rich man. He might in war betray his country. He might sell himself to a corrupt political party. He might join the army of some selfish sovereign bent on conquest and plunder, and gain a high position. Or he might pursue yet safer methods. He might turn first a usurer, then a financier. He might keep a degrading public-house, or a gigantic immoral place of amusement. He might issue a debasing newspaper, write corrupting books and dramatic pieces. Provided he does not expose himself to the hatred, contempt, and even the unfavourable criticism of his fellow-beings, or injure his health, there is positively nothing to prevent him from adopting all these courses to the great detriment of humanity, so long as he is perfectly sure that he shall not be called to account after death.

What some of our scientists forget is that very few people are in the same position as they themselves are, where respectability and quasi-philanthropy pays; but on the contrary, that the great majority live under the constant temptation to secure wealth, health, esteem, and reputation, by means which are injurious to society. To such arguments they can only reply that the man, however successful, who attains his success by anti-social means runs a risk of ruining the happiness of his life by loss of self-respect.

But, if the man has a conscience,—and he could

not lose his self-respect without one—it could not trouble him so long as he was convinced that he had done the best for himself. By bringing the conscience at all into the discussion, the scientists fall back on an emotion which has been always intimately associated with the sense of personal responsibility, and which they themselves have been compelled, in order to protect their theories, to deny absolutely as an instinct or to represent as the result of religious education.

For this reason, Max Nordau would not call that instinct in man which prompts him to live and act morally—an instinct which is the original motor of all moral progress—conscience. He would probably prefer to call it the social instinct. But names matter little. The essential point is, that there exists in man's consciousness a strong instinct which cannot be reasoned away. This instinct is intimately connected with another, without which it would never have produced the results we see around us—namely, the instinct that the *Ego* is imperishable. No one would deny the universal existence of this instinct, but plenty of scientists, while acknowledging it as an inherited tendency, would deny it any value as an argument in favour of the immortality of the *Ego*, on the ground that a hazy, unreasoned, and utterly inexplicable yearning need not have a distinct goal.

The instinct of human beings is a subject which has been very much neglected by science, and for the good reason that, whatever instincts may be natural to man, they have been carefully smothered by teachings, examples, and experience, all appealing to his reason from infancy upwards. He never uses, never tries, and never suspects the existence of his instincts, and when accidentally they lead him right, he regards the fact as a delusion, and even avoids mentioning it from a fear of being laughed at. This has however not prevented men, and often remarkable men, from being guided by their instincts; only it is called feeling, taste, luck. There are examples of men who owe the greater part of their success to instinctive feeling, and who have committed great mistakes by having trusted too much to it. Besides it is generally believed that woman's instincts are clear and trustworthy, and many men consider themselves to have been largely benefited by consulting them.

But, in order to get at a true appreciation of the value and power of instincts, we must go to the animals. What else but instinct could we call the feeling which allows the carrier-pigeon to find its way from London to Paris in an atmosphere of darkness and fog which would render it impossible for the most experienced mariner to distinguish between north and south. It is a well-known fact

that dogs and even cats that have been left behind by their owners have followed them at great distances, though the owner has gone by rail or water and the animal has had to find its way across country. In face of such facts and considerations, no man who has not a strong bias would suggest that an instinct that is general to humanity need not be heeded.

The instinct of personal responsibility cannot be re-christened social instinct and then minimised by the assertion that the social instinct is the outcome of reason, the sense of self-preservation and intelligent selfishness: for in that case the poor labourer who wanted to become wealthy and famous, as instanced above, could be as evil as he liked so long as he was successful, and could not be restrained by the social instinct, but only by conscience, or in other words, the feeling of unlimited personal responsibility.

Atheistic scientists, who lead a moral and useful life, cannot hold themselves up as a pattern of results produced by social instincts, because in the great majority of men, placed differently, these instincts would permit them to injure society to an enormous extent. Nor does the assertion of these scientists bear the stamp of sincerity when they say: "Behold us, we have no belief in personal responsibility beyond the grave. And yet we labour

and run risks for the good of humanity. We sacrifice our time, our money, our health for others, and we remain poor, while we could be rich. Our life is the outcome of intelligent selfishness."

They would have a better chance of convincing us, if they said: "Life after death is impossible. We prove by our lives that we believe this. Our moral lives and our humanitarianism are sheer hypocrisy which we practice in order to get esteem and fame. The books we write are not true, but they bring us money, and we do not care how much evil we inflict on humanity by ripping away the only foundation on which its morality and happiness can be built, while the substitute which we supply is worthless. We might have averted an immense amount of vice and degradation by leaving old religions alone until the Religion of Humanity was perfect enough to replace them. But we attack them now because in this way we make money and fame."

