

Influence of Religious Belief upon National Character.

*with regard to*

*B. M.*

**XXI.**

*20.*

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

DEMOSTHENIAN AND PHI KAPPA SOCIETIES,

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA,

*August 7, 1845.*

~~~~~  
BY REV. B. M. PALMER, JR. OF S. C.

A Member of the Phi Kappa Society.  
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CORRESPONDENCE.

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PHI KAPPA HALL, August 7th, 1845.

On motion of Joseph C. Wilkins, Esq.

*Resolved*, That the thanks of this Society be returned to the Rev. B. M. PALMER, Jr. for the highly practical and profound oration this day pronounced in the College Chapel; and that a Committee be appointed to request a copy for publication.

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PHI KAPPA HALL, August 7th, 1845.

*Dear Sir*: It is with the greatest pleasure we comply with the above Resolution; and as a committee on the part of the Phi Kappa Society, tender you our sincerest thanks for those highly important and practical truths this day pronounced before the Demosthenian and Phi Kappa Societies. We would earnestly request of you a copy for publication: and we are induced the more earnestly to ask this favor, from the conviction that those thoughts which you have this day presented to our minds, should be placed in more lasting abodes than the impression made upon memory from hearing them once spoken: we would have them upon the written page, in order that we as well as others may read and reflect. The importance of your subject induces us to urge the request we have now the honor to prefer. Accept from the Society we represent its grateful recollections, and from ourselves individually the deepest respect.

C. B. KING.  
 B. S. SCREVEN. } *Committee.*  
 J. R. BLAKE

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ATHENS, August 8th, 1845.

*Gentlemen*: I have the honor to acknowledge the reception of your polite note, requesting a copy of the address delivered on yesterday, for publication. I have long been persuaded that we are too prone to overlook the religious element in society—if the publication of the address will at all contribute to direct the public mind to this subject, I shall not regret that I have yielded my own inclination in placing it at your disposal.

Be pleased to express to the Society my grateful sense of its kindness: and to you, Gentlemen, I am also indebted for the truly flattering manner in which you have conveyed to me the wishes and feelings of that body. With a cordial reciprocation of the good will you have expressed,

I am very truly yours,

B. M. PALMER, Jr.

Messrs. King, Screven and Blake.

# ORATION.

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*Gentlemen of the Demosthenian and Phi Kappa Societies :*

It is no mean proof of the refinement to which Ancient Greece attained that her teeming population, on every fifth year, was poured into the plains of Elea to celebrate the Olympian games. It is true the Physical attributes of man were there chiefly developed, and the olive wreath adorned the brow of him who should conquer in the foot-race and the wrestling match. Yet even these rude contests indicated a love of glory, an appreciation of fame, which never characterized a barbarous people. Here too their Poets sang in rival strains : and while the judges distributed the prizes among the competitors of the Stadium, the populace echoed to the appeals of the eloquent declaimer. But it is a higher proof of the elegant taste of our people, that so large an assembly is here convened to greet with you the annual return of this literary festival. All ranks are here : the tradesman and the artizan forsake their toil—the statesman relaxes from the study of diplomatic arts—the jurist ceases to delve in the mines of human law—the grave Divine rises with brow unbent from tracing the alphabet of those sublime mysteries, which are written in full upon the scroll of eternity : all meet here—the learned, the witty and the gay, gathering from the dusty paths they severally tread in life, to enjoy “ the feast of Reason and the flow of soul,” in these groves long consecrated to philosophy and the Muse.

We meet here not only to seek our own gratification, but to sympathise in the struggles and success of others.

The fond father, who having well nigh 'accomplished his own day' is now only ambitious for a hopeful son, is here. Brothers and sisters are here with warm smiles to greet him who returns to their embrace, with "all his blushing honors" thick upon him. The patrons of learning and science are here, to crown with laurels the first success of those who have entered the lists for fame. A large body of the serious are here to welcome into their ranks, those who promise to do service for God and their country in the great battle of life. It is a season when Hope beats with as strong a pulse in the old as in the young; and therefore it is fitting that the drama should not close, until those who have gone forth into life, who have borne its cares and gathered its honors, shall have spoken back to you words of cheer and sympathy. To this grateful office, gentlemen, your partial voice has called me: and while I stand upon this platform, I feel that it is a high and noble mission to be thus the Representative of all the classes to which allusion has been made, and in their name to welcome you to the fellowship of those who are associated together in the great commonwealth of letters. Be assured it is with profound self-distrust that I undertake this mission: for what offering can I bring worthy of your acceptance and of theirs? Your summons found me drenched in the early toils of a severe profession, and too heavily fettered with daily duties, to roam through the fields of polite learning that I might gather a boquet, fragrant enough to be laid upon this sacred shrine. Yet however feeble my voice, it is a filial duty to obey the call of an Institution, to which I owe all the affection of a foster-child--and this pious sentiment which now glows within my breast will, I trust, be as incense to the offering, and consecrate it to your acceptance.

