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I.

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY ON EARTH.

HE would be a bold thinker who should undertake to foretell the fortunes and the state of an American Republic five or ten centuries hence:—who should attempt not only to describe the type or types of government which may then exist here, but also to delineate the personal characteristics of the men and women of that distant era, the social life of the period, the grade of development and of civilization which our humanity will then have attained on this broad and elect continent. How much bolder would he be who, in full view of the present medley of antagonistic elements, religious, political, social, in European society and life, should propose to tell us what Europe will have become, after the agitations and the mutations of the next thousand years! Bolder still would he be deemed who should attempt to prognosticate the future at that distant period, not of any single nation or continent, but of all the continents and all the races of mankind: who should assume to say what this world, in its controlling elements and tendencies, its prevailing spirit and principles and life, will be at the end of five or ten more centuries of activity and of growth. But would not he be boldest of all—daring beyond all comparison—who should venture to prophesy concerning the career and development of our humanity, not for any such given period however prolonged, but down to the last century and the last hour of recorded time: unfolding before our vision that ultimate issue in which the whole of human life on earth shall be consummated, in the decisive day

when God shall sum up all earthly things in His own comprehensive conclusion?

Yet this is precisely what the Bible professes to do: it is, in a word, the Book of the Future of Humanity. With reference to the past, it may be described as the condensed and the sublime biography of mankind, even from the beginning of time: a complete record of the origin, experiences, developments, and career of the human race. With reference to the present, it is the one authoritative law and guide for all men, furnishing the regulative principles which should control all human activities, and breathing forth a spirit which—were it everywhere admitted—would transform man into an angel, and change our world into a paradise of holiness and of bliss. Yet this Book concerns itself no less closely or solemnly with “the things which shall be hereafter.” A singular element of prophecy flows like a silver stream throughout its vast expanse: now disclosing simply the future destinies of an individual, a city or a nation: now bringing into view the onward procession of great principles or tendencies or dispensations: now revealing in awful form and coloring even the end of earthly things, the scenes and issues of the final consummation. In this respect, as well as in so many others, the Bible is a book without an equal or a parallel. Neither the ancient dream of an Atlantis, nor the ideal Republic of Plato, nor the Utopia of Thomas More, nor any other fancy or anticipation in literature, can be compared for a moment in clearness, in breadth, in splendor, with its predictions concerning the future of man and of the world. Whether truthfully or falsely, it undertakes to tell us not merely whither our humanity is to move during the successive generations and ages before it on earth, but also what are to be the laws and inspirations which shall control that broad development, and the grand result in which our race will reach its “most consummate flower.” The whole course of mankind is herein most clearly described: the end and fruition of that course are most elaborately revealed.

It is also worthy of note that the Bible stakes its claim to be regarded as the Book of God for man, largely on the historical verification of these varied and comprehensive predictions. In the Mosaic, and specially in the prophetic era,

it staked its claim upon Jewish credence, not merely on the stupendous miracles which accompanied and endorsed it, but also on the clear and unquestioned fulfilment of its particular prophecies respecting individuals like Cyrus, cities like Tyre, tribes or nations like the descendants of Ishmael. In the Messianic and apostolic era it again rested the question of its authenticity, chiefly indeed on what our Lord himself did and was, but also largely on the wonderful verifications of prophecy seen in His life, in the outpouring of His Spirit, and in the supernatural development of His Church. So now this singular Book consents to have its right to be received as divine, turn on the exact and ever-growing parallel between human history as it transpires, and its recorded prognostications and foreshadowings of that history. It asks us to compare its declarations concerning the career of humanity, century by century, with the facts as they are gradually traced on the historic page: and then to say whether any mind less than divine could have furnished such a delineation, and followed it with such a realization. The history of the world is continuously verifying the divine Word, not merely in its predictions, but by consequence in all its statements, and in all its claims on human acceptance.

We may expect the Scripture to justify itself more and more conclusively by this peculiar and supreme test of prophecy. Suppose indeed that the world, as it moves on toward some predestined close, should progressively develop a future entirely different from that foretold in the Bible:—suppose that some thoroughly pessimistic theory of humanity should turn out to be the true one, and the race, instead of rising into any really worthy consummation, should go down at last into some unutterable abyss of corruption and of misery:—suppose, even, that the unfolding history of man should, in fact, bring to light no providential ordering in things, and disclose nothing but one endless series of events, with no worthy movement, no developing purpose, and no adequate result: an unending chain of revolving occurrences, bringing nothing to pass, but simply clattering on age after age, without aim or end. In either case, the claim of the Bible to be the Book of God would sooner or later be overthrown irrecoverably; for nothing is clearer to any thoughtful student of that Book, than the

fact that its predictions are in utter and irreconcilable contrast with every such supposition. If such should prove to be the actual course and end of man in this world, not only would the prophecies of Scripture be cast aside as illusive, but every doctrine, every precept, every asserted right to rule in man or over man, would be swept away together. But if, on the other hand, what the Bible predicts to-day, turns out to be the fact a thousand or ten thousand years hence: if it is found that there really is in history just such an order and movement as this Book foretells, and if that history should at last be crowned and glorified in just such a consummation as this Book promises, and the actual outcome of things should stand forth before the world as an exact parallel to what was here foretold a thousand ages previous: then at the end, if never before, all men will be compelled to say: It is divine! The conclusion will be simply irresistible. The Mind that so shaped the unfolding future of the world, must have been the same Mind that dictated this volume: and the Mind that could thus both foretell and shape such a vast, progressive, glorious future, can have been none other than divine.

