

mark on her institutions and laws. Their value was negative or relative, rather than direct or positive. On the other hand, the French Revolution, with all those associations of blood and terror which its name suggests, was something more than the long-delayed vengeance of a nation on dignities become corrupt and *effete*, more than the product of scepticism and ignorance, brought into conflict with superstition and despotism. It was constructive as well as destructive; and the excesses of some of its agents and instruments should not blind us to the salutary, enlightened, and still enduring character of its earlier legislation. Thus may the productions and institutions of even the noblest periods be found incapable of satisfying the wants of a later generation, for some taint of imperfection will be found to cleave to all of them.

In those facts of history which have been already referred to, and of which the symmetrical arrangement has obtruded itself on our attention, we now seem also to trace the workings of this law of human nature. Periods of hope and enthusiastic striving have blossomed into high attainment, to be followed by times of questioning and testing, often with such results as discord, division, and the dissolution of institutions once revered and prized; and this because, in every effort either wholly or partially human, some elements of error and weakness have hitherto found a place. So, that season of reflection and criticism which inevitably succeeds the days of ardour and productiveness, ever finds something, perhaps many things, to correct or eliminate. With societies of men, even more than in the case of individuals, such a season must be in various respects one of trial. Established institutions are challenged and confirmed customs interfered with, existing interests compromised, until, as the growing sense of what is defective comes to be more and more confronted with the opposing unwillingness to surrender what has been already acquired, the occasions of conflict become multiplied, and the disposition to resort to extremities tends to increase. At last, the bounds of resistance are broken; the battle, often fierce, prolonged, and for some time dubious, has to be fought out; and out of the wreck which it leaves behind, there comes to be formed some new combination of the old materials—some solid outward unity, animated by new-born hopes and ideas. In another form, with many differences, the cycle repeats itself, and wise men feel, as Goethe felt on the battle-field of Valmy, that a new age has begun.

For the illustration of this process, at once of thought and action, in the more civilized societies, we can appeal to the more memorable centuries. Let us take the sixteenth. The middle of its predecessor had been marked by conflicts, religious as well as political; and these struggles had *seemed* to be decided in favour of those reactionary tendencies, in the direction of royal prerogative and renewed religious uniformity, of which the earlier years of the fifteenth century had given foreshadow. Yet, at the very time when despotism, well-nigh personified in Louis XI., Edward IV., of England, and the Borgias in Italy, with some of their competers, had apparently obtained a firm hold of Europe, there were witnessed some evidences that the triumph of authority, now perverted into tyranny, was not to prove complete or final. The principle of individual responsibility, demanding opportunities of free enquiry, seemed awhile to have been crushed under the weight of priestly authority, aided by the force of arbitrary power. Yet in various parts of Europe it began at that hour to revive, elastic as before, but purified from that crude extravagance, attendant on the ignorance of the darker ages, which had mingled with and marred some of its earlier manifestations. It rose again, to struggle and suffer indeed, but this time on the whole to prevail,—to win more lasting conquests in a world now prepared by Providence to be the fitting theatre for its nobler, because better regulated exercises.

In this instance, the grand moving ideas of that approaching age were heralded by a train of concurrent circumstances worthy of their divine origin and of their world-wide importance. The simultaneous occurrence of great physical discoveries, momentous political changes, and a surprising literary revival, has not escaped the attention of even commonplace historians; but the thoughtful and reverent mind cannot fail to note, as truly indi-

cative of the forth-putting of a divine finger, the preparation afforded by all these events for the growth and success of a secret, but spiritual, and therefore all-powerful principle. A candid view of the state of morality, private as well as public, in the age immediately preceding the Reformation, would, we cannot help thinking, render this opinion regarding the source and significance of the great movement unavoidable.

But the middle of this eventful century, fertile in political changes, brought also discord and division among the ranks of even the enlightened advocates of liberty. When success had partially diminished the early warmth of the reformers, the drawbacks and difficulties of the new position began to reveal themselves. The gains acquired at such cost were re-examined and analyzed; divergence in the opposite direction of progress and conservatism quickly followed; whilst the ideas of authority and restraint profited by their mutual recriminations. Still, however, the vast force of the original impulse, spreading throughout the various ranks of European society, carried the new ideas triumphantly over all opposition in the lands of their birth; nay, seemed likely also to establish their supremacy even in regions where blind submission to authority had long been the rule.

At this very time, however, the indications of a counter-movement, necessitated, it may be, by the very success of the Reformation, began to array themselves over the whole field of victory. The principle of authority, destined to prevail in the succeeding century, may now be traced in tendencies that wrought beneath or amidst the manifestations of free thought in the sixteenth.

Thus, the seventeenth century, like the fifteenth, proved to be a contrast to its predecessor. Its ruling idea was that of authority, either in its beneficial aspect as law, or regulated restraint, or in its perversions, such as fantastic loyalty, ritualistic sacerdotalism and superstitious zeal. When these tendencies came into collision with the lately dominant spirit of freedom, a fierce and lasting struggle ensued; and this struggle was nearly co-extensive with the field of civilization. On the whole, the victory seemed to be on the side of authority, even in its more rampant forms.

Before the century came to its close, the English Revolution had sounded the knell of irresponsible authority; and liberty, in its purified forms of toleration and constitutionalism, had announced a new and far-extending reign under William III. The eighteenth century has, in our own days, been subjected to hearty and unsparring censure. Notwithstanding the popularity of such a judgment, which, as proceeding from the men of the age closely following, can scarcely claim the merit of impartiality, it may be confidently stated that the last century fulfilled the promise of its introduction, proving favourable, in the main, to real progress, and not entirely belying its somewhat complacent claims to enlightenment. It has been stigmatised, on plausible grounds, as materialistic and sceptical, yet it may well be asked whether these tendencies were not partly the legacy of a preceding age, and partly the accidental consequences of increasing tolerance in conjunction with the pacific, prosperous operation of constitutional government.

Our readers may have observed that, for a long time, according to our induction, the prevailing tendencies of the centuries have been alternately in favour of liberty and authority. The statement might be supported by the admissions of writers deservedly honoured as master historians, though we have not observed this alternative character recognized by any of them. By studying the whole historical literature for themselves, attentive students may find further confirmation of 'his very singular fact.' Thus they may note the dominant "Caesarism" of the first century, following an age of democratic license. In the provincial enfranchisement of Trajan, Adrian, and the Antonines, they may trace a more liberal spirit presiding over the destinies of the second. The third was the age of military despotism, while the fourth, on the other hand, saw the triumph of Christianity and the rise of the northern nations. In the fifth, barbarian monarchs assumed the powers of conquered emperors, and the designs of the Papacy first appeared with Leo the Great. The sixth witnessed the rise of distinct nation-