

GOBINEAU ARTHUR

THE MORAL AND
INTELLECTUAL
DIVERSITY OF RACES

Arthur Gobineau

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Diversity of Races**

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Gobineau A.

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comte de Arthur Gobineau
The Moral and Intellectual Diversity
of Races With Particular Reference
to Their Respective Influence in the
Civil and Political History of Mankind

EDITOR'S PREFACE

It has been truly observed that a good book seldom requires, and a bad one never deserves, a long preface. When a foreign book, however, is obtruded on the notice of the public, it is but just that the reasons for so doing should be explained; and, in the present case, this is the more necessary, as the title of the work might lead many to believe that it was intended to re-agitate the question of unity or plurality of the human species – a question which the majority of readers consider satisfactorily and forever settled by the words of Holy Writ. Such, however, is not the purpose of either the author or the editor. The design of this work is, to contribute toward the knowledge of the leading mental and moral characteristics of the various races of men which have subsisted from the dawn of history to the present era, and to ascertain, if possible, the degree to which they are susceptible of improvement. The annals of the world demonstrate beyond a doubt, that the different branches of the human family, like the individual members of a community, are endowed with capacities, different not only in degree but in kind, and that, in proportion to these endowments, they have contributed, and still contribute to that great march of progress of the human race, which we term civilization. To portray the nature of these endowments, to estimate the influence of each race in the destinies of all, and to point out the effects of mixture of races in the rise and fall of great empires, has been the task to the accomplishment of which, though too extensive for one man, the author has devoted his abilities. The troubles and sufferings of his native country, from sudden political gyrations, led him to speculate upon their causes, which he believes are to be traced to the great variety of incongruous ethnical elements composing the population of France. The deductions at which he arrived in that field of observation he subjected to the test of universal history; and the result of his studies for many years, facilitated by the experiences of a diplomatic career, are now before the American public in a translation. That a work, on so comprehensive a subject, should be exempt from error, cannot be expected, and is not pretended; but the aim is certainly a noble one, and its pursuit cannot be otherwise than instructive to the statesman and historian, and no less so to the general reader. In this country, it is peculiarly interesting and important, for not only is our immense territory the abode of the three best defined varieties of the human species – the white, the negro, and the Indian – to which the extensive immigration of the Chinese on our Pacific coast is rapidly adding a fourth, but the fusion of diverse nationalities is nowhere more rapid and complete; nowhere is the great problem of man's perfectibility being solved on a grander scale, or in a more decisive manner. While, then, nothing can be further removed from our intentions, or more repugnant to our sentiments, than to wage war on religion, or throw ridicule on the labors of the missionary and philanthropist, we thought it not a useless undertaking to lay before our countrymen the opinions of a European thinker, who, without straining or superseding texts to answer his purposes, or departing in any way from the pure spirit of Christianity, has reflected upon questions which with us are of immense moment and constant recurrence.

H. H.

Philadelphia, *Nov. 1, 1855.*

ANALYTICAL INTRODUCTION

Before departing on one's travels to a foreign country, it is well to cast a glance on the map, and if we expect to meet and examine many curiosities, a correct itinerary may not be an inconvenient travelling companion. In laying before the public the present work of Mr. Gobineau, embracing a field of inquiry so boundless and treating of subjects of such vast importance to all, it has been thought not altogether useless or inappropriate to give a rapid outline of the topics presented to the consideration of the reader – a ground-plan, as it were, of the extensive edifice he is invited to enter, so that he may afterwards examine it at leisure, and judge of the symmetry of its parts. This, though fully sensible of the inadequacy of his powers to the due execution of the task, the present writer has endeavored to do, making such comments on the way, and using such additional illustrations as the nature of the subject seemed to require.

Whether we contemplate the human family from the point of view of the naturalist or of the philosopher, we are struck with the marked dissimilarity of the various groups. The obvious physical characteristics by which we distinguish what are termed different races, are not more clearly defined than the psychical diversities observable among them. "If a person," says the learned vindicator of the unity of the human species,¹ "after surveying some brilliant ceremony or court pageant in one of the splendid cities of Europe, were suddenly carried into a hamlet in Negro-land, at the hour when the sable tribes recreate themselves with dancing and music; or if he were transported to the saline plains over which bald and tawny Mongolians roam, differing but little in hue from the yellow soil of their steppes, brightened by the saffron flowers of the iris and tulip; if he were placed near the solitary dens of the Bushman, where the lean and hungry savage crouches in silence, like a beast of prey, watching with fixed eyes the birds which enter his pitfall, or greedily devouring the insects and reptiles which chance may bring within his grasp; if he were carried into the midst of an Australian forest, where the squalid companions of kangaroos may be seen crawling in procession, in imitation of quadrupeds, would the spectator of such phenomena imagine the different groups which he had surveyed to be the offspring of one family? And if he were led to adopt that opinion, how would he attempt to account for the striking diversities in their aspect and manner of existence?"

These diversities, so graphically described by Mr. Prichard, present a problem, the solution of which has occupied the most ingenious minds, especially of our times. The question of unity or plurality of the human species has of late excited much animated discussion; great names and weighty authorities are enlisted on either side, and a unanimous decision appears not likely to be soon agreed upon. But it is not my purpose, nor that of the author to whose writings these pages are introductory, to enter into a contest which to me seems rather a dispute about words than essentials. The distinguishing physical characteristics of what we term races of man are recognized by all parties, and whether these races are *distinct species* or *permanent varieties*² only of the same, cannot affect the subject under investigation. In whatever manner the diversities among the various branches of the human family may have originated, whether they are primordial or were produced by external causes, their permanency is now generally admitted. "The Ethiopian cannot change his skin." If there are, or ever have been, external agencies that could change a white man into a negro, or *vice versa*, it is obvious that such causes have either ceased to operate, or operate only in a lapse of time so incommensurable as to be imponderable to our perceptions, for the races which now exist can be traced up to the dawn of history, and no well-authenticated instance of a transformation under any circumstances is on record. In human reasoning it is certainly legitimate to judge of the future by

¹ *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*. By James Cowles Prichard, M. D., London, 1841. Vol. i. p. 1.

² "Mr. Prichard's *permanent variety*, from his own definition, is to all intents and purposes a *species*." —*Kneeland's Introduction to Hamilton Smith's Natural History of the Human Species*, p. 84.

the experiences of the past, and we are, therefore, warranted to conclude that if races have preserved their identity for the last two thousand years, they will not lose it in the next two thousand.

It is somewhat singular, however, that while most writers have ceased to explain the physical diversities of races by external causes, such as climate, food, etc., yet many still persist in maintaining the absolute equality of all in other respects, referring such differences in character as are undeniable, solely to circumstances, education, mode of life, etc. These writers consider all races as merely in different stages of development, and pretend that the lowest savage, or at least his offspring, may, by judicious training, and in course of time, be rendered equal to the civilized man. Before mentioning any facts in opposition to this doctrine, let us examine the reasoning upon which it is based.

"Man is the creature of circumstances," is an adage extended from individuals to races, and repeated by many without considering its bearing. The celebrated author of *Wealth of Nations*³ says, "that the difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, arises, not so much from nature, but from habit and education." That a mind, which, with proper nurture, might have graced a philosopher, should, under unfavorable circumstances, remain forever confined in a narrow and humble sphere, does not, indeed, seem at all improbable; but Dr. Smith certainly does not mean to deny the existence of natural talents, of innate peculiar capacities for the accomplishment of certain purposes. This is what they do who ascribe the mental inequality of the various branches of the human family to external circumstances only. "The intellectual qualities of man," say they, "are developed entirely by education. The mind is, at first, a perfect blank, fitted and ready to receive any kind of impressions. For these, we are dependent on the political, civil, and religious institutions under which we live, the persons with whom we are connected, and the circumstances in which we are placed in the different periods of life. Wholly the creatures of association and habit, the characters of men are formed by the instruction, conversation, and example of those with whom they mix in society, or whose ideas they imbibe in the course of their reading and studies."⁴ Again: "As all men, in all nations, are of the same species, are endowed with the same senses and feelings, and receive their perceptions and ideas through similar organs, the difference, whether physical or moral, that is observed in comparing different races or assemblages of men, can arise only from external and adventitious circumstances."⁵ The last position is entirely dependent on the first; if we grant the first, relating to individuals, the other follows as a necessary consequence. For, if we assume that the infinite intellectual diversities of individuals are owing solely to external influences, it is self-evident that the same diversities in nations, which are but aggregations of individuals, must result from the same causes. But are we prepared to grant this first position – to assert that man is but an automaton, whose wheelwork is entirely without – the mere buffet and plaything of accident and circumstances? Is not this the first step to gross materialism, the first argument laid down by that school, of which the great Locke has been stigmatized as the father, because he also asserts that the human mind is at first a blank tablet. But Locke certainly could not mean that all these tablets were the same and of equal value. A tablet of wax receives an impression which one of marble will not; on the former is easily effaced what the other forever retains. We do not deny that circumstances have a great influence in moulding both moral and intellectual character, but we do insist that there is a primary basis upon which the degree of that influence depends, and which is the work of God and not of man or chance. What agriculturist could be made to believe that, with the same care, all plants would thrive equally well in all soils? To assert that the character of a man, whether good or wicked, noble or mean, is the aggregate result of influences over which he has no control, is to deny that man is a free agent; it is infinitely worse than the creed of the Buddhist, who believes that all animated beings possess a detached portion of an all-embracing intelligence,

³ Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Amer. ed., vol. i. p. 29.

⁴ *Vide* Bigland's *Effects of Physical and Moral Causes on the Character and Circumstances of Nations*. London, 1828, p. 282.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

which acts according to the nature and capacity of the machine of clay that it, for the time, occupies, and when the machine is worn out or destroyed, returns, like a rivulet to the sea, to the vast ocean of intelligence whence it came, and in which again it is lost. In the name of common sense, daily observation, and above all, of revelation, we protest against a doctrine which paves the road to the most absurd as well as anti-religious conclusions. In it we recognize the fountain whence flow all the varied forms and names under which Atheism disguises itself. But it is useless to enter any further upon the refutation of an argument which few would be willing seriously to maintain. It is one of those plausible speculations which, once admitted, serve as the basis of so many brilliant, but airy, theories that dazzle and attract those who do not take the trouble of examining their solidity.

Once we admit that circumstances, though they may impede or favor the development of powers, cannot give them; in other words, that they can call into action, but cannot create, moral and intellectual resources; no argument can be drawn from the unity of species in favor of the mental equality of races. If two men, the offspring of the same parents, can be the one a dunce, the other a genius, why cannot different races, though descended of the same stock, be different also in intellectual endowments? We should laugh at, or rather, pity the man who would try to persuade us that there is no difference in color, etc., between the Scandinavian and the African, and yet it is by some considered little short of heresy to affirm, that there is an imparity in their minds as well as in their bodies.

We are told – and the objection seems indeed a grave one – that if we admit psychical as well as physical gradations in the scale of human races, the lowest must be so hopelessly inferior to the higher, their perceptions and intellectual capacities so dim, that even the light of the gospel cannot illumine them. Were it so, we should at once abandon the argument as one above human comprehension, rather than suppose that God's mercy is confined to any particular race or races. But let us earnestly investigate the question. On so vital a point the sacred record cannot but be plain and explicit. To it let us turn. Man – even the lowest of his species – has a soul. However much defaced God's image, it is vivified by His breath. To save that soul, to release it from the bondage of evil, Christ descended upon earth and gave to mankind, not a complicated system of philosophy which none but the learned and intellectual could understand, but a few simple lessons and precepts, comprehensible to the meanest capacity. He did not address himself to the wise of this world, but bade them be like children if they would come unto him. The learned Pharisees of Judea jeered and ridiculed him, but the poor woman of Canaan eagerly picked up the precious crumbs of that blessed repast which they despised. His apostles were chosen from among the lowly and simple, his first followers belonged to that class. He himself hath said:⁶ "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." How then shall we judge of the degree of intellect necessary to be a follower of Jesus? Are the most intellectual, the best informed men generally the best Christians? Or does the word of God anywhere lead us to suppose that at the great final judgment the learned prelate or ingenious expositor of the faith will be preferred to the humble, illiterate savage of some almost unknown coast, who eagerly drinks of the living water whereof whosoever drinketh shall never thirst again?

This subject has met with the attention which its importance deserves, at the hands of Mr. Gobineau, and he also shows the fallacy of the idea that Christianity will remove the mental inequality of races. True religion, among all nations who are blessed with it and sincerely embrace it, will purify their morals, and establish friendly relations between man and his fellow-man. But it will not make an *intellectually* inferior race equal to a superior one, because it was not designed to bestow talents or to endow with genius those who are devoid of it. Civilization is essentially the result of man's intellectual gifts, and must vary in its character and degree like them. Of this we shall speak again in treating of the *specific differences of civilization*, when the term *Christian civilization* will also be examined.

⁶ St. Matthew, ch. xi. v. 25.

One great reason why so many refuse to recognize mental as well as physical differences among races, is the common and favorite belief of our time in the infinite perfectibility of man. Under various forms this development-theory, so flattering to humanity, has gained an incredible number of adherents and defenders. We believe ourselves steadily marching towards some brilliant goal, to which every generation brings us nearer. We look with a pity, almost amounting to contempt, upon those who preceded us, and envy posterity, which we expect to surpass us in a ratio even greater than we believe ourselves to surpass our ancestors. It is indeed a beautiful and poetic idea that civilization is a vast and magnificent edifice of which the first generation laid the corner-stone, and to which each succeeding age contributes new materials and new embellishments. It is our tower of Babel, by which we, like the first men after the flood, hope to reach heaven and escape the ills of life. Some such idea has flattered all ages, but in ours it has assumed a more definite form. We point with pride to our inventions, annihilating – we say – time and distance; our labor-saving machines refining the mechanic and indirectly diffusing information among all classes, and confidently look forward to a new era close at hand, a millennium to come. Let us, for a moment, divest ourselves of the conceit which belongs to every age, as well as to every country and individual; and let us ask ourselves seriously and candidly: In what are we superior to our predecessors? We have inventions that they had not, it is true, and these inventions increase in an astonishing ratio; we have clearer ideas of the laws which govern the material world, and better contrivances to apply these laws and to make the elements subservient to our comfort. But has the human mind really expanded since the days of Pythagoras and Plato? Has the thinker of the nineteenth century faculties and perceptions which they had not? Have we one virtue more or one vice less than former generations? Has human nature changed, or has it even modified its failings? Though we succeed in traversing the regions of air as easily and swifter than we now do broad continents and stormy seas; though we count all the worlds in the immensity of space; though we snatch from nature her most recondite secrets, shall we be aught but men? To the true philosopher these conquests over the material world will be but additional proofs of the greatness of God and man's littleness. It is the vanity and arrogance of the creature of clay that make him believe that by his own exertions he can arrive at God-like perfection. The insane research after the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life may be classed among the many other futile attempts of man to invade the immutable decree: "Thus far, and no farther." To escape from the moral and intellectual imperfections of his nature, there is but one way; the creature must humbly and devoutly cast himself into the ever-open arms of the Creator and seek for knowledge where none knocketh in vain. This privilege he has enjoyed in all ages, and it is a question which I would hesitate to answer whether the progress of physical science has not, in many cases at least, rather the effect of making him self-sufficient and too confident in his own powers, than of bringing him nearer to the knowledge of the true God. It is one of the fatal errors of our age in particular, to confound the progress of physical science with a supposed moral progress of man. Were it so, the Bible would have been a revelation of science as well as of religion, and that it is not is now beginning to be conceded, though by no means so generally as true theology would require; for the law of God was intended for every age, for every country, for every individual, independent of the state of science or a peculiar stage of civilization, and not to be modified by any change which man might make in his material existence. With due deference, then, to those philosophers who assert that the moral nature of the human species has undergone a change at various periods of the world's history; and those enthusiasts who dream of an approaching millennium, we hold, that human nature has always been the same and always will be the same, and that no inventions or discoveries, however promotive of his material well-being, can effect a moral change or bring him any nearer to the Divine essence than he was in the beginning of his mundane existence. Science and knowledge may indeed illumine his earthly career, but they can shed no light upon the path he is to tread to reach a better world.

Christ himself has recognized the diversity of intellectual gifts in his parable of the talents, from which we borrow the very term to designate those gifts; and if, in a community of pure and

faithful Christians, there still are many degrees and kinds of talents, is it reasonable to suppose that in that millennium – the only one I can imagine – when all nations shall call on His name with hope and praise, all mental imparities of races will be obliterated? There are, at the present time, nations upon whom we look down as being inferior in civilization to ourselves, yet they are as good – if, indeed, not better – Christians than we are as a people. The progress of physical science, by facilitating the intercourse between distant parts of the world, tends, indeed, to diffuse true religion, and in this manner – and this manner only – promotes the moral good of mankind. But here it is only an instrument, and not an agent, as the machines which the architect uses to raise his building materials do not erect the structure.

One more reason why the unity of the human species cannot be considered a proof of equal intellectual capability of races. It is a favorite method of naturalists to draw an analogy between man and the brute creation; and, so far as he belongs to the animal kingdom, this method is undoubtedly correct and legitimate. But, with regard to man's higher attributes, there is an impassable barrier between him and the brute, which, in the heat of argument, contending parties have not always sufficiently respected. The great Prichard himself seems sometimes to have lost sight of it.⁷ Thus, he speaks of "psychological" diversities in varieties of the same undoubted species of animal, though it is obvious that animals can have no psychological attributes. But I am willing to concede to Mr. Prichard all the conclusions he derives from this analogy in favor of unity of the human species. All dogs, he believes, are derived from one pair; yet, there are a number of varieties of dogs, and these varieties are different not only in external appearance, but in what Mr. Prichard would call psychological qualities. No shepherd expects to train a common cur to be the intelligent guardian of a flock; no sportsman to teach his hounds, or their unmixed progeny, to perform the office of setters. That the characteristics of every variety of dogs are permanent so long as the breed remains pure, every one knows, and that their distinctive type remains the same in all countries and through all time, is proved by the mural paintings of Egypt, which show that, 2,000 years B. C., they were as well known as in our day.⁸ If, then, this permanency of "psychological" (to take Mr. Prichard's ground) diversity is compatible with unity of origin in the dog, why not in the case of man? I am far from desiring to call into question the unity of our species, but I contend that the rule must work both ways, and if "psychological" diversities can be permanent in the branches of the same species of animals, they can be permanent also in the branches of the human family.

In the preceding pages, I have endeavored to show that the unity of species is no proof of equal intellectual capability of races, that mental imparities do not conflict with the universality of the gospel tidings, and that the permanency of these imparities is consistent with the reasoning of the greatest expounder of the unity theory. I shall now proceed to state the facts which prove the intellectual diversities among the races of man. In doing so, it is important to guard against an error into which so many able writers have fallen, that of comparing individuals rather than masses.

What we term national character, is the aggregate of the qualities preponderating in a community. It is obvious that when we speak of the artistic genius of the Greeks, we do not mean that every native of Hellas and Ionia was an artist; and when we call a nation unwarlike or valorous, we do

⁷ Vide Prichard's *Natural History of Man*, p. 66, *et passim*. "His theory," says Van Amringe, "required that animals should be analogous to man. It was therefore highly important that, as he was then laying the foundation for all his future arguments and conclusions, he should elevate animals to the proper eminence, to be analogous; rather than, as Mr. Lawrence did, sink man to the level of brutes. It was an ingenious contrivance by which he could gain all the advantages, and escape the censures of the learned lecturer. It is so simple a contrivance, too – merely substituting the word 'psychological' for 'instinctive characteristics,' and the whole animal kingdom would instantly rise to the proper platform, to be the types of the human family. To get the psychology of men and animals thus related, without the trouble of philosophically accomplishing so impossible a thing, by the mere use of a word, was an ingenious, though not an ingenuous achievement. It gave him a specious right to use bees and wasps, rats and dogs, sheep, goats, and rabbits – in short, the whole animal kingdom – as human psychical analogues, which would be amazingly convenient when conclusions were to be made." —*Natural History of Man*, by W. F. Van Amringe. 1848, p. 459.

⁸ This fact is considered by Dr. Nott as a proof of *specific* difference among dogs. —*Types of Mankind*. Phila., 1854.

not thereby either stigmatize every individual as a coward, or extol him as a hero. The same is the case with races. When, for example, we assert that the black race is intellectually inferior to the white, it is not implied that the most intelligent negro should still be more obtuse than the most stupid white man. The maximum intellect and capacity of one race may greatly exceed the minimum of another, without placing them on an equality. The testimony of history, and the results of philanthropic experiment, are the data upon which the ethnologist must institute his inquiries, if he would arrive at conclusions instructive to humanity.