It is not the well-meaning, plodding scientist, striving to arrest disease, lessen pain, and dispel superstition, that can bounce us into the belief in personal irresponsibility. This could only be done by real flesh and blood, Ducs des Esseintes, men like the hero in Huysman's novel, "A Rebours." This author, whom Max Nordau classes among drivelling imbeciles, has shown that he has a clearer

idea than our clever alienist what type of men the certitude of personal irresponsibility could produce. We are fully convinced that Max Nordau is no Duc des Esseintes at heart, masquerading as a benefactor of humanity, and, if he boasts a little of his good intentions and not at all of his wickedness, it is because he believes that what he does is right, and does it because he is prompted by that strong sense of personal responsibility which his scientific prejudices and his lack of logical power cause him to deny.

Having striven by "vigorous affirmations" to implant the belief in his readers' minds that they have no *Ego* independent of their body, and that they consequently are fatally doomed to become what their defective brains and nerves are bound to make them, he proceeds with another series of "vigorous affirmations," that degeneration is on the increase, that it is characteristic of the end of the century, that the men whom we take for geniuses are mattoids, and finally, that the whole of our western civilization is degenerate. We have, in preceding chapters, tried to show how he has neglected to pay any attention to the many signs all over the civilized world indicating an increase in mental and moral powers; how he endeavours to overwhelm his readers by comparisons between the symptoms in real degenerates, or lunatics, and similar symptoms

—accompanied however by perfect rationality and great intelligence—in authors and artists, and concludes that they are as mad as the madman. He tries to force this conclusion on the unwary reader by simply ignoring all other grounds for eccentricity that would have been taken into account by an unbiassed enquirer.

Let us instance the way in which he judges Zola. He never for an instant regards him as a free agent, but speaks of him as a patient suffering from erotic madness and other brain and nerve affections, which compel the novelist to write, and to write exactly in the vein he does.

The very idea that human beings should be thus subjected to all kinds of irresistible impulses produces the same gruesome impression as the old stories of demoniacal possessions. Max Nordau might as well have described Zola as a man hating above all things the writing of novels, with a natural repugnance for anything savouring of the obscene, compelled by a demon in possession of his body and his soul to write the history of the Rougeon-Maquarts and other distasteful works. On the careful reader the impression would have been precisely the same. But no number of "vigorous affirmations" would have induced even the most weak-minded of readers to have accepted the demon, while Zola's eroticism and his mischievous olfactory

nerves may have imprinted themselves upon the minds of some by dint of scientific dissertation.

While it would seem to most people rational to study Zola's character and the state of his mind, in order to form a correct idea of the objects he has in view, Max Nordau, by his method of supposing that a writer is not a free agent, but is compelled to exhibit for the readers of his works the innermost recesses of his consciousness, proceeds in the opposite manner; he evolves the character of writers from the characters of their books. From what he says about Zola, one feels inclined to conclude that this author devotes the large amounts he makes by his writings to the gratification of bestial lusts, living in a kind of harem of degraded women, rapidly destroying by debauch every spark of intelligence left in his tottering brain. We do not know M. Zola personally, but, from what we hear, he seems to live a quiet and laborious life with his wife in a peaceful country house, and far from spending his earnings in riotous living, he banks them as a reserve for old age, to which he seems likely to attain. When however a man's private life and rational attention to his own business seem to clash conspicuously with Max Nordau's diagnoses, his serenity and self-confidence are not in the slightest degree disturbed, because he has given his description to the man's tendency in a "psychia-

tric sense," and has referred to the man's actual life. But the decrepancy between the author's actual life and the life he, according to Max Nordau, ought to lead, is not an extenuating circumstance in the eyes of so harsh a judge as our alienist. On the contrary, it aggravates the sentence, for if the accused author is not in reality the monster he ought to be, it is simply because his attenuated physique does not allow of it, and drives him to through all his debaucheries in his imagination.

We do not admire such literature as Zola has put forth, and do not believe that it has accomplished one iota of the good at which its author, according to his admirers, aims. But all rational men should bear in mind that such books are sure indications that there is something rotten in the State. To ascertain to what an extent the circumstances surrounding the author are capable of inducing a sound-minded man like Zola to write such books, before jumping to the conclusion that such authors are lunatics, would be the method adopted by sincere searchers after truth.

A rapid survey of the circumstances under which Zola began to write will at once show that the inborn eroticism and even coprolalia which Max Nordau tries to foist upon Zola were not the only influences to which he was subjected. In Paris, as in all great capitals, there is a host of young ambi-

tious *littérateurs* who compete for the attention not only of the public but of the publishers. It is far from certain that the books which most please the public would be most acceptable to the publishers, and the latter are, therefore, to a great extent responsible for the state of literature. Max Nordau says that M. Alphonse Lemerre was able to make Parnassians, as the editor, Cotta, in the first half of the century, made German classics; and he is right. A Parisian publisher has the power to make pornographic authors just as well as Parnassians. He is a business man, and of course wishes to obtain a large circulation for his books, and, therefore, is on the look-out for authors who are sensational one way or another. At the time Zola began to write, the obscene novel was beginning to be fashionable. Paul de Kock and his imitators, had become old-fashioned, and the corruption of the Third Empire, as well as the spread of scientific atheism, had created a demand for something racier than the peccadilloes of light-hearted *viveurs*. Besides, pessimism was in the ascendant, and erotic literature had to be morbid instead of gallant and gay.

