superior to Gibbon's statement of his renunciation of Mlle. Curchod in B, the version he was chiefly following at the moment. There are many such evidences of Lord Sheffield's editorial intelligence. But unfortunately Lord Sheffield's labors did not end here, and when in the late nineteenth century the full text of all the versions was published, it became apparent that, well conceived though his edition was, it was incomplete and badly needed revision. In obedience to his notions of propriety Lord Sheffield had omitted or altered a word here and a passage there, with the result that, however striking still, the book he printed is tamer and less interesting than what Gibbon wrote. Although this fact has been known for almost seventy years, no editor before Mr. Dero A. Saunders, whose edition appeared as a paperback in 1961, attempted to produce a coherent, faithful text of the work.*

Saunders' intention in re-editing the autobiography is, he tells us, to "introduce new readers to the historian, in the hope that they will thereby be led to the history." That hope is probably vain. It has become almost a commonplace to remark, with the great British scholar G. Birkbeck Hill, that for "one reader who has read his *Decline and Fall*, there are at least a score who have read his autobiography. . . ." As Professor Donald Stauffer puts it, "How many people . . . know how and where Gibbon began and finished the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* who know neither how nor where the Roman Empire fell?" There is good reason for this, and it is not simply the negative one sometimes adduced, that the autobiography is shorter and less demanding than the great history.

*Dero A. Saunders, editor. *The Autobiography of Edward Gibbon*. Meridian Books: New York, 1961.

II.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY presents peculiar problems to the critic, for (more than any other *genre*) it necessarily and incessantly tempts him away from "pure" literary considerations to judgments on the character of the author. Such judgments, no doubt, are finally proper—but *only* finally. In Gibbon's case especially, if the true nature of his autobiography is to be understood, the critic's moral passions must be indulged with uncommon tact. For the temptation to judge—and judge harshly—is unusually great. Gibbon was not in any ordinary sense an attractive person. His virtues, and those of his book, are not charming ones. Nevertheless, they are real, and they will be missed by those who concentrate on such easy targets as Gibbon's smugness, vanity and coldness of heart. No doubt it is the abundance of those easy targets that makes ordinary opinion about his autobiography so unsatisfactory. The usual critical tactic is to praise the book and deplore the man. Having said that the book is "without a rival," G. Birkbeck Hill can find nothing better to say of its subject than that he had an "original and interesting nature." These carefully non-committal adjectives we frequently utter when confronted by something surprising, puzzling, and indistinctly minatory. To apply them to Gibbon is appropriate, in a sense, but surely it is not to say the last word. This notion of Gibbon as someone against whom one must defend oneself finds its most direct and vulgar expression in the introduction to the Everyman edition. There Oliphant Smeaton contrives to triumph over Gibbon by condescending to praise his "little outcrops of egotism" because they show him to have been "no demi-god, but merely a man of like passions with ourselves"—passions, as it turns out, that are "death to the respect

whereon love must be based." Smeaton very neatly has it both ways.

The Everyman introduction is inconsequential as criticism, of course, but both Smeaton's and G. Birkbeck Hill's remarks appear to issue from an interesting misconception of the nature of the work they are concerned with. Both men seem implicitly to conceive of Gibbon's book—and perhaps every autobiography—as an *apologia*. If it is not, they imply, it *ought* to be. This misunderstanding of the tasks autobiography may perform, this limitation of its scope, forces them into the contradiction of congratulating Gibbon on his frankness while accusing him of an insufficient sense of shame.

In short, Gibbon's critics have failed or refused to meet him on his own ground. For Gibbon seems to have had no notion that his life required defense, or, if it did, that it was his place to supply it. To say that Gibbon did not mean to apologize for anything is not, of course, to say that he had nothing to apologize for; but at least it helps us to see what the book is really about. Not apology and self-justification, but "Truth—naked, unblushing truth" is his object. Such avowals are conventional enough in the early pages of autobiographies, but Gibbon seems really to have meant what he said. As always, history is on his mind. Gibbon's early ambition to write a biography of Sir Walter Raleigh had been frustrated by the paucity of information about his subject's private life—details that are, he says, "the most essential and important to a biographer." Gibbon himself will someday have a biographer, he knows; it would be false modesty in him to think otherwise, for "the public is always curious to know the men who have left behind them any image of their minds." Therefore he will provide the facts: "I must be conscious that no one is so well qualified as myself to describe the

series of my thoughts and actions." The process of setting down that series is amusing, he finds, and his "social sympathy," too, is gratified "by the idea that now, in the present hour, he is imparting some degree of amusement or knowledge to his friends in a distant land, that one day his mind will be familiar to the grandchildren of those who are yet unborn."

