

A FEW RAMBLING THOUGHTS ON A GREAT SUBJECT.

A new system of religion, without social reconstruction in conformity with its principles, resembles a citadel in the midst of a system of outworks in possession of an enemy.

Among the great variety of religions which have developed the destinies of mankind, believers in direct revelation from the Supreme Being have been the comparatively few among the many, and have been considered a distinct class among their fellow men. They have been like an occasional oasis in a desert world, like a bright spot now and then relieving the gloom of the passing centuries, sometimes brilliant and distinct, then losing its identity in the surrounding darkness.

When the means of exchanging ideas, when cause and effect succeed each other with a rapidity heretofore unparalleled in the world's history, a religious system is developing which appears new because it has been lost for centuries under the rubbish of traditional errors. However new it may appear, it has all the advantages of age and precedent; for it embraces the principles taught by primitive patriarchs, prophets and apostles. But this going back to what many of this generation consider the world's twilight, this evolving of the principles of regeneration from the mouldering debris of ages, does not flatter the egotism of the nineteenth century. It wounds the self-conceit of the age by presupposing that sectarian Christianity is wrong, and that society needs reconstructing on a new basis.

These newly revealed principles come in collision with the moral perceptions, with social customs, with the governmental policies of the age, and therefore develop general antagonism in their surroundings; not from necessity, but because truth and error are ever in opposition. Their representatives aim at universal regeneration under the guidance of Divine inspiration. But the sword and the fagot, military array and judicial despotism do not represent their ideas of reforming mankind. With the fullest confidence in their principles they oppose truth to error, revelation to tradition, and a living, practical religion to scholastic theories and mere emotional sensations. They realize that the transition is great from modern ethics to the primitive principles of the decalogue.

With the Latter-day Saints, the great labor of reconstruction implies a state of transition. Without a comprehensive literature, ennobled by their principles, without educational works for their youth, imbued with high moral perceptions, controlled by a jurisprudence which is trammelled by precedent, and ever open to misconception, with civil institutions which guarantee all they desire, but under which they suffer from the prejudice and license of unprincipled administrators, can they successfully combat the gigantic antagonisms of their surroundings? Can their inspirations culminate in a world's revolution, through the teaching of regenerating principles and their application to the relations of life? There appears but one answer to these queries. Their practice must rapidly assimilate to their principles, and concentration of action and reconstruction keep pace with the increase of opposition.

History will perhaps furnish some illustration of their position and the magnitude of the work before them. When Christ came to fill his mission of redemption, the eastern hemisphere was essentially polytheistic in religion. The pagan standard of exaltation was low, and man's chief divinities were only a little above him, and were similarly endowed with virtues and follies. They were all of the earth earthy. The mind of man was chained down in terrestrial obscurity. If a ray of light occasionally penetrated it from above, it was received with distrust.

A theoretical philosophy made up the religion of the learned, the austerity of the mystics satisfied those who sought for peculiar purity, and a traditional hierarchy led the ignorant masses.

Even Israel, with its many experiences of the manifestation of the power of God in its behalf, with its venerated ritual, with its record of inspired prophets, with the pinnacles of its sacred temple still towering on Mount Moriah, covering the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant, had forfeited

the blessings of divine revelation and lost the spirit of the teachings of its great divinity. It had descended to the level of its surroundings, and when the Shiloh came there were few to recognize and receive him. He found his bitterest enemies in what should have been the house of his friends. But he filled his mission, and the Mosaic dispensation passed away.

Gospel churches were established with a uniformity of faith, of worship, of organization, but there was no gathering together, no concentration of interests, no union of action, therefore no social reconstruction on Gospel principles. The Christian churches were detachments scattered here and there among the masses of the enemy.

They were powerless to inaugurate civil government, to create political organizations. They had no code of laws, no system of ethics to correspond with their religious principles. Under these unfavorable circumstances, they also had their former traditions and habits to contend with.

