evil. If the career of politics be more open and the temptation to crowd it stronger, competition will spring up, numbers will engage in the pursuit; the less able, the less industrious, the less ambitious must retire and leave the race to the swift and the battle to the strong. But in hereditary governments no such remedy exists. One class of society, by the nature of its position, must be rulers, magistrates, or politicians. Weak or strong, willing or unwilling, they must play the game, though they, as well as the people, pay the bitter forfeit.

The obnoxious king can seldom shake off the empoisoned purple; he must wear the crown of thorns till it is struck off at the scaffold; and the same artificial necessity has obliged generations of nobles in all the old states of Europe to toil and bleed for a

"Power too great to keep or to resign."

Where the compulsion stops short of these afflicting extremities, still, under the governments in question, a large portion of the community is unavoidably destined to the calling of the courtier, the soldier, the party retainer; to a life of service, intrigue, and court attendance; and thousands, and those the prominent individuals in society, are brought up to look on a livelihood gained by private industry as base; on study as the pedant's trade, on labor as the badge of slavery.

I look in vain in institutions like these for anything essentially favorable to intellectual progress. On the contrary, while they must draw away the talent and ambition of the country quite as much as popular institutions can do it into pursuits foreign from the culture of the intellect, they necessarily doom to obscurity no small part of the mental energy of the land. For that mental energy has been equally diffused by sterner levellers than ever marched in the van of a

revolution; the nature of man and the Providence of God. Native character, strength, and quickness of mind are not of the number of distinctions and accomplishments that human institutions can monopolize within a city's walls. In quiet times they remain and perish in the obscurity to which a false organization of society consigns them. In dangerous, convulsed, and trying times they spring up in the fields, in the village hamlets, and on the mountain tops, and teach the surprised favorites of human law, that bright eyes, skilful hands, quick perceptions, firm purpose, and brave hearts, are not the exclusive appanage of courts.

Our popular institutions are favorable to intellectual improvement because their foundation is in dear nature. They do not consign the greater part of the social frame to torpidity and mortification. They send out a vital nerve to every member of the community by which its talents and power, great or small, are brought into living conjunction and strong sympathy with the kindred intellect of the nation; and every impression on every part vibrates with electric rapidity through the whole. They encourage nature to perfect her work; they make education, the soul's nutriment, cheap; they bring up remote and shrinking talent into the cheerful field of competition; in a thousand ways they provide an audience for lips which nature has touched with persuasion; they put a lyre into the hands of genius; they bestow on all who deserve it or seek it the only patronage worth having, the only patronage that ever struck out a spark of "celestial fire,"—the patronage of fair opportunity.

This is a day of improved education; new systems of teaching are devised; modes of instruction, choice of studies, adaptation of text-books, the whole machinery of means, have been brought in our day under severe revision. But were I to

attempt to point out the most efficacious and comprehensive improvement in education, the engine by which the greatest portion of mind could be brought and kept under cultivation, the discipline which would reach farthest, sink deepest, and cause the word of instruction, not to spread over the surface like an artificial hue carefully laid on, but to penetrate to the heart and soul of its objects, it would be popular institutions.

Give the people an object in promoting education, and the best methods will infallibly be suggested by that instinctive ingenuity of our nature which provides means for great and precious ends. Give the people an object in promoting education, and the worn hand of labor will be opened to the last farthing that its children may enjoy means denied to itself. This great contest about blackboards and sand-tables will then lose something of its importance, and even the exalted names of Bell and Lancaster may sink from that very lofty height where an over-hasty admiration has placed them.

But though it be conceded to us that the tendency which is alleged to exist in this country toward the political career is not a vicious effect of our free institutions, still it may be inquired whether the new form of social organization among us is at least to produce no corresponding modification of our literature? As the country advances, as the population becomes denser, as wealth accumulates, as the various occasions of a large, prosperous, and polite community call into strong action and vigorous competition the literary talent of the country, will no peculiar form or direction be given to its literature by the nature of its institutions? To this question an answer must without hesitation be given in the affirmative.

