THE RUINS,

OR, MEDITATION ON THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES: AND THE LAW OF NATURE,

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TO WHICH IS ADDED

VOLNEY'S ANSWER TO DR. PRIESTLY, A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE BY COUNT DARU, AND THE ZODIACAL SIGNS AND CONSTELLATIONS BY THE EDITOR.

I will cherish in remembrance the love of man, I will employ myself on the means of effecting good for him, and build my own happiness on the promotion of his.—Volney.

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PARIS TRANSLATION,

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and Sickels.

INVOCATION.

Hail, solitary ruins! holy sepulchres, and silent walls! you I invoke; to you I address my prayer. While your aspect averts, with secret terror, the vulgar regard, it excites in my heart the charm of delicious sentiments—sublime contemplations. What useful lessons! what affecting and profound reflections you suggest to him who knows how to consult you. When the whole earth, in chains and silence, bowed the neck before its tyrants, you had already proclaimed the truths which they abhor, and confounding the dust of the king with that of the meanest slave, had announced to man the sacred dogma of Equality! Within your pale, in solitary adoration of Liberty, I saw her Genius arise from the mansions of the dead; not such as she is painted by the impassioned multitude, armed with fire and sword, but under the august aspect of justice, poising in her hand the sacred balance, wherein are weighed the actions of men at the gates of eternity.

O Tombs! what virtues are yours! you appal the tyrant's heart, and poison with secret alarm his impious joys; he flies, with coward step, your incorruptible aspect, and erects afar his throne of insolence.

LONDON TRANSLATION.

INVOCATION.

Solitary ruins, sacred tombs, ye mouldering and silent walls, all hail! To you I address my invocation. While the vulgar shrink from your aspect with secret terror, my heart finds in the contemplation a thousand delicious sentiments, a thousand admirable recollections. Pregnant, I may truly call you, with useful lessons, with pathetic and irresistible advice to the man who knows how to consult you. A while ago the whole world bowed the neck in silence before the tyrants that oppressed it; and yet in that hopeless moment you already proclaimed the truths that tyrants hold in abhorrence: mixing the dust of the proudest kings with that of the meanest slaves, you called upon us to contemplate this example of Equality. From your caverns, whither the musing and anxious love of Liberty led me, I saw escape its venerable shade, and with unexpected felicity, direct its flight and marshal my steps the way to renovated France.

Tombs! what virtues and potency do you exhibit! Tyrants tremble at your aspect—you poison with secret alarm their impious pleasures—they turn from you with

impatience, and, coward like, endeavor to forget you amid the sumptuousness of their palaces.

PHILADELPHIA TRANSLATION.

INVOCATION.

Hail, ye solitary ruins, ye sacred tombs, and silent walls! 'Tis your auspicious aid that I invoke; 'tis to you my soul, wrapt in meditation, pours forth its prayers! What though the profane and vulgar mind shrinks with dismay from your august and awe-inspiring aspect; to me you unfold the sublimest charms of contemplation and sentiment, and offer to my senses the luxury of a thousand delicious and enchanting thoughts! How sumptuous the feast to a being that has a taste to relish, and an understanding to consult you! What rich and noble admonitions; what exquisite and pathetic lessons do you read to a heart that is susceptible of exalted feelings! When oppressed humanity bent in timid silence throughout the globe beneath the galling yoke of slavery, it was you that proclaimed aloud the birthright of those truths which tyrants tremble at while they detect, and which, by sinking the loftiest head of the proudest potentate, with all his boasted pageantry, to the level of mortality with his meanest slave, confirmed and ratified by your unerring testimony the sacred and immortal doctrine of Equality.

Musing within the precincts of your inviting scenes of philosophic solitude, whither the insatiate love of true-born Liberty had led me, I beheld her Genius ascending, not in the spurious character and habit of a blood-thirsty Fury, armed with daggers and instruments of murder, and followed by a frantic and intoxicated multitude, but under the placid and chaste aspect of Justice, holding with a pure and unsullied hand the sacred scales in which the actions of mortals are weighed on the brink of eternity.

The first translation was made and published in London soon after the appearance of the work in French, and, by a late edition, is still adopted without alteration. Mr. Volney, when in this country in 1797, expressed his disapprobation of this translation, alleging that the translator must have been overawed by the government or clergy from rendering his ideas faithfully; and, accordingly, an English gentleman, then in Philadelphia, volunteered to correct this edition. But by his endeavors to give the true and full meaning of the author with great precision, he has so overloaded his composition with an exuberance of words, as in a great measure to dissipate the simple elegance and sublimity of the original. Mr. Volney, when he became better acquainted with the English language, perceived this defect; and with the aid of our countryman, Joel Barlow, made and published in Paris a new, correct, and elegant translation, of which the present edition is a faithful and correct copy.

CHAPTER I.

THE JOURNEY.

In the eleventh year of the reign of Abd-ul-Hamid, son of Ahmid, emperor of the Turks; when the Nogais-Tartars were driven from the Crimea, and a Mussulman prince of the blood of Gengis-Kahn became the vassal and guard of a Christian woman and queen,* I was travelling in the Ottoman dominions, and through those provinces which were anciently the kingdoms of Egypt and Syria.

My whole attention bent on whatever concerns the happiness of man in a social state, I visited cities, and studied the manners of their inhabitants; entered palaces, and observed the conduct of those who govern; wandered over fields, and examined the condition of those who cultivated them: and nowhere perceiving aught but robbery and devastation, tyranny and wretchedness, my heart was oppressed with sorrow and indignation.

I saw daily on my road fields abandoned, villages deserted, and cities in ruin. Often I met with ancient monuments, wrecks of temples, palaces and fortresses, columns, aqueducts and tombs. This spectacle led me to meditate on times past, and filled my mind with contemplations the most serious and profound.

Arrived at the city of Hems, on the border of the Orontes, and being in the neighborhood of Palmyra of the desert, I resolved to visit its celebrated ruins. After three days journeying through arid deserts, having traversed the Valley of Caves and Sepulchres, on issuing into the plain, I was suddenly struck with a scene of the most stupendous ruins—a countless multitude of superb columns, stretching in avenues beyond the reach of sight. Among them were magnificent edifices, some entire, others in ruins; the earth every where strewed with fragments of cornices, capitals, shafts, entablatures, pilasters, all of white marble, and of the most exquisite workmanship.

** In the eleventh year of Abd-ul-Hamid, that is 1784 of the Christian era, and 1198 of the Hegira. The emigration of the Tartars took place in March, immediately on the manifesto of the empress, declaring the Crimea to be incorporated with Russia. The Mussulman prince of the blood of Gengis-khan was Chahin-Guerai. Gengis-Khan was borne and served by the kings whom he conquered: Chahin, on the contrary, after selling his country for a pension of eighty thousand roubles, accepted the commission of captain of guards to Catherine II. He afterwards returned home, and according to custom was strangled by the Turks.*

After a walk of three-quarters of an hour along these ruins, I entered the enclosure of a vast edifice, formerly a temple dedicated to the Sun; and accepting the hospitality of some poor Arabian peasants, who had built their hovels on the area of the temple, I determined to devote some days to contemplate at leisure the beauty of these stupendous ruins.

Daily I visited the monuments which covered the plain; and one evening, absorbed in reflection, I had advanced to the Valley of Sepulchres. I ascended the heights which surround it from whence the eye commands the whole group of ruins and the immensity of the desert. The sun had sunk below the horizon: a red border of light still marked his track behind the distant mountains of Syria; the full-orbed moon was rising in the east, on a blue ground, over the plains of the Euphrates; the sky was clear, the air calm and serene; the dying lamp of day still softened the horrors of approaching darkness; the refreshing night breezes attempered the sultry emanations from the heated earth; the herdsmen had given their camels to repose, the eye perceived no motion on the dusky and uniform plain; profound silence rested on the desert; the howlings only of the jackal,* and the solemn notes of the bird of night, were heard at distant intervals. Darkness now increased, and through the dusk could only be discerned the pale phantasms of columns and walls. The solitude of the place, the tranquillity of the hour, the majesty of the scene, impressed on my mind a religious pensiveness. The aspect of a great city deserted, the memory of times past, compared with its present state, all elevated my mind to high contemplations. I sat on the shaft of a column, my elbow reposing on my knee, and head reclining on my hand, my eyes fixed, sometimes on the desert, sometimes on the ruins, and fell into a profound reverie.

** An animal resembling a dog and a fox. It preys on other small animals, and upon the bodies of the dead on the field of battle. It is the Canis aureus of Linnaeus.*

CHAPTER II.

THE REVERIE.

Here, said I, once flourished an opulent city; here was the seat of a powerful empire. Yes! these places now so wild and desolate, were once animated by a living multitude; a busy crowd thronged in these streets, now so solitary. Within these walls, where now reigns the silence of death, the noise of the arts, and the shouts of joy and festivity incessantly resounded; these piles of marble were regular palaces; these fallen columns adorned the majesty of temples; these ruined galleries surrounded public places. Here assembled a numerous people for the sacred duties of their religion, and the anxious cares of their subsistence; here industry, parent of enjoyments, collected the riches of all climes, and the purple of Tyre was exchanged for the precious thread of Serica;* the soft tissues of Cassimere for the sumptuous tapestry of Lydia; the amber of the Baltic for the pearls and perfumes of Arabia; the gold of Ophir for the tin of Thule.

