

society inspires. They do not create, they obey the Spirit of the Age; the serene and beautiful spirit descended from the highest heaven of liberty, who laughs at our little preconceptions, and, with the breath of his mouth, sweeps before him the men and the nations that cross his path.

By an unconscious instinct the mind in the strong action of its powers adapts itself to the number and complexion of the other minds with which it is to enter into communion or conflict. As the voice falls into the key which is suited to the space to be filled, the mind, in the various exercises of its creative faculties, strives with curious search for that master-note which will awaken a vibration from the surrounding community, and which, if it do not find, it is itself too often struck dumb.

For this reason, from the moment in the destiny of nations that they descend from their culminating point and begin to decline, from that moment the voice of creative genius is hushed, and at best, the age of criticism, learning, and imitation succeeds. When Greece ceased to be independent, the forum and the stage became mute. The patronage of Macedonian, Alexandrian, and Pergamean princes was lavished in vain. They could not woo the healthy muses of Hellas from the cold mountain tops of Greece to dwell in their gilded halls. Nay, though the fall of greatness, the decay of beauty, the waste of strength, and the wreck of power have ever been among the favorite themes of the pensive muse, yet not a poet arose in Greece to chant her own elegy; and it is after nearly three centuries and from Cicero and Sulpicius, that we catch the first notes of pious and pathetic lamentation over the fallen land of the arts. The freedom and genius of a country are invariably gathered into a common tomb, and there

"Can only strangers breathe
The name of that which was beneath."

It is when we reflect on this power of an auspicious future that we realize the prospect which smiles upon the intellect of America. It may justly be accounted the great peculiarity of ancient days compared with modern that in antiquity there was, upon the whole, but one civilized and literary nation at a time in the world. Art and refinement followed in the train of political ascendancy, from the East to Greece and from Greece to Rome.

In the modern world, under the influence of various causes, intellectual, political, and moral, civilization has been diffused throughout the greater part of Europe and America. Now mark a singular fatality as regards the connection of this enlarged and diffused civilization with the progress of letters and the excitement to intellectual exertion in any given state. Instead of one sole country, as in antiquity, where the arts and refinements find a home, there are, in modern Europe, seven or eight equally entitled to the general name of cultivated nations, and in each of which some minds of the first order have appeared. And yet, by the unfortunate multiplication of languages, an obstacle all but insuperable has been thrown in the way of the free progress of genius in its triumphant course from region to region. The muses of Shakespeare and Milton, of Camoens, of Lope de Vega, and Calderon, of Corneille and Racine, of Dante and Tasso, of Goethe and Schiller, are strangers to each other.

This evil was so keenly felt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the Latin language was widely adopted as a dialect common to scholars. We see men like Luther, Calvin, and Erasmus, Bacon, Grotius, and Thuanus, who could scarce have written a line without exciting the admiration of their contemporaries, driven to the use of a tongue which none but the learned could understand.

For the sake of addressing the scholars of other countries these great men and others like them, in many of their writings, were obliged to cut themselves off from all sympathy with the mass of those whom as patriots they must have wished most to instruct. In works of pure science and learned criticism this is of less consequence, for being independent of sentiment it matters less how remote from real life the symbols in which their ideas are conveyed. But when we see a writer like Milton, who more than any other whom England ever produced, was a master of the music of his native tongue, who, besides all the eloquence of thought and imagery, knew better than any other man how to clothe them according to his own beautiful expression,—

“In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness, long drawn out,
With wanton heed and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running,
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony;”

—when we see a master of English eloquence thus gifted choosing a dead language, the dialect of the closet, a tongue without an echo from the hearts of the people, as the vehicle of his defence of that people's rights; asserting the cause of Englishmen in the language, as it may be truly called, of Cicero, we can only measure the incongruity by reflecting what Cicero would himself have thought and felt if called to defend the cause of Roman freedom, not in the language of the Roman citizen, but in that of the Chaldeans or Assyrians, or some people still farther remote in the history of the world.