The subject which I propose to develop before you, is worthy of your serious attention; though one of such boundless extent, that I cannot hope to do more than

suggest it to your notice, and to open some of the lines of thought by which you may approach to its investigation. It is *the influence which Religious Belief exerts in the formation of National Character.*

When we cast our eyes over the great family of nations upon the Globe, we discover specific traits by which they are all distinguished. Philosophers have patiently inquired into the reasons of the different forms and colors, by which the races of men are discriminated: but the different features of the mind and character are worthy of as minute attention. A single glance reveals to us the difference in character, between the Egyptian and the Hebrew—the ancient Roman and the ancient Greek—the Chinese and the Hindoo—between the Spaniard and the Frenchman—the German and the Italian—between the Briton and the Turk. It is now a question of profound interest, what causes have produced this obvious diversity? If, as we believe, all are sprung from one original—if all have the same general characteristics—are governed by the same wants, and exhibit the same passions, whence, among so many traits of general resemblance, this specific diversity? Beyond a doubt we shall err, if we assign this result to any single cause. There are many sources from which National Character is drawn. We must estimate fully the influence of climate and scenery: we must not overlook the moulding influence of occupations and habits: and, above all, those combinations effected by the intermingling of nations, the ingrafting of one branch upon the stock of another. But of all causes which operate to give direction to National Character, perhaps not the least influential is the forms of Religious Belief which, in different ages, obtain ascendancy over the minds of men. My design will be to developé this influence, to trace its ramifications, and to describe its mode of operation. The task is one of acknowledged difficulty: we cannot rely with certainty upon any

conclusions at which we may arrive by abstract reasoning; and the final appeal must be made to the page of History. It will be difficult to condense into one tabular view the state of different Kingdoms upon the Globe—and still more difficult from the mass of facts thus accumulated to eliminate by a wise analysis, the peculiar causes which have produced the results we observe, and to assign to these the precise quota of influence due to each. We shall be undeniably exposed to the danger of making a false induction from so many particulars: yet, with a prudent attention, I think we may be able to generalize these particulars into a safe and legitimate conclusion.

That Religious opinions must modify the character of a people, may be inferred from their transforming power upon individuals. There can be no doubt that, in the extensive and etymological meaning of the term, man is a Religious being. There is a feeling of dependence upon a superior power, and a sense of accountability to divine law, which never can be dislodged from the human breast. However various and fantastic may be the forms which the religious opinions of men have assumed, their religious instincts remain imperishably the same. I am aware that a few spirits have arisen reckless enough to dispute this fact—and who have striven to supplant these convictions in their own minds, and in the minds of the mass. Yet you cannot but observe that these very men exhibit most intensely the power of religion over the individual mind. Volney, musing amid the grey ruins of ancient Empires, and meditating that attack which was designed to lay equally low the spiritual Empire of Christianity; Voltaire, composing in his retirement at Ferney those works which have gained for him the title of the Coryphæus of Deists in France; Thomas Paine, retailing, in his low way, that filthy scandal which his vicious taste enabled him to collect from the bar-room and the barber-shop; and David Hume, coolly philosophizing away

those identical principles of human belief, in the exercise of which he was enabled to construct his fame as the Prince of modern Historians; are all of them as striking instances of the power of religious instinct, as the most zealous martyr that ever bled for the faith which he loved. They all vainly struggled to dislodge principles which were deeply bedded in the lowest strata of the soul—and, however they may boast of bursting the fetters of a weak superstition, and of sundering the tie which united them to the service and worship of God, yet a special Providence has preserved the record of facts, which falsify this vain boast. It is related of Lord Herbert, who has been styled the Father of English Deists, that when he had completed his work, ‘de veritate’ in order to prove that there was no Providence, and could be no divine Revelation, he opened his window to the South, and prayed that the Supreme would afford him a visible sign to proceed in the publication of the treatise. The sign was obtained, and the book was printed. But this prayer remains on record, a standing witness, that he could not belie the testimony of conscience, and that, in fact, he did not credit that very argument, which he had framed against Divine Revelation, from the absurdity of its being delivered only to a few of mankind. And, surely, if Philosophers have not been able to reason away their convictions of God, and of his Empire over them, much more is the mass of mankind under the influence of religious emotions. The various superstitions which disgrace the reason and dishonor the religious sentiment of mankind, are themselves “proof strong as Holy Writ.” But it is when the mind is properly enlightened, as to the character and Providence of God, that it discovers the Supreme Being every where. His voice is heard in the thunder, as it rolls from cloud to cloud: it is the glancing of His eye which is seen in the lightning, as it flies from one end of Heaven to the other—

“ God! let the torrents like a shout of nations  
 Answer: and let the ice plains echo—God!  
 God! sing ye meadow streams with gladsome voice:  
 Ye Pine Groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!  
 And they too have a voice. Yon piles of snow,  
 And in their perilous fall, shall thunder, God!”

Thus does man, as the Priest of nature, recognize in all the objects around him the Being whom he adores.—The thundering cataract—the sliding avalanche—the roaring tempest—the careering whirlwind—storms, clouds and tempest—all these are but the equipage of Jehovah and we instinctively bow before the revealed Majesty of God.

Such are the impressions made upon the individual mind: and what are nations but the aggregates of individuals, the grand total made up of separate units! It may therefore be fairly presumed that the whole will partake of the qualities of its constituent parts. There may be a modification in the developement and operation of this principle: yet its influence, like the great law of gravitation in Physics, is as manifest upon the mass as upon the single atom.

This conclusion, which we reach in the way of inference, is confirmed by the most casual appeal which we make to History. The simple fact that one of the profoundest political problems now in the process of solution is the separation of Church and State, plainly shows how universally men have recognized the influence of Religion upon Society: \*and ingenious men are not wanting, who have attempted to prove that some popular religious ceremonials, and some prominent articles of religious belief were solely the invention of Kings and Statesmen, devised for political purposes. But we may refer to particular facts. Those remarkable movements, which have signally affected the fortunes of mankind, and which therefore stand in bold relief upon the records of the past, were notoriously effected by the force of religious

\*See Bishop Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*—Book 2nd, Sec. 1st.



