

HISTORIC PARALLELS.

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ONE of the most curious things in history, and, as I venture to think, not the least instructive of all those which history presents to the consideration of the careful student, is the parallelism which may be discovered between events occurring in different ages, and at remote places.

The subject and period treated of in Mr. Mayer's recent paper recalled to my mind one very striking illustration of this, which I am induced now to bring before you.

Is it not a very singular fact that so many of the events of the "Great Rebellion" in this country, should have been acted over again in the French Revolution? Both these great national outbreaks arose through contentions between the king and his parliament: in both countries, the king was captured after an attempted flight: in both, he was brought to a mock trial before his own subjects: by them he was condemned, and by them beheaded. In both countries the nobility and clergy fell with the monarch: in both, the parliament was at length superseded by an usurper: in both, that usurper was the first military genius of the age: in both (for the period of Richard Cromwell's rule is of no weight to the contrary), the usurping power was not continued beyond the tenure of the first possessor: in both, the legitimate succession was restored with great *éclat*: but, in both, the successors of the restored sovereigns were dethroned: in both cases, the vacant throne was offered to, and accepted by, a different branch of the royal family, the deposed sovereign being driven into exile—the English king

(James II.) into France, and the French monarch (Charles X.) into England: the exclusion of both these sovereigns extended to their descendants; but in both, the power of the hero of the revolution was limited to himself: William and Mary had no child to inherit the crown, and Louis Philippe died an expelled exile.

But there are circumstances connected with these events which are yet more singular than even these strange coincidences. The parallel occurrences took place within a few years of exactly a century and a half. Charles I. was beheaded in the decade 1640-1650:—add 150 years to this, and we are brought to 1790-1800. It was within that period that Louis XVI. was put to death. Charles II. was restored A.D. 1660. In 1815, a century and a half (plus 5 years) later, Louis XVIII. succeeded Napoleon in the throne of France, as Charles had put an end to the rule of the Cromwells in England. James II. was dethroned, and William of Orange appointed king, A.D. 1688-9: add 150 years to this, and we are brought to 1830-1840; and it was in the “three glorious days of July,” 1830, that the dynasty of Charles X. fell, and Louis Philippe was called to succeed him.

Is it fair, or is it safe, to reason from these facts? They do not stand alone either. There are others which history would furnish, from different periods: as, for example, the efforts of Queen Mary, to re-establish the Papal authority, and stop the Reformation in England, in the middle of the sixteenth century; and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, intended to extirpate the Reformation in France, at the end of the seventeenth,—the results of which were much alike in the two countries.

Very recently, the present ruler of France boasted before the world, in reference to his campaign in Italy, that France was the only country which could afford to go to war “for an idea.” There was a time in our history when we might have made

the same boast. It was at the Peace of Utrecht—a *century and a half ago*. For what more than “an idea” did we go to war when Marlborough commanded our victorious armies in the Low Countries? He won all his battles, yet gained nothing for his cause. We all know old Caspar’s pointless story to his grandchildren, and its lame conclusion, about the “famous victory” of Blenheim—when

“Everybody praised the Duke,
Who such a fight did win;
But what good came of it, at last?
Quoth little Peterkin.
Why, that I cannot tell, said he;
But, ’twas a famous victory.”

Surely such fighting “for an idea,” *and nothing more*, would gratify the vanity and justify the boast of even the Emperor of the French. We have, however, lived on a century and a half in the life of a nation, and have left that age of empty boastfulness so far behind. The war I have just been speaking of was a marvellous instance of doing a great deal for nothing, on the one hand; and losing everything, yet surrendering nothing, on the other. Macaulay describes it as having been undertaken “for the purpose of transferring the crown of Spain from one bigoted Catholic to another.” A notable *idea*, truly, for the two successors of James II., *in his own lifetime*, to lend themselves to; and yet, though Marlborough’s victories were signal, complete, and crushing—though the actual King of Spain was habitually beaten, and twice driven as a fugitive from his own capital—though the vast power of France was nearly ruined through its efforts to support him, so that Louis had, twice over, begged for terms of peace which yielded everything, but which were scornfully rejected, the final result was the conclusion of peace upon terms which gained nothing to the cause of those whose arms had gained everything, but actually secured the permanent possession of the throne to the very man whom all the combined and victorious efforts of

England and her allies had been aiming to destroy : so that among other things, perhaps, the passion of "fighting for "an idea" may have attacked our neighbours in France, a hundred and fifty years after we had outgrown it.*

May we venture, then, to draw the inference that, historically, these neighbours of ours are a century and a half behind ourselves? Such an inference would, perhaps, be too galling to them, and too flattering to ourselves. I will not presume to theorize upon the subject. I simply place before you the facts and the dates: deal with them as you please; but one reflection seems forced upon the most indifferent observer, which is, that in reference to the political freedom, and the social condition of the French people, a century and a half does not seem too long a term to give them to emerge from their present state, and to overtake ourselves. May the day be nearer than that. The free man knows no jealousy; he is only anxious that those less fortunate than he should rejoice in the same liberty, know how to value it wisely, and to enjoy it with moderation; and in so doing reap all the varied blessings,—social, political, and national,—which freedom brings in its train.

