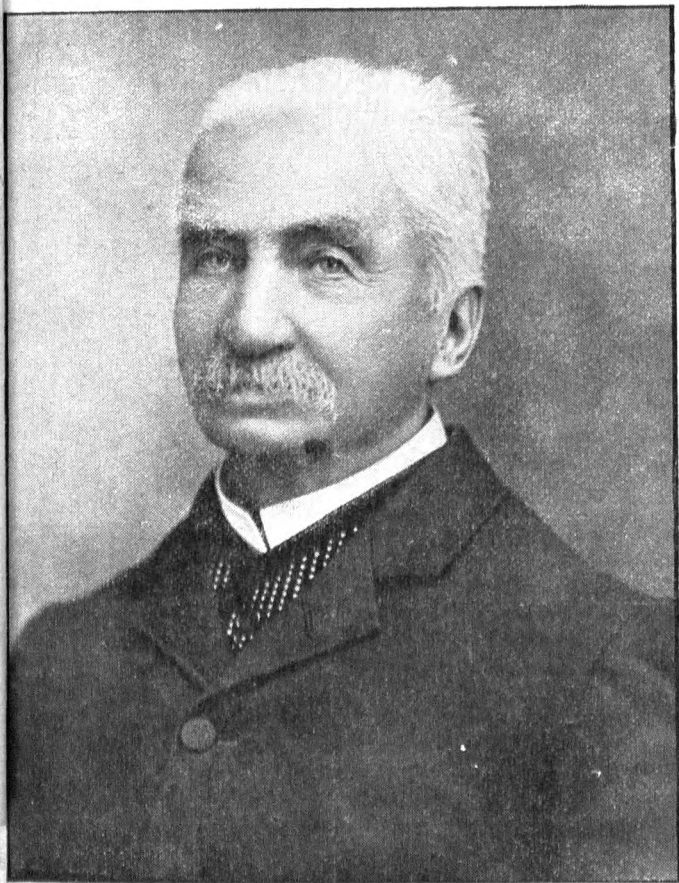


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The Next Reformation.

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The Next Reformation.

The last great Reformation was one which only affected the external forms of Religion, its rites, and ceremonies, its modes of worship, and some of the doctrines and dogmas, which, having been invented and adopted during the Dark Ages, were rejected and laid aside by the advancing intelligence of the epoch. The next Reformation, towards which so many thoughtful men are directing their aspirations and their hopes, will be one of Religion itself. It will be radical and sweeping. It will aim at the re-assertion and re-establishment of Christianity, as taught by Christ himself. At the present moment, this is virtually unknown throughout the length and breadth of Christendom.

For what is religion, in the popular acceptation of the word? It is the setting apart of one day in the week for what is called Divine Service, or the service of God, and the dedication of the other six, to the worship and glorification of Self.

Worship—Sunday worship—is a relic of Judaism and Paganism. It originated in the false and foolish conceptions of the Supreme Being formed by man in the infancy of the human race. He was then regarded as an object of dread. "*To fear God,*" is one of the fundamental precepts of the Old Testament. A superstitious people heard His voice in the thunder; and discerned the manifestations of His awful power in the lightning, the earthquake, plague, pestilence and famine. Every great calamity was the expression of His wrath; every convulsion of nature an evidence of His terrible anger—a "*visitation of Providence*"—a divine judgment on man. Hence the religious services, the sacrifices and burnt offerings of earlier times were propitiatory. They were intended to appease and soothe an irritable and offended Deity. God, in the universal idea of Him, was a magnified man, and subject to the worst passions of humanity: to offended pride, jealousy, vindictiveness, resentment, and a propensity to cruelty and torture.

Therefore the ignorant multitude strove to placate Him in much the same way as they would have done an extremely powerful earthly despot. And soon there arose an astute, avaricious, and ambitious priesthood, which discerned in the superstitious fears of the people a splendid opportunity for the achievement of a commanding influence, and the acquisition of much wealth, by trading on the popular dread of the Almighty. In furtherance of its own selfish ends, this priesthood invented rituals, prescribed fasts and festivals, claimed to be invested with divine authority and to speak in the name of the Most High. Now and then, some inspired seer and prophet arose, who denounced all such pretensions and practices, demanding, as Isaiah did: "Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with. It is iniquity; even the solemn meeting." And, later on, we may recognise the voice of inspiration in the words of Micah: "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God?"

