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Historic Causation in the Histories of the United States of George Bancroft and Richard Hildreth

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HISTORIC CAUSATION IN THE HISTORIES OF THE UNITED STATES
OF GEORGE BANCROFT AND RICHARD HILDRETH

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By

Susan Hill Grey

1967

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of historic causation in the American histories of George Bancroft and Richard Hildreth. The authors' respective histories of the United States were used as the basis of the paper.

This investigation involved primarily an internal study of George Bancroft's and Richard Hildreth's histories of the United States. The model for historic explanations that is used in the paper is Ernest Nagel's in The Structures of Science.

A comparison of these two historians' methods and their conclusions suggests that their explanations of causation varied widely because of their opposing views on the nature of historiography.

This investigation suggests that it is possible to write an explanatory history that will retain its validity.

HISTORIC CAUSATION IN THE HISTORIES OF THE UNITED STATES
OF GEORGE BANCROFT AND RICHARD HILDRETH

INTRODUCTION

It is my purpose in this paper to investigate and explicate the use of "causality" in the histories of the United States by Richard Hildreth and George Bancroft. These two men form an interesting contrast. They lived in the same era, both were New Englanders who attended Phillips Exeter and Harvard about a decade apart. George Bancroft began collecting the material for the first volume of his history in 1832. Between 1834 and 1875 the ten volumes of the history were published, in twenty five editions. Hildreth's first three volumes were published between June and October of 1849. He had worked on them for about twelve years. The last three volumes were published in 1851 and 1852. So although Hildreth began to write after Bancroft had published several volumes, their histories were written in about the same period. Yet with all these similarities, their views of philosophy, politics, and historiography are completely divergent. They were representative of an era of historiography still largely unaware of the analytical problems involved in historical research and writing that have been raised in recent years by such men as Beard, Becker, Robinson, Gottschalk, and others.

Bancroft believed that the events of history must be carefully authenticated but that they must be used in historical writing to instruct, entertain, enlighten, and set examples for men. He followed in the tradition of the Puritan historians who saw in every event the hand of God, but with Bancroft this providential view was tamed and tempered by German Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and Jacksonian democracy. God was no longer mysterious

and terrible, working in strange ways, understood only to Himself. For Bancroft, God had chosen as his vehicle America, which was to become a model to the world of Liberty and Progress.

Although ultimately God must direct the events in the universe, Bancroft placed his immediate hope in the common man. He was easily able to combine this faith in the reasonableness of the common man with the most blatant use of demagoguery in his political career. In fact, his friends claimed that it was hard to tell when his history was intended as an objective accounting for the progress of America and when it was a "vote for Jackson."¹ In sum, his historical writing was a grand moral battle: the hand of God was in the background, but progress of the common man in America was the agency and focus.

Hildreth, on the other hand, conceived of a science of man: "My principle is, to apply to the philosophy of man's nature the same inductive method which has proved so successful in advancing what is called natural philosophy," that is, science.² His approach to historical writing foreshadowed what has come to be called scientific history. His style was direct and plain. His object was not to preach a particular faith but to achieve objectivity in his History by using an inductive approach to his evidence. By an inductive method he meant that all available historical evidence would be studied meticulously and then he would draw explanations and conclusions from this evidence. His object was to place historiography beyond the reach of personal prejudice and make it into one

¹ Herbert W. Schneider, A History of American Philosophy (N. Y., 1963), 104-105.

² Richard Hildreth to Caroline Weston, Jan. 8, 1841, MS, Anti-Slavery Weston Papers, Boston Public Library. Quoted in Donald E. Emerson, "Hildreth, Draper, and Scientific History," Historiography and Urbanization. (Baltimore, 1941), 139.

branch of the "philosophy of man's nature."

Although these two men had completely divergent ideas about history, both view points can be seen as typical of the early nineteenth century. The two aspects of their era which help to explain their points of view are: 1) the meaning of "science" at that time, and 2) the relationship of the individual to government in the emerging capitalist economy of America.

It is difficult to generalize about these two complex aspects of thought as they were viewed at a certain period in history. However, a brief outline of what I understand was the general position on science and politics in the early nineteenth century in America will clarify Bancroft's and Hildreth's underlying positions since their points of view are (to a certain degree) dependent upon these contemporary ideas. Since Bancroft and Hildreth did not write or think in an intellectual vacuum, it is necessary to investigate briefly this climate of thought. This outline of early nineteenth-century concepts about science and politics serves as the broad framework for their thinking, and an understanding of the conclusions presented in this paper is contingent upon an understanding of this broad framework.

A quickening of scientific inquiry and discovery created an optimistic atmosphere in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which held the promise of finding universal laws by empirical observation that would apply to both the universe and man. This represented a partial rejection of the medieval point of view which pictured the flesh as unimportant and vile, only a deterrent to the salvation of man. With the partial rejection of this view and the embracing of the concept of man as a legitimate area for scientific, empirical inquiry --something to be studied and explained by natural laws--the emphasis was turned from heaven to matter and man

himself. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, these empiricists were opposed by men who wished to conserve spiritual values because they felt that the empiricists reduced man to merely an explainable, observable animal. Although they also believed that man could be studied as a natural phenomenon, they wanted to preserve a field for free will and feeling. Such was the state of thought about the implications of science in the early nineteenth century. Science had radically changed man's view of himself and his universe since medieval times. The question was: is it possible to hold on to any of the preconceptions about the unique value of man or must he relegate himself to a mere soulless speck in a self-regulating universe? It was a conflict within the ranks of empiricists that was taking place during Bancroft's and Hildreth's era and it profoundly influenced their views of science and man.³

Hildreth was a Benthamite utilitarian, and utilitarianism was representative of one step in the development of the empirical study of man. The eighteenth-century natural philosophers denied an earlier idea that man could be explained entirely by the mechanical laws of matter and motion. They asserted that man was unique in his sensitivity. Their motto was, "From Polyp to Prince all is Pain and Pleasure."⁴ This principle that man is guided by the pain-pleasure principle is the basis of that kind of utilitarian philosophy of which Richard Hildreth was an ardent follower.

But, obviously implicated in the idea of man as an area for scientific study were the promises of romantic attitude. The empiricists denied that

³ Woodbridge Riley, From Myth to Reason (N. Y., 1926), passim.

⁴ Ibid., 200-201.

they reduced everything to non-spiritual values by saying that it was far more wonderful and exciting to study man as an observable entity than it was merely to speculate on his place in an unproven, unobservable heaven. This furnished a creed for glorifying nature: men like Rousseau ultimately saw perfection in nature and, thus, in the natural man. These pre-Darwinian romanticists were able to view man as the ultimate complex and fascinating creature in a complex and wondrous universe. Nature, from this view point, was kindly and bountiful to man.

Bancroft added to this romantic notion the German romantic idea that embedded in each nation is an "idea" or "spirit" which directs its development. He spoke of the common mind--meaning a collective mind, a Transcendental concept closer to Hegel than Emerson.⁵ Bancroft was a student in German after receiving his degree from Harvard. He gleaned from his experiences there a very generalized, romantic faith in the common man. This was not a carefully thought out philosophical concept; this common man and the collective mind appear in his works as hypostatizations. With Bancroft, Rousseau's perfect Natural Man evolved into a perfect Common Man: the "idea" of America was to direct its development and the common man acts out the "idea." So Bancroft also believed he had a scientific basis for writing history. He had discovered the "idea" of America and would merely write it down. He followed the scholarly practices of going to original source material for his History as his Gottingen professor, Heeren, had emphasized,⁶ but he felt he was scientific because he had

⁵ Schneider, Philosophy, 105.

⁶ See, Letter from Heeren to Bancroft, quoted by M. A. D. Howe, The Life and Letters of George Bancroft (N. Y., 1908), I, 209-210.

discovered the pattern or plan, "idea" or "spirit," of America and was using it to explain historical events.⁷

Thus, the other side of a view of careful, empirical, scientific inquiry can be seen to be a romantic faith in the progress of men and nations and a glorification of them. George Bancroft's view of science was just the counterpart of Richard Hildreth's view.

Jacksonian politics and economic principles were embraced by various men of varying backgrounds in part because they embodied the vague hopes and the amorphous fears of an era of extreme change. Not only had man's view of his place in the universe changed completely but the rise of modern capitalism and the evolving change from an agrarian to an industrial society seemed to threaten the very moral basis of the "Old Republic." The process of rapid industrial change could not be reversed, but a wide range of men clung to the strength of Jackson as protection against a new, often exciting but incomprehensible world. Equally, the Jacksonian "persuasion" was rejected by a diverse group of men who viewed it as dangerous for a variety of different reasons. Richard Hildreth rejected Jackson, not, as had been suggested, because of vague attachments to early childhood loyalties⁸ but because he saw Jackson as a dangerous demagogue.⁹ He rejected Jackson's economic policies as well, but it was the dictator-demagogue appealing to half-educated masses that Hildreth feared--not the idea of democracy itself.

⁷ David D. Van Tassel, Recording America's Past (Chicago, 1960), 111-118.

⁸ Alfred H. Kelly, "Richard Hildreth," The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography. William T. Hutchinson, ed. (Chicago, 1937), 40.

⁹ Donald E. Emerson, Richard Hildreth (Baltimore, 1946), 47-51.

Bancroft, on the other hand, pictured Jackson as the Messiah of the common man and a major contributor to the unfolding of the "idea" of America. As in their scientific views, so in the political realm Hildreth and Bancroft represent two sides of the same coin. It is still plausible to judge Jackson either as a demagogue or as a legitimate defender of the common man against entrenched "privilege." Both Bancroft and Hildreth during the Jacksonian era pictured him in these two different yet closely connected, ways. Through out this study I have tried to keep in mind not only the divergent aims and accomplishments of Bancroft and Hildreth in writing their histories, but also their similar starting point in early nineteenth-century thought.

To study and analyze "causation" as it operates in Bancroft's and Hildreth's histories it is necessary to outline what I mean by "historic causation" and the model that I will use to explain and criticize their works. In recent years historians and philosophers have raised questions about what is involved in historical explanation and what problems are involved in determining causes of historical events. I have taken as my model throughout this paper the study of historic inquiry by Ernest Nagel in his book The Structure of Science.

In this paper the word "causation" is used as meaning the causal dependence between events. The cause of an event (or historic causation) is a developmental concept. Historical explanations of causation thus seek to discover a necessary relationship between sequentially ordered events. The events themselves may become causes of other events and it is their relationship that the historian attempts to explain when he talks of causation. I have taken it for granted in most cases that these historians have the events in their histories in proper sequence and that the evidence they

present is factually correct.

All scientific explanations depend on general laws. Nagel and others distinguish between different types of general laws. A brief review of these distinctions is important to this paper. First, there are a priori laws or metaphysical laws. These are laws which no amount of proof can either prove or disprove. They have no claim on this world and thus they cannot be supported by empirical data. They are speculative in the sense that they try to assert: If a certain a priori law is true then what conditions would follow from its acceptance? For example, "God is all-powerful and knowledgable and thus causes all events" is an a priori law--if this law is taken for granted then other propositions can be deduced from this law. However, there is no empirical proof either for or against the existence of an all-powerful God that causes all events.

Second, there is the type of laws called empirical. These are derived from observation of natural phenomena. They are arrived at by an inductive method and, therefore, are not absolute or universal and are subject to change. The physical laws of matter and motion are examples of this type of law.

Third, there is a generalization which is a sub-type of empirical law, called empirical generalization. These generalizations are deducible from facts, but are mere sketches of observed phenomena. They are not laws because they explain only a specific occurrence and do not have universal form. "I'm hungry so I will eat" is an example of an empirical generalization.

Nagel argues convincingly that there is no logical difference between the structure of historical explanations and scientific explanations. Historians, unlike scientists "aim to assert warranted singular statements

about the occurrence and the inter-relations of specific actions and other particular occurrences" while the scientist attempts to make both singular and general statements. Historians, in other words, while depending on general laws of human behavior in their explanations, do not aim at establishing these laws. Still, historical explanations of particular events do not differ from the structure of similar scientific explanations. Nagel points out that the logical structure of historical explanations exhibits a probabilistic rather than deductive form. If we say: we have a reason under a circumstance for which an individual always does a certain action, therefore, having the reason and circumstance the individual does this action, this would be a deductive argument. However, historical explanations have at best inductive rather than a deductive form. They assert only that given a reason under a circumstance most men or a certain percentage of men do a certain action, therefore, it is probable that the actor did the action because of the given reason.

