

ulant and encouragement for him who has the soul to adopt it."*

But it is not great men only that have to be taken into account in estimating the qualities of a nation, but the character that pervades the great body of the people. When Washington Irving visited Abbotsford, Sir Walter Scott introduced him to many of his friends and favorites, not only among the neighboring farmers, but the laboring peasantry. "I wish to show you," said Scott, "some of our really excellent plain Scotch people. The character of a nation is not to be learnt from its fine folks, its fine gentlemen and ladies; such you meet everywhere, and they are everywhere the same." While statesmen, philosophers, and divines represent the thinking power of society, the men who found industries and carve out new careers, as well as the common body of working-people, from whom the national strength and spirit are from time to time recruited, must necessarily furnish the vital force and constitute the real backbone of every nation.

Nations have their character to maintain as well as individuals; and under constitutional governments—where all classes more or less participate in the exercise of political power—the national character will necessarily depend more upon the moral qualities of the many than of the few. And the same qualities which determine the character of individuals also determine the character of nations. Unless they are high-minded, truthful, honest, virtuous, and courageous, they will be held in light esteem by other nations, and be without weight in the world. To have character, they must needs also be reverential, disciplined, self-controll-

* "Blackwood's Magazine," June, 1863, art. Girolamo Savonarola.

ing, and devoted to duty. The nation that has no higher god than pleasure, or even dollars or calico, must needs be in a poor way. It were better to revert to Homer's gods than be devoted to these; for the heathen deities at least imaged human virtues, and were something to look up to.

As for institutions, however good in themselves, they will avail but little in maintaining the standard of national character. It is the individual men, and the spirit which actuates them, that determine the moral standing and stability of nations. Government, in the long run, is usually no better than the people governed. Where the mass is sound in conscience, morals, and habit, the nation will be ruled honestly and nobly. But where they are corrupt, self-seeking, and dishonest in heart, bound neither by truth nor by law, the rule of rogues and wire-pullers becomes inevitable.

The only true barrier against the depotism of public opinion, whether it be of the many or of the few, is enlightened individual freedom and purity of personal character. Without these **there can** be no vigorous manhood, no true liberty in a nation. Political rights, however broadly framed, will not **elevate a** people individually depraved. Indeed, the more **complete** a system of popular suffrage, the more perfect **its protection**, the more completely will the real character of a people be reflected, as by a mirror, in their laws and government. Political morality can never have any solid existence on a basis of individual immorality. Even freedom, exercised by a debased people, would come to be regarded as a nuisance, and liberty of the press but a vent for licentiousness and moral abomination.

Nations, like individuals, derive support and strength from the feeling that they belong to an illustrious race, that they are the heirs of their greatness, and ought to be the

perpetuators of their glory. It is of momentous importance that a nation should have a great past* to look back upon. It steadies the life of the present, elevates and upholds it, and lightens and lifts it up, by the memory of the great deeds, the noble sufferings, and the valorous achievements of the men of old. The life of nations, as of men, is a great treasury of experience, which, wisely issued, issues in social progress and improvement; or, misused, issues in dreams, delusions, and failure. Like men, nations are purified and strengthened by trials. Some of the most glorious chapters in their history are those containing the record of the sufferings by means of which their character has been developed. Love of liberty and patriotic feeling may have done much, but trial and suffering nobly borne more than all.

A great deal of what passes by the name of patriotism in these days consists of the merest bigotry and narrow-mindedness; exhibiting itself in national prejudice, national conceit, and national hatred. It does not show itself in deeds, but in boastings—in howlings, gesticulations, and shrieking helplessly for help—in flying flags and singing songs—and in perpetual grinding at the hurdy-gurdy of long-dead grievances and long-remedied wrongs. To be infested by *such* a patriotism as this is perhaps among the greatest curses that can befall any country.

* One of the last passages in the Diary of Dr. Arnold, written the year before his death, was as follows: "It is the misfortune of France that her 'past' can not be loved or respected—her future and her present can not be wedded to it; yet how can the present yield fruit, or the future have promise, except their roots be fixed in the past? The evil is infinite, but the blame rests with those who made the past a dead thing, out of which no healthful life could be produced."—*Life*, ii., 387, 388 (ed. 1858).