Here, you will observe, is a pure and simple religion, defined in a few words, involving neither temples nor churches; neither a priesthood nor a form of worship. To be just and merciful, and to walk humbly before God, as the Author and Giver of all good; this was all. Imagine a community fulfilling these precepts, and you will imagine a "Paradise Restored."

Then, in process of time, the Creator of this fair world of ours sent upon the earth a Messenger, greater than any of the prophets, greater than Buddha than Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Socrates, or Confucius in the person of the son of a poor village carpenter and he, Jesus of Nazareth, the real founder of Spiritualism, demolished the whole fabric of religious worship, and substituted for what had erroneously been called divine service, the service of our fellow crea

tures; for common prayer, private supplication; for temples of brick and stone and marble, the sanctuary of our own hearts; for the Eden of the Jews, and the White Island of the Hindus, and the Olympus of the Greeks, and the Elysian fields of the Romans; an internal heaven; saying, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

I have said that Christ abolished public worship; and he did so in the most explicit and emphatic terms of which human language is capable. After reprehending the practice of those who attended the synagogues, and even prayed at the corners of the streets, he said to each of his disciples: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." And then he gave them that beautiful petition, which is the summary of all our wants, and the eternal expression of the relationship of man to God, who is His Father.

Moreover, the greatest of the Apostles twice placed upon record the following declaration:—"The Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." The transparent absurdity of "divine worship" to the Infinite One did not fail to strike the sensible mind of Paul, and he therefore exposed it in language of singular force and lucidity. For what, he asked, can God need at the hands of His finite children, who are indebted to Him for their very existence, and for everything by which that existence is maintained? What, indeed, does He require at our hands, but obedience to those laws which He has instituted for our health and happiness. If we reflect for a moment, we cannot fail to perceive the insult which we unintentionally offer to His boundless intelligence by imagining that He can be pleased by the spectacle of some hundreds of people assembling in a particular building, upon the first day of the week, and offering up a form of prayer to Him "who knoweth what things we have need of before we ask," and singing hymns

and anthems in praise of One who is above all praise. above all comprehension, indeed, in the awful might of His Majesty, in the supreme splendour of His Glory, in the magnificence of His sublime and unapproachable Perfection.

I do not presume to assert, for a moment, that men and women can not, and do not, benefit by assembling together for spiritual communion and intercourse, but I do assert that what is called public worship is diametrically opposed to the admonitions of the Master, and to the tenor of the teachings of Paul. And inasmuch as the first observance of Sunday dates only from the edict of Constantine in the year 321, "divine service" must have been unknown during the first three centuries of the Christian era. It will disappear, I believe, at the next Reformation, and will be replaced by that private and secret prayer which Christ enjoined.

People will then look back with a feeling of compassion upon the mental darkness and narrowness of their forefathers, who were capable of imagining that the Creator of all these stupendous universes could be gratified by His earthly creatures assembling in certain large buildings on the first day of the week, in His honour, and devoting all the rest of it to the sincere and earnest worship of Mammon. The coming generation, I take it, will be rather inclined to exclaim, with the poet:—

"Thrice blessed is the man with whom
The gracious prodigality of nature,
The balm, the bliss, the beauty, and the bloom,
The bounteous providence in ev'ry feature,
Recall the good Creator to His creature.
Making all earth a fane, all heav'n its dome !
To his tun'd spirit the wild heather bells
Ring Sabbath-knells ;
The jubilate of the soaring lark
Is chant of clerk :
For choir, the thrush and the gregarious linnet ;
The sod's a cushion for his pious want ;
And, consecrated by the heav'n within it ;
The sky-blue pool a font ;
Each cloud-capp'd mountain is a holy altar ;
An organ breathes in every grove ;
And the full heart's a Psalter,
Rich in deep hymns of gratitude and love !"

