

ARTICLE V.

NO NATIONAL STABILITY WITHOUT MORALITY.

BY PRESIDENT CHARLES W. SUPER, LL.D.

THERE is, perhaps, no thought that occupies men's minds more frequently at the present time than admiration for the wonderful age in which we live. Nor is this surprising. When one compares the close of the year 1896 with that of the latter years of the sixties, and examines somewhat in detail the inventions and discoveries of the intervening period, he finds himself indeed in a new world. In no one particular has public opinion undergone a more marked change than in the estimate placed upon the value of knowledge, *per se*. So many secrets have been wrung from the keeping of material nature, and the knowledge thus gained has been turned, in so many ways, to the effective service of man, that the world seems to be looking for its temporal salvation in this direction. That the increase of the public welfare is commensurate with the advance of knowledge is an axiom that has influenced public opinion within the last few decades to a remarkable degree.

The most tangible expression of this belief is the liberality shown, both by states and individuals, in the establishment and support of institutions for the highest education. It is entirely safe to say that more money has been donated and voted for this purpose during the last ten or fifteen years than during the entire preceding history of our country. Most of it has come from men, and by the votes of men, whose scholastic qualifications are not above the average. They have been influenced in their action by the

tide of popular opinion, perhaps far more than by their own inclination, at least in a majority of instances. But this estimate of the value of knowledge is not confined to the United States. France has been extraordinarily liberal in its provision for both elementary and higher education. The Republic has literally covered the country with normal schools and faculties, corresponding to some extent to German universities. Germany has for a long time been conspicuous for its liberality in educational matters. Strangely, too, the Germans, under a government verging on a despotism, promote education, in order to maintain their political institutions; while France and the United States are pursuing the same course, in order to strengthen their free institutions. We have been persistently reminded that we must educate, or we must perish by our own prosperity; and that, unless we do so, we shall inevitably lose the liberties that have been handed down to us from our fathers. It is hard to see how anything can produce two diametrically opposite effects, and it may be profitable to examine the foundation upon which the popular belief rests.

If the effect of the general diffusion of knowledge is to promote the highest welfare of the largest number, it is probable that the form of government has little to do with the question. But it will be profitable to consider, whether those periods of the world that are most conspicuous for intelligence were, on the whole, the happiest; whether there are not other factors of the social organism, such as national traits, individual characteristics, and creeds, that are more potent for good than mere knowledge; and whether, conversely, we are not mistaken in assuming that all we need to do to make men better is to make them more intelligent. It is taken for granted that to make men more intelligent is to make them more reasonable. Is the assumption correct? Is it true that, as the

majority becomes enlightened, as the world judges enlightenment, they will be more ready to help those, always a large proportion, of the population who need help and guidance and encouragement?

One cannot read attentively the history of the ancient Greeks without feeling all the time that many of them clearly recognized the horrors of war, and the futility of engaging in it with a view of gaining any permanent good. This is plainly indicated in their historians, their philosophers, and their dramatic moralists. They recognize clearly, too, the existence of a rule of right that was not dependent upon the changing beliefs and impulses of men. They nevertheless were compelled to yield to public opinion in the midst of which they lived, and Greek civilization decayed under their eyes and through forces against which they continually protested. A modern historian even goes so far as to say that the Greeks were not naturally a warlike people, in spite of the fact that they were almost constantly engaged in war. Even in the Homeric Poems the transcendent value of obedience to law and the rule of right are clearly recognized. Yet how little influence did this recognition have on the progress of events. It is almost literally true that the most civilized and intelligent people of antiquity went to their destruction with their eyes open. Though wanting to do good, evil was ever present with them. It was impossible to make head against an all-powerful, pernicious public opinion that received its inspiration not from reason but from sentiment.

On the other hand, the Roman state was built up and maintained by the intense feeling of patriotism which made its citizens always act in the spirit of the maxim, "My country, right or wrong." The Romans possessed a genius for government which was not founded on intelligence, but on a national trait. Passing over a large interval of time, we find this genius the most marked in the English.

Yet, taken on a whole, it will hardly be claimed that they have been the most intelligent people of Europe for the last three or four hundred years. On the other hand, it seems clear that the moral forces have, during most of this time, been more active and more influential in England than in any country on the Continent.

Though there is some apparent injustice in comparing the two periods, owing to the difference in time, we are safe in saying that the Reformation in Germany had much less influence on the morals of the people than the movement inaugurated in England by the Wesleys and Whitefield. In mere scholastic learning Germany was unquestionably far ahead of England in the middle of the eighteenth century, and probably for a long time before. The same is true in a more marked degree of France. Yet, while France and Germany were filled with scholars and men of genius, the country was going from bad to worse, and, so far as a regeneration came, it was not inspired or carried out by them. In England, moral and religious forces have always been active and vigorous, as they still are; on the Continent, except at rare intervals, weak. No matter how much we investigate, no matter how large a stock of facts we accumulate, if one has no inclination to use them, of what advantage are they? And while England is doing less to-day than either France or Germany to promote intelligence, and put the highest learning within the reach of all, we do not hear of much that is done to promote practical morality in the latter countries. If we are to judge the situation from the testimony of Germans and Frenchmen, the moral condition of their countrymen is becoming worse as they are becoming more intelligent. Plainly the salvation of the world does not come through worldly wisdom. This is a truth confirmed by past experience and present observation.

