

STEWART'S QUARTERLY.

GEORGE STEWART, Jr.,

EDITOR & PROPRIETOR.

VOL. V.

SAINT JOHN, N. B., OCTOBER, 1871.

No. 3.

HUMAN PROGRESS—IS IT REAL?

By REV. M. HARVEY, St. John's, N. F.

The question I propose to discuss, in the present paper, is this—have we any reason to believe that, in the long historic march of mankind, our race has been progressing—gaining higher and higher levels, so that we of the present generation stand on a loftier vantage-ground, in regard to what constitutes the grand essentials of existence, than those who have preceded us? Has the course of humanity, since its start in the far east in the dawn of history, been on the whole progressive; or like the swing of the pendulum, constantly traversing the same arc of the circle, always in motion but making no advance? After all the toils and sorrows and conflicts of man, prolonged through thousands of years, has he any solid gains to show? Has he become richer in wisdom and virtue, in mind and heart, in the essentials of true happiness, as the ages roll along? Is the world, on the whole, a better place than it was a thousand or three thousand years ago, or man a nobler being? Or is our boasted civilization only a seeming progress—only change but not an advance?

At first sight such questions may appear superfluous, almost insulting to the civilization of our glorious nineteenth century. For are not we of this generation entitled to look back, with pity and contempt, on those who have gone before us? With our railways and steam-driven ocean-rangers, our factories and power-looms, our world-embracing commerce and enormous productive industry, are we not far ahead of any ancient or mediæval nation? Think of our great hives of industry. Listen to the roar of our machinery as it ceaselessly turns out all that can minister to human wants. Survey our docks, warehouses and stately mansions, our iron-clads, our Armstrong guns and Henry-Martini rifles. Above all, estimate, if you can, the wonders of the daily newspaper. Have we not laid down our Atlantic Cables, so that New York and Chicago are abreast of London in regard to intelligence? How absurd then to compare this telegraphic, gas-lighted, steaming age with the stupid, sluggish ages that have gone before? Truly we are

“Heirs of all the ages,
In the foremost files of time.”