

popular mind. This is equally true, whether we think of that wide-spreading of book and pamphlet as educating and elevating the mental taste of the masses, or view it as the result of mental demand. Homer was a great poet. The Grecian mind might be termed colossal; yet the Greeks were, comparatively speaking, an ignorant people, because there were no facilities for the communication of knowledge to the masses. They heard Homer sung by wandering minstrels, but they never had the opportunity to sit down and ponder over his beauties. They caught a transitory gleam of his sublime genius as they listened to the thunderous roll of the old man's hexameters, but in the nature of the case it could have been but transitory. If the echoes waked for a moment the responsive chords of the Grecian heart, the response could not long survive the echo. It was nearly the same in England contemporaneous with Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Knowledge was confined to the few. The rich alone had power to unlock the door of College and Academy. As learning could not be circulated but in manuscript, and that costly, the mass of the English people were grossly ignorant. This state of things began to be altered on the introduction of printing by Caxton in 1476, but long after that groups might be seen collected round some one who had a copy of Wycliffe's Bible, listening eagerly to inspired truth. So precious were they held that they were bound with iron and chained to the pulpit.

What a fortunate people are we of the 19th century, especially that part of us whose heritage—none more lordly—is the Saxon tongue. The people's library of a very few half-centuries ago consisted of a Bible, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and perhaps *Robinson Crusoe*. Now it has been augmented to such an extent that it would be an endless task to enumerate the catalogue. Public libraries are to be found in England and America in many places, where are supplied to the people—no matter how destitute—the treasured and embalmed life-blood of the universe. Besides this, weekly and monthly papers, Scientific, Political, Religious, have sprung into existence with vast circulation, until their name is legion. Compare the peasant of old time to the farmer of to-day. The one lived, ate, slept, labored, died. The other is a well-read politician and feels a responsibility and paternal care for the land he helps to govern. He can take to pieces the whole machinery of State and argue from the great principles of political economy and government, which ought to govern President and Premier. He is a scholar. In many cases he can read you three or four languages. This is the case with Prussian ship captains—a necessary part of their education.

To sum it up briefly he is a ruler, a representative and pillar of the new Republic; in toto, in the "Parliament of Men," a peer in the "Federation of the World," a citizen. It might be well to glance in a cursory manner at a few of the causes of this great change. With limited space only a very superficial glance can be taken. Looking back to the time when first the framework of mediæval society began to heave under the molten billows of reform, the days of Chaucer, Wycliffe, Milton, we see the obstructions to freedom of thinking, speaking and worshipping, tottering to the fall. These indeed, were hard and perilous times. Visions of monasteries loom darkly up in the grey morning mists, at once the familiar hiding place of the foulest corruption and the brightest learning of the age. They stood as long as the spirit of Saxon liberty could be held in thrall, and having in some degree subserved the interests of that spirit of freedom by the preservation in manuscript form of the literature of the ancients, they were swept away. This was the first great means to the end.

Visions of priest and prelate are before us; of men who contended in the Council Chambers, in the Parliament, as well as in the fires of Smithfield, against spiritual and mental bondage. Tyranny and Freedom in a long, bloody grapple; there is the shaven Paritan—priests of Right by the "imposition of a mightier hand" than that of Pope; there is the long-haired cavalier, the King-worshipper, at once the stronghold of hereditary pride, and the priest and sycophant of royalty. They mingle in strife and deadly battle, but in this case the eternal principle of heroic souls which disarms the panoplied hosts of oppression, asserts her supremacy. Borne away on the crest of the waves that roll in on time-worn barriers of "ancient shapes of foul disease," that comes fresh with the salt and foamy breeze from the ocean of the nations' inner, higher life—go the wrecks of the Past, the feudalisms of mental and spiritual oppression. Thus by the ruin of the Stuart's throne the second great means to the end is effected. This was a period of travail pains. Our great privileges were not bought with any lesser price than blood. Looking back we can behold with joy that from the tumult of that period, the Genius of our prosperity snatched from the grasp of sceptred Caprice and mitred Power, sprang into new and vigorous life. Neither was this the result of an impulse of passion. Long before the great struggle, the student of history discerns forces partially hidden in the heart silently working, a spirit that boded ill for the existing Absolutism chafing and palpitating in the veins of social life. Chaucer arose, the morning

star, like a beacon flame or pillar of fire he went before, the grandest pioneer that ever struck axe into the tangled brushwood of superstition and prejudice, and with an arm luminous with the fire of a future age he pointed the way forward in the darkness. Milton must next arise, the incarnation of those principles which had been gathering strength for years, and which culminated in the tempest of Puritanic excess. Free from the bigotry and ill-directed zeal of the extreme party he spoke for the liberty of the press in his "Arcopagitica." This was the deepest voice of all that rang across that civil storm. "The noble and puissant nation was beginning to arouse itself like a strong man after sleep and shaking its mighty locks."

All obstacles removed, the genius of a progressive age developed itself, slowly indeed but surely. It was the "increasing purpose" running down through succeeding years, growing mightier by its own expansive power:

Thoughts of men are widened by the process of the sun.

Now let us improve our opportunities for dear enough they were purchased. For every book a groan, for every paper a drop of blood. With a liberty which does not blush at its own name, a mind enfranchisement, a disenthralled soul, what future canst thou carve out of the possibilities ahead?

THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE mighty though unseen forces that hurled us into life, are but links in the great chain of circumstances, that lies about our being during its brief sojourn on earth. Around the earliest trembling opening of consciousness, hover the spirits of time, and change that shall guide the incarnated soul into its destined path, and aid in moulding and fashioning its imperishable ingenuum. Before the heart drove the blood into the arteries, or sent the flush of life to the cheek; before the brain felt the sacred overshadowing of a mighty resistless inspiration, that made it the vehicle of mind, and the pride of man, upon the horizon of a life yet swathed in a gloom the reputed prerogative of the hour before the dawn, there came steadily silently swiftly legions that the common eye sees not, and as the faint gray dawn smote the opening vision, it revealed an assemblage of circumstances that left an eternal impress on the infant spirit.

The deathless all pervading oft resistless power of circumstances to shape character, and direct its energies is recognized and acknowledged. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends rough how them how we will," and circumstances hemming in mortal life are but God's commissioned messengers to execute his unalterable decrees concerning it.