Nagel outlines three possible types of historical explanations. As he points out, there may be many more varieties of historical explanations, but as these are common ones and since they are important for this paper I shall briefly outline them.

The first type (which I will designate as reason-explanation) is an action involving an individual which lacks temporal spread. In other words, the historian does not write as if a sequential series of events spread over time are important for the argument. There may have been events leading up to the particular event that is being explained, but for the duration of the argument, time is stopped and the historian gives the causes for an action without reference to time or to sequential happenings. This type of explanation aims at giving a reason or reasons why an individual

(or group of individuals) decided to act in a certain way under certain circumstances. For example, if I said that a person committed a crime because of deep feelings of hostility toward his father this would give a possible cause of his action without reference to a particular event in a sequential order. What is necessary to this type of explanation is that the character of the actor is invoked, that his circumstances are revealed and that the various choices of actions are elicited and the necessary evidence is given for his particular choice of action.

The second type of argument is one that involves explaining the actions of an individual or individuals in terms of "temporarily extended circumstances." In this type of explanation the causal dependence between events is not always explicitly stated but the selection for "sequential mention" infers that the events are causally dependent. This type of explanation usually takes the form of a narration. For example, two people were taking a walk and found a valuable object. Since they did not know to whom the object belonged, they engaged in a violent argument over which of them was to claim it. Without explicitly stating so, this argument supposes that we see the causal dependence between 1) a walk 2) two people being together 3) the finding of a valuable object 4) a fight. It assumes that implicit within the sequence of events are the reasons for, the causes of the action to be explained. The whole explanation involves mentioning a series of events, and is analyzable into a series of probabilistic explanations that happened more or less sequentially. It is what is called genetic in form, meaning developmental. I will designate this type of explanation, genetic explanation.

Finally, there is the type of explanation that attempts to explain an aggregation of events constituted out of the actions of many men. This

type of explanation is made up of strands of subordinate accounts and forms a pattern that is probabilistic and genetic, but is composed of a number of strands of genetic accounts. For example, a certain war, began at a particular time, and, when analyzed, the causes of the war are composed of social forces, economics, intellectual ideas, national goals, governmental structure, etc. interacting for stated reasons. Shortly before the particular time the war started the historian finds that these forces, were in a state of equilibrium. Now the historian must show why the alignment of forces changed. He usually does this by explaining that an immediate (or precipitating) event or events occurred at that time produced some effect which upset the equilibrium. To explain the war the historian must also give an account of the development of each of the social forces. Though this account may involve giving underlying and immediate causes for the forces named such causes are eventually analyzable into strands of probabilistic, genetic explanations. This will be designated, aggregate explanation.

All of the above explanations depend on giving some of the necessary or indispensable causes for events but never the sufficient conditions. In other words, explanations of particular occurrences (in both science and history) are only accepted with certain reservations. The premises in historical explanations are incomplete when compared to valid deductive reasoning and it is in this sense that they are called "probabilistic." Also it should be noted again that generalizations of some kind appear in the premises of all three types of explanations.

One fear some historians express over a complete acceptance of a view of history as social science is that then their arguments must aim to be free of value judgments. They claim that only factual judgments are made in scientific explanation and these are judgments or estimates of the probability of correctness of hypothesis, not of their value in the typically ethical sense. In other words, a judgment of fact is one which depends entirely upon empirical demonstration for its proof while a value judgment is an opinion about the pragmatic worth of an idea or occurrence to a society or individual. However, if it can be shown that, to the contrary, value judgments are made in the sciences the view of what is meant by "scientific explanation" may be changed.

In recent writings on this subject the word "objective" is often used synonymously with "value-neutrality" and the problems discussed from Beard and Becker to the present day revolve around the difficulties of eliminating bias, prejudice and point of view from an objective history. In a recent paper Richard Rudner has given a convincing argument to the effect that scientists qua scientists make value judgments.¹¹ He argues that on pragmatic grounds scientists must decide how much evidence is necessary to warrant acceptance of a hypothesis. Since the amount of necessary evidence is not a fixed quantity, the amount of necessary evidence considered to be enough will depend on many pragmatic considerations. For example, the acceptance of a hypothesis may depend on the amount of evidence available (or in history the comparative paucity of evidence) and the consequence of accepting a false hypothesis. James Leach,

¹¹

Richard Rudner, "The Scientist Qua Scientist Makes Value Judgments," Philosophy of Science, IX (1953), 2-8.

supporting Rudner's earlier argument, says that "the acceptability of probabilistic hypotheses necessitates appraisal according to those pragmatic criteria and hence surrendering the value-neutrality thesis."¹² Additionally he argues that in history the requirements of acceptable evidence may be loosened considerably because often the data are meager, there abound plausible competing hypotheses, and the immediate consequences of accepting a false hypothesis are rarely crucial.¹³ Although this is merely a summation of their ideas, this paper will take for granted their conclusion that scientists do make value judgments as scientists. In sum, value judgments enter all scientific explanations at the moment of accepting a particular hypothesis. What is considered the necessary evidence for its acceptance is a pragmatic, value-charged decision. In history as well, value judgments must enter at the moment of deciding that a particular hypothesis about an historical subject is acceptable and that there is the necessary evidence to warrant its acceptance. However, although it may be demonstrated in the future that value judgments must enter at other points in the explanation, for the purposes of this paper it will be assumed that this is the only place that value judgments should enter historical explanations.

Having accepted Nagel's thesis that historical explanations display the same structure as scientific explanations and having surrendered the value-neutrality thesis, what then is involved is an objective accounting of history and historical explanation? I will relate this question to the use of historic causation in the works of Bancroft and Hildreth.

¹²

Leach, James J., "Historical Explanation and Value-Neutrality." Essay in possession of the author, 2.

¹³

Ibid., 16.

Obviously Bancroft and Hildreth have two opposing views on the writing of history. Bancroft claims to have discovered a plan or design embedded in history and is revealing it. What is this plan or idea of America? What are the implications involved in writing a history that explicates a central design? Is it possible for Bancroft to give warranted explanations within this frame work? What are the final results of writing a history from his point of view? How does this method effect his use of historic causation?

Hildreth set out to write a scientific history by using an inductive approach to his evidence. What does he feel is involved in the writing of a scientific history? Does he consistently apply his inductive method? Does he take objectivity to mean the elimination of point of view? How successful is he in applying his scientific method? Are his explanations warranted? How does his method effect his use of historic causation? These are the major questions which I will deal with in this paper.

CHAPTER I

CAUSATION IN GEORGE BANCROFT'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

George Bancroft's life and works appear to be in polar opposition to Richard Hildreth's. While Hildreth's life was tragic in many ways--his historical and philosophical works were for the most part ignored, he was never financially successful, his attempts at winning political office were a failure, his health was poor,--Bancroft's life would be the envy of any man. Bancroft was a child prodigy, admired and loved as a student at Harvard, his marriages were both socially and financially advantageous, his histories were very popular, his political activities fruitful and his health truly amazing.¹ Bancroft was an exuberant Democrat in the heyday of Jacksonian Democracy and reaped rewards of a civil service, a Cabinet position and ambassadorial appointments for his faithful service to the cause.

Bancroft can be seen as a demagogue, an opportunist, even something of a snob--employing every means to get ahead in the political game--even using his History to please Democratic party sentiments. However, he can also be legitimately pictured as a sincere defender of the common man and a convinced patriot who praised his beloved country in his History. To see him exclusively in either way would be incorrect for Bancroft encompassed both of these contrary positions. His History

¹ See, M. A. DeWolfe Howe, The Life and Letters of George Bancroft (N. Y., 1908). Russel B. Nye, George Bancroft, Brahmin Rebel (N. Y., 1945).

reveals these two facets of its author. In fact, Bancroft is an excellent symbol of Jacksonianism itself--its opportunist, demagogic, self-seeking aspects versus its vision of a responsible citizenry controlling and supervising their own government for the general good.

Bancroft was not a profound thinker or philosopher. His early student years in Germany changed him from a serious, hardworking, New England theological scholar into a bit of a dandy, socially graceful and quite worldly.² On his return New England seemed dull, backward and piously serious. Within a few years he had rebelled against the pessimistic Puritanism of his home state of Massachusetts and embraced Jacksonian democracy which he proceeded to believe uncritically and optimistically for the rest of his life. But Bancroft was also somewhat of an aristocrat in his tastes. As ambassador to England during Polk's administration he at first scorned the English with nationalistic fervor but then began to take on some of the trappings of diplomatic life in England with relish. He dressed in elegant, court clothes and bought a specially built, fancy carriage contrasting the plain one of his predecessor Edward Everett, who felt that the representative of a Republic should dress and ride in simplicity.³

For Bancroft, our Revolutionary war was the culmination of man's highest achievements to be emulated by other countries in the years to come. Thus, as ambassador to Prussia from 1867-1874 he interpreted Bismarck as a German George Washington who would unite the German states in the name of Democracy.⁴ Bismarck charmed Bancroft into this naive

² Nye, Bancroft, 87-88.

³ Ibid., 160-162.

⁴ Ibid., 241-279.

view of him by flattering Bancroft with attentions and playing on his love of intrigue and power. Bancroft did not see the true motives involved, nor did he realize that he himself did not really care for the masses on close contact. Bancroft secretly enjoyed the privileges of power and wealth while at the same time he glorified the masses, and so he was hoodwinked by the clever Bismarck.

This innocent narcissistic faith in humanity was based on Bancroft's romantic thesis that man was basically good and rational, and that he was made so by God. For Bancroft, America showed by the example of her victory over the tyranny of England and her bestowing of democratic rights on her populace the possibilities for self-government inherent in all men. This is the obvious and simplistic message of his histories. He feels no necessity to apologize for this claim, as he never questions that his message will be borne out by the facts. He believed in a universal history: that he could use the story of America's past to show the direction of man's future development. The basis of Bancroft's universal history was his German romantic notion that in each state is embodied a pantheistic "idea" of the nation's development.⁵ Bancroft was convinced that the "idea" of America and ultimately of all states was an evolution toward complete democracy. Thus in Germany he heralded Bismarck as the star actor in a drama that would be played along lines similar to American development.

Why, though, was the "idea" of America the condition of evolution toward "democracy" that Bancroft propounded? The very popularity of Bancroft's

⁵ Van Tassel, Recording, 111.

6

History gives a clue to this. The various volumes of the History were written over a forty year period, but Bancroft published the first volumes in the 1830's. The concept of Manifest Destiny appeared at this time. Bancroft served not only the Jacksonian cause but also reflected in his History a belief in Manifest Destiny.⁷ His History, in other words, reflects the rise of romantic nationalism. Since this attitude was the common one his great popularity was likely. All of Bancroft's beliefs led him to reiterate the popular ideas of the day under a thin veneer of writing a "scientific" history. He was an ardent Jacksonian, he believed in the progress of the common man, he believed in the Manifest Destiny of America, he had a romantic faith in a central "idea" for every country; so it seemed clear to him that the "idea" of America had already revealed itself and that other nations would follow a similar design. Bancroft rationalized and made respectable what most Americans already thought about their own country.

Because Bancroft was appreciating the romantic democratic faith, his literary style was exuberant and colorful. Because he subdivided all American history under such categories as: Progress, Liberty, Divine Will and the Triumph of Common Man over Privilege, he had few organizational problems. He took up topics that interested him one at a time and, although

6

Throughout the section on Bancroft I have not used Bancroft's "Authors Last Revision" for this was not representative of his history as most people read it in the nineteenth century. It did not sell well. It was the many editions of the earlier volumes of the history that were popular. Where the last revision is substantially different I have indicated this.

7

In places it appears that Bancroft's History is more a vote for Polk than a "vote for Jackson."

his was a chronological approach, he usually completed each topic before moving to another. Occasionally he had some difficulty in resolving problems of selection, increased by his tendency to digress on subjects in which he was particularly interested, such as volume I when he included a short history of slavery, and volume IV when he wrote twelve pages of German history.⁸

Bancroft is at his best when he is dealing with an event of vivid and intense action. For example, his chapter on Pontiac's war is exciting, yet lacks the verbose literary flourishes he is prone to use. Here his genetic explanation is warranted as the causes of events within the action of the battle are complex but they are also obvious. But if this is Bancroft's best use of historic causation, Bancroft is writing mere "popular" history. Pontiac's war or any particular battle is in general of only antiquarian interest.⁹

Most often Bancroft based all his causal relations upon a struggle between democracy and tyranny. He chose evidence to suit this purpose or twisted the evidence to bear out his formula. No matter what the event, the cause of the event must show the common man on the side of democracy, struggling toward liberty. The common man is the hero and always in the right. Because Bancroft is fitting the events of history

8

Some of these digressions he eliminates in his final revision.