In the next Reformation, its Wycliffs and Luthers will sink a shaft down to the very bed-rock of Christianity, I anticipate; and, making the discovery that it is not based upon a mass of dogmas and doctrines, devised by a dominant priesthood in the Middle Ages, but is simply a rule of conduct, exemplified in the daily life of its admirable Founder, will adopt and affirm the only definition of Religion which is to be found in the pages of the New Testament. That definition is the following:—"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless, and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

There is nothing here, you will observe, about creeds or articles of faith, or public worship, with its rites and ceremonies; nothing about the trinity or the atonement, nothing about the efficacy of Faith, or any priestly doctrine whatsoever. No: in its beautiful simplicity and conciseness, pure religion and undefiled is declared to consist in the exercise of kindness, compassion, sympathy and brotherly love; and in personal purity and unworldliness. The definition is so simple that its meaning is intelligible to the understanding of a little child, and to that of an ignorant savage. And, as it is comprehensible by all, so is it of universal force and application. It is identical in its simplicity, as in its essence, with the sublime commandment, "Little children, love one another." It appeals to the spark of divinity which has been implanted in all men—in the Buddhist and the Moslem, in the disciples of Confucius, and in the followers of Zoroaster. As a religion of goodness, it is broad enough, and comprehensive enough, to embrace the whole of mankind within its loving clasp; and it needs no argument, on my part, to prove to you that it implies the brotherhood of mankind, and that, whenever it shall be universally practised the whole of the human race will be fused into one great concordant family, and that there will be no more religious quarrels, no more conflicts of creeds, no more sectarian differences. People will look back, indeed, with feelings of horror and absolute incredulity, upon the appalling records and traditions of a time when

religious persecutions prevailed, and when human beings tortured and butchered each other, under the impious and blasphemous pretext that they did so "for the love of God."

For us, Spiritualists, this definition carries with it an overwhelming weight of authority, because its absolute truth is attested by myriads of spirit-voices speaking to us from beyond the grave. During the last fourteen years alone—dating, that is to say, from the time when I began to record the communications I received from the other world—I have been spoken to by upwards of 1300 distinct personalities, belonging, when on earth, to all countries, all ages and all creeds. Their statements fill more than 50 volumes of M.S. and they are unanimous upon one point, namely, that the condition of every human being in the after life, whether for weal or for woe—and the first of these is an enduring happiness, and the second a temporary and disciplinary remorse, followed by the expiation of whatever is thought, spoken, or done amiss—is rigorously, exactly and righteously determined, by his or her conduct on the earth; and not by his or her beliefs, or no-beliefs; and that the agnostic, who was honest in his scepticism, but strove to do all the good in his power, and to live up to that "light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," attains to a condition of peace and joy, which is not reached for many years, perhaps, by the professedly religious man, who, while fulfilling all the outward observances enjoined by his Church or sect, was nevertheless a hard task-master, a diligent accumulator of earthly wealth, an ostentatious donor of subscriptions to public charities, and a shining light in the business world, but who uniformly forgot, as Marley did in that splendid Xmas story by Charles Dickens, which Thackeray pronounced to be the finest charity sermon ever preached, that "Mankind was his business; the common welfare was his business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were his business," and that "the dealings of his trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of his business."

