

have to fill, and consider every age in the past as far transcending, in all desirable or esteemed qualities, this one in which we are called upon to live and act at present.

Nor do we in any way excuse ourselves by placing all the blame on the degeneracy of the age. There are not, as we know, any arbitrary rules by which any one is compelled to conform slavishly to any established custom of the times that he is conscientiously opposed to. On the contrary, in order to ennoble any age, it is only necessary to live nobly in it.

But the cry is raised that a moral degeneracy far in excess of any previous one is characteristic of this age.

This cry is easily raised, and it seems to have been always a congenial subject for a certain class of gloomy speculators to dilate upon. Like the star-dust of the philosophers, it forms a convenient hypothesis by which to explain phenomena otherwise unaccounted for. The fallacy of this argument, however, is apparent from the fact that a similar company of sentimentalists have been wont to descant on the same congenial topic, throughout all those very ages which our lugubrious philosopher looks upon as the consummation of all virtue and prosperity.

He who is at all conversant with the history of the past—not indeed that history which is made up, as so many are, of mere details of war, dates, and other external events; but that of the interior life, whether intellectual, moral, or religious, of the times—will not be apt to be deceived by such a cry.

Yet as the population of the world increases, and as large numbers of men are collected together in the principle centres of trade, the weak points in human nature, acted on by new influences, and brought together by the density of the population, become more apparent; till our philosopher, Mr. Littlefaith, is willing to give up all as lost. Such a one, as he enters some large metropolis of the present day, sees nothing but its vices and incentives to vice, poverty and wretchedness without hope of their betterment, while over the whole rests a shadow

of gloom, through which he seem to descry the spectres of departed virtues weeping over a degenerate progeny. It is all in vain to remind him of vices which obtained in those times which he has chosen as his ideal of perfection. To tell him that Athens, that seat of culture and refinement, became a den of corruption and licentiousness; to mention the atrocities of the Colosseum, where fierce gladiators cut down human beings like trees of the forest, while the elite of Rome looked on and enjoyed a fiendish pleasure; or the appalling wickedness of Paris at a time when anarchy held sway, or its climax when terror sat on the throne and made Europe tremble—all this were to no purpose. He is determined to see only the dark side of the matter, and time only—the great tester of truth and fallacy—will convince him to the contrary. The over credulous reader of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* might suppose that ere now England had become a habitation of owls and bats, but such a conclusion would be far from correct.

There are those, however, who take a more hopeful view of the indications of the present time; who think that “this sordid view of human kind is surely not the best.” Occasionally, too, do we find our little extremist on the sunny side, as if having doffed his garments of the night he had come out awhile to enjoy the daylight of life, in which, of course, he is all absorbed for the time being.

Meeting now in his new cloak (for the exterior habiliment are everything to him) the same scenes which before presented an aspect of gloom, there appears to him on every hand symptoms of untarnished virtue, and tokens of unbounded prosperity; while along the broad thoroughfares, which before seemed the dens of iniquity, the proud architecture of Cathedrals and Churches, with their spires pointing humanity heavenward, assure him of a race whose grand object is the cultivation of the higher affections of the mind. To such extremes will men allow themselves to be carried. But as there cannot be a mean without extremes,