Let us take for illustration the white and the black races, supposed by many to represent the two extremes of the scale of gradation. The whole history of the former shows an uninterrupted progress; that of the latter, monotonous stagnation. To the one, mankind owes the most valuable discoveries in the domain of thought, and their practical application; to the other, it owes nothing. For ages plunged in the darkest gloom of barbarism, there is not one ray of even temporary or borrowed improvement to cheer the dismal picture of its history, or inspire with hope the disheartened philanthropist. At the boundary of its territory, the ever-encroaching spirit of conquest of the European stops powerless.⁹ Never, in the history of the world, has a grander or more conclusive experiment been tried than in the case of the negro race. We behold them placed in immediate possession of the richest island in the richest part of the globe, with every advantage that climate, soil, geographical situation, can afford; removed from every injurious contact, yet with every facility for constant intercourse with the most polished nations of the earth; inheriting all that the white race had gained by the toil of centuries in science, politics, and morals; and what is the result? As if to afford a still more irrefragable proof of the mental inequality of races, we find separate divisions of the same island inhabited, one by the pure, the other by a half-breed race; and the infusion of the white blood in the latter case forms a population incontestably and avowedly superior. In opposition to such facts, some special pleader, bent upon establishing a preconceived notion, ransacks the records of history to find a few isolated instances where an individual of the inferior race has displayed average ability, and from such exceptional cases he deduces conclusions applicable to the whole mass! He points with exultation to a negro who calculates, a negro who is an officer of artillery in Russia, a few others who are employed in a counting-house. And yet he does not even tell us whether these *rarae aves* are of pure blood or not, as is often the case.¹⁰ Moreover, these instances are proclaimed to the world with an air of triumph, as if they were drawn at random from an inexhaustible arsenal of facts, when in reality they are all that the most anxious research could discover, and form the stock in trade of every declaimer on the absolute equality of races.

Had it pleased the Creator to endow all branches of the human family equally, all would then have pursued the same career, though, perhaps, not all with equal rapidity. Some, favored by circumstances, might have distanced others in the race; a few, peculiarly unfortunately situated, would have lagged behind. Still, the progress of all would have been in the same direction, all would have had the same stages to traverse. Now is this the case? There are not a few who assert it. From our earliest infancy we are told of the savage, barbarous, semi-civilized, civilized, and enlightened states. These we are taught to consider as the steps of the ladder by which man climbs up to infinite perfection, we ourselves being near the top, while others are either a little below us, or have scarcely yet firmly established themselves upon the first rounds. In the beautiful language of Schiller, these latter are to us a mirror in which we behold our own ancestors, as an adult in the children around him re-

⁹ In 1497, Vasco di Gama sailed around Cape Good Hope; even previous to that, Portuguese vessels had coasted along the western shores of Africa. Since that time the Europeans have subjected the whole of the American continents, southern Asia and the island world of the Pacific, while Africa is almost as unknown as it ever was. The Cape Colony is not in the original territory of the negro. Liberia and Sierra Leone contain a half-breed population, and present experiments by no means tested. It may be fairly asserted that nowhere has the power and intelligence of the white race made less impression, produced fewer results, than in the domain of the negro.

¹⁰ Roberts, the president of the Liberian Republic, boasts of but a small portion of African blood in his veins. Sequoyah, the often-cited inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, so far from being a pure Indian, was the son of a white man.

witnesses his own infancy. This is, in a measure, true of nations of the same race, but is it true with regard to different races? It is little short of presumption to venture to combat an idea perhaps more extensively spread than any of our time, yet this we shall endeavor to do. Were the differences in civilization which we observe in various nations of the world, differences of degree only, and not of kind, it is obvious that the most advanced individual in one degree must closely approach the confines of a higher. But this is not the case. The highest degree of culture known to Hindoo or Chinese civilization, approaches not the possessor one step nearer to the ideas and views of the European. The Chinese civilization is as perfect, in its own way, as ours, nay more so.¹¹ It is not a mere child, or even an adult not yet arrived at maturity; it is rather a decrepit old man. It too has its degrees; it too has had its periods of infancy, of adult age, of maturity. And when we contemplate its fruits, the immense works which have been undertaken and completed under its ægis, the systems of morals and politics to which it gave rise, the inventions which signalized its more vigorous periods, we cannot but admit that it is entitled in a high degree to our veneration and esteem.¹² Moreover it has excellencies which our civilization as yet has not; it pervades all classes, ours not. In the whole Chinese empire, comprising, as it does, one-third of the human race, we find few individuals unable to read and write; in China proper, none. How many European countries can pretend to this? And yet, because Chinese civilization has a different tendency from ours, because its course lies in another direction, we call it a semi-civilization. At what time of the world's history then have we – the *civilized* nations – passed through this stage of semi-civilization?

The monuments of Sanscrit literature, the magnificent remains of palaces and temples, the great number of ingenious arts, the elaborate systems of metaphysics, attest a state of intellectual culture, far from contemptible, among the Hindoos. Yet their civilization, too, we term a semi-civilization, albeit it is as little like the Chinese as it is like anything ever seen in Europe.

Few who will carefully investigate and reflect upon these facts, will doubt that the terms Hindoo, Chinese, European civilization, are not indicative of degrees only, but mean the respective development of powers essentially different in their nature. We may consider our civilization the best, but it is both arrogant and unphilosophical to consider it as the only one, or as the standard by which to measure all others. This idea, moreover, is neither peculiar to ourselves nor to our age. The Chinese even yet look upon us as barbarians; the Hindoos probably do the same. The Greeks considered all extra-Hellenic peoples as barbarians. The Romans ascribed the same pre-excellency to themselves, and the predilections for these nations, which we imbibe already in our academic years from our classical studies, cause us to share the same opinion, and to view with their prejudices nations less akin to us than they. The Persians, for instance, whom the Greeks self-complacently styled outside-barbarians, were, in reality, a highly cultivated people, as no one can deny who will examine the facts which modern research has brought to light. Their arts, if not Hellenic, still attained a high degree of perfection. Their architecture, though not of Grecian style, was not inferior in magnificence and splendor. Nay, I for one am willing to render myself obnoxious to the charge of classical heresy, by regarding the pure Persians as a people, in some respects at least, superior to the Greeks. Their religious system seems to me a much purer, nobler one than the inconsistent, immoral mythology of

¹¹ For the great perfection to which the Chinese have carried the luxuries and amenities of life, see particularly M. Huc's *Travels in China*. He lived among them for years, and, what few travellers do, spoke their language so fluently and perfectly that he was enabled, during a considerable number of years, to discharge the duties of a missionary, disguised as a native.

¹² It would be useless to remind our readers of the famous Great Wall, the Imperial Canals, that largest of the cities of the world – Peking. The various treatises of the Chinese on morals and politics, especially that of Confucius, have been admired by all European thinkers. Consult Pauthier's elaborate work on *China*. It is equally well known that the Chinese knew the art of printing, gunpowder and its uses, the mariner's compass, etc., centuries before we did. For the general diffusion of elementary knowledge among the Chinese, see Davis's *Sketches*, and other authors. Those who may think me a biased panegyrist of the Chinese, I refer to the following works as among the most reliable of the vast number written on the subject: —• *Description Historique, Géographique, et Littéraire de la Chine*. Par M. G. Pauthier. Paris, 1839. • *China Opened*. By Rev. Chs. Gutzlaff. London, 1838. • *China, Political, Commercial, and Social*. By R. Montgomery Martin. London, 1847. • *Sketches of China*. By John F. Davis. London, 1841. And above all, for amusing and instructive reading, • *Journey through the Chinese Empire*. By M. Huc. New York, 1855; and • *Mélanges Asiatiques*. Par Abel Remusat. Paris, 1835.

our favorites. Their ideas of a good and an evil power in perpetual conflict, and of a mediator who loves and protects the human race; their utter detestation of every species of idolatry, have to me something that prepossesses me in their favor.

I have now alleged, in a cursory manner, my principal reasons for considering civilizations as specifically distinct. To further dilate upon the subject, though I greatly desire to do so, would carry me too far; not, indeed, beyond the scope of the inquiries proposed in this volume, but beyond the limited space assigned for my introduction. I shall add only, that – assuming the intellectual equality of all branches of the human family – we can assign no causes for the differences of *degree only* of their development. Geographical position cannot explain them, because the people who have made the greatest advance, have not always been the most favorably situated. The greatest geographical advantages have been in possession of others that made no use of them, and became of importance only by changing owners. To cite one of a thousand similar instances. The glorious Mississippi Valley, with its innumerable tributary streams, its unparalleled fertility and mineral wealth, seems especially adapted by nature for the abode of a great agricultural and commercial nation. Yet, the Indians roamed over it, and plied their canoes on its rivers, without ever being aware of the advantages they possessed. The Anglo-Saxon, on the contrary, no sooner perceived them than he dreamed of the conquest of the world. We may therefore compare such and other advantages to a precious instrument which it requires the skill of the workman to use. To ascribe differences of civilizations to the differences of laws and political institutions, is absolutely begging the question, for such institutions are themselves an effect and an inherent portion of the civilization, and when transplanted into foreign soils, never prosper. That the moral and physical well-being of a nation will be better promoted when liberty presides over her councils than when stern despotism sits at the helm, no one can deny; but it is obvious that the nation must first be prepared to receive the blessings of liberty, lest they prove a curse.

Here is the place for a few remarks upon the epithet Christian, applied to our civilization. Mr. Gobineau justly observes, that he knows of no social or political order of things to which this term may fitly be said to belong. We may justly speak of a Brahminic, Buddhistic, Pagan, Judaic civilization, because the social or political systems designated by these appellations were intimately connected with a more or less exclusive theocratical formula. Religion there prescribed everything: social and political laws, government, manners, nay, in many instances, dress and food. But one of the distinguishing characteristics of Christianity is its universality. Right at the beginning it disclaimed all interference in temporal affairs. Its precepts may be followed under every system of government, in every path of life, every variety of modes of existence. Such is, in substance, Mr. Gobineau's view of the subject. To this I would add a few comments of my own. The error is not one of recent date. Its baneful effects have been felt from almost the first centuries of the establishment of the Church down to our times. Human legislation ought, indeed, to be in strict accordance with the law of God, but to commend one system as Christian, and proscribe another as unchristian, is opening the door to an endless train of frightful evils. This is what, virtually, they do who would call a civilization Christian, for civilization is the aggregate social and political development of a nation, or a race, and the political is always in direct proportion to the social progress; both mutually influence each other. By speaking of a Christian civilization, therefore, we assert that some particular political as well as social system, is most conformable to the spirit of our religion. Hence the union of church and State, and the influence of the former in temporal affairs – an influence which few enlightened churchmen, at least of our age, would wish to claim. Not to speak of the danger of placing into the hands of any class of men, however excellent, the power of declaring what legislation is Christian or not, and thus investing them with supreme political as well as spiritual authority; it is sufficient to point out the disastrous effects of such a system to the interests of the church itself. The opponents of a particular political organization become also the opponents of the religion which advocates and defends it. The indifferentism of Germany, once so zealous in the cause of religion, is traceable to this source. The people are dissatisfied with their political machinery, and hate the church which

vindicates it, and stigmatizes as impious every attempt at change. Indeed, one has but to read the religious journals of Prussia, to understand the lukewarmness of that people. Mr. Brace, in his *Home Life in Germany*, says that many intelligent natives of that country had told him: Why should we go to church to hear a sermon that extols an order of things which we know to be wicked, and in the highest degree detestable? How can a religion be true which makes adherence to such an order a fundamental article of its creed?

One of the features of our constitution which Mr. De Tocqueville most admires, is the utter separation of church and State. Mere religious toleration practically prevails in most European countries, but this total disconnection of the religious from the civil institutions, is peculiar to the United States, and a lesson which it has given to the rest of the world.

I do not mean that every one who makes use of the word Christian civilization thereby implies a union of church and State, but I wish to point out the principle upon which this expression is based, viz: that a certain social and political order of things is more according to the spirit of the Christian religion than another; and the consequences which must, or at least may, follow from the practical acceptance of this principle. Taking my view of the subject, few, I think, will dispute that the term Christian civilization is a misnomer. Of the civilizing influence of Christianity, I have spoken before, but this influence would be as great in the Chinese or Hindoo civilizations, without, in the least, obliterating their characteristic features.

Few terms of equal importance are so vaguely defined as the term civilization; few definitions are so difficult. In common parlance, the word civilization is used to designate that moral, intellectual, and material condition at which the so-called European race, whether occupying the Eastern or the Western continent, has arrived in the nineteenth century. But the nations comprised in this race differ from one another so extensively, that it has been found necessary to invent a new term: *enlightenment*. Thus, Great Britain, France, the United States, Switzerland, several of the States of the German Confederacy, Sweden, and Denmark, are called enlightened; while Russia, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Brazil, and the South American republics are merely civilized. Now, I ask, in what does the difference consist?

Is the diffusion of knowledge by popular education to be the test? Then Great Britain and France would fall far below some countries now placed in the second, or even third rank. Denmark and China would be the most civilized countries in the world; nay, even Thibet, and the rest of Central Asia, would take precedence before the present champions of civilization. The whole of Germany and Switzerland would come next, then the eastern and middle sections of the United States, then the southern and western; and, after them, Great Britain and France. Still retaining the same scale, Russia would actually be ranked above Italy, the native clime of the arts. In Great Britain itself, Scotland would far surpass England in civilization¹³.

¹³ Unwilling to introduce statistic pedantry into a composition of so humble pretensions as an introduction, I have refrained to give the figures – not always very accurate, I admit – upon which the preceding gradation is based, viz: the number of persons able to read and write in each of the above-named countries. How far England and France are behindhand in this respect, compared either with ourselves, or with other European nations, is tolerably well known; but the fact that not only in China proper, but in Thibet, Japan, Anam, Tonquin, etc., few can be found devoid of that acquirement, will probably meet with many incredulous readers, though it is mentioned by almost every traveller. (See *J. Mohl's Annual Report to the Asiatic Society*, 1851.) But, it may be safely asserted that, in the whole of that portion of Asia lying south of the Altai Mountains, including Japan, altogether the most populous region of the globe, the percentage of males unable to read and write is by far smaller than in the entire population of Europe. Be it well understood, that I do not, therefore, claim any superiority for the inhabitants of the former region over those of the latter. "In China," says M. Huc, "there are not, as in Europe, public libraries and reading-rooms; but those who have a taste for reading, and a desire to instruct themselves, can satisfy their inclinations very easily, as books are sold here at a lower price than in any other country. Besides, the Chinese find everywhere something to read; they can scarcely take a step without seeing some of the characters of which they are so proud. One may say, in fact, that all China is an immense library; for inscriptions, sentences, moral precepts, are found in every corner, written in letters of all colors and all sizes. The façades of the tribunals, the pagodas, the public monuments, the signs of the shops, the doors of the houses, the interior of the apartments, the corridors, all are full of fine quotations from the best authors. Teacups, plates, vases, fans, are so many selections of poems, often chosen with much taste, and prettily printed. A Chinese has no need to give himself much trouble in order to enjoy the finest productions of his country's literature. He need only take his pipe, and walk out, with his nose in

Is the perfection to which the arts are carried, the test of civilization? Then Bavaria and Italy are the most civilized countries. Then are we far behind the Greeks in civilization. Or, are the useful arts to carry the prize? Then the people showing the greatest mechanical genius is the most civilized.

Are political institutions to be the test? Then the question, "Which is the best government?" must first be decided. But the philosophic answer would be: "That which is best adapted to the genius of the people, and therefore best answers the purposes for which all government is instituted." Those who believe in the abstract superiority of any governmental theory, may be compared to the tailor who would finish some beau-ideal of a coat, without taking his customer's measure. We could afford to laugh at such theorists, were not their schemes so often recorded in blood in the annals of the world. Besides, if this test be admitted, no two could agree upon what was a civilized community. The panegyrist of constitutional monarchy would call England the only civilized country; the admirer of municipal liberty would point to the Hanse towns of the Middle Ages, and their miserable relics, the present free cities of Germany; the friend of sober republicanism would exclude from the pale of civilization all but the United States and Switzerland; the lover of pure democracy would contend that mankind had retrograded since the time of Athens, and deplore that civilization was now confined to some few rude mountain or nomadic tribes with few and simple wants; finally, the defender of a paternal autocracy would sigh for the days of Trajan or Marcus Aurelius, and hesitate whether, in our age, Austria or Russia deserved the crown.

Neither pre-eminence in arts and sciences, nor in popular instruction, nor in government, can singly be taken as the test of civilization. Pre-eminence in all, no country enjoys. Yet all these are signs of civilization – the only ones by which we distinguish and recognize it. How, then, shall we define this term? I would suggest a simple and, I think, sufficiently explicit definition: Civilization is the continuous development of man's moral and intellectual powers. As the aggregate of these differs in different nations, so differs the character of their civilization. In one, civilization manifests itself in the perfection of the arts, either useful or polite; in another, in the cultivation of the sciences; in a third; in the care bestowed upon politics, or, in the diffusion of knowledge among the masses. Each has its own merits, each its own defects; none combines the excellencies of all, but whichever combines the most with fewest defects, may be considered the best, or most perfect. It is because not keeping this obvious truth in view that John Bull laughs (or used to laugh) self-complacently at Monsieur Crapaud, and that we ourselves sometimes laugh at his political capers, forgetting that the thinkers of his nation have, for the last century at least, led the van in science and politics – yes, even in politics.¹⁴ It is, for the same reason, that the Frenchman laughs at the German, or the Dutchman; that the foreigner cannot understand that there is an *American civilization* as well, and, bringing his own country's standard along with him, finds everything either too little or too great; or, that the American, going to the native soil of the ripest scholars in the world, and seeing brick and mortar carried up by hand to the fourth story of a building in process of erection,¹⁵ or seeing five

the air, through the principal streets of the first town he comes to. Let him enter the poorest house in the most wretched village; the destitution may be complete, things the most necessary will be wanting; but he is sure of finding some fine maxims written out on strips of red paper. Thus, if those grand large characters, which look so terrific in our eyes, though they delight the Chinese, are really so difficult to learn, at least the people have the most ample opportunities of studying them, almost in play, and of impressing them ineffaceably on their memories." —*A Journey through the Chinese Empire*, vol. i. pp. 327-328.

¹⁴ Is it necessary to call to the mind of the reader, that the most prominent physicians, the greatest chemists, the best mathematicians, were French, and that to the same nation belong the Comptes, the De Maistres, the Guizots, the De Tocquevilles; or that, notwithstanding its political extravaganzas, every liberal theory was first fostered in its bosom? The father of our democratic party was the pupil of French governmental philosophy, by the lessons of which even his political opponents profited quite as much as by its errors.

¹⁵ Brace, in his *Home Life in Germany*, mentions an instance of this kind, but not having the volume at hand, I cannot cite the page. To every one, however, that has travelled in Europe, or has not, such facts are familiar. It is well known, for instance, that in some of the most polished European countries, the wooden ploughshare is still used; and that, in Paris, that metropolis of arts and fashion, every drop of water must be carried, in buckets, from the public fountains to the Dutchess' *boudoir* in the first, and to the Grisette's garret in the seventh story. Compare this with the United States, where – not to mention Fairmount and Croton – the smallest town, almost, has her water-works, if required by her topography. Are we, then, so infinitely more civilized than France?

men painfully perform a job which his youngest son would have accomplished without trouble by the simplest, perhaps self-invented, contrivance, revolves in his own mind how it is possible that these people – when the schoolmaster is abroad, too – are still so many centuries "behind the time." Thus each nation has its own standard by which it judges its neighbors; but when extra-European nations, such as the Chinese or Hindoos, are to be judged, all unite in voting them *outside barbarians*.

Here, then, we have indubitable proofs of moral and intellectual diversities, not only in what are generally termed different races, but even in nations apparently belonging to the same race. Nor do I see in this diversity ought that can militate against our ideas of universal brotherhood. Among individuals, diversity of talent does not preclude friendly intercourse; on the contrary, it promotes it, for rivals seldom are friends. Neither does superior ability exempt us from the duties which we owe to our fellow-man.

I have repeatedly made use of the analogy between societies and the individuals that compose them. I cannot more clearly express my idea of civilization than by recurring to it again. Civilization, then, is to nations what the development of his physical and intellectual powers is to an individual; indeed, it is nothing but the aggregate result of all these individual powers; a common reservoir to which each contributes a share, whether large or small. The analogy may be extended further. Nations may be considered as themselves members of societies, bearing the same relations to each other and to the whole, as individuals. Thus, all the nations of Europe contribute, each in its own manner and degree, to what has been called the *European* civilization. And, in the same manner, the nations of Asia form distinct systems of civilizations. But all these systems ultimately tend to one great aim – the general welfare of mankind. I would therefore carefully distinguish between the civilizations of particular nations, of clusters of nations, and of the whole of our species. To borrow a metaphor from the mechanism of the universe, the first are like the planets of a solar system, revolving – though in different orbits, and with different velocities – around the same common centre; but the solar systems again – with all their planets – revolve round another, more distant point.

Let us take two individuals of undoubted intellect. One may be a great mathematician, the other a great statesman. Place the first at the head of a cabinet, the second in an observatory, and the mathematician will as signally fail in correctly observing the changes in the political firmament, as the other in noting those in the heavenly. Yet, who would decide which had the superior intellect? This diversity of gifts is not the result of education. No training, however ingenious, could have changed an Arago into a Pitt, or *vice versa*. Raphael could under no circumstances have become a Handel, or either of them a Milton. Nay, men differ in following the same career. Can any one conceive that Michael Angelo could ever have painted Vandyke's pictures, Shakspeare written Milton's verses, Mozart composed Rossini's music, or Jefferson followed Hamilton's policy? Here, then, we have excellencies, perhaps of equal degree, but of very different kinds. Nature, from her inexhaustible store, has not only unequally, but variously, bestowed her favors, and this infinite variety of gifts, as infinite as the variety of faces, God has doubtless designed for the happiness of men, and for their more intimate union, in making them dependent one on another. As each creature sings his Maker's praise in his own voice and cadence, the sparrow in his twitter, the nightingale in her warble, so each human being proclaims the Almighty's glory by the rightful use of his talents, whether great or small, for the promotion of his fellow-creatures' happiness; one may raise pious emotion in the breast by the tuneful melody of his song; another by the beauty and vividness of his images on canvas or in verse; a third discovers new worlds – additional evidences of His omnipotence who made them – and, by his calculations, demonstrates, even to the sceptic, the wonderful mechanism of the universe; to another, again, it is given to guide a nation's councils, and, by His assistance, to avert danger, or correct evils. Fie upon those who would raise man's powers above those of God, and ascribe diversity of talents to education and accident, rather than to His wisdom and design. Can we not admire the Almighty as well in the variety as in a fancied uniformity of His works? Harmony consists in the union of different sounds; the harmony of the universe, in the diversity of its parts.

