

Wonder-workers are we—our achievements well-nigh miraculous. The telegraphic operator, at Heart's Content, takes a gun-cap, a bit of zinc and a single drop of water, and with this thaumaturgic apparatus, he communicates intelligibly with his friend on the other side of the Atlantic. San Francisco whispers to Calcutta; and soon Ariel's feat of putting a girdle round the globe in forty minutes, will be translated into sober fact. Take our literature, our laws, our governments—what enormous strides we have made! Who can estimate the progress of our science, as it searches all things in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, gauging, on the one hand, those ghosts of light, the galaxies and nebulae that seem to hang on the outskirts of creation, and, on the other, bringing the elementary atoms of each simple substance under the dominion of mathematical laws, and disclosing the secrets of light, heat and electricity. Consider how enormously the geologist has enlarged the historic records of our globe, taking us away back through the steaming forests, the chaos-lighted fields, the strange animal and vegetable creations of worlds that have preceded our own, and are now entombed beneath our feet. Think of the broad advances of material power—the onward sweep of intellectual attainments—the power, the freedom, the energy that characterize modern thought, and have we not reason for self-congratulation? May we not say, “swift-footed, clear-seeing, audacious age, latest form of the sixty centuries that stretch up to Adam, heir of them all, and parent of the future, thou art the noblest, brightest of them all.”

But to all this loud-voiced, self-glorification it would not be difficult to make a very chilling reply. When closely looked at, the background of the picture has many dark figures. Our showy civilization has many an ugly feature, and hides, under purple robes, many a social ulcer. England—great, wealthy, benevolent England—has, at this moment, more than a million of paupers, eighteen per cent able-bodied, and has to take, annually, from the hard-won earnings of her industrious classes, six millions sterling to keep the idle paupers from starvation. Scotland relieves annually 602,520 paupers, at an expense of £770,000. This huge, hungry pauperism, kept temporarily from death or rebellion by the expedient of a poor-law, what an ugly blotch it is on our civilization! Like an advancing column of locusts, it is deepening and extending itself year by year, and is now the despair of statesmen, the terror of philanthropists. There stands the black, portentous monster, lantern-jawed, blue-visaged, one of the most frightful spectres that ever rose out of the foul swamps of humanity! Add now to this huge army of hopeless, incapable “lack-alls” the masses of men and women who, by hard struggles, are just able to keep out of the maelstrom of pauperism, but for whom life has little joy and no hope,—the pale, stunted factory workers, distressed needle-women, labourers rural and urban, begging for leave to toil and too often asking in vain. With this spectacle before us we begin to look somewhat doubtfully at our boasted civilization, and to ask, had Babylon or Rome anything quite so bad as this? The Census of 1861 showed that Scotland—industrious, progressive, religious Scotland—had 7,964