In all of this what is new—or almost new, at any rate—is the assumption that the thoughts and activities of any man of note are automatically interesting. Gibbon writes his autobiography because the success of *The Decline and Fall* has made him an object of legitimate, morally neutral curiosity. His great history is the occasion of his autobiography and the justification of it.

His autobiography, then, is not so much the life of Edward Gibbon, a private person, as it is the life of the author of *The Decline and Fall*. So much G. Birkbeck Hill admits, when he is not quarreling with Gibbon's faults: "He who had written the *Decline and Fall* has a right to tell the world how he had been prepared for his great task." But Gibbon was doing something more ambitious than exercising a right. As Roy Pascal, a student of autobiography, remarks, "The peculiar significance of his account lies in his inclusion of numerous types of experience that contributed, he recognizes, to his development as a historian." Some of these influences—of books and tutors, for example—we would naturally expect him to record. But others come as something of a surprise. Gibbon recognizes and thereby dignifies and reclaims for serious attention a whole class of experiences—of idleness, illness, lovelessness, isolation—that had not ordinarily been conceived of in any sufficiently complicated sense as capable of contributing to a man's success.

III.

GIBBON APPEARS before us first of all as the trustee of his intelligence. The book is "the history of my own mind," and he believes that in reviewing his "moral and literary character" he should "expatiate . . . on my private studies, since they have produced the public writings which . . . entitle me to the esteem and friendship of my readers." That is to say, the most obvious of those types of experience to which Roy Pascal refers is intellectual; and Gibbon traces his education with great care.

Gibbon could not remember a time when he could not read, write, and cipher. In his very early years, however, his formal schooling was sporadic, for he was forever ill; "the care of my mind," he says, "was too frequently neglected for that of my health." Early in 1746, at the age of eight, Gibbon entered a school at Kingston-upon-Thames. "A school is a cavern of fear and sorrow," says Gibbon in a passage Lord Sheffield omits. There boys labor, "like the soldiers of Persia, under the scourge, and their education is nearly finished before they can apprehend the sense or utility of the hard lessons they are forced to repeat." At this school, at any rate, Gibbon learned little but Latin syntax, purchased "at the expense of many tears and some blood," before he was called home by his mother's death in 1747. Now for a time he came under the care of an aunt, Miss Catherine Porten. She became, he tells us, "the true mother of my mind," a fact which no doubt accounts for the strong affection he always felt for her. To her he owed his "invincible love of reading." Gibbon's maternal grandfather, James Porten, had recently absconded to escape his debts, and in the months before his house and its contents were sold Gibbon and his aunt ranged freely through the old man's library. There he "turned over many English pages

of poetry and romance, of history and travels." That year, 1748, when he was eleven, was delightful—"the most propitious to the growth of my intellectual stature."

At last, however, the house was sold, and Miss Porten's rich relations, who "were not *absolutely* without bowels," set her up as a boardinghouse-keeper at Westminster School. There Gibbon followed her, as a boarder and a pupil. His attendance at classes was intermittent, for he was still sick, suffering now from a mysterious "nervous affection which alternately contracted my legs and produced, without any visible symptoms, the most excruciating pain." Various courses of treatment proved ineffective, until at last he spontaneously and permanently recovered. Now his father suddenly was "urged to embrace a singular and desperate measure," and in 1752 Gibbon, who had never risen beyond the third form at Westminster, was enrolled as a gentleman-commoner at Magdalen College, Oxford.