feeling. When the myriads of Europe, in the wars of the Crusades, were precipitated upon the plains of Judea, this mighty upheaving of society was effected by the expansive force of religious enthusiasm. The hermit Peter stood at the mouth of his cell and sounded forth the call to march against the Infidel; and though all Europe lay prostrate and bleeding from her Feudal wars, it found an echo in the hearts of many thousands, who, starting up as if by magic, were ready, with sword and battle axe, to avenge the supposed wrongs of Christendom. One sentiment animated that mighty host, nerved every arm and stirred each soul to its depths: it was to rescue the Holy Sepulchre from the contaminating step of the Mussulman.

Another illustration, equally convincing, may be drawn from the annals of the Great Reformation in the sixteenth century. When Luther, that magnanimous man, who rises up before us in the middle history of the world, like some commanding cliff amid the surges of the Ocean—when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Chapel at Wittenberg—or when, with more lofty courage, he made a public bonfire of the Pope's bulls and decretals, it was like the act of a magician, which immediately broke the trance that had for so many ages enwrapped the nations of the Earth. In an instant he dissolved the spell of that proud enchanter seated afar off upon the seven hills at Rome, and

“————— with his rod reversed  
And backward mutters of dis severing power.”

He freed the nations that had so long sat

“In ~~strong~~ fetters, fixed and motionless.”

*Stony* No mind of proper tone and balance can read the history of this wonderful man without feelings of profound admiration: yet all our admiration of the man, and all our wonder at the strange incidents in his life are lost in contemplating the results which he effected. The whole history of this period affords a sublime instance of the influ-

ence of religious feeling over the minds of men. If, at this juncture, the Church was reformed and society was renovated, it was because a few great religious principles were brought out to view, which regenerated the individual, while they renovated the mass. Luther, be it remembered, found the Bible, and read it too, at the end of an iron chain in the Chapel of the Convent at Erfurth:\* he broke that chain—he brought out the great truth of Christianity, salvation through the cross of a Redeemer, which, like an electric spark, woke into action the sluggish souls of men, wherever it touched. †It at once arrested the mighty ebb which had taken place in the history of the world and rolled back the flood, which for two hundred years, has steadily risen, and which is destined with its increasing swell to throw higher and higher, upon the strand, those political and social abuses which have embittered the lives and fortunes of mankind.

These facts of a general nature thus adduced, are sufficient to show the influence which religion exerts over men in the mass as well as in their individuality. We may, however, now advance from the threshold into the interior of our subject, and open upon a more direct discussion of it. *Religion, then, is confessedly one of the great cohesive principles which unite men in society.* It is obvious that men cannot be brought together, unless they possess sentiments and affections in common. The pressure of outward circumstances may indeed drive them into temporary associations: yet even these presuppose and prove the existence of certain social affections, which are the points of contact in the case. Still these social affections are limited in extent: at most, they can originate and support only a number of separate and petty communi-

\*D'Aubigne's Reformation in Germany and Switzerland—Vol. I—Page 141.

†For a full exhibition and proof of this fact, the reader may do well to consult an Essay on the spirit and influence of the Reformation by C. Villers, sometime Professor of Philosophy in the University of Gottingen. The Essay obtained the prize offered by the National Institute of France, and is known to theologians as an able and comprehensive treatise on the whole subject of the Reformation.

ties. These may, for the sake of mutual safety, be merged into a larger community, and the continuance of outward pressure may serve to keep them together. Still a principle of cohesion is needed, which will not only hold together the separate parts, but will harmonize and consolidate these into a system. This is afforded, to a great extent, by religion: the religious sentiments and instincts of men bring them together; attracting them mutually to each other, by relating each to that Supreme Being who is the source and centre of all. Thus religion is the invisible tie, which universally connects the individuals of society together. I find that, inadvertently, I have almost adopted the language of M. Neckar, in his work 'sur l'importance des Religieuses opinions' (and I now cite his authority, because he wrote as a statesman, while I may be suspected of speaking as a divine :) "what we have not sufficiently observed," writes he, "is that in society its moral sentiments are the imperceptible tie of a number of parts, which seem to be held by their own agreement, and which would be successively detached, if the chain which united them were ever to be broken." Thus it is: all the Planets in our Solar System are kept in their relative positions by that common principle which connects each with the central orb. So in society, all its dependencies are primarily regulated by the personal relation of each individual to the Great God, who is his author and preserver.

But it must be further observed: whatever connects and regulates the elementary particles of society must necessarily affect the character of the mass. If the affections of men are drawn forth upon the same objects, and their sentiments expressed by the same formulas, this community of thought and feeling must finally produce a community of character. Whatever thus consolidates society must also mould it: for the process of consolidation is only the giving to each of the parts that identical

cast by which they coalesce. If then it may be shown, as all History testifies, and all reason confirms, that religion is the great tie of society, the band which passing around it connects it with a controlling Providence, there is but a single step in the argument which proves that what consolidates the parts must give shape to the whole.