9

Richard Hildreth, The History of the United States of America, Rev. ed. (N. Y., 1863), III, 274. Hildreth put it well when he said, "History, indeed, as she grows more enlightened and humane, would gladly turn away altogether from such wretched scenes of hate and carnage [of war], and she dwells upon them only in proportion to their political consequences, and their connection with civil affairs."

into a preconceived causal structure one can predict with a high degree of accuracy what he will say about the causes of events. For Bancroft this formula is deducible from metaphysical laws and his evidence must bear out these metaphysical, absolute laws. For example, he gives an account of the western Regulators rebellion in North Carolina in 1771, but instead of pointing out that it was an internal dispute--a breakdown in the new experiment in American unity--Bancroft pictures the western Regulators as simple, rustic folk who are rebelling against privilege which had its origin in England in a system of patronage.¹⁰ The cause of the rebellion must be blamed on the tyrannical maneuvers of the enemy--in this case England. When he describes Bacon's rebellion, Nathaniel Bacon is pictured as having been "educated in a period when every active mind had been awakened to a consciousness of popular rights and popular power,--he had not yielded the love of freedom to the enthusiasm of royalty." He "carried to the banks of the James River the liberal principles which he had gathered from English experience."¹¹ "The Grand Rebellion in Virginia," as Bancroft titles Bacon's rebellion, is between liberty, represented by Bacon, and tyranny, represented by Berkeley. Here the events are placed in sequence but the causes of the rebellion are the cowardice and arrogance of the Royalists. For Bancroft, the rebellion's underlying cause was "A collision between prerogative and popular opinion, between that part of the wealth of the country which was

¹⁰
George Bancroft, History of the United States from the Discovery of the Continent, 22nd ed. (Boston, 1867), IV, 173-191, 390-400.

¹¹
Ibid., II, 217-218.

allied with royalism, and the great mass of the numbers and wealth of the country, resting on popular power, between the old monarchical system and the American popular system."¹² Thus tyranny versus liberty is a basic metaphysical law in his history and he uses his evidence to point out this metaphysical law.

Bancroft's historical research was thorough and arduous, he spent years collecting letters and manuscripts from the archives of Europe and America, his library was extensive. It is astonishing that with mountains of material at his disposal he could so sweepingly expostulate his formula; when the heroes are in the wrong he usually states the facts but his conclusions avoid them. Thus in the case of the Pequod war he states the facts of the Indians' extermination in gruesome detail, but concludes, "The vigor and courage displayed by the settlers on the Connecticut, in this first Indian War in New England, struck terror into the savages, and secured a long succession of years of peace."¹³ He describes the horrors of the Salem witchcraft trials, but when the trials had run their course he concludes:

The common mind of Massachusetts was more wise. It never wavered in its faith; more ready to receive every tale from the invisible world, than to gaze on the universe without acknowledging an Infinite Intelligence. But, employing a gentle skepticism, eliminating error, rejecting superstition as tending to cowardice and submission, cherishing religion as the source of courage and the fountain of freedom, the common mind in New England refused henceforward to separate belief and reason.¹⁴

¹²

Ibid., II, 214.

¹³

Ibid., I, 402.

¹⁴

Ibid., III, 98.

Bancroft stated the facts of the trial but his conclusions gloss over the weaknesses of Puritanism which were their cause. The puritans are counted among Bancroft's heroes. Earlier he had featured them as "harbingers of a revolution . . ."; "their claim to the liberty of prophesying was similar to the modern demand of the liberty of the press."¹⁵ Thus their behavior at the trials must be rationalized. He does this in the above quoted paragraph by a subtle inference that they were carried away by zeal but that it was a temporary insanity that is now permanently corrected. In the case of the Pequot war, Bancroft has rationalized the savage behavior of the settlers by inferring that this massacre was the cause of years of peace between the Indians and the settlers. Thus Bancroft uses historic causation and explanation of events as a propaganda device. It is the cause of events and the conclusions he draws from events that are most often forced to bear out his metaphysical laws. The common man, or hero, must be in the right (and right means on the side of liberty) and if the event does not show off the heroes in a proper light then the cause is altered or the conclusion rationalizes their behavior.

Bancroft would see no contradiction between his carefully researched facts and the formula that he forces them to bear out. In volume III he explicitly states the duty of the historian:

The moral world is swayed by general laws. They extend not over inanimate nature only, but over man and nations, over the policy of rulers and the opinion of masses. Event succeeds event according to their influence: amidst the jars of passion and interests, amidst wars and alliances,

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Ibid., VI, 284.

commerce and conflicts, they form the guiding principle of civilization, which marshals incongruous incidents into their just places, and arranges checkered groups in clear and harmonious order. Yet let not human arrogance assume to know intuitively, without observation, the tendency of the ages. Research must be unwearied, and must be conducted with indifference; as the student of natural history, in examining even the humblest flower, seeks instruments that may unfold its wonderful structure, without color and without distortion. For the historic inquirer to swerve from exact observation, would be as absurd as for the astronomer to break his telescopes, and compute the path of a planet by conjecture.¹⁶

Here Bancroft clearly states his position that a priori, metaphysical laws govern the universe. "The moral world is swayed by general laws." For Bancroft these are discoverable but absolute and timeless laws, and although he admonishes man with the empirical necessity of finding these laws through observation, they are within his grasp. One cannot read his history without developing the impression that he has already discovered the laws to this "clear and harmonious order." These metaphysical laws are both simple and all encompassing: each nation has a central plan or "idea"; all nations if they follow the common mind of man toward democracy and liberty will discover this plan and it will unfold; the United States is superior to other nations because she had the wit to follow this inclination first so her example should be followed by other nations. But the problem with Bancroft's use of causation is not finally that his theories are correct or incorrect. It is that the causes of events are altered to fit the formula. In other words, his writing is popularized history not primarily because of selection, incorrect information, or literary style although some of these factors enter into his problems. The trouble is

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Ibid., III, 396.

that he has the cart before the horse--the law which should come after the evidence, comes before it. If the evidence supported his hypothetical laws (the common man as the hero in all actions, the steady progress of man, democracy as a central "idea" of the nation, America as a perfect example of the working out of this "idea"), then Bancroft would perhaps be using warranted causal theories. But since he used them as metaphysical laws and consistently uses causality to prove these laws he frequently vitiates his arguments. In fact, he often goes through a tortuous process of excusing or fitting the evidence into his metaphysical laws.

To clarify what is meant by altering causes to fit events so that laws are saved, I shall do a close analysis of one short section of Bancroft's History. The Antinomian controversy is fairly short and fortunately there is a comparable section in Kildreth which I shall take up later. By following each step in Bancroft's argument it becomes clear how he manages to fit his carefully researched facts into a scheme that supports his unchanging, absolute metaphysical laws.

Bancroft begins his description of the Antinomian crisis with a long paragraph depicting the religious zeal of the colonists. For example: (I) "The minds of the colonist were excited to intense activity on questions which the nicest subtlety only could have devised" . . . Then he begins a new paragraph to give the background of the immediate problem: (II) "Amidst the arrogance of spiritual pride, the vagaries of undisciplined imaginations, and the extravagances to which the intellectual power may be led in its pursuit of ultimate principles . . . two distinct parties may be perceived." Paragraph I describes a situation where a split over unspecified religious ideas would occasion bitter controversy. Paragraph II says there are two parties and that they oppose each other because of religious reasons.

Now he devotes two paragraphs to a general description of the two groups: Group A is distinguished by being: 1) "the original settlers," 2) "framers of the civil government," 3) "intent on the foundation and preservation of the commonwealth," 4) desirous of "patriotism, union and common heart," and 5) reproached by group B for following a "covenant of works." Now it seems that the distinguishing features of group A have, from this description, little directly to do with religious arguments. However, Bancroft infers by number 5 that they are attacked on these grounds and he sets up group B as religious dissenters: Group B is composed of 1) new arrivals who 2) came to America "for freedom of religious opinion," 3) are not interested in the institutions of Massachusetts, 4) sustained with fanaticism the authority of private judgment. The structure of conflict, from Bancroft's evidence, is a situation schematized as follows:

Group A	Group B
Primary interest preservation of the colony of Massachusetts	Primary interest religion

Bancroft now brings on Anne Hutchinson as the leader of Group B and describes more specifically who composes this group: Anne: "A woman of such admirable understanding and profitable and sober carriage, that her enemies could never speak of her without acknowledging her eloquence and her ability." This is not a description of a fanatic but of an upright and intellectual woman. Her followers (group B) are: 1) John Wheelwright 2) Henry Vane (Governor) 3) the majority of the people of Boston, and 4) scholars, men of learning, members of the magistracy and the general court. Within Bancroft's text this listing does not seem to follow in all cases from his general description of group B. For example, were the majority of Boston citizenry newcomers? Had they come for religious freedom? Did

they include scholars, members of the court, etc.? Vane and Wheelwright were newcomers but it would not seem that the majority of Bostonians would be. Bancroft has added here a geographic division (without acknowledging it) and the reader is left to wonder: Was it perhaps the city dwellers (with a higher percentage of newcomers) against the countryside and smaller towns that really formed the two groups? Or was the majority of Boston for Anne because of her own characteristics of leadership?

After setting up his two groups Bancroft goes on to relate two events that followed in a genetic argument which can be outlined as follows:

1. "Nearly all the clergy, except Cotton, in whose house Vane was an inmate, clustered together in defense of their influence and in opposition to Vane."
2. "Wheelwright who, in a fast-day's sermon, had strenuously maintained the truth of his opinions."
 - 2a "he had never been confuted,"
 - 2b "he was censured by the general court."
3. "At the ensuing choice of magistrates, the religious divisions controlled the elections."
 - 3a "friends of Wheelwright had threatened to appeal to England;"
 - 3b "but in the colony it was accounted perjury and treason to speak of appeals to the king."
4. "The contest appeared, therefore, to the people, not as the struggle for intellectual freedom against the authority of the clergy, but as a contest for the liberties of Massachusetts against the power of the English government."
5. "Therefore Winthrop and his friends, the fathers and founders of the colony, recovered the entire management of the government."
6. "But the dispute infused its spirit into everything."

- 6a "It interfered with the levy of troops for the Pequod war."
- 6b "It influenced the respect shown to the magistrates, the distribution of town lots" etc.
7. "To prevent the increase in faction esteemed to be so dangerous a law /the alien act/ was enacted by the party in power."
8. "The dangers which were simultaneously manaced from the Episcopal part in the mother country, gave the measure an air of magnanimous defiance; it was almost a proclamation of independence."
9. "As an act of intolerance it found in Vane an inflexible opponent."
10. "/Vane/ soon embarked for England, where he afterwards pleaded in parliament for the liberties of Catholics and Dissenters."
11. "The friends of Wheelwright could not brook the censure of their leader."
12. "They justified their indignant remonstrations by the language of fanaticism."
- 12a They "avowed their determination to follow the impulses of conscience."
13. "The government feared, or pretended to fear, a disturbance of the public peace . . ."
14. "A synod of the ministers of New England was therefore assembled, to accomplish the difficult task of settling the true faith."
15. "At the synod/numerous opinions were harmoniously condemned; and vagueness of language, so often the parent of furious controversy, performed the office of peace-maker."
16. "It was hardly possible to find any grounds of difference between the flexible Cotton and his equally orthodox opponents."
17. "The general peace of the colony being thus assured."
18. "The triumph of the clergy was complete."
19. "The civil magistrates proceeded to pass sentence on the more resolute offenders."

