

THE OLD AND THE NEW.



THE history of science tells us that in all ages the brightest minds have been engaged in the study of Man. Every age and school had its thinkers on the origin, nature and destiny of the human race. "Know thyself," was the Pagan precept, engraved in the

Temple of Delphos.

To our first father, God revealed the origin and destiny of Man. This knowledge was transmitted from father to son, but as mankind fell into sin, they turned off from the illuminated paths of faith, and forgetting God, lost the truth He had revealed. Through the violation of the law, they lost the gift of faith, they deprived themselves of all remembrance not only of their Creator, but of what they were themselves, and what they were intended for. A powerful illustration is this, that faith, a bright gift of the Almighty, will not live long in a heart given up to sin and vice, and thereby rendered inimical to Him. The Prince of darkness did not succeed in utterly extinguishing this light, for all nations have preserved some vague notions, clothed with the fancies of idolatry, but yet revealing traces of a universal belief, and evidence of the unity of the human race. One nation alone, the Jews, preserved the light of faith.

Following the inclination of the intellect after knowledge, and recognizing that

"The proper study of mankind is man," the wise men of pagan nations, exercised themselves greatly with the question, What is Man? They saw that he was the highest and most perfect being in nature, truly wonderful, and a fit subject of philosophical speculation. Of the Greeks, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had studied deeply and proclaimed different theories in explanation, but all more or less inseparably connected with their paganism; some truths they had indeed discovered, especially had Aristotle, but altogether incomplete. Among the Romans, Cicero stands first and nearest the whole truth of man's com-

position and destiny. The origin of man had, however, baffled the brightest of pagan intellects. With his belief, Cicero proclaimed the highest principles of pagan morality. He lived in that period of intense darkness, just before the dawn of Christianity, when pagan nations were at the lowest deep of idolatry and error; their condition could not be more degraded. A keen observer and voluminous writer, his works reflect the current beliefs of his time. From the dismal view of life, universally entertained, may be inferred the errors of the prevalent doctrine. Poets, philosophers and historians declared Man to be the most miserable and abject of creatures. What wonder, then, that suicide was frequent, since, not knowing God and the immortality of the soul, they believed that death terminated for ever a miserable existence! Not so thought Cicero, as shown particularly in his *De Senectute*. To this essay of "the greatest of Romans," we wish to refer, on account of its teachings, and the manifestation therein of a spirit of independence in maintaining what his countrymen denied, and of a desire for the supremacy of the truth.

A study of *De Senectute* discovers the height of pagan Rome's morality, and its science of Man. Cicero did not believe in the absolute misery of mankind, and aims at showing how happiness may be procured to old age, a period of life generally deemed insufferable. Now, the desire for happiness is the stimulus of Man's every act, of the pagan, and of the Christian. Man was made for happiness, not the worldly but the heavenly one, this is his ultimate end, the possession of his Creator, his supreme happiness. But though so ordained, he is not debarred from enjoying it rationally here below. The man of the world, possessed of a powerless will, or guided by a false reason, seeks the pleasures of earth, and when he has found them thinks himself happy. The man of God seeks not happiness here, but in Heaven, where only there is true happiness. The pagans sought it in this world and shaped their actions accordingly. Cicero's essay may be termed a