

OUR CIVILIZATION AND OUR UNIVERSITIES*

BY THE, REV. DR. CARMAN,

General Superintendent of the Methodist Church.

I.



STANDING on the slope of the mountain and looking down the busy valley, the observer may trace its course and extent in the darkness by the hum of its industries on the air, and the halo of its radiance on the sky. The blazing furnaces, the signal towers, and the electric diamonds throw on the firmament guiding lines of light, revelations of activities far out of sight. So the reflected splendours of the bygone civilizations mark the pathway of nations, and indicate the connections and prominent positions of human history. Civilizations have gathered around mighty, central ideas, and have been quickened into life and invigorated to fruitfulness by the strongest impulses of our common humanity. And according to the prevailing idea, the predominating impulse is the character of the civilization.

Every civilization has, so to speak, a soul ; and, as in man, the soul has to do with shaping the body. We have had civilizations of wealth, civilizations of power, civilizations of art, science and philosophy, civilizations of commerce, civilizations of chivalry and adventure, civilizations of law and jurisprudence, civilizations of ethics and religion. And as one or the

other energy flamed upward, or as one with the others combined in the transient brilliancy, colour strength and form were imparted to national life, deed, and destiny. Over Babylon and Assyria hover the fiery glow of absolutism and military conquest ; over Egypt the luminous haze of ancestral tradition and priestly mysteries ; over Greece flash the splendours of freedom and of art ; over Rome shines the crimson orb of martial glory and the steadier brightness of legislation and jurisprudence ; over Tyre and Sidon the radiance of commercial enterprise, and over Judæa the crowning effulgence and supernatural guidance of a divine revelation. Spain has her concave of golden hue darkened by cruelty and blood ; Arabia spread the silvery light of the crescent, and the mediæval republics threw on high the sheen of literature, architecture, painting, sculpture, and the scarlet and purple of luxury and pride. They all had their opportunity. They fell by their own accumulation of corruption and wrong. They all lived long enough and flourished grandly enough to prove that national life might have been perpetuated and national glory maintained to these times. They demonstrate that the eternal God, the Universal Father, hath put within our reach numberless redemptive and recuperative energies that, used aright, will uphold and bear us onward ; that, neglected and misdirected, will insure and precipitate our overthrow.

Recall that majestic and re-

* An address as in substance delivered by the Rev. Dr. Carman in the Auditorium, Chicago, on the occasion of the Annual Commencement of the North-Western University.