

CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY.

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"La source de tous nos maux, meme politiques est l'ignorance, et plus enaore les demi lumieres, qui se reconnaissent a leur violence et a leur presumption."—*De Bonald.*

Since the establishment of Christianity the spirit of evil has modified, over and over again, its plan of attack. With a craft and a perseverance worthy of him who "was a murderer from the beginning" and who "is a liar and the father of lying," it has always adapted its manœuvres to the particular circumstances which accompanied the successive development of the work of God for the salvation of mankind.

Appearing suddenly upon the face of the earth, when the thickest darkness enveloped it, Christianity brought forth to the desolate world all truth, all order and all happiness; a society divinely organized, a legislation as mild as it was energetic, a ministry as devout as it was powerful.

Christianity comes forth like the fabled Minerva, from the first day of its birth it possesses all its grandeur and all its force. The spirit of evil, however, hopes to overthrow it by gradual attacks.

From the side of the idolaters who repulse it brutally without attempting to know it, arise innumerable sects which labour to corrupt a part of its doctrines and practices springing therefrom. They accept the divine institution of Christianity; but substituting practically the spirit of the individual for the spirit of God, each sect distorts some of its dogmas. This is the first phase of the war which the genius of Evil wages against the Church. This epoch extends from the first to the fifteenth century of the Christian era: it is the epoch of *partial heresies*.

The evil spirit attacks Christianity in each of its dogmas. The reality of the Incarnation, the Trinity of the divine persons, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the unity of His person in His double nature, original sin, the necessity of supernatural grace, the liberty of man under grace and predestination, all the principal points of the Christian doctrine become in turn the object of its rage. But its rage is powerless against the Church and against the Truth, of which she is the guardian and infallible mistress. Having shaken the weak by its blasphemies and carried into the abyss the rash who trifled with the danger, each heresy expired at the foot of the rock upon which the Church is built. Christianity, the vanquisher of false doctrines, tames at the same time the ferocity of the passions. Christian civilization gains everywhere. It recasts the civilizations to its own image. Order, law, mildness, and consequently liberty succeed, in the regenerated societies, to the anarchy, the tyranny, the cruelty of pagan barbarity.

But the spirit of evil is far from considering itself beaten. To the greatness of its losses it proportions the violence and the malice of its new attacks. It enrolls a phalanx of humanists whom it has intoxicated with the charms of pagan literature. This intoxication, extinguishing in many souls Christian reason, exposes them to all the seductions of sensuality and pride. These preparations being well advanced, Wicliffe sketches a new plan of campaign, Luther and Calvin complete, develop, and execute it. Henceforth the evil spirit does not stop at a few dogmas of faith, in particular. It erects into a principle that which forms the very essence of heresy, that is to say, the revolt of the individual reason against divine authority. It has become convinced by an experience of fourteen centuries that no error can solidly establish itself in the world, so long as a living authority subsists in the middle of the people to protect them against the lies of error. Then, what does the genius of evil do? It *denies* this protecting authority and directs all its efforts to this one sole end—to banish it from the earth. It denies not only the necessity of such authority, not only its actual legitimacy, but even its absolute possibility.

It makes its unfortunate dupes believe, not only that no authority has been divinely established upon earth to interpret and defend the divine teaching, but such an authority is impossible, absurd, essentially contrary to the inviolable rights of the human conscience. This is the plan of war of the second epoch: overthrow of all religious authority; idolatry of the individual mind; *radical heresy*.

Thus far the spirit of error has manœuvred upon theological ground. Upon this battlefield it has been beaten and confounded by phalanxes of invincible doctors; in the first epoch by the Iræneuses, the Athanasines, the Gregories, the Jeromes, the Augustines, the Bernards; in the second epoch, by the Ecks, the Emsers, the Canos, the Bellarmins, the Suarez, the Bossuets. Then it abandons the lofty regions of theological science and takes refuge in the domain of natural reason. There it commences a war, as perfidious as it is infuriated, against what it designates by the name of *scholasticism*.

Through the medium of Bacon and Descartes, the evil spirit boldly maintains before the astonished world, that the human race in the previous centuries had learned nothing; that up to that moment it had even ignored the only legitimate means of establishing science; it is necessary to recast the human mind entirely to find for it new faculties in order to discover and demonstrate the truth.

The new plan is adopted. Men will not be wanting to put it in execution. Ignorance, sloth, pride, and all the other vices find in it very easily their motive. This is the epoch of *philosophism* or *philosophy in revolt*.

The insurrection of philosophism against God, inaugurated in the 17th century, assumed large proportions only in the 18th. In passing to the 19th it has retained the same principles but modified its tactics. The sophists of the 18th century, in starting their philosophy against Christian truth, tried at least to discuss or pretend to discuss. In the double movement of their polemics, directed at the same time to the destruction of Christianity and to the substitution of a purely natural order, they essayed to give grounds for their negations and their assertions, they attempted to convince the old faith and the old science of falsehood. The sophists of our century do not consider themselves bound to take so much trouble. Reproducing against Christian science and civilization the calumnies of their fathers of the preceding century, they dispense themselves from bringing forward even the semblances of proofs in support of their systems, though these systems are full of paradoxes and incredible hypotheses.

There are, therefore, in this third epoch two clearly distinct phases: the first is that of *pure philosophism*; the second of *fanatic philosophism*.

Several causes have obliged the spirit of evil to renounce the great theological contests and to confine itself in the narrow circle of natural philosophy. At first, as we have just said, the assaults of the evil spirit against Christianity under the theological form were victoriously repulsed all along the line. The vanquished enemy was therefore, compelled to abandon the field of his shame. Error impoverished necessarily the intellect. It lowered its aim, weakened its force, smothered its noble inspirations. The blindest minds in the obstinacy of error have still a secret sentiment of their fear and their dishonour. This sentiment renders them timid even in the transports of their boldness. This sentiment inspires them with an insurmountable aversion to questions where they lie to themselves and deny their reason. Theology, the queen of sciences, demands, in order to be serious, varied knowledge, profound studies, an intellect long exercised in the most elevated speculations of natural and supernatural metaphysics. The science of theology, having the sources of its demonstrations in the holy books, in the Councils, in the Fathers, in history, in reason illuminated by faith, employs more or less in its service all the other sciences. Minds enfeebled and contracted by radical errors are no longer capable of studies so deep and so extended.

The idolatry of the individual reason, even when it is engaged upon statefical matters, lead equally to the