What is true of a society composed of individuals, is true of that vast political assemblage composed of nations. That each has a career to run through, a destiny to fulfil, is my firm and unwavering belief. That each must be gifted with peculiar qualities for that purpose, is a mere corollary of the proposition. This has been the opinion of all ages: "The men of Bœotia are noted for their stolidity, those of Attica for their wit." Common parlance proves that it is now, to-day, the opinion of all mankind, whatever theorists may say. Many affect to deride the idea of "manifest destiny" that possesses us Anglo-Americans, but who in the main doubts it? Who, that will but cast one glance on the map, or look back upon our history of yesterday only, can think of seriously denying that great purposes have been accomplished, will still be accomplished, and that these purposes were designed and guided by something more than blind chance? Unroll the page of history – of the great chain of human events, it is true, we perceive but few links; like eternity, its beginning is wrapt in darkness, its end a mystery above human comprehension – but, in the vast drama presented to us, in which nations form the cast, we see each play its part, then disappear. Some, as Mr. Gobineau has it, act the kings and rulers, others are content with inferior roles.

As it is incompatible with the wisdom of the Creator, to suppose that each nation was not specially fitted¹⁶ for the part assigned to it, we may judge of what they were capable of by what they have accomplished.

History, then, must be our guide; and never was epoch more propitious, for never has her lamp shone brighter. The study of this important science, which Niebuhr truly calls the *magistra vitæ*, has received within our days an impulse such as it never had before. The invaluable archæological treasures which the linguists and antiquarians of Europe have rescued from the literature and monuments of the great nations of former ages, bring – as it were – back to life again the mouldered generations of the dim past. We no longer content ourselves with chronological outlines, mere names, and unimportant accounts of kings and their quarrels; we seek to penetrate into the inner life of those multitudes who acted their part on the stage of history, and then disappeared, to understand the modes of thought, the feelings, ideas, *instincts*, which actuated them, and made them what they were. The hoary pyramids of the Nile valley are forced to divulge their age, the date of a former civilization; the temples and sepulchres, to furnish a minute account of even the private life of their builders;¹⁷ the arrow-headed characters on the disinterred bricks of the sites of Babylon and Nineveh, are no longer a secret to the indefatigable orientalists; the classic writers of Hindostan and China find their most zealous scholiasts, and profoundest critics, in the capitals of Western Europe. The dross of childish fables, which age after age has transmitted to its successor under the name of history, is exposed to the powerful furnace of reason and criticism, and the pure ore extracted, by such men as Niebuhr,

¹⁶ Since writing the above, I lit upon the following striking confirmation of my idea by Dr. Pickering, whose analogism here so closely resembles mine, as almost to make me suspect myself of unconscious plagiarism. "While admitting the general truth, that mankind are essentially alike, no one doubts the existence of character, distinguishing not only individuals, but communities and nations. I am persuaded that there is, besides, a character of race. It would not be difficult to select epithets; such as 'amphibious, enduring, insidious;' or to point out as accomplished by one race of men, that which seemed beyond the powers of another. Each race possessing its peculiar points of excellence, and, at the same time, counterbalancing defects, it may be that union was required to attain the full measure of civilization. In the organic world, each field requires a new creation; each change in circumstances going beyond the constitution of a plant or animal, is met by a new adaptation, until the whole universe is full; while, among the immense variety of created beings, two kinds are hardly found fulfilling the same precise purpose. Some analogy may possibly exist in the human family; and it may even be questioned, whether any one of the races existing singly would, up to the present day, have extended itself over the whole surface of the globe." — *The Races of Man, and their Geographical Distribution*. By Charles Pickering, M. D. Boston, 1811. (*U. S. Exploring Expedition*, vol. ix. p. 200.)

¹⁷ Since Champollion's fortunate discovery of the Rosetta stone, which furnished the key to the hieroglyphics, the deciphering of these once so mysterious characters has made such progress, that Lepsius, the great modern Egyptologist, declares it possible to write a minute court gazette of the reign of Ramses II., the Sesostri of the Greeks, and even of monarchs as far back as the IVth dynasty. To understand that this is no vain boast, the reader must remember that these hieroglyphics mostly contain records of private or royal lives, and that the mural paintings in the temples and sepulchral chambers, generally represent scenes illustrative of trades, or other occupations, games, etc., practised among the people of that early day.

Heeren, Ranke, Gibbon, Grote. The enthusiastic lover of ancient Rome now sees her early history in clearer, truer colors than did her own historians.

But, if history is indispensable to ethnology, the latter is no less so to a true understanding of history. The two sciences mutually shed light on one another's path, and though one of them is as yet in its infancy, its wonderful progress in so short a time, and the almost unparalleled attention which it has excited at all hands, are bright omens for the future. It will be obvious that, by *ethnology*, we do not mean *ethnography*, with which it has long been synonymous. Their meaning differs in the same manner, they bear almost the same relation to one another as *geology* and *geography*. While ethnography contents herself with the mere description and classification of the races of man, ethnology, to borrow the expressive language of the editor of the *London Ethnological Journal*, "investigates the mental and physical differences of mankind, and the organic laws upon which they depend; seeks to deduce from these investigations principles of human guidance, in all the important relations of social and national existence."¹⁸ The importance of this study cannot be better expressed than in the words of a writer in the *North British Review* for August, 1849: "No one that has not worked much in the element of history, can be aware of the immense importance of clearly keeping in view the differences of race that are discernible among the nations that inhabit different parts of the world... In speculative history, in questions relating to the past career and the future destinies of nations, *it is only by a firm and efficient handling of this conception of our species, as broken up into so many groups or masses, physiologically different to a certain extent, that any progress can be made, or any available conclusions accurately arrived at.*"¹⁹

But in attempting to divide mankind into such groups, an ethnologist is met by a serious and apparently insurmountable difficulty. The gradation of color is so imperceptible from the clearest white to the jettest black; and even anatomical peculiarities, normal in one branch, are found to exist, albeit in exceptional cases, in many others; so that the ethnographers scarce know where to stop in their classification, and while some recognize but three grand varieties, others contend for five, for eleven, or even for a much greater number. This difficulty arises, in my estimation, mainly from the attempt to class mankind into different species, that is, groups who have a separate origin; and also, from the proneness to draw deductions from individual instances, by which almost any absurdity can be sustained, or truth refuted. As we have already inveighed against the latter error, and shall therefore try to avoid falling into it; and as we have no desire to enter the field of discussion about unity or plurality of species, we hope, in a great measure, to obviate the difficulties that beset the path of so many inquirers. By the word *race*²⁰ we mean, both here and in the body of the work, such branches of the human family as are distinguished in the aggregate by certain well-defined physical or mental peculiarities, independent of the question whether they be of identical or diverse origin. For the sake of simplicity, these races are arranged in several principal classes, according to their relative affinities and resemblances. The most popular system of arrangement is that of Blumenbach, who recognizes five grand divisions, distinguished by appellations descriptive either of color or geographical position, viz: the White, Circassian, or European; the Yellow, Altaic, Asiatic,

¹⁸ *Ethnological Journal*, edited by Luke Burke, London, 1848; June 1, No. 1, from *Types of Mankind*. By Nott and Gliddon, p. 49.

¹⁹ From *Types of Mankind*. By Nott and Gliddon, p. 52.

²⁰ The term "race" is of relative meaning, and, though often erroneously used synonymously with *species*, by no means signifies the same. The most strenuous advocates of sameness of species, use it to designate well-defined groups, as the white and black. If we consider ourselves warranted by the language of the Bible, to believe in separate origins of the human family, then, indeed, it may be considered as similar in meaning to species; otherwise, it must signify but subdivisions of one. We may therefore speak of ten or a hundred races of man, without impugning their being descended from the same stock. All that is here contended for is, that the distinctive features of such races, in whatever manner they may have originated, are now persistent. Two men may, the one arrive at the highest honors of the State, the other, with every facility at his command, forever remain in mediocrity. Yet, these two men may be brothers. That the question of species, when disconnected from any theological bearing, is one belonging exclusively to the province of the naturalist, and in which the metaphysician can have but a subordinate part, may be illustrated by a homely simile. Diversity of talent in the same family involves no doubt of parentage; but, if one child be born with a black skin and woolly hair, questions about the paternity might indeed arise.

or Mongolian; the Red, American, or Indian; the Brown, or Malay; and, lastly, the Black, African, or negro. This division, though the most commonly adopted, has no superior claims above any other. Not only are its designations liable to very serious objections, but it is, in itself, entirely arbitrary. The Hottentot differs as much from the negro as the latter does from the Malay; and the Polynesian from the Malay more than the American from the Mongolian. Upon the same principle, then, the number of classes might be indefinitely extended. Mr. Gobineau thought three classes sufficient to answer every purpose, and these he calls respectively the white, yellow, and black. Mr. Latham,²¹ the great ethnographer, adopts a system almost precisely similar to our author's, and upon grounds entirely different. Though, for my own part, I should prefer a greater number of primary divisions, I confess that this coincidence of opinion in two men, pursuing, independent of, and unknown to each other, different paths of investigation, is a strong evidence of the correctness of their system, which, moreover, has the merit of great simplicity and clearness.

It must be borne in mind that the races comprised under these divisions, are by no means to be considered equal among themselves. We should lay it down as a general truth, that while the entire groups differ principally in *degree* of intellectual capacity, the races comprised in each differ among themselves rather in kind. Thus, we assert upon the testimony of history, that the white races are superior to the yellow; and these, in turn, to the black. But the Lithuanian and the Anglo-Saxon both belong to the same group of races, and yet, history shows that they differ; so do the Samoyede and the Chinese, the negro of Lower Guinea, and the Fellah. These differences, observable among nations classed under the same head, as, for instance, the difference between the Russians and Italians (both white), we express in every day's language by the word "genius." Thus, we constantly hear persons speak of the artistic, administrative, nautical genius of the Greeks, Romans, and Phenicians, respectively; or, such phrases as these, which I borrow from Mr. Gobineau: "Napoleon rightly understood the *genius* of his nation when he reinstated the Church, and placed the supreme authority on a secure basis; Charles I. and his adviser did not, when they attempted to bend the neck of Englishmen under the yoke of absolutism." But, as the word *genius* applied to the capacities or tendencies of a nation, in general implies either too much or too little, it has been found convenient, in this work, to substitute for it another term — *instinct*. By the use of this word, it was not intended to assimilate man to the brute, to express aught differing from intellect or the reasoning capacity; but only to designate the peculiar manner in which that intellect or reasoning capacity manifests itself; in other words, the special adaptation of a nation for the part assigned to it in the world's history; and, as this part is performed involuntarily and, for the most part, unconsciously, the term was deemed neither improper nor inappropriate. I do not, however, contend for its correctness, though I could cite the authority of high names for its use in this sense; I contend merely for its convenience, for we thereby gain an easy method of making distinctions of *kind* in the mental endowments of races, in cases where we would hesitate to make distinctions of *degree*. In fact, it is saying of multitudes only what we say of an individual by speaking of his *talent*; with this difference, however, that by talent we understand excellency of a certain order, while instinct applies to every grade. Two persons of equal intellectual calibre may have, one a talent for mathematics, the other for literature; that is, one can exhibit his intellect to advantage only in calculation, the other only in writing. Thus, of two nations standing equally high in the intellectual scale, one shall be distinguished for the high perfection attained in the fine arts, the other for the same perfection in the useful.

At the risk of wearying the reader with my definitions, I must yet inflict on him another which is essential to the right understanding of the following pages. In common parlance, the terms *nation* and *people* have become strictly synonymous. We speak indifferently of the French people, or the French nation; the English people, or the English nation. If we make any distinction at all, we perhaps designate by the first expression the masses; by the second, rather the sovereignty. Thus, we say the

²¹ *Natural History of the Varieties of Man*. By Robert Gordon Latham. London, 1850.

French people are versatile, the French nation is at war with Russia. But even this distinction is not always made.

My purpose is to restore the word nation to its original signification, in which it expresses the same as the word race, including, besides, the idea of some sort of political organization. It is, in fact, nothing but the Latin equivalent of that word, and was applied, like tribe, to a collection of individuals not only living under the same government, but also claiming a closer consanguinity to one another than to their neighbors. It differs from tribe only in this respect, that it is applied to greater multitudes, as for instance to a coalescence of several closely-allied tribes, which gives rise to more complicated political forms. It might therefore be defined by an ethnologist as *a population consisting of homogeneous ethnical elements*.

The word *people*, on the contrary, when applied to an aggregation of individuals living under the same government, implies no immediate consanguineous ties among them. *Nation* does not necessarily imply political unity; *people*, always. Thus, we speak of the Greek *nation*, though the Greeks were divided into a number of independent and very dissimilar sovereignties; but, we say the Roman *people*, though the whole population of the empire obeyed the same supreme head. The Russian empire contains within its limits, besides the Russians proper, an almost equal number of Cossacks, Calmucks, Tartars, Fins, and a number of other races, all very different from one another and still more so from the Russians, not only in language and external appearance, but in manners, modes of thinking: in one word, in instincts. By the expression Russian people I should therefore understand the whole population of that empire; by Russian nation, only the dominant race to which the Czar belongs. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of keeping in view this distinction, as I shall prove by another instance. The Hungarian people are very nearly equally divided (exclusive of about one million Germans) into two nations, the Magyars and the Slaves. Not only have these two, though for centuries occupying the same soil, remained unmixed and distinct, but the most intense antipathy exists between them, which only requires an occasion to display itself in acts of bloodshed and relentless cruelty, that would make the tenants of hell shudder. Such an occasion was the recent revolution, in which, while the Magyars fought like lions for their independence, the Slaves, knowing that they would not participate in any advantage the others might gain, proved more formidable opponents than the Austrians.²²

If I have been successful in my discrimination between the two words, it follows plainly that a member of one nation, strictly speaking, can no more become a member of another by process of law, than a man, by adopting a child, can make it the fruit of his loins. This rule, though correct in the abstract, does not always apply to individual cases; but these, as has already been remarked, cannot be made the groundwork of general deductions. In conclusion of this somewhat digressional definition, I would observe that, owing to the great intermixture of the European populations, produced by their various and intimate mutual relations, it does not apply with the same force to them as to others, and this I regard as the reason why the signification of the word has become modified.

If we will carefully examine the history of great empires, we shall be able, in almost every instance, to trace their beginning to the activity of what, in the strictest sense of the word, may be called a nation. Gradually, as the sphere of that nation expands, it incorporates, and in course of time amalgamates with foreign elements.

Nimrod, we learn from sacred history, established the Assyrian empire. At first, this consisted of but little more than the city of Babylon, and must necessarily have contained a very homogeneous population, if from no other cause than its narrow geographical limits. At the dawn of profane history,

²² The collision between these two nationalities, only a few years ago, was attended by scenes so revolting – transcending even the horrors of the Corcyrian sedition, the sack of Magdeburg, or the bloodiest page in the French Revolution – that, for the honor of human nature, I would gladly disbelieve the accounts given of them. But the testimony comes from neutral sources, the friends of either party being interested in keeping silence. I shall have occasion to allude to this subject again, and therefore reserve further details for a note in the body of the work.

however, we find this empire extending over boundless tracts, and uniting under one rule tribes and nations of the most dissimilar manners and tongues.

The Assyrian empire fell, and that of the Medes rose on its ruins. The Median monarchy had an humble beginning. Dejoces, says tradition, united the independent tribes of the Medes. Later, we find them ruling nations whose language they did not understand, whose manners they despised.

The Persian empire exceeded in grandeur its mighty predecessors. Originating in a rebellion of a few liberty-loving tribes, concerted and successfully executed by a popular leader (Cyrus), two generations of rulers extended its boundaries to the banks of the Nile. In Alexander's time, it was a conglomeration of a countless number of nations, many of whom remained under their hereditary rulers while rendering allegiance, and paying tribute to the great king.

I pass over the Macedonian empire, as of too short a duration to be a fair illustration. The germ of the Roman empire consisted of a coalescence of very closely allied tribes: Romulus's band of adventurers (who must have come from neighboring communities), the Sabines, Albans, and Latins. At the period of its downfall, it ruled, at least nominally, over every then known race.

In all these instances, the number of which might be further increased, we find homogeneousness of population at first, ethnical mixture and confusion at the end. "But what does this prove? will be asked. That too great an extension of territory is the cause of weakness? The idea is old, and out of date in our times, when steam and electricity bring the outskirts of the largest empire in closer proximity than formerly were the frontiers of the humblest sovereignty." Extension of territory does not itself prove a cause of weakness and ruin. The largest empire in the world is that of China, and, without steam or electricity, it has maintained itself for 4,000 years, and bids fair, spite of the present revolution, to last a good long while yet. But, when extension of territory is attended with the incorporation of heterogeneous masses, having different interests, different instincts, from the conqueror, then indeed the extension must be an element of weakness, and not of strength.

The armies which Xerxes led into Greece were not Persians; but a small fragment of that motley congregation, the *élite*, the leaven of the whole mass, was composed of the king's countrymen. Upon this small body he placed his principal reliance, and when, at the fatal battle of Salamis, he beheld the slaughter of that valiant and noble band, though he had hundreds of thousands yet at his command, he rent his garments and fled a country which he had well-nigh conquered. Here is the difference between the armies of Cyrus and those of Xerxes and Darius. The rabbles which obeyed the latter, perhaps contained as much valor as the ranks of the enthusiastic followers of the first, though the fact of their fighting under Persian standards might be considered as a proof of their inferiority. But what interest had they in the success of the great king? To forge still firmer their own fetters? Could the name of Cyrus, the remembrance of the storming of Sardis, the siege of Babylon, the conquest of Egypt, fire them with enthusiasm? Perhaps, in some of those glorious events, their forefathers became slaves to the tyrants they now serve, tyrants whose very language they do not understand.

The last armies of tottering Rome were drafted from every part of her boundless dominions, and of the men who were sent to oppose the threatening barbarians of the north, some, it might be, felt the blood of humbled Greece in their veins; some had been torn from a distant home in Egypt, or Libya; others, perhaps, remembered with pride how their ancestors had fought the Romans in the times of Juba, or Mithridates; others, again, boiled with indignation at the oppression of their Gallic brethren; – could those men respect the glorious traditions of Rome, could they be supposed to emulate the former legions of the proud city?

It is not, then, an extensive territory that ruins nations; it is a diversity of instincts, a clashing of interests among the various parts of the population. When each province is isolated in feelings and interests from every other, no external foe is wanted to complete the ruin. Ambitious and adroit men will soon arise who know how to play upon these interests, and employ them for the promotion of their own schemes.

Nations, in the various stages of their career, have often been compared to individuals. They have, it is said, their period of infancy, of youth, of manhood, of old age. But the similitude, however striking, is not extended further, and, while individuals die a natural death, nations are supposed always to come to a violent end. Probably, we do not like to concede that all nations, like all individuals, must ultimately die a natural death, even though no disease anticipates it; because we dislike to recognize a rule which must apply to us as well. Each nation fancies its own vitality imperishable. When we are young, we seldom seriously think of death; in the same manner, societies in the period of their youthful vigor and energy, cannot conceive the possibility of their dissolution. In old age and decrepitude, they are like the consumptive patient, who, while fell disease is severing the last thread that binds him to the earth, is still forming plans for years to come. Falling Rome dreamed herself eternal. Yet, the mortality of nations admits of precisely the same proof as that of individuals – universal experience. The great empires that overshadowed the world, where are they? The memory of some is perpetuated in the hearts of mankind by imperishable monuments; of others, the slightest trace is obliterated, the vaguest remembrance vanished. As the great individual intelligences, whose appearance marks an era in the history of human thought, live in the minds of posterity, even though no gorgeous tombstone points out the resting-place of their hull of clay; while the mausoleum of him whose grandeur was but temporary, whose influence transient only, carries no meaning on its sculptured surface to after ages; even so the ancient civilizations which adorned the globe, if their monuments be not in the domain of thought, their gigantic vestiges serve but to excite the wonder of the traveller and antiquary, and perplex the historian. Their sepulchres, however grand, are mute.²³

Many have been the attempts to detect the causes why nations die, in order to prevent that catastrophe; as the physicians of the Middle Ages, who thought death was always the consequence of disease, sought for the panacea that was to cure all ills and thus prolong life forever. But nations, like individuals, often survive the severest attacks of the most formidable disease, and die without sickness. In ancient times, those great catastrophes which annihilated the political existence of millions, were regarded as direct interpositions of Providence, visiting in its wrath the sins of a nation, and erecting a warning example for others; just as the remarkable destruction of a noted individual, or the occurrence of an unusual phenomenon was, and by many is even now, ascribed to the same immediate agency. But when philosophy discovered that the universe is governed by pre-established, immutable laws, and refused to credit miracles not sanctioned by religion; then the dogma gained ground that punishment follows the commission of sin, as effect does the cause; and national calamities had to be explained by other reasons. It was then said, nations die of luxury, immorality, bad government, irreligion, etc. In other words, success was made the test of excellency and failure of crime. If, in individual life, we were to lay it down as an infallible rule, that he who commits no excesses lives forever, or at least very long; and he who does, will immediately die; that he who is honest in his dealings, will always prosper more than he who is not; we should have a very fluctuating standard of morality, since it has pleased God to sometimes try the good by severe afflictions, and let the wicked prosper. We should therefore be often called upon to admire what is deserving of contempt or punishment, and to seek for guilt in the innocent. This is what we do in nations. Wicked institutions have been called good, because they were attended with success; good ones have been pronounced bad, because they failed.

