

the last age with a class of skeptics who,—their skepticism assuming, as is not very uncommon, the form of credulous belief,—used to argue that there had been an infinite series of men upon earth; and, of course, if the race had no beginning, could it be held in consistency that it was to have an end? We now absolutely know, as geologists, not only that a beginning there was, but that the beginning was a comparatively recent event; and further, founding on the unvarying experience of the past, we also know that the race, in at least its existing character and condition, is to have an end. There are peculiarities, too, in the visitations of the present time, suited to suggest many a pregnant thought in connection with this curious and surely not unimportant subject. I travelled by railway, in middle autumn, two years ago, for about a hundred miles, through a series of well-cultivated fields; and found almost all their potatoes, constituting about one-fifth of the entire produce of the district, killed by a mysterious disease, and exhaling a heavy odor of death and decay, that infected the air mile after mile. There were perhaps as many individual plants of this useful vegetable lying brown and dead in the extensive area through which I passed as the entire species would have consisted of had it not been so sedulously and extensively cultivated by man; and the appearance of the blackened and fetid fields suggested to me how, in at least some of the instances, species may have died. A disease similarly extensive is devastating at the present time the vineyards of the south; and it is said that, should it continue its ravages for a year or two longer, the generous *Madeira* of the wine-drinker will become as much a mere tradition in consequence as the extinct wines of the ancients. Nay, during the present age have we not seen a new and terrible disease, quite as mysterious in its character and origin as any of those which have fallen on the vegetable kingdom, sweeping away greatly more than a hundred millions of our own species?