ON THE THEORY OF HUMAN
PERFECTIBILITY.

Nothing can be more true than the assertion, that
man is a mystery. Great though his talents may be,
and lofty though his aspirations are in all his search-
ings after truth, or in his imaginings after ideal
good,—there is still hung around him a veil through
whose folds he cannot pierce,—there still yawns
around him a gulf whose depths he cannot fathom,
—there still seems to be drawn around him a web of
destiny through whose inextricable labyrinths he
cannot wind his way to absolute perfection and
happiness. Within so bounded a horizon, and with-
out any positive knowledge of the regions beyond,
it almost appears to the calm eye of reason, that the
whole span of his limited existence, and the scenes
and circumstances around him, united, are a mockery,
a delusion, and a dream. The fervid aspirations of
every mind, after the unattainable objects of imagi-
nary bliss; and the hope,—often colored with rainbow
hues, of the realization of our fancies,—though often
drawing us from considering the stern realities and
truths of life,—are yet, like gleams of sunshine
through a cloudy sky, necessary to cheer our exist-
ence with prospects of brighter days and happier
hours. A constant contemplation of what we are
and have been, without those prospects of the future
illuminating all, and urging us to still greater triumphs, would benumb our faculties, freeze our passions, and turn the fair face of creation into a sterile and dreary blank, while we ourselves would seem but as bubbles tossed to and fro by an incontrollable destiny wholly ignorant of our course.

It is certain, however, that, though ignorant of the future in its ultimate results, we can, through our knowledge of the past, so far calculate, from circumstances, the probabilities of the future, as to draw accurate outlines of events which may occur, and effects which may be produced. But, on the other hand, when unforseen events are continually occurring, and at times seem to alter the current of all human calculation, and sage-like wisdom and experience, it were vain to expect exact fulfilment of uninspired prophecies, or an uniform procedure of irregular contingencies. When all mankind possess different minds, and are unequally agitated by varying passions and influences, and, so far as the future is concerned, seem, in some degree, the creatures of circumstances, it were vain to expect uniformity and consistency in thought and action; to expect all to obey certain fixed rules,—to operate along certain lines, or within certain impassable limits. Material laws and operations are alone subject to demonstration. Mental laws and operations, though uniform and consistent, are more subtle and evanescent; intangible in their analysis; and the subjects of conflicting conjecture more than demonstrable certainty. Hence, the deductions of all moral, partake of the fluctuations of all mental science; or, in other words, the uncertainty of all human actions, is referable to the
uncertainty and fluctuation of the minds that conceive them. And as we know that from the first progenitors of our race until now, all human minds have been alike unstable, and must, from all we can see, so continue; and that the history of past generations is but a history of the progress of mind through so many ages, we think the history of mankind through ages past, an unerring index of what man, left to his own reason and instincts, will, in all probability, be for the future.

As the human mind can only act when acted upon by other minds, and external objects and circumstances, it should necessarily be considered in relation to other minds, and the events continually occurring. Abstract qualities and principles can only be understood by tangible symbols and analogies. The powers and tendencies of the mind can only be inferred from its past achievements and present operations. The question, therefore, whether it contains within itself the seeds of perpetual progression up to ultimate perfection, is a matter of fact and argument to be deduced from history, more than any mere speculative deductions from the nature of mind itself.

The theological opponents of the doctrine of human perfectibility will find little difficulty in demolishing the theories of Turgot, Condorcet, and Madame de Stael. Drawing their weapons immediately from the Bible, they at once dispose of every argument for man's perfectibility and ultimate happiness being developed upon earth, through moral and philosophical means alone, as the mere visions of unholy and insane imaginations. We admit that
to the divine authority we must bow; and that to all inspired declarations we should pay due reverence and regard; but when the arguments in favour of perfectibility, are founded and supported apart from scripture authority,—are, in fact independent speculations of reason,—we think they should be allowed to stand or fall on their own grounds of evidence and truth. So long as scripture is untouched in our free and philosophical researches, why should it be brought forth as a judge to decide upon questions foreign to its spirit and principles, or, at least, distinct from the scope and tenor of its high and sacred decisions? Much, we are aware, of the moral philosophy, or ethics, which reign dominant in our colleges, and which some conceive to be independent speculations of the human mind, have been drawn from the inspired page; but in all these reasonings we find a code of principles laid down as fundamental and binding upon the conscience; and clearly showing,—when contrasted with the crude moral doctrines of heathen sages,—that it has been directly drawn from the pure fountain of God's word. Thus, when Lord Herbert of Cherbury decried the light of the Gospel as superfluous, he was walking in the reflected light of its revelations, and drawing the very weapons of his argumentative warfare from the armoury of heaven. So the doctrine of reciprocal rights and duties, or relative obligations throughout society, or of doing unto others as we would wish others to do unto us, which forms the foundation of all systems of speculative morals, has alone been found clearly and emphatically set forth in scripture. With regard to
the French doctrine of man’s perfectibility, however, no code of morals is enunciated which can in the least startle the lovers of truth, or convey the impression that scripture has been successfully attacked, or in any degree superseded. The reasonings of such philosophers have been entirely harmless, though ingenious, and in many points so clearly refute themselves, as, at once, to be both the bane and the antidote.

That the world is in a progressive state cannot be denied; but whether that progress has been such from the first creation of our race as to warrant us in alleging that it has been continual and uninterrupted through all time, is the question which requires solution, and must determine the nature of the conclusion. If the student of history can find evidence of such progression in the whole range of his subjects, the theory may seem tenable; but if there be found a break in the line of its continuity,—an eclipse of its advancing glories by the shadows of a ruder barbarism hanging over and blighting it, the whole will lose its plausibility and its only basis of apparent truth. Or if the moralist and political economist insist upon the truth of the theory and fail to show why the universal code of conscience binding man to man by sacred ties and obligations; and why the laws, literature and philosophy of nations, as directing the currents of civilization, have all been abortive in producing the grand results of perfectibility, then must he also forego his tenacious hold of the doctrine. Or if the metaphysician, in his subtle analysis of mental phenomena, has ever detected the latent seeds of
perfection lurking within its mysterious folds, which he can prove that time and circumstances alone can mature,—then may he also speculate upon the probable issues of the future in the elevation of man;—but as his knowledge of all human minds must necessarily flow from an innate knowledge of his own mental powers and emotions,—from his own mind alone he must prove the existence of some hitherto undiscovered germ or faculty of higher civilization; and if failing to do so must necessarily allow his whole fabric to perish.

