

upon this point, if I had space, some curious passages from historians of the age. The great body of the people in the country, and of the poorer classes in the towns, were destitute of the simplest elementary education. They could not read even their bibles. Trials for witchcraft were then not unfrequent—Chief Justice Holt, in the reign of James II, conducted no less than twelve. The power of fortune-telling was as much confided in as revelation. Hale, when Chief Justice, did not deny the gift of supernatural powers; and Johnson, half a century posterior, during his visit to the Highlands, became a convert to the doctrine of 'second sight.'

I come now to the present, and to the last. In the march of mind, in the useful triumphs of genius—in the general spread of education and of intelligence—how far, how immeasurably far does this surpass any former age of knowledge. ['*Enriches des decouvertes de trois (four) autres,*' says Voltaire, '*il a plus fait en certain genres que les trois tous ensemble.*'] It is difficult to delineate the line of demarcation between the fourth and the present—for, from Milton, Newton, and Addison, up to the era of Byron, Herschel, and Scott, there seems no break in the line of illustrious men. This age of literary achievement may be dated from the time of Hume, Gibbon, and Robertson; all of whom imparted a more masculine and nervous vigour to the national style and eloquence.

But the earliest manifestations of the concentrated genius of the age were exhibited in the publication of the *Edinburgh Review*, the bright precursor of that host of competitors which have since given to learning and criticism their popular efficacy and influence. I might easily dilate upon the inspiration which the exciting events of the American and French Revolutions, had upon the intellect of Europe. The first fired the oratory of Chatham, and since the days of Demosthenes, never did the potent spell of eloquence charm up so glorious a band of worshippers—Pitt, Fox, Sheridan, Burke, Erskine, Canning and O'Connell. The mantle of the classics seemed to have descended upon them. The greatest historians of modern times, who may justly be contrasted with Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, and Livy, were of this period. Adam Smith followed out the crude and immature conceptions of the French Economists, and laid the foundation of that noble science of Political Economy, which must eventually form the basis of all just and enlightened legislation. Herschel pursued the discoveries of Halley and Newton until he has widened the limits of our planetary system, and extended beyond all former estimate, the boundaries of visible and peopled space. Poetry has assumed a nobler, more useful, because a simpler range. Criticism has become more practical and healthy. The Novel deals with men and the events of life, and less with fancy and wild

romance. By the genius of Scott it has been moulded into its most perfect form, and now blends the learning of history and the influence of morals, with the graces of the imagination. Add to this the improvement in the metaphysical sciences, effected by Reid, Stewart, Brown and Abercrombie—the discoveries in Chemistry, elaborated by Lavoisier, Davy, and Faraday: the Science of Watt; the labours of Cuvier and Lyell in Geology and Fossil bones; the calculating machine of Babbage, the Locomotive Engines of Stephenson, the pious light which has been cast by Paley and Roget on Vegetable Physiology—the application of steam to spinning and weaving—the progress made in the science of agriculture—the innumerable discoveries in the circle of the practical arts, founded upon chemical analyses; and it will, I think, be readily conceded, that no former age had a tithe of the glory appertaining to this.

But this age is chiefly remarkable, and it is on this point of superiority, and the bearing it has upon our present argument, I now press it upon the notice of the Institute, *in the care it has extended to the education of the people.*—The system pursued in colleges has been modernized, and their ancient privileges invaded and broken down, so as to open their portals, and extend their benefits to less exclusive classes. Schools have been multiplied, and the classics and popular sciences taught to those to whom before they were unknown and inaccessible. The Minister of Education forms an important member of the Cabinet in every popular government. A liberal quota of the public funds is placed at his disposal. France, Prussia, the Russian Autocrat, England, and America, pursue with common zeal, this noble course of national advancement. Reform has thus reached and recast the learning of the schools—but the effort of improvement, the march of intellect, is chiefly to be traced in the '*education of circumstances*,' to which the popular mind is subjected. I allude to the number of Periodicals and Newspapers published and circulated—the innumerable host of volumes issuing from the Press in the form of Cabinet Cyclopedias, Family Libraries, &c., under the patronage of Societies for the 'Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,' which are intended to bring science and literature within the reach and means of the middle orders; the establishment of Societies for the learned, and of Mechanics' Institutes for the artisans and operative classes; and lastly, the publication of those Journals and Penny Magazines, which, in their philosophy and literary execution, when contrasted with the cheapness of their price, are such honourable trophies to the genius and art of the age. Chambers has now secured a weekly circulation of 100,000, and the London Penny Magazine 270,000. These two sheets have a more important effect in advancing the general intelligence in a week than all the liter-