Gibbon's description of his state of knowledge at this juncture is well known. "I arrived at Oxford," he says, "with a stock of erudition that might have puzzled a doctor and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy would have been ashamed." Memorable as that sentence is, it is merely a summary. Gibbon details that "stock of erudition," and as he does so he makes clear the basis for the statement later in the book that "I *know* by experience that from early youth I aspired to the character of an historian." During his time at Westminster he had cherished his illnesses, for they gave him the opportunity to read as he wished; and "reading—free desultory reading" was his greatest pleasure. His interest "subsided by degrees in the historical line," a circumstance he attributes to his having been fascinated by successive volumes, issued serially, of the *Universal History*. From that work he proceeded to

English translations of Herodotus, Xenophon, Tacitus, and Procopius, and thence "to the modern world: many crude lumps . . . passed through me like so many novels, and I swallowed with the same voracious appetite the descriptions of India and China, of Mexico and Peru." Such reading, so "vague and multifarious," did him little direct good. Indeed, as the vigor of his appetitive imagery suggests, his passion for these books, in its undisciplined strength, was perhaps an aspect of the illness it eased. But it had the effect of fixing Gibbon's mind before the age of sixteen upon his great object. Even his "first introduction to the historic scenes which have since engaged so many years of my life" occurred during this time. On a visit to Wiltshire with his father in 1751, he happened upon the *Continuation of Eachard's Roman History*, and it so fascinated him, he recalls, that "I was immersed in the passage of the Goths over the Danube when the summons of the dinner bell reluctantly dragged me from my intellectual feast." The figure that emerges in his account of those years is, as Gibbon seems to recognize, somehow grotesque: it is a child historian, a boy whose father's visitors used to discover him "surrounded with a heap of folios of whose titles they were ignorant, and on whose contents he could pertinently discourse." Gibbon's detractors to the contrary, there is little smugness in this portrait of himself. It was ridiculous of him to presume "to weigh the systems of Scaliger and Petavius, of Marsham and Newton" in his "childish balance"; but there is pathos, too, in his statement that in those years "the dynasties of Assyria and Egypt were my top and cricket ball."

IV.

GIBBON'S CHILDHOOD, however painful it was, nevertheless issued happily in solid

achievement, and he does not regret it. Eventually it did not even matter much that his fourteen months at Oxford turned out to be the "most idle and unprofitable" of his life. The most serious consequence of those months was that, out of simple curiosity as much as anything else, Gibbon became a Roman Catholic. Twenty-two days after his reception into the Church he was, by his father's arrangement, in Lausanne, where from 1753 until 1758 he lived in the home of his tutor, M. Pavilliard, a Protestant clergyman. This was a most important period in his intellectual history, "the foundation of all my future improvements." By March of 1755 he had completed the first of the two educations that, he says, "every man who rises above the common level has received"; that is, he was through with teachers. Now he proceeded to the "second, more personal and important" of his educations, the one he got "from himself." Gibbon will not, "like the fanatics of the last age, define the moment of grace," but he cannot forget the era of his life in which his mind has expanded to its proper form and dimensions. In April of 1755 began the eight-month period "of the most extraordinary diligence and rapid progress" he ever experienced.

In 1758, at the age of twenty-one, Gibbon was summoned home by his father. By this time French, in which he "spontaneously thought," was more familiar to him than English; in short, he "had ceased to be an Englishman" and his "opinions, habits, and sentiments were cast in a foreign mold." But that condition was to be corrected, at least in part. The great point was that now he was able to look ahead to a career in some fashion intellectual. His self-confidence was already so well established that he had begun to correspond, sometimes in Latin, with eminent European professors, who answered him as an

equal and of whom one welcomed and praised his emendation of a passage in Livy. It would take Gibbon some time and a number of false starts to find out just what his work would be; but the outlines of his future were beginning to define themselves.

His studies, of course, continued. But increasingly they were professional studies. The mind of the historian had been formed, though the history itself was yet to be conceived, and what Gibbon read now he read less for its own sake or even for the sake of its contribution to his intellectual culture than for its usefulness to him as a scholar. Now other men's books were things from which he did or did not get something to advance his own projects and ambitions.

