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VARIOUS

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THE
YALE LITERARY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXVII.

JULY, 1862.

No. VIII.

EDITORS FOR THE CLASS OF '63.

E. B. BINGHAM,

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J. H. BUTLER,

C. W. FRANCIS,

J. F. KERNOCHAN.

Day Dreams.

How little will make a kingdom! Even if men do claim private rights on certain portions of this earth of ours, they leave behind them many a noble domain owned by every one, and yet possessed in peculiar claim by each. Why, just to-night, as the sun went down, I had completed a great castle out in the West. It was just such an one as Reginald Front de Boeuf defended against the most worshipful knight Le Noir Faneant; and while I was doubting whether to fashion a certain golden line of clouds into a gallant cavalcade of full-armed nobles passing from its moated walls, behold a breath of envious wind scattered my castle, turret over battlement, into space. What became of the procession of knights I could not discover, except that he whom I had made the leader went careering off to the northward, accompanied by another form, which I at once discovered to be the 'fayre ladye' of the pageant, on a white palfrey. And when all were gone, I leaned back from the window and wondered if the next evening would bring them again to rebuild the shattered towers, and to hold high festival in the golden West.

Aye,—the *golden* West. And then what visions of those old adventurers, who passed full of hope into the broad ocean, steering through weedy sea and by dreaded sandbars, to the land over which hangs Hesperus, calm and pale, as in the days of olden time. Their dreams

were of the wealth of the Incas, of the untold richness of Manoa, "the golden city," and of the hoards of the captive Montezumas. And then came the English, under such men as Hawkins and Drake, and the covetous Spaniard had many a hard fight for his darling gold. Those were the days when Las Casas, in order to lighten the Indians' toil, brought into employment the stronger arms of the negroes, and introduced that slavery the curse of which has hung on our footsteps like an insatiable Nemesis ever since.

And yet in the very thickest of all this grasping for gain, there is one spark at least of the truest and most romantic daring. When Ponce de Leon set forth from Jamaica in his two caravels, for that new island of flowers, 'the Florida,' he sought not for gold, nor slaves, nor conquest. All his hope was centered in the discovery of the Fountain of Youth, whose waters he longed to drink and be young again. Hardy old soldier that he was, skilled in a thousand battles, and well aware of all Indian wiles, he left his bones in the green savannas, happily ignorant that his fabled stream was to be found only in a land which is not of the earth. And as I sit here and look out on the fast fading tints of the sky, I cannot but think that it was better to die as he did, than to fall with Cortes' bravest on the broken causeway in the Mexican lake.

Such stories have always been the fittest themes for song and legend. Chivalrous devotion to a cause never fails of throwing around and over all imperfections the veil of poetry. And any noble nature, if rightly portrayed, moves us up to higher things, happy if the impression be strong enough to outlast the wear of years. We learn best by example, and therein consists the true strength of the novelist. No one can read such books as 'Adam Bede,' Kingsley's 'Amyas Leigh,' or De la Motte Fouque's 'Thiodolph,' without a yearning to be more like those characters. As for 'Thiodolph,' that has been so little known when compared with 'Undine' and 'Sintram,' that I must crave pardon for having named it with the others, and yet no book is more worthy so to be named.

It is one of a man's frequent day dreams to imagine himself in positions of honor or power, and to fancy how he would conduct himself therein. His acts are all satisfactory to him, and everything goes smoothly, till perhaps the dream is broken by some such catastrophe as befell the glass merchant in the Arabian story, and his fancied riches turn into the sober reality of broken wares. But in spite of all, we keep to the old custom still, and wake ever and anon to the truth, merely to doze away again into some other vision of what may

be. Like the Lotus Eaters, we strive to banish thought in this mental intoxication. Alas for us, that the reaction is sometimes greater than we can bear. Such dreams are but the messengers of that indolent philosophy which would persuade us to forget everything but enjoyment, and believe that the

'Dread of something after death,'

is but a mere fiction of some excited brain, fit only to trouble the minds of those who foolishly think that there is an existence beyond the grave.

But there are dreams of another nature—truer and more elevating. They are the visions which come to us, when we are at our times of quiet, when we lay back as I do to-night and conjure up strange fancies from among the elm-leaves, and out of the rustle of the breeze. What a pity that we are so free from superstitions in this New World of ours. It would be worth a great deal if some enterprising Yankee should bring over a ship-load of Brownies and Kobolds, elves and dwarfs, to haunt our nooks and out of the way corners, in order to make some poetry for the masses therefrom. But as we are now, there is no prospect of such a desirable result, and the only sprites of the green wood are a few half-starved Indian demons, who never allow themselves to be distinctly noted and described. And while I think of these, my mind goes back to many an old legend, in which the fairy-folk played prominent parts. The Rhine is rich with them, from the story of the planning of Cologne Cathedral to the dismal tales of the nixie and the nymph of the Lurleyberg. And do not Norseland and Angletland, Germany and France, cherish yet the stories of these strange beings?

And there be dreams beside all these, courteous reader, which need to be specially dealt with. Did not the stern old Reformer cast ink-horn and ink full in the face of the foul fiend which tempted him? And shall we, even weak as we are, allow these cheating phantoms to steal away our hearts? Dreams are but the fabric of thin air, and yet the thoughts which produce them are not to be left free of guard. Think rightly, act rightly, and none but right visions shall ever come. These shapes of evil may have as little real existence as the Mountains of the Moon, or the North-West Passage, but they are just as sternly tugging at our heart strings as if they were in bodily presence. We must remember when our fancies come thickest upon us, to work out from their confusion some ordered whole, else we may justly receive

censure for time misspent and thoughts thrown away. As grand Will Shakspeare has it,—

"Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But like a thrifty goddess she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use."