Several authors of great ability, but strongly influenced by the pessimism of the time, and with the field of their ethical studies limited to the Parisian boulevards and the Quartier Breda, had

paved the way for that false realistic literature of which Zola's writing may be called the climax. The publishers, knowing their market, were eager to accept books of an obscene character, provided they were serious and written in a philosophical spirit. Zola may have seen his way to eclipse anything written in that style, and being himself a child of his time,— materialist, and nervously inclined to exaggeration—may have seized upon the chance of making money and fame, though he probably foresaw that his first novels would expose him to the execration of the Philistines and the respectable world. He might also have foreseen that one day he would be able to establish a sufficient fame to be received by English *littérateurs* as a genius of his time. If, therefore, Zola's object was to push himself to the front, in the manner we here suppose him to have done, he has certainly succeeded—a fact which could not establish his intellectual degradation. He simply yielded to a tremendous temptation, and, if he did so under the impression that the scientists had completely proved the non-existence of personal responsibility, Max Nordau should be the last to blame him.

But there is not the slightest necessity to assume —nor do we assume—that Zola yielded to any temptation at all. On the contrary, it is perfectly possible that, in writing the books he has, he sincerely be-

lieved that he was serving some good purpose. Knowing how many other Frenchmen feel in this respect, we might well suppose that he reasoned somewhat in the following manner: Religion is wrong, and a fraud practised by the clever on the simple-minded. The control which the Church has assumed over the relations of the sexes is one of the means by which it retains its power, and is fraught with immense unhappiness to the people. The separation of the sexes and the devout decency which refrains from openly speaking or writing about sexual subjects, distorts the people's ideas, inflames their imagination, and tempts them into unhealthy vice. Nature is not sinful. It is either the only divinity we have, or it is created by the Almighty, and in this case it is holy. To yield rationally to its dictates is therefore no sin. Books should therefore be written to prove this point, and at the same time accustom the people to look upon nature and its laws without shame, without hypocrisy, and without running the risk of being overpowered by wild passions. In this way humanity may be elevated, because it will be frank and natural, and religion, which science has proved to be inimical to humanity, will lose its influence.

We are not saying that Zola's ideas ran in this groove, only that it is possible that they did. If they did, he would have been utterly wrong; but he

would not have been the first nor the last man whose views have been influenced by their interests. No man who knows both France and England better than Max Nordau seems to do could for one moment doubt that had Zola been born and educated in England, where the surroundings are so vastly different to those of France, he would have written books of quite a different character, and probably free from obscenity. If this be true, it constitutes another reason why the surrounding circumstances of an author should be considered before it is asserted that inborn degeneration is alone responsible for the blemishes of his work.

Max Nordau himself points out that the fashion which brought Zola to the front is on the decline, and that his influence is on the wane. If so, it only proves how limited the influence of such supposed degenerates really is, and that,—at least, with regard to Zola,—Max Nordau's book is out too late, and those who have been deeply impressed by his "vigorous affirmations" about the mental decay of the race need not despond.

Over and over again civilization and society have been threatened by new and apparently dangerous tendencies, but they have generally culminated in absurd exaggerations, and have thus lost their potency. Who knows whether Zola, through the wisdom that the years bring, will not change his opinions,

and with them his vein of writing? We feel morally certain that he is now engaged on some novel entirely free from those erotic allusions which Max Nordau says he cannot avoid—a book as pure as the first part of "La Joie de Vivre"; and if he does, what will become of Max Nordau's imperious dogmas?

Another of those features of Max Nordau's work which strongly impresses his readers is seriousness. He speaks throughout in that grave and solemn tone — the So-spake-the-Lord style — which never yet failed to impress superficial readers. He is anxious to convey the impression that if he has to say unpleasant things, it is because his teachings are momentous to humanity, and not because he wishes to be sensational. He condescends to speak about poetry, drama, and music, but he plainly shows it to be his opinion that all these are vanities, and hardly worthy to occupy a great man's thoughts. He aims at crushing with his contempt both artists and poets, the whole herd who have neglected science, and who try to divert the attention of humanity from this all-important subject. He would scare us with the threat that, when science has elevated humanity for a little longer, such frivolities as poetry, music and dancing will be relegated to the nursery. Grown-up men and women, who now indulge in such pastimes, are made to feel that they belong to degenerates, and that they only prove their folly if they look upon themselves

with any self-respect. He endeavours to deprive love between persons of the two sexes of its poetical reality, and to wrap it in a gloomy scientific misconception by regarding it as a feeling of comradeship grown out of habit, or as the same sexual instinct as in animals. The pure and real love which permeates life, which gives to man his manhood, and to woman her true womanhood, which has created the home, and therefore the State—this love he denies, and expects serious-minded readers to look upon the world-phenomenon and the drama of humanity deprived of their chief elements — light, heat, and motion. He speaks of the tendency in men and women to take their own life when its burdens outbalance its pleasures as calmly as if suicide were the usual exit from our earthly existence.

