

results of observation, which is so much the more difficult to shake, as it denies the validity of the facts by which it may be refuted. This empiricism, the melancholy heritage transmitted to us from former times, invariably contends for the truth of its axioms with the arrogance of a narrow-minded spirit. Physical philosophy, on the other hand, when based upon science, doubts because it seeks to investigate, distinguishes between that which is certain and that which is merely probable, and strives incessantly to perfect theory by extending the circle of observation.

This assemblage of imperfect dogmas, bequeathed by one age to another—this physical philosophy, which is composed of popular prejudices—is not only injurious because it perpetuates error with the obstinacy engendered by the evidence of ill-observed facts, but also because it hinders the mind from attaining to higher views of nature. Instead of seeking to discover the *mean* or *medium* point, around which oscillate, in apparent independence of forces, all the phenomena of the external world, this system delights in multiplying exceptions to the law, and seeks, amid phenomena and in organic forms, for something beyond the marvel of a regular succession, and an internal and progressive development. Ever inclined to believe that the order of nature is disturbed, it refuses to recognize in the present any analogy with the past, and, guided by its own varying hypotheses, seeks at hazard, either in the interior of the globe or in the regions of space, for the cause of these pretended perturbations.

It is the special object of the present work to combat those errors which derive their source from a vicious empiricism and from imperfect inductions. The higher enjoyments yielded by the study of nature depend upon the correctness and the depth of our views, and upon the extent of the subjects that may be comprehended in a single glance. Increased mental cultivation has given rise, in all classes of society, to an increased desire of embellishing life by augmenting the mass of ideas, and by multiplying means for their generalization; and this sentiment fully refutes the vague accusations advanced against the age in which we live, showing that other interests, besides the material wants of life, occupy the minds of men.

It is almost with reluctance that I am about to speak of a sentiment, which appears to arise from narrow-minded views, or from a certain weak and morbid sentimentality—I allude to the *fear* entertained by some persons, that nature may by degrees lose a portion of the charm and magic of her power,