I. But what is the sum of this revealed future, as delineated in Scripture? What, according to this witness, is to be the line of historic development for mankind? What, if these inspired predictions be true, will be the nature and contents of the final consummation? Three things, each wonderful beyond all comparison, seem to be blended together in the biblical conception:

Of these the first is a thoroughly regenerated or renewed human nature. The Bible clearly foretells the fact of a profound, comprehensive, vital change as yet to occur, not in here and there an individual, but in mankind: not a physical or constitutional change primarily, but rather a moral, a spiritual change, pervading all the higher nature, and involving the complete and permanent rectification of manhood and womanhood throughout the world. It declares not merely that such a transformation as this is possible even in our degenerate human nature, and that the divine Word and the divine Spirit are agencies adequate to produce it, but also that it is the divine purpose in and through the Gospel to bring this transformation to pass in the heart of humanity, and

finally to present the race thus faultless and sanctified before the throne of a reconciled God. It is unquestionable that the Bible stakes the issue of its own divinity on the demonstrated ability of the Gospel to work such a change as this in certain specific cases: the whole Christian scheme is based on the truthfulness of this assumption. But it is hardly less obvious that this Book in like manner claims to possess ability to make this change universal—to bring humanity in general into such an improved moral condition. If we must say that, in case regeneration be not a fact in human experience, the Scriptures cannot be from God; much more must we say that the fact of regeneration must ultimately become universal, or the Scriptures, which predict such universality, are not from God.

A regenerate human nature, produced by forces inherent in Christianity and essentially universal, clearly stands out at the end of things as one vital element in the consummation toward which humanity is moving. Nothing short of this could be recognized by a thoughtful and upright philosophy as meeting the moral needs or satisfying the higher aspirations of mankind: nothing short of this could be regarded as essential to the realizing on earth of that promised age of peace whose white glories are so strongly brought to view in the later Scriptures. How much may be involved in such renewal of humanity, or what may be the specific forms in which such renewal will make itself apparent in that glorious era, it would be difficult now to anticipate. Much more than all that we now indicate by such terms as conviction, or repentance, or conversion, may be included in it: it may carry in it moral revolutions and moral growths of which the maturest saint is hardly now conscious: it may include phases of experience and types of character far beyond any now apparent in the life of the Church. The regenerative capabilities of the Gospel are certainly far from being exhausted: the potencies of the Word and the potencies of the Spirit may in that era be exhibited on a scale quite above any yet realized by man. What new, sweet, purer thoughts may then arise in human consciousness: what higher, more celestial, and blessed sentiments may then throb through the renewed breast of humanity: what holier purposes, and larger capacities for effort, and

expanded ability to serve God in all appointed spheres of duty, may then be developed under the action of these divine agencies, it is not given to man now to discern. It is enough to know that, in that blessed age, human nature, so long corrupted and enfeebled by sin, will be renewed, regenerate, sanctified.

As a consequence of this vital transformation in humanity, the Bible clearly predicts a corresponding change in human society:—such a reorganization of that society, on the basis of this spiritual renewal, as shall progressively include all usages, principles, arts, institutions, governments; and shall finally work out a structural and organic, as well as individual, regeneration for the world. How far that world now is from any such organic process of renewal according to the divine ideal set forth in Scripture:—how vast, complex, and difficult such a process must be in such a world as this, we may to some extent conceive, though we can hardly comprehend the methods to be employed in it, or imagine the completeness and the glory of the result. Yet the Christian Revelation affirms that such a reconstructive process is going on, and that such a result will eventually be realized. The Christian scheme not only declares its intention and aim to establish among men such a kingdom of heaven, but also asserts that such a kingdom will, in fact, be established, and such a social revolution be consummated, in some grand earthly hereafter.

It is a beautiful picture which the Bible paints, of a society thus renovated organically, and thus brought into more than paradisiac purity and blessedness:—a state of things of which the bright vision of Milton, as he contemplates the morn of the Nativity, is only an imperfect emblem. In that fair era, all the customs and usages of the world, now so often tributary to the diffusion and the sway of sin, will be sweetly subordinated to the prevalent authority of the divinest virtue. In that era all the arts, instead of ministering to the vanities and passions of men, will become true servitors of religion, true ministrants at the altar of devotion. In that era the principles that rule in all the social fellowships of life, the laws that order mutual relations and obligations, will be drawn entirely from the divine Word, and infused into men through the divine Spirit. In that era, the governments of men will be sanctified through-

out by the supreme authority of the Gospel; the administration of civil affairs in capital and court will be thoroughly Christianized; and in the words of prophecy, the kingdoms of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Organically, as well as individually, humanity is thus to be redeemed and restored; and over all Immanuel is to reign supreme.

The biblical delineation fairly justifies the raising of a third question, whether this grand spiritual and social renovation will not be accompanied by some corresponding changes in the earth itself, fitting it to be the abode of a race thus individually and organically restored. The Bible seems not indistinctly to point forward to such a physical rejuvenescence of the earth in connection with the regeneration of mankind. We know on its authority that this earth was once judicially cursed on account of man—so changed in its structure and phenomena as to indicate in every part the divine displeasure with human transgression: bringing forth everywhere, in mute rebuke, the thorns that were to scourge man and the burdensome disabilities which in countless forms were to try and discipline him for his sin. Does not Paul seem to point forward to a corresponding process of restoration, by which the creation now travailing together in sympathetic pain, and waiting patiently to be delivered, shall yet share in the higher life that shall be granted to our humanity? And does not Isaiah, in the vivid pictures he has drawn of the fir-tree supplanting the brier, of the wilderness blossoming as the rose, of the leopard lying down with the kid, of a placid age where nothing shall hurt or destroy, seem in like manner to tell us of a material world once more beautified and restored as by a divine Hand, until it becomes the fit abode of a regenerate, as it is now the fit abode of an apostate, race?