Max Nordau thus obtains part of his success by the same methods as those so freely adopted by the gloomy anathematising preachers—rapidly becoming types of the past—who, by threats of the devil and hell fire, aim at compelling their hearers to turn their attention from this world in order to brood exclusively on dismal dogmas. He would fain banish from our minds all that appeals to what is truest within us—our imagination and our emotions—as the kill-joy fanatics in the pulpit have banished from our villages the maypole, the dance on the green, and the forfeit game.

He is much mistaken if he believes that by such means he can in our days produce a lasting impression on the common sense and intensely human English mind. Here and there he may drive some clouded soul into neo-Catholicism, and augment the ranks of the symbolists and the decadents, but he will only make the morbid more morbid, or morbid in a different mood. The hard-working and enlightened Englishman does not apply himself savagely to his business for business sake. Nor does he encourage scientific progress for the sake of science.

When he considers himself, and is considered by others, an eminently practical man, it is because he knows what he aims at, and uses, studies, and encourages the most effective and promptest means to attain his ends. But the secret and the essence of this English practicality lies in the fact that his aims, so clear and so precise, are determined by his imagination, his emotions, and his instincts. Unlike the German who despairs of realizing his ideal, the Englishman has it in his imagination as clearly before him as the architect has the plans, elevations and sections of the palace he is going to build. He does not begin to build until he is convinced that every detail is correct. Nothing discourages him more than the spoiling and blurring of his ideals; he stops

his work, as does the builder when his drawings are lost, or found impracticable.

It is vain for Max Nordau to try to persuade the average Englishman, be he educated or not, that the enjoyments which enchant him in his youth shall not cast their roseate hue over the rest of his days. Poetry, music, the drama, are part and parcel of the pleasures the English people look forward to when business has supplied them with the means of enjoying them in the expensive form in which, with us, unfortunately, they are alone obtainable in perfection.

It is not only such enjoyments as educated people of all ages appreciate which for an Englishman retain a life-long charm. Even his boyish tastes give zest to his life, so long as he retains his faculties. At ten years of age he reads, raves and dreams about horses and dogs; at seventy he rides to hounds, and at a still more advanced age he partakes in all the excitements of the racecourse. As a boy he reads about travels and adventures; at middle age, or even later, we find him travelling all over the world in quest of big and small game. Cricket, football, boating, and athletics in general represent the life of English boys, and far into old age they can seldom refrain from glancing at the sporting columns of their paper, which to a foreigner appear as interesting as the dullest of dull market

reports; while athletic sports are witnessed by ever-growing crowds of people of all ages, who watch the proceedings with a zest as intense as that of the Spaniard watching a bull-fight.

And to people who thus enjoy their lives, Max Nordau would say: "You are degenerates, because you enjoy childish things. Put them behind you, and rise to my level. Take a seat at the table of science, where we will show you by dissection, and by vivisection, the minutest details of the entrails of those creatures which, in the fulness of their life, in the beauty of their form, afford you a childish delight."

If such be the road to regeneration, only the weak-minded among the English people will enter upon it. Thousands might momentarily experience a depression—a gloom similar to that produced by the fulminating and damnation-dealing preacher one meets with in country districts. The dismal appearance of the orator, his description of hell, of an accursed world, of the narrow way to salvation, as well as the scared faces in the dark and dank little church, may evoke a gruesome mood while the sermon lasts. But on coming out into the summer air, into the midst of the revivifying sunshine, of the rustling trees, radiant flowers, singing birds, dancing butterflies, and softly humming bees, the healthy minded of the congregation experience a sense of

relief and joy; for the uncharitable condemnation of the ascetic preacher is powerfully contradicted by the direct and unmistakable language in which nature appeals to man's emotions.

The depressing effect of Max Nordau's book is enhanced by his ostentatious display of knowledge, and by the absolute faith he himself has in it. He follows the methods of wily political speakers. These have a way of piling proofs upon proofs in order to demonstrate the truth of such points as are almost self-evident; and when they have thus established among their audience a confidence in their logic, they slur over the weak points, take for granted that everything is proved, and draw a plausible conclusion devoid of any direct connection with the arguments. A postmaster-general, for example, does not wish to be bothered with the reduction of postage, and, in order to resist such a proposal, he will deliver a lengthy harangue to show that the work of the post-office is useful to the public, that it cannot be well administered without sufficient revenue, the necessity of keeping a complete staff, the impossibility of reducing wages and salaries, and many other points which are perfectly clear without demonstration. He will then suddenly conclude that the post-office works at present with very small means, and that, if those means are further reduced, disorganization and disorder may ensue. To be able

to draw this conclusion, he has to take for granted that the reduced postage would mean reduced income to the post-office, while in reality it may mean the very contrary.