Dr. Arnold, in his Lectures on Modern History, has well said—"The harvest gathered in the fields of the past is to be "brought home for the use of the present." Such is the use of History. "We live, to some extent, in peace and comfort," says another writer, "upon the results obtained for us by the "chronicles of our forefathers. We do not see this," he adds,

* In reference to the "Freedom of the Press" (if that term is descriptive of the thralldom which still fetters the French Press), perhaps some little advance has been made by our neighbours—they approach us a *little* nearer; for it is not quite a century and a half (though not much less) since that parallel period in our own history, when Dr. Johnson wrote the debates in Parliament, under the title of "The Senate of Lilliput," and evaded the restrictions of the law by giving feigned names to the speakers, or substituting transparent parodies, or clumsy anagrams, which disclosed what they appeared to conceal.

“without some reflection. But imagine what a full-grown nation would be if it knew no history—like a full-grown man with only a child’s experience.” Indeed we do not require to *imagine* such a case. It *exists*, in that strange people whom we have just defeated in the fortresses of their exclusiveness and their prejudice, in the remotest East. What an astounding and incredible amount of ignorance will be removed from the minds of the Chinese people by a knowledge of our history: when they know *really* who and what we are. Next to the Gospel itself, nothing, we may venture to say, would go so far to render impossible the monstrous proceedings of that people as to know who it is they have been fighting against.*

But this is a wide subject. Our recent enemies have yet to learn the first *rudiments* of that wonderful story which tells how the inhabitants of “this little isle, set in the silver sea,” have grown up through the trials and struggles of a thousand years, to be the ruling race of the wide universe. To us it is a familiar story, and we can afford to turn from the grand picture, as it spreads itself on the broad canvas of the past, to a closer examination of some of its smaller details. Indeed, the eminent living author just now quoted, says—“The most likely way of attracting men’s attention to historical subjects will be by presenting them with small portions of history, of great interest, thoroughly examined. This may give them the habit of applying thought and criticism to historical matters.”† Such has been my purpose in the notes and queries with which I opened this paper; and when we come to see how events and characters seem to be repeated, and reproduced, in various periods of the world’s history: how, in the language of Holy Writ—“The thing which hath been is that which shall

* Macaulay quotes Voltaire as saying, in one of his 6000 pamphlets, that he was the first person who told the French that England had produced eminent men besides the Duke of Marlborough.

† “Friends in Council,” ii. 206.”

“be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and “there is no new thing under the sun,” we seem to get at this principle as the law of human progress—that “one thing “is set over against another.” Motion is not continuous and direct, but fitful and erratic; action and *reaction* are in constant interchange. The advance of the human race may be compared to the climbing up a hill—a struggle against the natural law of gravitation; you go now to this side with your load of drawbacks, and now to that, and it is by the constant tendency upwards that (errors and accidents excepted) the ascent is slowly and surely made, in spite of inevitable obstacles.

If you examine into the history of human thought and action, you will find this to be the common rule. Sometimes slowly, and with a measured tread, and at other times with a quick rebound, this alternation is constantly occurring, and the facts which it discloses are some of the most striking phenomena in the history of man. The martyr of one age is the hero of the next: the heresy of one generation is the creed of its successor: the theories and dreams of to-day are the realized facts of to-morrow: down deep, and nearly lost, they may be, in the trough of the sea at one period, but it is only to be thrown up high upon the beach into the light of day upon the crest of the next succeeding wave. Thus the rebound from superstition is to infidelity: from tyranny to anarchy. The laxity of Charles the Second’s reign was the historical consequence of the bow having been too sternly bent during the ascendancy of Cromwell and the Puritans, in the times we have already spoken of. The military despotisms of the Bonapartes have arisen out of the disorganisation of the preceding revolutions. The homœopathist will tell you that his mode of medical treatment, and the pre-Raphaelite will insist that his own particular *craze*, have sprung into existence in precisely the same manner—as the revulsion from their opposites. In

New England, the rigid prohibition of all theatrical amusements has led finally to this result—"That the rage for scenic representation," according to the testimony of a recent traveller, "is, perhaps, greater in Boston, than in any town in the "United States, except New Orleans."