It may be said that such images are to be taken as metaphorical throughout: that they are simply the material forms through which the Holy Spirit describes the work which He is yet to perform in the heart and life of humanity. Let it be granted that such material emblems often recur in Scripture, where they must be interpreted as symbolical merely; but must it follow that we are to exclude altogether the conception of a physical as well as a moral restoration, as one of the

crowning issues in the scheme of grace? Contemplating the fact of an actual degeneration of the earth on account of the degeneracy of man, are we not spontaneously led to look forward to a corresponding fact of restoration for the creature now, in apostolic phrase, waiting to be delivered? Does not a judicial cataclysm in the interest of sin foretold a gracious cataclysm in the interest of salvation? And to the believing mind, that sees everywhere a divine Hand holding all the resources of nature in its grasp, and turning them whithersoever it will—a Hand that once did actually modify the forces and movements of nature, and bring new shadows upon the world as an expression of divine wrath and divine sorrow over human guilt—what intrinsic difficulty is there in believing also that the same Hand may yet work graciously in these material elements until every desolate place shall become a garden, and nature herself, restored to her pristine beauty, shall join all her voices with those of humanity, in responsive love and adoration? He who can change man into an angel, can change our earth into paradise again.

In these two or possibly three generic aspects, the Word of God clearly promises a grand future for humanity on earth—a Millennial Age of truth, of righteousness, of purity and peace, incomparably beyond the recorded experiences, or even the brightest dreams of mankind. The restoration of our spiritual nature to more than its primitive grace and strength, the reconstruction of human society so that in all its elements and developments it shall become the very kingdom of heaven, and possibly the renewal of the earth we dwell in, so that it shall be as the garden of the Lord, more bright and fair than the original Eden: these supernatural processes are to go on together, under the action of forces already developed or symbolized in the Gospel, until they eventuate even in that New Jerusalem which John in prophetic vision once saw descending as from heaven, and dwelling among men—the *Civitas Dei* within whose sacred walls our race is at last to dwell. Glorious vision! will it be realized?

It is not the purpose of this essay to present the specific evidence that such is, in fact, the future which the Bible promises to mankind. Such a presentation would of itself require an ample volume. That evidence lies partly in the Messianic



promises which brighten so strangely the early dawn of the race, and which so singularly foretell the breaking forth of a millennial noontide, not for the Hebrew merely, but for man. It lies partly in the prophetic declarations of the Old Testament, from David to Isaiah, from Daniel to Malachi: declarations which evidently reach out far beyond the Jewish people, and include in their beneficent scope all nationalities, all lands, all dispensations. It rests largely on the striking affirmations of our Lord—in aphorism, in parable, in simple suggestion, respecting a kingdom of truth and righteousness, wide as the world in its sphere, and bearing in its hand all possible blessing and hope for mankind. It also lies largely in what the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to affirm concerning the future of the world:—in the sublime prophecies of Paul, and in the apocalyptic vision of the seer of Patmos. It lies incidentally in the declarations, the aspirations, the efforts, and hopes of the apostolic Church: and in the singular verification of all these in the actual history of that Church during the first supernatural century. It may be said to lie also, as a just inference, in the biblical conception of the Gospel itself, viewed as a grand remedial measure, and of the forces which are divinely joined together in making that Gospel efficacious in the world:—forces whose potency is incapable of being exhausted, and whose full effect and influence can be realized in nothing less than a regenerated and paradisiac world.

All such scriptural argumentation waived, what is here claimed is simply this: that in the clear light of Providence and of history, on a fair and thoughtful examination of things as they have been, and are, and to our eyes seem likely to be, this scriptural view of the Future of Humanity amply justifies itself as not merely in a high degree probable, but even as certain to be realized. If human experience thus far has not afforded data from which the events of a hundred ages hence may be scientifically computed—if a reverent philosophy, inquiring into the causes, the laws, and the drift of our earthly life, is not able to determine exactly where and how that life will find its consummation, still philosophy and experience may combine together in furnishing the materials for at least a probable judgment: they may shed such light on the problem, as shall enable us on one side to cast aside certain hypoth-

eses as untenable, and on the other to reach a conclusion which is approximately and morally, though it be not scientifically, sufficient. To the broad question whether the biblical conception already defined is thus rendered probable, and in a moral sense certain, by what we may learn from these tributary sources, considerate attention is now invited.

II. Two or three false or defective opinions concerning Providence as revealed in history, concerning history as containing within itself the germs and the indices of the future, need to be briefly mentioned here :

Of these the first is the atheistic theory, which in various forms denies in fact the existence of what we term providence, and pronounces the past and the present too chaotic, too void of method or order, to be any index as to the future. Ninety years have passed since Constantine Volney, one of the most witty, brilliant, and specious leaders in the French atheism of the eighteenth century, wrote his famous treatise, "*Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les Révolutions des Empires.*" The aim of that treatise was not merely to show as Depuis had already attempted to do in his "*Origine des Cultes,*" that historical Christianity was only one in a long series of natural religions, and therefore as insufficient in its claims and as evanescent in its influence as any of its predecessors ; but also that all religions, all states, all human institutions and usages and interests, exist only in a perpetual flow, dissolving successively without method even in their disappearance, and nowhere exhibiting traces of a divine plan or presence. It was an attempt, able and audacious, to eliminate God from human history—to exclude the idea of providence as at work in any form in the management or the movement of human affairs. All we see, it was said, is simply an endless succession of births, developments, decline, and decay in the religious, the civil, and the social institutions and life of men. No divine purpose or agency is apparent anywhere ; there is consequently for the race no determinate career, and no appointed consummation. As the unhappy king of Israel declared, in the days of his scepticism, so this type of unbelief affirmed : The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be ; and that which is done, is that which shall be done ; and there is no new thing under the sun.