The dreams of a golden age so current among the fables of the ancient world, when innocence and happiness among the nomadic, or pastoral, races of the earth, reigned over all; and flocks and herds, instead of current coins, formed the wealth of infant nations, and the commodities of kingly traffic, can never again recur in this advanced age of the world. Still, the human mind, as if longing for a foretaste of supernal bliss, and an earthly realization of its infinitude, aspires to a state of more positive happiness. By whatever object man is attracted; or with whatever spiritual or material aliment he may attempt to fill up the craving void of his mind, the one great aim of the whole is happiness and expansion. In quest of that he wanders, labours, and endures disappointment after disappointment,—confident, that if he even does not find the precious pearl on earth, he will find it in some other region; and at last dies without gaining the object of his ambitious search. It does not alone exist in the breasts of kings and conquerors, statesmen, poets, and philosophers; the desire is indigenous to the soil of every mind, and
breathes in the aspirations of the plebeian, as well as the patrician; in the hovel, as well as the palace. Its deep foundations are not alone laid in the ideal republic of Plato,—the Utopia of More,—the new Atlantis of Bacon,—the Eldorado of Raleigh, or the New Moral World of Owen. It breathes through the universal literature of nations, and is the central point of human existence, to which all spiritual life and motion ever gravitates. The atheist seeks it in denying the being and attributes of a God; and the Christian in offering up his incense on the altar of love. The philosopher seeks it in the investigation of the most recondite truths; and the Mahommedan in his ignorance, blindly submitting to the imaginary decrees of fate. It is sought for in the revolutions of dynasties, and the wars of nations; in the speculations of dreamers, the enactment of laws, and the spread of commerce; in the growth and diffusion of literature; and in the glorious dawn expected to break upon the benighted world, through the influence of that refined, sentimental, but false philosophy which shone amidst the volcanic eruptions of revolutionary France, through the speculations of Turgot, Condorcet, and afterwards by M. de Stael; and partially in our own country, by Godwin, in his "Political Justice." The golden age of the ancient world was one of pastoral simplicity and innocence, unembittered by dissension and war, and the many drawbacks to happiness found in a state of progressive civilization, and among the marts of manufacture and commerce. The perfectibility of the French philosophers, is to flow from the triumphs of civilization over the rude elements of barbarism,—the ascendancy of justice
and truth over tyranny and error,—the elevation of the minds of all through the prevalence of literature and philosophy, to a just knowledge of the consequences of human actions; and the general desire which will then exist, in every grade of society, so to act, that the rules or laws of social happiness and virtue may not be infringed to cause dissension and bitterness in the earthly paradise.

Whether this theory is ever likely to be realized in practice through the influence of literature and science alone, we think extremely questionable, and shall here consider it in a few of its many aspects, without trenching, however upon the doubtful and contested questions of politics, or polemics, or attempting to excite party feelings or prejudices.

Our earliest introduction to profane history is through the Homeric ballads. But the nature of the events there narrated, and the mythological absurdities interwoven with the more natural machinery of the story, throws so improbable an air over the whole, as at once to prove it more fabulous than real. From that period downward to the date of the first Olympiad, 776 years before Christ, when the narrative begins to assume a more connected form, all the successive steps of Grecian history are the same. Fact is lost in fable. Truth is lost in extravagant romance. After the first chronological era, and for several ages downwards, the whole history, though bearing a more dignified and sober carriage, and amidst all its Herodotean marvels, more consistent with natural operations and events, is still of so dubious a character as to raise suspicions regarding its truth and fidelity. So long, in fact, as clear and
irrefragable testimony is wanting to substantiate the
wondrous statements set forth, little faith can be
placed in their veracity,—and all readers of Grecian
history are aware,—without travelling so far back as
the Pelasgic, or Argonautic periods,—that no clear
undoubted testimony exists, of the reality, so promi-
antly set forth, of some features of the Lycurgan
era of the Lacedemonean state. The whole of the
earlier Grecian, indeed, like that of the Roman
history from the days of Romulus and Remus, and
the founding of Rome, is replete with the marvellous
and improbable,—the features shaded with much of
the dark, the undefined, and the romantic,—and yet
the light which issued from its early literature, and
fragmentary philosophy, as the first-born and freshest
in the world, is so imposing and attractive, as often
to captivate the reader, and pledge him almost in-
sensibly to a tacit belief in all that is told.