The purity of the Gospel was soon tarnished with pagan theories; its simple rites were mixed with the more showy pageantry of idol worship, to make them more palatable to the masses, doctors of theology assumed the prerogatives of apostles, and Gospel truth gave way before traditional philosophy, until Christianity was fitted to become the paramount religion of imperial Rome.

The change developed but little improvement in the moral condition of the people. The spirit of inspiration had departed. The gospel power of regeneration was gone. While Pagan Rome became Christian Rome, it still retained its pagan social vices, its political corruptions, its iron rule, its aggressive spirit, and its mythical literature. Roman paganism had departed from its early virtues; it and Christianity found a common level, and the sword of the barbarian was sent forth to relieve the earth of its overburden of wickedness.

Pagan Rome forced barbarian nations to accept a stern but wholesome despotism which inaugurated material advancement, but Christian Rome sent forth legions of monks and nuns to fatten on the products of others' labor, to live under the constant restraint of the wholesome passions of nature, or to indulge in profligate idleness, both alike injurious to the best interests of society.

Under a Christian hierarchy society sank below its former standard of pagan civilization. The orgies of the temple of Venus were transferred to convents and nunneries, and the licentiousness of Roman emperors and of prelates and prefects found a parallel in the courts of Christian princes, and in the palaces of sanctimonious bishops and cardinals.

The legacy of science, literature and art, which pagan Rome bequeathed to its future, was nearly smothered by Christian zeal for priestly dominion; and it was the revival of classical literature rather than of Gospel truth which first roused Europe from its lethargy. It infused into institutions of learning a desire for freedom and progress. New hopes and aspirations were diffused among the people, and the Bible was brought forth from the dusty shelves of monastic libraries, and made the battering ram for shattering the fortifications which the Papal See had been raising around itself for centuries.

Before the reformation, the licentiousness of the Romish priesthood had become unbearable; it had permeated all the avenues of social life. In the midst of a reviving civilization it strove to drag religion down to the level of barbarism, and great political and social changes were necessary to save society from anarchy.

Papery had become the extreme of a corrupt materialism. Its doctrine of salvation exclusively by works—by confession and penance, by the purchase of masses for the dead, and of indulgences for criminal licence, was too absurd for the increasing intelligence of the age. The "Holy See" placed itself in antagonism to the world's progress, and the right arm of its power was paralyzed.

The materialism of the Roman Catholic religion has been the tower of its strength. It is the key of the power with which it now shapes the thoughts and aspirations of the millions who make up a large proportion of American and European civilization. It is this

which gives all polytheistic religions a strong hold on the human heart.

Paganism led the world's civilization from the deluge to the time when the emperor Constantine substituted the cross for the eagles at the head of the Roman legions, and the primary principles of Grecian and Roman mythology formed a large proportion of the ingredients of the Christianity which has taken the lead in civilization for fifteen centuries.

The theoretical tendencies of Protestantism, and the ignoring of the direct interference of the higher powers in the affairs of men, are its weak points, and but a comparatively short time elapsed before its power culminated, and it is evidently on the decline.

Papery claimed that men were justified by works, the Reformers that they were justified by faith. The former is the extreme of materialism, the latter of the doctrine of internal purification. As man is both material and spiritual in his organization, any religion which does not lead both of these elements in unison, must be very imperfect in its results.

Papery discarded the Bible for the canons of the church. The Reformers discarded the canons of the church for the Bible, but they smothered its practical truths under a mass of allegorical rubbish, and thereby neutralized its regenerating power.

By discarding miracles and direct revelation, the Reformers threw away the key of power. They debased man by forcing him to rely on his own judgment, where that judgment is incapable of leading. They brought the Holy Scriptures down to the level of man's unaided reason, by making that reason the standard of their interpretation. They denied man that light which alone can lift him out of terrestrial darkness, to the plane of angels and the Gods.