After glancing my eye over the design and order of a new book, I suspended the perusal till I had finished the task of self-examination, till I had revolved, in a solitary walk, all that I knew or believed or had thought on the subject. . . . I was then qualified to discern how much the author added to my original stock, and if I was sometimes satisfied by the agreement, I was sometimes armed by the opposition of our ideas.

Rational scepticism of authority, of the sort this passage implies, is, as every scholar knows, necessary to a man who hopes to deal intelligently and productively with facts and ideas. And Gibbon had, even this early, another scholarly virtue—an accurate sense of his intellectual defects. It was not just knowledge that he had to acquire, but an appropriate literary style. His own, he knew, had been “corrupted by the long use of a foreign idiom,” and to correct it he read “our English writers since the Revolution,” particularly Addison and Swift. He read the modern British historians too. William Robertson's *History of Scotland* had just

been published, and it “inflamed” Gibbon with the hope that he might write as well. Hume's history of England under the Stuarts was new, too, but its effect was sometimes to daunt him. Struck by Hume's “careless, inimitable beauties,” he often closed a volume “with a mixed sensation of delight and despair,” to return again, presumably, to his stylistic studies.

V.

BUT INTELLECTUAL influences were not the only ones at work on him. From May 1760 until December 1762 he served as an officer in the Hampshire Militia. He regretted the “loss of so many busy and idle hours” and believed that his temper had been “soured by the society of our rustic officers.” But this “wandering life of military servitude” did not prove a dead loss. It made him, he says, an Englishman again. Moreover, the “discipline and evolutions of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legions, and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers . . . has not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire.” And there is something more here, something that redeems the pomposity of Gibbon's references to himself. It is hinted at in a sentence that occurs between his summaries of the evils and benefits of his months in the militia. “In every state there exists . . . a balance of good and evil,” he writes. We must not be misled by the banality of this fragment of philosophy. Gibbon is expressing what he holds to be a general truth that explains the part that circumstance, accident, and even luck played in his life.

It is a theme to which he often recurs. “I have drawn a high prize in the lottery of life,” he says, and he means it.

The far greater part of the globe is overspread with barbarism or slavery;

in the civilized world the most numerous class is condemned to ignorance and poverty; and the double fortune of my birth in a free and enlightened country, in an honorable and wealthy family, is the lucky chance of a unit against millions.

Even his grandfather's financial difficulties and his father's extravagance, subjects on which he sometimes comments harshly, turn out in the end to have been blessings, however thoroughly disguised. Enough was left him to insure his independence; and yet he was not rich enough to be tempted to dissipation. This was for him a happy situation. "Few works of merit and importance have been executed either in a garret or a palace," he remarks in a passage Lord Sheffield suppressed; "in circumstances more indigent or more wealthy I should never have accomplished the task, or acquired the fame, of an historian." For similar reasons he is glad that he did not take his stepmother's advice and study law. He was not suited to it, he believes, and therefore, had he followed her suggestion, he would "have been diverted from the labors of literature without acquiring the fame or fortune of a successful pleader." Gibbon is always aware of what, probably disastrously, might have been.

In Gibbon's view, in short, it was chance as much as talent and industry that formed the historian and hence the history. Nowhere is this clearer than in a phrase he uses to describe his first sojourn in Lausanne, the period when (as we have seen) his mind "expanded to its proper form and dimensions." He speaks of it as a "fortunate shipwreck," and these two words, modifying one another almost in the manner of an oxymoron, define the moral tone of Gibbon's autobiography. At the end of his life Gibbon can see his passage toward fame as having been, in

a sense at least, a journey in the dark. There is humility in this, humility of a kind that, giving credit where it is due, allows him to claim for his will and intelligence the great share in his achievement they deserve.

VI.