As the grand-daughters of those who used to pin themselves up in the straitest of skirts, now flourish in all the spreading amplitude of crinoline; as the ladies of our time have been wearing a tire for the head which is a great deal less than a bonnet, while those of Queen Caroline's day wore one which was a great deal more than a bonnet; as the reaction from "pantaloon" is to "pegtops;" and the gossamer tie has displaced that stifling winding-sheet about the neck, which even Beau Brummel could not adjust without innumerable "failures;" as the sons of over-strict parents are sometimes the greatest of reprobates; as Voltaire avowed that he was first made an infidel by being required to believe what he felt to be incredible; as the founder of the *Tablet* newspaper—more Romish than the Romanists—had been brought up a Quaker; as Sir Francis Burdett, who had been imprisoned in the Tower as the most refractory of Radicals, became, in his old age, the most tenacious of Tories:—so is it still in every other sphere where the fallibility of human nature opens the door to the operation of the same law.

Not long ago, churches were built like barns: they were mean, and cheap, and hideous: it seemed as if anything was good enough for God's service. That evil has cured itself, or been cured, and now it is evidently thought that nothing is too good to give to Him who gives us everything. If it were necessary to seek for other illustrations, and fitting to take them from the history of the different schools of religious thought amongst us, we should readily see this same truth strikingly exemplified in our various "church parties." An age of cold intellectualism is followed by one of earnest

spiritualism ; and a zealous upholding of the doctrines of the Faith, produces, at length, a closer attention to the externals of church order and discipline.

And thus it is, that while we are ever rushing onwards, we are constantly looking back. We take our lessons from the Past, while we buckle on our armour to do the work of the Present and the Future. Surrounded as we are by new discoveries, and by the novel application of knowledge which is no longer new, the principle of deference to authority and reverence for antiquity meets us at every step. But, more singular still, our own veneration for what is ancient, is altogether eclipsed—absolutely placed out of the reach of all reasonable comparison, by the passion for the relics of old associations and manners which, in our American brethren—in the newest and the most progressive nation upon earth—amounts almost to idolatry. Witness the crowds of enthusiastic pilgrims from the New World to the home scenes which are associated with the names and the works of our common forefathers: witness the anxiety which was expressed to have Shakspeare's house carried across the Atlantic, and set up as it stands at Stratford, in the western world: witness also the avidity with which the best copies of the best editions of English books of value are bought up in this country to enrich American libraries. To what also, but to the wide-spread influence of the same principle can we fairly ascribe the extensive reprint of old books; the undeniable popularity of old authors; the prevalent love for antiquities; the intelligent admiration for the Old Masters in painting; the increasing familiarity with the works of the older musical composers; and the reproduction of old forms and fashions in things innumerable? Indeed, this love of what is old has attained to the dignity of a science, and we have its activity and research evidenced in the various departments of Ethnology, Archæology, and Philology, in which the lovers of such pursuits may busy themselves, very profitably,

to enquire into the origin of races, their popular customs, and their current languages. "The lovers of poetry" said one who was ardent in his love of it—the late Professor Wilson—"The lovers of poetry have fallen back upon still "older bards. Think ye that Shakspeare and Milton are "without their worshippers? In how many thousand "libraries—great and small—are they to be found? Bequeathed "unawares from generation to generation, neglected by whole "families during their whole lifetimes, by their successors "rescued from idle oblivion, their names again household "words, and their spirits household gods."

But it is unnecessary, and would only be tedious, to prosecute this inquiry, or accumulate these illustrations, further.

One conclusion which we may fairly draw from the study of general history seems obviously deducible here: that all results in the life and progress of nations must be allowed the proper period for their natural growth. If they are worth having, they are worth waiting for; and if they are to be beneficial, not baneful—satisfying, and not disappointing—they *must* be waited for—and *must* be the result of natural growth and prudent culture. The gourd which grows up in a night will wither in a day, and afford only the mockery of a shelter; while the sturdy oak, which has grown strong in resisting and braving the storms of centuries, is destined to long life still; to glow in many a summer's sun; to weather many a wintry blast; and to be the refuge and the trust of unknown generations yet to come.

Nor is it forbidden to us to look further; and, assuredly, if we do reverently look, we shall infallibly find, the signs of a Divine Presence, and the workings of a Divine Power in the affairs of the world, which should move us to earnest endeavours that we may realize our own responsibility, and

discharge our own duty. For whatever else may change they can never change. Our own responsibility will survive every change of dynasty: our own duty remain unaltered through every change of polity. And the fact that the various systems which have prevailed in the government of even our own country, were suited to other times, and are not in their completeness suited to our own, suggests this reflection also—that all the different systems of polity which Providence permits at various periods to influence the destinies of nations, have in them something specially adapted to the exigencies of the times in which they exist, and that under Divine superintendence each performs its purpose better than any other institution could possibly perform it. And when that purpose is effected, and society has been benefited thereby, and circumstances have changed, and fresh necessities have sprung up which demand new agencies adapted to their peculiar characters, other systems arise which operate under the same High sanction and for the same great ends, and thus human improvement and human happiness are beneficently and wisely ministered unto by Him whose creatures we are, and whose will is our present happiness as a preparative for our future glory.