A more critical study of history has demonstrated the fallibility of this theory, which is now in a great measure discarded, and another adopted in its stead. It is argued that, at a certain period in its existence, a nation infallibly becomes degenerated, and thus falls. But, asks Mr. Gobineau, what is degeneracy? A nation is said to be degenerated when the virtues of its ancestry are lost. But why

²³ Even the historians of ancient Greece wondered at those gigantic ruins, of which many are still extant. Of these cyclopean remains, as they were often called, no one knew the builders or the history, and they were considered as the labors of the fabulous heroes of a traditional epoch. For an account of these memorials of an *ante-hellenic civilization in Greece, of which we have no record*, particularly the ruins of Orchomonos, Tirgus, Mycene, and the tunnels of Lake Copais, see *Niebuhr's Ancient History*, vol. i. p. 241, *et passim*.

are they lost? Because the nation is degenerated. Is not this like the reasoning in the child's story-book: Why is Jack a bad boy? Because he disobeys his parents. Why does he disobey his parents? Because he is a bad boy.

It is necessary, then, to show what degeneracy is. This step in advance, Mr. Gobineau attempts to make. He shows that each race is distinguished by certain capabilities, which, if its civilizing genius is sufficiently strong to enable it to assume a rank among the nations of the world, determine the character of its social and political development. Like the Phenicians, it may become the merchant and barterer of the world; or, like the Greeks, the teacher of future generations; or, like the Romans, the model-giver of laws and forms. Its part in the drama of history may be an humble one or a proud, but it is always proportionate to its powers. These powers, and the instincts or aspirations which spring from them, never change as long as the race remains pure. They progress and develop themselves, but never alter their nature. The purposes of the race are always the same. It may arrive at great perfection in the useful arts, but, without infiltration of a different element, will never be distinguished for poetry, painting, sculpture, etc.; and *vice versa*. Its nature may be belligerent, and it will always find causes for quarrel; or it may be pacific, and then it will manage to live at peace, or fall a prey to a neighbor.

In the same manner, the government of a race will be in accordance with its instincts, and here I have the weighty authority of the author of *Democracy in America*, in my favor, and the author's whom I am illustrating. "A government," says De Tocqueville,²⁴ "retains its sway over a great number of citizens, far less by the voluntary and rational consent of the multitude, than by that *instinctive*, and, to a certain extent, involuntary agreement, which results from similarity of feelings, and resemblances of opinions. I will never admit that men constitute a social body, simply because they obey the same head and the same laws. A society can exist only when a great number of men consider a great number of things in the same point of view; when they hold the same opinions upon many subjects, and when the same occurrences suggest the same thoughts and impressions to their minds." The laws and government of a nation are always an accurate reflex of its manners and modes of thinking. "If, at first, it would appear," says Mr. Gobineau, "as if, in some cases, they were the production of some superior individual intellect, like the great law-givers of antiquity; let the facts be more carefully examined, and it will be found that the law-giver – if wise and judicious – has contented himself with consulting the genius of his nation, and giving a voice to the common sentiment. If, on the contrary, he be a theorist like Draco, his system remains a dead letter, soon to be superseded by the more judicious institutions of a Solon who aims to give to his countrymen, not the best laws possible, but the best he thinks them capable of receiving." It is a great and a very general error to suppose that the sense of a nation will always decide in favor of what we term "popular" institutions, that is to say, such in which each individual shares more or less immediately in the government. Its genius may tend to the establishment of absolute authority, and in that case the autocrat is but an impersonation of the *vox populi*, by which he must be guided in his policy. If he be too deaf or rash to listen to it, his own ruin will be the inevitable consequence, but the nation persists in the same career.

The meaning of the word degeneracy is now obvious. This inevitable evil is concealed in the very successes to which a nation owes its splendor. Whether, like the Persians, Romans, &c., it is swallowed up and absorbed by the multitudes its arms have subjected, or whether the ethnical mixture proceeds in a peaceful manner, the result is the same. Even where no foreign conquests add suddenly hundreds of thousands of a foreign population to the original mass, the fertility of uncultivated fields, the opulence of great commercial cities, and all the advantages to be found in the bosom of a rising nation, accomplish it, if in a less perceptible, in a no less certain manner. The two young nations of the world are now the United States and Russia. See the crowds which are thronging over the frontiers of both. Both already count their foreign population by millions. As the original population

²⁴ Democracy in America, vol. ii. ch. xviii. p. 424.

– the initiatory element of the whole mass – has no additions to its numbers but its natural increase, it follows that the influent elements must, in course of time, be of equal strength, and the influx still continuing, finally absorb it altogether. Sometimes a nation establishes itself upon the basis of a much more numerous conquered population, as in the case of the Frankish conquerors of Gaul; then the amalgamation of ranks and classes produces the same results as foreign immigration. It is clear that each new ethnical element brings with it its own characteristics or instincts, and according to the relative strength of these will be the modifications in government, social relations, and the whole tendencies of the race. The modifications may be for the better, they may be for the worse; they may be very gradual, or very sudden, according to the merit and power of the foreign influence; but in course of time they will amount to radical, positive changes, and then the original nation has ceased to exist.

This is the natural death of human societies. Sometimes they expire gently and almost imperceptibly; oftener with a convulsion and a crash. I shall attempt to explain my meaning by a familiar simile. A mansion is built which in all respects suits the taste and wants of the owner. Succeeding generations find it too small, too dark, or otherwise ill adapted to their purposes. Respect for their progenitor, and family association, prevent, at first, very extensive changes, still each one makes some; and as these associations grow fainter, the changes become more radical, until at last nothing of the old house remains. But if it had previously passed into the hands of a stranger, who had none of these associations to venerate and respect, he would probably have pulled it down at once and built another.

An empire, then, falls, when the vitalizing principle which gave it birth is exhausted; when its parts are connected by none but artificial ties, and artificial ties are all those which unite races possessed of different instincts. This idea is expressed in the beautiful image of the inspired prophet, when he tells the mighty king that great truth, which so many refuse to believe, that all earthly kingdoms must perish until "the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."²⁵ "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee, and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them."²⁶

I have now illustrated, to the best of my abilities, several of the most important propositions of Mr. Gobineau, and attempted to sustain them by arguments and examples different from those used by the author. For a more perfect exposition I must refer the reader to the body of the work. My purpose was humbly to clear away such obstacles as the author has left in the path, and remove difficulties that escaped his notice. The task which I have set myself, would, however, be far from accomplished, were I to pass over what I consider a serious error on his part, in silence and without an effort at emendation.

Civilization, says Mr. Gobineau, arises from the combined action and mutual reaction of man's moral aspirations, and the pressure of his material wants. This, in a general sense, is obviously true. But let us see the practical application. I shall endeavor to give a concise abstract of his views, and then to point out where and why he errs.

In some races, says he, the spiritual aspirations predominate over their physical desires, in others it is the reverse. In none are either entirely wanting. According to the relative proportion and intensity of either of these influences, which counteract and yet assist each other, the tendency of

²⁵ Daniel ii. 44.

²⁶ Daniel ii. 31 to 35.

the civilization varies. If either is possessed in but a feeble degree, or if one of them so greatly outweighs the other as to completely neutralize its effects, there is no civilization, and never can be one until the race is modified by intermixture with one of higher endowments. But if both prevail to a sufficient extent, the preponderance of either one determines the character of the civilization. In the Chinese, it is the material tendency that prevails, in the Hindoo the other. Consequently we find that in China, civilization is principally directed towards the gratification of physical wants, the perfection of material well-being. In other words, it is of an eminently utilitarian character, which discourages all speculation not susceptible of immediate practical application.

This well describes the Chinese, and is precisely the picture which M. Huc, who has lived among them for many years, and has enjoyed better opportunities for studying their genius than any other writer, gives of them in his late publication.²⁷

Hindoo culture, on the contrary, displays a very opposite tendency. Among that nation, everything is speculative, nothing practical. The toils of human intellect are in the regions of the abstract where the mind often loses itself in depths beyond its sounding. The material wants are few and easily supplied. If great works are undertaken, it is in honor of the gods, so that even their physical labor bears homage to the invisible rather than the visible world. This also is a tolerably correct picture.

He therefore divides all races into these two categories, taking the Chinese as the type of the one and the Hindoos as that of the other. According to him, the yellow races belong pre-eminently to the former, the black to the latter, while the white are distinguished by a greater intensity and better proportion of the qualities of both. But this division, and no other is consistent with the author's proposition, by assuming that in the black races the moral preponderates over the physical tendency, comes in direct conflict not only with the plain teachings of anatomy, but with all we know of the history of those races. I shall attempt to show wherein Mr. Gobineau's error lies, an error from the consequences of which I see no possibility for him to escape, and suggest an emendation which, so far from invalidating his general position, tends rather to confirm and strengthen it. In doing so, I am actuated by the belief that even if I err, I may be useful by inviting others more capable to the task of investigation. Suggestions on important subjects, if they serve no other purpose than to provoke inquiry, are never useless. The alchemists of the Middle Ages, in their frivolous pursuit of impossibilities, discovered many invaluable secrets of nature and laid the foundation of that science which, by explaining the intimate mutual action of all natural bodies, has become the indispensable handmaiden of almost every other.

The error, it seems to me, lies in the same confusion of distinct ideas, to which I had already occasion to advert. In ordinary language, we speak of the physical and moral nature of man, terming physical whatever relates to his material, and moral what relates to his immaterial being. Again, we speak of *mind*, and though in theory we consider it as a synonyme of soul, in practical application it

²⁷ Among many passages illustrative of the ultra utilitarianism of the Chinese, I can find space but for one, and that selected almost at random. After speaking of the exemplary diffusion of primary instruction among the masses, he says that, though they all read, and frequently, yet even their reading is of a strictly utilitarian character, and never answers any but practical purposes or temporary amusement. The name of the author is seldom known, and never inquired after. "That class are, in their eyes, only idle persons, who pass their time in making prose or verse. They have no objection to such a pursuit. A man may, they say, 'amuse himself with his pen as with his kite, if he likes it as well – it is all a matter of taste.' The inhabitants of the celestial empire would never recover from their astonishment if they knew to what extent intellectual labor may be in Europe a source of honor and often wealth. If they were told that a person among us may obtain great glory by composing a drama or a novel, they would either not believe it, or set it down as an additional proof of our well-known want of common sense. How would it be if they should be told of the renown of a dancer or a violin player, and that one cannot make a bound, nor the other draw a bow anywhere without thousands of newspapers hastening to spread the important news over all the kingdoms of Europe!" "The Chinese are too decided utilitarians to enter into our views of the arts. In their opinion, a man is only worthy of the admiration of his fellow-creatures when he has well fulfilled the social duties, and especially if he knows better than any one else how to get out of a scrape. You are regarded as a man of genius if you know how to regulate your family, make your lands fruitful, traffic with ability, and realize great profits. This, at least, is the only kind of genius that is of any value in the eyes of these eminently practical men." — *Voyages en Chine*, par M. Huc, Amer. trans., vol. i. pp. 316 and 317.

has a very different signification. A person may cultivate his mind without benefiting his soul, and the term *a superior mind*, does not necessarily imply moral excellency. That mental qualifications or acquisitions are in no way connected with sound morality or true piety, I have pointed out before. Should any further illustrations be necessary, I might remark that the greatest monsters that blot the page of history, have been, for the most part, men of what are called superior minds, of great intellectual attainments. Indeed, wickedness is seldom very dangerous, unless joined to intellect, as the common sense of mankind has expressed in the adage that a fool is seldom a knave. We daily see men perverting the highest mental gifts to the basest purposes, a fact which ought to be carefully weighed by those who believe that education consists in the cultivation of the intellect only. I therefore consider the moral endowments of man as practically different from the mental or intellectual, at least in their manifestations, if not in their essence. To define my idea more clearly, let me attempt to explain the difference between what I term the moral and the intellectual nature of man. I am aware of the dangerous nature of the ground I am treading, but shall nevertheless make the attempt to show that it is in accordance with the spirit of religion to consider what in common parlance is called the moral attributes of man, and which would be better expressed by the word *psychical*, as divisible into two, the strictly moral, and the intellectual.

The former is what leads man to look beyond his earthly existence, and gives even the most brutish savage some vague idea of a Deity. I am making no rash or unfounded assertion when I declare, Mr. Locke's weighty opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, that no tribe has ever been discovered in which some notion of this kind, however rude, was wanting, and I consider it innate – a yearning, as it were, of the soul towards the regions to which it belongs. The feeling of religion is implanted in our breast; it is not a production of the intellect, and this the Christian church confirms when it declares that *faith* we owe to the grace of God.

Intellect is that faculty of soul by which it takes cognizance of, classes and compares the facts of the *material* world. As all perceptions are derived through the senses, it follows that upon the nicety of these its powers must in a great measure depend. The vigor and delicacy of the nerves, and the size and texture of the brain in which they all centre, form what we call native intellectual gifts. Hence, when the body is impaired, the mind suffers; "mens sana in corpore sano;" hence, a fever prostrates, and may forever destroy, the most powerful intellect; a glass of wine may dim and distort it. Here, then, is the grand distinction between soul and mind. The latter, human wickedness may annihilate; the former, man killeth not. I should wish to enter more fully upon this investigation, not new, indeed, in speculative science, yet new in the application I purpose to make of it, were it not for fear of wearying my reader, to whom my only apology can be, that the discussion is indispensable to the proper investigation of the moral and intellectual diversities of races. When I say moral diversities, I do not mean that man's moral endowments, strictly speaking, are unequal. This assertion I am not prepared to make, because – as religion is accessible and comprehensible to them all – it may be supposed that these are in all cases equal. But I mean that the manifestation of these moral endowments varies, owing to causes which I am now about to consider. I have said that the moral nature of man leads him to look beyond the confines of the material world. This, when not assisted by revelation, he attempts to do by means of his intellect. The intellect is, as it were, the visual organ by which the soul scans the abyss between the present and the future existence. According to the dimness or brightness of this mental eye, are his perceptions. If the intellectual capacity is weak, he is content with a grovelling conception of the Deity; if powerful, he erects an elaborate fabric of philosophical speculations. But, as the Almighty has decreed that human intellect, even in its sublimest flight, cannot soar to His presence; it follows that the most elaborate fabric of the philosopher is still a *human* fabric, that the most perfect human theology is still *human*, and hence – the necessity of revelation. This divine light, which His mercy has vouchsafed us, dispenses with, and eclipses, the feeble glimmerings of human intellect. It illumines as well the soul of the rude savage as of the learned theologian; of the illiterate as of the erudite. Nay, very often the former has the advantage, for the erudite philosopher is prone

to think his own lamp all-sufficient. If it be objected that a highly cultivated mind, if directed to rightful purposes, will assist in gaining a *nobler* conception of the Deity, I shall not contradict, for in the study of His works, we learn still more to admire the Maker. But I insist that true piety can, and does exist without it, and let those who trust so much in their own powers beware lest they lean upon a broken staff.

The strictly moral attributes of man, therefore, those attributes which enable him to communicate with his Maker, are common – probably in equal degree – to all men, and to all races of men. But his communications with the external world depend on his physical conformation. The body is the connecting link between the spirit and the material world, and, by its intimate relations to both, specially adapted to be the means of communication between them. There seems to me nothing irrational or irreligious in the doctrine that, according to the perfectness of this means of communication, must be the intercourse between the two. A person with dull auditory organs can never appreciate music, and whatever his talents otherwise may be, can never become a Meyerbeer or a Mozart. Upon quickness of perception, power of analysis and combination, perseverance and endurance, depend our intellectual faculties, both in their degree and their kind; and are not they blunted or otherwise modified in a morbid state of the body? I consider it therefore established beyond dispute, that a certain general physical conformation is productive of corresponding mental characteristics. A human being, whom God has created with a negro's skull and general *physique*, can never equal one with a Newton's or a Humboldt's cranial development, though the soul of both is equally precious in the eyes of the Lord, and should be in the eyes of all his followers. There is no tendency to materialism in this idea; I have no sympathy with those who deny the existence of the soul, because they cannot find it under the scalpel, and I consider the body not the mental agent, but the servant, the tool.

It is true that science has not discovered, and perhaps never will discover, what physical differences correspond to the differences in individual minds. Phrenology, starting with brilliant promises, and bringing to the task powers of no mean order, has failed. But there is a vast difference between the characteristics by which we distinguish individuals of the same race, and those by which we distinguish races themselves. The former are not strictly – at least not immediately – hereditary, for the child most often differs from both parents in body and mind, because no two individuals, as no two leaves of one tree, are precisely alike. But, although every oak-leaf differs from its fellow, we know the leaf of the oak-tree from that of the beech, or every other; and, in the same manner, races are distinguished by peculiarities which are hereditary and permanent. Thus, every negro differs from every other negro, else we could not tell them apart; yet all, if pure blood, have the same characteristics in common that distinguish them from the white. I have been prolix, but intentionally so, in my discrimination between individual distinction and those of race, because of the latter, comparative anatomy takes cognizance; the former are left to phrenology, and I wished to remove any suspicion that in the investigation of moral and intellectual diversities of races, recourse must be had to the ill-authenticated speculations of a dubious science. But, from the data of comparative anatomy, attained by a slow and cautious progress, we deduce that races are distinguished by certain permanent physical characteristics; and, if these physical characteristics correspond to the mental, it follows as an obvious conclusion that the latter are permanent also. History ratifies the conclusion, and the common sense of mankind practically acquiesces in it.

To return, then, to our author. I would add to his two elements of civilization a third – intellect *per se*; or rather, to speak more correctly, I would subdivide one of his elements into two, of which one is probably dependent on physical conformation. The combinations will then be more complex, but will remove every difficulty.

I remarked that although we may consider all races as possessed of equal moral endowments, we yet may speak of moral diversities; because, without the light of revelation, man has nothing but his intellect whereby to compass the immaterial world, and the manifestation of his moral faculties

must therefore be in proportion to the clearness of his intellectual, and their preponderance over the animal tendencies. The three I consider as existing about in the following relative proportions in the three great groups under which Mr. Gobineau and Mr. Latham²⁸ have arranged the various races – a classification, however, which, as I already observed, I cannot entirely approve.

But the races comprised in each group vary among themselves, if not with regard to the relative proportion in which they possess the elements of civilization, at least in their intensity. The following formulas will, I think, apply to the majority of cases, and, at the same time, bring out my idea in a clearer light: —

If the animal propensities are strongly developed, and not tempered by the intellectual faculties, the moral conceptions must be exceedingly low, because they necessarily depend on the clearness, refinement, and comprehensiveness of the ideas derived from the material world through the senses. The religious cravings will, therefore, be contented with a gross worship of material objects, and the moral sense degenerate into a grovelling superstition. The utmost elevation which a population, so constituted, can reach, will be an unconscious impersonation of the good aspirations and the evil tendencies of their nature under the form of a good and an evil spirit, to the latter of which absurd and often bloody homage is paid. Government there can be no other than the right which force gives to the strong, and its forms will be slavery among themselves, and submissiveness of all to a tyrannical absolutism.

When the same animal propensities are combined with intellect of a higher order, the moral faculties have more room for action. The penetration of intellect will not be long in discovering that the gratification of physical desires is easiest and safest in a state of order and stability. Hence a more complex system of legislation both social and political. The conceptions of the Deity will be more elevated and refined, though the idea of a future state will probably be connected with visions of material enjoyment, as in the paradise of the Mohammedans.

Where the animal propensities are weak and the intellect feeble, a vegetating national life results. No political organization, or of the very simplest kind. Few laws, for what need of restraining passions which do not exist. The moral sense content with the vague recognition of a superior being, to whom few or no rites are rendered.

	BLACK RACES, OR ATLANTIDÆ. ¹	YELLOW RACES, OR MONGOLIDÆ. ¹	WHITE RACES, OR JAPETIDÆ. ¹
Intellect	Feeble	Mediocre	Vigorous.
Animal Propensities	Very strong	Moderate	Strong.
Moral Manifestations	Partially latent	Comparatively developed	Highly cultivated.

¹. According to Latham's classification, *op. cit.*

But when the animal propensities are so moderate as to be subordinate to an intellect more or less vigorous, the moral aspirations will yearn towards the regions of the abstract. Religion becomes a system of metaphysics, and often loses itself in the mazes of its own subtlety. The political organization and civil legislation will be simple, for there are few passions to restrain; but the laws which regulate social intercourse will be many and various, and supposed to emanate directly from the Deity.

²⁸ Nat. Hist. of the Varieties of Man. London.

Strong animal passions, joined to an intellect equally strong, allow the greatest expanse for the moral sense. Political organizations the most complex and varied, social and civil laws the most studied, will be the outward character of a society composed of such elements. Internally we shall perceive the greatest contrasts of individual goodness and wickedness. Religion will be a symbolism of human passions and the natural elements for the many, an ingenious fabric of moral speculations for the few.