Literature as well in its origin as in its true and only genuine character is but a more perfect communication of man with man and mind with mind. It is a grave, sustained,

deliberate utterance of fact, of opinion, and feeling; or a free and happy reflection of nature, of characters, or of manners; and if it be not these it is poor imitation. It may therefore be assumed as certain that the peculiarity of our condition and institutions will be reflected in some peculiarity of our literature; but what that shall be it is as yet too early to say.

Literary history informs us of many studies which have been neglected as dangerous to existing governments, and many others which have been cultivated because they were prudent and safe. We have hardly the means of settling from analogy what direction the mind will most decisively take when left, under strong excitements, to action wholly without restraint from the arm of power. It is impossible to anticipate what garments our native muses will weave for themselves. To foretell our literature would be to create it.

There was a time before an epic poem, a tragedy, or a historical composition had ever been produced by the wit of man. It was a time of vast and powerful empires, of populous and wealthy cities. But these new and beautiful forms of human thought and feeling all sprang up in Greece under the stimulus of her free institutions. Before they appeared in the world it would have been idle for the philosopher to form conjectures as to the direction which the kindling genius of the age was to assume. He who could form could and would realize the anticipation, and it would cease to be an anticipation.

Assuredly epic poetry was invented then and not before, when the gorgeous vision of the Iliad, not in its full detail of circumstance, but in the dim conception of its leading scenes and sterner features, burst into the soul of Homer. Impossible, indeed, were the task fully to foretell the progress of

the mind under the influence of institutions as new, as peculiar, and far more animating than those of Greece.

But if, as no one will deny, our political system brings more minds into action on equal terms, if it provides a prompter circulation of thought throughout the community, if it gives weight and emphasis to more voices, if it swells to tens of thousands and millions those "sons of emulation who crowd the narrow strait where honor travels," then it seems not too much to expect some peculiarity at least, if we may not call it improvement, in that literature which is but the voice and utterance of all this mental action.

There is little doubt that the instrument of communication itself will receive great improvements; that the written and spoken language will acquire force and power; possibly that forms of address wholly new will be struck out to meet the universal demand for new energy. When the improvement or the invention (whatever it be) comes, it will come unlooked for, as well to its happy author as the world. But where great interests are at stake, great concerns rapidly succeeding each other, depending on almost innumerable wills, and yet requiring to be apprehended in a glance and explained in a word; where movements are to be given to a vast empire, not by transmitting orders, but by diffusing opinions, exciting feelings, and touching the electric chord of sympathy, there language and expression will become intense, and the old processes of communication must put on a vigor and a directness adapted to the aspect of the times.

Our country is called, as it is, practical; but this is the element for intellectual action. No strongly marked and high-toned literature, poetry, eloquence, or ethics, ever appeared but in the pressure, the din, and crowd of great interests, great enterprises, perilous risks, and dazzling rewards. Statesmen, and warriors, and poets, and orators, and artists, start up under one and the same excitement. They are all branches of one stock. They form, and cheer, and stimulate, and, what is worth all the rest, understand each other; and it is as truly the sentiment of the student in the recesses of his cell as of the soldier in the ranks which breathes in the exclamation:

> "To all the sons of sense proclaim,
> One glorious hour of crowded life
> Is worth an age without a name."

But we are brought back to the unfavorable aspect of the subject by being reminded out of history of the splendid patronage which arbitrary governments have bestowed on letters, and which, from the nature of the case, can hardly be extended even to the highest merit under institutions like our own.

We are told of the munificent pensions, the rich establishments, the large foundations; of the museums erected, the libraries gathered, the endowments granted, by Ptolemys, Augustuses, and Louises of ancient and modern days. We are asked to remark the fruit of this noble patronage; wonders of antiquarian or scientific lore, Thesauruses and Corpuses, efforts of erudition from which the emulous student who would read all things, weigh all things, surpass all things, recoils in horror; volumes and shelves of volumes before which meek-eyed patience folds her hands in despair.

When we have contemplated these things and turn our thoughts back to our poor republican land, to our frugal treasury and the caution with which it is dispensed; to our modest fortunes and the thrift with which they are hoarded; to our scanty public libraries and the plain brick walls within which they are deposited, we may be apt to form gloomy auguries of the influence of free political institutions on our

literature. It is important then that we examine more carefully the experience of former ages and see how far their institutions, as they have been more or less popular, have been more or less associated with displays of intellectual excellence. When we make this examination, we shall be gratified to find that the precedents are all in favor of liberty.

