

mind which precludes all further mental progress. The spread of instruction appears to mean not so much the extension of it to the once excluded classes, as the multiplying of the subjects taught to all that partake of it. Governing boards, 'Education' departments, and commissions, generally composed, not of educators, but of men selected because they are peers, or judges, or even because they are members of Parliament, sit in council, and seem to determine that any subject suggested as useful in after life is forthwith to be thrust into teaching programmes. Thus, for example, French or chemistry is ordered to be taught, without considering whether the hours are not already excessive, and yet not sufficient for the proper study of the great primary subjects, or of more than three or four subjects. The framers of our codes are not well informed, or not careful in these things, and therefore the present system is doing so much harm, that the good is impaired or even counteracted. Human nature can only be improved at a very slow pace, and we are trying to force that pace.

So far, then, the theory, as put into practice, is not verifying the loud promises of the theorists, and there is even a possibility, which some would call a hope, that human nature will some day rebel against this terribly-increasing burden of our youth, and abolish it as our Government has abolished the fêtes of Juggernaut in India. It remains for us to consider whether these defects are not corrigible, and whether, if the instructors are themselves properly instructed, and coerced to moderation, a better, slower, and more deliberate system will not justify the highest expectations of the optimists.

It is strange how these serious, world-sad moderns contrast with the joyous, fresh ancients in their pro-

phesies. The modern thinks there will be no limit to the world's progress; that, as knowledge advances by steps, strides, bounds, so material comfort and moral worth will pervade our race. The ancient thought that, however perfect the structure of the commonwealth; however complete the system of education, all social and political, like all physical, organisms must have their period of growth, perfection, and decay: that you might as well expect a man of perfect health, beauty, and virtue to last for ever, as to suppose it of a State, even were it the ideally perfect Republic of Plato. Which of these theories is the more probable? Which of them shows the deepest insight into the possibilities of the future?

It is hardly necessary to remind the modern reader of the prophecies made by astronomers and by geologists concerning the extinction of life on our globe. As the moon is now a burnt-out cinder with no atmosphere or moisture, so the day will come when this planet will no longer be fit for human life. Great changes in temperature, whether to cold or to heat, will some day change all animal life; and, long before that catastrophe, will affect human society. We cannot even be certain that a conflagration similar to those observed in some of the fixed stars may not befall our sun, and cause us suddenly to melt with fervent heat, and pass away into vapour. But changes far short of these, either in distance or in violence, will be enough to mar that delicate growth called civilisation, and ruin all our boasted progress. If the coal of the earth fails in two or three centuries—a very possible misfortune, against which we are making no provision—are we sure that any scientific discovery will find means to replace it? Would any sane man trust to the most complete education as a safeguard against such a catastrophe?