BUT THOUGH apparent misfortunes often turned out to be real blessings, the ambiguities of experience did not always favor him. By the time he came to compose his autobiography, his life had taught him a dark, Johnsonian lesson. "The warm desires, the long expectations of youth, are founded on the ignorance of themselves and of the world. They are gradually damped by time and experience, by disappointment and possession." Style, says Gibbon on the first page of his book, "is the image of character," and few works exemplify this familiar notion more fully than this one, in which antithesis and balance reflect Gibbon's mature conviction that time and the event modify or even contradict the fears and hopes of the past, transforming weaknesses into strengths and ambitions into disappointments. Thus he characteristically reflected that to balance the "first emotions of joy" he felt upon completing his history there was the idea that he had taken "everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion," and, further, that, however long his history should live, "the life of the historian must be short and precarious." At the end of his life he had achieved the fame he had sought. It brought solid satisfactions—"a name, a rank, a character in the world, to which I should not otherwise have been entitled." But though he was happy, his was an "autumnal felicity." And with the death of his old friend Deyverdun, though Gibbon was "in Paradise," he felt the pain of being there alone. Possession, as he

says, is not much better than disappointment.

The pathos of Gibbon's life is clear enough, the more so for his air of detachment about it, the sense his book communicates that for him the discovery that life is a melancholy enterprise was one he might have made without living it. As delicately as may be, he commends to us the notion that what experience and a lifetime of scholarship have revealed to him is the human sufficiency of those things he had had almost from the start—such “solid comforts of life” as “a convenient, well-furnished house, a domestic table, half a dozen chosen servants, my own carriage, and all those decent luxuries whose value is the more sensibly felt the longer they are enjoyed.”

It has seemed to some of Gibbon's readers that the pleasure Gibbon takes in these comforts convicts him of bourgeois smugness; but the truth of the matter is something quite different. These are the highest blessings that even such a lucky man as Gibbon may reasonably expect; but they are not all he might desire. They are not what he had aspired to, but what he settled for. Gibbon acquiesces reluctantly in the judgment of experience upon the large demands youth makes of life and accepts, with a full sense of their value, the compensations that come his way. This is in Gibbon's view the path of wisdom, of however gloomy a sort. To the sympathetic reader it must seem that to follow that path required considerable intellectual and moral courage, as does any other course of action that rejects what one holds to be the comforts of illusion.

This rigorous loyalty to what he believed to be reality accounts for the sometimes unpleasant severity of Gibbon's judgments of persons and ideas. Like most of us, Gibbon almost instinctively conceives of reality as something harsher and less pleasing

than appearance. It would be wrong to accuse him of what Whitehead calls the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, according to which only objects really exist (and they meaninglessly), the qualities we perceive in them being only the productions of our own minds. But surely that is the tendency of Gibbon's ideas. For Gibbon it is particularly the emotions, especially those that bind us to other persons, that are deficient in point of reality. They can be felt, to be sure, and hence must be acknowledged in some sense to exist; but they are neither desirable for their own sakes nor useful in achieving rational—and therefore human—ends. Like the friction produced in a machine, the intensity of emotion is a function of the inefficiency of reason: one strives to reduce it but recognizes that it cannot be eliminated. “My nerves are not tremblingly alive,” says Gibbon, and he rejoices in the fact. When he tells us that in giving up Mlle. Curchod “I sighed as a lover; I obeyed as a son,” we sense that he did not sigh very deeply nor obey very reluctantly. Such detachment permits him to say of the death of his father, for whom he felt real affection,

The tears of a son are seldom lasting. I submitted to the order of nature, and my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety. Few, perhaps, are the children who, after the expiration of some months or years, would sincerely rejoice in the resurrection of their parents, and it is a melancholy truth that my father's death, not unhappy for himself, was the only event that could save me from a hopeless life of obscurity and indigence.

Lord Sheffield omitted the first and last of these sentences, in the interest of Gibbon's public character. They are uncomfortably reasonable remarks, and they typify Gib-

bon's consistent refusal to permit emotional convention to obscure the facts. What he says here is not cynical; it is merely true. The willingness to say it is a mark in Gibbon's favor, not one against him, for the moral self-awareness that prevents one from taking refuge in the comforts of grief and from afterwards pretending (even to oneself) to that respectable emotion is not often a pleasant possession.