In looking back, however, from Greece and Rome
to Assyria and Egypt, India and China, and other
nations claiming a high degree of antiquity, the
question is, whether those nations displayed so much
of juvenile immaturity in the sciences of law and
government, the arts of war and conquest, sculpture
and architecture, as to warrant the conclusion, that
they were less intellectual and inventive than the
Greeks at the periods of their greatest originality and
splendour; or less masculine than the Romans in
their Augustan age of universal conquest and classic
elegance. Doubtless, with increase of years, there
is, in most cases, increase of wisdom through ex-
perience. The dawn of civilization in Greece followed
that of the more remote nations mentioned. Yet
the Greeks created by their own salient and inventive genius all the literature which, as, a perennial fountain, has watered all lands with its classic streams,—all the arts of painting and architecture, sculpture and grace, which reflect to modern ages the light and glory of those days when Demosthenes thundered and Aristotle taught. And certainly the Greeks, when, thus, forming themselves into a distinct people, and founding their state, had but a dreamy conception of other nations, to them half fabulous; were destitute of models to imitate,—experienced leaders to direct and guide them,—or ennobling laws, drawn from established codes, to mould their opinions; so that they were the architects of their own greatness,—the cradled giants, who, yet in their infancy, reared the pillars of their own independence and imperishable renown. What Greece was, Rome was emulous to become. What Greece possessed, Rome, victorious, either plundered or borrowed. Less delicate and feminine, and more iron in her constitution,—less literary and philosophic, and more warlike in her habits and customs, as she conquered the world, than Greece;—the decayed monuments of her power and glory, still teaching lessons of wisdom and vanity from her seven-hilled city,—scathed with the burning vials of Almighty wrath,—tell emphatically, but painfully, what was the might of her sons, in the days of her palmiest magnificence and unconquered strength. If Rome, therefore, borrowed from Greece, and if Greece founded empire and its commanding characteristics without assistance from other states or models drawn from the peoples of more ancient dynasties, surely those more ancient
nations which preceded it in civilization, and which during its infancy still flourished in colossal strength and splendour, must have been equally as inventive, and in earlier days have displayed as great intellectual ascendancy as the Greeks in all their eminence. Proofs, indeed, we have but few, if any, from profane literary remains, of any intellectual supremacy ever existing among the Chaldean, Assyrian, or Egyptian empires; but neither have we, prior to the Augustan age, much literature or philosophy to indicate the mental superiority of the Romans. If we may credit tradition, astronomy was cultivated at Babylon, and the observations registered on bricks, more than two thousand years before Christ. And, humanly speaking, does the Hebrew literature of the earliest ages shew anything like intellectual infancy? Moses was born in, and, according to Scripture, was learned in all the learning of Egypt, then, we may infer from this remark alone, the most learned of existing nations, as, two hundred years previous, during the government of Joseph, it was one of the most civilized. And, so far as external evidence from the characters of those governments,—the magnificence of their capitals and courts, can testify to the existence of mental vigour and strength, we have no reason to imagine that the ancient peoples of Asia and Egypt were lower in the scale of intellectual power than the Greeks, or the Greeks than ourselves of the present day. Though, therefore, the human mind may have improved in sagacity through many ages of experience, it has not been accumulating native strength and power.

When Greece was still in her infancy, her people
wondered at the gorgeous descriptions given by travellers of the glories of Egypt, the merchandise of Tyre,—the ships of Tarshish, and the gold of Sheba; nor less at the extent of Thebes, the splendours of Babylonian riches and manufacture, the vastness of Nineveh, and the labour and architecture of the Egyptian pyramids. Those cities and nations were to pass away; their decline of greatness and external glory to be perceptible when Greece and Rome were rising in power and reflecting their light to far distant ages. The hand of ruin was drawing its sepulchral shadows over each successive cycle of their history, and the stern despot, Time, was striding triumphant over crumbling temple and tower. They progressed and filled their allotted span up to its culminating point, and then gradually vanished from the horizon of nations. Their moral, like their national history, reads us a powerful lesson, and tells us a thrilling tale.

Nor is it, alone, the voiceless solitudes, the riven arches, and broken columns,—the mouldering towers, temples, and eternal pyramids, which tell us of glory departed, power overthrown and extinguished, and strength, once deemed impregnable, shattered in ruin. The suggestions awakened are more imposing than the ruins themselves. Leaving for a time the wilds of nature, where we can more freely commune with the eternal, we conjure up before us in those regions of desolation all the living associations, which for centuries emanated from, and gathered around the tides of human beings ebbing and flowing through their mighty gates. They then dreamt not, any more than we do now of the probable fate of our
own, of the falling asunder of their mighty capitals and empires, but exulted in their fancied security, as they surveyed the massive walls and pinnacled towers,—like eternal giants, defying time; and thought, perchance, that such fabrics, like the everlasting mountains, would survive the wreck of other nations, and end only with time itself. Then amidst the humble solitudes, broken only by the howl of the jackal and the hiss of the serpent, we muse over the fickleness of all earthly power and pursuits, and the vanity of all human ambition. What pulses beat,—what hearts throbbed,—what high aspirations, winged by the spirit of ambition, darting into the future, have been associated around those colossal but frowning ruins! There all the emotions that ever swelled the human breast with rapture, or melted it with love, or tore it with agonizing passion, or paralysed it with iron despair, found free vent and ample theatre for expression and action! There we cannot but think of crimson crimes appealing to heaven for vengeance,—of a long and desolating course of guilt and debauchery, consuming the vitals, and sapping the foundations of the empires and their capitals, until shaken as if by some terrible earthquake-like violence, they fell from the proud pedestal of their magnificence, and vanished from the map of living nations! Where, amidst all these heaps of crumbling bricks, and granite and drifting dust, can we distinguish the dust of kings and queens, courtiers or warriors, from the dust of the slaves who dragged their chariot wheels, or suffered death in the moments of their capricious tyranny? Perishable and fleeting thus are all mortal greatness, beauty, glory, and re-
nown! But it was not fate, with unintermitting strokes,—to which we too often transfer our ideas of decay and change,—which shattered asunder the greatness and blasted the hopes and prospects of those peoples:—the elements of destruction were inherent in themselves, and, like Samson in the temple of Dagon, they drew down upon their own heads the sweeping retribution which destroyed them.

If, therefore, progress of society, intellectual enlargement, and moral elevation and happiness, were, according to the framers of the theory of perfectibility, to be uninterrupted through all time, and among all nations and races,—why this utter wreck of empires, and extinction of peoples? Why, instead of advancement from a lower to a higher point, this retrogression or rather sinking of all the arts of progressive civilization? this rushing backward into "chaos and old night," after gaining the light of a nobler day? Why this regurgitation of the stream to its fountain head, instead of rolling onward, and refreshing the parched desert with its living waters? Alas! nothing was abiding. Nothing was uninterruptedly progressing. "'Twas revolution all."