It is well written of the hours, on the old sun-dial at Oxford,
"Pereunt et Imputantur." S. W. D.

THE DEFOREST PRIZE ORATION.

The Tendency to Decay incident to High Civilization.

BY DANIEL HENRY CHAMBERLAIN, WORCESTER, MASS.

ANALYSIS.

- I. Definition and proper conception of Civilization.
 - (a.) Progress through conflict.
- II. Such a conflict involves a liability to decline and relapse at all times.
- III. This tendency peculiarly strong and marked in high civilization.
- IV. Historical confirmations of this theory.
- V. Specific signs and evidences of this decay.
 - (a.) Want of physical energy.
 - (b.) Loss of Public Spirit.
 - (c.) Loss of faith in Ideas and Moral Truths.
- VI. Influence of Christianity.

ORATION.

HISTORY, of which civilization is to be regarded as one phase or department, is a motive process, dependent for its life and permanence upon the expansive and forceful nature of underlying ideas and principles. From that sublime hour when the Divine creative fiat ordained the course of nature and opened the initial chapter of human existence, the history of man has formed one continuous line of natural and necessary connections. It has separated itself into epochs; it has been

lifted into the beauty and glory of intellectual and moral eras ; or been sunk into the deformity and degradation of benighted and barbarous periods ; but epochs, eras and periods are but the articulating points in an unbroken process of expansion. Development, wherein law is supreme and each step has its natural antecedent, is the characteristic of historic life.

But development is not necessarily improvement, and expansion is not to be confounded with progress. In the sphere of nature development is ideal and perfect ; in the sphere of human history it is always to some extent imperfect and abnormal. The primary basis of history was displaced or corrupted by the free act of man. In the germinal source of his destiny, conflicting tendencies and opposing forces now take their places, and the stream of human history is thenceforth broken and fretted by antagonisms, convulsions and revolutions. Development is still its law and progress its destiny, but it is a development of decay as well as of growth, and its progress is often checked and turned back in the struggle of its elemental forces.

Civilization is, therefore, at once a conflict and a progress. It is not conflict alone ; it is not progress alone. It is such a conflict as involves progress ; it is such a progress as has the strife and adjustment of contending forces for its perpetual condition. Progress through conflict, antagonisms working out a higher unity, is the law of the individual and the community. As the harmonies of nature are but the equilibrium of its conflicting agencies, and its outward serenity is purchased by its elemental strife, so are the harmonies of civilization and the stability of society wrought out by their antagonizing elements. The liability to decay and relapse is, therefore, an universal and constant fact in the conflict and advance of civilization.

There are periods, however, in which this general and pervading tendency asserts itself with peculiar distinctness and power. In the infancy of civilization or before the slow and central process of development has become confirmed in an assured and steady progress, we find the downward tendencies and adverse forces strongly and clearly at work. In this early and formative era, civilization meets its first perils and wins its first triumphs. It gradually marshals and unites its scattered powers, combines into one movement its separate elements, and with victorious hand presses on in its benign and upward career.

The influence of this early conjunction of the helpful powers of civilization generally outlasts the exigency in which it takes place and renders the social advance more uniform and rapid through many suc-

ceeding generations. Life, growth, activity, power, characterize the age which succeeds the early conflicts of civilization, and in the incessant stir and expansion, we may mark the intensest development of character and mind. It is the era of a grand and massive strength of will and purpose, the age of strong faith, of profound earnestness, of boundless energy, and unselfish patriotism.

If now we pass to a later period in this progressive movement, we are met by a change in the relative power and prominence of the social forces. The passionate conflict and struggle of the first era, the earnest severity and ennobling simplicity of the second, are succeeded by an age of accumulated wealth and material abundance, of high social and intellectual refinement, of voluptuous elegance and cloying luxuriance. Upon this fair and placid scene the latent elements of decay reappear, betraying the insecurity and blighting the beauty of the social growth. The impulse imparted by the rude energy and strong ambition of the earlier periods, is no longer sufficient to continue the upward movement against the presence and resistance of the unambitious and selfish character of the age. The unaided natural powers of society have accomplished their highest work, and the nerves of social ambition and energy are now unstrung. In such a crisis of civilization, the causes and signs of decay appear with unwonted clearness and power.

Put now this theory of the action of the natural forces of civilization, to the test of historical fact. Does it form a picture of humanity to which the entire history of man, so far as he is unaffected by supernatural influences, has contributed? The ancient civilizations stand to testify at once the dignity and the corruption, the power and the weakness of human effort and natural forces. Those mighty Asiatic empires with colossal power, trod the same grand and sad round of rude and savage strength, of succeeding order and civil power, of final decay and dissolution. The germs of national life blossomed into outward beauty and glory but contained no enduring vitality, no immortal principle which could arrest the inherent and fatal decline. Egypt was once the lair of barbarism, then the home of learning and philosophy, and now the silent pyramids keep their mournful and eternal watch over the scenes of her long-departed glory. The civilization of the Greeks had its sources in the sturdy strength of the *savage* Pelasgic race. On this rude and strong foundation grew that wondrous harmony of Strength and Beauty which will be an indestructible and influential factor in all the progress of the race; yet poetry and art, eloquence and philosophy, could not resist the slow and relentless march of that law which gave to decay and ruin all the