

From Hogg's Instructor.

THE PRESENT AGE.

ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND REACTIVE TENDENCIES.

[Continued from the Gleaner of February 25.]

The stream of history floats us on to Rome, the great type of foreign conquest and internal struggle. Through its history we wade not now: the shades of its kings, its consuls, and its emperors, flit past in rapid succession. The deities of Olympus fall before the divine spirit of Christianity; a new standard of morals is exhibited; and the religion of Jesus, every where spoken against, gains ground. The northern hordes pour down, restless in their fury; the empire, after many a struggle, stripped little by little of its power, falls in the over-ripe-ness of refinement, which had destroyed all energy, and had so secularised Christianity itself, that little was left save the name. But now we float in troubled and turbid waters; ages of darkness succeed. Gothic barbarity, Vandal ignorance, feudal power, ecclesiastical bondage, are successively the chief objects which we discern as we peer through the gloom. Ages these of human wretchedness—ages in which few redeeming features can be found, and yet ages subserving, as they were intended to subserve, purposes most important. Rome had fallen in the autumn of an era; its ripeness passed into corruption; and the cold north wind, with its sleet, and snow, and frost, the dark days of winter—a winter extending over centuries—however dreary, were needful to destroy much that was noxious, and to prepare for a more genial spring. The attempts to exhibit those ages as wise, and happy, and refined, by collecting the scattered evidences which remain of literary acquirements, monastic piety, or artistic skill is absurd; but equally absurd is it to regard them as utterly destitute of worth, or as the recession of the human mind from all that is praiseworthy and good. We may find in them the germs of much that we value now; the erroneous directions which zeal and valour then took were over-ruled to work future advantages. The crusades, in themselves foolish, were, in their influence, beneficial, promoting international intercourse, ingrafting eastern refinement upon western rudeness, crippling baronial power by exhausting baronial wealth—enabling the monarch, on the one hand, to claim prerogative; and municipalities, on the other, to secure privilege. These and other advantages may fairly be referred to that European frenzy which poured host after host upon the shores of Palestine on a bootless errand of mistaken zeal. So again with the institution of chivalry. We recall the images of knight-banneret, knights, squires, and their lady loves, and listen to the song of the troubadours in praise of valour and of love; we see the tournament, attended by all that was gorgeous and gay; we hear the thrilling shouts of the herald, "Fight on, brave knights, bright eyes behold you!" but strip it of its tinsel and romance, examine its laws and regulations in detail, its splendid folly, its indomitable pride, its waste of human life, and its utter carelessness for the population at large; take its combat a l'outrance, and see, after the vanquished knight is lying prostrate on the turf, the victor take his dagger, miscalled that of mercy, and, thrusting it through the iron bars of the vizor, pierce his adversary to the brain. Yet, mingled with all this folly and crime, there were grains of gold; and we would not that all chivalrous feelings, all burning desire to aid the weak against the strong, or to do battle for principles which are not recognised, though right—we would not willingly let these feelings die.

In our rapid survey we must pass ages of struggle, of glorious struggle for liberty of thought and action, of mind and body—ages in which municipalities were gradually acquiring privileges, obtaining them for the most part by purchase, when the necessities of the sovereign or of the feudal lords compelled them to seek the aid of the peaceful burgher. In these ages we have the dawn of free thought; men dared, occasionally at least, to whisper their convictions, that under the garb of piety there was much of corruption, and that in the seat of justice foul wrongs were perpetrated; and these whippers became louder and louder, till they shook the Vatican and the despot's throne. Then there followed the wondrous sixteenth century, an era in many particulars resembling our own. The recent discovery of printing; the successful researches of Columbus and his followers, removing the veil which had hidden the New World, and returning with freights of treasure and tales of wonder; the emancipation, first of Germany and then of other European lands, from ecclesiastical bondage. Fain would we linger on these inspiring scenes, and evoke the shades of Luther, with his indomitable perseverance, Melancthon, with his silver tones and gentle spirit; Erasmus, with his polished Latin and sarcastic wit; while the gorgeous pageants of royalty connected with Charles V., Francis I., and Henry VIII. form the background of our picture. But other names—names connected with our own land—rise before us in the reign of Elizabeth, a sovereign whose character has borrowed lustre from those by whom she was surrounded, and respecting whom we imagine future historians will speak more plainly than any who have hitherto written of that age. As for ourselves, sick of the court flattery, the overweening pride, the ever-apparent vanity, of the virgin queen, we turn to her poets—Chaucer, with his rich and quaint old English; Spenser, with his gorgeous creations of fairyland and true poetic fire; and Shakespeare, unrivalled in dramatic skill—poets whose writings contain an exhaustless store of beautiful thoughts, noble sentiments, and just descriptions, combined with richest fancy and most