** The precious thread of Serica.—That is, the silk originally derived from the mountainous country where the great wall terminates, and which appears to have been the cradle of the Chinese empire. The tissues of Cassimere.—The shawls which Ezekiel seems to have described under the appellation of Choud-choud. The gold of Ophir.—This country, which was one of the twelve Arab cantons, and which has so much and so unsuccessfully been sought for by the antiquarians, has left, however, some trace of itself in Ofor, in the province of Oman, upon the Persian Gulf, neighboring on one side to the Sabeans, who are celebrated by Strabo for their abundance of gold, and on the other to Aula or Hevila, where the pearl fishery was carried on. See the 27th chapter of Ezekiel, which gives a very curious and extensive picture of the commerce of Asia at that period.*

And now behold what remains of this powerful city: a miserable skeleton! What of its vast domination: a doubtful and obscure remembrance! To the noisy concourse which thronged under these porticoes, succeeds the solitude of death. The silence of the grave is substituted for the busy hum of public places; the affluence of a commercial city is changed into wretched poverty; the palaces of kings have become a den of wild beasts; flocks repose in the area of temples, and savage reptiles inhabit the sanctuary of the gods. Ah! how has so much glory been eclipsed? how have so many labors been annihilated? Do thus perish then the works of men—thus vanish empires and nations?

And the history of former times revived in my mind; I remembered those ancient ages when many illustrious nations inhabited these countries; I figured to myself the Assyrian on the banks of the Tygris, the Chaldean on the banks of the Euphrates, the Persian reigning from the Indus to the Mediterranean. I enumerated the kingdoms of Damascus and Idumea, of Jerusalem and Samaria, the warlike states of the Philistines, and the commercial republics of Phoenicia. This Syria, said I, now so depopulated, then contained a hundred flourishing cities, and abounded with towns, villages, and hamlets.* In all parts were seen cultivated fields, frequented roads, and crowded habitations. Ah! whither have flown those ages of life and abundance?—whither vanished those brilliant creations of human industry? Where are those ramparts of Nineveh, those walls of Babylon, those palaces of Persepolis, those temples of Balbec and of Jerusalem? Where are those fleets of Tyre, those dock-yards of Arad, those work-shops of Sidon, and that multitude of sailors, of pilots, of merchants, and of soldiers? Where those husbandmen, harvests, flocks, and all the creation of living beings in which the face of the earth rejoiced? Alas! I have passed over this desolate land! I have visited the palaces, once the scene of so much splendor, and I beheld nothing but solitude and desolation. I sought the ancient inhabitants and their works, and found nothing but a trace, like the foot-prints of a traveller over the sand. The temples are fallen, the palaces overthrown, the ports filled up, the cities destroyed; and the earth, stripped of inhabitants, has become a place of sepulchres. Great God! whence proceed such fatal revolutions? What causes have so changed the fortunes of these countries? Wherefore are so many cities destroyed? Why has not this ancient population been reproduced and perpetuated?

** According to Josephus and Strabo, there were in Syria twelve millions of souls, and the traces that remain of culture and habitation confirm the calculation.*

Thus absorbed in meditation, a crowd of new reflections continually poured in upon my mind. Every thing, continued I, bewilders my judgment, and fills my heart with trouble and uncertainty. When these countries enjoyed what constitutes the glory and happiness of man, they were inhabited by infidel nations: It was the Phoenician, offering human sacrifices to Moloch, who gathered into his stores the riches of all climates; it was the Chaldean, prostrate before his serpent-god,* who subjugated opulent cities, laid waste the palaces of kings, and despoiled the temples of the gods; it was the Persian, worshipper of fire, who received the tribute of a hundred nations; they were the inhabitants of this very city, adorers of the sun and stars, who erected so many monuments of prosperity and luxury. Numerous herds, fertile fields, abundant harvests—whatsoever should be the reward of piety—was in the hands of these idolaters. And now, when a people of saints and believers occupy these fields, all is become sterility and solitude. The earth, under these holy hands, produces only thorns and briers. Man soweth in anguish, and reapeth tears and cares. War, famine, pestilence, assail him by turns. And yet, are not these the children of the prophets? The Mussulman, Christian, Jew, are they not the elect children of God, loaded with favors and miracles? Why, then, do these privileged races no longer enjoy the same advantages? Why are these fields, sanctified by the blood of martyrs, deprived of their ancient fertility? Why have those blessings been banished hence, and transferred for so many ages to other nations and different climes?

** The dragon Bell.*

At these words, revolving in my mind the vicissitudes which have transmitted the sceptre of the world to people so different in religion and manners from those in ancient Asia to the most recent of Europe, this name of a natal land revived in me the sentiment of my country; and turning my eyes towards France, I began to reflect on the situation in which I had left her.*

** In the year 1782, at the close of the American war.*

I recalled her fields so richly cultivated, her roads so admirably constructed, her cities inhabited by a countless people, her fleets spread over every sea, her ports filled with the produce of both the Indies: and then comparing the activity of her commerce, the extent of her navigation, the magnificence of her buildings, the arts and industry of her inhabitants, with what Egypt and Syria had once possessed, I was gratified to find in modern Europe the departed splendor of Asia; but the charm of my reverie was soon dissolved by a last term of comparison. Reflecting that such had once been the activity of the places I was then contemplating, who knows, said I, but such may one day be the abandonment of our countries? Who knows if on the banks of the Seine, the Thames, the Zuyder-Zee, where now, in the tumult of so many enjoyments, the heart and the eye suffice not for the multitude of sensations,—who knows if some traveller, like myself,

shall not one day sit on their silent ruins, and weep in solitude over the ashes of their inhabitants, and the memory of their former greatness.

At these words, my eyes filled with tears: and covering my head with the fold of my mantle, I sank into gloomy meditations on all human affairs. Ah! hapless man, said I in my grief, a blind fatality sports with thy destiny!* A fatal necessity rules with the hand of chance the lot of mortals! But no: it is the justice of heaven fulfilling its decrees!—a God of mystery exercising his incomprehensible judgments! Doubtless he has pronounced a secret anathema against this land: blasting with maledictions the present, for the sins of past generations. Oh! who shall dare to fathom the depths of the Omnipotent?

** Fatality is the universal and rooted prejudice of the East. "It was written," is there the answer to every thing. Hence result an unconcern and apathy, the most powerful impediments to instruction and civilization.*

And sunk in profound melancholy, I remained motionless.

CHAPTER III.

THE APPARITION.

While thus absorbed, a sound struck my ear, like the agitation of a flowing robe, or that of slow footsteps on dry and rustling grass. Startled, I opened my mantle, and looking about with fear and trembling, suddenly, on my left, by the glimmering light of the moon, through the columns and ruins of a neighboring temple, I thought I saw an apparition, pale, clothed in large and flowing robes, such as spectres are painted rising from their tombs. I shuddered: and while agitated and hesitating whether to fly or to advance toward the object, a distinct voice, in solemn tones, pronounced these words:

How long will man importune heaven with unjust complaint? How long, with vain clamors, will he accuse Fate as the author of his calamities? Will he forever shut his eyes to the light, and his heart to the admonitions of truth and reason? The light of truth meets him everywhere; yet he sees it not! The voice of reason strikes his ear; and he hears it not! Unjust man! if for a moment thou canst suspend the delusion which fascinates thy senses, if thy heart can comprehend the language of reason, interrogate these ruins! Read the lessons which they present to thee! And you, evidences of twenty centuries, holy temples! venerable tombs! walls once so glorious, appear in the cause of nature herself! Approach the tribunal of sound reason, and bear testimony against unjust accusations! Come and confound the declamations of a false wisdom or hypocritical piety, and avenge the heavens and the earth of man who calumniates them both!