In the same way Max Nordau gives us pages upon pages in order to show us such facts as psychological science has established, and then boldly elicits supposed facts which science never has and may never be able to prove. We have already given plenty of instances of this, and they need not be referred to again. His careful minuteness in psychological matters often induces the unwary reader to accept his unproved statements purporting to represent facts drawn from other branches of knowledge. Thus, for example, he speaks of matters pertaining to sociology, economy, administration and politics, as if he were a universally acknowledged authority on these subjects. It will suffice, however, to read his plan for arresting the spread of degeneration to understand at once on what feeble foundations his apparent omniscience rests. His ideas of an ideal social order is an impossible amalgamation of socialistic as well as communistic fallacies. While he retains the absurd postulate of the socialists, that a perfect government could be established, distributing all the wealth of the nation among individuals, he indulges heedlessly in the communistic delusion that those who accumulate

under the present system would continue to accumulate wealth at the same rate when the government confiscates all fortunes left by deceased individuals. He does not see that people under such a system would take very good care to dispose of their property before they die, a course which even the German police could not prevent.

He does not insist on these errors, but they come out distinctly as indispensable links in the association of ideas, underlying his views regarding the anti-semitist movement, the dangers of individual liberty, the bestial propensities of the masses, and the necessity of a government composed of strong-minded scientific men. It is only too easy to see that in all his suggestions of working out the terrestrial paradise of humanity,—which one day, according to him, will be the outcome of science,—he is guided entirely by prejudice and feeling. In summing up what he has said on this subject, his ideal social order presents itself to our minds as unfree, completely subjected but well-cared-for masses benevolently governed by senates of strong-minded, scientifically educated men—the Jews.

The gloom and unrest called forth by Max Nordau's work in nervous minds no doubt gain in strength from the apparently powerful personality behind it. But it suffices, as we have shown, to divest this imposing giant of his assumed power in

order to escape from his influence. Max Nordau, had he not done so before, reveals himself unmistakably in the very last sentence of his book as one largely beset by human frailties when, in self-glorification, he quotes the words of Him whose work he so strenuously attempts to undermine and oppose. In order to assure his readers that his object, as a scientist, is to benefit humanity, to lead it further on the road on which religion, so much contemned by him, has already taken it some distance, he quotes Christ's words: "Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets; I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

We here refrain from the temptation to write half a dozen pages in order to show, in Max Nordau's own manner, how, by quoting from the Scriptures, by appealing to faith and emotion, by comparing himself to Christ, he is symbolic with Paul Verlaine, he is mystical with the neo-Catholics, he is emotional with Rossetti, he is an egomaniac with the Diabolists and a melogomaniac with Wagner. But we refrain, and only say that he is human.

CHAPTER XII

REGENERATION

IF the manifold discussions which have raged around the question of human progress have failed to establish a consensus of opinion, it is largely due to the absence of any exact definition of the term progress. There can be no doubt about our advance in science. The trite references to the use we make of steam, of which the ancient sages knew so little as to call it smoke, establishes this beyond the possibility of denial. But, on the other hand, our advance in literature and art has been crab-like; for it has been accomplished with our face turned towards antiquity. To set up ideals out of the actualities of the past involves the recognition that we, as a race, stand lower than we have done before, or at least at one time we have slided backwards and not yet retrieved the lost ground.

The progress of humanity, with all its deviations and backslidings, may appear as one decided

march onwards, if we look upon our ideals, plucked from the past, as so many pegs thrown out into the distant future demarcating the ground to be occupied by the road of civilization. The Greeks showed us, as in a flash, and within a limited space, ideals of poetry and art, and since the time of the Renaissance we have been striving to attain them. Christ has been the moral ideal held up to us for well-nigh nineteen hundred years; but this we are so far from having realized, as to be filled with doubt whether, in our awkward groping, with our faces turned towards Calvary, we move in the right direction.

There are many circumstances which render it difficult to decide whether we have progressed or not. How are we to determine which represents the greater advance, the high degree of æsthetic civilization in the small group of the human family, and all the rest plunged in barbarian darkness; or, a lower degree of æsthetic civilization uniformly spread among all the peoples of the world? We have, thus, to consider not only the degrees of progress, but the nature—whether æsthetic or moral—and its extension, before we can decide whether we have progressed or not. But this is not all. We must agree, or at least have clearly determined in our own minds, towards what goal the progression is supposed to move. If it be to bring the

whole of humanity up to an ideal beauty, perfect health, and a maximum of strength and agility, our civilization in our present stage certainly tends in the other direction. If, on the other hand, the goal be the conquest of Nature's forces, we are certainly moving rapidly towards it.

In face, then, of the complexity of the question, whether humanity is progressing or not, the best method of replying to it rationally is to take one feature of human development only, but one in which the others are included, or on which they depend. To select for such a test-feature the psychological conditions of civilized humanity, at a certain period as manifested in literature and art, might at the first glance appear as the most rational course, because with strong and sound minds, with well-balanced psychological faculties, a nation is most likely to shape its destiny in such a fashion as to secure excellency in all the domains of its existence.