It was even affirmed by some successors of Volney that the Bible itself, regarded as an historical record merely, reveals nothing more than this: that while the doctrine of providence is there inculcated as a dogma, the Scripture history is enough of itself to prove the doctrine untrue. Reference was made to empires like the Egyptian or the Persian, coming into prominence, living out their brief life, and then changing into dust:—to cities like Babylon or Tyre, springing into splendor, controlling the world for a time, and then crumbling into ruin:—to the Jewish nation itself passing through precisely the same experiences as other nationalities, and at last becoming a scattered, fragmentary, hapless race. Nowhere even in Holy Writ do we discover, it was said, any historic evidences of a divine wisdom at work in the affairs of men, or of any comprehensive scheme and order of things in which these shifting affairs shall ultimately be seen to be obvious, tributary, harmonious elements.

So far as this atheistic theory claims to find a warrant for itself in the assumed confessions or contradictions of Scripture, the answer must be a quick and decisive challenge of the false interpretation employed. It may justly be maintained that, studied on a broader scale, the Bible as a historical record simply does rather indicate most clearly both a realized fact of progress and a divine law of progress: its narratives of men and nations, not contradicting, but abundantly confirming its doctrinal affirmations. The biblical evidences of such a providential ordering and movement are too abundant to be enumerated here; but the general fact must, in the estimate of any thorough student of Scripture, be quite beyond question. And if to this be added the direct teaching of the Bible as to the existence and the attributes of God, as to His sovereign will and guidance in human life, as to His mighty and just and beneficent orderings of events on earth, the answer must be still more immediate and decisive. In the light of such teaching it is safe to say, either that there is such a providence at work in the world, or that the divine Word is wholly a delusion.

Without considering at this point the further proposition that history itself, apart from Scripture, reveals the existence and potency of such providences, we may pass to note another

kindred theory, springing from the soil, not of atheism, but of materialism: a theory which admits in some degree the general fact of a progressive order in history, but maintains that such order is due exclusively to physical or other natural causes, rather than to religious agencies. This theory sometimes even extols the manifest progress in human history, and spreads out in large and imposing array the various forces, material and intellectual and social, out of whose combined action that progress is supposed to flow. It even assumes both to furnish the only explanation possible in the case, and to be alike the exponent and the chief agent in such human advance. It boldly excludes the supernatural from the field of history, and remands God to some lofty isolation where indeed He may contemplate, but meanwhile does not control this grand earthly evolution. And it is hardly too much to say that one of the most serious hindrances to true progress in this day, is the prevalence of such materialistic conceptions of history, expounded in able treatises, regnant in some popular reviews, and largely affecting the practical judgment of multitudes on many important issues of the time. If it be an injurious error to declare that there is no order or progress in history, it must be regarded as an error hardly less injurious thus to regard that order and that progress as traceable to natural causes only.

That no really adequate consummation for humanity can be counted upon, as the result of such instrumentalities, must be apparent. A material consummation, in which the earth we live in is in the highest measure utilized, and in which the utmost limits of physical development are reached, cannot satisfy the demands even of a materializing philosophy, so long as man himself, in the loftier elements of his nature, does not attain the largest growth and blessedness of which that nature is capable. A consummation merely intellectual or æsthetic, or one in which the social instincts and life of man reach their best practical development, cannot satisfy, unless his religious capabilities are brought into full exercise, and bloom into their divinest beauty. If his powers of thought were trained to their utmost capacity; if his taste, his sensibilities, his heart, were elevated to the completest degree of culture; if he were provided with a perfect social and civil state, and the earth

around him were transformed into an Eden of delight, there could be for him no really satisfying outcome of life, no adequate consummation, while his higher spiritual needs were unmet and unfed. It is an incontestable fact that religion in some form must enter as a vital and central element into any future of our race, that can be accepted by the mind as right or worthy. To shut out this highest factor, and to look for an issue that will be adequate from the continuous action of material or other human forces alone, is certainly not philosophic: it savors rather of a folly which is as degenerate as it is unwise.

The biblical doctrine is also confronted by another theory of the future which may be termed the catastrophic: a theory which, indeed, differs from both of the preceding in recognizing religion as an essential factor in all present, and even in all prospective development under existing conditions, but which holds that religion, even in the form of spiritual Christianity, will never bring the human race into any such consummation as the world is looking for, and as the Bible is here affirmed to predict. It is asserted by writers of this school that the human race, even under the influence of such Christianity, is making no essential advance in moral condition: that the Christian scheme cannot be expected to do much more than it has done already; that even under its influence humanity is the rather growing worse and worse; and that the end of the present order of things will be, not a consummation, but rather a catastrophe, in which wrath and judgment and flame will finally sweep aside the larger portion of a race which even the Gospel seems unable radically to improve. On this theory the future of humanity can in no sense be regarded as an orderly progression under the action of forces already existing, and especially of the forces actually employed in the Gospel. Convulsions, earthquakes, retributions, are to take the place of the Word and the Spirit as agents in improving mankind; and the issue of their action is not a true restoration of human nature or of human society, or the renewal of a sinful earth, but rather the rescue of some proportion of that race, amid the smiting and overthrow of the vast remainder.

Without bringing this catastrophic theory to the test of

Scripture, we may measure it sufficiently by what we know of Providence as revealed in the actual career of humanity, and especially as presented in the records of historical Christianity. It is a species of Christian Volneyism ;—not, indeed, denying the existence of God or the divine relations to humanity, nor expressly questioning the doctrine of a providential order and potency in the world, yet regarding the movements of Providence as a series of experiments and even of failures, and contemplating in the end an issue which seems as derogatory to the divine wisdom and love as it is destructive to the best hopes of man. The answer of fact is conclusive against it. What we perceive of the nature and adaptations of Christianity as a moral force, unexhausted and exhaustless : what we know of the actual progress of Christianity in the past : what we know of its present position and influence and prospects : what we know of its demonstrated capacity to work out the completest spiritual renovation in man and in society,—all conspire to assure us that the hypothesis of a vast final cataclysm in which the present order of things, Christianity included, shall be engulfed in an abyss of vengeance, is alike unwarranted and illusive.