There is yet another view to be taken of this matter. National character includes at last the same elements with individual character. The individual is fully described when all his qualities of mind and heart are enumerated. So with communities of men. The seven prismatic colors form the rainbow: so the union of individual thoughts and feelings forms the complexion of the National Character; the consentaneous pulsation in individual breasts forms the beating of the nation's heart. Now it is religion which affords subjects of thought to the mass of mankind—the secrets of state belong necessarily to the cabinet: the discoveries of science must be chiefly confined to the savans of the country; the pleasures of literature are reserved to those of refined and cultivated taste: but the commonalty, the Great Commons, if they think beyond the petty businesses of life must find their subjects of thought mainly in religious themes. This is more præeminently true of the affections of the heart, as religion presents to us those objects most fitted to awaken the strongest emotions. \*It presents at all times the most powerful motives to virtue; conveys its admonitions privately to the heart at those seasons when it is most open to rebuke; and confers its rewards upon the good, such as cannot be wrested from them. Thus does religion educate the affections and cultivate sentiments of virtue in the breasts of men: and by first regulating the individual, finally affects the whole condition of society.

\*The subject of this whole section is beautifully handled by M. Neckar in his work 'l'importance des Religieuses Opinions'—Chap. 2.

These principles are doubtless felt to be Philosophically true: yet it may satisfy some better, if we rest our conclusions upon historical facts rather than upon abstract speculations. Let us then turn to the examination of particular cases, where we may be able to trace the influence of religious opinions in modifying society: and these will answer both for illustration and confirmation.

Take then, for this purpose, the character of the Hebrew nation, as exhibited both in past and present times. The first feature of the Hebrew national character which meets the eye is its *exclusiveness*. For a period, indeed, in their early History they manifested a proclivity to associate with and to become assimilated to other nations: and the lapse of many years, together with the lessons of a supernatural Providence, was required to counteract this tendency. Yet this fact only shows, the more abundantly, that the exclusiveness, so peculiarly exhibited during the latter portion of their history, and throughout the whole period of their dispersion, till the present time, is due to the agency of an external cause, and was not an original inherent characteristic. In a thousand instances in the world's History, nations have been conquered, and have finally been amalgamated with the conqueror: but this race, never. Scattered up and down over the entire Globe—persecuted in almost every land—poor and oppressed—without a King and without a Priest—without any of those bonds which usually unite men in society, they still exist the most marked, in their national features, of any people upon the Globe. It is usual to regard the whole history of this people as supernatural, and to ascribe each event to the direct agency of a Providence which was uniformly miraculous. Undoubtedly there is a foundation for this common belief in the peculiar covenant relation they sustained to the God of Heaven, and the frequent interposition of divine power in their behalf. Still I am inclined to think that much of what is remark-

able in their history is due to the fact, that this history is accompanied with an inspired exposition. They are the only people among whom the Prophet stands by the side of the Historian—we trace the finger of God in all the events of their times, because the Prophet interprets the fact which the Historian records. History interpreted is Providence expounded: they are two parts of the same subject—two aspects of the same truth: in history, we have the evolutions of Providence: in Providence the interpretation of history: without the former, Providence is only a blind mystery: without the latter, history is a mere fable. Many of the events of modern times, in which the control of Providence is wholly overlooked, might appear, also, supernatural if they were recorded by the pen of the sacred rather than of the profane Historian—at any rate, when, with due attention, we read Hebrew history, while, on the one hand, we admire the workings of a Providence which is elsewhere invisible to us, we are struck, on the other hand, with the results obtained by the continued operations of certain moral causes. This national exclusiveness, for example, is mainly to be traced to the fact, that for nearly two thousand years they were the sole depository of one great truth, *the unity of God*. This single truth, like a wall of rock, throughout the whole tract of their history insulated them among the nations. While these were sunk in idolatry, and worshipped Gods of the woods, of the plains and of the rivers, the Hebrews who alone worshipped the spiritual God, were shut out from their intercourse. In the lapse of time, they acquired that fixedness of character, which has been subjected to the most excruciating tests, without being lost. Combined with this, another religious tenet has operated to stereotype the national character of the Hebrews, the universal expectation of a coming Messiah. Separated, thus, both in faith and in hope, from the rest of mankind, they lived in communion only

with each other: their thoughts and their feelings were cast into one mould, and by the continued influence of these combined principles, they have been preserved immutable, in their character, amidst the thousand changes in their fortunes.

These two principles have also operated to produce another striking feature of their national character, that wonderful *elasticity* by which they recover from the pressure of the heaviest calamities. In the midst of all their dispersion, even in the face of protracted persecution they have never lost heart. Lying still under the weight of eighteen centuries, they rise, Atlas-like, to sustain the enormous load. How can this moral phenomenon be explained? The sentiment has for ages been deepening its impressions upon their minds, that they are the people whom Heaven has recognized—they were the depository of His truth: and though now the Shekinah has departed, and the ark, that Great Palladium of their liberty, is removed; the memory of these still lingers, with a dim glory, around each Jewish heart. A secret conviction of their real nobility is interwoven into the whole fabric of their thoughts and of their affections. Though considered by others as the filth and off-scouring of the world, their very name a term of reproach—even in rags and degradation, they cannot forget the fact, that they were the first noblemen of earth—and never can they forget it till the sacred names of Abraham, of Moses, of Joshua, of Aaron, of Ezra, of Horeb and of Zion are obliterated from the memory: never, until the last trace of their national covenant with the God of Heaven is erased from its tablet, the nation's heart. How can they lose their proud isolation, when upon the mind of the youngest Israelite is enstamped the expectation, that their ancient Theocracy will be renewed, with more than its pristine glory, by Messiah-King, who is yet to sit upon David's throne? This universal sentiment kindles the fires of

hope in every breast. They can never yield to despair so long as they expect, fully, to be redeemed from reproach, and to be made glorious in the eyes of those who now tread them in the dust : to be rescued from captivity, and to be again planted in the land of ancient promise : to exchange their sighs and their groans for the Great Hallel, which they are yet to sing upon the steps of their rebuilt Temple.