20. "Wheelwright, Anne Hutchinson, and Aspinwall, were exiled from the territory."
21. "their adherents . . . were required to deliver up their arms."¹⁷

Within this genetic argument Bancroft has two problems to resolve if his explanation is to follow his metaphysical laws. The Antinomians according to Bancroft's laws, represent one step in the evolution of intellectual freedom in American democracy and are counted among his heroes. On the other hand, the common Puritans are also heroes in Bancroft's scheme. Within the Antinomian controversy, he must confront the problem that two sets of heroes are in opposition, that the common people of Massachusetts are voting against intellectual freedom (in the form of the Antinomians). Since his metaphysical laws cannot be altered both sets of heroes must somehow be made to appear in the right. Bancroft resolves this problem with a subtle shift of his two original groups. As schematized originally these two groups were involved in a serious conflict of interest. Presumably each group included not only their leaders as outlined by Bancroft, but a group of followers who chose sides because they believed that either Massachusetts was more important or that religion was more important. Who then will be Bancroft's villains and how will he resolve a conflict between two sets of heroes?

Event I sets up a group of villains for Bancroft. He now says that the leaders of group A "clustered together in defense of their influence"-- in other words he now infers that the leaders of group A are primarily interested in maintaining their personal power rather than having an honest

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Ibid., I, 386-391.

disagreement with group B. Bancroft rationalized the behavior of his heroes, the common people of group A, by another inference: in events 3, 3a, 3b, he said that Wheelwright made the mistake of appealing to England for support.¹⁸ In event 4 he changed the character of the controversy (to be decided in the coming election) and implied that the common people were duped into voting against their true interest, Group B, which now represented "intellectual freedom."

There are two aspects of this argument that make it unwarranted. First, following Bancroft's original division of the two groups, there was an honest conflict of interest but then Bancroft changed this conflict of interest without reasons or explanations to a "struggle for intellectual freedom against the authority of the clergy." Then he implied by 3, 3a, 3b, that the amorphous common people (group A) would have voted for intellectual freedom if their leaders had not tricked them into voting against it-event 5.

In 6a, 6b, Bancroft again implied a real conflict-that the dispute caused real problems for the young colony. Then in 7-8 he again discounted this conflict. In 7 he seemed to use the qualifying word "esteemed" to infer that the danger was not really a serious one yet he had just pointed out in 6, 6a, 6b, how serious it was. Again in 8 he implied that a large group (presumably his common people) went along with the alien act (7)

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Though Bancroft cites as his source for this threat to appeal to the King a letter from "Burdett to Laud," I can find no evidence of this threat before the election. In Saints and Sectaries, Emery Battis says that Wheelwright threatened to appeal to the King and actually did make an appeal later but both these incidents happened after the election. (See, Emery Battis, Saints and Sectaries (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1962), 154 and 184.) Since this threat is crucial to Bancroft's argument I suspect that he may have manipulated his evidence at this point.

because it was given an "air of magnanimous defiance from England." Again his choice of language is important: "an air of defiance" implies that the act was not really in defiance of England but that it was made to seem so by the leaders so that group A would go along with it. Group A was again duped by its leaders. Again event 13 clearly sets up the leaders of group A as wanting something different from their followers. Now it is the government (or leaders of group A) that fears a "disturbance of the public peace." Bancroft may very well have been correct in supposing that this was true but, starting with 1 through 13, he subtly inferred that these leaders of group A 1) were primarily interested in personal power, 2) that their followers were duped into supporting them-4, 8, and 13, and 3) that group A was operating against its true interests in supporting its leaders and in not supporting group B who now have come to represent intellectual freedom (event 4).

Again conclusion 18 is not warranted by events 15-17. In 15-17 Bancroft says peace was restored to the colony yet 18 seems to imply that it was only group A's leaders that benefited. 19-21 merely explain what happened to the Antinomians. Only in 10 does Bancroft present any evidence that would substantiate his conclusion in 4 that group B desired "intellectual freedom." Nor does the inference in 4 that the majority of the colonists in group A were duped into voting against "intellectual freedom" follow from his original division of the colonists along the lines of a serious conflict of interest.

In his explanation of the Antinomian controversy Bancroft has "saved" both groups of "heroes" who were in conflict with each other. In consistency with his own metaphysical laws of history he pictures the Antinomians as a vital link in the progress of man and the evolution of

individual liberty in America. At the same time he has already pictured the Puritans, in general, as a prototype of democratic citizenry, especially the common freemen of Massachusetts. Here they are in conflict, and so the cause of the conflict must prove that they are both really on the same side--that of liberty. The causes of these events must show the reasons for conflict between two sets of heroes. Therefore, Bancroft subtly changed the original reasons for the controversy. As the argument develops the causes of conflict are no longer between a group that wishes primarily to secure the safety of Massachusetts and a group that considers their religious principles more important than the preservation of Massachusetts; beginning with 4 the conflict is between intellectual liberty and the "authority of the clergy." Bancroft implied that the leaders of group A are more interested in power than in either preserving the colony of Massachusetts or religion, although he gives no evidence for such a supposition. In this way he saves the common people of group A for the side of "liberty" while still having group B stand for "intellectual freedom." By his own evidence the Antinomians were causing real problems within the colony. However, he must "save" both groups A and B so they suddenly appear on the same side, and any real problems that group B caused are ignored. The villains are the leaders of group A and bear the burden of blame that "intellectual freedom" was rejected.

This section is typical of Bancroft's approach to causation. The causes of events fulfill the function of fitting the evidence into Bancroft's scheme. Since he will not give up the scheme he must twist and turn the causes to fit the effects which contradict his metaphysical laws.

He concludes his section on the Antinomian crisis as follows:

So ended the Antinomian strife in Massachusetts. The principles of Anne Hutchinson were a natural consequence of the progress of the reformation. She had imbibed them to Europe; and it is a singular fact, though easy of explanation, that, in the very year in which she was arraigned at Boston, Descartes, like herself a refugee from his country, like herself a prophetic harbinger of the spirit of the coming age, established philosophic liberty on the method of free reflection. Both asserted that the conscious judgment of the mind is the highest authority to itself. Descartes did not promulgate, under the philosophic form of free reflection, the same truth which Anne Hutchinson, with fanaticism of impassioned conviction, avowed under the form of inward revelations.¹⁹

When Bancroft's genetic argument is fully outlined his evidence to support Anne as a harbinger of intellectual freedom is less than conclusive. Except for the small bit of information on Vane's subsequent activities in England, (10) Bancroft gives no evidence that group B was even interested in religious freedom, much less in intellectual freedom. All that is explicitly stated is that they "sustained with intense fanaticism the paramount authority of private judgment"--in other words they emphasized the "Covenant of Grace" over that of "works." To conclude that Anne Hutchinson was a religious counterpart of Descartes is certainly unwarranted from the evidence that Bancroft has presented. In fact, Bancroft has explicitly pointed out that the division was a serious one with many repercussions that had nothing to do with theology.

It is clear to me that Bancroft used causation to fit evidence into his scheme of universal history. Bancroft's scheme is based on a system

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Ibid., I, 391. In his final revision Bancroft eliminates this comparison of Anne Hutchinson to Descartes.

of metaphysical laws that are unchanging and unchangeable. No empirical evidence can challenge his laws. Our complaint against his formula is two fold: First, that he treats his empirical data as if it will bear out his metaphysical laws. Second, when it does not bear them out he alters the evidence so that it will. Thus, Bancroft gives explanations only incidentally; his major object in writing his History of the United States is to rationalize his own universal system. What Bancroft has done is simply not historical writing. It may be something else: a speculative philosophic attempt to develop general laws that control all history, a piece of propaganda to inspire democratic thought, or a questionable piece of fiction.

CHAPTER II

CAUSATION IN RICHARD HILDRETH'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

Richard Hildreth (1807-1865) was misunderstood and, for the most part, ignored in his own time. His six-volume history of America did enjoy a brief vogue in the second half of the nineteenth century during the heyday of "scientific" history writing but its reputation has since suffered a decline. His contemporaries bought and read George Bancroft's history of America in preference to Hildreth's, not only because its style was livelier but because Bancroft's attitudes toward American history were generally more compatible with their own. Neither were Hildreth's philosophical ideas popular, upon which the history as well as his other writing rested. Richard Hildreth was a convinced utilitarian of Benthamist sort. At a time when New England was in a ferment over the controversy between such conservative Unitarians as Andrews Norton and the radical new philosophy of Transcendentalism, Hildreth went his own way, disagreeing with both.¹ He embraced a stand on morals that was bound to antagonize provincially pious New England. Hildreth's proto-pragmatic system of morality was founded on the consequences of human actions without reference to abstract, absolute realms.²

¹ See, "A Letter to Andrews Norton on Miracles as the Foundation of Religious Faith." Printed in: Martha Pringle, An American Utilitarian: Richard Hildreth (N. Y., 1948), 129-152.

² For Hildreth's philosophical ideas see, Ibid.

Hildreth is representative of a group of men who felt alienated from their country, especially New England, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Herman Melville, Ambrose Bierce, Theodore Parker and Orestes Brownson all disassociated themselves from the changes that were occurring at this time and looked at the "progressiveness" of Jacksonian democracy with pessimism. It is perhaps significant that Hildreth followed in their tradition by becoming somewhat of an expatriate. By the Civil War era he was sick and penniless. His wife appealed secretly to Lincoln for a post for him on the grounds of his abolitionist endeavors. Lincoln awarded him a small consular post at Trieste and he died in Italy in 1865. He was buried in the American cemetery at Florence, close to the grave of Theodore Parker. His death, far from the country he loved, yet from which he was alienated by his advanced philosophy was typical of his courageous, frustrated life.

His contemporaries found his History of the United States dry and dull and complained that it lacked a "philosophy." In consequence, after Hildreth published the last three volumes of the History in 1852, he also published a treatise called Theory of Politics³ in which he said, "the author specially commends this treatise to the attention of such critics as have complained that his History of the United States has no philosophy in it."⁴ Hildreth did have a philosophical basis for his history. He believed that the history of the United States and its evolution toward democracy bore out his philosophical principles. This philosophy was based on a pleasure-pain

³ He wrote this treatise before he wrote his History of the United States but it had never been published.

⁴ Richard Hildreth, Theory of Politics (N. Y., 1853), Advertisement.

calculus: humans seek that which brings pleasure and avoid that which causes pain. For Hildreth, a democracy causes the least pain as it minimizes the pain of inferiority by allowing the largest number of participants in government. Although citizens must obey their representatives, the pain of obeying is lessened by the reciprocal necessity of the representatives having to keep their own ambitions within bounds in order to be reelected. In the democracy of the United States of his day he found three "disturbing forces" which prevented its working as an ideal democracy. First, English common law as the basis of American jurisprudence allowed legislation to be undermined by court decisions, thereby defeating the intention of laws; second, the prevalence of "mystical ideas" (religious dogmatism, superstition, etc.), he felt, prevented free inquiry into certain crucial subjects beyond a socially acceptable point. Third, the existence of chattel slavery encouraged "a spirit of caste" which was in direct contradiction with democratic ideas. Hildreth strongly advocated the necessity of a powerful central government for he felt that if the government were unable, through weakness, to carry out its program for the happiness of the greatest number it would not satisfy the people and would fail. Thus, he agreed with Hamilton in the Federalist insistence on a strong executive and with the Whiggish American System, although he strongly opposed many of the Whig Party's recommendations and

⁵
Ibid., 264-265.

⁶
Ibid., 251.

7
Hamiltonian economics.

Not only did Hildreth adhere to utilitarianism, but he was an active crusader for certain reforms. He was a strong supporter of the temperance crusade, wrote the first American anti-slavery novel (published sixteen years before Uncle Tom's Cabin) and was an active abolitionist. Even during the years that he worked diligently on his History he did not neglect these crusades. His anti-slavery zeal was partly based on philosophical principles, but as well on a first hand experience with the institution as a resident of Florida from 1834-36. It was then that he wrote Despotism in America, a treatise on slavery, and The Slave: or Memoirs

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For an excellent summation of Hildreth's political thoughts see: Hildreth, History, IV, pages 291-297. For example, he objects to Jefferson's political ideas mainly because, "Jefferson's attention seems to have been almost exclusively directed toward abuses of power. Hence his political philosophy was almost entirely negative--its sum total seeming to be the reduction of the exercise of authority within the narrowest possible limits, even at the risk of depriving government of its ability for good as well as for evil . . . "; On Adams: [with the idea of hereditary ranks/"Adams seems entirely to have overlooked one most important consideration. If the love of superiority and distinction leads to the institution of ranks and orders, that very same sentiment diffusing itself through the mass of the people, produces impatience of the superiority of others, and a disinclination to submit to that inferiority which the existence of ranks and orders implies." On Hamilton: "Having but little confidence either in the virtue or the judgment of the mass of mankind, he thought the administration of affairs most safe in the hands of a select few . . . He had the sagacity to perceive, what subsequent experience has abundantly confirmed, that the Union had rather to dread resistance of the states to federal power than executive usurpation; but he was certainly mistaken in supposing that a president and senate for life or good behavior, . . . strength, under all elective systems must depend on public confidence, and public confidence is best tested and secured by frequent appeals to the popular vote." During the Revolutionary War, Hamilton had "become very strongly impressed with the impossibility of duly providing for the public good . . . except by a government invested with ample powers and possessing means for putting those powers into vigorous exercise . . . To give due strength to a government, it was necessary in his opinion, . . . to attach the most wealthy and influential part of the community to it by the ties of personal and pecuniary advantage; . . . Hamilton was inclined, . . . to ascribe to motives of pecuniary and personal interest a somewhat greater influence over the course of events than they actually possess."

of Archy Moore, his anti-slavery novel.