intimate knowledge of men. But we must not tarry in the bower of muses now. A century of fierce conflict and civil war calls us to sterner spectacles. Prerogative and privilege are grappling. The Stuart race, infatuated and doomed, as if some nameless and withering curse attached to it in all its branches, come upon the scene. Mary of Scotland, murdered in the land to which she fled as an asylum; her son James, vain and pedantic; her grandson Charles, expiating on the scaffold a reign of cunning treachery; Charles II., the most frivolous and heartless mortal whom Englishmen ever recognised as king; James II., whose duplicity once more roused our fathers to renounce their allegiance, to drive him from these shores, and to place a stranger on the throne; these, one by one, rise, teaching truths which the events of the present year have proved that the sovereigns of Europe have been slow to learn, and provoking, by their tyranny, men like Hampden, Cromwell, and Vane, who were driven to resistance, and who, not for ambition, but for their countries' liberties, took the sword; while among them there stands one whom we value more as the poet than as the politician—the blind bard, whose "Paradise Lost" and "Regained," his "Comus" and his sonnets, have woven for him a wreath greener and more beautiful than those of the senate-house or of the camped field. In James I.'s reign, Bacon, illustrious as a philosopher, but degraded as a venal judge, is the only name of eminence occurring to us now; and then, after the fall of the Stuarts, there follow ages of mediocrity, in which there were comparatively few great men; in which religion was weak, because she was content with being respectable; in which war was deified, and those debts were incurred under which the nation still groans; the American war, teaching that even Britain's flag must fall in fight when it had not justice on its side; the French revolution, with its scenes of carnage and demoniac blood-thirstiness; the military despotism of Napoleon, rising, like the gourd of Jonah, in a night, and in a night withered and laid low; the re-establishment of legitimacy; congresses of emperors and diplomatists; deep laid schemes of state policy; thrones propped up, and warranted to last for ages; bulwarks so strong that at the sight of them freedom should yield in despair: all these have been seen by many living now; and, as if to exhibit the littleness of man, his utter inability to contend against the onward march of intelligence and freedom, this year has rendered treaties valueless, shivered sceptres, and upheaved kingdoms from their base.

Exhausted by our rapid flights through centuries, we rest, we look around us, and we ask, "Where are we now?" What is chiefly to distinguish the present age? It has lately been the fashion to call this an age of progress—a very true, but equally indefinite term. Every age at which we have glanced might thus be distinguished; for progress differs alike in kind and in degree. Some ages have made progress sideways, advancing crab-like to a goal; others have crept like the tortoise, moving slowly, but still moving steadily and well; swallow-like, some centuries have described sweeping and erratic curves; others have soared like the eagle; and some again, like the steam locomotive, have rushed on resistlessly, caring not for obstacles, crushing life, happiness, individuality, or aught that seemed in their way. In all these modes, ages, nations, may advance, and each may be said to make progress; but better far than all these—and would that thus we could characterise every movement of the present day—is the calm, dignified, stately, rational progress of man. Let us have more of this and less of the swallow; more of this and less of the steam locomotive, and our advance, if not apparently so rapid, will be more real.

By Humboldt.

THE SUBLIME CHARACTER OF HEBREW POETRY.

It is characteristic poetry in reference to nature, that, as a reflex of monotheism, it always embraces the whole world in its unity, comprehending the life of the terrestrial globe, as well as the shining regions of space. It dwells less on details of phenomena, and loves to contemplate great masses. Nature is portrayed, not as self-subsisting, or glorious in her own beauty, but ever in relation to a higher, an over-ruling, a spiritual power. The Hebrew bard ever sees in her the living expression of the omnipresence of God in the works of the visible creation. Thus, the lyrical poetry of the Hebrews, in its descriptions of nature, is essentially, in its very subject, grand and solemn; and, when touching on the earthly condition of man, full of a yearning pensiveness. It is deserving of notice, that notwithstanding its grand character, and even in its highest lyrical flights, elevated by the charm of music, the Hebrew poetry, unlike that of the Hindus, scarcely ever appears unrestrained by law and measure. Devoted to the pure contemplation of the Divinity, figurative in language, but clear and simple in thought, it delights in comparisons, which occur continually and almost rhythmically. As descriptions of natural scenery, the writings of the Old Testament show, as in a mirror, the nature of the country in which the people of Israel moved and dwelt, with its alternations of desert, fruitful land, forest, and mountain. They portray the variations of the climate of Palestine, the succession of the seasons, the pastoral manners of the people, and their innate disinclination to agriculture. The epic, or historical and narrative, portions are of the utmost simplicity, almost more unadorned even than Herodotus; and from the small alteration which has taken place in the manners, and in