We often confound the periods of greatest national advancement in power and conquest, with the greatest existing amount of happiness to the greatest number of people, forgetting that where through despotism, national monuments and temples have arisen, it has almost invariably been through the expenditure of the muscles and liberties of the people; and that in all cases, barbarian magnificence has been marked with the curse of tyranny and intellectual prostration. The enslaved children of the chosen house of Israel,
assisted in rearing the pyramids of Egypt; Jewish captives, when they hung their harps upon the willows, cemented with tears the wondrous walls of Babylon, and swelled the current of the Euphrates; slaves dragged the chariot wheels of tyrants; slaves and slavery existed in the most refined days of ancient kingdoms and courts,—swelled the numbers of the admiring rabble at the heels of Pericles, and waited upon Aspasia at supper; and in the palmiest days of Rome, were kept in subjection by the reception of supplies of corn from the granaries of the empire. In this respect the lapse of ages brought no change. Power has always been used to trample and crush. In ancient times slaves formed part of the common population, and were of the same colour, and spoke the same language as their taskmasters. European bondsmen, however oppressed under a mock freedom, are not now, in the same sense, slaves. But look backward for nearly three thousand years, and say,—has the progress of time and civilization changed the heart of man with regard to his right of holding property in man? Mark even human progress since the great ameliorating principles of the gospel have been shed abroad, and say, whether in the most civilized kingdoms, and in republics boasting of freedom above other states, the inhuman principles of holding man as the property of his fellow man, have not been most broadly and unequivocally advocated, and most unblushingly and cruelly practised. Britain has, through her legislature, washed her escutcheon from the stain of negro blood. Ask the United States of America whether she has made the same advance in the path of per-
fectibility, and struck the tyrant’s chain from her millions of slaves.

Seldom, however, have the triumphs of intellect and the march of civilization been united to a corresponding advance of moral excellence. In all times the fact has been proved that a state of adversity, which often promotes humility, has been best calculated to foster the moral virtues; and that continued prosperity, in both individuals and communities, begets pride and arrogance, the forerunners and co-partners of despotism and crushing tyranny. The histories of all nations uninfluenced by Christianity clearly show, that in every case of every people upon whom the curse of retributive justice has fallen, the extinction of the moral virtues prepared the way. When Nineveh fell from its pedestal of greatness; and when Cyrus turned the stream of the Euphrates from its course, and executed the decreed vengeance of heaven upon the guilty king and court of Babylon,—the peoples, like their rulers, were sunk in sloth and debauchery, dreaming in their citadels of fancied security that they should see no sorrow. So was it with Athens after the death of Socrates, and the division of the Macedonian kingdom, when the shifting sands of empire began to heave from the Ilissus to the Tiber. So was it with Rome after the age of Augustus, when the blood of the saints was shed, and her once commanding sceptre was devoured by her own inherent canker. And so it was with Egypt when Cæsar triumphed over the chastity of Cleopatra, and the young Octavius crowned the conquest at Actium, and, after the death of the Queen overthrew the monarchy.
Intellectual, therefore, is not necessarily allied to moral greatness in either individuals or communities of such; and he who would affirm that the world has marched onward from its earliest epoch, in one continued line of intellectual, moral, and social progress, affirms it in the face of the accumulated testimony of the world itself in favour of the opposite doctrine. Let such enter the ruins of Thebes, and preach such doctrines from the temple of Karnak. Let him stand upon the sandheaps, and hillocks of crumbling bricks, bitumen and mortar, by the banks of the Euphrates or the Tigris, and preach perpetual progress and stability. Let his voice echo to the footsteps of ages among the columns of Paestum, the decayed temples of Athens and Palmyra, and the Colliseum of Rome,—or by the once glorious Jerusalem on the hill Calvary, and proclaim aloud to the world that men and nations have from the beginning been in a state of uninterrupted progress to ultimate perfection and happiness on earth.

The advocates of perfectibility, however, anxious to overleap the obstacle presented by the decay of ancient nations, attempt to argue that their rise and fall was, in reality, no hindrance to the world's advance. They rose and flourished. And as in the decay of the plant, the seed it bears is scattered by the winds to take root and vegetate in other soils, they argue, that the seeds of ancient civilization were, in the decay of states, scattered to other parts of the globe, destined, in succeeding ages, to bring forth a more rich and exuberant harvest of civilization.

We would not attempt to undervalue the influence of ancient literature, and its refinement on modern
society in Europe, but we think this argument a mere shirking of the question. We are told that all European nations are still indebted to Greece and Rome for their poetry, their polite literature, and philosophy; for the free spirit of inquiry that pervades our institutions, and the unquenchable fire of liberty that glows in every bosom. Allowing this to be true, it may be asked,—have the intellectual fountains of Greece and Rome fed the human intellect, and produced our present civilization without extraneous power from another source?

After the dawn of Christianity, when a mighty impetus was given to the moral advancement of its disciples, and its principles seemed in many respects triumphant, there was room for expecting a deep and permanent renovation of society. Yet it is certain, that, though for a season it did wondrously advance, the elements opposing it were, humanly speaking, of more than equal strength and threw barriers all but insurmountable in its way. And when it partially emerged from the fires and dungeons of persecution, and, under the care of Constantine, was united to the state, the limits of its exercise were circumscribed, but a small portion of mankind were aware of its nature and influence; and, thus, even the progress likely to spring from its transforming principles, seemed far from universal, or, even where it existed among contending currents, so far from being universally salutary, that the perfectibility of mankind was but little nearer its consummation. But had the triumphs of Christianity been ten times greater, its grand transforming truths and principles did not spring from the scat-
tered seeds of ancient civilization; and hence its influence upon society, during the first six centuries of its existence, cannot, according to the theories of the French philosophers, be reckoned among the elements of necessary progress, developed in the grand scheme of human perfectibility.