To the same moral causes must we refer, indirectly, another feature of the national mind of the Hebrews.—They are, to a proverb, keen and subtle in the pursuits of life, far-seeing in their plans, and over reaching in their aims. The lofty destiny which they have accomplished, hitherto, and which is not yet consummated, the past rich in historical recollections to them, and their sublime expectations for the future, all conspire to keep their souls in action. They can never become stupid and sluggish without a total suspension of memory and of hope ; yet the only field open for the exercise of their powers has been the accumulation of wealth. They are a people without a country—a nation without a Government—a State without a place—no offices of trust or of honor stimulate their ambition : and yet all that is Jewish within them prompts them to exertion. What else can they do but hoard their gold? They might live for a future world, if their proudest anticipations did not point them to a career of earthly glory, yet to be run.—Community of suffering and of hope renders them generous and hospitable to each other ; while the universal proscription, they experience from others, has naturally converted them into Ishmaelites : their hands are against every man, because every man's hand is against them.—An exclusive religious belief, together with the sufferings they have so unjustly endured, will explain that bitter hatred to others ; which has uniformly exhibited itself in usurious extortion, simply because this was the only



mode of revenge within their reach. Shakspeare has hit this off with great truthfulness in the character of Shylock, who, after all, is not so much an individual as the impersonation of his people. He is exacting the payment of the bond, the pound of flesh:

“————— if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me of half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated my enemies: and what's his reason? I am a Jew. If a Jew wrong a Christian what is his humility? Revenge: if a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge.”

Here is portrayed to us not more the avarice of the usurer, than the petty vindictiveness of the injured Jew, who deeply felt that

“Sufferance was the badge of all his tribe.”

Thus directly or remotely, all the leading traits of the Hebrew national character, its *exclusiveness*, its *elasticity*, that *active and supple cunning*, may be traced to the influence of their religious sentiments combined with their peculiar circumstances.

I have referred to the exclusiveness of the Hebrews as a striking national trait. There is however another people who exhibit it in almost an equal degree. I allude now to the Chinese, and in them it must be attributed to similar causes. It is entirely probable that the original government of China, as well as its religion, was Patriarchal—and the Monarchy arose from the union of several clans under one Head Chief. In the progress of time, as their religious notions became confused and corrupted, there arose a strange mixture of religious and political Idolatry. The Emperor, as the High Priest of the nation, came to be regarded by the multitude with religious veneration: and this result more easily obtained, when their sacred and profane traditions were woven into one web. Schlegel observes, in his *Philosophy of History*, that we shall greatly err if we regard the extravagant titles by which the Emperor is addressed as the “mere swell and exaggeration of Eastern ~~Philosophy~~,” and he

*Phrenology*

thereby intends an oblique hint that it is due to religious associations. Indeed he asserts this roundly when he states that "the most determined eulogists of the Chinese Constitution and manners cannot deny that the Monarch is almost the object of a real worship." Religion with them has degenerated into an idolatry of the state: they worship their country and deify its institutions. This, of necessity, has given to every thing in China a stereotyped form and an unchangeable complexion. It has naturally induced that exclusive spirit of which their celebrated wall is only a symbol. The inordinate vanity which such sentiments will generate, explains the singular correspondence they have always maintained with foreigners, their cold contempt for every thing which does not bear the impression of the seal of the Celestial Empire, and the false politeness which the affectation of superiority coupled with actual insincerity will inevitably produce. Even the wit and ingenuity discovered to us in their arts and sciences doubtless arise from that self-reliance which as exclusives must of necessity characterize them.

The Chinese are probably the most irreligious people on the Globe, because a political idolatry has supplanted their religious feelings. Even the moral sentiments inculcated by their great Philosopher, Confucius, could not fill the void occasioned by the absence of proper religious ideas. On the contrary, like the speculations of the ancient Greek Philosophers, they may rather have tended to make atheists of the learned while they utterly failed to reform the vulgar. The lower classes of society in China appear to be much more occupied with outward religious ceremonies than the upper classes: for we know that the ignorant cannot, as the learned, amuse themselves with mere abstractions—they cannot do without the forms of some religion: and it is well known that, about the Christian Era, the old notions of religion in

China, the remains of Patriarchism were wholly overlaid by Buddhism, or the religion of Fo, introduced from India. But however engaged in the ceremonies of this vain worship, it is still true that the heart of this great people is not possessed of strong religious sentiments—and to their absence must be ascribed the want of honesty, the proclivity to falsehood, the hollow-hearted insincerity, the fictitious politeness, the contemptible vanity and insufferable arrogance of this singular nation. Thus we observe the same moral causes producing the same ultimate effects upon the character of two nations as widely separated as the Hebrews and the Chinese.