What is that blind fatality, which without order and without law, sports with the destiny of mortals? What is that unjust necessity, which confounds the effect of actions, whether of wisdom or of folly? In what consist the anathemas of heaven over this land? Where is that divine malediction which perpetuates the abandonment of these fields? Say, monuments of past ages! have the heavens changed their laws and the earth its motion? Are the fires of the sun extinct in the regions of space? Do the seas no longer emit their vapors? Are the rains and the dews suspended in the air? Do the mountains withhold their springs? Are the streams dried up? And do the plants no longer bear fruit and seed? Answer, generation of falsehood and iniquity, hath God deranged the primitive and settled order of things which he himself assigned to nature? Hath heaven denied to earth, and earth to its inhabitants, the blessings they formerly dispensed? If nothing hath changed in the creation, if the same means now exist which before existed, why then are not the present what former generations were? Ah! it is falsely that you accuse fate and heaven! it is unjustly that you accuse God as the cause of your evils! Say, perverse and hypocritical race! if these places are desolate, if these powerful cities are reduced to solitude, is it God who has caused their ruin? Is it his hand which has overthrown these walls, destroyed these temples, mutilated these columns, or is it the hand of man? Is it the arm of God which has carried the sword into your cities, and fire into your fields, which has slaughtered the people, burned the harvests, rooted up trees, and ravaged the pastures, or is it the hand of man? And when, after the destruction of crops, famine has ensued, is it the vengeance of God which has produced it, or the mad fury of mortals? When, sinking under famine, the people have fed on impure aliments, if pestilence ensues, is it the wrath of God which sends it, or the folly of man? When war, famine and pestilence, have swept away the inhabitants, if the earth remains a desert, is it God who has depopulated it? Is it his rapacity which robs the husbandman, ravages the fruitful fields, and wastes the earth, or is it the rapacity of those who govern? Is it his pride which excites murderous wars, or the pride of kings and their ministers? Is it the venality of his decisions which overthrows the fortunes of families, or the corruption of the organs of the law? Are they his passions which, under a thousand forms, torment individuals and nations, or are they the passions of man? And if, in the anguish of their miseries, they see not the remedies, is it the ignorance of God which is to blame, or their ignorance? Cease then, mortals, to accuse the decrees of Fate, or the judgments of the Divinity! If God is good, will he be the author of your misery? If he is just, will he be the accomplice of your crimes? No, the caprice of which man complains is not the caprice of fate; the darkness that misleads his reason is not the darkness of God; the source of his calamities is not in the distant heavens, it is beside him on the earth; it is not concealed in the bosom of the divinity; it dwells within himself, he bears it in his own heart.

Thou murmurest and sayest: What! have an infidel people then enjoyed the blessings of heaven and earth? Are the holy people of God less fortunate than the races of impiety? Deluded man! where then is the contradiction which offends thee? Where is

the inconsistency which thou imputest to the justice of heaven? Take into thine own hands the balance of rewards and punishments, of causes and effects. Say: when these infidels observed the laws of the heavens and the earth, when they regulated well-planned labors by the order of the seasons and the course of the stars, should the Almighty have disturbed the equilibrium of the universe to defeat their prudence? When their hands cultivated these fields with toil and care, should he have diverted the course of the rains, suspended the refreshing dews, and planted crops of thorns? When, to render these arid fields productive, their industry constructed aqueducts, dug canals, and led the distant waters across the desert, should he have dried up their sources in the mountains? Should he have blasted the harvests which art had nourished, wasted the plains which peace had peopled, overthrown cities which labor had created, or disturbed the order established by the wisdom of man? And what is that infidelity which founded empires by its prudence, defended them by its valor, and strengthened them by its justice—which built powerful cities, formed capacious ports, drained pestilential marshes, covered the ocean with ships, the earth with inhabitants; and, like the creative spirit, spread life and motion throughout the world? If such be infidelity, what then is the true faith? Doth sanctity consist in destruction? The God who peoples the air with birds, the earth with animals, the waters with fishes—the God who animates all nature—is he then a God of ruins and tombs? Demands he devastation for homage, and conflagration for sacrifice? Requires he groans for hymns, murderers for votaries, a ravaged and desolate earth for his temple? Behold then, holy and believing people, what are your works! behold the fruits of your piety! You have massacred the people, burned their cities, destroyed cultivation, reduced the earth to a solitude; and you ask the reward of your works! Miracles then must be performed! The people whom you extirpated must be recalled to life, the walls rebuilt which you have overthrown, the harvests reproduced which you have destroyed, the waters regathered which you have dispersed; the laws, in fine, of heaven and earth reversed; those laws, established by God himself, in demonstration of his magnificence and wisdom; those eternal laws, anterior to all codes, to all the prophets those immutable laws, which neither the passions nor the ignorance of man can pervert. But that passion which mistaketh, that ignorance which observeth neither causes nor effects, hath said in its folly: "All things flow from chance; a blind fatality poureth out good and evil upon the earth; success is not to the prudent, nor felicity to the wise;" or, assuming the language of hypocrisy, she hath said, "all things are from God; he taketh pleasure in deceiving wisdom and confounding reason." And Ignorance, applauding herself in her malice, hath said, "thus will I place myself on a par with that science which confounds me—thus will I excel that prudence which fatigues and torments me." And Avarice hath added: "I will oppress the weak, and devour the fruits of his labors; and I will say, it is fate which hath so ordained." But I! I swear by the laws of heaven and earth, and by the law which is written in the heart of man, that the hypocrite shall be deceived in his cunning—the oppressor in his rapacity! The sun shall change his course, before folly shall prevail over wisdom and knowledge,

or ignorance surpass prudence, in the noble and sublime art of procuring to man his true enjoyments, and of building his happiness on an enduring foundation.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXPOSITION

Thus spoke the Phantom. Confused with this discourse, and my heart agitated with different reflections, I remained long in silence. At length, taking courage, I thus addressed him: Oh, Genius of tombs and ruins! Thy presence, thy severity, hath disordered my senses; but the justice of thy discourse restoreth confidence to my soul. Pardon my ignorance. Alas, if man is blind, shall his misfortune be also his crime? I may have mistaken the voice of reason; but never, knowingly, have I rejected its authority. Ah! if thou readest my heart, thou knowest with what enthusiasm it seeketh truth. Is it not in its pursuit that thou seest me in this sequestered spot? Alas! I have wandered over the earth, I have visited cities and countries; and seeing everywhere misery and desolation, a sense of the evils which afflict my fellow men hath deeply oppressed my soul. I have said, with a sigh: is man then born but for sorrow and anguish? And I have meditated upon human misery that I might discover a remedy. I have said, I will separate myself from the corruption of society; I will retire far from palaces where the mind is depraved by satiety and from the hovel where it is debased by misery. I will go into the desert and dwell among ruins; I will interrogate ancient monuments on the wisdom of past ages; I will invoke from the bosom of the tombs the spirit which once in Asia gave splendor to states, and glory to nations; I will ask of the ashes of legislators, by what secret causes do empires rise and fall; from what sources spring the Prosperity and misfortunes of nations, on what principles can the Peace of Society, and the happiness of man be established?

I ceased, and with submissive look awaited the answer of the Genius.

Peace and happiness, said he, attend those who practice justice! Since thy heart, O mortal, with sincerity seeketh truth; since thine eyes can still recognize her through the mist of prejudice, thy prayer shall not be in vain. I will unfold to thy view that truth thou invokest; I will teach thy reason that knowledge thou seekest; I will reveal to thee the science of ages and the wisdom of the tombs.

Then approaching and laying his hand on my head, he said:

Rise, mortal, and extricate thy senses from the dust in which thou movest.

Suddenly a celestial flame seemed to dissolve the bands which held us to the earth; and, like a light vapor, borne on the wings of the Genius, I felt myself wafted to the regions above. Thence, from the aerial heights, looking down upon the earth, I

perceived a scene altogether new. Under my feet, floating in the void, a globe like that of the moon, but smaller and less luminous, presented to me one of its phases; and that phase* had the aspect of a disk varigated with large spots, some white and nebulous, others brown, green or gray, and while I strained my sight to distinguish what they were, the Genius exclaimed:

** See Plate representing half the terrestrial globe, opposite page 10.*

Disciple of Truth, knowest thou that object?

O Genius, answered I, if I did not see the moon in another quarter of the heavens, I should have supposed that to be her globe. It has the appearance of that planet seen through the telescope during the obscuration of an eclipse. These varigated spots might be mistaken for seas and continents.

They are seas and continents, said he, and those of the very hemisphere which you inhabit.

What! said I, is that the earth—the habitation of man?

Yes, replied he, that brown space which occupies irregularly a great portion of the disk, and envelops it almost on every side, is what you call the great ocean, which advancing from the south pole towards the equator, forms first the great gulf of India and Africa, then extends eastward across the Malay islands to the confines of Tartary, while towards the west it encircles the continents of Africa and of Europe, even to the north of Asia.

That square peninsula under our feet is the arid country of the Arabs; the great continent on its left, almost as naked in its interior, with a little verdure only towards its borders, is the parched soil inhabited by black-men.* To the north, beyond a long, narrow and irregular sea,** are the countries of Europe, rich in meadows and cultivated fields. On its right, from the Caspian Sea, extend the snowy and naked plains of Tartary. Returning in this direction that white space is the vast and barren desert of Cobi, which separates China from the rest of the world. You see that empire in the furrowed plain which obliquely rounds itself off from our sight. On yonder coasts, those ragged tongues of land and scattered points are the peninsulas and islands of the Malays, the wretched possessors of the spices and perfumes. That triangle which advances so far into the sea, is the too famous peninsula of India.*** You see the winding course of the Ganges, the rough mountains of Thibet, the lovely valley of Cachemere, the briny deserts of Persia, the banks of the Euphrates and Tygris, the deep bed of the Jordan and the canals of the solitary Nile.

