

It may, however, occur to us here, that when we consider man as an improver and innovator in the world, there is much that suggests a contrariety between him and nature, and that, instead of being the pupil of his environment, he becomes its tyrant. In this aspect man, and especially civilized man, appears as the enemy of wild nature, so that in those districts which he has most fully subdued, many animals and plants have been exterminated, and nearly the whole surface has come under his processes of culture, and has lost the characteristics which belonged to it in its primitive state. Nay more, we find that by certain kinds of so-called culture man tends to exhaust and impoverish the soil, so that it ceases to minister to his comfortable support, and becomes a desert. Vast regions of the earth are in this impoverished condition, and the westward march of exhaustion warns us that the time may come when even in comparatively new countries, like America, the land will cease to be able to sustain its inhabitants. Behind this stands a still farther and portentous possibility. The resources of chemistry are now being taxed to the utmost to discover methods by which the materials of human food may be produced synthetically, and we may possibly, at some future time, find that albumen and starch may be manufactured cheaply from their elements by artificial processes. Such a discovery might render man independent of the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Agriculture might become an unnecessary and unprofitable art. A time might come when it would no longer be possible to find on earth a green field, or a wild animal; and when the whole earth would be one great factory, in which toiling millions were producing all the materials of food, clothing, and shelter. Such a world may never exist, but its possible existence may be imagined, and its contemplation brings vividly before us the vast powers inherent in man as a subverter of the ordinary course of nature. Yet even this ultimate annulling of wild nature would be brought about not by any-