

merce, and that wealth grants to its possessors the boon of leisure, that a new turn is given to public taste, that the nation, conscious at last of its own successful progress, deems that the time is come to have its name recorded on as fair a page as that which chronicles the glory of preceding or contemporary powers, and certain spirits, always ready for the exigency of every time, step forward with new-born alacrity, and the literary void is soon filled by those emulous to follow in their track, and earn the same applause which greeted the efforts of the first pioneers.

No nation, even in its earliest stages, was wholly destitute of some description of literary pretension. With the people of antiquity, the wandering Bards and strolling chroniclers of love, war, or wine, founded the rude and imperfect foundation of a future literature. In a new population of the present age, such a class is represented by the newspaper and periodical press, which finds its way into almost every civilized community, almost contemporaneously with its earliest existence, and for many years, longer or shorter according to the peculiar genius of the people, forms the ephemeral but only record or comment of the acts, character, or manners around it. The nations that have been longest in moulding to maturity their various elements of greatness, who have had the fiercest struggles, not only with external foes, but within themselves before their policy had assumed a settled shape, or Government become stable or permanent, have seen the longest period elapse before the arts and learning dared to raise their timid heads above the stormy multitude. The Russian, occupying a third of the Continent of Europe, has only within the last fifty years, since civilization began to assert her empire over barbarism, given any important addition to the general literature of mankind. Spain, torn for centuries by Moorish invasion and internal tumult, has been almost equally backward. Portugal has made still fewer advances. Take away from both half a dozen such names as Cervantes or Camoens, and their literary annals are a blank. Wealth and leisure, two legitimate descendants of successful industry, must be found before a nation exhibits either of the two classes, authors or their patrons. Startling exceptions may doubtless be found to this rule, but experience fully warrants the generality in its statement.

The early existence of a Colony presents an interesting field to the observer of the rise and progress of national literature. When a number of the inhabitants of an old nation abandon their homes, and emigrate across an ocean to a virgin country, they of course bring with them the leading characteristics of their father-land. Language, religion, peculiar opinions, generally remain unchanged: but many of the minor details of thought and custom are left behind in the land they grew in. Popular superstitions are abandoned with the local altars of their ancient faith; opinions and beliefs never thoroughly tested by reason, and merely kept alive by the constant presence of particular natural objects or conventional usages, cannot bear the rude transplanting to a strange soil,—and the emigrant in his new abode, while yet the same man, feels himself almost wholly freed from the “diminutive chains of habit” which once bound him as strongly as the tiny needles of Lilliput held down the struggling Gulliver.

We all are aware how strongly every national literature is tinctured and imbued with the spirits of its early superstitions, the quaint fancies or stirring recollections of local usages and conventional habits. A Colony torn from its former homes, and placed in the antipodes, abandons or forgets all these, and while retaining sufficient of the parental impress to warrant its legitimacy, invariably commences a new social existence, and enters on a new era of recollection, thought, and feeling.

The United States present a striking instance in illustration of the preceding remarks.—Peopled from almost every civilized nation of Europe, how totally have its citizens forgotten the thousand and one local usages of their respective countries; how completely have they merged the shadowy in the real, blended the fanciful in the matter of fact, and forgotten the peculiarities and sectional customs of their former abodes in the stir and bustle of a new existence. The wild Highlander left his historic recollections of clans and feuds when he lost sight of the hills of Morven; the Irish peasant drowned his old superstitions in the tears that mourned for the “last glimpse of Erin”; and the German stalked coldly through a North American forest, without a thought on the once dreaded apparition of the wild Huntsman, or the spectres of the Hartz mountain.—The country is now upwards of two centuries