the usages and circumstances of a nomad life, modern travellers have been enabled to testify unanimously to their truth to nature. The Hebrew lyrical poetry is more adorned, and unfolds rich and animated views of the life of nature. A single psalm, the 104th, may be said to present a picture of the entire cosmos.

From the London People's Journal.

THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

What is Religion? 'Tis the fervid glow  
Of pure devotion in the mind within;  
No formal, vain, or artificial show,  
Too oft the garb of slavery and sin.  
It is the blossom of the soul, akin  
To deity that will for ever stand,  
Through ages of confusion, and the din  
Of argument, or war's unholy hand,  
Which scatters death and devastation o'er the land.  
It is the incense of the human heart,  
Which purifies the actions, and appears  
In every scene of life, that steals apart  
To worship; 'tis the living gem that cheers  
And guides man onwards through this vale of tears,  
Smooth the rude paths of sorrow, and displays  
Its fruits of kindness, heart to heart endears,  
And sanctifies with its benignant rays,  
Leading its followers in wisdom's pleasant ways.  
It seeks no fabric raised by mortal skill,  
No form of creed, nor dim monastic care;  
But in the forest, by the warbling rill,  
It sings its holiest songs, its purest prayers,  
And sweet unbiased homage rises there,  
Among creation's flowers, and trees of green  
Where vocal choristers on waves of air,  
Pour forth their raptures, 'mid the golden  
To the presiding god, by human eyes unseen.  
Were every temple prostrate in the dust,  
And every altar broken, we should find  
Religion still; eternal hope and trust  
Will hold their seats e'en in the untaught mind;  
Nature herself proclaims a Being kind,  
An all pervading, all protecting power;  
And man adores the Beautiful enshrined  
Within the planet, or the tender flower  
That shuns its pearly eye at evening's tranquil  
hour.

From Milne's Descriptive Atlas of Astronomy and Geography.

THE RIVERS OF IRELAND.

Few countries of the same extent possess so many facilities for inland navigation, and have an equal amount of water power fitted for industrial purposes, afforded by rivers, lakes, and natural dams. The Shannon, the principal river, ranks third among the streams of the United Kingdom in regard to the extent of its basin, draining an area of 6,946 square miles, yielding only in this respect to the Humber and the Severn; but its line of navigation surpasses that of any river in the British Isles, amounting to 213 miles from the entrance of the estuary, the navigation of the Thames extending only 193 miles from the Nore Light, and of the Severn only 193 miles from its mouth. This noble stream has its source in a limestone cavern in the county of Cavan. It then passes through a series of lakes, some of the most capacious in the island, or rather forms them by its own expansions, dividing Leitrim, Longford and Westmeath from Roscommon, Tipperary from Galway, and Limerick from Clare, on its way to the Atlantic, exhibiting the somewhat rare occurrence of its falling being the greatest in the lower part of its course. Out of an entire fall of 345 feet in 225 miles, it descends 97 feet in about 17 miles, between Killaloe and Limerick, forming there the Rapids of Doonoe, where the navigation is conducted by a lateral cut.

The next important river-system is that of the Barrow, Suir, and Noir, sometimes called the Three Sisters, from their sources lying in the same ridge of mountains, and their junction after a long separate course before reaching the sea. They rise in the Shevbloom Mountains, drain Tipperary, Queen's County, Kilkenny, and Carlow, with part of King's County, Kildare, Wexford, and Waterford, and have their common estuary in Waterford Harbor. The Lee, which terminates its course in Cork Harbor; the Blackwater, in Youghal Bay; the Slaney, in Wexford Harbor; the Liffey, in Dublin Bay; the Boyne, below Drogheda; the Foyle, in Lough Foyle; and the Bann, which flows through Lough Neagh to the north coast of Antrim, are the other considerable streams.

A GOOD DAUGHTER.