III. In presenting more specifically the evidence of providence and history in favor of the biblical conception of the future, as against all such theories, we may start from the cardinal proposition that God must be conducting our race toward some adequate, satisfying, sublime result. If there be a God, He must be a Being capable, not merely of foreseeing all that is to come to pass in the progressing career of humanity, but also of determining and controlling the vast, complex succession of events in that career. To conceive of Him as either ignorant of the future, or unable to control it, would be fatally derogatory to the idea of Him as divine. But not only must He be capable of thus foreseeing and predetermining : He must in some sense actually foreknow and control. He must plan, order, rule ; and the result, as it is progressively evolved, must exhibit in every part His capacity to plan, order, rule. Whatever difficulties we may encounter in framing such a conception, or whatever mysteries may seem to us to encircle the actual developments of such providence, we cannot throw aside the conception itself without plunging into the

abyss of atheism with Volney, or yielding ourselves to the corrupting influences of some kindred delusion. There must be a Providence—wise, foreseeing, beneficent, and sovereign—or there is no God.

Waiving any further statement of the general doctrine of providence, we may safely affirm that, if there be such providence, man must be included in it, and his earthly career from the beginning to the close must be one of its sublimest expressions. Such is the position of man in nature, and such are his relative capabilities and worth, that a providence which did not specifically include man, or which was not administered specifically in the interest of man, would hardly be worthy of the name. Such also are the peculiar relations of man as made in the image of God to the great Author of his being, and such the peculiar value of man as an immortal spirit, that we cannot for a moment conceive of a providence which does not concern itself with man, even primarily and chiefly. For what claim could any actual providence have on human respect or confidence, which was occupied with grasses and flowers, or with revolving masses of matter set in rhythmic order in the skies, but which left man out of the account, and made no provision for that future in which man is to circle when all these material things have perished, and the very stars have fallen forever from their places in the heavens? And what suitable explanation can be given of the creation of man by the hand of such providence, of his perpetuation through providence, and of his tributary activities in providence, if there be after all for him no real, adequate, satisfying future fixed by providence?

If it be said that the plan of God in nature appears to involve no progress, and be moving forward to no definite consummation—that nature rather seems to be an endless repetition of the old, with no organic advance, the answer must be that this lies in the very constitution of a material or physical system, while movement, progress, growth, rather than such repetition, lie in the very nature of moral beings such as man. If it be said that the divine plan—should there be one—hardly appears to be unfolding itself in fact:—that the world goes on, cycle after cycle, with little else than repetition and reproduction, the answer must be that some prog-

ress at least is historically visible; and that this progress, however slow or small to human vision, is always prophetic of further and better progress, and of some truly grand result at last. Say what men may about the primeval man in his peculiar estate: say what men may about golden periods in the past history of man as sinful, yet no thoughtful observer can deny that the world of to-day is better, in the best senses of that term, than the world of a thousand years ago, or the world at the Augustan stage in the development of the Roman Empire. The voice of history, when calmly heard, assures us that God has a plan for man, and that He is slowly, but surely, working out that plan; the voice of history assures us that this plan is worthy alike of God and of man as a being made in His image, and created for His glory; the voice of history assures us that in the unfolding of this plan something higher, worthier, grander, will be continually revealing itself; and that at last the world and man will together reach some appointed, some adequate consummation. To deny that any such testimony can be derived from history—to shut the eyes to all signs of a divine purpose and control in human affairs, and either to reject the conception of providence altogether with atheists, or to misconceive and belittle it as the materialistic school is doing, is certainly not a process which, in view of the facts, a wise, just mind can approve.

It is another cardinal proposition to be noted here, that, in the future thus divinely ordained for man, religion, and specifically historical Christianity, seems destined to be a central and controlling force. This proposition is not to be urged in the present discussion on the authority of Scripture, though the Bible abundantly declares it. It may be rested rather on the recorded evidence of history as to the peculiar capabilities of Christianity, and on the actual effects of Christianity as exhibited in human life. In the broadest sense of the term, religion must be recognized as one of the most potential factors in human affairs. Even in its crudest forms, where it seems to be simply the outgrowth of the merest instincts in man, and is not dignified by the presence of aught that is capable of commanding his intelligent respect and adoration, religion still possesses his thoughts, masters his feelings, assumes control



over his life. What has not religion wrought in the world? It has changed social customs, moulded public as well as individual character, dominated over the household and the court no less than the temple and the altar; it has modified the deepest characteristics of strong races, revolutionized proud governments, stimulated to the grandest enterprises, worked out the largest changes, and more than any other influence that can be named, swayed the life and destinies of humanity. And all this must be in accordance with a divine purpose and in harmony with some deep principle in the constitution of man. We can account for it only by supposing that man is constitutionally a religious as truly as a domestic or political being: and that in his development as such, God has intended that religion should bear a most conspicuous part.

All this is specially true and significant in the case of Christianity. Tried by the most comprehensive and searching tests, the Christian religion has shown itself to be thus far the strongest element in the life of the race. It has wrought more changes, produced greater revolutions, worked out larger reforms, and more deeply affected the institutions and usages as well as the principles and sentiments of men than any other influence that can be named. Its history, at least since the advent of Christ, has been the history of humanity: for the past thousand years no agency has been so potent in human affairs; at this hour, everything besides seems to be bending to it, as the sheaves of his brethren bowed before the sheaf of Joseph. Thus far at least, Christianity is clearly first among the quickening and elevating forces in the life of men. Nor is there any present evidence that its potency is as yet exhausted. Its sway seems rather to be growing more imperial, more complete; as if its capacities to affect human affairs were rather increasing than declining. Its sphere seems to be steadily growing wider and more full of promise: its purposes and aims are continually broadening, and to human view seem more and more likely to be realized. If the apostles and their associates could indulge any hope of success, drawn from the aspect of the world in their day, such hope may be justified a thousand-fold by the present aspect of that world, as studied in relation to the place and influence of Christianity within it. The dream of their age has already become a fact in ours:

and the dream of our day is changing, even while we gaze upon it, into a still more glorious reality.