There is little doubt that the prevalence of the Latin language among modern scholars was a great cause not only of the slow progress of letters among the lower ranks, but of the stiffness and constraint formerly visible in the vernacular style of most scholars themselves. That the reformation in

religion advanced with such rapidity is doubtless in no small degree to be attributed to the translation of the Scriptures and the use of liturgies in the modern tongues. While the preservation in England of a strange language—I will not sin against the majesty of Rome by calling it Latin—in legal acts, down to so late a period as 1730, may be one cause that the practical forms of administering justice have not been made to keep pace with the popular views that have triumphed in other things.

With the erection of popular institutions under Cromwell, among various other legal improvements, very many of which were speedily adopted by our plain-dealing forefathers, the records of the law were ordered to be kept in English; “a novelty,” says the learned commentator on the English laws, “which at the Restoration was no longer continued, practisers having found it very difficult to express themselves so concisely or significantly in any other language but Latin;” an argument for the use of that language whose soundness it must be left to clients to estimate.

Nor are the other remedies more efficacious which have been attempted for the evil of a multiplicity of tongues. Something is done by translations and something by the acquisition of foreign languages. But that no effectual transference of the higher literature of a country can take place in the way of translation is matter of notoriety; and it is a remark of one of the few who could have courage to make such a remark, Madame de Staël, that it is impossible fully to comprehend the literature of a foreign tongue.

The general preference given to Young's “Night Thoughts” and Ossian over all the other English poets, in many parts of the continent of Europe, seems to confirm the justice of the observation. There is, indeed, an influence of exalted genius

co-extensive with the earth. Something of its power will be felt in spite of the obstacles of different languages, remote regions, and other times. But its true empire, its lawful sway, are at home and over the hearts of kindred men. A charm which nothing can borrow, nothing counterfeit, nothing dispense with, resides in the simple sound of our mother tongue.

Not analyzed nor reasoned upon it unites the earliest associations of life with the maturest conceptions of the understanding. The heart is willing to open all its avenues to the language in which its infantile caprices were soothed; and by the curious efficacy of the principal association it is this echo from the feeble dawn of life which gives to eloquence much of its manly power and to poetry much of its divine charm. This feeling of the music of our native language is the first intellectual capacity that is developed in children, and when by age or misfortune

"The ear is all unstrung,
Still, still, it loves the lowland tongue."

What a noble prospect is opened in this connection for the circulation of thought and sentiment in our country! Instead of that multiplicity of dialect by which mental communication and sympathy are cut off in the old world a continually expanding realm is opened and opening to American intellect in the community of our language throughout the widespread settlements of this continent. The enginery of the press will here for the first time be brought to bear with all its mighty power on the minds and hearts of men, in exchanging intelligence and circulating opinions, unchecked by the diversity of language, over an empire more extensive than the whole of Europe.

And this community of language, all important as it is, is but a part of the manifold brotherhood which unites and will unite the growing millions of America. In Europe, the worl

of international alienation which begins in diversity of language is carried on and consummated by diversity of government, institutions, national descent, and national prejudices. In crossing the principal rivers, channels, and mountains in that quarter of the world, you are met, not only by new tongues, but by new forms of government, new associations of ancestry, new and generally hostile objects of national boast and gratulation. While on the other hand, throughout the vast regions included within the limits of our republic not only the same language, but the same laws, the same national government, the same republican institutions, and a common ancestral association prevail and will diffuse themselves.

Mankind will here exist, move, and act in a kindred mass such as was never before congregated on the earth's surface. The necessary consequences of such a cause overpower the imagination. What would be the effect on the intellectual state of Europe at the present day were all her nations and tribes amalgamated into one vast empire, speaking the same tongue, united into one political system, and that a free one, and opening one broad unobstructed pathway for the interchange of thought and feeling from Lisbon to Archangel!

If effects are to bear a constant proportion to their causes; if the energy of thought is to be commensurate with the masses which prompt it and the masses it must penetrate; if eloquence is to grow in fervor with the weight of the interests it is to plead, and the grandeur of the assemblies it addresses; if efforts rise with the glory that is to crown them; in a word, if the faculties of the human mind, as we firmly believe, are capable of tension and achievement altogether indefinite,

"Nil actum reputans, dum quid superesset agendum."¹

then it is not too much to say that a new era will open on

¹"Counting nothing done as long as something still remained to be done."

the intellectual world in the fulfilment of our country's prospects.