I have here rapidly sketched a series of pictures from nature, which the historian and ethnographer will not fail to recognize. Whether the features thus cursorily delineated are owing to the causes to which I ascribe them, I must leave for the reader to decide. My space is too limited to allow of my entering into an elaborate argumentation. But I would observe that, by taking this view of the subject, we can understand why all human – and therefore false – religions are so intimately connected with the social and political organization of the peoples which profess them, and why they are so plainly mapped out on the globe as belonging to certain races, to whom alone they are applicable, and beyond whose area they cannot extend: while Christianity knows no political or social forms, no geographical or ethnological limits. The former, being the productions of human intellect, must vary with its variation, and perish in its decay, while revelation is universal and immutable, like the Intelligence of which it is the emanation.

It is time now to conclude the task, the accomplishment of which has carried me far beyond the limits I had at first proposed to myself. If I have so long detained the reader on the threshold of the edifice, it was to facilitate his after progress, and to give him a chart, that he may not lose himself in the vast field it covers. There he may often meet me again, and if I be sometimes deemed officious with my proffered explanations, he will at least give me credit for good intentions, and he may, if he chooses, pass me without recognition. Both this introduction and notes in the body of the work were thought necessary for several reasons. First, the subject is in some measure a new one, and it was important to guard against misconception, and show, right at the beginning, what was attempted to be proved, and in what manner. Secondly, the author wrote for a European public, and many allusions are made, or positions taken, upon an assumed knowledge of facts, of which the general reader on this side of the ocean can be supposed to have but a slight and vague apprehension. Thirdly, the author has, in many cases, contented himself with abstract reasoning, and therefore is sometimes chargeable with obscureness, on which account familiar illustrations have been supplied. Fourthly, the volume now presented to the reader is one of a series of four, the remainder of which, if this meets the public approbation, may in time appear in an English garb. But it was important to make this, as much as possible, independent of the others and complete in itself. The discussion of the moral and intellectual diversities of the various groups of the human family, is, as I have before shown, totally independent of the question of unity or diversity of species; yet, as it increases the interest attached to the solution of that question, which has been but imperfectly discussed by the author, my esteemed friend, Dr. J. C. Nott, who has so often and so ably treated the subject, has promised to furnish, in notes and an appendix, such additional facts pertaining to his province as a naturalist, as may assist the reader in arriving at a correct opinion.

With regard to the translation, it must be observed that it is not a *literal* rendering of the original. The translator has aimed rather at giving the meaning, than the exact words or phraseology of the author, at no time, however, departing from the former. He has, in some instances, condensed or omitted what seemed irrelevant, or useless to the discussion of the question in this country, and in a few cases, he has transposed a sentence to a different part of the paragraph, where it seemed more in its place, and more effective. To explain and justify these alterations, we must remind our readers that the author wrote for a public essentially different from that of the translator; that continental writers on grave subjects are in general more intent upon vindicating their opinions than the form in which they express them, and seldom devote that attention to style which English or American readers expect; to which may be added that Count Gobineau wrote in the midst of a multiplicity of

diplomatic affairs, and had no time, even if he had thought it worth his while, to give his work that literary finish which would satisfy the fastidious. Had circumstances permitted, this translation would have been submitted to his approbation, but at the time of its going to press he is engaged in the service of his country at the court of Persia.

For obtruding the present work on the notice of the American public, no apology will be required. The subject is one of immense importance, and especially in this country, where it can seldom be discussed without adventitious circumstances biasing the inquirers. To the philanthropist, the leading idea of the book, "that different races, like different individuals, are specially fitted for special purposes, for the fulfilment of which they are accountable in the measure laid down in Holy Writ: 'To whom much is given, from him much will be asked,' and that they are *equal* only when they truly and faithfully perform the duties of their station" – to the philanthropist, this idea must be fraught with many valuable suggestions. So far from loosening the ties of brotherhood, it binds them closer, because it teaches us not to despise those who are endowed differently from us; and shows us that they, too, may have excellencies which we have not.

To the statesman, the student of history, and the general reader, it is hoped that this volume will not be altogether useless, and may assist to a better understanding of many of the problems that have so long puzzled the philosopher. The greatest revolutions in national relations have been accomplished by the migrations of races, the most calamitous wars that have desolated the globe have been the result of the hostility of races. Even now, a cloud is lowering in the horizon. The friend of peace and order watches it with silent anxiety, lest he hasten its coming. The spirit of mischief exults in its approach, but fears to betray his plans. Thus, western and central Europe now present the spectacle of a lull before the storm. Monarchs sit trembling on their thrones, while nations mutter curses. Nor have premonitory symptoms been wanting. Three times, within little more than half a century, have the eruptions of that ever-burning political volcano – France – shaken the social and political system of the civilized world, and shown the amount of combustible materials, which all the efforts of a ruling class cannot always protect from ignition. The grand catastrophe may come within our times. And, is it the result of any particular social condition, the action of any particular class in the social scale, the diffusion of any particular political principles? No, because the revolutionary tendencies are various, and even opposite; if republican in one place, monarchical in another; if democratic in France, aristocratic in Poland. Nor is it a particular social class wherein the revolutionary principle flourishes, for the classes which, in one country, wish subversion, in another, are firmly attached to the established order of things. The poor in Germany are proletarians and revolutionists; in Spain, Portugal, and Italy, the enthusiastic lovers of their king. The better classes in the former country are mostly conservative; in the latter, they are the makers, or rather attempters, of revolutions. Nor is it any particular social condition, for no class is so degraded as it has been; never was poverty less, and prosperity greater in Europe than in the present century; and everywhere the political institutions are more liberal than ever before. Whence, then, this gathering storm? Does it exist only in the minds of the visionary, or is it a mere bugbear of the timorous? Ask the prudent statesman, the traveller who pierces the different strata of the population; look behind the grates of the State-prisons; count – if this be possible – the number of victims of military executions in Germany and Austria, in 1848 and 1849; read the fearful accounts of the taking of Vienna, of Rome, of Ancona, of Venice, during the same short space of time. Everywhere the same cry: Nationality. It is not the temporary ravings of a mob rendered frantic by hunger and misery. It is a question of nationality, a war of races. Happy we who are removed from the immediate scene of the struggle, and can be but remotely affected by it. Yet, while I write, it seems as though the gales of the Atlantic had blown to our peaceful shores some taints of the epidemic that rages in the Old World. May it soon pass over, and a healthy atmosphere again prevail!

H. H.

Mobile, Aug. 20, 1855.

CHAPTER I. POLITICAL CATASTROPHES

Perishable condition of all human societies – Ancient ideas concerning this phenomenon – Modern theories.

The downfall of civilizations is the most striking, and, at the same time, the most obscure of all the phenomena of history. If the sublime grandeur of this spectacle impresses the mind with awe, the mystery in which it is wrapped presents a boundless field for inquiry and meditation to a reflecting mind. The study of the birth and growth of nations is, indeed, fraught with many valuable observations: the gradual development of human societies, their successes, conquests, and triumphs, strike the imagination in a lively manner, and excite an ever increasing interest. But these phenomena, however grand and interesting, seem susceptible of an easy explanation. We consider them as the necessary consequences of the intellectual and moral endowments of man. Once we admit the existence of these endowments, their results will no longer surprise us.

But we perceive that, after a period of glory and strength, all societies formed by man begin to totter and fall; all, I said, because there is no exception. Scattered over the surface of our globe, we see the vestiges of preceding civilizations, many of which are known to us only by name, or have not left behind them even that faint memorial, and are recorded only by the mute stones in the depths of primeval forests.²⁹ If we glance at our modern States, we are forced to the conclusion that, though their date is but of yesterday, some of them already exhibit signs of old age. The awful truth of prophetic language about the instability of all things human, applies with equal force to political bodies and to individuals, to nations and their civilizations. Every association of men for social and political purposes, though protected by the most ingenious social and political ties and contrivances, conceals among the very elements of its life, the germ of inevitable destruction, contracted the day it was formed. This terrible fact is proved by the history of all ages as well as of our own. It is owing to a natural law of death which seems to govern societies as well as individuals; but, does this law operate alike in all cases? is it uniform like the result it brings about, and do all civilizations perish from the same pre-existing cause?

A superficial glance at the page of history would tempt us to answer in the negative, for the apparent causes of the downfall of the great empires of antiquity were very different in each case. Yet, if we pierce below the surface, we find in this very necessity of decay, which weighs so imperiously upon all societies without exception, the evidence of the existence of some general, though concealed, cause, producing a natural death, even where no external causes anticipate it by violent destruction. We also discover that all civilizations, after a short duration, exhibit, to the acute observer, certain intimate disturbances, difficult to define, but whose existence is undeniable; and that these present in all cases an analogous character. Finally, if we distinguish the ruin of civilizations from that of States (for we sometimes see the same culture subsist in a country under foreign domination, and survive the destruction of the political body which gave it birth; while, again, comparatively slight misfortunes cause it to be transformed, or to disappear altogether), we become more and more confirmed in the idea that this principle of death in all societies is not only a necessary condition of their life, independent, in a great measure, of external causes, but is also uniform in all. To fix and determine this principle, and to trace its effects in the lives of those nations, of whom history has left us records, has been my object and endeavor in the studies, the results of which I now lay before the reader.

²⁹ A. de Humboldt, *Examen Critique de l'Histoire de la Géographie du Nouveau Continent*. Paris.

The fact that every human agglomeration, and the peculiar culture resulting from it, is doomed to perish, was not known to the ancients. Even in the epochs immediately preceding ours, it was not believed. The religious spirit of Asiatic antiquity looked upon the great political catastrophes in the same light that they did upon the sudden destruction of an individual: as a demonstration of Divine wrath, visiting a nation or an individual whose sins had marked them out for signal punishment, which would serve as an example to those criminals whom the rod had as yet spared. The Jews, misunderstanding the meaning of the promise, believed their empire imperishable. Rome, at the very moment when the threatening clouds lowered in the horizon of her grandeur, entertained no doubt as to the eternity of hers.³⁰ But our generation has profited by experience; and, as no one presumes to doubt that all men must die, because all who came before us have died; so we are firmly convinced, that the days of nations, as of individuals, however many they be, are numbered. The wisdom of the ancients, therefore, will afford us but little assistance in the unravelling of our subject, if we except one fundamental maxim: that the finger of Divine Providence is always visible in the conduct of the affairs of this world. From this solid basis we shall not depart, accepting it in the full extent that it is recognized by the church. It cannot be contested that no civilization will perish without the will of God, and to apply to the mortal condition of all societies, the sacred axiom by which the ancients explained certain remarkable, and, in their opinion, isolated cases of destruction, is but proclaiming a truth of the first order, of which we must never lose sight in our researches after truths of secondary importance. If it be further added that societies perish by their sins, I willingly accede to it; it is but drawing a parallel between them and individuals who also find their death, or accelerate it, by disobedience to the laws of the Creator. So far, there is nothing contradictory to reason, even when unassisted by Divine light; but these two truths once admitted and duly weighed, the wisdom of the ancients, I repeat, affords no further assistance. They did not search into the ways by which the Divine will effected the ruin of nations; on the contrary, they were rather inclined to consider these ways as essentially mysterious, and above comprehension. Seized with pious terror at the aspect of the wrecks, they easily imagined that Providence had specially interfered thus to strike and completely destroy once powerful states. Where a miracle is recorded by the Sacred Scriptures, I willingly submit; but where that high testimony is wanting, as it is in the great number of cases, we may justly consider the ancient theory as defective, and not sufficiently enlightened. We may even conclude, that as Divine Justice watches over nations unremittingly, and its decrees were pronounced ere the first human society was formed, they are also enforced in a predeterminate manner, and according to the unalterable laws of the universe, which govern both animated nature and the inorganic world.

If we have cause to reproach the philosophers of the earlier ages, for having contented themselves, in attempting to fathom the mystery, with the vindication of an incontestable theological truth, but which itself is another mystery; at least, they have not increased the difficulties of the question by making it a theme for a maze of errors. In this respect, they rank highly above the rationalist schools of various epochs.

The thinkers of Athens and Rome established the doctrine, which has retained its ground to our days, that states, nations, civilizations, perished only through luxury, enervation, bad government, corruption of morals, fanaticism. All these causes, either singly or combined, were supposed to account for the downfall of civilizations. It is a necessary consequence of this doctrine, that where neither of these causes are in operation, no destructive agency is at work. Societies would therefore possess this advantage over individuals, that they could die no other but a violent death; and, to establish a body politic as durable as the globe itself, nothing further would be necessary than to elude the dangers which I enumerated above.

The inventors of this thesis did not perceive its bearing. They considered it as an excellent means for illustrating the doctrine of morality, which, as is well known, was the sole aim of their

³⁰ Amadée Thierry, *La Gaule sous l'Administration Romaine*, vol. i. p. 244.

historical writings. In their narratives of events, they were so strongly preoccupied with showing the happy rewards of virtue, and the disastrous results of crime and vice, that they cared little for what seemed to furnish no illustration. This erroneous and narrow-minded system often operated contrary to the intention of the authors, for it applied, according to occasion, the name of virtue and vice in a very arbitrary manner; still, to a great extent, the severe and laudable sentiment upon which it was based, excuses it. If the genius of a Plutarch or a Tacitus could draw from history, studied in this manner, nothing but romances and satires, yet the romances were sublime, and the satires generous.

I wish I could be equally indulgent to the writers of the eighteenth century, who made their own application of the same theory; but there is, between them and their teachers, too great a difference. While the ancients were attached to the established social system, even to a fault, our moderns were anxious for destruction, and greedy of untried novelties. The former exerted themselves to deduce useful lessons from their theory; the latter have perverted it into a fearful weapon against all rational principles of government, which they stigmatized by every term that mankind holds in horror. To save societies from ruin, the disciples of Voltaire would destroy religion, law, industry, commerce; because, if we believe them, religion is fanaticism; laws, despotism; industry and commerce, luxury and corruption.

I have not the slightest intention of entering the field of polemics; I wished merely to direct attention to the widely diverging results of this principle, when applied by Thucydides, or the Abbé Raynal. Conservative in the one, cynically aggressive in the other, it is erroneous in both.

The causes to which the downfall of nations is generally ascribed are not the true ones, and whilst I admit that these evils may be rifest in the last stages of dissolution of a people, I deny that they possess in themselves sufficient strength, and so destructive an energy, as to produce the final, irremediable catastrophe.

CHAPTER II. ALLEGED CAUSES OF POLITICAL CATASTROPHES EXAMINED

Fanaticism – Aztec Empire of Mexico. – Luxury – Modern European States as luxurious as the ancient. – Corruption of morals – The standard of morality fluctuates in the various periods of a nation's history: example, France – Is no higher in youthful communities than in old ones – Morality of Paris. – Irreligion – Never spreads through all ranks of a nation – Greece and Rome – Tenacity of Paganism.

Before entering upon my reasons for the opinion expressed at the end of the preceding chapter, it will be necessary to explain and define what I understand by the term society. I do not apply this term to the more or less extended circle belonging to a distinct sovereignty. The republic of Athens is not, in my sense of the word, a society; neither is the kingdom of Magadha, the empire of Pontus, or the caliphate of Egypt in the time of the Fatimites. These are fragments of societies, which are transformed, united, or subdivided, by the operation of those primordial laws into which I am inquiring, but whose existence or annihilation does not constitute the existence or annihilation of a society. Their formation is, for the most part, a transient phenomenon, which exerts but a limited, or even indirect influence upon the civilization that gave it birth. By the term society, I understand an association of men, actuated by similar ideas, and possessed of the same general instincts. This association need by no means be perfect in a political sense, but must be complete from a social point of view. Thus, Egypt, Assyria, Greece, India, China, have been, or are still, the theatres upon which distinct societies have worked out their destinies, to which the perturbations in their political relations were merely secondary. I shall, therefore, speak of the fractions of these societies only when my reasoning applies equally to the whole. I am now prepared to proceed to the examination of the question before us, and I hope to prove that fanaticism, luxury, corruption of morals, and irreligion, do not *necessarily* occasion the ruin of nations.

All these maladies, either singly or combined, have attacked, and sometimes with great virulence, nations which nevertheless recovered from them, and were, perhaps, all the more vigorous afterward.

The Aztec empire, in Mexico, seemed to flourish for the especial glory and exaltation of fanaticism. What can there be more fanatical than a social and political system, based on a religion which requires the incessant and profuse shedding of the blood of fellow-beings?³¹ Our remote ancestors, the barbarous nations of Northern Europe, did indeed practise this unholy rite, but they never chose for their sacrifices innocent victims,³² or, at least, such as they considered so: the shipwrecked and prisoners of war, were not considered innocent. But, for the Mexicans, all victims were alike; with that ferocity, which a modern physiologist³³ recognizes as a characteristic of the races of the New World, they butchered their own fellow-citizens indiscriminately, and without remorse or pity. And yet, this did not prevent them from being a powerful, industrious, and wealthy nation, who

³¹ See Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*.

³² C. F. Weber, *M. A. Lucani Pharsalia*. Leipzig, 1828, vol. i. pp. 122-123, *note*.

³³ Prichard, *Natural History of Man*. – Dr. Martius is still more explicit. (See *Martius and Spix, Reise in Brasilien*. Munich, vol. i. pp. 379-380.) Mr. Gobineau quotes from M. Roulin's French translation of Prichard's great work, and as I could not always find the corresponding pages in the original, I have sometimes been obliged to omit the citation of the page, that in the French translation being useless to English readers. —*Transl.*

might long have continued to blaspheme the Deity by their dark creed, but for Cortez's genius and the bravery of his companions. In this instance, then, fanaticism was not the cause of the downfall.³⁴

Nor are luxury or enervation more powerful in their effects. These vices are almost always peculiar to the higher classes, and seldom penetrate the whole mass of the population. But I doubt whether among the Greeks, the Persians, or the Romans, whose downfall they are said to have caused, luxury and enervation, albeit in a different form, had risen to a higher pitch than we see them to-day in some of our modern States, in France, Germany, England, and Russia, for instance. The two last countries are especially distinguished for the luxury prevalent among the higher classes, and yet, these two countries seem to be endued with a vitality much more vigorous and promising than most other European States. In the Middle Ages, the Venetians, Genoese, Pisanese, accumulated in their magazines the treasures and luxuries of the world; yet, the gorgeous magnificence of their palaces, and the splendid decorations of their vessels, did certainly not diminish their power, or subvert their dominion.³⁵

Even the corruption of morals, this most terrible of all scourges, is not necessarily a cause of national ruin. If it were, the prosperity of a nation, its power and preponderance, would be in a direct ratio to the purity of its manners; and it is hardly necessary to say that this is not the case. The odd fashion of ascribing all sorts of imaginary virtues to the first Romans, is now pretty much out of date.³⁶ Few would now dare to hold up as models of morality those sturdy patricians of the old school,

³⁴ I greatly doubt whether the fanaticism of even the ancient Mexicans could exceed that displayed by some of our not very remote ancestors. Who, that reads the trials for witchcraft in the judicial records of Scotland, and, after smiling at the frivolous, inconsistent testimony against the accused, comes to the cool, uncommented marginal note of the reporter: "Convicta et combusta," does not feel his heart leap for horror? But, if he comes to an entry like the following, he feels as though lightning from heaven could but inflict too mild a punishment on the perpetrators of such unnatural crimes. "1608, Dec. 1. – The Earl of Mar declared to the council, that some women were taken in Broughton as witches, and being put to an assize, and convicted, albeit they persevered constant in their denial to the end, they were burnt quick (alive), after such a cruel manner, that some of them died in despair, renouncing and blaspheming God; and others, half-burned, brak out of the fire, and were cast in it again, till they were burned to death." Entry in Sir Thomas Hamilton's *Minutes of Proceedings in the Privy Council*. (From W. Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, p. 315.) Really, I do not believe that the Peruvians ever carried fanaticism so far. Yet, a counterpart to this horrible picture is found in the history of New England. A man, named Cory, being accused of witchcraft, and refusing to plead, was accordingly pressed to death. And when, in the agony of death, the unfortunate man thrust out his tongue, the sheriff, without the least emotion, crammed it back into the mouth with his cane. (See Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Hartford. *Thau. Pneu*, c. vii. p. 383, *et passim*.) Did the ferocity of the most brutish savages ever invent any torture more excruciating than that in use in the British Isles, not much more than two centuries ago, for bringing poor, decrepit old women to the confession of a crime which never existed but in the crazed brain of bigots. "The nails were torn from the fingers with smith's pincers; pins driven into the places which the nails defended; the knees were crushed in the *boots*, the finger-bones splintered in the *pilniewinks*," etc. (Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 312.) But then, it is true, they had a more *gentle* torture, which an English Lord (Eglington) had the honor and humanity to invent! This consisted in placing the legs of a poor woman in the stocks, and then *loading the bare shins with bars of iron*. Above thirty stones of iron were placed upon the limbs of an unfortunate woman before she could be brought to the confession which led her to the stake. (Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 321, 324, 327, etc. etc.) As late as 1682, not yet 200 years ago, three women were hanged, in England, for witchcraft; and the fatal statute against it was not abolished until 1751, when the rabble put to death, in the most horrible manner, an old pauper woman, and very nearly killed another. And, in the middle of last century, eighty-five persons were burnt, or otherwise executed, for witchcraft, at Mohra, in Sweden. Among them were fifteen young children. If God had ordained that fanaticism should be punished by national ruin, were not these crimes, in which, in most cases, the whole nation participated, were not they horrible enough to draw upon the perpetrators the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah? Surely, if fanaticism were the cause of national decay, most European nations had long since been swept from the face of the globe, "so that their places could nowhere be found." – H.

