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## ANCIENT AND MODERN CIVILIZATION.

FIRST PRIZE ESSAY, JUNE, 1879—BY A. LAWSON, MEMBER OF UPPER 5TH FORM, AGED 16.

WHEN we read the history of by-gone empires, and the pictures of their magnificence and power are passed before the mind in succession, first, the crude, yet stately monuments of Egyptian grandeur, then passing in pompous brilliancy the regal splendor of Assyria's courts, followed by the classic refinement of intellectual Greece, and the undying glory of Imperial Rome, we are apt to form an opinion of ancient civilization prejudicial to that of modern times ; and this error—for it is an error—is the more easily fallen into because of the deep contrast it makes with the darkness and ignorance of the middle ages ; while on the other hand, there are some who, without attempting either to appreciate the greatness of the ancients, or to examine the defects of modern progress, come to the conclusion that we have arrived at the acme of perfect civilization, and proclaim their opinions accordingly. We shall notice briefly a few of the leading features of ancient and modern civilization ; and while it may be evident that the modern is greatly superior to the ancient, we will endeavor to show that the latter is by no means to be despised, but that it has many points well worthy the study, if not the imitation of our own age.

In attempting to form a correct

estimate of the social progress of a people, there are three considerations presented to the mind, viz :—their physical surroundings, their religion and their education ; for, under these general heads may be classified all the circumstances which can possibly affect the mental, moral, or physical improvement of man.

By the expression physical surroundings (which we use for want of a better), we wish to refer not so much to man's position with regard to geographical and climatic influences, as to the extent to which he has controlled and made use of the otherwise latent forces of nature ; for, although the geographical position of a country exerts a great influence on the social condition of its inhabitants, yet this would enter rather into an investigation of the comparative civilization of two contemporary nations, than that of two separate ages in the world's history. Leaving therefore, this part of the question, we shall proceed to consider the relation between social progress and man's control of the forces of nature. It has been said, that the civilization of a country has a strong tendency to vary directly as the length of its coast line. Now, for whatever truth there may be in this theory there is only one assignable cause, viz : that those countries