

a return to nature, a revolt against the artificiality of the existing state of society. Of this idea Rousseau was the great champion, the extreme and passionate exponent. The second was the idea of the perfectibility of the human race, a not less "passionate faith in the illimitable possibilities of human progress. Nothing short of a general overthrow of the planet could, in the eyes of the best minds of the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, stay the ever upward movement of human perfectibility."<sup>1</sup>

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Ideas of  
Return to  
Nature and  
of Perfecti-  
bility.

As already mentioned above, the latter conception was connected with the growth and diffusion of the scientific spirit, which owed much to Voltaire, though he himself was in this respect only a populariser. Although, in the long run, this scientific spirit has got the upper hand, and probably a greater hold of

<sup>1</sup> "They differed as to the details of the philosophy of government which they deduced from this philosophy of society, but the conviction that the golden era of tolerance, enlightenment, and material prosperity was close at hand, belonged to them all. Rousseau set his face the other way. For him the golden era had passed away from our globe many centuries ago. Simplicity had fled from the earth. Wisdom and heroism had vanished from out of the minds of leaders. The spirit of citizenship had gone from those who should have upheld the social union in brotherly accord. The dream of human perfectibility which nerved men like Condorcet, was to Rousseau a sour and fantastic mockery. The utmost that men could do was to turn their eyes to the past, to obliterate the interval, to try to walk for a space in the track of the ancient societies. They

would hardly succeed, but endeavour might at least do something to stay the plague of universal degeneracy. Hence the fatality of his system. It placed the centre of social activity elsewhere than in careful and rational examination of social conditions, and in careful and rational effort to modify them. . . . It substituted a retrograde aspiration for direction, and emotion for the discovery of law. We can hardly wonder when we think of the intense exaltation of spirit produced both by the Perfectibilitarians and the followers of Rousseau, and at the same time of the political degradation and material disorder of France, that so violent a contrast between the ideal and the actual led to a great volcanic outbreak." (See Lord Morley's 'Rousseau,' 1883, pp. 306-307.)