The greatest efforts of human genius have been made where the nearest approach to free institutions has taken place. There shone forth not one ray of intellectual light to cheer the long and gloomy ages of the Memphian and Babylonian despots. Not a historian, not an orator, not a poet is heard of in their annals. When you ask what was achieved by the generations of thinking beings, the millions of men whose natural genius was as bright as that of the Greeks, nay, who forestalled the Greeks in the first invention of many of the arts, you are told that they built the pyramids of Memphis, the temples of Thebes, and the tower of Babylon, and carried Sesostris and Ninus upon their shoulders from the west of Africa to the Indus.

Mark the contrast in Greece. With the first emerging of that country into the light of political liberty the poems of Homer appear. Some centuries of political misrule and literary darkness follow, and then the great constellation of their geniuses seems to rise at once. The stormy eloquence and the deep philosophy, the impassioned drama and the grave history, were all produced for the entertainment of that "fierce democratie" of Athens. Here then the genial influence of liberty on letters is strongly put to the test. Athens was certainly a free state—free to licentiousness, free to madness. The rich were arbitrarily pillaged to defray the expenses of the state, the great were banished to appease the envy of their

rivals, the wise sacrificed to the fury of the populace. It was a state, in short, where liberty existed with most of the imperfections which have led men to love and praise despotism. Still, however, it was for this lawless, merciless people that the most chastised and accomplished literature which the world has known was produced.

The philosophy of Plato was the attraction which drew to a morning's walk in the olive gardens of the academy the young men of this factious city. Those tumultuous assemblies of Athens, the very same which rose in their wrath and to a man, and clamored for the blood of Phocion, required to be addressed, not in the cheap extemporaneous rant of modern demagogues, but in the elaborate and thrice repeated orations of Demosthenes. No! the noble and elegant arts of Greece grew up in no Augustan age, enjoyed neither royal nor imperial patronage. Unknown before in the world, strangers on the Nile, and strangers on the Euphrates, they sprang at once into life in a region not unlike our own New England—iron-bound, sterile, and free.

The imperial astronomers of Chaldæ went up almost to the stars in their observatories; but it was a Greek who first foretold an eclipse and measured the year. The nations of the East invented the alphabet, but not a line has reached us of profane literature in any of their languages; and it is owing to the embalming power of Grecian genius that the invention itself has been transmitted to the world. The Egyptian architects could erect structures which after three thousand five hundred years are still standing in their uncouth original majesty; but it was only on the barren soil of Attica that the beautiful columns of the Parthenon and the Theseum could rest, which are standing also. With the decline of liberty in Greece began the decline of all her letters

and all her arts; though her tumultuous democracies were succeeded by liberal and accomplished princes.

Compare the literature of the Alexandrian with that of the Periclean age; how cold, pedantic, and imitative! Compare, I will not say, the axes, the eggs, the altars, and the other frigid devices of the pensioned wits in the museum at Alexandria, but compare their best spirits with those of independent Greece: Callimachus with Pindar, Lycophron with Sophocles, Aristophanes of Byzantium with Aristotle, and Apollonius the Rhodian with Homer. When we descend to Rome, to the Augustan age, the exalted era of Mæcenas, we find one uniform work of imitation, often of translation. The choicest geniuses seldom rise beyond a happy transfusion of the Grecian masters. Horace translates Alcæus, Terence translates Menander, Lucretius translates Epicurus, Virgil translates Homer and Cicero—I had almost said, translates Demosthenes and Plato.

But the soul of liberty did burst forth from the lips of Cicero, "her form had not yet lost all its original brightness," her inspiration produced in him the only specimens of a purely original literature, which Rome has transmitted to us. After him, their literary history is written in one line of Tacitus: "*gliscente adulatione, magna ingenia deterrebantur.*"[1] The fine arts revived a little under the princes of the Flavian house, but never rose higher than a successful imitation of the waning excellence of Greece. With the princes of this line, the arts of Rome expired, and Constantine the Great was obliged to tear down an arch of Trajan for sculptures, wherewithal to adorn his own.