But there are strong objections to this method of gauging human progress. The fashionable writers and artists may not represent the mass of their contemporaries, but may be the exponents of a temporary mood in a small uninfluential clique. Features of literature and art may, as we have already pointed out, convey the impression of retrogression simply because they reflect the unrest and confusion which

prevail in the majority of minds at periods when new ideas and new views, healthy in themselves, trample out the old ones. Art and literature do not always reflect the ethics of a nation at a given period. The nation may be intellectually strong and morally sound, but political events, economic troubles, may momentarily goad it into abnormal moods and drive it, by sheer necessity, into a course which, under normal circumstances, it would shun. A despot with æsthetic leanings, and his nobility, might be instrumental in causing art and literature to blossom forth most vigorously, while the people at large might be sunk in the deepest depths of demoralization and misery in order to furnish the means for the maintenance of a brilliant court. History and actualities afford ample confirmation of the fact that art and literature may flourish while the people degenerates. When the culture of Greece was in its zenith, a large proportion of the people—the slaves—had fallen so low as to afford actually object lessons to the young citizens, in order to deter them from the horrors of vice and degradation. During the Renaissance in Italy the courts were corrupt, and the Church had sunk to its deepest stage of demoralization. While the "Roi Soleil," was developing literature and art in the hot-house of his royal patronage, the immorality of the nobles and the degradation of the people were unprecedented.

Nor are there wanting examples of how a nation may be in a vigorous state of progression, without developing any remarkable features in art and literature. Switzerland was for a long time the leading nation in Europe in the matter of government, legislation, administration, civic virtues, and education, but has never distinguished itself æsthetically. During the period in which America was most progressive, its people were too busy with practical affairs to give much attention to the arts. If, therefore, we were to judge the progress of a nation by its art and literature, we might feel disposed to conclude that these two blossoms of civilization sprout forth in the same ratio as the people degenerate. But this would be absurd, for it would be to give the palm of civilization to the Esquimaux, or to the pigmies in the dark forests of Africa. The idea, therefore, of judging whether a nation, or a race, is rising or degenerating by the state of its arts, must be rejected as utterly misleading.

The political and social institutions of a nation are surely the features that best lend themselves to the test of the stage it has attained in progressive development, or degeneration. If laws and institutions are such as to give every inhabitant the best chances of attaining to a high degree of civilization, of morality, and of happiness, and such laws and institutions emanate from the people themselves, and are not imposed by another nation and not by the freak of a

despot, that nation is in a progressive state. It is difficult to imagine a country with good laws and good institutions without corresponding healthy conditions in all the other features of its existence. History offers no example of a community, or of a people, that has given itself laws and institutions equally beneficial to all the individuals, and yet exhibiting signs of decay in any domain of its culture. It is true that in a free, healthy, progressive State, especially a thoroughly democratic one, literature and art may not attain that hectic florescence so often co-existent with bad laws and bad institutions. But it has never been found that art and literature in such healthy nations are in a degenerating state.

It is true that different minds hold different opinions as to the attributes of good laws and institutions. A man who believes that human beings are essentially wicked and brutal would call a government good only when it possessed power enough to keep the people in subjection; while he who has discovered that the good qualities in human beings spring from a natural instinct, and the bad ones from unfavourable conditions and corrupt surroundings, would only call that form of government good which afforded to each individual the greatest possible liberty consistent with the same degree of liberty in others. But there can be no hesitation as to what constitutes good government

and good institutions, if we appeal to the only authority capable of judging with full knowledge of the case, namely, the individuals themselves.

We often meet with people who look with distrust upon institutions and systems of government based on liberty, but this does not affect our assertion that the great mass of individuals would personally, and for themselves, claim as much liberty as they could obtain. Those who advocate authoritative administration and the subjection of the people to a class, or an elected body, behold in such constitutions the means not of reducing their own liberty, but of extending it beyond legitimate boundaries, and at the expense of the liberty of others.

It is hardly possible to imagine a nation that has given itself, and is living under a system of personal liberty, and is at the same time degenerate. A degenerate man fears liberty, he prefers to lean on others; he feels not ashamed to live on charity, and would abuse his liberty in order to satisfy his base instincts. A sound-minded and morally healthy man needs no compulsion to respect the rights and liberties of others. He trusts and respects others, because he trusts and respects himself. He would assist no man in his attempts and intrigues to injure others. He would, therefore, uphold his own, as well as the liberty of others.

Such bad results as Max Nordau fears from insti-

tutions based on liberty can only arise out of oppression. We have shown how the Anti-Semitic movement, which he erroneously regards as an outcome of too much liberty, is the result of oppression exercised by the Jewish capitalists and employers in virtue of bad legislation, and no one will deny that the Anarchistic tendencies spring from the same cause. From these reasons we may fairly conclude that, if we wish to form an opinion of the intellectual soundness and moral strength of a nation, we cannot do better than examine to what an extent it has attained to good institutions based on personal liberty.

