the decadence of the superstition at considerable length; for it was at once one of the earliest and one of the most important conquests of the spirit of rationalism. There are very few examples of a change of belief that was so strictly normal, so little accelerated by sectarian passions or individual genius, and therefore so well suited to illustrate the laws of intellectual development. Besides this, the fact that the belief, when realised, was always followed by persecution, enables us to trace its successive stages with more than common accuracy, while the period that has elapsed since its destruction has, in a great measure, removed the subject from the turbid atmosphere of controversy.

It is impossible to leave the history of witchcraft without reflecting how vast an amount of suffering has, in at least this respect, been removed by the progress of a rationalistic civilisation. I know that when we remember the frightful calamities that have from time to time flowed from theological divisions—when we consider the countless martyrs who have perished in the dungeon or at the stake, the millions who have fallen in the religious wars, the elements of almost undying dissension that have been planted in so many noble nations, and have paralysed so many glorious enterprises—the fate of a few thousand innocent persons who were burnt alive seems to sink into comparative insignificance. Yet it is probable that no class of victims endured sufferings so unalloyed and so intense. Not for them the wild fanaticism that nerves the soul against danger, and almost steels the body against torments. Not for them the assurance of a glorious eternity, that has made the martyr look with exultation on the rising flame as on the Elijah's chariot that is to bear his soul to heaven. Not for them the solace of lamenting friends, or the consciousness that their memories would be cherished and honoured by posterity. They die alone, hated and unpitied. They were deemed by all mankind the worst of criminals. Their very kinsmen shrank from them as tainted and accursed.

The superstitions they had imbibed in childhood blending with the illusions of age, and with the horrors of their position, persuaded them, in many cases, that they were indeed the bond-slaves of Satan, and were about to exchange their torments upon earth for an agony that was as excruciating, and was eternal. And besides all this, we have to consider the terrors which the belief must have spread through the people at large; we have to picture the anguish of the mother, as she imagined that it was in the power of one whom she had offended to blast in a moment every object of her affection; we have to conceive, above all, the awful shadow that the dread of accusation must have thrown on the enfeebled faculties of age, and the bitterness it must have added to desertion and to solitude. All these sufferings were the result of a single superstition, which the spirit of rationalism has destroyed.—*History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe.* By W. E. H. Lecky, M.A.

Mr. Herman Merivale on the Theories of Positivism.

But, however this may be, no one can well contemplate in earnest these relics of a most curious and refined civilisation, in some respects, perhaps, the most curious and refined which the world has ever seen, and return with satisfaction to the coarse generalisation of the disciples of universal progress in the affairs of humanity, with whose speculations we have been lately surfeited. The feelings which such classical inquiries excite are assuredly more akin to those with which they inspired the proud and melancholy

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Leopardi, when he turned from them and from the wealth of conception and nobleness of sentiment with which the ancient world abounded to gaze on that long degradation of subsequent ages, out of which humanity is in truth only now emerging. Very grand, though profoundly sorrowful, are those lines of his, entitled 'Bruto Minoré,' in which he portrays the expiring patriot, not as bewailing his present catastrophe, nor calling on the gods for present revenge, but as brooding, in utter hopelessness of spirit, over "the dark forward and abysm of time"—the Erebus-like blackness of that prospect of coming degeneracy and decay, the trance of ages, into which the human soul was about to fall.

"In peggio
Precipitano i tempi: e mal s'affida
Ai putridi nipoti
L'onor d'egregié menti, e la suprema
De' miseri vendetta."

For the duration of that era of decline was indeed such as we are sufficiently accustomed to measure backwards on historical reflection; but as such, when contemplated as a future, the conception shrinks from with a painful sense of incapacity. Thirteen centuries were to elapse ere the first Italian could stretch his hand across the chasm to the last Roman. As the paradise of cultivation in which those Campanian cities nestled was separated from the fertile aspect of the same region in modern times by a formidable blank of centuries of duration, so was the ancient civilisation from the modern by a similar space of intellectual desert, and in each instance alike the succeeding age can scarcely appreciate its predecessor as a reality.

"Credetne vivum ventura propago,
Cum segetes iterum, cum jam hæc deserta virebunt,
Infra urbes populosque premi."

And yet there are those who persist in cramming us with that dry formula of positivism, that each generation enjoys the "accumulated knowledge" of preceding ones!

Ask those countless millions of Chinese who vegetate, generation after generation, in the vast interior of their empire, apart from all foreign influence, how much of "accumulated knowledge" their community has gathered since the days of Confucius; ask the black nations of the heart of Africa what amount of progress distinguishes them from their ancestors to Herodotus or to Leo Africanus; ask the wretched remnants of tribes which wander over the American wilderness whether their progenitors, the sons of those who came thither over the ocean, were fewer and feebler and more ignorant than they! For those who seek truth and not phrases, "progress," as the term is used in social science, is an attribute, not of mankind, but of the European family alone, and of that family only since the discovery of printing. What that incomparably greatest of all merely human events may have done towards fixing the elements of social improvement, and converting into a permanent advance that which was before only a precarious, oscillatory motion, we need not now consider. It may be that the so-called triumphal march of humanity is now secured from repulse, and that, as some of our latest speculators seem to hold, the powers of nature which we employ will begin of themselves to decay before our capability of employing them abates; and it may be (though this is a still bolder assumption) that moral and intellectual improvement must advance along with material civilisation. But all this, if so, does not annul the melancholy record of pre-