In modern times civilized states have multiplied; political institutions have varied in different states and at different

[1] As adulation increased, great geniuses declined.

times in the same state; some liberal institutions have existed in the bosom of societies otherwise despotic; and a great addition of new studies has been made to the encyclopædia, which have all been cultivated by great minds, and some of which, as the physical and experimental sciences, have little or no direct connection with the state of liberty. These circumstances perplex in some degree the inquiry into the effect of free institutions on intellectual improvement in modern times. There are times and places where it would seem that the muses, both the gay and the severe, had been transformed into court ladies.

Upon the whole, however, the modern history of literature bears but a cold testimony to the genial influence of the governments under which it has grown up. Dante and Petrarch composed their beautiful works in exile; Boccaccio complains in the most celebrated of his that he was transfixed with the darts of envy and calumny; Machiavelli was pursued by the party of the Medici for resisting their tyrannical designs; Guicciardini retired in disgust to compose his history in voluntary exile; Galileo confessed in the prisons of the Inquisition that the earth did not move; Ariosto lived in poverty; and Tasso died in want and despair.

Cervantes, after he had immortalized himself in his great work, was obliged to write on for bread. The whole French Academy was pensioned to crush the great Corneille. Racine, after living to see his finest pieces derided as cold and worthless, died of a broken heart. The divine genius of Shakespeare raised him to no higher rank than that of a subaltern actor in his own and Ben Jonson's plays. The immortal Chancellor was sacrificed to the preservation of a worthless minion, and is said (falsely I trust) to have begged a cup of beer in his old age, and begged it in vain. The most valuable of the

pieces of Selden were written in that famous resort of great minds, the Tower of London. Milton, surprised by want in his infirm old age, sold the first production of the human mind for five pounds. The great boast of English philosophy was expelled from his place in Oxford and kept in banishment, "the king having been given to understand," to use the words of Lord Sunderland, who ordered the expulsion, "that one Locke has, upon several occasions, behaved himself very factiously against the government." Dryden sacrificed his genius to the spur of immediate want. Otway was choked with a morsel of bread too ravenously swallowed after a long fast. Jonson was taken to prison for a debt of five shillings; and Burke petitioned for a professorship at Glasgow and was denied.

When we survey these facts and the innumerable others of which these are not even an adequate specimen we may perhaps conclude that in whatever way the arbitrary governments of Europe have encouraged letters it has not been in that of a steady cheering patronage. We may think there is abundant reason to acknowledge that the ancient lesson is confirmed by modern experience, and that popular institutions are most propitious to the full and prosperous growth of intellectual excellence.

If the perfectly organized system of liberty which here prevails be thus favorable to intellectual progress, various other conditions of our national existence are not less so, particularly the extension of one language, government, and character over so vast a space as the United States of America. Hitherto, in the main, the world has seen but two forms of social existence, free governments in small states and arbitrary governments in large ones. Though various shades of both have appeared at different times in the world, yet on the

whole, the political ingenuity of man has never found out the mode of extending liberal institutions beyond small districts, or of governing large empires by any other means than the visible demonstration and exercise of absolute power. The effect in either case has been unpropitious to the growth of intellectual excellence.

Free institutions, though favorable to the growth of intellectual excellence, are not the only thing needed. The wandering savage is free, but most of the powers of his mind lie dormant under the severe privations of a barbarous life. An infant colony on a distant coast may be free, but for want of the necessary mental aliment and excitement, may be unable to rise above the limits of material existence. In order then that free institutions may have their full and entire effect in producing the highest attainable degree of intellectual improvement, they require to be established in an extensive region and over a numerous people. This constitutes a state of society entirely new among men; a vast empire whose institutions are wholly popular.

While we experience the genial influence of those principles which belong to all free states, and in proportion as they are free; independence of thought and the right of expressing it; we are to feel in this country, we and those who succeed us, all that excitement which in various ways arises from the reciprocal action upon each other of the parts of a great empire. Literature, as has been partly hinted, is the voice of the age and the state. The character, energy, and resources of the country are reflected and imaged forth in the conceptions of its great minds. They are the organs of the time; they speak not their own language, they scarce think their own thoughts; but under an impulse like the prophetic enthusiasm of old they must feel and utter the sentiments which