Studying the problem before us even in this general aspect, it is much more reasonable to infer that this rare promise in Christianity will yet be realized, and that the race under its benign guidance will yet attain such a blessed future as the Bible seems to foretell, than to say with Volney that all such signs of order or progress are illusive, or with certain modern catastrophists that the force of the Gospel is exhausted and its mission substantially at an end. But the reasonableness of such an inference becomes still more apparent when we inquire more closely into the secret of this amazing success. What is that inherent potency, what are those indwelling forces, which have given Christianity so prominent a place in history, and which seem to be moving on with such resistless energy toward universal influence? Is it a fact that these forces are not only unexhausted, but inexhaustible; and have they power to produce not merely all that has been, but all that according to Scripture shall be, down to the end of time? In a word, is it true that the Christian scheme, once planted in the soil of humanity, can and will grow on and on till it produces a millennium on earth?

A partial answer to this question may be found in the system of truth embodied in Christianity. Examining that system in the light of philosophy alone, its substance and its influence seem alike to justify the largest anticipations as to its future career in the world. While it would not be correct to say that the recorded effects of the Christian religion are due only to the truth contained in it, it would be a mistake still more disastrous to say that this truth has no inherent power to convert and regenerate the world. The truths of Christianity clearly have inherent power: and the mental and moral nature of man spontaneously bows before their sway. Account for it as we may, we cannot question the fact that these truths do singularly affect men of all classes, all conditions: that they constrain all other truths of like nature to pay them tribute as supreme; that they both assume authority over man and maintain it: and that there seems to be no limit to their potency, and no successful rebellion against them.

The history of the Christian Doctrine is a history of wonderful triumphs—of triumphs such as have attended no other system of truth since the world began. That doctrine has conquered ignorance, conquered error, conquered the most determined unbelief. Though the heart of man has been arrayed against it, it has subdued that heart; it has quickened and elevated that heart, and led it forward into purer feeling, and a holier life. No victories have been so complete, and at the same time so beneficent, as those which this doctrine has won. Nor is its capacity to win new triumphs in the least impaired: it is as potent now as in the day when Christ first committed Himself to it as a vital factor in His scheme for renovating the world, or that in which the Apostles, confiding in its power, went forth to disciple humanity. Is it reasonable to suppose that such a system of truth will suddenly retire from the world, as from a lost battle? May we fancy that the Christian doctrine, though it be as strong, as vital, as beneficent as ever, is to withdraw itself from the world before its task is half accomplished—before that world has been led to see and to feel its blessed presence! Surely a future produced, not by power of any sort, but by this truth, and for it, is the only future which a wise philosophy can regard as likely to occur; if such truth cannot win its way to universal control, all other agencies may well give up the struggle in despair!

Associated with this peculiar system of doctrine we may recognize as another among the potencies working steadily toward the biblical future we anticipate, the peculiar spirit inculcated in Scripture and inherent in practical Christianity. That spirit is as much a factor in the development of mankind as such doctrine: and we cannot account for the historic career of Christianity without considering duly its presence and its power. What is that spirit? It has been claimed that the ethical precepts of the Bible are not superior to those of natural morality; and that there are even blemishes in Christian ethics against which natural morality revolts. It has been claimed that the Bible is, in some of its parts, an impure book; and that its influence is so far forth injurious and corrupting. It has been claimed, on the other side, that the moral temper inculcated in the Bible is one impossible of attainment—one which cannot be realized in the ordinary

life of man. A thousand taunts have been hurled from various quarters against this book; taunts which, if they were just, would have had force enough wholly to arrest its influence, and even to sweep this unique volume out of sight.

Yet the spirit of the Scripture survives as truly as its doctrine. The Bible is found to be not an impure book, but the purest of books and the source of all the whitest, sweetest sanctities the world has ever seen. The ethics of the Bible not only justify themselves before the closest scrutiny of reason and the moral judgment: they are not only found to rise above all dictates of natural morality and all the best moral aspirations of men: they are not only the recognized source of the finest systems of ethics and the purest laws and the worthiest moral activities: they are also regnant and supreme in their control, and at this moment they constitute the last court of appeal on earth, and become the final judge in all human conduct. Instead of being an impractical Book, moving in a sphere so high that man cannot follow it, and so baffling the very desires which it aims to enkindle in the breast, the Bible enters, both quietly and imperially, into every human relation, breathes its benignant influence on every connection and interest of life, suffuses humanity with both a sweeter grace and a loftier purpose; and so rules, as no other power has ever done, the heart and the career of man. That spirit has subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions: it has quenched the violence of fire, turned weakness into strength, made the valiant more strong: it has breathed on the world, and by that gentle breath like the warm air of spring has wrought changes in this icy earth which all the might of the Cæsars could never have secured. Even to an unbeliever, it must sometimes seem like the very Spirit of God thus entering into and sanctifying the life of man.

Is this spirit dying out—is it even declining? Is the world growing so corrupt that the sanctifying temper of Christianity can no longer move it, or so elevated as no longer to need such assistance? Is it not rather true that the spirit of the Bible is becoming more and more the ruling spirit in the social and civil life of man, in the laws and the administration of all civilized governments, in the intercourse of nation with nation, and even on the field of battle? And is it not true that the ulti-

mate triumph of this spirit is becoming more and more apparent: that its capacity to win such triumph is steadily increasing; and that it has only to go on, continuing to accomplish what it is already accomplishing, to bring the entire race finally into willing subordination to itself, and so to fill the world with the glories and the blessedness of its dominion? To one who duly appreciates the real nature of spiritual Christianity, who realizes what Christian love is as the fulfilling of all law, and who has felt in his own breast the quickening potency of such love, it will be impossible to accept any other conclusion. His spontaneous conviction must be: such a spirit ought to rule, and will sooner or later rule the earth!