By the sovereign efficacy of the partition of powers between the national and State governments, in virtue of which the national government is relieved from all the odium of internal administration, and the State governments are spared the conflicts of foreign politics, all bounds seem removed from the possible extension of our country but the geographical limits of the continent. Instead of growing cumbrous, as it increases in size, there never was a moment since the first settlement of Virginia, when the political system of America moved with so firm and bold a step as at the present day. If there is any faith in our country's auspices this great continent, in no remote futurity, will be filled up with a homogeneous population; with the mightiest kindred people known in history; our language will acquire an extension which no other ever possessed; and the empire of the mind, with nothing to resist its sway, will attain an expansion of which as yet we can but partly conceive.

The vision is too magnificent to be fully borne; a mass of two or three hundred millions, not chained to the oar like the same number in China by a brutalizing despotism, but held in their several orbits of nation and State by the grand representative attraction; bringing to bear on every point the concentrated energy of such a host; calling into competition so many minds; uniting into one great national feeling the hearts of so many freemen; all to be guided, persuaded, moved and swayed, by the master-spirits of the time!

Let me not be told that this is a chimerical imagination of a future indefinitely removed; let me not hear repeated the ribaldry of an anticipation of "two thousand years"—of a vision that requires for its fulfilment a length of ages beyond

the grasp of any reasonable computation. It is the last point of peculiarity in our condition to which I invite your attention as affecting the progress of intellect in the country, that it is growing with a rapidity hitherto entirely without example in the world. For the two hundred years of our existence the population has doubled itself in periods of less than a quarter of a century. In the infancy of the country, and while our numbers remained within the limits of a youthful colony, a progress so rapid as this, however important in the principle of growth disclosed, was not yet a circumstance strongly to fix the attention.

But arrived at a population of ten millions, it is a fact of the most overpowering interest that within less than twenty-five years these ten millions will have swelled to twenty; that the younger members of this audience will be citizens of the largest civilized State on earth; that in a few years more than one century the American population will equal the fabulous numbers of the Chinese empire.

This rate of increase has already produced the most striking phenomena. A few weeks after the opening of the revolutionary drama at Lexington, the momentous intelligence that the first blood was spilt reached a party of hunters beyond the Alleghanies who had wandered far into the western wilderness. In prophetic commemoration of the glorious event, they gave the name of Lexington to the spot of their encampment in the woods. That spot is now the capital of a State larger than Massachusetts; it is the seat of a university as fully attended as our venerable Alma Mater; nay, more, it is the capital of a State from which, in the language of one of her own citizens, whose eloquence is the ornament of his country, the tide of emigration still farther westward is more fully pouring than from any other in the Union.

I need not say that this astonishing increase of numbers is by no means the limit and measure of our country's growth. Arts, agriculture, all the great national interests, all the sources of national wealth, are growing in a ratio still more rapid. In our cities the intensest activity is apparent; in the country every spring of prosperity from the smallest improvement in husbandry to the construction of canals across the continent is in vigorous action; abroad our vessels are beating the pathways of the ocean white; on the inland frontier the nation is journeying on like a healthy giant with a pace more like romance than reality.

These facts, and thousands like them, form one of those peculiarities in our country's condition which will have the most powerful influence on the minds of its children. The population of several states of Europe has reached its term. In some it is declining, in some stationary, and in the most prosperous, under the extraordinary stimulus of the last part of the eighteenth century, it doubles itself but about once in seventy-five years. In consequence of this the process of social transmission is heavy and slow. Men, not adventitiously favored, come late into life, and the best years of existence are exhausted in languishing competition.

The man grows up, and in the stern language of one of their most renowned economists, Mr. Malthus, finds no cover laid for him at Nature's table. The smallest official provision is a boon at which great minds are not ashamed to grasp; the assurance of the most frugal subsistence commands the brightest talents and the most laborious studies; poor wages pay for the unremitted labor of the most curious hands; and it is the smallest part of the population only that is within the reach even of these humiliating springs of action.