The irruptions of the mingled hordes of northern barbarians into the Roman empire,—its downfall and dismemberment, and the disastrous eclipse which thence overspread, like a funeral pall, all the trophies of civilized life and the triumphs of Christianity, would of itself seem sufficient to overthrow all reasoning in favour of the theory. But this signal stagnation of all advancement of society,—this successive uprising of cloud after cloud over scenes of desolation and blood,—this mixture of races, of Huns, and Goths, and Vandals, with the warmer blood and more vivacious temperament of the natives of the south,—this union of natures so obviously opposite, and the unnatural springing up between them, and producing its monstrous spawn of ghostly tyranny and superstition of the Centaur of Christendom, miscalled the church,—all, according to this theory, are considered as ranking among the principal causes of the improvements in Europe during the last six centuries. Nations, our theorists contend, after running their destined cycles, become enervated and retrogressive; and that, before a new impulse in a forward career can be given them, amalgamation with other races must, by the transfusion of blood take place; and hence, they conclude, that the union of Scythians and Italians, after the crumbling down of the Romish power, produced a
prodigious improvement in both races. Instead, therefore, of considering Attila the 'scourge of God,' as has long been customary, executing the vengeance of heaven upon a doomed and guilty people, he and his savages should be considered, as conferring, amidst their bloody orgies, wreck of cities, and awful destruction of life, blessings in embryo upon continental nations, to be reaped many centuries afterwards in a golden harvest of learning, science, and progressive civilization.

If, therefore, ancient learning and refinement scattered abroad, were but the seeds from which more rich and enduring fruits were to spring, we may consider the dismemberment of the Roman empire, and the union of foreign races, the rise and triumph of Mahommedanism in Arabia,—its rapid spread over some of the fairest regions of Asia,—and the universal darkness which settled over the nations of Europe for so many ages, as the fruits of those seeds, transplanted from ancient classic lands and civilized cities. Certain that the nine centuries of Gothic darkness previous to the reformation is a fatal bar to the success of their doctrines, the advocates of the theory dextrously endeavour to evade it by urging that such anarchy and darkness were the necessary consequence of the blending of races,—the convulsion necessarily preceding the permanent dawn of a nobler epoch. Hence, this happy darkness they find subservient to their views in three particular points. In the first place,—it is the effect or fruit of the seeds sown during, or immediately succeeding, the periods of ancient civilization. In the second place,—it is the effect of the necessary blend-
ing of opposing races for the production of a higher civilization: And, in the third place, as naturally flowing from the preceding, it is affirmed that the sacred fires of learning and philosophy which seemed quenched in night, were only obscured for a season, that, like the sun under a veil of supernatural darkness, they might emerge from their chaos, and produce, by their long suppressed power and influence, a far richer and more luxuriant civilization. In the last point they allude to the rise of the schoolmen—the Provencal bards, and the general springing up of a more extended inquiry among all classes.

Allowing, however, that when the scholastic philosophers arose, they evinced high skill as dialecticians, it must be granted that they exhibited a super-abundance of credulity in choosing their subjects, and that their reasonings and conclusions were often imbecile and absurd. The followers, afar off, of the Bishop of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, were but mere tyros in true philosophy. They knew little and proved little in their endless logomachies. From their cradles, like all other human beings, they had acted more or less upon the principles of induction; but, ignorant of the proper method of applying them in searching after truth, they forsook the pathway of legitimate inquiry and vainly attempted to solve unfathomable problems, and failed in their avowed object of elucidating truth.

To assert, therefore, that during the long slumber of the middle ages, the minds of Europe were, though in a hidden manner, alive but inactive; and that when the schoolmen arose, they evinced a pro-
digious progress over the ancients, is a mere gra-
товитuous assumption. It would be difficult to prove,
that, had the Roman empire not fallen asunder, and
the consequent sleep of ages overspread Europe, the
minds of the population, when the schoolmen arose
and learning began to revive, would not have been
more enlightened, and their inquiries, and their
mode of conducting them been more calculated to
produce a richer harvest of fruit. To start upon a
higher career, and display more prominently its
faculties and energies, the human mind requires no
such lengthened slumber. When tyrannized over,
—when suppressed in its soarings and outpourings
by superstitious bigotry, and an inquisitorial cen-
sorship, it may give way for a season, as did that
of Galileo; but, like the bent elastic spring, it will
burst forth with all its native energy when free from
the pressure of the superincumbent weight. But for
this the lapse of ages is not necessary. The dispu-
tations of the early fathers of the church show as
deep a knowledge of the art of reasoning and subtlety
of discrimination, as the logomachies of the school-
men, after the deluge of barbarism had swept nearly
all learning and literature out of Europe. And were
the minds of Plato and Aristotle less distinguished
for imaginative richness and grandeur, acuteness and
subtlety, depth and comprehension, than those of
Origen and Augustine.

We do not presumptuously attempt to depreciate
the claims of the schoolmen. Except a few colossal
remnants, the old literature of the ancients had sunk
amidst the chaos of nations; and a new literature
had to be created, and a new language spoken and
immortalized. Dante, in his own country, proved its flexibility and strength; and the schoolmen then laid the foundation, though they did not rear the superstructure, of a purer reasoning; and even to the present day, the effect produced by their war of words is felt. If we may credit Roger Ascham,—during that period, their existed a marvellous thirst for knowledge in villages and towns. Then also were the foundations of many of our academical institutions laid. On all sides there seemed to be a revival of the sleeping embers of thought, and the beginning of an onward progress. This was the natural course of things after the resuscitation of mind: but we cannot conceive how this long slumber was necessary to prepare it for a more original and independent course of action. It at all times, like the body, acquires strength and energy from action; and like the body, requires rest and repose. Instead, therefore, of considering the mediæval ages of Europe as producing a necessary lull in the actions of the human mind to fit it for higher action, there is every reason to think, that had those centuries of slumber been actively improved in drawing forth and diffusing higher intellectual knowledge and true philosophy, the prophets of human perfectibility might, when they broached their theories, have found them nearer a practical consummation.