In the next Reformation, Spiritualism will constitute one of its great shaping forces. We have seen, in the recent Church Congress held in this city, how it is stealing into the minds, and leavening the ideas, of church dignitaries, even although they are evidently very imperfectly acquainted with its real nature, and with the enormous progress it is making in all parts of the world, and in Roman Catholic countries more particularly. It is probably not unknown to most, if not all of those whom I am addressing, that a movement is on foot in the spirit world, of which it is as impossible to estimate the tremendous magnitude, as to foresee its mighty consequences. Bands of powerful spirits, under the direction of One whom the churches ignorantly worship as God, but whom we affectionately venerate as our Master, and gratefully reverence as the Great Teacher, are engaged in making a simultaneous impact upon the mind of humanity, in order to rescue it from the degrading worship of Self, and to arrest its descent into that pit of materialism which threatens to engulf the whole of the civilised races of the world. This is the message which is coming to spiritualists in all parts of the globe. Hence the universal unrest that prevails; the falling away of worshippers, in such great numbers, from the various churches, which is being everywhere complained of by the clergy; the unsettlement of men's minds upon questions of faith and doctrine, Biblical inspiration and interpretation; the altogether remarkable outbreak of spiritual manifestations of a really startling kind which is taking place in Europe, America and Australia. And not unrelated to these impressive "Signs of the Times" are the revolutionary movements of a murderous character, and the spread of Anarchism in so many parts of the world; leading to the commission of crimes of an unusually revolting nature; for, it would appear, the "powers of the air," as the unprogressed spirits who are earth-bound are termed by Paul, are conscious of the other great movements I have just spoken of, and seem to dread the possible destruction of their influence over their vicious and criminal instruments in human form;

and thus "the spiritual wickedness in high places" has become more malignantly active than ordinary and makes itself evident by the atrocities which it inspires its plastic, but unconscious, agents to perpetrate. These, at least, are the statements which are being made, in many directions, by spiritual informants, who have no apparent motives for deceiving those to whom they communicate them.

Yes, Spiritualism, I repeat, will become one of the shaping forces of the next Reformation; and for the following reasons: The time is close at hand when the rapidly multiplying evidences of spirit return will carry with them such overwhelming weight as to compel their recognition and acceptance by all rational minds. Then, what will ensue? The statements they make with respect to the after life will enforce belief, because they will be found to be consonant with reason, and consistent with each other, and obviously true, because they are likewise obviously just; while, both separately and in the mass, they will constitute irresistibly powerful arguments for simplicity, purity and righteousness of life on earth. The confessions of those who have lived evilly will be more potent dissuasions from wrong-doing than all the sermons that were ever preached. The spectacle of the remorse and mental misery undergone by the unhappy beings who have spent their days in the accumulation of wealth, or in vicious self-indulgence, will be a more eloquent plea in favour of generosity philanthropy and unselfishness and a more impressive protest against their opposites than all the condemnations of Avarice that were ever penned.

The next Reformation will be accompanied by a total overthrow and complete reversal of all the ideas now current upon the earth, with respect to the relative value and importance of the present, and of the future life. At this moment, the former is everything, and the latter—where it is really believed to exist—is nothing in the estimation of the eager, restless, pushing, struggling, sordid, selfish multitude. They live only in and for it, as though it were going to last for ever. But when, enlightened by daily intercourse, with those who have passed before them,

into the Infinite Beyond, the surprising loveliness and beauty, the overflowing happiness, and everlasting duration of that magnificent existence, come to be fully understood and adequately appreciated, the visible and invisible worlds will fall into their proper and natural relationships. People will regard the present life as something to be lived wisely, simply, tranquilly, healthily, and happily, and as a training school for the higher faculties of their nature; and not, as we have made it, a scene of conflict and bloodshed, in which every man's hand is against that of his brother, in which commerce has become a field of cut-throat competition, and the awful trade of war is carried on by armies of unprecedented magnitude. While science exhausts its ingenuity in the invention of implements and explosives of unparalleled efficacy for the wholesale slaughter of our fellow creatures.

After the next Reformation, I venture to predict there will be no such monstrosity upon the face of the earth as a millionaire; for men with a genius for money-making will be appalled when the spirit of some great magnate of finance stands before them in the rags and squalor of a miserable mendicant—I, myself, have spoken with such—proclaiming the agonies of his remorse, deploring the folly and futility of his wretched career, and perceiving, with unutterable anguish, that he has made terrible shipwreck of his earthly life, and that he must spend long, long years—if may be even centuries—in effacing all the evils he has done and in expiating the awful mistakes he made in stifling every generous and unselfish impulse of his soul, and in sacrificing all the nobler faculties of his nature to the hideous and debasing lust of gold.

Once spiritualise our civilisation and there will be no more wealth, and no more poverty; no more warfare, and no more strife; while vice and crime, insanity and disease, will gradually diminish, and will ultimately disappear. For then

“The common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.”