If we are disposed now to cross the Southwestern border of China, we may gather further illustration for our subject among the people of India. The primary doctrine of Hindoo theology is that God and nature are essentially the same: the identical sentiment expressed in that famous couplet of Pope's, and which when once repeated to a learned Hindoo induced him to embrace the author as a good orthodox Brahmin:

“ All are but parts of one stupendous whole  
• Whose body nature is, and God the soul”—

The souls of men are regarded but as emanations from the Divine essence, and the only immortality they attain is final re-absorption into the same. This might be considered as a philosophical speculation upon the nature and destiny of spirit: I prefer to call it a doctrine of their religion, because of its practical influence upon society, showing it to be not one of those cobweb speculations which gather about the corners of the brains of learned but idle men: but an all pervading principle which has leavened the mass. Its first effect is to destroy utterly all the distinctions between virtue and vice: for when all events are regarded but as divine acts and produced solely by a divine energy, there is no vice: all things are alike virtuous, though not perhaps equally ben-

eficial. It is mainly to the practical working of this dogma in the hearts of the Hindoos, that we must ascribe their great immorality and proverbial falsehood. This Pantheism which regards every object material and spiritual as verily a part of God, and all events as solely produced by an immediate divine energy is, in its practical results, near akin to that blank atheism which denies a God and disowns a Providence.

Its next result is not less pernicious: it gives rise to a species of mysticism and asceticism alike unfavorable to popular virtue. It teaches that by abstraction and contemplation we attain to final re-absorption into the divine substance. Thus the attention is withdrawn from those practical virtues which alone can render society happy: and the land is filled with vagrant religionists who practise none of the virtues of life, fulfil none of its duties, and who seek, in every conceivable way, to contradict nature.

But, while considering the influence of Hindoo theology upon Indian morals and character, we must not overlook the doctrine of Metempsychosis. According to this tenet the souls of men, either in the way of probation or of expiation, transmigrate from one body to another, both human and bestial, until they are fitted for the grand consummation, re-absorption into the Deity. This annuls, as you perceive, all those sanctions of the divine law to which the conscience of men pay a reluctant deference. The only effect of sin is to secure the migration of the soul into the body of some beast or reptile: but as there is no preservation of personal identity in these changes, conscience cannot discharge its office as an accuser by ~~tattling~~ its charges against the offender, and therefore no possible benefit can accrue from this species of lustration. And further, since all suffering is regarded as the punishment of crimes committed in a pre-existent state, those salutary lessons which Providence conveys to us through

afflictions pass of course unheeded. It would be easy too to show that the partitions of caste, which so unalterably fix the destiny of every Hindoo born, had their origin in religious ideas. Brahma himself created these orders from the different members of his body: and none can pass over these division lines of society without being guilty of the crime of resisting an original creative decree. Thus do the awful sanctions of religion guard and perpetuate this most pernicious institute which, wherever it prevails, renders all progress in society absolutely impossible. Had we time to pass over into Egypt, we should find the same opinions current there with like results. Time however presses: and as I promised in the outset, I can only be suggestive. Yet in this rapid sketching of the ancient religions, it would be an act of treason against our classical associations, committed too in the very court of learning, to pass over in silence the imposing mythology of Greece.

The peculiar feature of the Greek religion I may best express in the language of another: it was a "sensual worship of nature." It was therefore preëminently a poetical religion: and its impress upon Greek character cannot be mistaken. Greek History is just the counterpart to Greek Mythology: and Grecian character is precisely the character of those who have completely succeeded in humanizing the Deity and investing Him with the passions of man rather than with the attributes of God. As a matter of fact it is worthy of note that when their wit had fairly exhausted all the poetry of their mythology, and they had pushed the worship of nature to its furthest extreme: and above all, when the speculations of the schools had broken the poetic spell, then it was that Greek character, Greek mythology and Greek history fell together precipitately into ruin: and now we know these things only through the classical writings in which they are faithfully and piously urned.

The time would fail me to speak of the Roman, Persian, Carthaginian and other creeds, with their respective influences upon the destinies of these nations. But if any one will sufficiently consider the influence of the single doctrine of Fate, as exhibited among the followers of Mohammed, he will not deny the influence of religion upon national character. What people were ever more fearless in breasting the current of battle, or more passive and evincing greater fortitude in suffering than the turbaned Turk? And yet what people more absolutely changeless in their character and condition than this?—The single doctrine of destiny has moulded their entire history: and amidst the universal advance in society has left them as fixed and unchangeable as the Pillar of Salt upon the Plains of Sodom.

But let us leave the misty regions of antiquity, and see what light an inspection of modern nations will throw upon the subject before us. In Europe, instead of the numerous superstitions which we find in Asia, are presented the two antagonist systems of Popery and of Protestantism. Yet these are presented to us under so many aspects, that we may safely form a judgment of their tendencies. And in the very outset we perceive a strong contrast between the political and social prosperity of Papal and of Protestant Europe. Wherever Protestantism prevails, we find the people thrifty, industrious and enterprising, the nation prosperous and independent, the social and domestic Institutions, which form the root of society, guarded by the most efficient sanctions, and all the wheels of society moving onward in harmonious progression. Wherever Popery prevails, we find the people ignorant and thriftless: no proper views of liberty and independence obtain, for where men have committed their eternal destiny to the keeping of a Priest, it is comparatively easy to entrust their temporal fortunes to the care of a tyrant. It would seem as though Providence, in its

sublime operations, had allowed Popery to embrace the fariest portions of the Earth, that its character might undergo the fullest test. Italy in former days, even under Pagan Rule, was the birth place of heroes ; men of iron frames and of lion hearts who, by their indomitable energy, filled the world with the fame of their deeds. The modern Italians, how wretchedly degenerate from the race which made Rome the mistress of the world ! Effeminate, luxurious, and crafty, they exhibit, most of all others, the ‘*obedientiam fracti animi.*’ Look too at Spain : once noble and chivalrous, the seat of learning, and the leading power in the Cabinet of European politics, holding as wide an Empire, through her Colonial possessions, as Britain can now boast, or Rome, herself, in the days of her ancient dominion. Now cold, bigoted and stern : her government weak and impoverished ; her people suspicious and reserved ; her religion would seem to have been acquired in the dungeons of the Inquisition, and the state, itself, as though it had been broken upon the wheel. Compare Spain with a power purely Protestant, such as England : compare her with what she once was, before she became so fully corrupted : compare her with what she might have been, with her immense advantages, which she knew not how to improve : and then estimate the causes of her degradation. I will not deny the agency of political influences in these results, for it would savor of empiricism to trace all forms of disease to any single cause. But he who will deny the influence of Romanism upon Spanish character, has surely resolved, with desperate hardihood, to contradict both philosophy and fact.

