

is to endeavour to improve the mucous surfaces and the blood by the alteratives, and tonics. In this way we can do some good; but it can avail but little to labour by medicine to make the stomach fitter to digest good food, when the patient cannot procure such food.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

THIS Work has been written at intervals spared from professional duty, and amidst those distractions of thought which frequent interruptions occasion, and has been composed at distant intervals, during which my own opinions have undergone modification; so that it is probable there will be found some positions wanting in precise accuracy, or stated without the qualifications by which they ought to be accompanied. For defects of such a character I do not fear a harsh judgment, when the labour of collecting and classifying my materials is considered, exceeding as those materials do, any collection which I believe has ever before been made for a treatise on a single disease.

And now that the task I have undertaken has been brought to a conclusion, I would shortly allude to a question which has forced itself upon my attention, from the beginning to the end of the inquiries in which I have been engaged, namely: What is the influence of civilization upon the physical vigour of a people? There can be no question, I apprehend, that it tends to the preservation of weak and ailing members of the community, who would not be reared under less favoured circumstances, but who are thus made the parent stock from which families take root.

Although the materials which we possess, do not enable me to offer any positive evidence on that question; and although some of the results which have been indicated, in the preceding pages, would seem, at first sight, to favour an opposite conclusion, I entertain a strong belief that the races which now occupy the more enlightened countries of Europe, have physically degenerated, and that civilization, including as one of its agents, improved medical science, has contributed to that result. Under a less advanced civilization, the

weaker and least vigorous members of a community die off, in early life, and the more robust and healthy members alone are reared. In more advanced stages of social progress, however, the case is very different. In those states many weakly subjects are brought to maturity by intelligent care. And yet science, which has contributed to preserve the lives of the weak and ailing, can rarely give them vigorous health. When reared, they contribute to the spread of population, and not unfrequently give birth to children equally weak and ailing with themselves, if indeed their progeny do not evince even greater tendencies, to particular diseases, than the sickly parent.

Injurious influences such as these, it is true, are modified by various compensating agencies, such as intermarriage with persons of a robust and hardy frame, or other causes, and therefore operate slowly and imperceptibly, and can only be estimated by comparing the physical qualities of the same races at different and distant periods of their history. The rise and fall of nations testifies, however, as distinctly to physical decline as to moral and intellectual degeneracy, and however greatly the progress of science and the spread of knowledge may increase the resources of society and the power of communities, they will not always secure to the individual man a physical vigour like that which in the early history of nations, elevated so many men above the general level. And if it be said, that such a conclusion is humiliating to the pride of science, when engaged in the noblest of all her missions, as the handmaid of suffering humanity, the reflection will not be without a wholesome influence, since it tends to humble our pride and impress us with the salutary truth, that man's power to remove suffering, or to mitigate evil, is confined within very narrow limits.

The suggestion may occur, that when the physical degeneracy of the civilized nations of the world shall have again arrived, their vigour may be recruited, as in former ages, by the energy of barbarian tribes; but it was beautifully said by the late Dr. Arnold, that there are now no new continents peopled by youthful races, the destined restorers of our worn-out generations, that we have the full amount of earth's resources before us, and

they seem inadequate to supply life for a third period of human history. And the stirring application he makes of these truths is this, that if existing nations are the last reserve of the world, God's work on earth will be left undone, unless they do it.