If civilized mankind is actually degenerating, we must find a tendency among the people in the countries under examination to give themselves, or to accept under compulsion, laws and institutions which rob them of their personal liberty.

In gauging the present epoch by this standard, we might first be inclined to side with Max Nordau. Those great nations which may fairly be looked upon as the leaders of civilization present spectacles of political corruption and retrogression, which might well suggest the idea that, instead of developing into a race intellectually and morally strong enough to live free, they show a marked willingness to place themselves under control of some kind—to abandon their divine attributes and to assume

those of domesticated animals. But a correct opinion about so important a question cannot be formed on a superficial glance. In no branch of knowledge are appearances so deceptive as in sociology. Apparently the same effects are often produced by two opposite causes, and under slightly different circumstances the same cause may produce two opposite effects. Thus, a man may vote for a measure because he is corrupt and selfish, and with the object of benefiting himself at the expense of his fellow men ; while another man may vote for the same measure because he does not happen to be in possession of certain special knowledge which would enable him to understand the nugatory character of his action.

There are nations in Europe at this moment presenting such a mass of anomalies as to render it extremely difficult to decide whether they are bent on improving their laws and institutions, or on making them worse. Much, for example, that has happened in Germany has been pronounced as a decided forward movement. The German army has displayed physical and mental qualities which bear witness to healthy development rather than degeneration. The unification of the German States into one Empire had for some time before the last war been the goal towards which the nation aspired. When it was reached, patriotic Germans expected

it to be made the starting-point of a new departure for further progress. But the very accomplishment of national unification involved features which clearly pointed to retrogression. The mediæval principle of conquest was revised. The future peace and good-will among the nations was destroyed by the annexation of the two provinces conquered from France. Standing armies for Germany became more than ever necessary, and the nation was called upon to make enormous sacrifices in order to ward off the consequences of retrogression in foreign politics. The heaviest burdens were laid upon the working-class, and their struggle for existence became desperate. They have shown many signs of discontent, and these have led to the consolidation of repressive measures. Thus Germany now presents the spectacle of a curious amalgam of mediæval and modern features.

At the head of this great empire we find a young Emperor who, though not a despot in the widest sense of the word, possesses, as an indispensable feature of the system, sufficient power to plunge not only the whole of Germany, but all Europe, into unspeakable misery. The individuals of the nation sink into insignificance before him. They plainly feel that their destiny is in his hands as much as that of their ancestors was in the hands of their mediæval emperors. And yet the people

are highly civilized, well educated, and show, in their different walks of life, intelligence, strength of character, moral worth.

Here, then, is a people, which, judged collectively by our standard, would stand at a low point of development, because their laws and institutions are not based on personal liberty. If we consider the direction in which they are moving, the verdict becomes as unfavourable. The country is torn by two divergent tendencies, neither of them aiming onwards. The one represented by the Emperor, the official bodies, the plutocrats, and men who think as Max Nordau, who wish to keep a keener watch on the destitute classes; the other represented by the socialists, who clamour for the destruction of the present system, not for the purpose of securing personal liberty, but of wresting what little is left of it from the people, and of establishing complete State tyranny.

If the standard we are applying be trustworthy, neither of the two currents of development, noticeable in Germany, run in the direction of a high degree of civilization. At the present moment it seems difficult to discover whence, within Germany, could come the impulse for such general mental and moral progress as would be manifested by good and free institutions. If the present conditions could prevail indefinitely, and gradually improve

so as to safeguard, or at least not impede, the development of the individuals, Germany might look forward to the future with equanimity.

But, unfortunately, actualities in that country confirm only too well the trustworthiness of our standard. The result of the present system cannot fail to exercise degenerating effects on the people, but whether these effects will influence the present generation only, or by heredity be perpetuated in the nervous systems and the brains of the race, is a question for psychologists to settle, The stupendous standing army, the heavy taxation, and a host of bad laws, have undermined, and are still undermining, the welfare of the people. The immediate results are, among the working-classes: extreme penury, hopeless lives, low morals, intense hatred of the wealthy class, a growing sympathy with the destructive programme of the advanced anarchists, decay of religious belief without any growth of the religion of humanity of science. Among the commercial class, the results are: intense competition, small profits, nervous application to business, a thirst for gold and recklessness with regard to the means of satisfying it. Among the bureaucratic classes the dread of reduced and retarded advancement has caused discipline and absolute submission to take the place of religion and philosophy. The landed

aristocracy, seeing their incomes threatened by the deplorable state of agriculture, plot and plan how to recoup themselves at the expense of the people, and have even shown an inclination to resist the Emperor himself when their interests require it. This state of affairs is more than sufficient to account for such signs of degeneration as Max Nordau has noticed in his own country. What wonder that artists and writers, menaced by misery and actuated by the general thirst for gold, should consult their market rather than their inspiration, and that they should copy successful authors and artists in France and elsewhere, rather than take the trouble and the risk to do original work. A comparison between German literature of to-day, and that of decaying Rome could not fail to impart important lessons.