As we carry out the comparison between Protestant and Papal countries : as for example between Scotland bleak and barren, and Italy, with its sunny plains, Prussia with Austria, Sweden with Spain, the Republics of South America with the United States : the balance is so uniformly in favor of Protestantism that it requires a

vast deal of assurance to ascribe it all to political causes. But Providence itself has anticipated such a solution, when it presents to us the same people divided in religious sentiment. When we compare the Protestant portions of Germany with the Papal: the Protestant Cantons of Switzerland with the Popish: Protestant Ireland with Romish Ireland; the Huguenots with the rest of Papal France, what shall we say? Living under the same laws, obeying the same rulers, and of course affected by the same political influences, is it not reckless in these cases to deny the agency of moral and religious causes?

At first view it may seem that the general condition of France contravenes the positions above assumed: and yet it is France that furnishes the fullest illustration of the same. Without entering into any analysis of French character, it is sufficient to observe that it needs to be deepened. They are certainly a people of great taste and refinement: they have made distinguished progress in the exact and experimental sciences: their literature is polished, various and extensive: they are impulsive, enthusiastic and strongly possessed of national feelings: yet it is written upon every page of their history that they lack depth of character. Now parallel with this take the pregnant fact, that of all the nations of Europe the French are the least possessed of religious sentiments. The common people are indeed occupied with the painted worship and idle pomp of the Romish Ritual: yet these are more the matters of form with them than is probably the case with any other Peasantry in Europe. As regards the more refined and intelligent classes, Philosophy has done much to render them Infidel. France, I regard, as being very much in the condition of Greece before the coming of Christ. As the speculations of the schools made havoc of the poetical mythology, so the philosophy of France has exploded the absurd and contradictory dogmas of Romanism. Philosophy is powerful to break



down the defences of a baseless superstition, but it cannot substitute in its stead a true faith. Thus while one half of the French nation is piling up altars to unknown Gods through excess of superstition, the other half laughs at all religion and is wholly given up to an Epicurean Philosophy. In proof of this, I may remark ~~of either~~, *further* that the French are the only people among whom the awful scenes of the French Revolution could have been enacted; simply because among no people was there such previous preparation. The same political causes might have produced Revolution and Civil war in other countries: but France was the only country in which it was possible for Religion to be openly pulled down, the Sabbath itself annulled, and Reason worshipped in the person of a miserable courtesan. It must be remembered that Danton, Marat and Robespierre were preceded by the Infidel philosophers: these last were the men who separated all society by the joints and paved the way for the infernal horrors which succeeded. It is with great truthfulness and force that Thomas Carlyle declared Rousseau to have been "the Evangelist of the French Revolution."\* He surely was so; as surely as Robespierre was its Apostle. The melancholy events of this dark period plainly show what French character needs: and the pious and noble Huguenots exemplify on the other hand, how perfect the French nation may become, if ever it is leavened with a true Religion which shall hold the people's Heart.

Gentlemen, I have done. Taking my position at various points in the history of the past, I have endeavored to illustrate a single truth: not denying the influence of political causes, I have proved by examples that national character is greatly modified by religious views.—It is matter of sincere regret to me that the brief time allowed for the preparation of this address would not per-

\*His work, Heroes and Hero worship.

mit me to enter more fully into this subject. I have presented to you but the outline of a splendid theme: yet rudely as I have sketched it, it is with a profound sense of their seasonableness and importance that I submit to you these thoughts. This is a subject which admits a close application to the hearts of our American people.—With a little spice of National vanity perhaps, we are wont on State occasions to give expression to our patriotic feelings by uttering the praises of our country. It is well. Ours is indeed a noble country, its bold streams, dense forests, broad prairies, lofty mountains, glassy lakes and deep Savannahs are enough to elicit alike our poetry and our patriotism—yet it is not these that awaken our pride, that send the glow to the cheek and roll a tide of feeling upon the heart of the American abroad, when in the halls of Princes he avows himself an American and a Republican. We are proud of our history: proud of the battles which achieved our independence: but prouder still of the high destiny which awaits us. This Western Hemisphere, I cannot doubt, has been especially reserved that in these latter ages of the world, it might serve as the platform upon which to solve the mightiest Problems. For generations untold it was in the keeping of the wild Red man: but in due season he has yielded it up to a people whom Providence has transplanted, in the most remarkable manner, from other climes. With an eclectic population such as ours, having a good Anglo-Saxon basis—thrown upon this broad continent which affords us room for indefinite extension—separated by a world of waters from the strifes of European and of Asiatic politics—and with a form of government which forces into exercise the moral and intellectual energies of our people—we may surely regard with honest pride the noble mission to which we are called. In the eye of all nations, and upon a platform as elevated as our own Alleghanies, we are called in Providence to work out results

to which other nations and other lands are utterly inadequate.