Looking still at the religion of Christ as a providential and historical fact simply, we may find another of these potent and growing forces in the Christian Church, viewed merely as a structure endowed and equipped for a specific purpose. Saying nothing as to the supernatural origin or quality of that Church, we may point to its continued existence, to its extensive and varied developments, to its aggregated and constantly increasing resources, to the amazing growth of its influence in the world, and to its avowed aim and purpose yet to rule the world. That the Church exists in providence, and has some providential mission to fulfil, seems as clear as that man himself exists in providence and has some providential mission. Even Hobbes, with his low conception of the Church as a creation of the State, would be willing to admit such a proposition, so long as he admitted that the State had its origin in God. The Church exists in providence at least as really as the family so exists; and its career must therefore be regarded as subject to the ordering of providence, and as moving on toward some predestined end. What is that end?

If one who rejects the Scripture would admit the doctrine of miracles in any form, he would admit that the history of the Christian Church is little less than a standing miracle. As he sees how it has gone on century after century, often changing its form, but never changing its aim: as he sees it surviving all the mutations of time and the convulsions of empire, living on serenely while everything about it was perishing: as he sees it ever rectifying itself, improving its methods, gathering in resources of every sort, cultivating its own capabilities, until

it becomes, as every thoughtful observer knows it to be, the strongest organization in this world: as he sees how steadfastly it moves on toward what it never hesitates to declare as its true design—to subjugate humanity to itself and to make the whole world the Church of God:—as he sees all this, he must be not only astounded at the providential miracle thus brought to light in the actual career of the Church, but also assured that it will ultimately reach the sublime result toward which he sees it to be ever aspiring. The regeneration of humanity, the renovation of society, and even the renewal of the earth, so far at least as a regenerated race of men might transform it into more beautiful shape, all these seem possible, probable, certain, in and through this triumphing Church. Surely it cannot be that that Church is to be arrested, its members caught away into some inscrutable rapture, its plans all abandoned, and its influence evaporated, just as it is engaging, and engaging successfully, in a task so glorious as that of bringing the whole world back to allegiance to God. Rather must it be true that, so far as anything is probable, it is probable that the Church will yet be universally extended until it fills and glorifies the whole earth.

In speaking of the doctrine and the spirit of Christianity, and of the living Church, as constituting the three providential potencies whose work among men might be expected to last, and whose influence if lasting would produce in the end just such a future as the Bible describes, no reference has been made to what every Christian mind must recognize as the underlying and the most vital and efficient potency in the case—the Holy Spirit. It might easily be shown that God may work directly upon the developing future of humanity, as He is now working and has always worked in human history; not merely through chosen instrumentalities, such as have been named, but even immediately—pouring His own power directly into the current of dependent being, and shaping human life by deep interior ministrations. A sound philosophy, reverently recognizing God as a real Being and a providential Ruler, can hardly refuse to accept such a proposition. But if we may for a moment imagine God as thus personally acting in the history of mankind, Himself planning,

shaping, producing that history in any sense, our faith in the future delineated in Scripture must be immensely enhanced. With God, if not with man, all things are possible.

Nothing can be more derogatory to the character of God than to view the divine administration of things as in any sense a failure, or to anticipate only some terrific catastrophe as the final outcome of human life. Even on the general plane of providence, such suppositions seem to be condemned alike by our most sober judgment and by our worthiest feeling. But by so much as we admit, even as a possibility, the biblical conception of the Holy Ghost, working personally in human hearts, revealing the things of Christ to the moral as well as the intellectual nature, transforming the spirits of men into filial resemblance to God, acting graciously in and for the Church, and ordering all things in the interest of religion: if we admit such a conception as this, even in the smallest degree, by so much we must admit the strong probability, the glorious certainty, that the knowledge of God and the grace of God shall yet fill the whole earth, as the waters fill the sea. In the presence of that truth, all doubt as to the possibility of a grand future for humanity seems instantly to disappear.

One marked illustration of this grand providential movement, and of the peculiar potencies employed in it, may be seen in the history of modern missions. For it must be admitted that modern missions have originated distinctively in the conception of a renewed humanity, individual and social, regenerated through the forces inherent in spiritual Christianity. These missions are an attempt, and the first general and organized attempt since the apostolic century, to carry out in letter and spirit the final command of our Lord to disciple the nations—to preach repentance and remission to every creature. In contemplating the development and the features of this sublime undertaking, we are led to note such facts as the following:

First, the remarkable rise of the spirit of missions, especially within the general sphere, not of Romanism or Liberalism, but of evangelical Protestantism—a development more broad in its aim, more elevated in its quality, and every way more significant, than the historic uprising of Europe to cap-

ture the holy places of our faith. Second, the rapid growth of this spirit, not only among the most cultivated and most spiritual sections of Protestantism, but also in many individual minds, confessedly foremost in the ranks of evangelical belief and representative of the purest convictions and experience of the age. Third, the striking manifestations of this spirit not merely in direct missions, domestic and foreign, but equally in efforts for the evangelization of specific classes, in contributions for the poor and the afflicted, in institutions and instrumentalities almost beyond number, all concerned in some way with the mighty task of bringing this world back to perfection by bringing it back to God. Fourth, the amazing success of many of these particular efforts, the victories already won in the name of Christianity, the missions planted and influential, and the enlarging hopefulness and devotion of the Church, under the inspiration of this sublime purpose to secure through the Gospel the regeneration of humanity. Fifth, the suggestive developments of providence in harmony with this high aspiration, the singular opening of doors and avenues to the Gospel, the spread of commerce, the tributary movements of political parties and of state diplomacy, and even the decisions of the battle-field, all conspiring to prepare the way for the universal diffusion of spiritual Christianity.

