

of still greater danger to religion and morality on account of its subtlety and obscurity.

In England Hume reached only the educated classes, but his ideas soon permeated poetry and lighter literature and by this means the poison was instilled into the life-blood of the nation. The just dissatisfaction of the oppressed poor was turned into bitter rancour against the rich, and blasphemous hatred against God. Owing to the greater freedom of English political institutions, and, in part also, to that stubbornness of the national character which renders the Englishman averse to sudden and violent changes, the cursed seed did not bear its fruit as fully in "the tight little island" as it did on the less free and less conservative continent. There under the skillful cultivation of Voltaire and others it spread throughout the land, and, becoming the peoples' food, maddened their brains and corroded their hearts. Still, even in England, though it required more time to bring about its effects, it finally undermined, to a great extent, religious belief and gave a new impetus to that materialistic philosophy which still holds that country under its baneful sway.

History, in the hands of Hume, proved a powerful weapon for the accomplishment of this fell work. It was yet more dangerous when Gibbon held the pen. He did not openly attack religion: his method was that so happily described by Lord Byron as "sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer." He attempted to destroy its ground-work facts. Christianity depends primarily on the fact of revelation, but this rests for proof on certain historical events, manifestly supernatural in character, which convey to the human race an

authoritative message of heavenly import. Gibbon's object was to explain these away by invoking natural agencies. Slurring over the early phenomenal propagation of Christianity, and dwelling minutely upon occasional subsequent corruption in some of its adherents, he sought to prove the account of its supernatural origin a myth, and to make it appear a thoroughly human institution. In his case, at least, the evil he did lives after him in the widespread spirit of unbelief so characteristic of these latter days.

The Johnsonian was, therefore, an age of transition and internal agitation. Opening with the artificial classicism of Johnson, it merged, gradually, and almost unconsciously, into naturalism, leading up to the final triumph of this tendency, at the opening of the next age, in the publication of Cowper's task. During this time the tide of criticism reached its ebb and the flow of creation began anew just after its close. It was likewise a period of suppressed excitement. The lower classes began to assert themselves and to claim that they too had rights. The success of the American Revolution emphasized their demands. Unfortunately their movement was prostituted by the false doctrines of so-called philosophers which hurried it into the wildest excesses.

Despite this, however, the Johnsonian Age has wrought for the good both of English literature and human liberty. It freed the former from the cold artificiality of the classical school, enriched its vocabulary, and introduced into it a new and popular method of conveying thought, and it taught that the latter belonged to man as man, and was not the exclusive right of a privileged few.

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