³⁵ There seem, at first sight, to be exceptions to the truth of the assertion, that luxury, in itself, is not productive of national ruin. Venice, Genoa, Pisa, etc., were *aristocratic* republics, in which, as in monarchies, a high degree of luxury is not only compatible with, but may even be greatly conducive to the prosperity of the state. But the basis of a *democratic* republic is a more or less perfect equality among its citizens, which is often impaired, and, in the end, subverted by too great a disparity of wealth. Yet, even in them, glaring contrasts between extravagant luxury and abject poverty are rather the sign than the cause, of the disappearance of democratic principles. Examples might be adduced from history, of democracies in which great wealth did not destroy democratic ideas and a consequent simplicity of manners. These ideas must first be forgotten, before wealth can produce luxury, and luxury its attendant train of evils. Though accelerating the downfall of a democratic republic, it is therefore not the primary cause of that downfall. – H.

³⁶ Balzac, *Lettre à Madame la Duchesse de Montausier*. That this stricture is not too severe will be obvious to any one who reflects on the principles upon which this legislation was based. Inculcating that war was the great business of life, and to be terrible to one's enemies the only object of manly ambition, the Spartan laws sacrificed the noblest private virtues and domestic affections. They deprived the female character of the charms that most adorn it – modesty, tenderness, and sensibility; they made men brutal, coarse,

who treated their women as slaves, their children as cattle, and their creditors like wild beasts. If there should still be some who would defend so bad a cause, their reasoning could easily be refuted, and its want of solidity shown. Abuse of power, in all epochs, has created equal indignation; there were deeper reasons for the abolition of royalty than the rape of Lucretia, for the expulsion of the decemvirs than the outrage of Appius; but these pretexts for two important revolutions, sufficiently demonstrate the public sentiment with regard to morals. It is a great mistake to ascribe the vigor of a young nation to its superior virtues; since the beginning of historical times, there has not been a community, however small, among which all the reprehensible tendencies of human nature were not visible, notwithstanding which, it has increased and prospered. There are even instances where the splendor of a state was owing to the most abominable institutions. The Spartans are indebted for their renown, and place in history, to a legislation fit only for a community of bandits.[38]

So far from being willing to accord to youthful communities any superiority in regard to morals, I have no doubt that, as nations advance in age and consequently approach their period of decay, they present to the eyes of the moralist a far more satisfactory spectacle.³⁷ Manners become milder; men accommodate themselves more readily to one another; the means of subsistence become, if not easier, at least more varied; reciprocal obligations are better defined and understood; more refined

and cruel. They stunted individual talents; Sparta has produced but few great men, and these, says Macaulay, only became great when they ceased to be Lacedaemonians. Much unsound sentimentality has been expended in eulogizing Sparta, from Xenophon down to Mitford, yet the verdict of the unbiassed historian cannot differ very widely from that of Macaulay: "The Spartans purchased for their government a prolongation of its existence by the sacrifice of happiness at home, and dignity abroad. They cringed to the powerful, they trampled on the weak, they massacred their helots, they betrayed their allies, they contrived to be a day too late for the battle of Marathon, they attempted to avoid the battle of Salamis, they suffered the Athenians, to whom they owed their lives and liberties, to be a second time driven from their country by the Persians, that they might finish their own fortifications on the Isthmus; they attempted to take advantage of the distress to which exertions in their cause had reduced their preservers, in order to make them their slaves; they strove to prevent those who had abandoned their walls to defend them, from rebuilding them to defend themselves; they commenced the Peloponnesian war in violation of their engagements with their allies; they gave up to the sword whole cities which had placed themselves under their protection; they bartered for advantages confined to themselves the interests, the freedom, and the lives of those who had served them most faithfully; they took, with equal complacency, and equal infamy, the stripes of Elis and the bribes of Persia; they never showed either resentment or gratitude; they abstained from no injury, and they revenged none. Above all, they looked on a citizen who served them well as their deadliest enemy." —*Essays*, iii. 389. — H.

³⁷ The horrid scenes of California life, its lynch laws, murders, and list of all possible crimes, are still ringing in our ears, and have not entirely ceased, though their number is lessened, and they are rapidly disappearing before lawful order. Australia offered, and still offers, the same spectacle. Texas, but a few years ago, and all newly settled countries in our day, afford another striking illustration of the author's remark. Young communities ever attract a great number of lawless and desperate men; and this has been the case in all ages. Rome was founded by a band of fugitives from justice, and if her early history be critically examined, it will be found to reveal a state of society, with which the Rome described by the Satirists, and upbraided by the Censors, compares favorably. Any one who will cast a glance into Bishop Potter's *Antiquities*, can convince himself that the state of morals, in Athens, was no better in her most flourishing periods than at the time of her downfall, if, indeed, as good; notwithstanding the glowing colors in which Isocrates and his followers describe the virtues of her youthful period, and the degeneracy of the age. Who can doubt that public morality has attained a higher standard in England, at the present day when her strength seems to have departed from her, than it had at any previous era in her history. Where are the brutal fox-hunting country squires of former centuries? the good old customs, when hospitality consisted in drinking one's guest underneath the table? What audience could now endure, or what police permit, the plays of Congreve and of Otway? Even Shakspeare has to be pruned by the moral censor, before he can charm our ears. Addison himself, than whom none contributed more to purify the morals of his age, bears unmistakable traces of the coarseness of the time in which he wrote. It will be objected that we are only more prudish, no better at the bottom. But, even supposing that the same vices still exist, is it not a great step in advance, that they dare no longer parade themselves with unblushing impudence? Many who derive their ideas of the Middle Ages, of chivalry, etc., from the accounts of romance writers, have very erroneous notions about the manners of that period. "It so happens," says Byron, "that the good old times when *l'amour du bon vieux temps*, *l'amour antique* flourished, were the most profligate of all possible centuries. Those who have any doubts on the subject may consult St. Palay, particularly vol. ii. p. 69. The vows of chivalry were no better kept than any other vows whatever, and the songs of the troubadour were not more decent, and certainly much less refined, than those of Ovid. The 'cours d'amour, parlements d'amour, ou de courtoisie et de gentillesse,' had much more of love than of courtesy and gentleness. (See Roland on the same subject with St. Palay.)" *Preface to Childe Harold*. I should not have quoted the authority of a poet on historical matters, were I not convinced, from my own investigations, that his pungent remarks are perfectly correct. As a further confirmation, I may mention that a few years ago, in rummaging over the volumes of a large European library, I casually lit upon a record of judicial proceedings during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in a little commonwealth, whose simplicity of manners, and purity of public morals, especially in that period, has been greatly extolled by historians. There, I found a list of crimes, to which the most corrupt of modern great cities can furnish no parallel. In horror and hellish ingenuity, they can be faintly approached only by the punishment which followed them. Of many, our generation ignores even the name, and, of others, dares not utter them. — H.

theories of right and wrong gain ground. It would be difficult to show that at the time when the Greek arms conquered Darius, or when Greek liberty itself fled forever from the battle-field of Chæronæa, or when the Goths entered Rome as victors; that the Persian monarchy, Athens, or the imperial city, in those times of their downfall, contained a smaller proportion of honest and virtuous people than in the most glorious epochs of their national existence.

But we need not go so far back for illustrations. If any one were required to name the place where the spirit of our age displayed itself in the most complete contrast with the virtuous ages of the world (if such there were), he would most certainly point out Paris. Yet, many learned and pious persons have assured me, that nowhere, and in no epoch, could more practical virtue, solid piety, greater delicacy of conscience, be found than within the precincts of this great and corrupt city. The ideal of goodness is as exalted, the duties of a Christian as well understood, as by the most brilliant luminaries of the Church in the seventeenth century. I might add, that these virtues are divested of the bitterness and severity from which, in those times, they were not always exempt; and that they are more united with feelings of toleration and universal philanthropy.³⁸ Thus we find, as if to counterbalance the fearful aberrations of our own epoch, in the principal theatre of these aberrations, contrasts more numerous and more striking, than probably blessed the sight of the faithful in preceding ages.

I cannot even perceive that great men are wanting in those periods of corruption and decay; on the contrary, these periods are often signalized by the appearance of men remarkable for energy of character and stern virtue.³⁹ If we look at the catalogue of Roman emperors, we find a great number of them as exalted in merit as in rank; we meet with names like those of Trajan, Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus, Alexander Severus, Jovian; and if we glance beneath the throne, we see a glorious constellation of great doctors of our faith, of martyrs, and apostles of the primitive church; not to consider the number of virtuous pagans. Active, firm, and valorous minds filled the camps and the forums, so that it may reasonably be doubted whether Rome, in the times of Cincinnatus, possessed so great a number of eminent men in every department of human activity. Many other examples might be alleged, to prove that senile and tottering communities, so far from being deficient in men of virtue, talent, and action, possess them probably in greater number than young and rising states; and that their general standard of morals is often higher.

Public morality, indeed, varies greatly at different periods of a nation's history. The history of the French nation, better than any other, illustrates this fact. Few will deny that the Gallo-Romans of the fifth and sixth centuries, though a subject race, were greatly superior in point of morals to their heroic conquerors.⁴⁰ Individually taken, they were often not inferior to the latter in courage and

³⁸ This assertion may surprise those who, in the words of a piquant writer on Parisian life, "have thought of Paris only under two aspects – one, as the emporium of fashion, fun, and refinement; the abode of good fellows somewhat dissipated, of fascinating ladies somewhat over-kind; of succulent dinners, somewhat indigestible; of pleasures, somewhat illicit; – the other, as the place *par excellence*, of revolutions, *émeutes*, and barricades." Yet, all who have pierced below the brilliant surface, and penetrated into the recesses of destitution and crime, have seen the ministering angel of charity on his errand, and can bear witness to the truth of the author's remark. No city can show a greater number of benevolent institutions, none more active and practical *private* charity, which inquires not after the country or creed of its object. – H.

³⁹ Tottering, falling Greece, gave birth to a Demosthenes, a Phocian; the period of the downfall of the Roman republic was the age of Cicero, Brutus, and Cato. – H.

⁴⁰ The subjoined picture of the manners of the Frankish conquerors of Gaul, is selected on account of the weighty authority from which it comes, from among a number of even darker ones. "The history of Gregory of Tours shows us on the one hand, a fierce and barbarous nation; and on the other, kings of as bad a character. These princes were bloody, unjust, and cruel, because all the nation was so. If Christianity seemed sometimes to soften them, it was only by the terror which this religion imprints in the guilty; the church supported herself against them by the miracles and prodigies of her saints. The kings were not sacrilegious, because they dreaded the punishments inflicted on sacrilegious people: but this excepted, they committed, either in their passion or cold blood, all manner of crimes and injustice, because in these the avenging hand of the Deity did not appear so visible. The Franks, as I have already observed, bore with bloody kings, because they were fond of blood themselves; they were not affected with the wickedness and extortion of their princes, because this was their own character. There had been a great many laws established, but the kings rendered them all useless by the practice of issuing *preceptions*, a kind of decrees, after the manner of the rescripts of the Roman emperors. These preceptions were

military virtue.⁴¹ The intermixture of the two races, during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, reduced the standard of morals among the whole nation to a disgraceful level. In the three succeeding centuries, the picture brightens again. Yet, this period of comparative light was succeeded by the dark scenes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when tyranny and debauchery ran riot over the land, and infected all classes of society, not excepting the clergy; when the nobles robbed their vassals, and the commonalty sold their country to a foreign foe. This period, so distinguished for the total absence of patriotism, and every honest sentiment, was emphatically one of decay; the state was shaken to its very foundation, and seemed ready to bury under its ruins so much shame and dishonor. But the crisis passed; foreign and intestine foes were vanquished; the machinery of government reconstructed on a firmer basis; the state of society improved. Notwithstanding its bloody follies, the sixteenth century dishonors less the annals of the nation than its predecessors, and it formed the transition period to the age of those pure and ever-brilliant lights, Fenelon, Bossuet, Montausier, and others. This period, again, was succeeded by the vices of the regency, and the horrors of the Revolution. Since that time, we have witnessed almost incredible fluctuations of public morality every decade of years.

I have sketched rapidly, and merely pointed out the most prominent changes. To do even this properly, much more to descend to details, would require greater space than the limits and designs of this work permit. But I think what I have said is sufficient to show that the corruption of public morals, though always a great, is often a transient evil, a malady which may be corrected or which corrects itself, and cannot, therefore, be the sole cause of national ruin, though it may hasten the catastrophe.

The corruption of public morals is nearly allied to another evil, which has been assigned as one of the causes of the downfall of empires. It is observed of Athens and Rome, that the glory of these two commonwealths faded about the same time that they abandoned their national creeds. These, however, are the only examples of such a coincidence that can be cited. The religion of Zoroaster was never more flourishing in the Persian empire, than at the time of its downfall. Tyre, Carthage, Judea, the Mexican and Peruvian empires expired at the moment when they embraced their altars with the greatest zeal and devotion. Nay, I do not believe that even at Athens and Rome, the ancient creed was abandoned until the day when it was replaced in every conscience, by the complete triumph of Christianity. I am firmly convinced that, politically speaking, irreligion never existed among any people, and that none ever abandoned the faith of their forefathers, except in exchange for another. In other words, there never was such a thing as a religious interregnum. The Gallic Teutates gave way to the Jupiter of the Romans; the worship of Jupiter, in its turn, was replaced by Christianity. It is true that, in Athens, not long before the time of Pericles, and in Rome, towards the age of the Scipios, it became the fashion among the higher classes, first to reason upon religious subjects, next to doubt them, and finally to disbelieve them altogether, and to pride themselves upon scepticism. But though there were many who joined in the sentiment of the ancient "freethinker" who dared the augurs to look at one another without laughing, yet this scepticism never gained ground among the mass of the people.

Aspasia at her evening parties, and Lelius among his intimates, might ridicule the religious dogmas of their country, and amuse themselves at the expense of those that believed them. But at both these epochs, the most brilliant in the history of Greece and Rome, it would have been highly dangerous to express such sentiments publicly. The imprudence of his mistress came near costing Pericles himself dearly, and the tears which he shed before the tribunal, were not in themselves sufficiently powerful to save the fair sceptic. The poets of the times, Aristophanes, Sophocles, and afterwards Æschylus, found it necessary, whatever were their private sentiments, to flatter the religious notions of the masses. The whole nation regarded Socrates as an impious innovator, and

orders to the judges to do, or to tolerate, things contrary to law. They were given for illicit marriages, and even those with consecrated virgins; for transferring successions, and depriving relations of their rights; for putting to death persons who had not been convicted of any crime, and not been heard in their defence, etc." – Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, b. 31, c. 2. – H.

⁴¹ Augustin Thierry, *Récit des Temps Mérovingiens*. (See particularly the *History of Mummolus*.)

would have put to death Anaxagoras, but for the strenuous intercession of Pericles. Nor did the philosophical and sceptical theories penetrate the masses at a later period. Never, at any time, did they extend beyond the sphere of the elegant and refined. It may be objected that the opinion of the rest, the mechanics, traders, the rural population, the slaves, etc., was of little moment, as they had no influence in the policy of the state. If this were the case, why was it necessary, until the last expiring throb of Paganism, to preserve its temples and pay the hierophants? Why did men, the most eminent and enlightened, the most sceptical in their religious notions, not only don the sacerdotal robe, but even descend to the most repugnant offices of the popular worship? The daily reader of Lucretius⁴² had to snatch moments of leisure from the all-absorbing game of politics, to compose a treatise on haruspicy. I allude to the first Cæsar.⁴³ And all his successors, down to Constantine, were compelled to unite the pontifical with the imperial dignity. Even Constantine himself, though as a Christian prince he had far better reasons for repugnance to such an office than any of his predecessors, was compelled to compromise with the still powerful ancient religion of the nation.⁴⁴ This is a clear proof of the prevalence of the popular sentiment over the opinion of the higher and more enlightened classes. They might appeal to reason and common sense, against the absurdities of the masses, but the latter would not, could not, renounce one faith until they had adopted another, confirming the old truth, that in the affairs of this world, the positive ever takes precedent over the negative. The popular sentiment was so strong that, in the third century, it infected even the higher classes to some extent, and created among them a serious religious reaction, which did not entirely subside until after the final triumph of Christianity. The revolution of ideas which gradually diffused true religion among all classes, is highly interesting, and it may not be altogether irrelevant to my subject, to point out the principal causes which occasioned it.

In the latter stages of the Roman empire, the armies had acquired such undue political preponderance, that from the emperor, who inevitably was chosen by them, down to the pettiest governor of a district, all the functionaries of the government issued from the ranks. They had sprung from those popular masses, of whose passionate attachment to their faith I have already spoken, and upon attaining their elevated stations, came in contact with the former rulers of the country, the old distinguished families, the municipal dignitaries of cities, in fact those classes who took pride and delight in sceptical literature. At first there was hostility between these latter and the real rulers of the state, whom they would willingly have treated as upstarts, if they had dared. But as the court gave the tone, and all the minor military chiefs were, for the most part, devout and fanatic, the sceptics were compelled to disguise their real sentiments, and the philosophers set about inventing systems to reconcile the rationalistic theories with the state religion. This revival of pagan piety caused the greater number of the persecutions. The rural populations, who had suffered their faith to be outraged by the atheists so long as the higher classes domineered over them, now, that the imperial democracy had reduced all to the same level, were panting for revenge; but, mistaking their victims, they directed their fury against the Christians. The real sceptics were such men as King Agrippa, who wishes to hear St. Paul⁴⁵ from mere curiosity; who hears him, debates with him, considers him a fool, but never

⁴² Lucretius was the author of *De Rerum Natura*, and one of the most distinguished of pagan "free-thinkers." He labored to combine the philosophy of Epicurus, Evhenius, and others, into a sort of moral religion, much after the fashion of some of the German mystics and Platonists of our times. — H.

⁴³ Cæsar, whose private opinions were both democratical and sceptical, found it convenient to speak very differently in public, as the funeral oration in honor of his aunt proves. "On the maternal side, said he, my aunt Julia is descended from the kings; on the paternal, from the immortal gods. For my aunt's mother was of the family of the Martii, who are descended from King Ancus Martius; and the Julii, to which stock our family belongs, trace their origin to Venus. Thus, in her blood was blended the majesty of kings, the most powerful of men, and the sanctity of the gods, who have even the kings in their power." — *Suetonius, Julius*, 5. Are not these sentiments very monarchical for a democrat; very religious for an atheist?

⁴⁴ It is well known that Constantine did not receive the rite of baptism until within the last hours of his life, although he professed to be a sincere believer. The coins, also, struck during his reign, all bore pagan emblems. — H.

⁴⁵ Acts xxvi. 24, 28, 31.

thinks of persecuting him because he differs in opinion; or Tacitus, the historian, who, though full of contempt for the believers in the new religion, blames Nero for his cruelties towards them.

Agrippa and Tacitus were pagan sceptics. Diocletian was a politician, who gave way to the clamors of an incensed populace. Decius and Aurelian were fanatics, like the masses they governed, and from whom they had sprung.

Even after the Christian religion had become the religion of the state, what immense difficulties were experienced in attempting to bring the masses within its pale! So hopeless was in some places the contest with the local divinities, that in many instances conversion was rather the result of address, than the effect of persuasion. The genius of the holy propagators of our religion was reduced to the invention of pious frauds. The divinities of the groves, fields, and fountains, were still worshipped, but under the name of the saints, the martyrs, and the Virgin. After being for a time misdirected, these homages would finally find the right way. Yet such is the obstinacy with which the masses cling to a faith once received, that there are traces of it remaining in our day. There are still parishes in France, where some heathenish superstition alarms the piety, and defies the efforts of the minister. In Catholic Brittany, even in the last centuries, the bishop in vain attempted to dehort his flock from the worship of an idol of stone. The rude image was thrown into the water, but rescued by its obstinate adorers; and the assistance of the military was required to break it to pieces. Such was, and such is the longevity of paganism. I conclude, therefore, that no nation, either in ancient or modern times, ever abandoned its religion without having duly and earnestly embraced another, and that, consequently, none ever found itself, for a moment, in a state of irreligion, which could have been the cause of its ruin.

Having denied the destructive effects of fanaticism, luxury, and immorality, and the political possibility of irreligion, I shall now speak of the effects of bad government. This subject is well worthy of an entire chapter.

CHAPTER III.

INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT UPON THE LONGEVITY OF NATIONS

Misgovernment defined – Athens, China, Spain, Germany, Italy, etc. – Is not in itself a sufficient cause for the ruin of nations.

I am aware of the difficulty of the task I have undertaken in attempting to establish a truth, which by many of my readers will be regarded as a mere paradox. That good laws and good government exert a direct and powerful influence upon the well-being and prosperity of a nation, is an indisputable fact, of which I am fully convinced; but I think that history proves that they are not absolute conditions of the existence of a community; or, in other words, that their absence is not necessarily productive of ruin. Nations, like individuals, are often preyed upon by fearful diseases, which show no outward traces of the ravages within, and which, though dangerous, are not always fatal. Indeed, if they were, few communities would survive the first few years of their formation, for it is precisely during that period that the government is worst, the laws most imperfect, and least observed. But here the comparison between the body political and the human organization ceases, for while the latter dreads most the attack of disease during infancy, the former easily overcomes it at that period. History furnishes innumerable examples of successful contest on the part of young communities with the most formidable and most devastating political evils, of which none can be worse than ill-conceived laws, administered in an oppressive or negligent manner.⁴⁶

Let us first define what we understand by bad government. The varieties of this evil are as various as nations, countries, and epochs. It were impossible to enumerate them all. Yet, by classing them under four principal categories, few varieties will be omitted.

