

in glowing terms of the character of the age, while another see in it little less than evil. One person is denounced as a ruthless image breaker; another is charged with foggism and intolerance. These sharply drawn lines tell us that the opposing forces are yet but imperfectly blended. So long as this is true, we may expect to see one man carry new ideas to an extreme, while another recoils from all radical views. If the former should be checked in his destructive work, the latter can only bring his conservatism into disrepute by shunning a fair issue with the new ideas constantly springing up. We may not always appeal to history as the arbiter to decide what ought now to be. Theories have arisen that have little historic precedent in their favor. Many of these will force their way into general acceptance, despite all opposition.

The phases of modern life have assumed an optimism which asserts the rapid approach to an ideal of future perfection. At this, we can scarcely wonder. It is a necessary consequence of our modes of thought. An ideal is best conceived when placed at a distance. But the man of to-day has acquired a distaste for what is ancient. He is thus compelled to place in the future the ideal which his imagination runs riot in building.

But in the path of its realization, lie two stern facts: human nature and the duration of life. The former is imperfect and must remain so. If men were perfect, progress could not exist. If all classes were superlatively happy and prosperous, little incentive to exertion or virtue would remain. Man is a creature of ideas, and though these are ever changing, an inexorable law limits their sphere of action. The shortness of life also limits our attainments. If the field of our knowledge is constantly widening, the soil becomes shallow to the individual in an equal ratio.

In this way, progress is conditioned. Despite the momentum given it by favorable circumstances, and despite its

achievements, great as they are, men are at least brought to a keen realization of its limits. If a deep undercurrent of reaction does not then set in, men are at least seized with doubt and discontent, and awake to the futility of trying to solve every problem suggested to them.

All our inquiries pertain either to the natural or to the supernatural. In those which deal with the former, we see the most noticeable elements of change. They have given shape to what may be called a secular materialism. Since the sudden impetus which industry has received seems without bounds, every one is engrossed in the pursuit of gain. If equality promotes this result, science lends it new strength. The American promptly avails himself of the countless aids of science, so far as they bear directly on the purpose which he has in view. The popular estimation of science thus depends on its practical results. If this is a misfortune, it is none the less unavoidable. It is of little use to deride the age for practicality. The desire of gain is an essential element of human nature, and when its incentives to action are multiplied, we may expect to see the standard of utility applied indiscriminately to all things.

This practical manner of viewing objects is thus extended to the domain of supernatural. Here, we are constantly reminded of the destructive spirit of modern skepticism. The peculiar nature of this element is a movement of the age, no less inevitable than the republican reaction in Europe. Since all Americans stand on a common ground of political equality, the individual is disinclined to take the opinion of any one for granted. Science, again, enables him to solve with ease difficulties that not long since were insurmountable. This has caused the idea that nothing is beyond the reach of the understanding. Our incredulity of the supernatural has become almost instinctive, and we are no longer inclined to place the source of intellectual authority beyond humanity.