When Hildreth turned to the writing of his history he was determined to approach his subject in the same way that he had approached the study of man--by "inductive reasoning." Before investigating his failure or success in applying this method to his writing of history there are some obvious complaints that must be brought against Hildreth's History of the United States for they tend to disguise more important aspects of the History.

Although Hildreth's other writing was often lively and frequently impassioned, he felt compelled by his idea of setting down objective facts to choose a precise, generally dry literary style for his History. Hildreth selected a vaguely chronological organization for his work. It appears that history, for Hildreth, was made up of "slices of time" and that the enumeration of the events that took place within these segments was the historian's task. This approach is particularly disconcerting in his chapters of the colonial period. Since this part of American history does not break up conveniently into neat Presidential periods and all the colonies developed in different ways and at different times, it is very difficult to handle. Hildreth constantly drops the development of one colony to shift to another. Sometimes an entire chapter is devoted to each colony with some attempt at fruitful organization, but at other times accounts of events are reduced to short paragraphs with the various colonies treated together. The colonial section lacks any over all organization. To the contrary, his chronological approach seems to have a life of its own in the History. Hildreth may start

out to make a clear and concise point about one aspect of history, but he feels compelled to interject facts unrelated to his central theme that happen to come into the time slice.⁹ He often seems unaware that he has started a theme earlier and often fails later to relate earlier facts to later developments. Thus, crucial events are often buried in unrelated events with no attempt at topical organization.

The chapter endings are indicative of Hildreth's organizational problems. Usually, they end abruptly with no pretense at summing up their contents.¹⁰ This abruptness, which occurs again and again, was one aspect of Hildreth's proposal of relating disinterested facts of history. In a note found among his papers he analyzed the last two sentences of Bancroft's sixth volume. In criticizing these sentences Hildreth says of Bancroft's work: "the object here is to wind up the chapter by saying something grand, and the facts often stand in the way of such artistry."¹¹ Hildreth's complaint with Bancroft's conclusions is valid. Unfortunately, however, Hildreth's failure to make evaluations at the end of chapters too often amounts to the leaving out of any summation of events. Not only

⁹ For example, see, Hildreth, History, II, 127-128. He takes up New York affairs, which he had begun to explain forty pages earlier. He now mentions a letter from William III to the governor of New York as if it had been mentioned earlier, however, he had never taken it up before. Also see, III, 414-415, where he gives important information about France but he meanders from one topic to another. Also see, I, 519-520 where four disconnected paragraphs begin on one page yet the final paragraph fits in very well to a topic begun on page 512.

¹⁰ For example, see, Hildreth, History, I, Chapter VIII, he discusses the settlement of Maryland but his last paragraph deals with the first Virginia "stop law." III, Chapter XLIII, this chapter marks the end of the Revolutionary War but one hardly realizes that the war is over. IV, Chapter III, after discussing "funding" he ends the chapter on the exploration of the Columbia River.

¹¹ Emerson, Hildreth, Appendix I, 166.

do the chapters end this way but separate events within chapters often end just as abruptly. Feeling no compulsion to draw conclusions or to sum up events, but instead to keep up with his chronology and to be consistent with his idea of giving disinterested facts, he often drops one topic and then later completes it, or he drops a topic only partially completed. This vague, choppy development makes for at least apparent inconsistency. Often explanations are offered, for the reader willing to dig them out of diverse contexts, but sometimes they are very sketchy or else lacking in generality.

Even though Hildreth's organization is poor and his style sometimes dull, this does not destroy the validity of his use of historic causation. We may complain that it is difficult at times to dig out the explanations, but this does not make them necessarily wrong. On the contrary, as an historian Hildreth anticipates many of the problems and questions that are being raised about the writing of history today. It is for this reason that he is of considerable interest to modern historians. Bancroft is an interesting period piece and represents aspects of his own era. Hildreth, while also representative of his own time, is the earliest American example of an historian who attempted to write an objective history from his facts.

Hildreth confronts the notion of "objectivity" in historical explanation from a stated point of view which, as was explained earlier, follows from an early nineteenth century view of the nature of science and politics and Hildreth's philosophical position on these matters. He makes judgments as to what is valuable and what is not valuable based on his own opinions and his ideas about the empirical laws of human behavior. For example, Hildreth assumes a strong government is a necessity for a democracy. He assumes that

a democracy is a good form of government. These, and other basic assumptions, are a part of his historical inquiry. In Bancroft's History, we found an unwillingness to give up his metaphysical laws when events did not fit his idea of them. Instead, Bancroft changed the causes for these events so that the events would still fit into his universal laws. Bancroft felt that his general laws explained all developmental change-- he developed a scheme of universal history which would be borne out by his facts. Hildreth is objective not because he does not have ideas on human behavior, not because he does not appeal to general laws, and not because he does not make value judgments in the commonly accepted ethical sense, but because he does not stretch either fact or causation to bear them out. Nor does he look for a pattern to describe all future developmental change beyond what he feels to be already discovered empirical laws of human behavior. The reason that Bancroft is predictable on each subject is that he deduced all history from certain universal laws. Hildreth applies an inductive method to historical explanation: he attempts to relate causes and actors that act upon these causes and then to show how they are causally connected; or else he implies a causal connection by means of what we now call a probabilistic argument. He can show this connection only if he assumes types of human actions but unlike Bancroft he did not assume that these types of actions will fit into a universal design.

Hildreth consciously confronts this problem of objectivity in his last three volumes. The first three volumes are about the periods of exploration and colonization and contain few instances to challenge Hildreth's objectivity. Hildreth admits in the introduction to the second series that:

The chief interest of the narrative being now mainly concentrated upon a few leading and conspicuous characters, whose personal qualities and particular views come to exercise a not inconsiderable influence over the progress of affairs and whose opinions and actions are dwelt upon at length--must naturally give to some portions of the present work somewhat more of an emotional character than was consistent with the multiplicity and rapid succession of events in the former volumes, and the reduced scale upon which almost everything had in consequence to be exhibited . . . /Hildreth says that it will still be his object/ To present, through a pure medium of impartial truth and justice, the events and character of the times of which I write, undistorted by prejudice, uncolored by sentiment, neither tricked out in gaudy tinsel of a meretricious rhetoric, nor stretched nor shortened to suit the purposes of any partial political theory.¹²

Hildreth recognized the Federal period would threaten his objective approach because of his strong opinions of current history and politics.

However, Hildreth was somewhat confused about the meaning of objectivity. He has an admitted point of view, yet much of the time he restricted his history to an attempt at merely stating facts. When he was chronicling events their explanations depended upon empirical generalizations and thus were sketches of the past. At other times he extended the idea of objectivity to include the presenting of a hypothesis and defending it with historical evidence. These parts of his history are the most enlightening for he still did not abandon his empirical data but in these explanations he used empirical laws and that allowed him to go beyond a simple chronicling of the past. These last three volumes have a lively quality which is lacking in the first three. They are better organized, as the Federal period lends itself to a completely chronological approach.

¹²

Hildreth, History, IV, vii-viii.

Hildreth consistently gives the opposing viewpoints in the Federalist--anti-Federalist disagreements. For example, in discussing the proposed Bill of Rights he says:

The Federalists, anxious to accomplish certain great objects--to consolidate the Union, to uphold the public credit, to aid and encourage the national commerce, navigation, and manufactures, to prevent paper issues, and to enforce the obligations of contracts--were chiefly intent upon securing a government capable of accomplishing those objects; and they appeared, therefore, at the present moment, as the special advocates of power and authority. The anti-Federalists, on the other hand, alarmed at the idea of national taxes, fearful lest the interests of agriculture might be sacrificed to the protection of commerce and manufactures; not over-anxious for the payment of debts either private or public, and more concerned for the interests of debtors than of creditors; looked with alarm upon the extensive powers vested in the national government. . . .¹³

Here he maintains his idea of objectivity and he also gives an insight into the possible underlying cause of the disagreement over the adoption of the Bill of Rights. He says that;

No question of fundamental principle as to the theory of government was really in debate between the Federalists and anti-Federalists, and the different views they took of the new Constitution grew much more out of differences of position and of local and personal interest, than out of any differences of opinion as to what ought to be the ends and functions of government or the methods of its administration.¹⁴

Yet, Hildreth does not hesitate to express strong opinions on the various issues and personalities involved. For example, he writes that

¹³

Ibid., IV, 119-120

¹⁴

Ibid., IV, 119.

"Though a great advocate for toleration and liberality in matters of religion, in politics Jefferson was a complete bigot,"¹⁵ But having gone on to explain why he has expressed this strong opinion he says that Jefferson's antipathy toward Hamilton grew partly "out of mere personal jealousy, partly based on imagined dangers to the liberties of the country--who can tell in what precise proportions?"¹⁶ He attempted to maintain an objectivity in presenting his arguments; he gave the facts and when interpreting them and giving the causes of actions he attempted to give the various possibilities; unlike Bancroft he does not change the causes to fit a group of metaphysical laws.

These differences become clearer when we compare like sections of Hildreth's History to those already covered of Bancroft's. For example, where Bancroft saw Bacon's rebellion as a purely democratic movement, Hildreth relates necessary facts and allows the reader to draw his own conclusions. Quite cleverly Hildreth pulls this confusing "rebellion" together at the beginning of his discussion of it by pointing out that there had long been discontent in Virginia and that "nothing, however, was wanting, except an occasion and a leader, to throw the whole community into a flame. An occasion was soon found in an Indian war; a leader presented himself in Nathaniel Bacon."¹⁷ Throughout the section he brings out both the faults of Governor Berkeley and of Bacon and his followers. For example, after pointing out the rather careful plans Berkeley made for the protection of the colony

¹⁵

Ibid., IV, 297-298.

¹⁶

Ibid., IV, 298-299.

¹⁷

Ibid., I, 528.

against the Indian raids, Hildreth says:

In the present excited state of the public mind, this scheme of defense was not satisfactory. The governor was accused of leaning toward the Indians; the forts were denounced as a useless burden; and offensive operations were loudly demanded . . . Bacon, to whom the governor had refused a commission to beat up for volunteers against the Indians, was particularly forward. He gave out that, on news of any further depredations, he should march against the Indians, commission or no commission. An attack upon his own plantation, near the falls of James River, afforded him speedy occasion to carry his threats into effect.¹⁸

At no point does he magnify Bacon into the protector of popular rights and herald of popular liberty that he is in Bancroft's description. In fact, he says that although Bacon "had taken the most prominent part in the late commotions, known, from him, as Bacon's Rebellion, but, as often happens in such cases, others less forward had exerted perhaps a greater influence."¹⁹ So Hildreth does not necessarily see Bacon as the primary actor of the rebellion. Hildreth concluded this section on the rebellion with changes in laws--both what he considers improvements and not--brought about in part from the rebellion and the subsequent royal investigations in Virginia. With a touch of wry wit he added "The Indian war, the immediate cause of all the late disturbances, seems to have subsided so soon as expeditions against the Indians were dropped."²⁰

Unlike Bancroft, Hildreth's position on Bacon's Rebellion is not predictable. Hildreth puts in the event, their causes--both underlying and immediate--but his conclusions follow from empirical laws. He does

¹⁸

Ibid., I, 533.

¹⁹

Ibid., I, 547.

