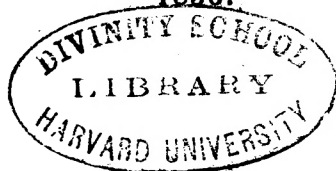


NEW VIEWS
OF
CHRISTIANITY, SOCIETY,
AND
THE CHURCH.

restes
vigustus
By O. A. BROWNSON.

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TO THE
MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF
THE SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN UNION AND PROGRESS,
THIS LITTLE
Volume is Inscribed,
AS A TOKEN OF AFFECTION AND ESTEEM,
BY THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER V.

REACTION OF SPIRITUALISM.

WHAT I have said of the Protestant world cannot be applied to the present century without some important qualifications. Properly speaking, Protestantism finished its work and expired in the French Revolution at the close of the last century. Since then there has been a reaction in favor of Spiritualism.

Men incline to exclusive Spiritualism in proportion to their want of faith in the practicability of improving their earthly condition. This accounts for the predominance of Spiritualism in the Church. The Church grew up and constituted itself amidst the crash of a falling world, when all it knew or could conceive of material well-being was crumbling in ruins around it. Greece and Rome were the prey of merciless barbarians. Society was apparently annihilated. Order there was none. — Security for person, property, or life, seemed almost the extravagant vagary of some mad enthu-

siast. Lawless violence, brutal passion, besotting ignorance, tyrants and their victims, were the only spectacles presented to win men's regard for the earth, or to inspire them with faith and hope to labor for its improvement. To the generation of that day, when the North disgorged itself upon the South, the earth must have appeared forsaken by its Maker, and abandoned to the Devil and his ministers. It was a wretched land; it could yield no supply; and the only solace for the soul was to turn away from it to another and a better world, to the world of spirit; to that world where tyrants do not enter, where wrongs and oppression, sufferings and grief, find no admission; where mutations and insecurity are unknown, and where the poor earth-wanderer, the time-worn pilgrim, may at length find that repose, that fulness of joy which he craved, which he sought but found not below. This view was natural, it was inevitable; and it could lead only to exclusive spiritualism — mysticism.

But when the external world has been somewhat meliorated, and men find that they have some security for their persons and property, that they may count with some degree of certainty on to-morrow, faith in the material order is produced and confirmed. One improvement prepares another.—

Success inspires confidence in future efforts. And this was the case at the epoch of the Reformation. Men had already made great progress in the material order, in their temporal weal. Their faith in it kept pace with their progress, or more properly, outran it. It continued to extend till it became almost entire and universal. The Eighteenth Century will be marked in the annals of the world for its strong faith in the material order. Meliorations on the broadest scale were contemplated and viewed as already realized. Our Republic sprang into being, and the world leaped with joy that "a man child was born." Social progress and the perfection of governments became the religious creed of the day; the weal of man on earth, the spring and aim of all hopes and labors. A new paradise was imaged forth for man, inaccessible to the serpent, more delightful than that which Adam lost, and more attractive than that which the pious Christian hopes to gain. We of this generation can form only a faint conception of the strong faith our fathers had in the progress of society, the high hopes of human improvement they indulged, and the joy too big for utterance, with which they heard France in loud and kindling tones proclaim **LIBERTY and EQUALITY.** France for a moment

became the centre of the world. All eyes were fixed on her movements. The pulse stood still when she and her enemies met, and loud cheers burst from the universal heart of Humanity when her tri-colored flag was seen to wave in triumph over the battle field. There was then no stray thought for God and eternity. Man and the world filled the soul. They were too big for it. But while the voice of Hope was yet ringing, and *Te Deum* shaking the arches of the old Cathedrals, — the Convention, the reign of Terror, the exile of patriots, the massacre of the gifted, the beautiful and the good, Napoleon and the Military Despotism came, and Humanity uttered a piercing shriek, and fell prostrate on the grave of her hopes !

The reaction produced by the catastrophe of this memorable drama was tremendous. There are still lingering among us those who have not forgotten the recoil they experienced when they saw the Republic swallowed up, or preparing to be swallowed up, in the Empire. Men never feel what they felt but once. The pang which darts through their souls changes them into stone. — From that moment enthusiasm died, hope in social melioration ceased to be indulged, and those who

had been the most sanguine in their anticipations, hung down their heads and said nothing; the warmest friends of Humanity apologized for their dreams of Liberty and Equality; Democracy became an accusation, and faith in the perfectibility of mankind a proof of disordered intellect.