In Gibbon's childhood are many suggestions of why he so mistrusted emotions stronger than the sentiment of friendship. As we have seen, he was a lonely boy. He will "not pretend to lament" the five brothers who died in infancy. Expecting him to die, Gibbon's parents had given each of them his name, and though Gibbon does not say so, it seems likely that this tactic, diminishing his importance and almost dismissing him, would not have endeared a brother to him had one lived. There was almost no one in whom to invest his affections. At the death of his mother, he says, "some natural tears were soon wiped." Despite the Miltonic allusion her loss was no expulsion from Eden: "As I had seldom enjoyed the smiles of maternal tenderness, she was rather the object of my respect than of my love." Aside from his aunt Catherine Porten, the only member of his family he can be said to have loved was his sister, whose early death he still regretted at the time of writing. But even here it is not so much the sister herself, as a particular person, that he misses (she is unnamed, and described only as "an amiable infant") as it is the relationship that might have grown up between them. With a sister, he says, a brother may have "a familiar and tender friendship with a female much about our own age, an affection perhaps softened by the secret influence of sex, but pure from any mixture of sensual desire, the sole species of platonic love that can be indulged with

truth, and without danger." The negative aspect of this ideal is striking. The absence of danger is what he praises. To love one's sister is to love prudently; it is like putting money into bank stocks or government bonds. For bolder ventures Gibbon had no desire; and for such timid ones as this, no real opportunity.

VII.

WHATEVER THE ORIGINS of his mistrust of emotion, this trait of character contributed to his ability to tell a certain kind of truth. His austerity of tone—in speaking of himself as well as others—helps persuade us that his assessment of the part persons and events played in the development of the historian is accurate. As we have seen, Gibbon is eager to acknowledge that he owed his success partly to luck, and that fact is a clue to the largest meaning of the book. The particular truth Gibbon's autobiography tells best is to be found in what he says about Fortune.

I mean Fortune in the sense first of all of "a fortune"—money. Few books deal more openly with the importance of money than Gibbon's autobiography. Its early pages concern themselves at length with how his family made and (during his grandfather's time) began to lose its money. The Gibbons were businessmen, and for all his consciousness of rank and insistence on being known as a gentleman, Edward Gibbon saw nothing wrong in this. "Our most respectable families," he says, "have not disdained the countinghouse, or even the shop," for "gentility is not degraded by the exercise of trade." Gibbon's sense of solidarity with his ancestors comes in large part from a feeling that they—or their energies, at least—live on in their money. This sense of the life of a fortune, of money as something not separate from its possessor but an aspect of

his person and character, like health or force of mind, is strange to us, but to Gibbon it seemed perfectly natural. There is scarcely a distinction in his mind between his genetic and his financial inheritance. Hence perhaps the severity of his criticism of his father's imprudence. Even the "decay and dissolution" of the elder Gibbon in his "last fatal summer" is described as a crisis in his affairs as much as in his health. The dissipation of a fortune was to the son not mere foolishness but vice, like dissipation in the sense of the waste of moral and physical powers.

In short, Gibbon recognizes that his life work, *The Decline and Fall*, is in an important sense the result of his ancestors' industry. As we have seen, he acknowledges that he would never have written it if he had had to do so in hours stolen from a trade or a profession. He was happy, too, in not having too much; but the point is that his fortune was as intimately essential a part of his equipment as a historian as his genius and his education. In him the energies of generations of his family at last express themselves in the life of culture. Gibbon's autobiography is intensely interesting if for no other reason than that it speaks out about the alchemy that creates civilization, the process through

which labor, money, and goods issue in art and ideas.

It is here that the notion of Fortune as money involves itself with the notion of it as luck or chance. The part that Fortune in the latter meaning of the term played in his life we examined earlier. It remains only to say how appropriate such a conception is as the informing principle of the autobiography of a historian—a man interested in the *fortunes* of things, in *how they turn out*. It is a principle in harmony with the historian's professional assumption that the true nature of events can only be understood in retrospect. Then reality sheds its disguise, and every item of experience, however happy or disastrous it may once have seemed, presents its consequences as its credentials. As the Greek poets insist, this conception of the operation of the world makes large allowance for the possibility of tragedy—a larger allowance than does the Christian notion, of which Gibbon was suspicious, that Divine Providence somehow makes all things work together for good, at least for those who love God. Gibbon's life, to be sure, was not tragic, but he knew it might very well have been. In this knowledge he appears before us as a wiser and more modest person than we have sometimes supposed him.