** Africa.*

*** The Mediterranean.*

**** Of what real good has been the commerce of India to the mass of the people? On the contrary, how great the evil occasioned by the superstition of this country having been added the general superstition!*

O Genius, said I, interrupting him, the sight of a mortal reaches not to objects at such a distance. He touched my eyes, and immediately they became piercing as those of an eagle; nevertheless the rivers still appeared like waving lines, the mountains winding furrows, and the cities little compartments like the squares of a chess-board.

And the Genius proceeded to enumerate and point out the objects to me: Those piles of ruins, said he, which you see in that narrow valley watered by the Nile, are the remains of opulent cities, the pride of the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia.* Behold the wrecks of her metropolis, of Thebes with her hundred palaces,** the parent of cities, and monument of the caprice of destiny. There a people, now forgotten, discovered, while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences. A race of men now rejected from society for their sable skin and frizzled hair, founded on the study of the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe. Lower down, those dusky points are the pyramids whose masses have astonished you. Beyond that, the coast, hemmed in between the sea and a narrow ridge of mountains, was the habitation of the Phoenicians. These were the famous cities of Tyre, of Sidon, of Ascalon, of Gaza, and of Berytus. That thread of water with no outlet, is the river Jordan; and those naked rocks were once the theatre of events that have resounded throughout the world. Behold that desert of Horeb, and that Mount Sinai; where, by means beyond vulgar reach, a genius, profound and bold, established institutions which have weighed on the whole human race. On that dry shore which borders it, you perceive no longer any trace of splendor; yet there was an emporium of riches. There were those famous Ports of Idumea, whence the fleets of Phoenicia and Judea, coasting the Arabian peninsula, went into the Persian gulf, to seek there the pearls of Hevila, the gold of Saba and of Ophir. Yes, there on that coast of Oman and of Barhain was the seat of that commerce of luxuries, which, by its movements and revolutions, fixed the destinies of ancient nations.*** Thither came the spices and precious stones of Ceylon, the shawls of Cassimere, the diamonds of Golconda, the amber of Maldivia, the musk of Thibet, the aloes of Cochin, the apes and peacocks of the continent of India, the incense of Hadramaut, the myrrh, the silver, the gold dust and ivory of Africa; thence passing, sometimes by the Red Sea on the vessels of Egypt and Syria, these luxuries nourished successively the wealth of Thebes, of Sidon, of Memphis and of Jerusalem; sometimes, ascending the Tygris and Euphrates, they awakened the activity of the Assyrians, Medes, Chaldeans, and Persians; and that wealth, according to the use or abuse of it, raised or reversed by turns their domination. Hence sprung the magnificence of Persepolis, whose columns you still perceive; of Ecbatana, whose sevenfold wall is destroyed; of Babylon,**** now leveled with the earth; of Nineveh, of which scarce the name remains; of Thapsacus, of Anatho, of Gerra, and of desolated Palmyra. O names for ever glorious! fields of renown! countries of never-dying memory! what sublime lessons doth your aspect offer! what profound truths are written on the surface of your soil! remembrances of times past, return into my mind! places, witnesses of the life of man in so many different ages, retrace for me the revolutions of his fortune! say,

what were their springs and secret causes! say, from what sources he derived success and disgrace! unveil to himself the causes of his evils! correct him by the spectacle of his errors! teach him the wisdom which belongeth to him, and let the experience of past ages become a means of instruction, and a germ of happiness to present and future generations.

** In the new Encyclopedia 3rd vol. Antiquities is published a memoir, respecting the chronology of the twelve ages anterior to the passing of Xerxes into Greece, in which I conceive myself to have proved that upper Egypt formerly composed a distinct kingdom known to the Hebrews by the name of Kous and to which the appellation of Ethiopia was specially given. This kingdom preserved its independence to the time of Psammeticus; at which period, being united to the Lower Egypt, it lost its name of Ethiopia, which thenceforth was bestowed upon the nations of Nubia and upon the different tribes of blacks, including Thebes, their metropolis.*

*** The idea of a city with a hundred gates, in the common acceptation of the word, is so absurd, that I am astonished the equivoque has not before been felt.*

It has ever been the custom of the East to call palaces and houses of the great by the name of gates, because the principal luxury of these buildings consists in the singular gate leading from the street into the court, at the farthest extremity of which the palace is situated. It is under the vestibule of this gate that conversation is held with passengers, and a sort of audience and hospitality given. All this was doubtless known to Homer; but poets make no commentaries, and readers love the marvellous.

This city of Thebes, now Lougsor, reduced to the condition of a miserable village, has left astonishing monuments of its magnificence. Particulars of this may be seen in the plates of Norden, in Pocock, and in the recent travels of Bruce. These monuments give credibility to all that Homer has related of its splendor, and lead us to infer its political power and external commerce.

Its geographical position was favorable to this twofold object. For, on one side, the valley of the Nile, singularly fertile, must have early occasioned a numerous population; and, on the other, the Red Sea, giving communication with Arabia and India, and the Nile with Abyssinia and the Mediterranean, Thebes was thus naturally allied to the richest countries on the globe; an alliance that procured it an activity so much the greater, as Lower Egypt, at first a swamp, was nearly, if not totally, uninhabited. But when at length this country had been drained by the canals and dikes which Sesostris constructed, population was introduced there, and wars arose which proved fatal to the power of Thebes. Commerce then took another route, and descended to the point of the Red Sea, to the canals of Sesostris (see Strabo), and wealth and activity were transferred to Memphis. This is manifestly what Diodorus means when he tells us (lib. i. sect. 2), that as soon as Memphis was established and made a wholesome and delicious abode, kings abandoned Thebes to fix themselves there. Thus Thebes continued to decline, and Memphis to flourish, till the time

of Alexander, who, building Alexandria on the border of the sea, caused Memphis to fall in its turn; so that prosperity and power seem to have descended historically step by step along the Nile; whence it results, both physically and historically, that the existence of Thebes was prior to that of the other cities. The testimony of writers is very positive in this respect. "The Thebans," says Diodorus, "consider themselves as the most ancient people of the earth, and assert, that with them originated philosophy and the science of the stars. Their situation, it is true, is infinitely favorable to astronomical observation, and they have a more accurate division of time into mouths and years than other nations" etc.

What Diodorus says of the Thebans, every author, and himself elsewhere, repeat of the Ethiopians, which tends more firmly to establish the identity of this place of which I have spoken. "The Ethiopians conceive themselves," says he, lib. iii., "to be of greater antiquity than any other nation: and it is probable that, born under the sun's path, its warmth may have ripened them earlier than other men. They suppose themselves also to be the inventors of divine worship, of festivals, of solemn assemblies, of sacrifices, and every other religious practice. They affirm that the Egyptians are one of their colonies, and that the Delta, which was formerly sea, became land by the conglomeration of the earth of the higher country which was washed down by the Nile. They have, like the Egyptians, two species of letters, hieroglyphics, and the alphabet; but among the Egyptians the first was known only to the priests, and by them transmitted from father to son, whereas both species were common among the Ethiopians."

"The Ethiopians," says Lucian, page 985, "were the first who invented the science of the stars, and gave names to the planets, not at random and without meaning, but descriptive of the qualities which they conceived them to possess; and it was from them that this art passed, still in an imperfect state, to the Egyptians."

It would be easy to multiply citations upon this subject; from all which it follows, that we have the strongest reasons to believe that the country neighboring to the tropic was the cradle of the sciences, and of consequence that the first learned nation was a nation of Blacks; for it is incontrovertible, that, by the term Ethiopians, the ancients meant to represent a people of black complexion, thick lips, and woolly hair. I am therefore inclined to believe, that the inhabitants of Lower Egypt were originally a foreign colony imported from Syria and Arabia, a medley of different tribes of savages, originally shepherds and fishermen, who, by degrees formed themselves into a nation, and who, by nature and descent, were enemies of the Thebans, by whom they were no doubt despised and treated as barbarians.

I have suggested the same ideas in my Travels into Syria, founded upon the black complexion of the Sphinx. I have since ascertained that the antique images of Thebias have the same characteristic; and Mr. Bruce has offered a multitude of analogous facts; but this traveller, of whom I heard some mention at Cairo, has so interwoven these facts with certain systematic opinions, that we should have

recourse to his narratives with caution.

It is singular that Africa, situated so near us, should be the least known country on the earth. The English are at this moment making explorations, the success of which ought to excite our emulation.