They raised his divinity so far above him that he failed to discern any affinity, any connecting link, any relationship. In the Protestant formulas of worship the idea of God's relationship to men is simply allegorical. The practical conception of paternal interest in the higher power, and of childlike dependence in man, is lost. But while it left the mind to wander without a pilot on the limitless ocean of theory, it measurably untrammelled the intellect, and thereby opened the way to political regeneration, to civil liberty and to material progress.

In every age and under every system of religion, there have been some souls purer than others, who have mourned the corruptions around them and longed for something better. They have been the salt of the earth, that has saved society from dissolution.

Man, in every age, has been self-conceited, but each generation will find its level in the grand ocean of life. While we admit that Christianity was the parent of many virtues, Christians should not forget that paganism has also developed some good in mankind.

When this creation has culminated in the grand dispensation of the fulness of times, those who are then progressing in intelligence will probably comprehend that every religion has had its special work to perform in developing mankind; that done, it has passed away to make room for something better, until perfection has been reached in the fulness of Divine intelligence.

As science traces, in the material world, satisfactory evidences of the gradual preparation of the elements for the reception of the successive higher grades of vegetable and animal life, until man stood on the earth in the glorious image of his Creator, so will the science of revelation enable those who study it to discern the footsteps of the Almighty through the past centuries in developing His great plan for man's regeneration.

Sectarian Christianity is becoming a thing of the past. It is not sufficiently comprehensive for the spirit of the age. Instead of taking the lead, it is trailing in the dust behind the car of progress. It does not meet the wants of the new phases of existence. Scholastic theories do not stand the test of the great advances in scientific research. They develop no new principles to correspond with the rapid march of intellect.

It has had a fair trial for fifteen centuries, and has signally failed to produce any great moral change. The licentiousness of the days of

Augustus Caesar finds its counterpart in the Christian licentiousness of the nineteenth century; vice may have somewhat changed its forms to suit the circumstances and policies of the age, but it still luxuriates under the benign influence of sectarian Christianity. Private and public virtues are rapidly becoming matters of mere commercial value.

War is still the trade of Christian nations, dominion the great object of Christian princes, and military glory, the most exalted idea of the Christian masses under the sway of the professed disciples of Him whose mission to earth was one of peace and good will to man, the power to oppress everywhere asserts its rights.

Caucasian energy, backed by Christian civilization, places the foot of its power upon the neck of the weaker barbarian, mercilessly robs him of his inheritance, forces its vices upon him, under which he withers away to make room for the spread of Christianity. The antagonisms of labor and capital often check the tide of prosperity, and threaten to undermine the social fabric of nations.

There is the same tendency to monopolize the elements of power as heretofore, and a general disposition to use that power to favor the few and oppress the many. Pinching want still hovers around the hearthstone of the cottage, while lavish waste and expenditure characterize the rich.

History records but one instance, among the great variety of organizations for man's progress, of continuous improvement, and that was the ante-diluvian Enoch, founded on the principle of universal brotherhood, under the guidance of Divine inspiration. All others have been wrecked by man's strong passions, or have withered away under a corroding licentiousness, which has worked its subtle influences through all the avenues of domestic, social and public life.

Man, the offspring of one common parent, needs some absorbing, controlling idea, that will bring him in harmony with himself and with his race, that will merge individual interests and ambitions into one channel. Then antagonisms will cease. Each individual will discover that his own interests are involved in those of others. Mutual interests will beget mutual dependence. The power to oppress will be broken. There will be the utmost freedom to do right, and wrong will be efficiently restrained. Then brotherhood and fraternity will no longer be the watchword of the levelling rabble or of the violent revolutionist. They will be something more than the rallying cry of infuriated mobs, rousing rulers from their midnight slumbers to find some terrible dread realized in murdered guards, burning palaces, barricaded streets, and gutters running with the blood of citizens.

Instead of frictionizing antagonisms there will be a genial good will permeating all the relations of life. Man's life will be lengthened, his usefulness increased, and earth's millennium commenced.

As great blessings to mankind have ever been of slow development, doubtless, history will repeat itself in the practical realization of principles that will harmonize the present discordant elements of existence.