We need not labor to contrast this state of things with the

teeming growth and noble expansion of all our institutions and resources. Instead of being shut up, as it were, in the prison of a stationary or a very slowly progressive community, the emulation of our countrymen is drawn out and tempted on by a horizon constantly receding before them.

New nations of kindred freemen are springing up in successive periods, shorter even than the active portion of the life of man. "While we spend our time," says Burke on this topic, "in deliberating on the mode of governing two millions in America, we shall find we have millions more to manage." Many individuals are in this house who were arrived at years of discretion when these words of Burke were uttered, and the two millions which Great Britain was then to manage have grown into ten, exceedingly unmanageable. The most affecting view of this subject is that it puts it in the power of the wise, and good, and great to gather while they live the ripest fruits of their labors.

Where in human history is to be found a contrast like that which the last fifty years have crowded into the lives of those favored men, who raising their hands or their voices when our little bands were led out to the perilous conflict with one of the most powerful empires on earth have lived to be crowned with the highest honors of the republic which they established? Honor to their gray hairs, and peace and serenity to the evening of their eventful days!

Though it may never again be the fortune of our country to bring within the compass of half a century a contrast so dazzling as this, yet in its grand and steady progress the career of duty and usefulness will be run by all its children under a constantly increasing stimulus. The voice which in the morning of life shall awaken the patriotic sympathy of the land will be echoed back by a community, incalculably

swelled in all its proportions, before it shall be hushed in death. The writer by whom the noble features of our scenery shall be sketched with a glowing pencil, the traits of our romantic early history gathered up with filial zeal, and the peculiarities of our character seized with delicate perception, cannot mount so entirely and rapidly to success but that ten years will add new millions to the numbers of his readers. The American statesman, the orator whose voice is already heard in its supremacy from Florida to Maine, whose intellectual empire already extends beyond the limits of Alexander's, has yet new states and new nations starting into being, the willing tributaries to his sway.

This march of our population westward has been attended with consequences in some degree novel in the history of the human mind. It is a fact, somewhat difficult of explanation, that the refinement of the ancient nations seemed almost wholly devoid of an elastic and expansive principle.

The arts of Greece were enchained to her islands and her coasts, they did not penetrate the interior. The language and literature of Athens were as unknown to the north of Pindus at a distance of two hundred miles from the capital of Grecian refinement as they were in Scythia. Thrace, whose mountain tops may almost be seen from the porch of the temple of Minerva at Sunium, was the proverbial abode of barbarism. Though the colonies of Greece were scattered on the coasts of Italy, of France, of Spain, and of Africa, no extension of their population toward the interior took place, and the arts did not penetrate beyond the walls of the cities where they were cultivated. How different is the picture of the diffusion of the arts and improvement of civilization from the coast to the interior of America!

Population advances westward with a rapidity which num-

bers may describe indeed but cannot represent with any vivacity to the mind. The wilderness, which one year is impassable is traversed the next by the caravans of the industrious emigrants, who go to follow the setting sun, with the language, the institutions, and the arts of civilized life. It is not the irruption of wild barbarians come to visit the wrath of God on a degenerate empire; it is not the inroad of disciplined banditti, marshalled by the intrigues of ministers and kings. It is the human family led out to possess its broad patrimony.

The states and nations which are springing up in the valley of the Missouri are bound to us by the dearest ties of a common language, a common government, and a common descent. Before New England can look with coldness on their rising myriads she must forget that some of the best of her own blood is beating in their veins; that her hardy children with their axes on their shoulders have been literally among the pioneers in this march of humanity; that young as she is she has become the mother of populous states.

What generous mind would sacrifice to a selfish preservation of local preponderance the delight of beholding civilized nations rising up in the desert; and the language, the manners, the institutions, to which he has been reared carried with his household gods to the foot of the Rocky Mountains? Who can forget that this extension of our territorial limits is the extension of the empire of all we hold dear; of our laws, of our character, of the memory of our ancestors, of the great achievements in our history? Whithersoever the sons of the thirteen States shall wander, to southern or western climes, they will send back their hearts to the rocky shores, the battle fields, and the intrepid counsels of the Atlantic coast. These are placed beyond the reach of vicissitude.