

"More than once in the chequered experiences of mankind there have been analogous epidemics of enthusiasm. Ideas have taken possession of enormous masses of people, calling themselves sacred, sweeping all before them for generations and ending in the sands like African rivers. For two hundred years the noblest part of Europe was persuaded that its highest duty was to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens. The ineffectual effort cost Christendom six million lives, and the nations woke out of their delusion to find that the Holy Sepulchre could not be rescued from the Saracens, and that the duties of English, French, Germans, and Burgundians lay at home and not in Syria. Generosity of intention cannot conquer facts, and enterprises inspired by passion and unguided by wisdom stand in history as monuments of folly. I sometimes think that this great wave of universal emancipation is not unlike the Crusades, a generous idea, taken up with impetuosity, decorated with fine flowers of rhetoric—but flowers which are but blossoms only, and will never set into fruit. I cannot find in history an encouragement to hope that on this road lies the way to regeneration. I, for my own part, will not make history answerable for what I cannot see that it teaches. Statistics, it is said, will prove anything, if you take only what makes for what you wish and leave out the rest. To me the entire theory of political progress is without interest. I do not find that liberty in the modern sense of the word raises the character either of individuals or nations: and if our existence on this planet has any meaning at all, the effect on character is the chief thing to be considered. The only true progress is moral progress.

"There have been great men and good men under monarchies, aristo-

cracies, republics, and limited democracies; but not more under one than under the other. I regard them all as accidental and unimportant varieties of the forms which society assumes. The sum of all is in Pope's line—

"What'er is best administered is best.

"Leaving historical theories, then we may turn to the less ambitious narratives. Here we should be on firmer ground, for we are rid of inferences, and have to do only with supposed facts. I have still, however, to say supposed facts, for the writers on whom we depend were subject to the prejudices of their own times, and we who study them have prejudices of our own which appear in the form in which we re-tell their stories. We speak of the mythic periods of history and we fancy we live in clearer daylight. We might as easily escape from our shadows. All history is mythic. Our knowledge of one another is mythic. Our knowledge is of everything is mythic, for in every act of perception we contribute something of our own. No two persons describe alike a scene which both have witnessed.

"Anecdotes, generally discredits able, gather round eminent men. One person believes such anecdote because he is constitutionally inclined to doubt the virtues of eminent man; another disbelieves for the opposite reason; but the unfavourable verdict usually carries the day. Stories of this kind are generally pungent. The most pungent are probably the most false; but they pass into history because they serve to amuse; and when they refer to persons who lived long ago, great writers, who admire their own time, adopt them for the sake of contrast. Macaulay is a great offender in this respect, and almost always takes an unfavourable interpretation of the conduct of a man