The past evidences the truth of the old adage, that "there is a time for all things." Cause and effect have ever succeeded each other with such well defined results, that dark indeed must be the understanding that does not admit pre-ordained design. In reviewing the past, the circumstances, the means and the men seem to have been ever peculiarly adapted to the accomplishment of God's providences.

Although the gospel preached by Jesus and his disciples was overshadowed by the surrounding darkness, it left some general truths to the world, which served to so modify the harsher features of Paganism, to so enlarge the conceptions of men, that through the purifying process of ages of change and revolution have been evolved the blessings of free institutions which have opened up a new era in the world's progress; one preeminently of mind, of untiring mental energy, of grand development.

The resources of the western hemisphere have developed a system of popular governments, to counterbalance the despotisms of the Old World. This great step towards revolutionizing former

policies of government have prepared the way for further progress. The transition would be quite in keeping with ordinary cause and effect, from popular co-operation for mutual defence and for self-government, to financial union and social harmony. Extraneous force developed the former and will doubtless be a powerful element in developing the latter.

The elements of the New World have been fitted, by the special providences of the Almighty, for the gospel preached by Jesus and his Apostles to develop all its powers for man's redemption. Here civil institutions are so nearly in accordance with man's natural rights, that social reconstruction in accordance with the principles of eternal truth cannot come in collision with them. Here divine revelation may so guide every element of man's nature, his pecuniary interests, his passions, his affections, his thoughts, his aspirations, his memories of the past, his hopes of the future, may so mould and direct him, that he will become subservient to the absorbing desire for peace, union and the universal good of all, and, as a final consummation, fit him for a higher plane of intelligence than this earth at present affords.

Even in this latitudinarian age, these ideas will be considered by many as emanations from the over fertile brains of religious enthusiasts, or as the Utopian ideas of the "fanatical Mormons." But when God works man need not hesitate. Certainly the present indicates an immediate future of rapid and important changes in the general condition of the human race. They cannot go backward.

Never before were the elements so yielding to man's desire to develop the hidden mysteries of nature. His present powers of locomotion, and of communicating intelligence, find no parallel in the world's previous history. The present is socially volcanic. Under the surface of long established governments, of venerated customs, of precedents and traditional prejudices, the increasing intellectual forces of the age are struggling for expansion, for room. Prescriptive authority has not power to bind it. Increased restraint only generates increased force, and when the explosion comes it will rend the old crust of society into fragments.

Geographical barriers to intercourse are becoming a thing of the past. Not only nations but continents are brought into close proximity, and ideas, customs, religions and races are rapidly intermingling. Antagonisms are becoming more widely diffused, more comprehensive, more potent in their results. It is peculiarly a period of great aggregations of political power, and the cohesiveness of empires is greatly increased by the appliances of steam and electricity. Standing armies have become permanent institutions, and the means for rapid military combinations have greatly increased.

Secret associations for effecting political and social changes are prevalent, and, being generally based on the principle of establishing equality by humbling the high instead of exalting the low, are subversive of stability and good order.

As the atmosphere of our globe is the medium through which the elements of life and physical growth are distributed, so the printing press, by constantly diffusing a knowledge of passing events, by bringing the experiences of history, the discoveries in science and of mechanical appliances within reach of the people, and by keeping up a constant interchange of thought and sentiment, is stimulating intellectual growth and power.

Religious antagonisms are numerous and on a gigantic scale. Before the era of Christianity paganism was the general religion of the world. At present probably about two-thirds of the population of the globe may be classed as such. The other one-third may be ranked under the four divisions of Mahomedan, Greek, Roman Catholic and Protestant, with a diversity of sects and parties. When these elements of powerful antagonisms are considered in connection with the spirit and activity of the age, we cannot but anticipate a future for which the previous history of the earth will furnish no parallel. We may well query, is there no culmination to the world's woes? No point to be reached beyond which the conditions of human life will be more favorable to peace and happiness.

Is it paganism that is to lead the