A good daughter! There are other ministers of love more conspicuous than she, but none in which a gentler, lovelier spirit dwells, and to which the heart's warm requitals more joyfully respond. There is no such thing as a comparative estimate of a parent's love for one or another child. There is little which she needs to covet, to whom the treasure of a good child has been given. But a son's occupation and pleasure carry him abroad, and he resides more among temptations, which hardly permit affection that is following him perhaps

over half the globe, to be mingled with anxiety, until the time when he comes to relinquish the shelter of his father's roof for one of his own, while a good daughter is the steady light of her parents' house.—Mary Mowat.

THRILLING ADVENTURE.

We heard the other day a story related by an old sailor, Captain J., which made a great impression on us, and which we wish we could repeat with the unctious and natural phraseology of the worthy narrator.

It occurred during the last war. The captain who was a native of Plymouth, Mass., was running on to the coast in a vessel loaded with flour. He had nearly reached his destination, when he was overhauled by the enemy's frigate, who ordered him peremptorily to heave a line aboard. There was no resisting the command, for the schooner was without arms, and the tender full of marines and sailors armed to the teeth with pistols, muskets and cutlasses. The captain had a light but fair breeze aloft, his sails drew, and he was driving near a reef, the entrance of which he was perfectly familiar with, and once inside which, he was sure of making port, undisturbed by the tender.

In this view he ordered one of his men forward with a line, and in a clear stentorian voice, perfectly audible on board of the tender, sang out—

"Heave your line aboard!" then he added in a low tone, so as to be heard only by his men, "Heave it short!"

The Yankee sailor caught the hint, and "hoave" according to directions. The end of the line went splashing into the water.

High above the execrations of the English officer commanding the tender rose the roar of the indignant Yankee skipper.

"Is that the way to heave a line, you lubberly son of a land-crab? Heave the line ship-shape, you lubber, or I'll cut your liver out. (Heave it short.)"

Again the line fell short, and the English officer and the Yankee captain vied with each other in showering imprecations and invectives on the head of the blundering "land lubber." Meanwhile the breeze was freshening, and the schooner drawing nearer to the reef.

Again and again the order to heave was given, with the same under-tone addition, and the same result. The Englishman began to smell a rat, and just as the Yankee skipper threw himself flat on the deck, and made his men follow his example, the report of a dozen muskets was heard, and a shower of bullets came whizzing through the rigging.

"Let 'em fire and be darned," said the Yankee; "I'll show them a clean pair of heels."

And taking the tiller between his heels, as he lay upon the deck, he ran the schooner cleverly inside the reef.

They were soon out of gunshot of the baffled tender. Up went the stars and stripes, with a hearty cheer from the mariners, and an old one-eyed sea dog pulled out a rusty life, and gave them Yankee Doodle in a strain as melodious as the triumphant notes of a porker that has escaped the butcher's knife. Capt. J. saved his bacon and his flour too.

A TOUGH STORY.

In a small town down East, there lived a butcher, a Jack-at-all-trades, and more particularly noted for his experiments in animal magnetism. A half-witted fellow, who lived entirely upon the charity of the town, imagining one day that he was quite ill, made application to the butcher to relieve him from the pains in his stomach. The thought flashed upon the mind of the butcher that he was a fit subject for experiment, and accordingly he mesmerised him into a profound sleep. He then made an incision into his stomach, and took out the inwards to wash them; after which he laid them down, and went into the house to get a needle and thread to sew up the incision. But on returning, to his astonishment, he beheld an old sow just leaving the place, having eaten them. In this dilemma he seized a sheep, and removed its entrails to the body of the man, then closing up the orifice, he awakened the slumbering subject, who was forthwith discharged cured.—Meeting the individual some days after, the butcher having some curiosity as to the success of the operation, asked the chap how he got along. "Oh, first rate," said he, "only I've got such an infernal hankering after grass!"

A SAFE BET FOR BOTH PARTIES.

Two bloods recently entered a tavern in New York where they had frequently resorted and calling for supper and two bottles of champagne, informed their host that they had laid a wager of such a repast as they had ordered, and had agreed to refer the question to him. They hoped he would wait for his pay until the decision, and then charge his amount to the loser. The landlord assented, and they sat down to a hearty supper. When they had finished, mine host had the curiosity to ask what was the nature of the bet, and was not a little charmed when he received for an answer that it originated in a dispute as to the direction the brick meeting-house steeple would take should it ever fall. The one bet it would fall east and the other west.

A VOLUME IN A LINE.—A recent temperance celebration in Newmarket, U.S., a little lad appeared in the procession bearing a flag, on which was inscribed the following:—"All's Right, when Daddy's Sober."