

THE  
MERCERSBURG REVIEW.

---

SEPTEMBER, 1849.

---

NO. V.

---

ART. XXVIII.—RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS.

By these words is indicated a period and a condition, which occupies a prominent place in Revelation, and which always has been, and should ever be, dear to the hearts and hopes of Christians of this period. "God hath spoken" oracularly, "by the mouth of all his holy prophets, which have been since the world began." Were there no other reason to urge us to an investigation of this future state of "all things," the fact that it forms the great burden of prophecy in all ages, would of itself, be sufficient. Whatever God hath spoken, deserves to be studied with diligence and prayer. But, especially, we should study profoundly and prayerfully what "he hath spoken," in so many different ways, and by so many different instruments, "by the mouth of *all* his holy prophets," men of the most exalted piety and profoundest wisdom—men admitted to the secrets of God, and his commissioned organs of communication to his creatures, in every age, "since the world began," till these extraordinary channels of revelation were closed. Surely a theme which occupies so large a portion of Revelation, should also legitimately occupy a large

## ART. XXXVI.—HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT.

“ We fear that this phrase “ historical ” is connected in their minds with the doctrine of development, of which also they speak a good deal, and which we consider the thing in the world most irreconcilable to the true idea of an historical Church. We ourselves do not see how development is to work without the aid of an infallible earthly head of the Church. We think it has worked very badly with the aid of such an head ; but that was because the head was not really infallible. It seems to us that continued progress requires a continual standard to which to appeal. If we have an infallible living teacher upon earth, to whom we can go, and upon whose decisions we can rely, the doctrine of development may be safe ; but it will be useless. But a development, independent of such a teacher, must be continually in danger of going wrong, as we find that most actual developments of Church doctrine have. Now, if we have not an infallible living authority to protect us, we must substitute for it some fixed standard, by which the development is to be tried. But progress is of the essence of development, and it must get beyond any fixed standard. They will come to differ. Which are we to follow ? If the fixed standard, why not adopt it at once, and say nothing of development ? If development, how are we to know that we are right ? What is theology but a science, like the human sciences ? What has become of Revelation ? We have no difficulty in answering these questions for ourselves. We adhere to the fixed standard, the Scriptures as interpreted by the consent of the whole Church, Catholic as well in time as in space. But this fixed standard is utterly incompatible with development. All sects, in the true sense of the word, have developed away from this standard. All “ sectarianism,” in the true sense of the word, is nothing but a development, which has introduced a new doctrine not conformed to this standard.”—*True Catholic*.

The passage here quoted, forms the conclusion of an article on “ Sectarianism,” in the April number of the *True Catholic*, (a most respectable Episcopal Magazine published in Baltimore,) which winds up with a short friendly notice of “ what has been called the Mercersburg School.” We use it as a convenient occasion, for fixing attention on the true force of the question to which it refers.

What is *historical* development ? Not fact added to fact, or thought to thought, in an outward way. Still less movement from one position to another wholly new and different. But growth, evolution from within, organic expansion. All *life* in-

plies such movement. History has no other sense. It is the revelation of an idea, or spiritual fact, in *time*; the very form, in which the original *wholeness* of such a fact is brought to pass, the only form in which it *can* come to pass. So in the case of the single man. So in the case of every nation. And shall we then hold the Church, the inmost sense of man's life, to be a dead outward *traditum*? God forbid. It is historical; not because it is the same thing forever, like a mountain or a sea; that would be the very opposite of history; but because it is the power of a divine fact, which is forever growing itself more and more into the consciousness, the interior life of the world, (a process that implies new forms and stages of its apprehension continually,) and which can never be complete till the whole thinking and working of humanity shall appear transfused with its glorious reconstructive power; something, God knows, to which even the Church itself, in its best and palmiest state, has never yet been able to attain.

What do the friends of Christianity mean, when they deny development. Can they deny *change*? Not surely without the derision of all history itself. The Church of the fourth century is *not* one in form with that of the first; the Church of the sixteenth century again is different from both. Rome pretends the contrary, in her own favor. But the pretense is monstrous. What Protestant denomination, however, can carry through any similar plea? Is modern Presbyterianism identical with past Christianity, in all ages before the Reformation or in *any*? Is modern Methodism? Is modern Episcopacy? All intelligent and candid men know the contrary, and are coming to confess it more and more. And what are we to say then of such change? Must it all be set down as apostacy and corruption? Let those shoulder this dread alternative who see proper to do so. We gladly embrace, for our part, (as the only escape from it,) the idea of organic development, by which, through all changes, we are allowed to believe the Church, *one*, holy, catholic and apostolical, from the beginning onward to the last day.

Such development requires no "infallible earthly head," for its direction and conduct; just as little as a living oak needs to be built up by line and compass. An outward authority of this

sort, supposed to supersede the free working of the intelligence and will of the Church itself, would be the source of petrification and stagnation only, not of development. This implies freedom, ethical activity, life poised upon itself as a principle and centre. It is just the stability system, which in every shape turns into mechanism and leads to popery.

Christianity, it is true, has its "fixed standard" in the Bible. But the standard is not itself Christianity, the thing it is to try and measure. *That* is a divine fact, from Christ onward, out of the Bible and beyond it. The Bible is its norm. But what then? Must it be stationary, to be normal? All life has its fixed norm, which, however, embraces it not as something fixed and at rest, but as a fact in motion, the succession of different states, and stages in time. Does the development of a plant, carry it "beyond its fixed standard"? The Bible is the fixed standard of Christianity, not as the whole depth and compass of its sense may be supposed to have been at hand in the consciousness of the Church from the beginning; for this has not been the case, and is very far from being the case even now; but as furnishing the divine mirror by which this sense is to be tried and recognized as true, through all stages of its growth into the actual life of humanity by the Church. The piety of a child is very different from that of a full grown man; and yet the Bible is the *fixed* standard of the entire *movement*, by which the first gradually ripens into the second.

"What has become of Revelation?" Can a revelation, we ask in return, be really in the world as a *mere* outward authority, be it living pope or dead book of whatever name; but to be so in any real sense *must* it not, along with the letter, enter into the actual consciousness of the world also, the very process of its inward being, as "spirit and life"? And how is this to be effected save in a *human* way, or through a mighty process of history, by which ages shall be required to evolve into full apprehension and power, the vast interior fulness of the Christian principle, the "great and wide sea" of truth that lies before us in the Bible? Surely to be *historical* at all, Christianity must be in the world under the form of history, which itself implies organic life and growth, and not with the form simply of Pompey's Pillar or the Pyramids.

N.