

ON SOME SUPPOSED CONSEQUENCES OF THE DOCTRINE OF HISTORICAL PROGRESS.*

BY PROFESSOR GOLDWIN SMITH, LL.D.

II.

CAST your eyes over the human characters of history, and observe to how great an extent the most soaring and eccentric of them are the creatures of their country and their age. Examine the most poetic of human visions, and mark how closely they are connected, either by way of direct emanation or of reaction, with the political and social circumstances amidst which they were conceived; how manifestly the Utopia of Plato is an emanation from the Spartan commonwealth; how manifestly the Utopia of Rousseau is a reaction against the artificial society of Paris. What likelihood, then, was there that the imagination of a peasant of Galilee would spring at a bound beyond place and time, and create a type of character perfectly distinct in its personality, yet entirely free from all that entered into the special personalities of the age; a type which satisfies us as entirely as it satisfied him, and which, as far as we can see or imagine, will satisfy all men to the end of time.

The character of Mahomet, and the character which is represented by the name of Buddha, were no doubt great improvements in their day on anything which had preceded them among the races out of which they arose. But the character of Mahomet was deeply tainted with fierce Arab enterprise, that of Buddha with languid Eastern resignation: and all progress among the nations by which these types were consecrated has long since come to an end.

M. Comte has constructed for his sect a whimsical Calendar of historic characters, in imitation of the Roman Catholic Calendar of Saints. Each month and each day is given to the historic representative of some great achievement of humanity. Theocracy is there, represented by Moses, ancient poetry by Homer,

*Through the courtesy of Professor Goldwin Smith, we are permitted to reproduce this admirable lecture, delivered at the University of Oxford—one of the noblest demonstrations, it seems to us, ever written of the divine origin of Christianity, and of the guiding hand of God in the history of the race.—Ed.