**** Ailah (Eloth), and Atsiom-Gaber (Hesien-Geber.) The name of the first of these towns still subsists in its ruins, at the point of the gulf of the Red Sea, and in the route which the pilgrims take to Mecca. Hesion has at present no trace, any more than Quolzoum and Faran: it was, however, the harbor for the fleets of Solomon. The vessels of this prince conducted by the Tyrians, sailed along the coast of Arabia to Ophir, in the Persian Gulf, thus opening a communication with the merchants of India and Ceylon. That this navigation was entirely of Tyrian invention, appears both from the pilots and shipbuilders employed by the Jews, and the names that were given to the trading islands, viz. Tyrus and Aradus, now Barhain. The voyage was performed in two different modes, either in canoes of osier and rushes, covered on the outside with skins done over with pitch: (these vessels were unable to quit the Red Sea, or so much as to leave the shore.) The second mode of carrying on the trade was by means of vessels with decks of the size of our river boats, which were able to pass the strait and to weather the dangers of time ocean; but for this purpose it was necessary to bring the wood from Mount Libanus and Cilicia, where it is very fine and in great abundance. This wood was first conveyed in floats from Tarsus to Phoenicia, for which reason the vessels were called ships of Tarsus; from whence it has been ridiculously inferred, that they went round the promontory of Africa as far as Tortosa in Spain. From Phoenicia it was transported on the backs of camels to the Red Sea, which practice still continues, because the shores of this sea are absolutely unprovided with wood even for fuel. These vessels spent a complete year in their voyage, that is, sailed one year, sojourned another, and did not return till the third. This tediousness was owing first to their cruising from port to port, as they do at present; secondly, to their being detained by the Monsoon currents; and thirdly, because, according to the calculations of Pliny and Strabo, it was the ordinary practice among the ancients to spend three years in a voyage of twelve hundred leagues. Such a commerce must have been very expensive, particularly as they were obliged to carry with them their provisions, and even fresh water. For this reason Solomon made himself master of Palmyra, which was at that time inhabited, and was already the magazine and high road of merchants by the way of the Euphrates. This conquest brought Solomon much nearer to the country of gold and pearls. This alternative of a route either by the Red Sea or by the river Euphrates was to the ancients, what in later times has been the alternative in a voyage to the Indies, either by crossing the isthmus of Suez or doubling the cape of Good Hope. It appears that till the time of Moses, this trade was carried on across the desert of Syria and Thebais; that afterwards it fell into the hands of the Phoenicians, who fixed its site upon the Red Sea; and that it was mutual jealousy that induced the kings of Nineveh and Babylon to undertake the destruction of Tyre and Jerusalem. I insist the more upon these facts, because I have never seen any thing reasonable upon the subject.*

***** It appears that Babylon occupied on the eastern banks of the Euphrates a space of ground six leagues in length. Throughout this space bricks are found by means of which daily additions are made to the town of Helle. Upon many of these are characters written with a nail similar to those of Persepolis. I am indebted for these facts to M. de Beauchamp, grand vicar of Babylon, a traveller equally distinguished for his knowledge of astronomy and for his veracity.*

CHAPTER XIII.

WILL THE HUMAN RACE IMPROVE?

At these words, oppressed with the painful sentiment with which their severity overwhelmed me: Woe to the nations! cried I, melting in tears; woe to myself! Ah! now it is that I despair of the happiness of man! Since his miseries proceed from his heart; since the remedy is in his own power, woe for ever to his existence! Who, indeed will ever be able to restrain the lust of wealth in the strong and powerful? Who can enlighten the ignorance of the weak? Who can teach the multitude to know their rights, and force their chiefs to perform their duties? Thus the race of man is always doomed to suffer! Thus the individual will not cease to oppress the individual, a nation to attack a nation; and days of prosperity, of glory, for these regions, shall never return. Alas! conquerors will come; they will drive out the oppressors, and fix themselves in their place; but, inheriting their power, they will inherit their rapacity; and the earth will have changed tyrants, without changing the tyranny.

Then, turning to the Genius, I exclaimed:

O Genius, despair hath settled on my soul. Knowing the nature of man, the perversity of those who govern, and the debasement of the governed—this knowledge hath disgusted me with life; and since there is no choice but to be the accomplice or the victim of oppression, what remains to the man of virtue but to mingle his ashes with those of the tomb?

The Genius then gave me a look of severity, mingled with compassion; and after a few moments of silence, he replied:

Virtue, then, consists in dying! The wicked man is indefatigable in consummating his crime, and the just is discouraged from doing good at the first obstacle he encounters! But such is the human heart. A little success intoxicates man with confidence; a reverse overturns and confounds him. Always given up to the sensation of the moment, he seldom judges things from their nature, but from the impulse of his passion.

Mortal, who despairest of the human race, on what profound combination of facts hast thou established thy conclusion? Hast thou scrutinized the organization of sentient

beings, to determine with precision whether the instinctive force which moves them on to happiness is essentially weaker than that which repels them from it? or, embracing in one glance the history of the species, and judging the future by the past, hast thou shown that all improvement is impossible? Say! hath human society, since its origin, made no progress toward knowledge and a better state? Are men still in their forests, destitute of everything, ignorant, stupid and ferocious? Are all the nations still in that age when nothing was seen upon the globe but brutal robbers and brutal slaves? If at any time, in any place, individuals have ameliorated, why shall not the whole mass ameliorate? If partial societies have made improvements, what shall hinder the improvement of society in general? And if the first obstacles are overcome, why should the others be insurmountable?

Art thou disposed to think that the human race degenerates? Guard against the illusion and paradoxes of the misanthrope. Man, discontented with the present, imagines for the past a perfection which never existed, and which only serves to cover his chagrin. He praises the dead out of hatred to the living, and beats the children with the bones of their ancestors.

To prove this pretended retrograde progress from perfection we must contradict the testimony of reason and of fact; and if the facts of history are in any measure uncertain, we must contradict the living fact of the organization of man; we must prove that he is born with the enlightened use of his senses; that, without experience, he can distinguish aliment from poison; that the child is wiser than the old man; that the blind walks with more safety than the clear-sighted; that the civilized man is more miserable than the savage; and, indeed, that there is no ascending scale in experience and instruction.

Believe, young man, the testimony of monuments, and the voice of the tombs. Some countries have doubtless fallen from what they were at certain epochs; but if we weigh the wisdom and happiness of their inhabitants, even in those times, we shall find more of splendor than of reality in their glory; we shall find, in the most celebrated of ancient states, enormous vices and cruel abuses, the true causes of their decay; we shall find in general that the principles of government were atrocious; that insolent robberies, barbarous wars and implacable hatreds were raging from nation to nation;* that natural right was unknown; that morality was perverted by senseless fanaticism and deplorable superstition; that a dream, a vision, an oracle, were constantly the causes of vast commotions. Perhaps the nations are not yet entirely cured of all these evils; but their intensity at least is diminished, and the experience of the past has not been wholly lost. For the last three centuries, especially, knowledge has increased and been extended; civilization, favored by happy circumstances, has made a sensible progress; inconveniences and abuses have even turned to its advantage; for if states have been too much extended by conquest, the people, by uniting under the same yoke, have lost the spirit of estrangement and division which made them all enemies one to the other. If the powers of government have been more concentrated, there has been more system

and harmony in their exercise. If wars have become more extensive in the mass, they are less bloody in detail. If men have gone to battle with less personality, less energy, their struggles have been less sanguinary and less ferocious; they have been less free, but less turbulent; more effeminate, but more pacific. Despotism itself has rendered them some service; for if governments have been more absolute, they have been more quiet and less tempestuous. If thrones have become a property and hereditary, they have excited less dissensions, and the people have suffered fewer convulsions; finally, if the despots, jealous and mysterious, have interdicted all knowledge of their administration, all concurrence in the management of public affairs, the passions of men, drawn aside from politics, have fixed upon the arts, and the sciences of nature; and the sphere of ideas in every direction has been enlarged; man, devoted to abstract studies, has better understood his place in the system of nature, and his relations in society; principles have been better discussed, final causes better explained, knowledge more extended, individuals better instructed, manners more social, and life more happy. The species at large, especially in certain countries, has gained considerably; and this amelioration cannot but increase in future, because its two principal obstacles, those even which, till then, had rendered it slow and sometimes retrograde,—the difficulty of transmitting ideas and of communicating them rapidly,—have been at last removed.

** Read the history of the wars of Rome and Carthage, of Sparta and Messina, of Athens and Syracuse, of the Hebrews and the Phoenicians: yet these are the nations of which antiquity boasts as being most polished!*

Indeed, among the ancients, each canton, each city, being isolated from all others by the difference of its language, the consequence was favorable to ignorance and anarchy. There was no communication of ideas, no participation of discoveries, no harmony of interests or of wills, no unity of action or design; besides, the only means of transmitting and of propagating ideas being that of speech, fugitive and limited, and that of writing, tedious of execution, expensive and scarce, the consequence was a hindrance of present instruction, loss of experience from one generation to another, instability, retrogression of knowledge, and a perpetuity of confusion and childhood.