²⁰

Ibid., I, 558.

not have automatic heroes or villains to uphold--both Bacon and Berkeley's actions are reported and neither turns out a hero or a villain,

Again in his description of the North Carolina Regulators--while showing that the poor westerners had legitimate grievances--he at no time says that it is a disagreement between Colonial patriots and despotic Englishmen. In fact, he shows it to be a clash of interests and points out that the Regulators became staunch Royalists when Josiah Martin, subsequent governor, cultivated their good will and redressed some of the wrongs done to them--a fact that Bancroft fails to mention. ²¹

I now turn to a close analysis of the Antinomian controversy to determine how Hildreth uses historic causation and compare his use of it to Bancroft's. Hildreth, like Bancroft, begins his description of the Antinomian crisis with a general paragraph about the religious nature of the controversy. But while Bancroft's leading paragraph only sets a vaguely emotional stage where a controversy could occur, Hildreth explicitly states that the controversy was over the difficulty of reconciling "the doctrine of the special personal enlightenment of each believer with that strict unity of faith and discipline esteemed in Massachusetts no less essential than at Rome." He goes on to state that this difficulty had already caused local controversies but now "threatened to divide the whole colony into two bitter and hostile religious factions."

Now Hildreth describes the two opposing factions: Group A is composed of the "heads and fathers of the church" who are the "established authorities of a new theocracy" and they now "pursued, without mercy or remorse, as

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Ibid., II, 570.

heretics and schismatics, the very persons by whom their late position was occupied." Group B is composed of numerous newcomers who brought new ideas from England. Then he describes Anne Hutchinson as their leader: she is "a woman of talent, ready eloquence and great self-reliance; an acute disputant, but, like most of the leading colonists, very much under the influence of religious enthusiasm, not unmixed, as often happens, with a little vanity and great love of power." He continues this description of Anne by saying that she began "to hold meetings in Boston, at which, under the pretense of repeating sermons, she soon began to criticize them, assuming to instruct the sisters of the Church in the most recondite doctrines of theology." "She maintained . . . justification by faith alone" but Hildreth points out that this is an involuntary faith given to the elect. He also points out that this doctrine "the fathers of Massachusetts were very forward to admit." But Anne goes on to ask "what was the value, what the necessity of use, of that formal and protracted worship, that system of life so ascetic and austere to which those fathers ascribed so much importance?" This question "was the basis of what was denounced in New England as Antinomianism." "This doctrine struck . . . a most deadly blow at the self-esteem and the influence of the present leaders" (Group A). Their austere lives did not show they were members of the elect yet they also held to this doctrine of justification by faith alone. Therefore, they answered by saying "all such assurances must be false and deceptive . . . unless accompanied by outward evidences of sanctity in life and conversation and they denied the pretended personal union with the Holy Ghost as no better than blasphemy."

Now Hildreth specifies Anne's leading followers: Vane, "the young governor, a man of kindred spirit, who delighted in enthusiastic subtleties," Wheelwright, "her brother-in-law, a minister lately arrived, and much in favor with the Boston Church," the influential Cotton, who²³ "leaned to her opinions," and a majority of the Church of Boston.

Like Bancroft, Hildreth in his first three paragraphs has set up the grounds of the controversy and the major actors. But Hildreth though less prolix is more precise. Hildreth stated the doctrinal disagreement in one sentence; he also points out that there are two powerful groups vying for power in the colony--those already established and the newcomers (A and B²⁴ respectively). He also sets the emotional stage for such an argument but with a precision which Bancroft must avoid to save his heroes from criticism. Hildreth is also more precise about Anne's character and although he does not discount her religious fervor still he sees in her "vanity and love of power." Hildreth devotes a long paragraph to Anne and pictures her as the prime mover in the dispute. Although for Bancroft she is a heroine of religious liberty, he avoids saying very much about her. Hildreth while describing group A as having "lost that position which gave it its chief glory to the Puritan name" . . . that of "opposition and reform" and as being "established authorities of a new theocracy" still does not imply that members of group B, therefore, are heroes. He clearly states that group B merely emphasized a belief held by both groups--"God's free grace to the elect." He even gives a possible rationalization to Group A

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Ibid., I, 244.

²⁴

Battis demonstrates in Saints and Sectaries that the core group supporting Anne was not made up of a majority of newcomers.

for their subsequent harsh treatment of group B when he says: "In the mouth of Luther that same question had availed to overthrow the ancient and gorgeous fabric of papal superstition and Roman ceremonial, could the new, frail, illcompacted system of New England Congregationalism expect to stand against the doctrine of justification by faith alone?"²⁵ Hildreth at no time implies that Group B wishes "religious freedom," but instead he implies that religious enthusiasm combined with desire to keep or attain power and leadership in the colony were at the bottom of the controversy. Therefore, Hildreth, while critical of group A as leaders of a "theocracy," sees group B as only desiring a shift in emphasis in religious doctrine in which they all believed. Anne is shown as being as fanatical as Group A, and he demonstrates that the shift in doctrine would have serious political implications.

The main body of Hildreth's argument is a carefully developed genetic explanation. It approximates the genetic explanation of the introduction. It will be recalled that by stating the occasions acted upon by the actors a developmental causal chain is the method of explanation. The object is to give enough of the necessary evidence to explicate how it is possible to arrive at the final outcome from the original situation. Within the chain of occasions the causal connection between events is not always explicitly stated. The occasions themselves should imply the causes and enough necessary evidence should be given to support these implications. Thus, they depend on what I earlier described as an empirical generalization.

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Hildreth, History, I, 243.

Having given us the general situation and the character of the major actors Hildreth proceeds with his genetic argument which can be outlined as follows:

1. A violent split in the colony on religious grounds.
2. Anne tells most of the church members and ministers that they are "under a covenant of works;" this includes most of the old leaders.
3. Wheelwright maintains this "invidious comparison" in a sermon.
4. This gives offense and Wheelwright is called in on a charge of sedition.
5. He is found guilty despite several petitions in his favor but sentence is postponed.
6. Group A resolves to hold elections out of Boston away from Anne's influence.
7. Elections are held and Winthrop is elected but Vane and Coddington are chosen deputies from Boston after the elections for governor so the Antinomians are not completely subdued.
8. Now group A calls for a synod to settle the theological questions brought up by Mrs. Hutchinson.
9. Many tracts are written on both sides.
10. Seeing that group A was winning Cotton "prepared to yield."
11. "Resolved to prevent any accessions to their opponents from abroad, the triumphant party at the elections enacted the Alien Law."
12. There is an outcry against this so Winthrop writes a treatise in its defense.
13. Vane replies to this defense.
14. But soon Vane leaves for England to "act on a broader stage."
15. (now, true to his one development Hildreth turns to the Pequod war--in six pages he continues with the Antinomian crisis)

16. The war ends and now they need to deal with heretics so the leaders call a synod.
17. The synod is composed of elders (some just arrived) and lay delegates from all the churches.
18. Before the synod was laid a list of eighty-two "false and heretical opinions," nine "unwholesome expressions," and diverse "perversions of Scripture."
19. "The eighty-two opinions were condemned at once . . . even by Wheelwright."
20. "Some of the Boston delegates objected to the production before the synod of such a list of error avowed by nobody, and exposing the colony to unnecessary reproach."
21. They insisted too strongly on this and "were silenced by threats of magisterial interference."
22. Therefore, "some of them left the assembly."
23. Thus "the ground was cleared, there remained only five points of dispute between Cotton and Wheelwright on the one hand, and the rest of the elders on the other."
24. These are "reduced to three."
25. These three are stated so ambiguously that Cotton and the elders are satisfied but not Wheelwright.
26. Also some points of discipline are determined.
27. "Wheelwright and his party persisted in their errors."
28. This synod "proved no more successful than others before and since, in bringing about unity of opinion."
29. "Convinced 'that two so opposite parties could not contain in the same body without apparent hazard of ruin to the whole,' the General Court . . . resolved upon decisive steps."
30. "Aspinwall, elected to the court as a deputy from Boston, was deprived of his seat, disfranchised, and banished because he had drafted the Boston petition presented at the previous court in Wheelwright's favor-- a very moderate and respectful document."

31. "His colleague, who justified the petition, though he had not signed it, was also expelled."
32. "The men of Boston inclined to re-elect these expelled deputies; but Cotton disuaded them."
33. "Two new deputies were chosen, but one of these was rejected because he too had signed the obnoxious petition; so the vacant seat remained unfilled."
34. "Wheelwright having refused to leave Boston, or to give up his public 'exercisings' was disfranchised and banished."
35. "He appealed to the king without result."
36. "Mrs. Hutchinson was also banished; but, because it was winter she was placed in custody."
37. Underhill was banished, all signers of the petition (except those who submitted) and all active supporters of Anne had to turn in their arms.
38. The court passed laws against those that defame their proceedings.
39. They sent to England an account of the crisis so "Godly friends" would not "discouraged from removal."
40. Anne withstood strenuous efforts for her conversion made by the elders during custody.
41. She fell into new "errors."
42. "Had up before the Boston Church . . . she was 'clearly confuted,' . . . and admonished by Cotton."
43. At a subsequent church meeting she was excommunicated-- after many arguments.
44. After this her spirits revived and "she gloried in her sufferings."
45. On orders from the governor she leaves the jurisdiction.
46. She is almost accused of witch craft because of her "monster" birth.
47. Now two strong laws were passed against dissenters that were soon repealed.

48. "As the final triumph of the orthodox party, Cotton, at a public fast, 'did confess and bewail his own and the Church's security and credulity whereupon so many dangerous errors had gotten up'."
49. Cotton recovered, thereby, his "former splendor throughout the country of New England."²⁶

In this genetic explanation, 2 and 3 suggest an explanation of why 4 happened--why the orthodox clergy would begin to fear group B. 5, the strength of group B (number petitions), but shows that group A still retains enough power to find a member of group B guilty of sedition. 6, that group A retains enough power to have the elections in a place preferential to themselves. 7, 11, 14, 25, 30, 34, each strengthens the position of group A. While 12, 13, 20, 22, 28, show that group B has a strong following throughout the controversy. However, group A, by having and keeping control of the mechanism of government, slowly erodes the power of group B. 29-38 explain how group A went about eliminating the leaders of group B by banishment and new laws. Finally, Hildreth implies that because of 41 even Anne's own erstwhile followers abandon her (42) and she leaves the colony. Cotton recants publicly and this is the "final triumph of the orthodox party" (48). Within this genetic explanation Hildreth shows how each of the smaller triumphs of the orthodoxy were possible: 6 partly explains 7; 17-24 help explain how 25 could occur and 32 explains 30. With the elimination of the leaders of group B the implication is that the lesser members of group B either left the colony or recanted. This conclusion would follow from Hildreth's emphasis on Anne's leadership abilities and also from the power displayed by the orthodox

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Ibid., I, 243-258.

party. Hildreth makes it clear that although group A is fearful of losing political control of the colony (6), it never does so and is able eventually to use harsh measures to eliminate group B (11, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38) even though there is opposition to many of their methods (7, 9, 12, 20, 32). By following Hildreth's argument closely it is possible to arrive at the conclusion of the complete triumph of the orthodox party from the original position of two strong and opposing parties.

Unlike Bancroft, Hildreth does not suggest that the opposition dwindled away after the synod. Hildreth shows precisely what happened to the leaders and many of the followers of group B and builds an excellent case for the triumph of the orthodoxy over strong opposition. Bancroft did not do this very clearly. He only claimed that vaguely stated pressures plus success at the elections accounted for the triumph of group A. Yet this is a weak explanation for he stated numerous conflicts between the groups after the election that indicate a still powerful group B. Hildreth, by staying with his original designation of the groups and by using his genetic form of explanation, has made his case for the triumph of the orthodoxy a strong one.

What is crucial in the argument is whether one can arrive at 45 from 1? With Bancroft the evidence to arrive at his conclusion that Anne was harbinger of religious freedom was untenable. Within Hildreth's explanation, per se, we can arrive at his conclusion by the chain of events that he presents. His explanation of the Antinomian controversy is valid because the evidence presented is substantiated.

Typically Hildreth does not summarize this section but passes on to the concrete results of the Antinomians' exile--where they went, etc.

Because of his notions of objectivity his explanation was not primarily aimed at determining who was right or wrong during the controversy but at why and how it occurred and what the results of it were.

