as they only engage the leiſure hours, without beco­ming the chief objects of purſuit—the employment which they give to the faculties is favourable both to the virtue and the happineſs of the human race.

The period arrives, however, when luxury is no long­er ſerviceable to the intereſts of nations ; when ſhe is no longer a graceful, elegant, active form, but a lan­guid, overgrown, and bloated carcaſe. It is the love of luxury, which contributed ſo much to the civiliza­tion of ſociety, that now brings on its decline. Arts are cultivated and improved, and commerce extended, till enormous opulence be acquired : the effect of opu­lence is to awake the fancy, to conceive ideas of new and capricious wants, and to inflame the breaſt with new deſires. Here we have the origin of that ſelfiſhneſs which, operating in conjunction with caprice and the violence of unbridled paſſions, contributes ſo much to the corruption of virtuous manners. Selfiſhneſs, ca­price, indolence, effeminacy, all join to looſen the bonds of ſociety, to bring on the degeneracy both of the uſe­ful and the fine arts, to baniſh at once the mild and the auſtere virtues, to deſtroy civil order and ſubordination, and to introduce in their room anarchy or deſpotiſm.

Scarce could we have found an example oſ the beau­tiful form of ſociety which we laſt attempted to deſcribe. Never, at leaſt, has any nation continued long to enjoy ſuch happy circumſtances, or to diſplay ſo amiable and reſpectable a character. But when we ſpeak of the de­clining ſtate of ſociety, we have no difficulty in finding inſtances to which we may refer. Hiſtory tells of the Affyrians, the Egyptians, and the Persians, all of them once flouriſhing nations, but brought low by luxury and an unhappy corruption of manners. The Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabians, owed their fall to the ſame cauſes ; and we know not if a ſimilar fate does not now threaten many of thoſe nations who have long made a diſtinguiſhed figure in the ſyſtem of Europe. The Portngueſe, the Venetians, and the Spaniards, have already fallen ; and what is the preſent ſtate of our neighbours the French ? They have long been a people deſtitute of religion, corrupted in morals, unſteady in conduct, and ſlaves to pleaſure and public amuſements. Among them luxury had arrived at its higheſt pitch ; and the conſequence has been, that after capriciouſly ſhaking off the yoke of deſpotiſm, they have eſtabliſhed, or rather ſet up (for eſtabliſhed it cannot be), a motely kind of government, which, in the courſe of a few years, has exhibited ſcenes of tyranny and oppreſſion, to which we doubt if the annals of the world can furniſh any parallel. Yet this is the people whoſe manners the other nations of Europe were ambitious to imitate. May thoſe nations take warning in time, and avoid the rocks upon which they have ſplit.

Thus have we viewed the ſeveral ſtages in which ſo­ciety appears in its progreſs from rudeneſs to refine­ment and decay. The intelligent reader will perceive, that the various and anomalous phenomena which occur in the natural hiſtory of ſociety, cannot easily be solved ; becauſe the neceſſary information cannot be ob­tained. Others have been well accounted for by the reſearches of curious philoſophical inquirers. Local circumſtances, the influence of climate, the intercourſe of nations in different ſtates of civilization, have been taken notice of, as cauſes ſerving to accelerate or retard

the progreſs of arts and manners. But our proper busineſs here was merely to mark the gradations between barbariſm and refinement : and as the painter who is to exhibit a ſeries of portraits repreſenting the human form in infancy, puerility, youth, and manhood, will not think of delineating all that variety of figures and faces which each of thoſe periods of life affords, and will find himſelf unable to repreſent in any ſingle figure all diverſities of form and features ; ſo we have not once thought of deſcribing particularly under this article, all the various national characters reducible to any one of thoſe divisions under which we have viewed the progreſs of ſociety, nor have found it poſſible to comprehend under one conſiſtent view, all the particu­lars which may be gathered from the remains of anti­quity, from the relations of later travellers, and the ge­neral records of hiſtory concerning the progreſſive cha­racter of mankind in various regions, and under the in­fluence of various accidents and circumſtances. This indeed would have even been improper, as all that in­formation appears under other articles in this Work.

SOCIETIES, aſſociations voluntarily formed by a number of individuals for promoting knowledge, induſtry, or virtue. They may therefore be divided into three claſ­ſes; ſocieties for promoting ſcience and literature, societies for encouraging and promoting arts and manufac­tures, and ſocieties for diffusing religion and morality and relieving diſtreſs. Societies belonging to the firſt claſs ex­tend their attention to all the ſciences and literature in general, or devote it to one particular ſcience. The fame obſervation may be applied to thoſe which are inſtituted for improving arts and manufactures. Thoſe of the third claſs are eſtabliſhed; either with a view to prevent crimes, as the Philanthropic Society ; for the diffusion of the Chriſtian religion among unenlightened nations, as the Society for the Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts; or for introducing arts and civiliza­tion, along with a knowledge of the Chriſtian religion, as the Sierra Leona company.

The honour of planning and inſtituting ſocieties for thoſe valuable purpoſes is due to modern times. A literary aſſociation is ſaid to have been formed in the reign of Charlemagne (see ACADEMY) ; but the plan ſeems to have been rude and defective. Several others were inſtituted in Italy in the 16th century ; but from the accounts which we have ſeen of them, they ſeem to have been far inferior to thoſe which are moſt flouriſhing at preſent. The moſt enlarged idea of literary societies ſeems to have originated with the great Lord Bacon, the father oſ modern philosophy, who recommended to the reigning prince to inſtitute ſocieties of learned men, who ſhould give to the world from time to time a regular account of their reſearches and diſcoveries. It was the idea of this great philosopher, that the learned world ſhould be united, as it were, into one immenſe republic; which, though conſiſting of many detached ſtates, ſhould hold a ſtrict union and preſerve a mutual intelligence with each other, in every thing that regards the com­mon intereſt. The want of this union and intelligence he laments as one of the chief obſtacles to the advance­ment of ſcience ; and, juſtly conſidering the inſtitutiou oſ public ſocieties, in the different countries of Europe, under the auſpices of the ſovereign, to be the beſt re­medy for that defect, he has given, in his fanciful work, the New Atlantis, the delineation of a philoſophical