But in the modern world, especially in Europe, great nations having allied themselves in language, and established vast communities of opinions, the minds of men are assimilated, and their affections extended; there is a sympathy of opinion and a unity of action; then that gift of heavenly Genius, the holy art of printing, having furnished the means of communicating in an instant the same idea to millions of men, and of fixing it in a durable manner, beyond the power of tyrants to arrest or annihilate, there arose a mass of progressive instruction, an expanding atmosphere of science, which assures to future ages a solid amelioration. This amelioration is a necessary effect of the laws of nature; for, by the law of sensibility, man as invincibly tends to render himself happy as the flame to mount, the stone to descend, or the water to find its level. His obstacle is his ignorance, which misleads him in the means, and deceives him in causes and effects. He will enlighten himself by experience; he will become right by dint of errors;

he will grow wise and good because it is his interest so to be. Ideas being communicated through the nation, whole classes will gain instruction; science will become a vulgar possession, and all men will know what are the principles of individual happiness and of public prosperity. They will know the relations they bear to society, their duties and their rights; they will learn to guard against the illusions of the lust of gain; they will perceive that the science of morals is a physical science, composed, indeed, of elements complicated in their operation, but simple and invariable in their nature, since they are only the elements of the organization of man. They will see the propriety of being moderate and just, because in that is found the advantage and security of each; they will perceive that the wish to enjoy at the expense of another is a false calculation of ignorance, because it gives rise to reprisal, hatred, and vengeance, and that dishonesty is the never-failing offspring of folly.

Individuals will feel that private happiness is allied to public good:

The weak, that instead of dividing their interests, they ought to unite them, because equality constitutes their force:

The rich, that the measure of enjoyment is bounded by the constitution of the organs, and that lassitude follows satiety:

The poor, that the employment of time, and the peace of the heart, compose the highest happiness of man. And public opinion, reaching kings on their thrones, will force them to confine themselves to the limits of regular authority.

Even chance itself, serving the cause of nations, will sometimes give them feeble chiefs, who, through weakness, will suffer them to become free; and sometimes enlightened chiefs, who, from a principle of virtue, will free them.

And when nations, free and enlightened, shall become like great individuals, the whole species will have the same facilities as particular portions now have; the communication of knowledge will extend from one to another, and thus reach the whole. By the law of imitation, the example of one people will be followed by others, who will adopt its spirit and its laws. Even despots, perceiving that they can no longer maintain their authority without justice and beneficence, will soften their sway from necessity, from rivalship; and civilization will become universal.

There will be established among the several nations an equilibrium of force, which, restraining them all within the bounds of the respect due to their reciprocal rights, shall put an end to the barbarous practice of war, and submit their disputes to civil arbitration.* The human race will become one great society, one individual family, governed by the same spirit, by common laws, and enjoying all the happiness of which their nature is susceptible.

** What is a people? An individual of the society at large. What a war? A duel between two individual people. In what manner ought a society to act when two of its members fight? Interfere and reconcile, or repress them. In the days of the Abbe de Saint Pierre this was treated as a dream, but happily for the human race it begins to be realized.*

Doubtless this great work will be long accomplishing; because the same movement must be given to an immense body; the same leaven must assimilate an enormous mass of heterogeneous parts. But this movement shall be effected; its presages are already to be seen. Already the great society, assuming in its course the same characters as partial societies have done, is evidently tending to a like result. At first disconnected in all its parts, it saw its members for a long time without cohesion; and this general solitude of nations formed its first age of anarchy and childhood; divided afterwards by chance into irregular sections, called states and kingdoms, it has experienced the fatal effects of an extreme inequality of wealth and rank; and the aristocracy of great empires has formed its second age; then, these lordly states disputing for preeminence, have exhibited the period of the shock of factions.

At present the contending parties, wearied with discord, feel the want of laws, and sigh for the age of order and of peace. Let but a virtuous chief arise! a just, a powerful people appear! and the earth will raise them to supreme power. The world is waiting for a legislative people; it wishes and demands it; and my heart attends the cry.

Then turning towards the west: Yes, continued he, a hollow sound already strikes my ear; a cry of liberty, proceeding from far distant shores, resounds on the ancient continent. At this cry, a secret murmur against oppression is raised in a powerful nation; a salutary inquietude alarms her respecting her situation; she enquires what she is, and what she ought to be; while, surprised at her own weakness, she interrogates her rights, her resources, and what has been the conduct of her chiefs.

Yet another day—a little more reflection—and an immense agitation will begin; a new-born age will open! an age of astonishment to vulgar minds, of terror to tyrants, of freedom to a great nation, and of hope to the human race!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GREAT OBSTACLE TO IMPROVEMENT.

The Genius ceased. But preoccupied with melancholy thoughts, my mind resisted persuasion; fearing, however, to shock him by my resistance, I remained silent. After a while, turning to me with a look which pierced my soul, he said:

Thou art silent, and thy heart is agitated with thoughts which it dares not utter.

At last, troubled and terrified, I replied:

O Genius, pardon my weakness. Doubtless thy mouth can utter nothing but truth; but thy celestial intelligence can seize its rays, where my gross faculties can discern nothing

but clouds. I confess it; conviction has not penetrated my soul, and I feared that my doubts might offend thee.

And what is doubt, replied he, that it should be a crime? Can man feel otherwise than as he is affected? If a truth be palpable, and of importance in practice, let us pity him that misconceives it. His punishment will arise from his blindness. If it be uncertain or equivocal, how is he to find in it what it has not? To believe without evidence or proof, is an act of ignorance and folly. The credulous man loses himself in a labyrinth of contradictions; the man of sense examines and discusses, that he may be consistent in his opinions. The honest man will bear contradiction; because it gives rise to evidence. Violence is the argument of falsehood; and to impose a creed by authority is the act and indication of a tyrant.

O Genius, said I, encouraged by these words, since my reason is free, I strive in vain to entertain the flattering hope with which you endeavor to console me. The sensible and virtuous soul is easily caught with dreams of happiness; but a cruel reality constantly awakens it to suffering and wretchedness. The more I meditate on the nature of man, the more I examine the present state of societies, the less possible it appears to realize a world of wisdom and felicity. I cast my eye over the whole of our hemisphere; I perceive in no place the germ, nor do I foresee the instinctive energy of a happy revolution. All Asia lies buried in profound darkness. The Chinese, governed by an insolent despotism,* by strokes of the bamboo and the cast of lots, restrained by an immutable code of gestures, and by the radical vices of an ill-constructed language,** appear to be in their abortive civilization nothing but a race of automatons. The Indian, borne down by prejudices, and enchained in the sacred fetters of his castes, vegetates in an incurable apathy. The Tartar, wandering or fixed, always ignorant and ferocious, lives in the savageness of his ancestors. The Arab, endowed with a happy genius, loses its force and the fruits of his virtue in the anarchy of his tribes and the jealousy of his families. The African, degraded from the rank of man, seems irrevocably doomed to servitude. In the North I see nothing but vilified serfs, herds of men with which landlords stock their estates. Ignorance, tyranny, and wretchedness have everywhere stupified the nations; and vicious habits, depraving the natural senses, have destroyed the very instinct of happiness and of truth.

** The emperor of China calls himself the son of heaven; that is, of God: for in the opinion of the Chinese, the material of heaven, the arbiter of fatality, is the Deity himself. "The emperor only shows himself once in ten months, lest the people, accustomed to see him, might lose their respect; for he holds it as a maxim that power can only be supported by force, that the people have no idea of justice, and are not to be governed but by coercion." Narrative of two Mahometan travellers in 851 and 877, translated by the Abbe Renaudot in 1718.*

Notwithstanding what is asserted by the missionaries, this situation has undergone no change. The bamboo still reigns in China, and the son of heaven bastinades, for the most trivial fault, the Mandarin, who in his turn bastinades the

people. The Jesuits may tell us that this is the best governed country in the world, and its inhabitants the happiest of men: but a single letter from Amyot has convinced me that China is a truly Turkish government, and the account of Sonnerat confirms it. See Vol. II. of Voyage aux Indes, in 4to.

*** As long as the Chinese shall in writing make use of their present characters, they can be expected to make no progress in civilization. The necessary introductory step must be the giving them an alphabet like our own, or of substituting in the room of their language that of the Tartars. The improvement made in the latter by M. de Lengles, is calculated to introduce this change. See the Mantchou alphabet, the production of a mind truly learned in the formation of language.*

In some parts of Europe, indeed, reason has begun to dawn, but even there, do nations partake of the knowledge of individuals? Are the talents and genius of governors turned to the benefit of the people? And those nations which call themselves polished, are they not the same that for the last three centuries have filled the earth with their injustice? Are they not those who, under the pretext of commerce, have desolated India, depopulated a new continent, and, at present, subject Africa to the most barbarous slavery? Can liberty be born from the bosom of despots? and shall justice be rendered by the hands of piracy and avarice? O Genius, I have seen the civilized countries; and the mockery of their wisdom has vanished before my sight. I saw wealth accumulated in the hands of a few, and the multitude poor and destitute. I have seen all rights, all powers concentered in certain classes, and the mass of the people passive and dependent. I have seen families of princes, but no families of the nation. I have seen government interests, but no public interests or spirit. I have seen that all the science of government was to oppress prudently; and the refined servitude of polished nations appeared to me only the more irremediable.