In looking back to the spread of philosophy and Christianity, in their loftier aspects since the reformation, and the rise of Bacon, we at once perceive how the truth has been diffused, after being properly apprehended; and in what light the labours of the schoolmen have been held by inductive enquirers,
and undisguised believers in the Gospel. Had their researches, as displayed in their visionary attempts at solving incomprehensible problems, been favourable to the advance of science and religion, would the followers of Bacon have discarded them, or the great authors of the reformation have opposed and overturned them? But many causes were at work, breaking up the old time-worn incrustations of society, and preparing the way for a reproduction of all its elements in a nobler form, and upon more enduring foundations. From the entrance of the Greek refugees into Italy,—the productions of Dante and the Provencal bards,—the discovery of the mariner’s compass, the continent of America, and wondrous regions there displayed,—the discovery of gunpowder, and the manufacture of paper,—but above all, and yet in conjunction with them, the uses of the newly invented printing press;—from all these causes the sluggish minds of Europe received a shock, and from the great collision sprung forward, more able to perceive their profound ignorance and baffle its efforts. Then the printing press with its Briarean arms, brought success to the cause of the reformation, and riveted the attention of millions upon high and sacred questions, buried amidst the rubbish of early controversy and superstition since the apostolic age. The dawn of a brighter era had commenced. The seeds of a nobler perfection, long under ground, were now putting forth their blossoms, and though cradled in the storm and rocked by the whirlwind, destined to rear their branches, laden with immortal fruit in regions more celestial and sublime.
But periods of great convulsion are always distinguished by the ascendancy of master minds, which seem as if spontaneously cast up to lead the movement and impress their genius indelibly upon society. Bacon thus followed Luther, and amidst ignorance, prejudice, and error, planted the keystone of that philosophic arch, over which succeeding generations should pass to the temple of science and truth. Then arose Shakspere with the key of the passions in his hand, the lightning of truth in his mental eye, reading the universal heart of man, and fixing before the world, as if in eternal brass, its varying phases and characteristics. Then arose Spenser, the child of allegory and romance, with the muse of many coloured wings; and nearly coeval with them arose Machiavel and Tasso, the glory and yet the shame of Florence and of Italy,—the starry Galileo, and the facetious Montaigne.

From the period of Bacon downwards, the impulse given to science has been felt more or less throughout the world. Being confined, in its material benefits, mostly to Europe and the colonial possessions of European powers, it certainly, in all its scope, cannot claim universality. Nor, even in our own country, where it is most advanced, does it exercise that elevating power over the human mind, which many, a priori would anticipate. There are deteriorating effects, which spring from the popularization of science, and more recondite knowledge, which go far to prove that mind, even under the most favourable circumstances, cannot move onward to perfection.

When original inventions and discoveries are brought forth, and astonish, and even perplex by
their magnitude and utility the master minds that produced them, but little is left to future followers in the same track, but the exposition and enforcement of ascertained truths, and the practical application of beneficial doctrines. St. Paul and St. Peter enunciated no new doctrines. The thorough inductive method of Bacon has never been superseded. Newton is yet the acknowledged discoverer of the most profound and universal truths of physical science. Hobbes and Locke laid the foundations of the more recent schools of metaphysics. Their followers have merely transplanted their doctrines, expounded their principles, and published the results in various disguises and with copious illustrations. Following immediately after, political and ecclesiastical information, through their many avenues of transmission, have swelled the stream of knowledge, and hastened human progress, and borne man nearer the goal of his anticipated perfection. Every convulsion,—every revolution,—every war of opinions and principles, has been productive of great results. The conflicts preceding and immediately following the commonwealth and the English revolution,—the wars of the Fronde, and the volcanic revolution in France, were events and epochs from which a rapid progress of the peoples of those countries may be dated. In thinking for themselves they naturally sought after knowledge; and in proportion as they have advanced in knowledge, have their opinions and their voices been heard and respected by their rulers. And now, through their interference alone, all seems in a state of progress. Science and literature, like an intellectual deluge, sweeps over the land. Philo-
A WORKING MAN.

Sophy, which to the mass is a forbidding term, is now popularized. Poetry and belles lettres attract the attention of all. Colleges may still have exclusive tests, but colleges are only for the few. The walls of literary despotism are crumbling down,—the great landmarks of bigotry and prejudice are defaced. Philanthropy has unfurled its standard. Liberality of sentiment, and the practical adoption of mighty emancipating principles of truth, have enlightened, and tended to cause millions of minds to rejoice. Under our humanizing laws we see slavery abolished—the exclusive tests of party in a great measure overthrown—trade free from restrictive monopolies—war disarmed of half its ferocity—capital punishments all but expunged from the statute book—and a wider and deeper range of feeling and affection partially breaking down the old barriers of caste and social tyranny and proscription.

We are apt to forget, however, in contemplating our own advancement and greatness, that the amelioration of which we boast, is confined within narrow bounds, and that beyond our own country and France, parts of Germany, and America, and a few more favoured portions of the earth, the great mass of mankind are either stationary or retrogressive. An infinite progression to perfectibility, as previously mentioned, involves a necessary and uninterrupted progression. Have either ancient or modern nations so advanced? Are the dusky hordes of India in a state of perpetual progression? Are the hundreds of millions in China, partially repelling all inducement to a higher civilization, necessarily advancing? Turkey and Egypt, indeed, are at present slightly
moved;—but what grounds have we for expecting that the vast continent of Western Africa will start from its immobility and move uninterruptedly onward to civilization and perfection?

But even supposing that science and learning should, when universally understood and applied, ameliorate the natural condition of our race, in what degree would such knowledge affect their moral and social condition? The marvellous excellence of steamships and railroads, and the utility of machinery carried so high as in a great measure to supersede human labour in some departments of travel and industry, may, in some minds, induce the belief, that science will ultimately conquer all natural imperfections, and that the results of knowledge will have a beneficial effect on the side of a refined humanity. But does scientific perfection, even if that could be attained, necessarily involve moral perfection, or, in other words, has its progress always been attended by a corresponding increase of morality? Some of most distinguished philosophers have been as noted for their hatred of all religion and their want of humanity, as for their greatness of talent and genius. Some of our brightest literary stars have been paragons of vice. In truth, we frequently find, in the largest towns, and among the most refined classes, where we naturally look for the nearest approaches to perfectibility, vice and debauchery, seduction and ruin, as prominent as among the lower classes.

