

taught us that things regarded impossible in one generation may become easy in the next; and that the power of man over nature is limited only by the one condition, that it must be exercised in conformity with the laws of nature. He must study those laws as he would the disposition of a horse he would ride, or the character of a nation he would govern; and the moment he presumes either to thwart her fundamental rules, or ventures to measure his strength with hers, he is at once rendered severely sensible of his imbecility, and meets the deserved punishment of his rashness and folly. But if, on the other hand, he will consent to use, without abusing, the resources thus abundantly placed at his disposal, and obey that he may command, there seems scarcely any conceivable limit to the degree in which the *average* physical condition of great masses of mankind may be improved, their wants supplied, and their conveniences and comforts increased. Without adopting such an exaggerated view, as to assert that the meanest inhabitant of a civilized society is superior in physical condition to the lordly savage, whose energy and uncultivated ability gives him a natural predominance over his fellow denizens of the forest,—at least, if we compare like with like, and consider the multitude of human beings who are enabled, in an advanced state of society, to subsist in a degree of comfort and abundance, which at best only a few of the most fortunate in a less civilized state could command, we shall not be at a loss to perceive the principle on which we ought to rest our estimate of the advantages of civilization; and which applies with hardly less force to every degree of it, when contrasted with that next inferior, than to the broad distinction between civilized and barbarous life in general.

(61.) The difference of the degrees in which the individuals of a great community enjoy the good things of life, has been a theme of declamation and discontent in all ages; and it is doubtless our paramount duty, in every state of society, to alleviate the pressure of the purely evil part of this distribution as much as possible, and, by all the means we can devise, secure the lower