

Poets and philosophers have repeated this theme in endless variations, probably without improving upon the classical and perfect expression which it has found in ancient<sup>1</sup> poetry and in the sacred writings. History has been written with the professed object of gaining, by analogy, an insight into the drift of modern or future events, and economic and political theories have been based upon the likelihood of a recurrence of what has happened before. Especially has the teaching been impressed upon us that the universal fate of all development is to lead to death and decay, and to make room for the endless repetition of the same recurring phases

Every art and every kind of philosophy having probably been found out many times up to the limits of what is possible and again destroyed; and remarks, "This notion of cycles refers to human civilisation, not to the universe, which is one eternal system with a fixed central mass, and with its outer part in a moving equilibrium. Empedocles undoubtedly had a theory of recurrent cycles in the universe. The four elements,—which he first brought together as elements of the whole, early thinkers having taken one or other of them as a first principle from which the rest are evolved,—according to Empedocles, are necessarily aggregated and segregated by the predominance of principles which he calls love (*φιλία*) and hate (*νείκος*). The four periods are: 1. Predominant love (the *σφαῖρος*), a state of complete aggregation; 2. decreasing love and increasing hate or strife; 3. predominant strife (*ἀκοσμία*, complete separation of the elements); 4. decreasing strife and increasing love. These are cosmic periods. It has been supposed—Zeller takes this view—that we are living in the

fourth cosmic period, the period of increasing love."

<sup>1</sup> The best known passage is that from the celebrated fourth eclogue of Virgil, where, after describing the return of the golden Saturnian age, the poet continues (vv. 31-36):—

"*Pauca tamen suberunt priscae vestigia fraudis,  
Quæ tentare Thetis ratibus, quæ cingere muris  
Oppida, quæ jubeant telluri infundere sulcos.  
Alter erit tum Tiphys, et altera quæ vehat Argo  
Delectos heros: erunt etiam altera bella,  
Atque iterum ad Trojam magnus mittetur Achilles.*"

Dugald Stewart ('Philos. Works,' vol. iii. p. 167) refers to this with the following quotation from Clavius's 'Commentary on the Treatise on the Sphere,' by Joannes Sacro Bosco: "Hoc intervallo, quidam volunt, omnia quæcumque in mundo sunt, eodem ordine esse reditura, quo nunc cernuntur," and he also attributes this theory of recurrence to an extreme application of the mathematical spirit (vol. iv. p. 207). How this idea of recurrent cycles fascinated and haunted Fr. Nietzsche see Seth's article, 'Contem. Rev.,' vol. 73, p. 734.