Again, we find, though true civilization is considered friendly to peace and progress, that the most civilized peoples and governments are as apt to plunge into war as the most ignorant and savage.
The alleged violation of some unimportant treaty, or an imagined insult to an ambassador, and through him to the government he represents, has often been the pretext for plunging nations into sanguinary wars, the rulers being, meanwhile, often the most refined and learned of their race. There are those who delight in warfare, despite the sufferings and the horrors it creates, or the many degrees it may be throwing the world back from greater approaches to perfectibility. When schools have been established to teach it as an art and practise it upon a mimic scale,—raising imaginary fortifications—casting imaginary trenches, and sapping imaginary walls, can we wonder that men of talent and fitting education should desire to practise it in reality and upon a greater scale? Who can wonder if, with great standing armies at command, and facilities for extensive operations ever ready, wily statesmen and ambitious soldiers should long for the tented field, the concussion of arms, and the shouts of victory? And surely if the spread of civilization, and a thorough and practical knowledge of the horrors of war, could prevent our own and neighbouring nations from indulging in it, Great Britain and France with all their boasted wisdom and experience might be expected to shun it for ever. Yet the opposite of this is the case.

Nations, in fact, as nations have no knowledge of humility. The higher their elevation in the scale of civilized states, the more determined they seem to make others respect their opinions, and bend to their mandates. Intolerance is not the produce of ignorance alone, but will be found as indigenous to
the soil of learning and civilization. In truth, broils and contentions are as common among the learned and ingenious, as among the vulgar and the rude. Men of ability will think for themselves; and if one phase of perfectibility be uniformity in sentiment and unity in action, it will be as vain to seek such coincidence among kings and statesmen, as among mechanics and farmers. It it be said that perfectibility may exist without uniformity of opinion regarding any creed, or object, or subject of speculation, then we argue that such is impossible, because inconsistent with human nature.

Ages of peace, also, when dreamers might expect the dawn of a millennial perfectibility, are fraught with their own peculiar evils. During war men’s minds are full and feverish with excitement; and for a time the more social affections seem crushed by the pressure of public affairs. Peace afterwards seems a narcotic. The public mind is but little engrossed with any excitable object, and ranges more at random. The passions are less concentrated and more prone to wander. Irregularity and destruction often occur. A community having thus few common points of attraction, or motives for united action, will seldom display a reciprocity of feeling; and amidst this tameness of public affairs, society, though essentially one, is split into divisions. Local factions are created. Parties and partizanship usurp the place of patriotism. Each is great in his little circle,—vain of his fancied superiority, and determined, like Diogenes, to suffer none to stand between him and the sun. The differences thus created, and the bad feelings excited, foster a coldness, a diffidence, and a
want of deferential respect, subversive of all social happiness, and promotive of the most narrow-minded selfishness.

If it be affirmed that political organization has always indicated a state of progression, we would beg to ask whether that has always been the case in China, in Turkey, Egypt, and other Mahometan states, and among the Hindoos, whose laws of caste have erected, more or less, barriers against all successful movement towards social and political amelioration? Nay, we may even go a step further and ask, whether political organization in some of the states of Europe, boasting of some civilization, has always been progressive? Are Russian serfs less crushed,—or is Russian freedom greater than during the reign of Peter the Great? Is social freedom under Austrian rule progressive? Is Italian independence advancing? In all these countries there is indeed motion, but little advancement. When expediency, and not political justice, reigns predominant in the cabinets of kings and statesmen, we may rest assured that the advancement of the people is an object but seldom entertained; and that the standard of perfectibility, according to them, is their placid subjection to the ruling powers, rather than their moral and intellectual elevation.

We are aware that there are evils which no governments or laws can cause or cure. Kings and governments are not the creators of evil, though often acting unjustly and tyrannically. The evil elements pervading them, pervade all alike. So long as the laws of a nation mark the mind and morals of a nation, the people, whoever be the rulers, reflect
and embody those laws. Men, therefore, in their individual capacities, and society, as an aggregate of such, must work out their own civilization. When men do nothing, and expect government to do everything, the complex machinery of society will stop or revolve backwards. The people not only form the basis of the great social pyramid, but possess the power which moves it; and in proportion as the members in every point of the scale strive to surpass their brethren in high and virtuous achievements, will the apex of the gigantic superstructure, adorned with the diadem of royalty and the sceptre of real power, appear more noble and magnificent.

What are termed the natural evils of the world arising in a great measure from causes over which we have no control, affect us but little. The moral evil pervading and permeating all human hearts,—all human affairs and institutions, and casting a deadly blight over society wherever existing, defies alike the empiricism of the politician, and the quack salve of the mere artificial moralist, because wholly uneradicable by mere human means. The world is growing old, and history and tradition tell us that of old human nature was the same; and what features does it present still in this most enlightened of countries and ages? Look, we would say, to the abysses of iniquity—the sloughs of pollution in which so many thousands of our fellow beings, boasting of civilization, and dreaming of perfectibility, still wallow! Look to the ground which imposture covers—which infidelity and atheism usurp! Look to the debauchee revelling in his sensuality—the harlot in her den of loathsome
iniquity—the swearer uttering his imprecations—the drunkard rolling in the streets—and the sabbath-breaker desecrating the sanctity of the sacred day! Look to the gaming table and the victims of its dire hallucinations! Go to the race course—go to the theatre—go to the masquerade, and see whether amidst the number of their votaries one will be found to whom, in a spiritual sense, the lightning of truth flashes not in vain! Go to their deluded votaries, and drawing back the curtain of fashion from their brazen front, and holding up the divine standard of moral truth to their view, and estimating the virtu of their actions by its measurement, see how pure virtue denuded of the mask of hypocrisy is a mere phantom; whilst guilt, disease, and pollution, throned in splendour upon her ruins, assume externally the guise and semblance of truth, and with the song of the syren and the poison of the serpent, lead, through their multiform fascinations, thousands to spiritual death and despair! Go and contemplate this immense aggregate of iniquity—this whirlpool of sin carrying myriads round its sweeping vortex, insensate and reckless, to everlasting ruin; and when considering that it has thus rolled for nearly six thousand years, say, whether, with a nature so perverse and blighted, we are progressing onwards to perfectibility.