These are facts—facts as perceptible and as characteristic as were the revival of sound doctrine and the consequent increase of interior activity among the churches of the Reformation. And these facts evidently rest on the broad propositions which have already been considered: on the idea of a providence really at work among men, and ordering all things in the interest of some truly worthy result: on the idea of spiritual Christianity as the strongest and best force now affecting the life and career of humanity: on the conceptions of a divine revelation and a divine Spirit and a divine Church, sent forth to illuminate and sanctify the whole world. The connection between the facts named and these underlying propositions is vital and essential: apart from the latter the former must be inexplicable. Are we, then, at liberty to say that all this development of missions, the most sublime manifestation of modern Christianity, rests on a hypothesis which has no warrant in either philosophy or Scripture, and which



is really at variance with the purpose of God, and with the true interest of man? May we affirm that there is really no redemption for our humanity as such, and that the Gospel of redemption was never really intended to convert the world; that the Church has entirely misapprehended her vocation, and undertaken a task to which she was never divinely called; that neither the Word of God nor the Spirit of God has ever warranted such aspiration and such effort; that the prayers of the Church, her hymns of faith and hope, her offerings of silver and gold, her consecration of sons and daughters to this work, are founded on an illusion as to the future; and that the final consummation of human history—if there is to be one—is a consummation to be secured by agencies which have little or nothing in common with existing Christianity? Does not this remarkable development, so characteristic of the age we are living in, rather indicate the existence of a divine plan and end to which all this is grandly tributary? Does it not rather foretell the certain coming of a time when our prostrate humanity shall rise again; when human society shall become in fact the glorious kingdom of heaven which God from the first designed it to be, and when the very earth, sanctified by the presence of such a spirit, shall become again an Eden more beautiful than that on which the eyes of Adam opened so wonderingly in the morning prime of his existence?

These suggestions as to the providential and the historic indications in regard to the future of humanity are at least sufficient to show that neither the atheistic nor the materialistic nor the catastrophic theory of that future can be true. The history of the world thus far, the providence of God thus far, the tendencies and aspirations of the race thus far, the story of Christianity thus far, the actual experience of mankind thus far both without the Gospel and under it, seem sufficient even to show, first, that there is to be for man and for the world a noble and blessed future; and secondly, that this future is to be introduced by forces inherent in spiritual Christianity, contemplated as a religion not of power, but of love. Such is the conclusion to which wise and patient study of history and of providence will surely lead: such is the con-

clusion in which the devout and thoughtful student of the Scripture may quietly rest.

Yet it is not to be imagined that such a future as this will come upon the world without conflict with antagonistic forces—without further struggle and further sacrifice on the part of those who labor and pray for its early dawning. It is an assured fact, obvious alike in history and in Scripture, that human sin has not yet reached its ultimatum: that the last and strongest positions of unbelief have not yet been taken. Even now, as in the days of John, are there many Antichrists: malevolent systems, philosophies, tempers, tendencies, which would trample Christianity out utterly, were they able. But other similar forces are yet to arise; the crown prince of evil has yet to receive his dark coronation. The Bible indeed contains a strange and dreadful biography of sin; but the world is constantly adding its confirmatory witness to that tragic story, and the record grows more terrific as time goes on. It is specifically true that, since the Reformation and eminently in our own century, unbelief has exhibited in many ways such a process of growth and maturing: the forms of scepticism which we are obliged to meet, being more profound, more subtle, more difficult to overcome, than any which the Church in previous ages has been called to encounter. It will be so in the future. There will be a downward as well as an upward movement in the moral career of mankind: Christ and Antichrist continuing their antithetic manifestations and activities even to the end. Nay, more! Is there not reason in both Scripture and philosophy for believing that the victory which our regenerated humanity is yet to win through grace, will be accompanied by remarkable signs of the completest overthrow of everything that opposeth itself—the last and highest Antichrist going down only as the true Christ is seen to be rising to the zenith of His power and His glory? The morning of that promised time of restitution will be beautiful—more beautiful than that on which the stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy:—but may not that morning rise out of a darker night than any which the world has thus far seen: and on the horizon behind it may there not hang the heavy shadows of a storm such as never before shook the solid pillars of the earth!

In the presence of such a future to be thus grandly won, in the presence of all the inspiriting events and the rare promise of the age we are living in, it seems strange that there should be men who are bent on making a philosophy, and even a religion, out of the lowest possible conceptions of what our humanity is and is to be. Blind must he be whose studies of human nature lead him down to the hopeless conclusion that deterioration and decay lie in the constitution of the race: mankind being at the best no better than the trunk of some old oak once shivered to its centre by the lightning stroke. Blinder still must he be who reads his Bible in such a way as to draw from it nothing but prognostications of some final and awful failure on the part of the Gospel, and of some correspondingly awful catastrophe to be experienced at last by a race whom God cannot save, and must therefore crush with the blows of omnific vengeance. He who is both a pessimist in his speculative thinking, and a catastrophist in his religious expectations, has certainly lost sight, not merely of much that shines out in Scripture, but also of all the best teachings of both providence and history. The natural effect of such thinking is to paralyze all healthful and hearty effort after the realization of that higher future toward which revelation and providence alike are really pointing.

Better views bring with them better inspirations. It is said by an eminent historian that the last word which was whispered from the lips of Peter the Great in his dying hour was the pregnant word—*Hereafter*. And the historian not without reason suggests, that it was not his own future in that eternity on whose threshold he was pausing, but rather the earthly future of the great and cherished empire of Russia, of which the expiring Czar was then thinking. But what is the Hereafter of any single nation, however vast or full of promise, compared with the unfolding Future of the World:—compared with the development of a kingdom of righteousness and truth and love, in which all human states and empires are to be but parts, and in whose consummation man and the earth he inhabits are to be perfected and glorified together! To be taught to live, labor, suffer, and even to die if need be, for such a Hereafter, is one of the richest privileges which God in His providence and by His Word has bestowed on man.

EDWARD D. MORRIS.