Though Hildreth presented the controversy precisely he is open in this latter part of his explanation to the criticism of being merely a chronicler. In this last part he gives us just a factual sketch using empirical generalizations. He again takes the position that objectivity means a presentation of only the factual events. So, while his genetic argument is warranted it is sketchy in places and comes to no definite conclusion because he was using empirical generalizations for his explanation and not attempting to support a definite hypothesis.

It is enough to show that Bancroft's use of historic causation takes an a priori form and is used to bear out a scheme of universal history. Thus, what he says on each topic is predictable. The Antinomian controversy as an example of a genetic explanation and the other examples that were given are a consistent view of his approach. However, in investigating Hildreth's use of causation it is not enough to point out that he conveys the causes of the Antinomian controversy in a warranted way. It is expected that Hildreth, by placing facts in order, could handle well an incident of short duration, requiring fairly simple genetic explanation. In genetic explanations the series of events are inferred causes which

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For examples of Genetic Explanations, see, Hildreth, *History*, I, 45-46--Cartiers; I, 145-148--Dutch; I, 197-198--Dudley replaces Winthrop as governor; II, 362-363--Ogethorpe; II, 459-461; Braddock's failure; III, 190-192--Howe and failure to occupy Philadelphia; III, 354--LaFayette's success with troops; IV, 283-286--St. Clair's defeat by Indians; IV, 617-621--Jefferson and Washington; V, 594-626--Burrs activities out west; VI, 420--Hanson and Boston riots; VI, 521-525, Jackson at New Orleans.

explain the relationship between the first and last occasion which, if taken alone, would not explain each other. Thus, we could anticipate that, if Hildreth merely set out to put down facts alone in chronological order he could write this type of argument well. But what of the types of causation designated as reason-explanation and aggregate explanation? In the former type the historian writes his explanation as if it has no temporal spread and in the latter he must draw together and balance the threads of events or separate genetic arguments to explain why collective events happened at a particular time and he also must explain the underlying causes and the immediate causes. It is legitimate to determine if Hildreth used these kinds of arguments within the context of his notions of the nature of historiography.

Reason-explanation he used often--perhaps consciously. He often talked about the actions of actors based on what he thought to be their character or motives in certain situations. For example, in explaining why Gates (during the Revolutionary War) was more successful than Schuyler (whom he superseded as commander of the Northern Department) in commanding and organizing the troops, Hildreth explains the circumstances surrounding the actor: "Gates' army was increasing every day. The Battle of Behmus' Heights was sounded through the country as a great victory, and the harvest being now over, the militia marched in from all sides to complete the overthrow of the invaders." He explains the character of the actor: "Gates was neither more able nor more trustworthy than Schuyler; but the soldiers believed him so; and zeal, alacrity, and obedience had succeeded to doubts, distrust and insubordination." ²⁸ The empirical generalization in this

explanation could be stated in this way: when an army is strengthened by new troops and, at least, believes their new commander to be more trustworthy and able than their former one, they will behave better. Hildreth ignored temporal occurrences here to explain the success of Gates in achieving control of his troops. Within the context of the evidence his argument and generalization are warranted. Here he did not hesitate to drop chronology or the process of just listing facts to indulge in an explanation that is not genetic. As he did this often, I conclude that although he organized his material in a rather clumsy, chronological fashion his aim was not to present mere chronologically oriented facts.

By investigating his method of dealing with a collective event it becomes even clearer that he did not have a simplistic view of historical explanation as being a process of merely presenting facts in temporal order. In a chapter in his last volume he deals with "the character and origin of the war" of 1812. In the first paragraph he presented his hypothesis or thesis concerning the war:

Never, surely, was an unfortunate country precipitated into an unequal and perilous contest under circumstances more untoward. There are wars, perilous and unequal, which can not be avoided. The choice may sometimes lie, as it did at the commencement of the Revolutionary struggle, between submission to an invading force and

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For examples of reason-explanations, see, Hildreth, History, I, 78-79, Gilbert; I, 180, Charles I and the charter; II, 211, Thomas Smith; II, 289, Nicholson as governor of S. C.; III, 194, LaFayette; III, 421-422, offer to Washington; IV, 42, Sam Adams; IV, 314, Jefferson; IV, 645-646, Washington and neutrality; V, 328-330, Adams' mission to France; V, 310, Patrick Henry; VI, 629, Clay and Monroe.

resistance at all hazards. For a purely defensive contest, deficient as the country was in military preparations, it had, in the spirit of a free people, ample means to thwart the haughtiest and strongest invader. But the present war was of a very different character. It was an offensive war, voluntarily undertaken on the part of the United States to compel Great Britain, by the invasion and conquest of her Canadian territories, to respect our maritime rights.³⁰

Hildreth wished not only to attempt to show the causes or "origins" of the war but he wanted to argue that the war was also perilous and unnecessary.

In the preceding chapters he had already given a barrage of evidence indicating that France was as guilty as Britain in disrupting our maritime rights and he had already traced some of the underlying forces that were causes of the war. Now he begins this section by giving reasons for his statement that the war was perilous: 1) "offensive operations, as a matter of policy . . . can never be justified, when rashly entered upon without forethought, means, or preparation." The offensive strategy Hildreth feels was dangerous for a militarily weak country. 2) "Unanimity on the part of the people, and especially on the part of those states whence men and money must principally come, might have excused, in some degree, the precipitancy and want of preparation with which the war had been declared . . . But such unanimity was entirely wanting." He says that the president and many of his advisers and the "active, busy and energetic section" of the population were not entirely in favor of declaring war.

Then Hildreth presented a transition paragraph that reveals a connection between the perilous nature of the war and the origins of the war.

³⁰

Ibid., VI, 313.

He explained that the policy of both the old Republicans and the Federalists had been "alike neutrality and peace." But while "Washington and the Federalists had regarded as the best means of securing those objects such a state of military and naval preparation as might inspire a degree of respect . . . Jefferson and the Old Republicans had objected to any such military and naval establishments as dangerous to liberty, almost as expensive as war, and tending to the indefinite continuance of the national debt . . ." Jefferson proposed to rely "first on an importunate diplomatic clamor for our rights . . . and if that failed, on a resort to commercial restriction." But he implies that without the backing of military strength these measures of the Republicans would not be treated with respect; therefore, unpreparedness in a sense was a cause of the war.

The reason that the country was unprepared for aggressive war was the fact that the Jeffersonian policy had won out. Now Hildreth went on to say that, whichever "scheme of policy" one favored, "the very idea of preserving peace implied the necessity of some concessions--of the yielding, at least for the moment, something of the utmost extent of strict right." He said that Washington by signing Jay's Treaty and Adams by ratifying the convention with Bonaparte had both done this. But he pointed out that though Jefferson had yielded to French demands,

his deep rooted dislike of Great Britain [made] the idea of any similar concessions to her utterly abhorrent to him. Hence his vehement opposition to the ratification of Jay's treaty. Hence his obstinate persistence in refusing the highly conciliatory offers of Grenville on the question of impressment, and his rejection of Monroe's treaty without ever having submitted it to the Senate. Hence that system of commercial restrictions commencing with the non-importation Act of 1806, of which the grand object, however France might have been included under some of the subsequent acts, to compel Great Britain to yield.

Then Hildreth said that though Jefferson did not intend war, "Yet that such a stickling for the extreme right, such an irritation constantly kept up, must lead inevitably to war . . ." This is the first underlying cause that Hildreth presented. To Hildreth, Jefferson's policies put the country in a perilously weak position militarily while inviting conflict by an unwillingness to compromise with Britain.

Hildreth then went on to another underlying cause of the war: "But, however peaceful might have been the intentions of Jefferson and the other Republican leaders, there had all along existed a considerable faction, bent, from the beginning, on war with Great Britain." They had been kept under control by Jefferson but "under Madison's feeble and vacillating rule, and amid the excitement produced by new collisions, this faction had served as a nucleus, about which the now triumphant war party had suddenly crystallized."

This original war party was composed of two elements: domestic and imported. Hildreth described the imported element as small but important as they were mostly printers and editors--exiled from Great Britain for political reasons and "thus converted into mouth-pieces of the Democratic party, they obtained and exercised an influence out of all proportion either to their numbers or their talent." The domestic element, until recently insignificant "had received accessions from various quarters."

1) Those concerned with the budding domestic manufactures--mostly Republicans--were for the war as a means of shutting off British competition. 2) Universal war spirit (the European wars) of twenty years duration had its effect: a) "On the sea-coast the spirit of enterprise found vent in exciting mercantile adventure." b) "In the South and West, thousands of young men, ambitious of distinction and eager for action,

but left in idleness by the institution of slavery, as they read day by day of battle after battle in Europe, had begun to sigh for words, epaulets and military glory."

Hildreth now demonstrated how these elements combined to help the war to gain control of the cabinet: "The war feeling thus invigorated and diffused; the old Republican policy discredited by apparent failure; the president known to be a man who could be molded; what wonder that the large number of young and ardent new members assembled in the Twelfth Congress, bent on substituting headlong energy for wise caution . . . Considered merely as political maneuver, this storming of the cabinet was managed with skill, firmness, admirable courage, and was crowned with remarkable success."

Hildreth spent the next three pages giving the various points of view on the war and he showed why he felt that most of the immediate excuses for going to war were groundless: 1) France had not stopped her depreciations against American shipping although she allegedly repealed her orders; 2) "the British orders in Council operated to exclude us only from trade with France . . . Holland and Northern Italy" . . . only came to six and one-half million dollars of our exports; 3) British vessels hovering off our coasts demanded a system of coast and harbor defense, not hostilities; 4) "The alleged agency of the British in stimulating Indian hostilities . . . remained a mere unproved suspicion," and 5) a war on land would not help impressed seamen. In these pages Hildreth listed the immediate causes of the war but he also gave evidence that the war was perilous and unnecessary. He then went on to give the various sides of the question in more detail.

Within the context of his own judgments about the unnecessary and perilous quality of the War of 1812 Hildreth has clearly brought the various threads of genetic explanations together and shown how the war came about at that particular time. The underlying generalization he made was that if a war spirit and party have long existed and they achieve control of the machinery of the government through a weak president and there are irritations with which they can stir up the populous through control of an important segment of the press, then war can be expected. This argument exhibits a probabilistic form, it cannot be deduced from the evidence given but Hildreth's evidence warrants the conclusion that although these were the causes of the war, still the war was both unnecessary and perilous.³² Most modern historians agree with Hildreth's estimate about the War of 1812. Within the argument what is crucial is the form that the explanation takes: it is a valid attempt to present evidence from a specific point of view, in the form of an inductive and probabilistic argument, giving enough of the necessary evidence to support his conclusions. The moment of value judgment entered when he accepted or rejected his hypothesis as what is considered enough evidence is a pragmatic judgment.

32

For examples of aggregate explanation, see, Hildreth, History, I, 49, decline of Spanish interest in colonization; I, 77-78, English maritime adventures, I, 478-482, causes of King Philips War; II, 145-167, Salem witchcraft trials; II, 374-378, third intercolonial war; III, 25-29, Boston tea party; III, 163-167, losses at the begging of the Revolutionary War; IV, 206-214, assumption; V, 389-408, presidential election of 1800; VI, 296-306, declaration of war.

In conclusion, Hildreth often does more than just "state facts" for there is ample evidence that he handles all three types of explanations well (used in this paper as models of three possible types of historical explanations). Objectivity is not always synonymous for Hildreth with merely relating facts and depending on empirical generalizations. He is objective in the sense that he appeals to empirical evidence to explain his hypotheses and historical events.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

A careful analysis of Bancroft's use of historic causation reveals that his arguments usually fail to explain historical events. Apart from a suspicion that he may not have handled his evidence with complete honesty, taken as the evidence appears in his history his explanations still turn out to be mere propaganda. For example, it was logically impossible to arrive at the conclusion that Anne was a harbinger of religious liberty from the evidence that Bancroft gave. It was equally impossible to infer that group A was composed of the "common people" who were merely duped by their leaders into voting against their own interests--liberty. As we saw throughout, his insistence on certain metaphysical laws directing history forced him to misuse consistently historic causation. Since he would not give up the formula, he consciously or unconsciously molded his arguments to bear out his metaphysical laws. The popularity of his history was at least partly attributable to the fact that he presented a view of America compatible with what many Americans believed or wished to believe about the history and destiny of their country. Furthermore, he wrote with a flowery grace that appealed to many people. His popularity, however, is to be regretted for George Bancroft helped to perpetuate many of the patriotic distortions in American history which only recently have been refuted and, perhaps, still linger on in grade school texts and in the minds of much of the general public.