Dr. Arnold affirms that unless the effusion of some new race into the elements of our northern civilization to elevate and strengthen its character, be effected, similar to that of the Goths and Huns into Roman society, or the combination of the Norman and Saxon races, we are in the last epoch
of the world's history; and he despairs of any existing race being capable of such amalgamation.* The accuracy of this opinion, however, we much question. The elements of progress among European nations have not been half developed; and if, as has been said, the ascendancy of commercial nations be limited to two hundred years, we have at least a century for further progress; and who can tell what revolutions may occur during that period, to raise and depress nations, and develope the latent elements of a higher civilization among ourselves and other less prosperous races! "We are young," says Lamartine, "we are hardly arrived at the age of virility. A new creation of ideas, of social forms, and of arts, will probably arise before many ages, out of the grand ruin of the middle age, which we ourselves are in. One feels that the moral world is charged with fruits, which it will produce in convulsions and grief. Ideas multiplied by the press, bring with them discussion, criticism, and examination everywhere; and by directing the light of intelligence to every point of fact, or speculation in the world, will lead on invincibly to the age of reason."†

It may be admitted that any attempts at metaphysical reasoning from the nature of mind itself, in favour either of or against the doctrine of perfectibility, is, at best, inconclusive. Limitation of the faculties may be considered an imperfection, but it is one of those wholly incurable in this state of

† Pilgrimage, vol. 2., p. 81.
nature, since, however elevated the Deity had chosen to create us, we must still have been limited, in comparison with his own incommunicable attributes. But mere limitation does not necessarily involve moral imperfection, because it is no contradiction to suppose the existence of beings of a higher nature and endowed with greater faculties than ourselves, and free from the alloy of evil; or to suppose of an era in existence when our original ancestors were exempt from sin, and in a state of moral perfection. Hence, so long as moral imperfection does not spring from the limitation of our faculties, no mere elevation of their nature nor superaddition to their number, could have raised us in the scale of infinite moral perfection, as we would still, however great our powers, have been at an infinite distance from the Creator. It is also certain that the organization of the faculties does not necessarily involve moral imperfection, since the supposition would endow the mere mental form or structure with what alone can belong to its essence or principle, and with motivity, which can alone spring from an intelligent free agent. Nor does man's material frame and contact with a world of matter necessarily involve moral imperfection, since that would also rob him of his free agency by charging all his defects and sins to the malignity of matter. Nor does the mere contact with other intelligent beings necessarily involve moral imperfection, since that would place all our lapses from truth and virtue to the account of others and not to ourselves; and in contradictory terms, charge communities of mankind with vices, not originally inherent in the constitution of each, and, hence, make all non-
responsible. All mankind are, therefore, limited in faculties, and imperfect and tending to evil, and the same arguments which show our natural and inherent imperfections, prove how abortive are all human attempts to arrive at perfectibility.

Where, then, does the chain of our argument lead us? Does it prove that ancient nations and dynasties have been permitted to pass over the stage of being, and blotted from the map, to prepare the seeds and hasten the progress of future perfectibility? Does it prove that modern revolutions, and the emancipation and diffusion of knowledge, have laid the basis of an actual regeneration of society? that the forms and structure of society itself are favourable to the full measure of perfectibility on earth? or that the nature and tendencies of mind support the dream-like theory? Alas! the opposite of all these is the case.

Still, amidst all that seems dark and demoralizing around us, and forbidding us to hope for ultimate perfectibility, we are naturally proud of our position among the nations of the world. But as national advancement as a whole, does not always comprise the equal advancement of individuals in the scale of prosperity and happiness, other causes than equal government—equal laws, and the impartial administration of political justice, as advocated by Godwin, and the universal diffusion of knowledge to enable men beforehand to judge of the consequences of their actions, must practically work out the grand problem of human perfectibility. We do not, like Leibnitz and his disciples in optimism, think this the best world that God could have created to be permissive
of evil, because the very supposition seems to place a curb upon his power; and, like many Sextus’s in guilt, he could have created many worlds differing in degrees of delinquency. We do not, like George Combe, attempt to trace the great bulk of our evils to ignorance of the natural laws, and, hence, look to a more thorough knowledge of physical cause and effect, as the prime means for our moral and social elevation. We do not, like Plato in his ideal republic, and Robert Owen in his “Book of the New Moral World,” expect to find a regenerating principle in man by extinguishing the natural affections, and substituting promiscuous licentiousness for the private home and the social hearth. We differ as widely from all these as from the French dreamers of the doctrine,—who would free the mind from the trammels of priestcraft and kingscraft by the diffusion of knowledge and philosophy, and yet, in strange contradiction to all, leave the animal instincts uncurbed and free,—who by improvements in medicine would immensely extend human longevity, to be followed by annihilation, instead of that immortality brought to light by the great Redeemer.

“Knowledge is power.” The aphorism is true in more points than one. It is the power for evil as well as for good. As the theorists of perfectibility consider it, their views can never be attained. Mere knowledge reflected from all around us, and universally applied, may partially civilize, but can never regenerate the inner man; and all true and lasting civilization must be fixed upon a moral and virtuous basis. Moral means alone can produce lasting moral effects; and moral, in union with physical well-being,
when drawing their strength from a spirit of true religion, can alone have a tendency to produce a true and permanent perfectibility. And when the primary basis of all education is thus impregnable and profound, the mastery of other auxiliary scientific and literary acquisitions will shine with increasing lustre and add ornament and grace to the temple of knowledge, then the the temple of truth. Thus did Newton and Grotius, Locke and Boyle, do it homage. Let but such principles actuate and guide mankind, and then shall true knowledge shine triumphant—then shall it tread the track of universal peace, leaving the stamp of the true golden age behind it,—then war, the offspring of ambition and ignorance, like an extinguished volcano, shall cease to shake the world with its sanguinary convulsions—then the sword shall be forged into the reaping hook, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb,—then all passions shall be subdued and hallowed, and a millennium, all but divinely perfect, shall be realized in the changed heart and aspects of the people of the world; and the philosopher's stone being found, and its transmuting qualities realized shall, in the guise of high and sacred knowledge, influence and direct the true moral interests of the world, and create in the now darkened purlicus of the human heart, and the abodes of men, a blooming paradise of intellectual, moral, and religious sweets.

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