But as there is an ignoble, so is there a noble patriotism—the patriotism that invigorates and elevates a country by noble work—that does its duty truthfully and manfully—that lives an honest, sober and upright life, and strives to make the best use of the opportunities for improvement that present themselves on every side; and at the same time a patriotism that cherishes the memory and example of the great men of old, who, by their sufferings in the cause of religion or of freedom, have won for themselves a deathless glory, and for their nation those privileges of free life and free political institutions of which they are the inheritors and possessors.

Nations are not to be judged by their size any more than individuals:

"It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make Man better be."

For a nation to be great, it need not necessarily be big, though bigness is often confounded with greatness. A nation may be very big in point of territory and population, and yet be devoid of true greatness. The people of Israel were a small people, yet what a great life they developed, and how powerful the influence they have exercised on the destinies of mankind! Greece was not big: the entire population of Attica was less than that of South Lancashire. Athens was less populous than New York; and yet how great it was in art, in literature, in philosophy, and in patriotism!*

* A public orator lately spoke with contempt of the Battle of Marathon, because only 192 men perished on the side of the Athenians, whereas by improved mechanism and destructive chemicals, some 50,000 men or more may now be destroyed within a few hours. Yet

But it was the fatal weakness of Athens that its citizens had no true family or home life, while its freemen were greatly outnumbered by its slaves. Its public men were loose, if not corrupt, in morals. Its women, even the most accomplished, were unchaste. Hence its fall became inevitable, and was even more sudden than its rise.

In like manner, the decline and fall of Rome was attributable to the general corruption of its people, and to their engrossing love of pleasure and idleness—work, in the latter days of Rome, being regarded only as fit for slaves. Its citizens ceased to pride themselves on the virtues of character of their great forefathers; and the empire fell because it did not deserve to live. And so the nations that are idle and luxurious—that “will rather lose a pound of blood,” as old Burton says, “in a single combat, than a drop of sweat in any honest labor”—must inevitably die out, and laborious, energetic nations take their place.

When Louis XIV. asked Colbert how it was that, ruling so great and populous a country as France, he had been unable to conquer so small a country as Holland, the minister replied: “Because, sire, the greatness of a country does not depend upon the extent of its territory, but on the character of its people. It is because of the industry, the frugality, and the energy of the Dutch that your majesty has found them so difficult to overcome.”

It is also related of Spinola and Richardet, the ambassadors sent by the King of Spain to negotiate a treaty at the Hague in 1608, that one day they saw some eight or ten persons land from a little boat, and, sitting down upon the

the Battle of Marathon, and the heroism displayed in it, will probably continue to be remembered when the gigantic butchers of modern times have been forgotten.

grass, proceeded to make a meal of bread-and-cheese and beer. “Who are those travellers?” asked the ambassadors of a peasant. “These are our worshipful masters, the deputies from the States,” was his reply. Spinola at once whispered to his companion, “We must make peace; these are not men to be conquered.”

In fine, stability of institutions must depend upon stability of character. Any number of depraved units cannot form a great nation. The people may seem to be highly civilized, and yet be ready to fall to pieces at the first touch of adversity. Without integrity of individual character, they can have no real strength, cohesion, or soundness. They may be rich, polite, and artistic, and yet hovering on the brink of ruin. If living for themselves only, and with no end but pleasure—each little self his own little god—such a nation is doomed, and its decay is inevitable.

Where national character ceases to be upheld, a nation may be regarded as next to lost. Where it ceases to esteem and to practise the virtues of truthfulness, honesty, integrity, and justice, it does not deserve to live. And when the time arrives in any country when wealth has so corrupted, or pleasure so depraved, or faction so infatuated the people, that honor, order, obedience, virtue, and loyalty have seemingly become things of the past; then, amidst the darkness, when honest men—if, haply, there be such left—are grouping about and feeling for each other's hands, their only remaining hope will be in the restoration and elevation of Individual Character; for by that alone can a nation be saved; and if character be irrecoverably lost, then indeed there will be nothing left worth saving.