

Our Library.

No. 15.

"The Obligations of the World to the Bible. By Gardiner Spring, D.D.

The great obligations of the world to the Bible are here displayed with a masterly hand, in a series of Lectures originally delivered to the young men of New York, by the author, a Presbyterian minister of that place. The indebtedness of literature, legislative science, liberty civil and religious, and society generally to the Sacred Writings, is proved by the most powerful arguments, which are accompanied by happy illustrations, and a style of great eloquence and beauty.

No. 16.

"Corinne on P'talie, par Mme. La Baronne De Staël."

This work, perhaps the most celebrated, which Madame de Staël has written, though placed in the form of a novel, should rather be considered as a description of Italy. Possessed of a glowing imagination, and well versed in the history and literature of the country, she has excelled every traveler in Italy in the irresistibly charm, which she has cast around the scenes of this most interesting of all countries. Especially is she at home amid the time-hallowed ruins of Rome, throwing out her brilliant thoughts among them, like so many jewels. We give the following translation of her description of St. Peter's, which, however, will convey but an imperfect idea of the strength and beauty of the original:—

"THE CHURCH OF ST. PETER AT ROME.—The Church of St. Peter then appeared to their view, the grandest structure which the hands of man have ever reared; for the pyramids of Egypt themselves are inferior in height. I ought, perhaps, said Corinne, to have shown you the finest of our edifices last; but that is not my system. It seems to me, that to render one susceptible of the charm of the fine arts, it is necessary to commence by viewing those objects which inspire a lively and profound admiration. This sentiment, once experienced, reveals, so to speak, a new sphere of ideas, and renders us henceforward more capable of admiring and judging of that which awakens, though in an inferior degree, the first impressions which we have received. All these gradations, these careful attempts to produce a great effect, are contrary to my taste. We do not attain the sublime by degrees, there is an infinite distance between it, and even that which is beautiful.

Oswald felt an emotion altogether extraordinary on arriving in front of St. Peter's. It was the first time that the work of man had produced upon him the effect of one of the marvels of nature. It is the only achievement of art upon the earth which possesses the same kind of grandeur which characterises the immediate works of creation. Corinne enjoyed the astonishment of Oswald. I have chosen, said she to him, a day in which the sun is shining in all its eclat, to show you this magnificent structure. I have in reserve for you a pleasure more deep, more sacred—that of contemplating it by the light of the moon; but it was necessary, first for you to be present at the most brilliant of our fetes, the genius of man decorated by the magnificence of nature.

The place in front of St. Peter's is encircled by columns, which appear light in the distance, but massive when near. The earth, which makes a gradual ascent to the portico of the church, adds still more to the effect which it produces. An obelisk of eighty feet in height, which appears insignificant in presence of the cupola of St. Peter's, stands in the middle of the place. The simple form of obelisks itself, has something in it which attracts the imagination; their summit loses itself in the air, and seems, as it were, to carry up to heaven a great thought of man. This monument, which came from Egypt to ornament the baths of Caligula, and which Sextus V. afterwards caused to be transported to the foot of the temple of St. Peter; this contemporary of so many ages, which have not been able to waste it away, inspires a sentiment of respect; man feels himself so

transitory, that he is over touched with emotion in presence of that which is unchangeable. At a little distance on each side of the obelisk, rise up two fountains, whose waters perpetually leap into the air, and fall down in luxuriant cascades. This murmur of waters, which we are accustomed to hear only in the country, produces in this enclosure a sensation entirely new; but this sensation is in harmony with that which is awakened by the aspect of a majestic temple.

Painting and sculpture, imitating most commonly the human figure, or some object existing in nature, reveal to our minds ideas perfectly clear and positive; but a beautiful monument of architecture has not, so to speak, any determinate expression; we are seized, in contemplating it, with that kind of reverie, without any limit or object, which bears away the thought to such an infinite distance. The noise of the waters contributes still more to these impressions so vague and profound.

"Eternal movement and eternal repose,"

are thus brought to combine with each other. It is in this place, above all others, that time has no power; it cannot dry up these jetting fountains, any more than it can shatter these immovable stones. The waters which leap up like a sheaf into the air, are so light and so mist-like, that in a fine day, the rays of the sun produce little rainbows, formed of the most beautiful colors.

Pause here a moment, said Corinne to Oswald, as he already stood within the portico of the church; pause before lifting aside the curtain which covers the entrance of the temple. Does not your heart beat on approaching this sanctuary? Do you not feel, at the moment of entering, all that can awaken the expectation of a solemn event? They advanced into the temple; and the impression which they received under these immense arches, was so profound and so sacred, as to banish from their minds every other thought. Every thing here commands silence; the least sound is echoed so far, that no words seem worthy of being thus repeated in an edifice almost eternal! Prayer alone, the accent of misfortune, proceeding from some feeble voice, sends its low sound through these huge vaults. And when, under these immense domes, we hear an old man approaching from afar, whose trembling steps lead him along over these beautiful marbles, watered with so many tears, we feel that man is rendered more venerable by that very infirmity of his nature, which subjects his divine spirit to so many sufferings, and that christianity, the religion of grief, contains the true secret of the sojourn of man upon the earth.

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D. C. VAN NORMAN, A. M.,

Hamilton, August 9, 1848.

Principal.

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