

or Macaulay. The vice and virtue of each succeeding age is stamped upon it. Words that mark the ebb and flow of the tide of humanity, tell of ages of superstition and ignorance. They portray the degradation of man and the awful depths of his fall. In them, also, truth is seen emerging from a cloud of blind fanaticism. Right and might are crowned on a common throne; while despotism and oppression crouch at the feet of liberty. The clanking chains fall from the limbs of the captive. The darkness of paganism clears away for the light of Christianity. Barbarian becomes civilized. The hand of God is seen guiding the affairs of men; and banners of love, light, and liberty, float as the ensigns of united peoples.

But history, written in chronicles or preserved in the structure of a language, is often a record of that which man would fain forget. Evil excludes the good; blood stains every page; inhumanity marks every epoch. The English language, though fraught with lessons from human history, has yet greater fields for research, a grander mission of intelligence. Advancing civilization has made it heir to the most illustrious languages of mankind. The Greek, with its symmetry, purity, and grandeur—Latin, combining vigor, grace, and dignity—both representing the highest types of ancient culture and refinement, have given their place to the English—the modern representative of Christian civilization. Grecian beauty and Roman strength have united to make ours the language of the sublimest age of history.

Alas, that Greece should have perished! That such architecture as the Parthenon, crowning the Acropolis of Athens, should crumble to dust, or that the statuary, carved on pillar and pediment, should be the shattered relics of such imperial splendor! Oh, Empire of Rome—heir of Grecian culture—magnificent in the luxury of beautiful gardens and peaceful villas—that thou, too, shouldst be as a dream of the fancy! The mist of centuries envelops these majestic ruins; their time tarnished domes fall into decay, but the glory of the age which they represent is preserved in their languages. Time may wear away the Parthenon and the Coliseum, but the beauty and the power of the Greek and Roman tongues will remain unchanged.

These were the prevalent languages when Christianity was introduced, and thus they became the "vehicles of the truths and revelation." But the spirit of the age was sceptical, cruel. Noble languages could not save pagan institutions. The fourth and fifth centuries, with their social and political upheavals, saw a second Babel. Each petty kingdom of mutilated Europe formed its dialect. The Bible, proclaiming peace and good will to men, was lost amid the ruin of crumbling empires. The needy multitudes knew not its teachings, felt not its influence. Then Gregory, touched with sympathy for the blue-eyed Angles on the streets of Rome, thought to teach them of the humble Nazarene, and struck the key-note to the pæan of the modern civilization. To a promising race he gave Christianity. This faith has been the guiding influence through the mightiest conflicts of centuries. It was the power that broke from the Anglo-Saxon the shackles of ignorance and superstition, and that wrought his crude speech into a noble language and literature.

From this time forward, the power and influence of our language increased slowly but grandly. Seven centuries passed in preparing for a literature. The Norman conquest came and with it a higher type of refinement. For a time the English seemed forgotten. The court, learning, and art spurned his speech. His rich legendary lore promised to be unsung, his conquest and valor, untold. Feudal lords bound him to the earth. The fountain of fame was to him as the water of Tantalus. But it was not to be always thus. The feudal system of the Norman was a greater evil than his culture was a blessing. The Englishman hated civilization which did not civilize. A new era was dawning. Feudalism and chivalry—noblest institutions of a blinded age—could not suppress the growing influence of that divinely-taught principle—the universal brotherhood of man. Through common interests a common speech was adopted; and the problem of equality was solved. The heart of the serf thrilled as he heard his language ringing through palace halls, enriched by the cultured sentiment of a courtly nobility. Thus the river, silently flowing beneath the rough surface of society, broke forth in singular sublimity. English literature found a beginning. Chaucer became the father of English poetry; Wyclif translated the Bible; and our language began its mission to the world.

Anglo-Saxon civilization is unparalleled in its material growth, its broad learning, and its social, moral and political

development. Men come and go; and the immortal products of their genius are their bequests to the world. The accumulations of art and science make the contributing ages appear like the range of mountain peaks—each towering high above its predecessor in Alpine magnificence. We behold and wonder what influences could have produced such grand results. Did inventive genius alone make the greatness of America? Has mere strength of arms carried England's flag into every habitable part of earth? Does Saxon valor, Saxon ambition, and Saxon firmness account entirely for the civil and religious liberty of one half the globe? No. Transcending all these powerful agencies, the English language stands out as the exponent of modern civilization. It is the embodiment of progressive thought, the matchless attainment of a progressive age. In its store house of words are the gems of the classics and the pearls of modern tongues. It is the key-stone in the arch of commerce to-day. In every battle against tyranny it has furnished the countersigns of freedom. Magna charta, declarations of independence, and emancipation proclamations, are its products. It is the "language of Bunyan and the Bible"—an argument for the Christian religion. Would you know its influence to-day,—destroy it literature, blot out the results of its existence, and think what would be the condition of the world? Where would be our glorious institutions, our resplendent civilization, our blood-bought liberties?

Our literature seems boundless like a summer landscape,—we approach the apparent limit, while Nature keeps unrolling her scroll of beauty. English libraries testify to an elegance of expression, a vividness of description, a terseness in narration not to be found elsewhere. Note the stately prose of Macaulay; the picturesque delineations of Scott; the rugged energy of Carlyle. But these are only of thousands who have made our language shine with sunlit brilliancy. English literature bears the impress of every advance of education and morals. Science has given it a vocabulary abreast with her phenomenal development. Christian philosophy has placed therein truths never dreamed of by a Plato or an Aristotle. Here, no less than in society, the progress of morals has witnessed evolution. The Sensual odes and Bacchanalian songs, rehearsed at the midnight revels and chanted around the altars of the gods, departed with the civilization that gave their birth. The pure character, the virtuous teaching, the ennobling sentiments are now the demands of literary merit and culture.

Grand principles and momentous questions have aroused the sleeping art of the ancients, and oratory has burst forth in this new language. Here it has found its true mission and achieved its greatest victories. The halls of parliament and of congress have been fit substitutes for the bema and forum. The burning eloquence of Burke and Chatham, Henry and Webster, pleading for freedom, justice and equality, was never surpassed by the "Orator of Athens" inveighing against Philip, or the Roman senator thundering against Catiline.

Is the poetry of our language excelled by any other? Did ancient bard ever picture human nature like Shakespeare? Is the "Fall of Troy" to be compared with the "Fall of Man"? Were Achilles and Æneas sublimer heroes than the Fallen Archangels? Ah! gifted poets have sung and proved that

"From Saxon lips Anacreon's numbers glide,
As once they melted on the Teian tide;
And, fresh transfused, the Iliad thrills again
From Albion's cliffs as o'er Achala's plain!"

As Napoleon marshaled his armed hosts before the pyramids of Egypt, he said: "Soldiers, forty centuries look down upon you." We, to-day, from a height of truth and liberty, say: Forty centuries look up to us. The crisis of nations finds our race leading a mightier and a more glorious civilization than forty centuries have seen. Yet after all this advancement, this attainment of power, our language seems only to have begun its mission. The rivulet that gushed from its fountain has swelled into the great river, and all its usefulness seems yet before it. Greater fields of thought are to be fertilized; ships of state are to float serenely, sublimely on its majestic current; it is to broaden into a mighty ocean and wash every shore of humanity.

To-day the civilized world looks to the Anglo-Saxon, with his linguistic inheritance, for the solution of every question of moral reform; Christendom recognizes him as her defender; heathendom sends forth wails of distress for his sympathy. This eminence is his because of his eloquence and song in the triumphant march of human freedom. Thus, as 'through the ages one increasing purpose runs,' we may see in a veiled but