In view of the testimony just cited, the man who be-

lieved that "righteousness exalteth a nation" may well ask, What then shall we do? Evidently to fill the land with scholars is not to fill it with men of character, with men who believe in doing right because it is right. If the more intelligent members of a community are truthful and commercially honest because the practice of truth and honesty are the characteristics of a gentleman, but take no interest in the weak and degraded, it is not hard to see where and to what such indifference will lead.

If there is any good reason for the somewhat widely diffused faith in the efficacy of mere education to promote the happiness of mankind, it ought to become strikingly manifest in the growing aversion to war. Is this so? A recent writer truthfully says: "If men forsake the use of swords and spears, it assuredly is not to convert them into plough-shares and pruning-hooks, but to substitute rifled cannon for these antique instruments of slaughter, now found ineffectively murderous. Surely never was the aspect of Europe so threatening as it is at the present hour. Standing armies of a vastness hitherto undreamed of confront one another. The frontiers of every country are embattled. Railways are converted into military roads. The physical sciences are ransacked for engines of carnage. The whole continent is an immense parade-ground, destined,—who can say how soon?—to become a vast battle-field." "'Tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true." In this willingness of the nations of the earth to engage in deadly conflict with each other, upon a trifling pretext, we see the power of irrational motives operating destructively. It is the spirit of a pack of mastiffs ready to fly at each other's throat as soon as an opportunity is offered. One does not need to have been a very profound student of history to know that when two governments wanted to go to war with each other they easily found a reason for so doing. Most of these professed reasons were flimsy enough, but

they served their purpose. The world is still ready, as it always has been, to applaud a weak nation for taking up arms against a strong one, though the outcome is plain beforehand. It at least shows pluck,—a praiseworthy trait, certainly, but it needs proper direction.

We all know the story of the German professor, who, when told that his house was on fire, said to his informant, "Go tell my wife; I never meddle with domestic affairs." He was a typical student; absorbed in some insignificant matter, he took no account of what was going on around him. In truth, the people have never perished for lack of knowledge, but for lack of the will to use it. When we see on what utterly useless trifles many men have spent their lives merely because they hoped to find out something never known before, we need to beware of expecting the world's salvation to depend on mere worldly wisdom. There has never been a time in what we may properly call the history of the world when there was not sufficient available knowledge to make all men as happy as they can ever expect to be, if they had seriously tried to use it. John Howard was a man of slender intellectual attainments as the world estimates attainments, but he was inspired by the noble motive to use what he knew for the uplifting of the neglected and vile of his race. And thousands before and after him have done the same. Not many wise are called, as the world counts wisdom; yet, except for these, the present generation would be far worse off than it is.

The moral law is founded on reason, but it does not appeal primarily to the reasoning faculties. To not more than three of the commands of the Decalogue is added a reason for obeying them. They seem to have been framed on the principle that men should obey as children are taught to obey their parents, in the full reliance that obedience may safely be trusted to justify itself. It is a maxim well established by experience, that he who stops to reason

when temptation assails him is in great danger of yielding. The only safe course is to turn resolutely away from even the appearance of evil. We do not believe that those who know most are the best. If this were so, the professional men in every country would be models of uprightness. There is much justification for the intuitive dread with which many a mother sees her son go away to college. It is not surprising that the plain people fear the effect on the moral character which the larger outlook gained by increasing knowledge brings with it. We need not wonder that in so many ages of the world some of the best men and women have looked back to the good old times with an inexpressible longing.

There has always been a movement of the population to the towns, and from the towns to the cities. It has never been more marked than in our day. No one can be blind to the fact, that, where the population is most dense, the elevating agencies are most powerful; but it is equally evident, that these agencies are often utterly inadequate to the demands made upon them. Yet it is to-day as it has been always; we look to the cities as the centers of intelligence and culture. No one who is morally weak seeks the city that he may be reformed, because he will find there many intelligent people, many fine churches, many eloquent preachers, great lawyers, and distinguished physicians. He will seek his own regeneration rather by reversing his course, and going where these conditions do not prevail. It is a well-established maxim, that cities are centers of moral turpitude of every form, and it has always been so.

The more one studies the epistolary writings of the New Testament in the light of the conditions under which they were produced, the more he becomes impressed with the marvelous insight into the needs of their time exhibited by the writers. They developed and applied the simple teachings of the Founder of Christianity in a manner that can-

not fail to command our admiration. Every Epistle is different from every other, according as the circumstances of those addressed were unlike, yet the fundamental theme is everywhere the same; the motives to which appeal is made, are the same. The various schools of Greek philosophy had each essayed in vain to provide a regenerative force. They were all originally too intellectual, and had in time degenerated into mere idle speculation, or into quiescent introspection. So far as they had any definite aim, it was to know, not what and how to do. The author of the "Education of the Greek People" well says, "Until the supernatural sense can recognize as its object a living God, or Being with perfect intelligence, love, and will, supernaturally correlated, but in no sense identical with the spirit of men, so that his perfections are their goal and not his being, their grave, it will never be able to maintain itself against abstracting reason or supply the basis of moral life." And again, "The lesson of history is, that of all the faculties of the human soul, that which demands the most careful training is the supernatural sense. While it remains undeveloped all other education leads ultimately to nothing. It was the failure to recognize this that made Greek education impotent to save the world, and forced it to crown itself with Christianity, whose function is to train the supernatural sense to a recognition of the living God as the Father of Spirits, the guardian of the moral law, and the bond of institutional life."

