

a new epoch and completing an old one, did we but know it, on the first day of every year we live, nay at the rising and the setting of every sun.

But, though a century be an arbitrary period, as purely conventional as a yard or a mile, and though every century has a hundred characters of its own, and as many lives and as many results, we must for convenience take note of conventional limits, and fix our attention on special features as the true physiognomy of an epoch. History altogether is a wilderness, till we parcel it out into sections more or less arbitrary, choosing some class of facts out of the myriads that stand recorded, steadily turning our eyes from those which do not concern our immediate purpose. And so, we can think of a century as in some sort a definite whole, in some sense inspired with a definite spirit, and leading to a set of definite results. And we are quite right in so doing, provided we keep a watchful and balanced mind, in no mechanical way, and in no rhetorical or moralizing mood, but in order to find what is general, dominant, and central.

If we seek for some note to mark off the eighteenth from all other centuries, we shall find it in this; it was the time of final maturing the great revolution in Europe, the mightiest change in all human history. By revolution we mean, not the blood-stained explosion and struggle in France, which was little but one of its symptoms and incidents, but that resettlement of modern life common to all parts of the civilized world; which was at once religious, intellectual, scientific, social, moral, political, and industrial; a resettlement whereon the whole fabric of human society in the future is destined to rest. The era as a whole (so far from being trivial, sceptical, fraudulent, or suicidal) was, in all its central and highest moments, an era of hope, enterprise, industry,

and humanity; full of humane eagerness for improvement, trusting human nature, and earnestly bent on human good. It sadly miscalculated the difficulties and risks, and it strangely undervalued the problems it attempted to solve with so light a heart. Instead of being really the decrepit monster among the ages, it was rather the *naif* and confident youngster. The work of political reformation on which it engaged in a spirit of artless benevolence brought down on its head a terrible rebuff; and it left us thereby a heritage of confusion and strife. But the hurly-burly at Versailles and the Reign of Terror are no more the essence of the eighteenth century, than the Irish atrocities and the Commune of Paris are the essence of the nineteenth. Political chaos, rebellions, and wars are at most but a part of a century's activity, and sometimes indeed but a small part.

In the core, the epoch was hearty, manly, humane; second to none in energy, mental, practical, and social; full of sense, work, and good fellowship. Its manliness often fattened into grossness; soon to show new touches of exquisite tenderness. Its genius for enterprise plunged it into changes, and prepared for us evils which it little foresaw. But the work was all undertaken in genuine zeal for the improvement of human life. If its poetry was not of the highest of all orders, the century created a new order of poetry. If its art was on the whole below the average, in the noble art of music it was certainly supreme. In philosophy, science, moral and religious truth, it was second to none that went before. In politics it ended in a most portentous catastrophe. But the very catastrophe resulted from its passion for truth and reform. Nor is it easy for us now to see how the catastrophe could have been avoided, even if we see our way to avoid such