

catastrophes again. And in such a cause it was better to fail in striving after the good than to perish by acquiescing in the evil. If one had to give it a name, I would rather call it the *humane* age (in spite of revolutions, wars, and fashionable corruption); for it was the era when humanity first distinctly perceived the possibilities and conditions of mature human existence.

It would be easy enough to find scores of names, facts, and events to the contrary of all this; but it would be quite as easy to find scores to the contrary of any opinion about any epoch. A century is a mass of contradictions by the necessity of the case; for it is made up of every element to be found in human nature. The various incidents are in no way to be overlooked; neither are they to be exaggerated. To balance the qualities of an epoch, we must analyze them all separately, compare them one by one, and then find the centre of gravity of the mass. England will concern us in the main; but the spirit of the age can never be strictly confined to its action in any one country. Such movements as the Renaissance in the sixteenth, or the Revolution in the eighteenth century, are especially common to Europe. It would be impossible to understand the eighteenth century in England, if we wholly shut our eyes to the movements abroad of which the English phase was the reflex and organ. Nor must we forget how much our judgment of the eighteenth century is warped (it is obvious that Mr Carlyle's was entirely formed) by literary standards and impressions. Literature has been deluged with the affectations, intrigues, savagery, and uncleanness of the eighteenth century. Other centuries had all this in at least equal degree; but the eighteenth was the first to display it in pungent literary form. Industry, science, invention,

and benevolence were less tempting fields for these brilliant penmen. And thus an inordinate share of attention is given to the quarrels of poets, the vices of courts, and the grimacing of fops. It is the business of serious history to correct the impression which torrents of smart writing have left on the popular mind.

We are all rather prone to dwell on the follies and vices of that era, with which we are more familiar than we are with any other, almost more than we are with our own. It is the first age, since that of Augustus, which ever left inimitable pictures of its own daily home existence. We recall to mind so easily the ladies of quality at the *Spectator's* routs, the rioters and intrigues of *Mervay's* memoirs, and of Walpole's, and of "the little Burney's;" the Squire Westerns, the Wilkeses, and the Queensberrys; the Hell-fire Clubs, and the Rake's Progresses; the political invectives of Junius and Burke; the courts of St. James's and Versailles; the prisons, the assizes, the parties of pleasure to Bedlam and to Bridewell; the Wells at Tunbridge, Bath, and Epsom; the masquerades at Vauxhall and Ranelagh; the taverns, the streets, the Mohocks, and the duellists; the gin-drinking and the bull-baiting, the gambling and the swindling; and a thousand pictures of social life by a crowd of consummate artists. Perhaps we study these piquant miniatures with too lively a gust. The question is not whether such things were, but what else there was also. The pure, the tender, the just, the merciful, is there as well, patiently toiling in the even tenor of its way; and if we look for it honestly, we shall find it a deeper, wider, more effective force in the main, shaping the issue in the end for good.

Addison and Steele were not the greatest of teachers, but they have