Passing again to modern times, for we are not here concerned with chronological sequence but with parity of conditions, we find many points of resemblance between western Europe in the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Roman Empire in the time of Christ. What is called the literature of these periods takes singularly little account of the common people. They are not the submerged tenth, but the neglected two-thirds or

more. The classical writers of these periods rarely mention them, except to stigmatize their brutality, rail at their ignorance, or sneer at their stupidity. It is true there exists a considerable body of devotional literature called into existence by the spiritual wants of those who aspired to a better life, but these books rarely found their way into the hands of the educated, and certainly did not exercise any influence on them. As in England, so in Germany and France, there was always a considerable portion of the population that were genuinely pious and sincerely desirous to lead pure and holy lives. But the masses were little, if at all, influenced by their example. Not until our own day did it occur to any one to write a *History of the English People*,—apparently because hitherto readers were only interested to know what the upper class, those who were more or less concerned in shaping the political destinies of the country, did.

A brilliant passage from Kidd's "*Social Evolution*" (page 236) sums up briefly the result of the forces and counter forces. "It has to be confessed that in England during the nineteenth century the educated classes, in almost all the great political changes that have been effected, have taken the side of the party afterwards admitted to have been in the wrong. They have invariably opposed at the time the measures they have subsequently come to defend and justify. This is to be noticed alike of measures which have extended education, which have emancipated trade, which have extended the franchise. The educated classes have even, it must be confessed, opposed measures which have tended to secure religious freedom and to abolish slavery. The motive force behind the long list of progressive measures carried along during this period has in scarcely any appreciable measure come from the educated classes; it has come almost exclusively from the middle and lower classes, who have in turn acted, not under the

stimulus of intellectual motives, but under the influence of their altruistic feelings.”

I am aware that he who undertakes to show the influence of motives generally classed as irrational in the development of society and to set forth their potency for good lays himself open to the charge of returning to the text on which the school of Rousseau preached so many powerful sermons in the last century. The influence and vitality of the doctrines so forcibly proclaimed by a man who was almost without education is a strong tribute to their truthfulness. In Germany a man of different mould, but aroused by the same conditions, was spurred to action while his French prototype was content to talk and write. The new doctrines were promulgated at a time when Europe was at least to some extent prepared for them, though this preparedness consisted rather in dissatisfaction with the old than a clear recognition of the needed remedy. The conservatism of the upper classes had become well-nigh unendurable. Their rule of life was regulated by the thought that for them the state existed; for them government performed its functions; it was right for them to exploit the resources of the country to the fullest extent it would bear. Almost all who had the courage to cry out against the existing conditions were proscribed; were often in danger of incarceration and even of their lives. That one man is as good as another; that all men are brothers and bound together by obligations to mutual helpfulness; that it is the duty of the weak to protect the strong, are not articles that are found in the creed of those who stand foremost in the ranks of the intelligent. It is Christianity, and Christianity alone, that has always insisted on the supreme importance of such teachings to the welfare of mankind in the widest sense. And it was just because the intelligent classes, not excepting those whose calling made them the exponents of Christianity, had long

ignored these teachings, that a protest arose against the wretched condition in which the poor were perforce kept, from so many of those who had no sympathy with the prevailing religious creeds. It was altruistic feeling breaking through the crust of custom that had been hardened by the conservatism of centuries.

This brief sketch of facts and inferences is not intended as a protest against the growing intelligence of our time. It is written for the purpose of calling attention to a serious danger into which we seem to be rapidly drifting. Some of the European nations are already on the verge of a precipice over which they may topple at any moment. There are few things for which it is impossible to find a reason. The most atrocious crimes have had their defenders; the most unjust institutions their apologists. Sentiments and ideas, too, are often misleading; yet it is in obedience to these mainsprings of action that the world has grown better. They are the prime motors in human progress. They furnish motives to which all men in every progressive country naturally respond. It is with them that reformers have primarily to reckon; it is to them they must chiefly look for support; against them it is impossible to make head. We may enlighten the head as much as we please, if we do not succeed in filling the heart with proper sentiments we shall not inspire any one to activity or to self-sacrifice for the good of others. It will hardly be denied that a large proportion of those who are engaged in research have no interest whatever in the welfare of mankind. Unquestionably the wisest activity is conditioned by the largest knowledge; but he who never acts until he is sure of being familiar with the entire situation will usually never act at all. I know of no caution that the enlightened nations of the world need more at this time than that against depending on mere human learning to bring about the state of affairs for which all good men wish and for which they devoutly pray.