Everything in Germany points to a coming catastrophe. Even, if we consider only one of the directions from which the first alarm may come—that is, the Finance Department—it seems impossible that the system can last much longer. The heavy taxation unfortunately undermines its own basis, namely, the ability of the people to pay, and the much strained credit of the State is likely to collapse at the very moment it will be most needed. It is, therefore, not premature to consider what will happen in that country at about the end of this century, when the financial

resources, the patience of the people, and the confidence of the army may be exhausted.

Two alternatives are possible. The crisis which seems bound to come may be a violent one, arising from below; or it may be a peaceful one, taking its origin from above. In the one case, there will be a momentary social chaos; for all the military and bureaucratic institutions, all systems, theories, prejudices, will be cast into the furnace. At what time and under what conditions Germany will emerge from the crisis will depend on the number, and the strength of mind, of those Germans who understand that good institutions based on liberty are the cardinal attributes of a sound-minded and morally strong nation.

The other case—the crisis coming from above—does not seem possible just now, because the Emperor himself would have to take the initiative. It is not likely that he would give up his power, his military tastes and pastimes, in order to render Germany a free and happy nation, living in peace with other free nations. For a sovereign to conceive such an idea would be almost supernatural, and to carry it out successfully would require the highest degree of human intelligence, because it could not be done except in harmony and in co-operation with the other European States.

From whatever direction the crisis comes, there is much in the Germans to warrant a final successful

issue. We cannot believe, with Max Nordau, that such signs as we see of degeneration spring from moral and intellectual weakness. In the external circumstances, we find sufficient cause for far more demoralisation than actually exists; and the Germans, taken as individuals, show themselves to possess plenty of those mental and moral qualities which are the only possible foundations of a healthy State. They bear witness to the fact that, despite unfavourable outward circumstances, the race is not decaying; and that the present corruption and demoralisation may be decay only of one stage of human development, from which in obedience to some strong impulse a new regenerating era may arise.

In order to elucidate the apparent state of degeneration which characterises civilization at the close of this most remarkable century, as well as its causes, we have instanced Germany—the country where Max Nordau has studied and written, and where he seems to have received his most vivid impressions. The circumstances and tendencies of other countries, especially in those governed more or less on despotic principles, are akin to those in Germany. Everywhere increasing penury, discontent among the destitute classes, a rapidly growing power among the plutocrats, national indebtedness, financial corruption, the decay of all religious belief, and general demoralisation. But the similarity does not end here. In

every country there are numbers of people striving and hoping to bring about a better state of things, even at the cost and sacrifice of some of the leading features of our civilization. There is a mass of evidence, including those peculiar features of modern society, on which Max Nordau has dwelt so largely, showing that a deep unrest has taken hold of humanity. The feeling is not only that we are in a wrong position, but that we are moving in a wrong direction. The general fear is not that degeneration has set in, but that, moving on the road that we do, we cannot escape it.

The most striking characteristic of our time is that in no nation do we find, on either side of the Atlantic, any distinct indication of the road which can lead us past the Slough of Despond. The moral state of the civilized world is like a nation preparing for revolt against a tyrant: gloomy, discontented, and excited men are encouraging one another with secret signs and pass-words, mustering and drilling in secret places, to be ready for action, but without any trustworthy leaders, without any plans for the future, without even any tactics for the first struggle. In some countries the cry is for leaders; but the old faith that the situations will bring out the men seems to have been utterly falsified: for everywhere mediocrity, prejudice, and corruption, hold the helm. The cry in England and other countries is not for leaders, but

for more light. We want a higher philosophy, nobler arts, a loftier literature, sounder principles of legislation, a purer religion.

No nation holds a higher responsibility than the English. Its vast possessions all over the globe, its financial and commercial supremacy, its ethical influence over all the English-speaking countries, marks it out as the standard-bearer of civilization. Nothing great can happen among us without re-echoing in the remotest corners of the earth, and any step onward taken by us will send a thrill throughout humanity. Degenerate Englishmen may still wish to meekly follow other nations, but our mission is to be the practical, energetic, daring pioneers heading the march of progress. By using its great power and influence, the British nation can render invaluable service to humanity in the present crisis. On England must therefore rest our hopes for the practical solution of the grave questions on which progress and retrogression depend. From England alone can proceed that electrifying impulse of which the bewildered nations stand in need, that they may marshal the forces and focus the goal of progress.

In our political circles, in the ranks of literature, and throughout all the strata of society, there are already unmistakable signs that the period of scepticism, selfishness, and rant will end with the

century ; that scientific superstition and sickly Collectivist chimeras are doomed ; and that the nation is sternly entering upon the mission of leading humanity towards good laws and institutions based on liberty, and thus inaugurating a universal movement which by its glorious results shall demonstrate that the alarming symptoms of degeneration, revealed by the psychologists, are the first symptoms of regeneration.

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.