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vious periods of torpidity or retreat. It is extremely difficult, no doubt, for us to delineate these periods to ourselves. It seems contrary to our notion of the order which governs the world to admit their reality. But we err in this—from applying to that governing order whose laws appear to be beyond our sphere of research our own limited notions of the expedient and the probable geology dimly reveals to us a succession of uncounted ages, during which this planet, rich as now in all other appliances of nature, was inhabited, and its lavish wealth enjoyed, by none but the lowest animal tribes. Astronomy seems to indicate, at least to the judgment of some of our acutest observers, the probable existence of enormous worlds lighted by the same sun as our own, in which animal life, such as we conceive it, cannot exist at all, or only in its feeblest and most torpid types. These speculations may be rectified by future discoveries. But the lesson which they teach will remain the same—that vast exhibitions of creative power may exist for which our purblind doctrine of final causes can imagine no utility, and can find no place in its scheme of providence. History, by assuring us of the reality and duration of such mournful periods as those above mentioned, only contributes her share to the same great lesson. In our healthy exuberance of life we can hardly conceive a state of chronic political ebb or decline—a state, that is, in which each generation, instead of profiting by the "accumulated knowledge" of its predecessors, lets something of the results of that knowledge drop from its enfeebled grasp, is reduced in numbers, less provided with the external comforts of life, weaker against agression, poorer in substance, feebler in spirit, inferior in mental acquirements. Nevertheless such periods have been beyond all doubt. The history of the Byzantine Empire furnishes one well known to all, and many such have rolled drearily away in the dimmer ages of early time. But let us take the most familiar and, at the same time, the truest instance of what we mean, and which happens also to be most germane to the matter in hand. Could a modern really do what many a visitor to Pompeii has striven to do in intense eagerness of fancy—could he restore those truncated columns, and repeople those desolate streets, and actually converse with some cultivated contemporary of Pliny and Juvenal, or Cicero and Horace—one can fancy that the feeling on both sides, after the first strangeness of the meeting had been got over, would be one of surprise that two specimens of humanity of such distant origin could have so much in common. In moral and social philosophy, in political speculation, in appreciation of eloquence, literature, art, they would really find themselves—some exceptions apart, which would give zest to the conversation—almost on the same ground. In respect of matters of still more intimate interest—the inner clothing, as it were, of civilised existence in the estimate of physical and mental pursuits, tendencies, weaknesses, pleasures, and pains, and their relation to each other—each would feel that he understood his companion; each would be conscious, as it were, of possessing a key to many of the other's inmost feelings. This would be partly owing, no doubt, to the circumstance that the ancients have been our tutors, and that much of our mental furniture is derived directly from them; but also, in a great measure, to mere similarity of circumstances, which engenders similarity of ideas. Civilisations so nearly resembling each other, even in many points of minuteness, as those of modern Europe and of the Rome of Cicero or the Athens of Demosthenes, must, from the necessity of the case, have strongly corresponding and mental emotions, and corresponding language wherein to express them.

Now let us alter the picture; let the man of the nineteenth century wake up under the shadow of Winchester or Canterbury cathedrals, such as the Saxons had reared them, and, to give him the best company of the day, let him consort with a baron or an abbot of the time of the Norman conquest.

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Except the subject of religion, of which we would not now speak, what single topic could they have in common? Would they not be separated from each other by a barrier as high and strong as any which divides contemporary civilised from savage man? What object (except possibly horses and dogs) could they appreciate together? What points of morals or science or politics, small talk, sentiment, or humour, would suit them both? How could they argue on premises which one would assume as certain and the other would treat with contempt? The mediæval wight would certainly rate the modern at a very different value from his own estimate of himself; and if the modern escaped with a whole skin from the interview, which is greatly to be doubted, he would find his romantic respect for the baron or veneration for the ecclesiastic very little increased. They would be denizens of alien spheres, and would converse in utterly dissonant tongues.

And yet the Norman was our countryman, was nearer to us by many an age than the Roman, and ought to have had over the latter the advantage of the "accumulated knowledge" (had such a thing really existed before the invention of printing) of many an intervening generation. But these were in truth generations of decline, not of advance; a decline often hardly sensible, or arrested for a time, but on the whole prodigious. And if the enthusiastic disciple of progress chooses to count these ebbs as insignificant exceptions to his general theory of flow, let us remember that a space of a thousand years, however unimportant to a geologist, is a considerable fraction of the historical existence of man.

And this, as many have said, though not many truly feel it, is one of the most real advantages of classical study, and one of the charms which make us turn back to it with recurring affection after resultless wanderings in company with the "positivists." He who has imbibed its lessons deeply can hardly find his judgment much affected by those metaphors turned into arguments which pass commonly current, likening the youth, manhood, and old age of the world to those of an individual; nor will he readily adopt the formulas of a recent clever writer of the positive school, that "we may expect to find, in the history of man, each successive age incorporating into itself the substance of the preceding;" and that "this power, whereby the present ever gathers into itself the results of the past, transforms the human race into a colossal man, whose life reaches from the creation to the day of judgment." Classical study made men pedants, after a fashion, two centuries ago; at present its effect is to preserve them from an equally tasteless and less innocent pedantry. By bringing clearly before our view that magnificent phantasma of great communities entombed, and great conceptions buried with them, it weakens the ordinary temptation to overvalue ourselves and our age. It displays to us the vast ocean of moral and intellectual being, such as it really is, subject to æons of rise and fall, and not a steady onward current, continually gaining ground; and, by so doing, administers a reasonable check to that ambitious tendency which elevates but often misleads us—an undiscriminating confidence in the destiny and powers of our species.—*Historical Studies.* By HERMAN MERIVALE.

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