In consequence of this reaction, men again despaired of the earth; and when they despair of the earth, they always take refuge in heaven; when man fails them, they always fly to God. They had trusted materialism too far—they would now not trust it at all. They had hoped too much—they would now hope nothing. The future, which had been to them so bright and promising, was now overspread with black clouds; the ocean on which they were anxious to embark was lashed into rage by the storm, and presented only images of dismasted or sinking ships and drowning crews.— They turned back and sighed for the serene past, the quiet and order of old times, for the mystic land of India, where the soul may dissolve in ecstasy and dream of no change.

At the very moment when the sigh had just escaped, that mystic land reappeared. The English, through the East India Company, had brought to light its old Literature and Philosophy, so diverse

from the Literature and Philosophy of modern Europe or of classical antiquity, and men were captivated by their novelty and bewildered by their strangeness. Sir William Jones gave currency to them by his poetical paraphrases and imitations; and the Asiatic Society by its researches placed them within reach of the learned of Europe. The Church rejoiced, for it was like bringing back her long lost mother, whose features she had remembered and was able at once to recognise. — Germany, England, and even France became Oriental. Cicero, and Horace, and Virgil, Æschylus, Euripides, and even Homer, with Jupiter, Apollo and Minerva were forced to bow before Hindoo Bards and Gods of uncouth forms and unutterable names.

The influence of the old Braminical or spiritual world, thus dug up from the grave of centuries, may be traced in all our Philosophy, Art and Literature. It is remarkable in our poets. It moulds the form in Byron, penetrates to the ground in Wordsworth, and entirely predominates in the Schlegels. It causes us to feel a new interest in those writers and those epochs which partake the most of Spiritualism. Those old English writers who were somewhat inclined to mysticism are revived; Plato, who travelled

in the East and brought back its lore which he modified by Western genius and moulded into Grecian forms, is reëdited, commented on, translated and raised to the highest rank among philosophers. The middle ages are reëxamined and found to contain a treasure of romance, acuteness, depth and wisdom, and are deemed by some to be "dark ages" only because we have not light enough to read them.

Materialism in Philosophy is extinct in Germany. It is only a reminiscence in France, and it produces no remarkable work in England or America. Phrenology, which some deem Materialism, has itself struck Materialism with death in Gall's Work, by showing that we are conscious of phenomena within us which no metaphysical alchemy can transmute into sensations.

Protestantism, since the commencement of the present century, in what it has peculiar to itself, has ceased to gain ground. Rationalism in Germany retreats before the Evangelical party; the Genevan Church makes few proselytes; English and American Unitarianism, on the plan of Priestley and Belsham, avowedly material, and being, as it were, the jumping-off place from the Church to absolute infidelity, is evidently on the decline. There is

probably not a man in this country, however much and justly he may esteem Priestley and Belsham, as bold and untiring advocates of reason and of Humanity, who would be willing to assume the defence of all their opinions. On the other hand Catholicism has revived, offered some able apologies for itself, made some eminent proselytes and alarmed many Protestants, even among ourselves.

Indeed every where is seen a decided tendency to Spiritualism. The age has become weary of uncertainty. It sighs for repose. Controversy is nearly ended, and a sentiment is extensively prevailing, that it is a matter of very little consequence what a man believes, or what formulas of worship he adopts, if he only have a right spirit. Men, who a few years ago were staunch Rationalists, now talk of Spiritual Communion; and many, who could with difficulty be made to admit the inspiration of the Bible, are now ready to admit the inspiration of the sacred books of all nations; and instead of stumbling at the idea of God's speaking to a few individuals, they see no reason why he should not speak to every body. Some are becoming so spiritual that they see no necessity of matter; others so refine matter that it can offer no resistance to the will, making it indeed move as the spirit

listeth; others still believe that all wisdom was in the keeping of the priests of ancient India, Egypt, and Persia, and fancy the world has been deteriorating for four thousand years, instead of advancing. Men go out from our midst to Europe, and come back half Catholics, sighing to introduce the architecture, the superstition, the rites and the sacred symbols of the middle ages.

A universal cry is raised against the frigid utilitarianism of the last century. Money-getting, desire for worldly wealth and renown, are spoken of with contempt, and men are evidently leaving the Outward for the Inward, and craving something more fervent, living and soul-kindling. All this proves that we have changed from what we were; that, though Materialism yet predominates and appears to have lost none of its influence, it is becoming a tradition; and that there is a new force collecting to expel it. Protestantism passes into the condition of a reminiscence. Protestant America cannot be aroused against the Catholics. A mob may burn a convent from momentary excitement, but the most protestant of the Protestants among us will petition the Legislature to indemnify the owners. Indeed Protestantism died in the French Revolution, and we are beginning to be-

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come disgusted with its dead body. The East has reappeared, and Spiritualism revives; will it again become supreme? Impossible.