A government is bad, when imposed by foreign influence. Athens experienced this evil under the thirty tyrants. Yet she shook off the odious yoke, and patriotism, far from expiring, gained renewed vigor by the oppression.

A government is bad, when based upon absolute and unconditional conquest. Almost the whole extent of France in the fourteenth century, groaned under the dominion of England. The ordeal was passed, and the nation rose from it more powerful and brilliant than before. China was overrun and conquered by the Mongol hordes. They were ejected from its territories, after having previously undergone a singular transformation. It next fell into the hands of the Mantchoo conquerors, but though they already count the years of their reign by centuries, they are now at the eve of experiencing the same fate as their Mongol predecessors.

A government is especially bad, when the principles upon which it was based are disregarded or forgotten. This was the fate of the Spanish monarchy. It was based upon the military spirit of the nation, and upon its municipal freedom, and declined soon after these principles came to be forgotten. It is impossible to imagine greater political disorganization than this country represented. Nowhere was the authority of the sovereign more nominal and despised; nowhere did the clergy lay themselves more open to censure. Agriculture and industry, following the same downward impulse, were also involved in the national marasmus. Yet Spain, of whom so many despaired, at a moment when her star seemed setting forever, gave the glorious example of heroic and successful resistance to the arms of one who had hitherto experienced no check in his career of conquest. Since that, the

⁴⁶ It will be understood that I speak here, not of the political existence of a centre of sovereignty, but of the life of an entire nation, the prosperity of a civilization. Here is the place to apply the definition given above, [page 114](#).

better spirit of the nation has been roused, and there is, probably, at this time, no European state with more promising prospects, and stronger vitality.⁴⁷

A government is also very bad, when, by its institutions, it authorizes an antagonism either between the supreme power and the nation, or among the different classes of which it is composed. This was the case in the Middle Ages, when the kings of France and England were at war with their great vassals, and the peasants in perpetual feud with the lords. In Germany, the first effects of the liberty of thought, were the civil wars of the Hussites, Anabaptists, and other sectaries. Italy, at a more remote period, was so distracted by the division of the supreme authority for which emperor, pope, nobles, and municipalities contended, that the masses, not knowing whom to obey, in many instances finished by obeying neither. Yet in the midst of all these troubles, Italian nationality did not perish. On the contrary, its civilization was at no time more brilliant, its industry never more productive, its foreign influence never greater.

If communities have survived such fearful political tempests, it cannot well be said that national ruin is a necessary cause of misgovernment. Besides, wise and happy reigns are few and far between, in the history of every nation; and these few are not considered such by all. Historians are not unanimous in their praise of Elizabeth, nor do they all consider the reign of William and Mary as an epoch of prosperity for England. Truly this science of statesmanship, the highest and most complicated of all, is so disproportionate to the capacity of man,⁴⁸ and so various are the opinions concerning it, that nations have early and frequent opportunities of learning to accommodate themselves to misgovernment, which, in its worst forms, is still preferable to anarchy. It is a well-proved fact, which even a superficial study of history will clearly demonstrate, that communities often perish under the best government of a long series that came before.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ This assertion will appear paradoxical to those who are in the habit of looking upon Spain as the type of hopeless national degradation. But whoever studies the history of the last thirty years, which is but a series of struggles to rise from this position, will probably arrive at the same conclusions as the author. The revolution of 1820 redeems the character of the nation. "The Spanish Constitution" became the watchword of the friends of constitutional liberty in the South of Europe, and ere thirteen months had fully passed, it had become the fundamental law of three other countries – Portugal, Naples, and Sardinia. At the mere sound of those words, two kings had resigned their crowns. These revolutions were not characterized by excesses. They were, for the most part, accomplished peacefully, quietly, and orderly. They were not the result of the temporary passions of an excited mob. The most singular feature of these countries is that the lowest dregs of the population are the most zealous adherents of absolutism. No, these revolutions were the work of the best elements in the population, the most intelligent classes, of people who knew what they wanted, and how to get it. And then, when Spain had set that ever glorious example to her neighbors, the great powers, with England at the head, concluded to re-establish the former state of things. In those memorable congresses of plenipotentiaries, the most influential was the representative of England, the Duke of Wellington. And by his advice, or, at least, with his sanction, an Austrian army entered Sardinia, and abolished the new constitution; an Austrian army entered Naples and abolished the new constitution; English vessels of war threatened Lisbon, and Portugal abolished her new constitution; and finally a French army entered Spain, and abolished the new constitution. So Naples and Portugal regained their tyrants, and Spain her imbecile dynasty. For years the Spaniards have tried to shake it off, and English influence alone has maintained on a great nation's throne, a wretch that would have disgraced the lowest walks of private life. But the day of Spanish liberty and Spanish *independence* will dawn, and perhaps already has dawned. The efforts of the last Cortes were wisely directed, and their proceedings marked with a manliness, a moderation, and a firmness that augur well for the future weal of Spain. – H.

⁴⁸ Who is not reminded of Oxenstierna's famous saying to his son: "Cum parva sapientiâ mundus gubernatur." – H.

⁴⁹ It is obvious that so long as the vitality of a nation remains unimpaired, misgovernment can be but a temporary ill. The regenerative principle will be at work to remove the evil and heal the wounds it has inflicted; and though the remedy be sometimes violent, and throw the state into fearful convulsions, it will seldom be found ineffectual. So long as the spirit of liberty prevailed among the Romans, the Tarquiniuses and Appiuses were as a straw before the storm of popular indignation; but the death of Cæsar could but substitute a despot in the stead of a mild and generous usurper. The first Brutus might save the nation, because he was the expression of the national sentiment; the second could not, because he was one man opposed to millions. It is a common error to ascribe too much to individual exertions, and whimsical philosophers have amused themselves to trace great events to petty causes; but a deeper inquiry will demonstrate that the great catastrophes which arrest our attention and form the landmarks of history, are but the inevitable result of all the whole chain of antecedent events. Julius Cæsar and Napoleon Bonaparte were, indeed, especially gifted for their great destinies, but the same gifts could not have raised them to their exalted positions at any other epoch than the one in which each lived. Those petty causes are but the drop which causes the measure to overflow, the pretext of the moment; or as the small fissure in the dyke which produces the *crevasse*: the wall of waters stood behind. No man can usurp supreme power, unless the prevailing tendency of the nation favors it; no man can long persist in hurrying a nation along in a course repulsive to it; and in this sense, therefore, not with regard to its abstract justness, it is undoubtedly true, that the voice of the nation is the voice of God. It is the expression of what shall and must be. – H.

CHAPTER IV. DEFINITION OF THE WORD DEGENERACY – ITS CAUSE

Skeleton history of a nation – Origin of castes, nobility, etc. – Vitality of nations not necessarily extinguished by conquest – China, Hindostan – Permanency of their peculiar civilizations.

If the spirit of the preceding pages has been at all understood, it will be seen that I am far from considering these great national maladies, misgovernment, fanaticism, irreligion, and immorality, as mere trifling accidents, without influence or importance. On the contrary, I sincerely pity the community which is afflicted by such scourges, and think that no efforts can be misdirected which tend to mitigate or remove them. But I repeat, that unless these disorganizing elements are grafted upon another more destructive principle, unless they are the consequences of a greater, though concealed, evil; we may rest assured that their ravages are not fatal, and that society, after a shorter or longer period of suffering, will escape their toils, perhaps with renewed vigor and youth.

The examples I have alleged seem to me conclusive; their number, if necessary, might be increased to any extent. But the conviction has already gained ground, that these are but secondary evils, to which an undue importance has hitherto been attached, and that the law which governs the life and death of societies must be sought for elsewhere, and deeper. It is admitted that the germ of destruction is inherent in the constitution of communities; that so long as it remains latent, exterior dangers are little to be dreaded; but when it has once attained full growth and maturity, the nation must die, even though surrounded by the most favorable circumstances, precisely as a jaded steed breaks down, be the track ever so smooth.

Degeneracy was the name given to this cause of dissolution. This view of the question was a great step towards the truth, but, unfortunately, it went no further; the first difficulty proved insurmountable. The term was certainly correct, etymologically and in every other respect, but how is it with the definition. A people is said to be degenerated, when it is badly governed, abuses its riches, is fanatical, or irreligious; in short, when it has lost the characteristic virtues of its forefathers. This is begging the question. Thus, communities succumb under the burden of social and political evils only when they are degenerate, and they are degenerate only when such evils prevail. This circular argument proves nothing but the small progress hitherto made in the science of national biology. I readily admit that nations perish from degeneracy, and from no other cause; it is when in that wretched condition, that foreign attacks are fatal to them, for then they no longer possess the strength to protect themselves against adverse fortune, or to recover from its blows. They die, because, though exposed to the same perils as their ancestors, they have not the same powers of overcoming them. I repeat it, the term *degeneracy* is correct; but it is necessary to define it, to give it a real and tangible meaning. It is necessary to say how and why this vigor, this capacity of overcoming surrounding dangers, are lost. Hitherto, we have been satisfied with a mere word, but the thing itself is as little known as ever.⁵⁰ The step beyond, I shall attempt to make.

⁵⁰ The author has neglected to advert to one very clear explanation of this word, which, from its extensive popularity, seems to me to deserve some notice. It is said, and very commonly believed, that there is a physical degeneracy in mankind; that a nation cultivating for a long time the arts of peace, and enjoying the fruits of well-directed industry, loses the capacity for warfare; in other words becomes effeminate, and, consequently, less capable of defending itself against ruder, and, therefore, more warlike invaders. It is further said, though with less plausibility, that there is a general degeneracy of the human race – that we are inferior in physical strength to our ancestors, etc. If this theory could be supported by incontestable facts – and there are many who think it possible – it would give to the term degeneracy that real and tangible meaning which the author alleges to be wanting. But a slight investigation will demonstrate that it is more specious than correct. In the first place, to prove that an advance in civilization does not lessen the

In my opinion, a nation is degenerate, when the blood of its founders no longer flows in its veins, but has been gradually deteriorated by successive foreign admixtures; so that the nation, while retaining its original name, is no longer composed of the same elements. The attenuation of the original blood is attended by a modification of the original instincts, or modes of thinking; the new elements assert their influence, and when they have once gained perfect and entire preponderance, the degeneration may be considered as complete. With the last remnant of the original ethnical principle, expires the life of the society and its civilization. The masses, which composed it, have thenceforth no separate, independent, social and political existence; they are attracted to different centres of civilization, and swell the ranks of new societies having new instincts and new purposes.

In attempting to establish this theorem, I am met by a question which involves the solution of a far more difficult problem than any I have yet approached. This question, so momentous in its bearings, is the following: —

Is there, in reality, a serious and palpable difference in the capacity and intrinsic worth of different branches of the human family?

material puissance of a nation, but rather increases it, we may point to the well-known fact that the most civilized nations are the most formidable opponents in warfare, because they have brought the means of attack and defence to the greatest perfection. But that for this strength they are not solely indebted to artificial means, is proved by the history of modern civilized states. The French now fight with as much martial ardor and intrepidity, and with more success than they did in the times of Francis I. or Louis XIV., albeit they have since both these epochs made considerable progress in civilization, and this progress has been most perceptible in those classes which form the bulk and body of armies. England, though, perhaps, she could not muster an army as large as in former times, has hearts as stout, and arms as strong as those that gained for her imperishable glory at Agincourt and Poitiers. The charge at Balaklava, rash and useless as it may be termed, was worthy of the followers of the Black Prince. A theory to be correct, must admit of mathematical demonstration. The most civilized nations, then, would be the most effeminate; the most barbarous, the most warlike. And, descending from nations to individuals, the most cultivated and refined mind would be accompanied by a deficiency in many of the manly virtues. Such an assertion is ridiculous. The most refined and fastidious gentleman has never, as a class, displayed less courage and fortitude than the rowdy and fighter by profession. Men sprung from the bosom of the most polished circles in the most civilized communities, have surpassed the most warlike barbarians in deeds of hardihood and heroic valor. Civilization, therefore, produces no degeneracy; the cultivation of the arts of peace, no diminution of manly virtues. We have seen the peaceful burghers of free cities successfully resist the trained bands of a superior foe; we have seen the artisans and merchants of Holland invincible to the veteran armies of the then most powerful prince of Christendom, backed as he was by the inexhaustible treasures of a newly discovered hemisphere; we have seen, in our times, troops composed of volunteers who left their hearthstones to fight for their country, rout incredible odds of the standing armies of a foe, who, for the last thirty years, has known no peace. I believe that an advanced state of civilization, accompanied by long peace, gives rise to a certain *domestication* of man, that is to say, it lays on a polish over the more ferocious or pugnacious tendencies of his nature; because it, in some measure deprives him of the opportunities of exercising them, but it cannot deprive him of the power, should the opportunity present itself. Let us suppose two brothers born in some of our great commercial cities, one to enter a counting-house, the other to settle in the western wilderness. The former might become a polished, elegant, perhaps even dandified young gentleman; the other might evince a supreme contempt for all the amenities of life, be ever ready to draw his bowie-knife or revolver, however slight the provocation. The country requires the services of both; a great principle is at stake, and in some battle of Matamoras or Buena Vista, the two brothers fight side by side; who will be the braver? I believe that both individual and national character admit of a certain degree of pressure by surrounding circumstances; the pressure removed, the character at once regains its original form. See with what kindliness the civilized descendant of the wild Teuton hunter takes to the hunter's life in new countries, and how soon he learns to despise the comforts of civilized life and fix his abode in the solitary wilderness. The Normans had been settled over six centuries in the beautiful province of France, to which they gave their name; their nobles had frequented the most polished court in Europe, adapted themselves to the fashions and requirements of life in a luxurious metropolis; they themselves had learned to plough the soil instead of the wave; yet in another hemisphere they at once regained their ancient habits, and — as six hundred years before — became the most dreaded pirates of the seas they infested; the savage buccaneers of the Spanish main. I can see no difference betweenOLONNOIS and his followers, and the terrible men of the north (his lineal ancestors) that ravaged the shores of the Seine and the Rhine, and whose name is even yet mentioned with horror every evening, in the other hemisphere, by thousands of praying children: "God preserve us from the Northmen." Morgan, the Welch buccaneer, who, with a thousand men, vanquished five times as many well-equipped Spaniards, took their principal cities, Porto Bello and Panama; who tortured his captives to make them reveal the hiding-place of their treasure; Morgan might have been — sixteen centuries notwithstanding — a tributary chief to Caractacus, or one of those who opposed Cæsar's landing in Britain. To make the resemblance still more complete, the laws and regulations of these lawless bands were a precise copy of those to which their not more savage ancestors bound themselves. I regret that my limited space precludes me from entering into a more elaborate exposition of the futility of the theory that civilization, or a long continued state of peace, can produce physical degeneracy or inaptitude for the ruder duties of the battle-field; but I believe that what I have said will suffice to suggest to the thoughtful reader numerous confirmations of my position; and I may, therefore, now refer him to Mr. Gobineau's explanation of the term degeneracy. — H.

For the sake of clearness, I shall advance, *à priori*, that this difference exists. It then remains to show how the ethnical character of a nation can undergo such a total change as I designate by the term *degeneracy*.

Physiologists assert that the human frame is subject to a constant wear and tear, which would soon destroy the whole machine, but for new particles which are continually taking the form and place of the old ones. So rapid is this change said to be, that, in a few years, the whole framework is renovated, and the material identity of the individual changed. The same, to a great extent, may be said of nations, only that, while the individual always preserves a certain similarity of form and features, those of a nation are subject to innumerable and ever-varying changes. Let us take a nation at the moment when it assumes a political existence, and commences to play a part in the great drama of the world's stage. In its embryo, we call it a tribe.

The simplest and most natural political institution is that of tribes. It is the only form of government known to rude and savage nations. Civilization is the result of a great concentration of powerful physical and intellectual forces,⁵¹ which, in small and scattered fragments, is impossible. The first step towards it is, therefore, undoubtedly, the union of several tribes by alliance or conquest. Such a coalescence is what we call a nation or empire. I think it admits of an easy demonstration, that in proportion as a human family is endowed with the capacity for intellectual progress, it exhibits a tendency to enlarge the circle of its influence and dominion. On the contrary, where that capacity is weak, or wanting, we find the population subdivided into innumerable small fragments, which, though in perpetual collision, remain forever detached and isolated. The stronger may massacre the weaker, but permanent conquest is never attempted; depredatory incursions are the sole object and whole extent of warfare. This is the case with the natives of Polynesia, many parts of Africa, and the Arctic regions. Nor can their stagnant condition be ascribed to local or climatical causes. We have seen such wretched hordes inhabiting, indifferently, temperate as well as torrid or frigid zones; fertile prairies and barren deserts; river-shores and coasts as well as inland regions. It must therefore be founded upon an inherent incapacity of progress. The more civilizable a race is, the stronger is the tendency for aggregation of masses. Complex political organizations are not so much the effect as the cause of civilization.⁵² A tribe with superior intellectual and physical endowments, soon perceives that, to increase its power and prosperity, it must compel its neighbors to enter into the sphere of its influence. Where peaceful means fail, war is resorted to. Territories are conquered, a division into classes established between the victorious and the subjugated race; in one word, a nation has made its appearance upon the theatre of history. The impulse being once given, it will not stop short in the career of conquest. If wisdom and moderation preside in its councils, the tracks of its armies will not be marked by wanton destruction and bloodshed; the monuments, institutions, and manners of the conquered will be respected; superior creations will take the place of the old, where changes

⁵¹ "Nothing but the great number of citizens in a state can occasion the flourishing of the arts and sciences. Accordingly, we see that, in all ages, it was great empires only which enjoyed this advantage. In these great states, the arts, especially that of agriculture, were soon brought to great perfection, and thus that leisure afforded to a considerable number of men, which is so necessary to study and speculation. The Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians, had the advantage of being formed into regular, well-constituted states." —*Origin of Laws and Sciences, and their Progress among the most Ancient Nations*. By President De Goguet. Edinburgh, 1761, vol. i. pp. 272-273. — H.

⁵² "Conquests, by uniting many nations under one sovereign, have formed great and powerful empires, out of the ruins of many petty states. In these great empires, men began insensibly to form clearer views of politics, juster and more salutary notions of government. Experience taught them to avoid the errors which had occasioned the ruin of the nations whom they had subdued, and put them upon taking measures to prevent surprises, invasions, and the like misfortunes. With these views they fortified cities, secured such passes as might have admitted an enemy into their country, and kept a certain number of troops constantly on foot. By these precautions, several States rendered themselves formidable to their neighbors, and none durst lightly attack powers which were every way so respectable. The interior parts of such mighty monarchies were no longer exposed to ravages and devastations. War was driven far from the centre, and only infected the frontiers. The inhabitants of the country, and of the cities, began to breathe in safety. The calamities which conquests and revolutions had occasioned, disappeared; but the blessings which had grown out of them, remained. Ingenious and active spirits, encouraged by the repose which they enjoyed, devoted themselves to study. *It was in the bosom of great empires the arts were invented, and the sciences had their birth.*" —*Op. cit.*, vol. i. Book 5, p. 326. — H.

are necessary and useful; – a great empire will be formed.⁵³ At first, and perhaps for a long time, victors and vanquished will remain separated and distinct. But gradually, as the pride of the conqueror becomes less obtrusive, and the bitterness of defeat is forgotten by the conquered; as the ties of common interest become stronger, the boundary line between them is obliterated. Policy, fear, or natural justice, prompts the masters to concessions; intermarriages take place, and, in the course of time, the various ethnical elements are blended, and the different nations composing the state begin to consider themselves as one. This is the general history of the rise of all empires whose records have been transmitted to us.⁵⁴ An inferior race, by falling into the hands of vigorous masters, is thus called to share a destiny, of which, alone, it would have been incapable. Witness the Saxons by the Norman conquest.⁵⁵ But, if there is a decided disparity in the capacity of the two races, their mixture, while it ennobles the baser, deteriorates the nobler; a new race springs up, inferior to the one, though superior to the other, and, perhaps, possessed of peculiar qualities unknown to either. The modification of the ethnical character of the nation, however, does not terminate here.

Every new acquisition of territory, by conquest or treaty, brings an addition of foreign blood. The wealth and splendor of a great empire attract crowds of strangers to its capital, great inland cities, or seaports. Apart from the fact that the conquering race – that which founds the empire, and supports and animates it – is, in most cases, inferior in numbers to the masses which it subdued and assimilated;

⁵³ The history of every great empire proves the correctness of this remark. The conqueror never attempted to change the manners or local institutions of the peoples subdued, but contented himself with an acknowledgment of his supremacy, the payment of tribute, and the rendering of assistance in war. Those who have pursued a contrary course, may be likened to an overflowing river, which, though it leaves temporary marks of its destructive course behind, must, sooner or later, return to its bed, and, in a short time, its invasions are forgotten, and their traces obliterated. – H.