One obstacle above all has profoundly struck my mind. On looking over the world, I have seen it divided into twenty different systems of religion. Every nation has received, or formed, opposite opinions; and every one ascribing to itself the exclusive possession of the truth, must believe the other to be wrong. Now if, as must be the fact in this discordance of opinion, the greater part are in error, and are honest in it, then it follows that our mind embraces falsehood as it does truth; and if so, how is it to be enlightened? When prejudice has once seized the mind, how is it to be dissipated? How shall we remove the bandage from our eyes, when the first article in every creed, the first dogma in all religion, is the absolute proscription of doubt, the interdiction of examination, and the rejection of our own judgment? How is truth to make herself known?—If she resorts to arguments and proofs, the timid man stifles the voice of his own conscience; if she invokes the authority of celestial powers, he opposes it with another authority of the same origin, with which he is preoccupied; and he treats all innovation as blasphemy. Thus man in his blindness, has riveted his own chains, and surrendered himself forever, without defence, to the sport of his ignorance and his passions.

To dissolve such fatal chains, a miraculous concurrence of happy events would be necessary. A whole nation, cured of the delirium of superstition, must be inaccessible to the impulse of fanaticism. Freed from the yoke of false doctrine, a whole people must impose upon itself that of true morality and reason. This people should be courageous and prudent, wise and docile. Each individual, knowing his rights, should not transgress them. The poor should know how to resist seduction, and the rich the allurements of avarice. There should be found leaders disinterested and just, and their tyrants should be seized with a spirit of madness and folly. This people, recovering its rights, should feel its inability to exercise them in person, and should name its representatives. Creator of its magistrates, it should know at once to respect them and to judge them. In the sudden reform of a whole nation, accustomed to live by abuses, each individual displaced should bear with patience his privations, and submit to a change of habits. This nation should have the courage to conquer its liberty; the power to defend it, the wisdom to establish it, and the generosity to extend it to others. And can we ever expect the union of so many circumstances? But suppose that chance in its infinite combinations should produce them, shall I see those fortunate days. Will not my ashes long ere then be mouldering in the tomb?

Here, sunk in sorrow, my oppressed heart no longer found utterance. The Genius answered not, but I heard him whisper to himself:

Let us revive the hope of this man; for if he who loves his fellow creatures be suffered to despair, what will become of nations? The past is perhaps too discouraging; I must anticipate futurity, and disclose to the eye of virtue the astonishing age that is ready to begin; that, on viewing the object she desires, she may be animated with new ardor, and redouble her efforts to attain it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW AGE.

Scarcely had he finished these words, when a great tumult arose in the west; and turning to that quarter, I perceived, at the extremity of the Mediterranean, in one of the nations of Europe, a prodigious movement—such as when a violent sedition arises in a vast city—a numberless people, rushing in all directions, pour through the streets and fluctuate like waves in the public places. My ear, struck with the cries which resounded to the heavens, distinguished these words:

What is this new prodigy? What cruel and mysterious scourge is this? We are a numerous people and we want hands! We have an excellent soil, and we are in want of subsistence? We are active and laborious, and we live in indigence! We pay enormous tributes, and we are told they are not sufficient! We are at peace without, and our

persons and property are not safe within. Who, then, is the secret enemy that devours us?

Some voices from the midst of the multitude replied:

Raise a discriminating standard; and let all those who maintain and nourish mankind by useful labors gather round it; and you will discover the enemy that preys upon you.

The standard being raised, this nation divided itself at once into two bodies of unequal magnitude and contrasted appearance. The one, innumerable, and almost total, exhibited in the poverty of its clothing, in its emaciated appearance and sun-burnt faces, the marks of misery and labor; the other, a little group, an insignificant faction, presented in its rich attire embroidered with gold and silver, and in its sleek and ruddy faces, the signs of leisure and abundance.

Considering these men more attentively, I found that the great body was composed of farmers, artificers, merchants, all professions useful to society; and that the little group was made up of priests of every order, of financiers, of nobles, of men in livery, of commanders of armies; in a word, of the civil, military, and religious agents of government.

These two bodies being assembled face to face, and regarding each other with astonishment, I saw indignation and rage arising in one side, and a sort of panic in the other. And the large body said to the little one: Why are you separated from us? Are you not of our number?

No, replied the group; you are the people; we are a privileged class, who have our laws, customs, and rights, peculiar to ourselves.

PEOPLE.—And what labor do you perform in our society?

PRIVILEGED CLASS.—None; we are not made to work.

PEOPLE.—How, then, have you acquired these riches?

PRIVILEGED CLASS.—By taking the pains to govern you.

PEOPLE.—What! is this what you call governing? We toil and you enjoy! we produce and you dissipate! Wealth proceeds from us, and you absorb it. Privileged men! class who are not the people; form a nation apart, and govern yourselves.*

** This dialogue between the people and the indolent classes, is applicable to every society; it contains the seeds of all the political vices and disorders that prevail, and which may thus be defined: Men who do nothing, and who devour the substance of others; and men who arrogate to themselves particular rights and exclusive privileges of wealth and indolence. Compare the Mamlouks of Egypt, the nobility of Europe, the Nairs of India, the Emirs of Arabia, the patricians of Rome, the Christian clergy, the Imans, the Bramins, the Bonzes, the Lamas, etc., etc., and you will find in all the same characteristic feature:—Men living in idleness at the expense of those who labor.*

Then the little group, deliberating on this new state of things, some of the most honorable among them said: We must join the people and partake of their labors and

burdens, for they are men like us, and our riches come from them; but others arrogantly exclaimed: It would be a shame, an infamy, for us to mingle with the crowd; they are born to serve us. Are we not men of another race—the noble and pure descendants of the conquerors of this empire? This multitude must be reminded of our rights and its own origin.

THE NOBLES.—People! know you not that our ancestors conquered this land, and that your race was spared only on condition of serving us? This is our social compact! this the government constituted by custom and prescribed by time.

PEOPLE.—O conquerors, pure of blood! show us your genealogies! we shall then see if what in an individual is robbery and plunder, can be virtuous in a nation.

And forthwith, voices were heard in every quarter calling out the nobles by their names; and relating their origin and parentage, they told how the grandfather, great-grandfather, or even father, born traders and mechanics, after acquiring wealth in every way, had purchased their nobility for money: so that but very few families were really of the original stock. See, said these voices, see these purse-proud commoners who deny their parents! see these plebian recruits who look upon themselves as illustrious veterans! and peals of laughter were heard.

And the civil governors said: these people are mild, and naturally servile; speak to them of the king and of the law, and they will return to their duty. People! the king wills, the sovereign ordains!

PEOPLE.—The king can will nothing but the good of the people; the sovereign can only ordain according to law.

CIVIL GOVERNORS.—The law commands you to be submissive.

PEOPLE.—The law is the general will; and we will a new order of things.

CIVIL GOVERNORS.—You are then a rebel people.

PEOPLE.—A nation cannot revolt; tyrants only are rebels.

CIVIL GOVERNORS.—The king is on our side; he commands you to submit.

PEOPLE.—Kings are inseparable from their nations. Our king cannot be with you; you possess only his phantom.

And the military governors came forward. The people are timorous, said they; we must threaten them; they will submit only to force. Soldiers, chastise this insolent multitude.

PEOPLE.—Soldiers, you are of our blood! Will you strike your brothers, your relatives? If the people perish who will nourish the army?

And the soldiers, grounding their arms, said to the chiefs:

We are likewise the people; show us the enemy!

Then the ecclesiastical governors said: There is but one resource left. The people are superstitious; we must frighten them with the names of God and religion.

Our dear brethren! our children! God has ordained us to govern you.

PEOPLE.—Show us your credentials from God!

PRIESTS.—You must have faith; reason leads astray.

PEOPLE.—Do you govern without reason?

PRIESTS.—God commands peace! Religion prescribes obedience.

PEOPLE.—Peace supposes justice. Obedience implies conviction of a duty.

PRIESTS.—Suffering is the business of this world.

PEOPLE.—Show us the example.

PRIESTS.—Would you live without gods or kings?

PEOPLE.—We would live without oppressors.

PRIESTS.—You must have mediators, intercessors.

PEOPLE.—Mediators with God and with the king! courtiers and priests, your services are too expensive: we will henceforth manage our own affairs.

And the little group said: We are lost! the multitude are enlightened.

And the people answered: You are safe; since we are enlightened we will commit no violence; we only claim our rights. We feel resentments, but we will forget them. We were slaves, we might command; but we only wish to be free, and liberty is but justice.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FREE AND LEGISLATIVE PEOPLE.

Considering that all public power was now suspended, and that the habitual restraint of the people had suddenly ceased, I shuddered with the apprehension that they would fall into the dissolution of anarchy. But, taking their affairs into immediate deliberation, they said:

It is not enough that we have freed ourselves from tyrants and parasites; we must prevent their return. We are men, and experience has abundantly taught us that every man is fond of power, and wishes to enjoy it at the expense of others. It is necessary, then, to guard against a propensity which is the source of discord; we must establish certain rules of duty and of right. But the knowledge of our rights, and the estimation of our duties, are so abstract and difficult as to require all the time and all the faculties of a man. Occupied in our own affairs, we have not leisure for these studies; nor can we exercise these functions in our own persons. Let us choose, then, among ourselves, such persons as are capable of this employment. To them we will delegate our powers to institute our government and laws. They shall be the representatives of our wills and of

our interests. And in order to attain the fairest representation possible of our wills and our interests, let it be numerous, and composed of men resembling ourselves.