It is my judgment that Bancroft's History is completely invalid as

a piece of explanatory historical writing. His History can now only be of interest as representative of certain attitudes, prejudices, and patriotic ideals of his own era. If modern historians can still consider Bancroft a valid historian they must give up any claim to the possibility that history can be a valid, objective explanation of the past in any sense. For Bancroft, with vast amounts of primary source materials at his disposal, still distorted causation. If this is historical explanation, then history's function is not to enlighten mankind about the past but only to reinforce preconceived ideas about the role of a country or people in the present or, perhaps, to direct the future through indoctrination. If this is not the function of history, it is vital to be able to show that indeed the evidence of history can be used to explain the past. What is crucial about Bancroft's History is that, even with authentic primary sources and careful research, he did not explain the past but merely supported his own preconceived notions.

What, did Bancroft feel, is the purpose and aim of historical writing? It is my judgment that Bancroft was caught between a "scientific" view of history and an older tradition of history as instructional, up-lifting, exemplary literature.

As I have shown, the new ideas in historical research that Bancroft encountered in Germany demanded that the historian be arduous in his search for and inspection of primary source material. This was the era which Van Tassel labels "documania"¹ -- feverish activity by historians to copy, edit, and preserve every scrap of evidence about the past. Bancroft joined in this rush to collect source material with relish and his extensive library

¹ Van Tassel, Recording, 103.

was a real contribution to future historians.

"Documania," and the using of primary sources is not one aspect of a new way to write history. Slightly earlier, Jared Sparks had edited and preserved historical documents with zeal but when he edited and wrote he had in mind not an explanatory history but a literature that would up-lift the common people of America and would serve as their guide. He said it is "preposterous and absurd" for historians to write about those "who have done nothing worth remembering."² Thus, Sparks selected the lives of great men as the proper subject for history.

Bancroft takes a wider view than Sparks and writes about the whole of American history yet his position is not far from that of Sparks. By combining Bancroft's romantic concept of the "idea" of America with Sparks' concept of the purpose of history as an instructional media one arrives at a clearer understanding of Bancroft's aims. For he too wrote history not for the purpose of explaining the past but as a tool to mold future generations.

Yet Bancroft is more perplexing than Sparks for he did not consciously admit writing exemplary history as his aim. In his introduction to his History Bancroft says:

I am impressed more strongly than ever with a sense of the grandeur and vastness of the subject /America/ and am ready to charge myself with presumption for venturing on so bold an enterprise. I can find for myself no excuse but in the sincerity with which I have sought to collect truth from trust-worthy documents and testimony. I have desired to give to the work the interest of authenticity. I have applied as I have proceeded, the principles of historical skepticism, and not allowing myself

to grow weary comparing witnesses, or consulting codes of laws, I have endeavored to impart originality to my narrative, by deriving it from writings and sources which were the contemporaries of the events that are described.³

Bancroft pictured himself as one of a new breed of historians. As I pointed out in part I, he felt he was a "scientific" historian for two reasons: First, because he used primary source materials and second, because he interpreted his metaphysical laws as the empirically discovered truth of how America developed in the past and would develop in the future. His idea of a "scientific" history is comparable to the Marxian idea of history: an all-encompassing, absolute scheme that explains all developmental change. Both of these formulas involve the basic irony that they are the antithesis of science because they both depend on metaphysical laws which have no claim on the empirical world and are thus untestable. Bancroft clearly stated that he would give to his work "the interest of authenticity" and apply "the principles of historical skepticism." Presumably by this latter statement, he meant that he would take into account the character and authenticity of his primary source material. He even suggested that his arduous scholarship was a possible excuse for his attempting so mammoth an enterprise as writing a history of the United States. Yet, Bancroft was totally blinded by this scholarship into accepting the validity of his own work. What is pitiful yet significant is that all this research was absolutely in vain. Because of his ideas on the nature of history (as quoted on pages 23 and 24) he was committed to an absolute formula which his scholarship would be forced to bear out.

³
Bancroft, History, VI, v.

Therefore, while Bancroft would deny Sparks' position in theory, in actuality he writes similar history. Bancroft did not start out to distort history for utility's sake as Sparks did. Because he was completely convinced that his metaphysical laws of progress of the common man and liberty as the driving force in America direct and explain American history, he had the same view of history as an instructional media, a propaganda device, as did Sparks. Although Bancroft was undoubtedly sincere when he said that he would be untiring in his quest for truth the framework within which he wrote his History did not permit the flexibility necessary to the writing of an explanatory history.

Hildreth, on the other hand, an early historian who tried to give explanations for past events. Hildreth purposefully set out to avoid the Sparks-Bancroft model and to seek a truly scientific method of writing history. He was not always certain, however, what was involved in writing a scientific history.

In the first three volumes of his History it appears that he usually thought of historical explanations as being merely the presentation of factual material which needed no extensive explanation. His chronicling often depended on what I have labeled in Part I as empirical generalizations. Therefore, in the long sections where this appears to be his method, his history was a mere sketch of the past with little explanatory force. It is probable that Hildreth was reacting erroneously to the idea of history as an imitable example for men to follow and, also, in a desire to achieve objectivity in the sense of avoiding any personal comments or hypotheses.

This chronicling method he did not use consistently. When he gave explanations he did not abandon his empirical method but expanded it to use empirical laws. This is a crucial difference between Bancroft and

Hildreth. By using empirical laws in his explanations he could change and adapt them to the new situations that he discovered in writing his history. Thus, instead of molding his material he could attempt broad explanations of the past within a flexible frame-work. When one recalls that he wrote at the apex of Bancroft's popularity when nationalistic histories were what most people considered legitimate, it is even more incredible that he had the foresight and courage to venture such an experimental method.

If the reader is often startled at the "objectivity," the "modern" quality of his explanations, he should not be. In fact, it is my contention that historians will have to reexamine what is meant by "revisionist" history. Hildreth's explanations may be thin--he may have a very concise explanation for an event that has been studied in depth by later historians--but his explanations are never empty. For example, his explanation of the Antinomian controversy is not unlike that one given by Emery Battis in his long and carefully researched volume on this subject. This is not to say that Battis does not say more on the subject that is of interest or that he does not introduce new facts (e.g., that the core Antinomians were not mostly newcomers). Instead, I believe that by following the known evidence and giving a genetic explanation using empirical laws or generalizations, Hildreth avoided the patriotic excesses of Bancroft and at the same time wrote a concise and logical explanation of the controversy which still is, in the main, an acceptable one.

Of more interest are his explanations of the causes of the War of 1812. Here he stated a positive thesis which he wished to prove in addition to the causes of the war: that the war was perilous and unnecessary. Both

the causes of the war that he states and this thesis are not dated.⁴
 His stated causes are essentially those given today and most modern historians also agree that the war was perilous because of America's unpreparedness.⁵ Some historians feel that the war was probably unnecessary as well.⁶ Hildreth seems to be unique in combining the two points; one of the reasons he gives for the war being unnecessary was our unpreparedness. In other words, he feels that in our own best interests we should have made sure we did not go into an offensive war because we were completely unprepared. Again, obviously what can be covered in a few pages is not strictly comparable to whole volumes written on the War of 1812, but, in general outline, Hildreth's arguments are not dissimilar to recent studies in depth.

When Hildreth abandoned his chronicling and used empirical laws to explain historical events he often tried to form a hypothesis and give a warranted argument for its acceptance. Sometimes Hildreth's zeal as a reformer and abolitionist comes out despite his best intentions to be objective. An example of this appears in his explanations for the causes

⁴ Hildreth seems unaware that the "Orders in Council" had been revoked (at least conditionally) before the declaration of war. Additionally he does not emphasize the land hunger of the westerners.

⁵ See, Francis F. Beirne, The War of 1812 (N. Y., 1949), 69-76.
 George Dangerfield, The Era of Good Feeling (N. Y., 1952), 15-91.

⁶ See, William T. Utter, "The Coming of the War," After Tippecanoe: Some Aspects of the War of 1812, Philip P. Mason, ed. (N. Y., 1963), 9-16.

of the War of 1812. He attributes the South's desire for war to the idleness of the slave owners and their desire for military honors. Although this is a possible hypothesis it is a weak and superficial one. I have the feeling that Hildreth was just stabbing at slavery in general by disparaging slaveholders and then retreating again to a factual account of the causes of the war. However, since this is not an integral part of his explanation it does not take away from its validity. In other words, though this type of comment is a value judgment, it is not a crucial part of his explanation. Neither, the validity of his explanation of the causes of the War of 1812 nor his hypothesis about its perilous and unnecessary nature hinge upon the acceptance or rejection of his reason for the South's desiring war.

Hildreth was well known in journalistic circles as a contentious man with an acerbic literary style.⁷ In his History he took jabs at various institutions and individuals who he felt were detrimental to the development of American democracy. But the reader feels that Hildreth would consider these sarcastic comments as slips of the pen; often he bends over backwards to right the score.

Hildreth is caught between two ideas of what constitutes "scientific history." He believed that his History had "a philosophy in it"; he also believed that objectivity (which would be a part of writing a scientific history) should be equated with eliminating hypotheses and point of view. He never reconciles these two positions. His philosophical ideas, as outlined in The Theory of Politics, sometimes serve as a framework for his hypotheses. For example, throughout the last three volumes

⁷ Emerson, Hildreth, 42-69.

he used his belief in the necessity for a strong central government as the core of his hypotheses concerning the development of the new government. Unlike his passing stabs, these philosophic beliefs help determine the point of view he takes on the many controversial issues that he treats in these volumes. When he said that "the present work will have somewhat more of an emotional character that was consistent with the first three volumes" and confessed that indeed his history had "a philosophy in it," he seems to have taken the point of view that this philosophy was both necessary and desirable.

Yet when he reduces history to chronicling, with empirical generalizations serving as sketchy explanations, he seems to have taken the opposite view; that hypotheses should not be the starting point of historical explanations.

In sum, Hildreth's History presents many of the problems and questions that modern historians are wrestling with today. He felt that he must be "objective." Sometimes he seemed to have felt that objectivity required chronicling the facts. At other times he gave a definite hypothesis and tried to support it with evidence. His History, therefore, is often choppy, hard to follow and inconsistent. However, when he does offer explanations for events, they almost consistently measure up to modern attempts.

It is my judgment that objectivity should not be equated with elimination of point of view or the presentation of hypotheses. If Hildreth had abandoned this position, he would have given the same explanations which he did in fact give at certain points. What is crucial to his explanations is that he used empirical generalizations and laws and drew his causes and conclusions from his evidence.

Modern historians who balk at the idea of writing "scientific" histories

must reconsider what is meant by scientific method and what the alternative is to this method. The alternative seems to me to be Bancroft's method: using primary sources in an inflexible framework which the facts are made to fit.

The other alternative is Hildreth's use of an inductive, scientific method, but Hildreth's method clarified by a consistent view of what is meant by objectivity. A more consistent use of "objectivity" in history would admit the necessity of formulating hypotheses for the causes of events and then the historian would attempt to give the necessary empirical evidence for their support. This objectivity would also admit that at least one variety of value judgment enters any explanation--at the point of either rejecting or accepting a particular hypothesis. At best historical explanations can only have a high probability of truth. Thus the historian's decision as to how high a probability is high enough for acceptance of an hypothesis will be a value-charged decision.

The apparent inconsistency in the History of Richard Hildreth is finally traceable to his ambiguous view of what is meant by objectivity and what is meant by value judgment. At times he felt that to be objective meant to give just facts; at other times he was willing to give hypotheses and attempt to support them. Sometimes he seemed to feel that value judgments consisted of making any comments at all about his evidence; at other times he took a definite stand on an issue and attempted to defend it.

The crucial difference between Bancroft's History and Hildreth's was Hildreth's use of empirical evidence to support or reject his hypotheses. It is possible to imagine an infinite amount of new topics for historians to deal with and "revise"--in the sense of adding new materials and insights--

without admitting the necessity that each generation must rewrite history. Hildreth's explanations reveal at least the possibility that historic explanations can and should withstand the test of time.

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