⁵⁴ The most striking illustration of the correctness of this reasoning, is found in Roman history, the earlier portion of which is – thanks to Niebuhr's genius – just beginning to be understood. The lawless followers of Romulus first coalesced with the Sabines; the two nations united, then compelled the Albans to raze their city to the ground, and settle in Rome. Next came the Latins, to whom, also, a portion of the city was allotted for settlement. These two conquered nations were, of course, not permitted the same civil and political privileges as the conquerors, and, with the exception of a few noble families among them (which probably had been, from the beginning, in the interests of the conquerors), these tribes formed the *plebs*. The distinction by nations was forgotten, and had become a distinction of *classes*. Then began the progress which Mr. Gobineau describes. The Plebeians first gained their *tribunes*, who could protect their interests against the one-sided legislation of the dominant class; then, the right of discussing and deciding certain public questions in the *comitia*, or public assembly. Next, the law prohibiting intermarriage between the Patricians and Plebeians was repealed; and thus, in course of time, the government changed from an oligarchical to a democratic form. I might go into details, or, I might mention other nations in which the same process is equally manifest, but I think the above well-known facts sufficient to bring the author's idea into a clear light, and illustrate its correctness. The history of the Middle Ages, the establishment of serfdom and its gradual abolition, also furnish an analogue. Wherever we see an hereditary aristocracy (whether called class or caste), it will be found to originate in a race, which, if no longer *dominant*, was once conqueror. Before the Norman conquest, the English aristocracy was *Saxon*, there were no nobles of the ancient British blood, east of Wales; after the conquest, the aristocracy was *Norman*, and nine-tenths of the noble families of England to this day trace, or pretend to trace, their origin to that stock. The noble French families, anterior to the Revolution, were almost all of *Frankish* or *Burgundian* origin. The same observation applies everywhere else. In support of my opinion, I have Niebuhr's great authority: "Wherever there are castes, they are the consequence of foreign conquest and subjugation; it is impossible for a nation to submit to such a system, unless it be compelled by the calamities of a conquest. By this means only it is, that, contrary to the will of a people, circumstances arise which afterwards assume the character of a division into classes or castes." — *Lect. on Anc. Hist.* (In the English translation, this passage occurs in vol. i. p. 90.) In conclusion, I would observe that, whenever it becomes politic to flatter the mass of the people, the fact of conquest is denied. Thus, English writers labored hard to prove that William the Norman did not, in reality, conquer the Saxons. Some time before the French Revolution, the same was attempted to be proved in the case of the Germanic tribes in France. L'Abbé du Bos, and other writers, taxed their ingenuity to disguise an obvious fact, and to hide the truth under a pile of ponderous volumes. – H.

⁵⁵ "It has been a favorite thesis with many writers, to pretend that the Saxon government was, at the time of the conquest, by no means subverted; that William of Normandy legally acceded to the throne, and, consequently, to the engagements of the Saxon kings... But, if we consider that the manner in which the public power is formed in a state, is so very essential a part of its government, and that a thorough change in this respect was introduced into England by the conquest, we shall not scruple to allow that a *new government* was established. Nay, as almost the whole landed property in the kingdom was, at that time, transferred to other hands, a new system of criminal justice introduced, and the language of the law moreover altered, the revolution may be said to have been such as is not, perhaps, to be paralleled in the history of any other country." – De Lolme's *English Constitution*, c. i., note c. – "The battle of Hastings, and the events which followed it, not only placed a Duke of Normandy on the English throne, but gave up the whole population of England to the tyranny of the Norman race. The subjugation of a nation has seldom, even in Asia, been more complete." – Macaulay's *History of England*, vol. i. p. 10. – H.

the conspicuous part which it takes in the affairs of the state, renders it more directly exposed to the fatal results of battles, proscriptions, and revolts.⁵⁶ In some instances, also, it happens that the substratum of native populations are singularly prolific – witness the Celts and Slaves. Sooner or later, therefore, the conquering race is absorbed by the masses which its vigor and superiority have aggregated. The very materials of which it erected its splendor, and upon which it based its strength, are ultimately the means of its weakness and destruction. But the civilization which it has developed, may survive for a limited period. The forward impulse, once imparted to the mass, will still propel it for a while, but its force is continually decreasing. Manners, laws, and institutions remain, but the spirit which animated them has fled; the lifeless body still exhibits the apparent symptoms of life, and, perhaps, even increases, but the real strength has departed; the edifice soon begins to totter, at the slightest collision it will crumble, and bury beneath its ruins the civilization which it had developed.

If this definition of degeneracy be accepted, and its consequences admitted, the problem of the rise and fall of empires no longer presents any difficulty. A nation lives so long as it preserves the ethnical principle to which it owes its existence; with this principle, it loses the *primum mobile* of its successes, its glory, and its civilization: it must therefore disappear from the stage of history. Who can doubt that if Alexander had been opposed by real Persians, the men of the Arian stock, whom Cyrus led to victory, the issue of the battle of Arbela would have been very different. Or if Rome, in her decadence, had possessed soldiers and senators like those of the time of Fabius, Scipio, and Cato, would she have fallen so easy a prey to the barbarians of the North?

It will be objected that, even had the integrity of the original blood remained intact, a time must have come when they would find their masters. They would have succumbed under a series of well-combined attacks, a long-continued overwhelming pressure, or simply by the chances of a lost battle. The political edifice might have been destroyed in this manner, not the civilization, not the social organization. Invasion and defeat would have been reverses, sad ones, indeed, but not irremediable. There is no want of facts to confirm this assertion.

In modern times, the Chinese have suffered two complete conquests. In each case they have imposed their manners and their institutions upon the conquerors; they have given them much, and received but little in return. The first invaders, after having undergone this change, were expelled; the same fate is now threatening the second.⁵⁷ In this case the vanquished were intellectually

⁵⁶ This assertion seems self-evident; it may, however, be not altogether irrelevant to the subject, to direct attention to a few facts in illustration of it. Great national calamities like wars, proscriptions, and revolutions, are like thunderbolts, striking mostly the objects of greatest elevation. We have seen that a conquering race generally, for a long time even after the conquest has been forgotten, forms an aristocracy, which generally monopolizes the prominent positions. In great political convulsions, this aristocracy suffers most, often in numbers, and always in proportion. Thus, at the battle of Cannæ, from 5,000 to 6,000 Roman knights are said to have been slain, and, at all times, the officer's dress has furnished the most conspicuous, and at the same time the most important target for the death-dealing stroke. In those fearful proscriptions, in which Sylla and Marius vied with each other in wholesale slaughter, the number of victims included two hundred senators and thirty-three ex-consuls. That the major part of the rest were prominent men, and therefore patricians, is obvious from the nature of this persecution. Revolutions are most often, though not always, produced by a fermentation among the mass of the population, who have a heavy score to settle against a class that has domineered and tyrannized over them. Their fury, therefore, is directed against this aristocracy. I have now before me a curious document (first published in the *Prussian State-Gazette*, in 1828, and for which I am indebted to a little German volume, *Das Menschengeschlecht auf seinem Gegenwärtigen Standpunkte*, by Smidt-Phiseldeck), giving a list of the victims that fell under the guillotine by sentence of the revolutionary tribunal, from August, 1792, to the 27th of July, 1794, in a little less than two years. The number of victims there given is 2,774. Of these, 941 are of rank unknown. The remaining 1,833 may be divided in the following proportions: —

1,084 highest nobility (princes, dukes, marshals of France, generals, and other officers, etc. etc.)
636 of the gentry (members of Parliament, judges, etc. etc.)
113 of the bourgeoisie (including non-commissioned officers and soldiers.)
1,833

Such facts require no comments. — H.

⁵⁷ • The recent insurrection in China has given rise to a great deal of speculation, and various are the opinions that have been

and numerically superior to their victors. I shall mention another case where the victors, though intellectually superior, are not possessed of sufficient numerical strength to transform the intellectual and moral character of the vanquished.

The political supremacy of the British in Hindostan is perfect, yet they exert little or no moral influence over the masses they govern. All that the utmost exertion of their power can effect upon the fears of their subjects, is an outward compliance. The notions of the Hindoo cannot be replaced by European ideas – the spirit of Hindoo civilization cannot be conquered by any power, however great, of the law. Political forms may change, and do change, without materially affecting the basis upon which they rest; Hyderabad, Lahore, and Delhi may cease to be capitals: Hindoo society will subsist, nevertheless. A time must come, sooner or later, when India will regain a separate political existence, and publicly proclaim those laws of her own, which she now secretly obeys, or of which she is tacitly left in possession.

The mere accident of conquest cannot destroy the principle of vitality in a people. At most, it may suspend for a time the exterior manifestations of that vitality, and strip it of its outward honors. But so long as the blood, and consequently the culture of a nation, exhibit sufficiently strong traces of the initiatory race, that nation exists; and whether it has to deal, like the Chinese, with conquerors who are superior only materially; or whether, like the Hindoos, it maintains a struggle of patience against a race much superior in every respect; that nation may rest assured of its future – independence will dawn for it one day. On the contrary, when a nation has completely exhausted the initiatory ethnical element, defeat is certain death; it has consumed the term of existence which Heaven had granted it – its destiny is fulfilled.⁵⁸

formed respecting it. But it is now pretty generally conceded that it is a great national movement, and, therefore, must ultimately be successful. The history of this insurrection, by Mr. Callery and Dr. Ivan (one the interpreter, and the other the physician of the French embassy in China, and both well known and reliable authorities) leaves no doubt upon the subject. One of the most significant signs in this movement is the cutting off the tails, and letting the hair grow, which is being practised, says Dr. Ivan, in all the great cities, and in the very teeth of the mandarins. (*Ins. in China*, p. 243.) Let not the reader smile at this seemingly puerile demonstration, or underrate its importance. Apparently trivial occurrences are often the harbingers of the most important events. Were I to see in the streets of Berlin or Vienna, men with long beards or hats of a certain shape, I should know that serious troubles are to be expected; and in proportion to the number of such men, I should consider the catastrophe more or less near at hand, and the monarch's crown in danger. When the Lombard stops smoking in the streets, he meditates a revolution; and France is comparatively safe, even though every street in Paris is barricaded, and blood flows in torrents; but when bands march through the streets singing the *ça ira*, we know that to-morrow the *Red Republic* will be proclaimed. All these are silent, but expressive demonstrations of the prevalence of a certain principle among the masses. Such a one is the cutting off of the tail among the Chinese. Nor is this a mere emblem. The shaved crown and the tail are the brands of conquest, a mark of degradation imposed by the Mantchoos on the subjugated race. The Chinese have never abandoned the hope of one day expelling their conquerors, as they did already once before. "Ever since the fall of the Mings," says Dr. Ivan, "and the accession of the Mantchoo dynasty, clandestine associations – these intellectual laboratories of declining states – have been incessantly in operation. The most celebrated of these secret societies, that of the Triad, or the *three principles*, commands so extensive and powerful an organization, that its members may be found throughout China, and wherever the Chinese emigrate; so that there is no great exaggeration in the Chinese saying: 'When three of us are together, the Triad is among us.'" (*Hist. of the Insur. in Ch.*, p. 112.) Again, the writer says: "The revolutionary impetus is now so strong, the affairs of the pretender or chief of the insurrection in so prosperous a condition, that the success of his cause has nothing to fear from the loss of a battle. It would require a series of unprecedented reverses to ruin his hopes" (p. 243 and 245). I have written this somewhat lengthy note to show that Mr. Gobineau makes no rash assertion, when he says that the Mantchoos are about to experience the same fate as their Tartar predecessors. – H.

⁵⁸ The author might have mentioned Russia in illustration of his position. The star of no nation that we are acquainted with has suffered an eclipse so total and so protracted, nor re-appeared with so much brilliancy. Russia, whose history so many believe to date from the time of Peter the Great only, was one of the earliest actors on the stage of modern history. Its people had adopted Christianity when our forefathers were yet heathens; its princes formed matrimonial alliances with the monarchs of Byzantine Rome, while Charlemagne was driving the reluctant Saxon barbarians by thousands into rivers to be baptized *en masse*. Russia had magnificent cities before Paris was more than a collection of hovels on a small island of the Seine. Its monarchs actually contemplated, and not without well-founded hopes, the conquest of Constantinople, while the Norman barges were devastating the coasts and river-shores of Western Europe. Nay, to that far-off, almost polar region, the enterprise of the inhabitants had attracted the genius of commerce and its attendants, prosperity and abundance. One of the greatest commercial cities of the first centuries after Christ, one of the first of the Hanse-Towns, was the great city of Novogorod, the capital of a republic that furnished three hundred thousand fighting men. But the east of Europe was not destined to outstrip the west in the great race of progress. The millions of Tartars, that, locust-like – but more formidable – marked their progress by hopeless devastation, had converted the greater portion of Asia into a desert, and now sought a new field for their savage exploits. Russia stood the first brunt, and its conquest exhausted the strength of the ruthless foe, and saved Western Europe from overwhelming ruin. In the beginning of the thirteenth century, five hundred thousand Tartar

I, therefore, consider the question as settled, which has been so often discussed, as to what would have been the result, if the Carthaginians, instead of succumbing to the fortune of Rome, had conquered Italy. As they belonged to the Phenician family, a stock greatly inferior to the Italian in political capacity, they would have been absorbed by the superior race after the victory, precisely as they were after the defeat. The final result, therefore, would have been the same in either case.

The destiny of civilizations is not ruled by accident; it depends not on the issue of a battle, a thrust of a sword, the favors or frowns of fickle fortune. The most warlike, formidable, and triumphant nations, when they were distinguished for nothing but bravery, strategical science, and military successes, have never had a nobler fate than that of learning from their subjects, perhaps too late, the art of living in peace. The Celts, the nomad hordes of Central Asia, are memorable illustrations of this truth.

The whole of my demonstration now rests upon one hypothesis, the proof of which I have reserved for the succeeding chapters: the moral and intellectual diversities of the various branches of the human family.

horsemen crossed the Ural Mountains. Slow, but gradual, was their progress. The Russian armies were trampled down by this countless cavalry. But the resistance must have been a brave and vigorous one, for few of the invaders lived long enough to see the conquest. Not until after a desperate struggle of fifty years, did Russia acknowledge a Tartar master. Nor were the conquerors even then allowed to enjoy their prize in peace. For two centuries more, the Russians never remitted their efforts to regain their independence. Each generation transmitted to its posterity the remembrance of that precious treasure, and the care of reconquering it. Nor were their efforts unsuccessful. Year after year the Tartars saw the prize gliding from their grasp, and towards the end of the fifteenth century, we find them driven to the banks of the Volga, and the coasts of the Black Sea. Russia now began to breathe again. But, lo! during the long struggle, Pole and Swede had vied with the Tartar in stripping her of her fairest domains. Her territory extended scarce two hundred miles, in any direction from Moscow. Her very name was unknown. Western Europe had forgotten her. The same causes that established the feudal system there, had, in the course of two centuries and a half, changed a nation of freemen into a nation of serfs. The arts of peace were lost, the military element had gained an undue preponderance, and a band of soldiers, like the Pretorian Guards of Rome, made and deposed sovereigns, and shook the state to its very foundations. Yet here and there a vigorous monarch appeared, who controlled the fierce element, and directed it to the weal of the state. Smolensk, the fairest portion of the ancient Russian domain, was re-conquered from the Pole. The Swede, also, was forced to disgorge a portion of his spoils. But it was reserved for Peter the Great and his successors to restore to Russia the rank she had once held, and to which she was entitled. I will not further trespass on the patience of the reader, now that we have arrived at that portion of Russian history which many think the first. I would merely observe that not only did Peter add to his empire no territory that had not formerly belonged to it, but even Catharine, at the first partition of Poland (I speak not of the subsequent ones), merely re-united to her dominion what once were integral portions. The rapid growth of Russia, since she has reassumed her station among the nations of the earth, is well known. Cities have sprung up in places where once the nomad had pitched his tent. A great capital, the handsomest in the world, has risen from the marsh, within one hundred and fifty years after the founder, whose name it perpetuates, had laid the first stone. Another has risen from the ashes, within less than a decade of years from the time when – a holocaust on the altar of patriotism – its flames announced to the world the vengeance of a nation on an intemperate aggressor. Truly, it seems to me, that Mr. Gobineau could not have chosen a better illustration of his position, that the mere accident of conquest can not annihilate a nation, than this great empire, in whose history conquest forms so terrible and so long an episode, that the portion anterior to it is almost forgotten to this day. – H.

CHAPTER V. THE MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY OF RACES IS NOT THE RESULT OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Antipathy of races – Results of their mixture – The scientific axiom of the absolute equality of men, but an extension of the political – Its fallacy – Universal belief in unequal endowment of races – The moral and intellectual diversity of races not attributable to institutions – Indigenous institutions are the expression of popular sentiments; when foreign and imported, they never prosper – Illustrations: England and France – Roman Empire – European Colonies – Sandwich Islands – St. Domingo – Jesuit missions in Paraguay.

The idea of an innate and permanent difference in the moral and mental endowments of the various groups of the human species, is one of the most ancient, as well as universally adopted, opinions. With few exceptions, and these mostly in our own times, it has formed the basis of almost all political theories, and has been the fundamental maxim of government of every nation, great or small. The prejudices of country have no other cause; each nation believes in its own superiority over its neighbors, and very often different parts of the same nation regard each other with contempt. There seems to exist an instinctive antipathy among the different races, and even among the subdivisions of the same race, of which none is entirely exempt, but which acts with the greatest force in the least civilized or least civilizable. We behold it in the characteristic suspiciousness and hostility of the savage; in the isolation from foreign influence and intercourse of the Chinese and Japanese; in the various distinctions founded upon birth in more civilized communities, such as castes, orders of nobility and aristocratic privileges.⁵⁹ Not even a common religion can extinguish the hereditary aversion of the Arab⁶⁰ to the Turk, of the Kurd to the Nestorian of Syria; or the bitter hostility of the Magyar and Sclave, who, without intermingling, have inhabited the same country for centuries. But as the different types lose their purity and become blended, this hostility of race abates; the maxim of absolute and permanent inequality is first discussed, then doubted. A man of mixed race or caste will not be apt to admit disparity in his double ancestry. The superiority of particular types, and their consequent claims to dominion, find fewer advocates. This dominion is stigmatized as a

⁵⁹ The author of *Democracy in America* (vol. ii. book 3, ch. 1), speculating upon the total want of sympathy among the various classes of an aristocratic community, says: "Each caste has its own opinions, feelings, rights, manners, and mode of living. The members of each caste do not resemble the rest of their fellow-citizens; they do not think and feel in the same manner, and believe themselves a distinct race... When the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, who all belonged to the aristocracy by birth and education, relate the tragical end of a noble, their grief flows apace; while they tell, with the utmost indifference, of massacres and tortures inflicted on the common people. In this they were actuated by an *instinct* rather than by a passion, for they felt no habitual hatred or systematic disdain for the people: war between the several classes of the community was not yet declared." The writer gives extracts from Mme. de Sevigné's letters, displaying, to use his own words, "a cruel jocularity which, in our day, the harshest man writing to the most insensible person of his acquaintance would not venture to indulge in; and yet Madame de Sevigné was not selfish or cruel; she was passionately attached to her children, and ever ready to sympathize with her friends, and she treated her servants and vassals with kindness and indulgence." "Whence does this arise?" asks M. De Tocqueville; "have we really more sensibility than our forefathers?" When it is recollected, as has been pointed out in a previous note, that the nobility of France were of Germanic, and the peasantry of Celtic origin, we will find in this an additional proof of the correctness of our author's theory. Thanks to the revolution, the barriers that separated the various ranks have been torn down, and continual intermixture has blended the blood of the Frankish noble and of the Gallic boor. Wherever this fusion has not yet taken place, or but imperfectly, M. De Tocqueville's remarks still apply. – H.

⁶⁰ The spirit of clanship is so strong in the Arab tribes, and their instinct of ethnical isolation so powerful, that it often displays itself in a rather odd manner. A traveller (Mr. Fulgence Fresnel, if I am not mistaken) relates that at Djidda, where morality is at a rather low ebb, the same Bedouine who cannot resist the slightest pecuniary temptation, would think herself forever dishonored, if she were joined in lawful wedlock to the Turk or European, to whose embrace she willingly yields while she despises him.

tyrannical usurpation of power.⁶¹ The mixture of castes gives rise to the political axiom that all men are equal, and, therefore, entitled to the same rights. Indeed, since there are no longer any distinct hereditary classes, none can justly claim superior merit and privileges. But this assertion, which is true only where a complete fusion has taken place, is applied to the whole human race – to all present, past, and future generations. The political axiom of equality which, like the bag of Æolus, contains so many tempests, is soon followed by the scientific. It is said – and the more heterogeneous the ethnical elements of a nation are, the more extensively the theory gains ground – that, "all branches of the human family are endowed with intellectual capacities of the same nature, which, though in different stages of development, are all equally susceptible of improvement." This is not, perhaps, the precise language, but certainly the meaning. Thus, the Huron, by proper culture, might become the equal of the Englishman and Frenchman. Why, then, I would ask, did he never, in the course of centuries, invent the art of printing or apply the power of steam; why, among the warriors of his tribe, has there never arisen a Cæsar or a Charlemagne, among his bards and medicine-men, a Homer or a Hippocrates?

These questions are generally met by advancing the influence of climate, local circumstances, etc. An island, it is said, can never be the theatre of great social and political developments in the same measure as a continent; the natives of a southern clime will not display the energy of those of the north; seacoasts and large navigable rivers will promote a civilization which could never have flourished in an inland region; – and a great deal more to the same purpose. But all these ingenious and plausible hypotheses are contradicted by facts. The same soil and the same climate have been visited, alternately, by barbarism and civilization. The degraded fellah is charred by the same sun which once burnt the powerful priest of Memphis; the learned professor of Berlin lectures under the same inclement sky that witnessed the miseries of the savage Finn.

⁶¹ The man
Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys.
Power, like a desolating pestilence,
Pollutes whate'er it touches; and
obedience,
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
Makes slaves of man, and of the human frame
A mechanized automaton.
Shelley,
Queen Mab.[63]

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