

by the more delightful venture of filling up the dim outlines which we see before us, with analogies of past experience or creations of our imagination. And even if we do descend into the plains and continue the minuter and more laborious search, we cannot rid ourselves of certain preconceived but frequently misleading ideas which the superficial glance has impressed on our minds.

The condensation may become an idealisation of knowledge. History affords numerous examples of these different stages of progress; centuries of dull accumulation, of unmethodical and ill-arranged learning, have been followed by short periods of enlightenment, by the triumphant shout of sudden discovery or the confident hope of invention. Patient work and real progress have for a long time been repressed by the allurements of seductive phantoms, which have had to be abandoned after an immense waste of labour. New prospects have suddenly opened the view into vast unexplored regions, heights have been gained from which the whole of human knowledge appeared for the moment condensed into a single truth or idealised into a vision, and again these delightful achievements have for a time appeared lost in an all-pervading discouragement and dismay.

2.
Object of
the book.

Whether our century has been characterised by any one or by a succession of several of these varying moods, is a question which I hope to answer in the sequel. For the present it is sufficient to note that in both directions—in that of accumulating and in that of condensing and idealising knowledge—the efforts of the nineteenth century have been many and conspicuous. In the former it is altogether unparalleled, whereas in the latter it has

3.
Nineteenth
century un-
equalled in
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tion of
knowledge.