Having made the election of a numerous body of delegates, the people thus addressed them:

We have hitherto lived in a society formed by chance, without fixed agreements, without free conventions, without a stipulation of rights, without reciprocal engagements,—and a multitude of disorders and evils have arisen from this precarious state. We are now determined on forming a regular compact; and we have chosen you to adjust the articles. Examine, then, with care what ought to be its basis and its conditions; consider what is the end and the principles of every association; recognize the rights which every member brings, the powers which he delegates, and those which he reserves to himself. Point out to us the rules of conduct—the basis of just and equitable laws. Prepare for us a new system of government; for we realize that the one which has hitherto guided us is corrupt. Our fathers have wandered in the paths of ignorance, and habit has taught us to follow in their footsteps. Everything has been done by fraud, violence, and delusion; and the true laws of morality and reason are still obscure. Clear up, then, their chaos; trace out their connection; publish their code, and we will adopt it.

And the people raised a large throne, in the form of a pyramid, and seating on it the men they had chosen, said to them:

We raise you to-day above us, that you may better discover the whole of our relations, and be above the reach of our passions. But remember that you are our fellow-citizens; that the power we confer on you is our own; that we deposit it with you, but not as a property or a heritage; that you must be the first to obey the laws you make; that to-morrow you redescend among us, and that you will have acquired no other right but that of our esteem and gratitude. And consider what a tribute of glory the world, which reveres so many apostles of error, will bestow on the first assembly of rational men, who shall have declared the unchangeable principles of justice, and consecrated, in the face of tyrants, the rights of nations.

CHAPTER XIX.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONS.

Thus spoke the legislator; and the multitude, seized with those emotions which a reasonable proposition always inspires, expressed its applause; while the tyrants, left without support, were overwhelmed with confusion.

A scene of a new and astonishing nature then opened to my view. All that the earth contains of people and of nations; men of every race and of every region, converging from their various climates, seemed to assemble in one allotted place; where, forming an immense congress, distinguished in groups by the vast variety of their dresses, features, and complexion, the numberless multitude presented a most unusual and affecting sight.

On one side I saw the European, with his short close coat, pointed triangular hat, smooth chin, and powdered hair; on the other side the Asiatic, with a flowing robe, long beard, shaved head, and round turban. Here stood the nations of Africa, with their ebony skins, their woolly hair, their body girt with white and blue tissues of bark, adorned with bracelets and necklaces of coral, shells, and glass; there the tribes of the north, enveloped in their leathern bags; the Laplander, with his pointed bonnet and his snow-shoes; the Samoyede, with his feverish body and strong odor; the Tongouse, with his horned cap, and carrying his idols pendant from his neck; the Yakoute, with his freckled face; the Kalmuc, with his flat nose and little retorted eyes. Farther distant were the Chinese, attired in silk, with their hair hanging in tresses; the Japanese, of mingled race; the Malays, with wide-spreading ears, rings in their noses, and palm-leaf hats of vast circumference;* and the tattooed races of the isles of the southern ocean and of the continent of the antipodes.** The view of so many varieties of the same species, of so many extravagant inventions of the same understanding, and of so many modifications of the same organization, affected me with a thousand feelings and a thousand thoughts.*** I contemplated with astonishment this gradation of color, which, passing from a bright carnation to a light brown, a deeper brown, dusky, bronze, olive, leaden, copper, ends in the black of ebony and of jet. And finding the Cassimerian, with his rosy cheek, next to the sun-burnt Hindoo, and the Georgian by the side of the Tartar, I reflected on the effects of climate hot or cold, of soil high or low, marshy or dry, open or shaded. I compared the dwarf of the pole with the giant of the temperate zones, the slender body of the Arab with the ample chest of the Hollander; the squat figure of the Samoyede with the elegant form of the Greek and the Sclavonian; the greasy black wool of the Negro with the bright silken locks of the Dane; the broad face of the Kalmuc, his little angular eyes and flattened nose, with the oval prominent visage, large blue eyes, and aquiline nose of the Circassian and Abazan. I contrasted the brilliant calicoes of the Indian, the well-wrought stuffs of the European, the rich furs of the Siberian, with the tissues of bark, of osiers, leaves and feathers of savage nations; and the blue figures of serpents, flowers, and stars, with which they painted their bodies. Sometimes the variegated appearance of this multitude reminded me of the enamelled meadows of the Nile and the Euphrates, when, after rains or inundations, millions of flowers are rising on every side. Sometimes their murmurs and their motions called to mind the numberless swarms of locusts which, issuing from the desert, cover in the spring the plains of Hauran.

** This species of the palm-tree is called Latanier. Its*

leaf, similar to a fan-mount, grows upon a stalk issuing directly from the earth. A specimen may be seen in the botanic garden.

*** The country of the Papons of New Guinea.*

**** A hall of costumes in one of the galleries of the Louvre would, in every point of view, be an interesting establishment. It would furnish an admirable treat to the curiosity of a great number of persons, excellent models to the artist, and useful subjects of meditation to the physician, the philosopher and the legislator.*

Picture to yourself a collection of the various faces and figures of every country and nation, exhibiting accurately, color, features and form; what a field for investigation and enquiry as to the influence of climate, customs, food, etc. It might truly be called the science of man! Buffon has attempted a chapter of this nature, but it only serves to exhibit more strikingly our actual ignorance. Such a collection is said to have been begun at St. Petersburg, but it is also said at the same time to be as imperfect as the vocabulary of the three hundred languages. The enterprise would be worthy of the French nation.

At the sight of so many rational beings, considering on the one hand the immensity of thoughts and sensations assembled in this place, and on the other hand, reflecting on the opposition of so many opinions, and the shock of so many passions of men so capricious, I struggled between astonishment, admiration, and secret dread—when the legislator commanded silence, and attracted all my attention.

Inhabitants of earth! a free and powerful nation addresses you with words of justice and peace, and she offers you the sure pledges of her intentions in her own conviction and experience. Long afflicted with the same evils as yourselves, we sought for their source, and found them all derived from violence and injustice, erected into law by the inexperience of past ages, and maintained by the prejudices of the present. Then abolishing our artificial and arbitrary institutions, and recurring to the origin of all right and reason, we have found that there existed in the very order of nature and in the physical constitution of man, eternal and immutable laws, which only waited his observance to render him happy.

O men! cast your eyes on the heavens that give you light, and on the earth that gives you bread! Since they offer the same bounties to you all—since from the power that gives them motion you have all received the same life, the same organs, have you not likewise all received the same right to enjoy its benefits? Has it not hereby declared you all equal and free? What mortal shall dare refuse to his fellow that which nature gives him?

O nations! let us banish all tyranny and all discord; let us form but one society, one great family; and, since human nature has but one constitution, let there exist in future but one law, that of nature—but one code, that of reason—but one throne, that of justice—but one altar, that of union.

He ceased; and an immense acclamation resounded to the skies. Ten thousand benedictions announced the transports of the multitude; and they made the earth re-echo JUSTICE, EQUALITY and UNION.

But different emotions soon succeeded; soon the doctors and the chiefs of nations exciting a spirit of dispute, there was heard a sullen murmur, which growing louder, and spreading from group to group, became a vast disorder; and each nation setting up exclusive pretensions, claimed a preference for its own code and opinion.

You are in error, said the parties, pointing one to the other. We alone are in possession of reason and truth. We alone have the true law, the real rule of right and justice, the only means of happiness and perfection. All other men are either blind or rebellious.

And great agitation prevailed.

Then the legislator, after enforcing silence, loudly exclaimed:

What, O people! is this passionate emotion? Whither will this quarrel conduct you? What can you expect from this dissension? The earth has been for ages a field of disputation, and you have shed torrents of blood in your controversies. What have you gained by so many battles and tears? When the strong has subjected the weak to his opinion, has he thereby aided the cause of truth?

O nations! take counsel of your own wisdom. When among yourselves disputes arise between families and individuals, how do you reconcile them? Do you not give them arbitrators?

Yes, cried the whole multitude.

Do so then to the authors of your present dissensions. Order those who call themselves your instructors, and who force their creeds upon you, to discuss before you their reasons. Since they appeal to your interests, inform yourselves how they support them.

And you, chiefs and governors of the people! before dragging the masses into the quarrels resulting from your diverse opinions, let the reasons for and against your views be given. Let us establish one solemn controversy, one public scrutiny of truth—not before the tribunal of a corruptible individual, or of a prejudiced party, but in the grand forum of mankind—guarded by all their information and all their interests. Let the natural sense of the whole human race be our arbiter and judge.