

13. The law and operation of habit, as exemplified in one individual mind, formed the theme of our third general argument. The only adaptation which we shall notice to this part of our mental constitution in the framework of society, is that afforded by the changes which it undergoes in the flux of its successive generations—in virtue of which, the tender susceptibilities of childhood are placed under the influence of that ascendent seniority which precedes or goes before it. At first sight it may be thought of this peculiarity, that it tells equally in both directions—that is, either in the transmission and accumulation of vice, or in the transmission and accumulation of virtue in the world. But there is one circumstance of superiority in favour of the latter, which bids us look hopefully onward to the final prevalence of the good over the evil. We are aware of the virulence wherewith, in families, the crime and profligacy of a depraved parentage must operate on the habits of their offspring; and of the deadly poison which, in crowded cities, passes with quick descent from the older to the younger, along the links of youthful companionship; and even of those secret, though we trust rare and monstrous societies, which in various countries and various ages, were held for the celebration of infernal orgies, for the initiation of the yet unknowing or unpractised in the mysteries of vice. But after every deduction has been made for these, who