

THE ORATIONS.

CONSERVATISM AND RADICALISM IN SOCIETY.

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In the study of the progress of society from the beginning to the present, two forces ever meet us—conservatism and radicalism—each contending for mastery. We are in turn shocked, grieved, and alarmed as we pass through the diversified events of their conflict. As we follow them through history we come to three distinct periods stamped with their energy, the barbarian, the pagan, and the Christian. The historian might particularize this classification still further, but the record would read the same. In the first period man was little more than an animal, governed by his instincts and passions. There was an occasional flash of reason's light, but it was like the passing of the moon from one cloud to another in the midnight storm. Science had not as yet lit her torch and begun her flaming march of investigation and discovery. The mechanical arts had not yet subordinated to their service the proud achievements of scientific research. Literature was smothered in ignorance and superstition. The highest ambition of these dwellers in darkness was to possess sufficient physical power to vanquish every assailant on the field of blood. They hurled the javelin in war, they roamed the field and forest for their food, and dwelt beneath the thatched roofs of their rude huts for shelter. They clung tenaciously to the traditions and customs of their ancestors, and were suspicious of every innovation in their established manner of living. They were conservative through fear of displeasing the gods, who were supposed to be the custodians of their peace and prosperity. Had a philosopher appeared in their midst, possessing a knowledge of the forces in nature, their infinite combinations and varied utility, his radical notions would have cost him his life. The ownership of property was settled by force of clubs and spears, and the law of the survival of the strongest governed their social intercourse. Wifehood and motherhood were debased to the lowest servitude, and the family life was coarse and selfish. Still, there was some progress toward the light. They watched the stars, they observed the seasons, they noted the changes going on about them, and deduced a meagre system of natural laws. They felt the upward yearnings of the soul; they saw, everywhere, the operation of a supreme power; they were by intuition religious beings, and thus they came to have a faint knowledge of their relation to the spiritual and the divine. Yet all was chaos and confusion. The knowledge they possessed was purely sensuous. Ignorance was on the throne and reason had not begun her contest for the crown. In the transition, as we pass to the next period, the light of progress in society shone out with an incandescent glow. Conservatism, no longer in the ascendancy, withdrew to the caves and desert places. Radicalism had obtained the field, and with lavish hand was sowing the seed of a new life. Philosophy, science, law, and art sprang out of the soil on the shore of the Ægean sea, with a depth of root and vigor of growth that furnished scions to every garden of thought in the world of letters for all time. The influence of these living, growing forces spread everywhere; and civilization received an impetus upward and onward it had not felt before. The people lived better, worked easier, and advanced to architectural elegance and comfort in the construction of their homes. The Greek mind possessed nothing to itself but thought. Thought in philosophy, represented by Socrates; thought in science created by Aristotle; thought in law constructed by Solon; thought in art, carved out by Phidias; and now these new energies of civilization were hurled in every direction. The world at last began its advance toward ideal perfection. Teachers of the new order of truths were at the court of Rome, the school of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, arousing the people to a study of themselves and the laws that bound them to their environment. Said Mendimus, the pedantic courtier, to his master, the emperor: "If I shall go on studying this Greek writing, I may become an oracle, or even one of the gods some day." So potent a factor had Greek thought and life become with men of learning in that precocious age. The religion of this period alone escaped the ravages of the radical spirit. It rested on an elaborate system of mythology, and was so interwoven with all that

was lovely in nature, and all that was poetic in imagination, as to exercise a most powerful influence upon the character of the people. The idea of God that seemed to flash across the pagan mind was an ecstatic vision of divine energy, a world soul, which, rushing through all created things, as the wind across the lyre, thrilled them into divinest harmony. They held the soul to be a portion of Deity Himself. And as a bubble arises from the boundless and formless sea, floating about here and there, merging into other bubbles, and then floats on to its inevitable destiny—an absorption, an incorporation into the ocean again. So individual souls were emanations from the great infinite soul; and as a sunbeam touches at the same time the sun and the earth, so they touched at once the source of eternal reason and corporal being. And when at last the soul should throw off its earthly shroud it was to be absorbed into the abyssal depths of infinite love. Such, then, were some of the most important results of the operation of these two giant forces—radicalism and conservatism—upon thought and life, during the infancy and early growth of the race.

In passing to the Christian period, we may trace with a keener analysis the varied achievements and disasters wrought by their iron hand. Conservatism, peculiarly sensitive to the influence of antiquity, pursued the ghost of ancestral habits and refused to sanction a single law of change. Progress was interpreted to mean destruction. Every new thought, every new invention, every new discovery was regarded with the most baleful suspicion and with fearful forebodings. Determined to be the dictator of law, it insisted that the people should be subject to a king who ruled by divine right, and developed the miserable system of feudalism, and clung to it till every mediæval nation was deluged with blood. By its endeavor to control religion it made the church a storehouse of abuses and citadel of tyranny, so that at her behest a Galileo was sent to prison and a Savonarola to the flames. Desiring to contribute something to philosophy, conservatism busied itself with the most ridiculous and unprofitable questions in metaphysics, science, and theology. Occasionally, as in the French revolution, it checked the muddy stream of error, but far oftener it dammed the crystalline river of truth and doomed the world for a longer time to the drought of gloomy superstition. On the other hand, radicalism, ever active for the improvement and progress of the race, stood out opposed to everything that was tainted with antiquity. Though impetuous and extravagant in all its actions, it saw the need of reform and invention, and plunged ahead to secure them. It fought against authority, despised custom, and made the end to sanction the means. Over-confident of results, it disregarded the warnings of defeat and rushed headlong into the rapids, whose flood but hastened it on to the terrible whirlpool below. Like the swift flying shuttle of a mighty loom, it passed from one extreme to the other, and seemed never to be satisfied. It fought the blending of truth, equality, and justice, and would challenge an army, face any peril—yea, would sacrifice life itself merely to satisfy its caprice concerning ideal right.

Coming now to our day, we find that these two powerful elements, look in what ever direction we may, continue to wage the same relentless warfare. Like the ceaseless heaving of the ocean, the fight is now subdued and scarcely discernible, and anon vehement and irrepressible, agitating the social mass to the very core. Every great reform of the past has been and every great reform of the present must be carried forward to triumphant consummation by either the aggression of the one or the opposition of the other of these elements.

Conservatism sought to perpetuate American slavery. Radicalism ordered to arms its forces and swept the gigantic curse out of the nation. The victory cost one million of men and four billions of money, but it transformed the four millions of serfs into free men; and, to-day,

"There are domes of white blossoms
Where spread the white tent,
There are plows in the way
Where the war wagons went,
And there are songs
Where they lifted up Rachel's lament."

Conservatism seeks to build upon a firm foundation a traffic worse than pestilence, fire, sword—the traffic in strong drink—legalized and licensed by act of congress and legislature. Radicalism in tears and woe and despair pleads pityingly for its prohibition, root and branch. Conservatism would fasten upon the nation all the enormous evils of unrestricted immigration, anarchism, the destruction of the Sab-