It is matter for boasting that with such a mixed population, after little more than one century of Colonial existence, our forefathers ventured upon the sublime experiment of self-government. Only to a partial extent had this experiment been before tried, and always with fatal ill-success: never before were fitting instruments found, and a nation virtuous enough to insure success. But now the world beholds with admiration those who bear the ensigns of power and wear the robes of office only fulfilling a delegated trust, and at appointed seasons rendering it back to those who originally conferred it.

But there was another political experiment boldly ventured upon by our ancestors, and which is still under trial, the entire separation of Church and State. It is wonderful that after eighteen centuries this should still be an experiment which many are afraid to adventure: yet in another aspect, it was a bold conception of the Statesmen of '76 to discard openly the whole principle of an establishment, and without hesitation to adopt in its stead the voluntary principle—and it is matter for devout thanksgiving to God that now throughout this commonwealth of twenty-six States there is not one Protestant heart that desires an identification of the Church with the State: not one, who would not deprecate it more for the welfare of the Church than for the safety of the State. So much for the complete success thus far of this experiment.

These are only among the great problems which remain to be solved in future American History. But gentlemen, shall our country accomplish this lofty destiny which now promises to ennoble her? This question touches every chord of pride and of patriotism in the American breast: it reaches down into the depths of your souls as I now propound it. Let me say it is not to be answered in the party slang and cant of the day. I suffer

not any of those two-penny politicians to answer it, who swarm like the locusts of Egypt over the land, eating up every green thing, and who aspiring to be Statesmen cannot reach higher than the brawling demagogue. *You* may answer it, but not until you have first gone down into the hearts of this mighty American people and fully estimated the virtues which are there enshrined and which form the only sure guarantee for our national prosperity. If there be any pledge given us that American principles will be perpetuated, it is found in the intelligence, virtue and piety of our people: it is found in the fact, that in every Hamlet the temple of God lifts its spire pointing the way to Heaven; that in the cottages of our peasantry the Bible holds its place upon the humble book-shelf; that in our Primary schools the common people receive that elementary education, which enables them to read in the Scriptures the Charter of their religious freedom, and in the published documents the passing political history of their country: it is in the fact, not that our people are religious after *some* sort but after the *true* sort; and that their articles of religious belief are intrinsically true, alike coincident with the teachings of revelation and the dictates of right reason.

They then are the greatest foes of American liberty, who would extinguish the light of Christianity within our borders. And they are patriots upon the largest scale who lend their influence to the spread of the pure Gospel. Gentlemen, I would impress it upon your minds as the great lesson of this discourse that Christianity pure and unfettered is the conservative influence in our history, the great uniting principle which binds in harmony the heterogeneous elements of our population, and which alone can hold in check the political and religious fanatics, who are always the great incendiaries in every country. Why, let me ask, are the Assyrian, Egyptian, Carthaginian, Persian, Roman and Grecian Empires not now

extant? Why must we seek them amidst the half-buried wrecks of ancient days? Simply because they did not further the liberty and happiness of mankind: simply because being destitute of a true worship they became so utterly vicious that they could not be sustained even under the power of despotism. When we read thus of the rise and fall of Empires, it is a false impression if we suppose it must necessarily be true of nations as it is of individuals, "one generation passeth away and another generation cometh"—these Empires fell because, being unworthy to stand, Providence in pushing on its ultimate and sublime ends threw them into oblivion. But there is no a priori necessity that America like these should go "slouching down the world on the wrong side of her crisis." So long as her aim in politics continues to be the advancement of true liberty, and so long as her religion continues to be of that pure kind which regenerates the heart, so long will she continue to grow: and she will assuredly shine with a resplendent glory which ~~would~~ *shall* throw contempt upon the pomp and splendor of all the ancient dynasties combined.

The particular form of danger to which we are exposed upon this point is the introduction of Infidelity by means of Pseudo-Reformations. Circumstances have made us an adventurous people: we have experimented successfully in the department of politics, we may think to experiment in morals. Doubtless there are social and political evils from which we desire to be delivered: yet in the madness of reform, the foundations of true religion may insensibly be subverted. I submit it to you as a question for grave and deep thought, whether Satan under the disguise of a Reformer may not be playing a deep game with the destinies of men and of nations. No more fatal calamity can befall a people than to have false moral principles, substituted for the true. Men may be vicious in practice: yet if their avowed principles are correct,

there is ground upon which to operate for their recovery: but when they are corrupted in their principles, the whole nation rushes downward upon an inclined plane into ruin.

To you, gentlemen, as a portion of the educated mind of this country it is committed to watch these evils. If you are fired with the noble ambition of moulding your country's character and destiny, I might suggest that you yield at least to the indirect and reflex influence of Christianity. It is a solemn fact that no man ever became a traitor to his country before becoming an apostate from virtue and religion. Arnold became a gambler before he was fit for treason. He did not sell his sword to the British until this master passion so ate into his soul that he was willing to throw his country upon the dice board, as his last and most desperate stake. Protect the religious integrity of the people: suffer Christianity to go forth in its regenerating power—and be assured, our political prosperity will be placed upon as firm a basis as the granite beneath our mountains: our national glory will be as broad as the world and as permanent as the Continent upon which we live.



