

TRANSCENDENTALISM:

THE NEW ENGLAND RENAISSANCE.*

The subject given me for my brief hour in this course of lectures reads simply "Transcendentalism." I propose to enlarge the title into "Transcendentalism; or, The New England Renaissance." The especial designation, Renaissance, or Re-birth, I would emphasize from the outset, as starting in the mind a distinct class of conceptions, without the aid of which the New England movement cannot be treated with due sense of historical continuity.

This term, "The Renaissance," — the New or the Second Birth of the world,— is one we are all familiar with nowadays. In its broadest, its only scientifically historical sense, it denotes what Symonds, who has written the history of the movement in Italy, summarizes as "the whole transition from the conceptions of the Middle Ages to the conceptions of the Modern World." Its two grand achievements were, as Michelet puts it, "the discovery of the world and the discovery of man." High-sounding terms these,— "the discovery of the world and the discovery of man"; but in how vast a sense are they literally true! Go back in imagination to the Middle Ages, and ask yourselves, Did man then know, did he so much as dream of, this majestic universe which has finally become revealed to the modern mind? Question, again, man's actual knowledge in those days of the charac-

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ter and scope of his own indwelling powers. Did he so much as dream of the triumphs reason was to achieve, of the intellectual systems thought was to build, of the world of beauty art and literature were to create, of the order and stability law was to inaugurate, of the conquests of disease and misery medicine was to usher in, of the richness, variety, and charm all these were to impart to human life? No: as such potential miracle-worker he never suspected himself. He would have thought you were talking of wizards or demons, and have shrunk back in horror. Thus, in a thousand higher aspects of his being, man had not yet been discovered by himself.

And how was brought to pass this double discovery of the inner and the outer world? In the one only possible way,—of the foremost intellects and characters of Europe beginning to trust in and use their natural powers, thus finding out experimentally alike what these powers were made for, what they could hope to achieve, and to what marvels of marvels they were externally related. The compass, first heard of in 1302, gave the world later on the discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope, the circumnavigation of the globe. The telescope enabled Copernicus and Galileo to prove the revolution of the earth and the true theory of the planetary system. Printing began its marvellous career, and made accessible to thousands the works of the mighty spirits of Greece and Rome. Gunpowder revolutionized the art of war. Men of genius in sculpture and painting revealed the grace and glory of the human form. To France, to Germany, to Holland, to England, the movement spread, to break out in original shapes in Shakespeares and Bacons, in Erasmuses, in Luthers, in Descartes, in Spinozas. Was not all this in truth, then, what Michelet so accurately calls it, “the discovery of man and the discovery of the world”? Did it not inaugurate a new human consciousness, and bring to the lips the ecstatic cry: “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel!

in apprehension, how like a god!" How Transcendental, by the way, this last quotation sounds!

Meantime, however, while all this was going forward, there was another and a vastly larger class of people, who looked on with anything but eyes of favor. Nor is it to be wondered at. The smug citizen, who has been accustomed all his days to walk on level ground and with his head up in the air,—no wonder he has a vindictive word to say of the impious physicist, who makes his brain spin by telling him that, in the course of the next twelve hours, he will be where he will have to stand with his feet turned up to the bottom of a globe and his head hanging down into a frightful abyss. The Mediterranean sailor, with a love in every port, whom Columbus drags off to cross the boundless ocean; the routine student, who is contemptuously told to learn to think for himself, when he naturally supposed that others had done all that for him; the comfortable priest, whose whole needful stock in trade had been a string of beads and the mumbling of a few unintelligible Latin prayers; the splendid prelate, with stipends and dignities entirely dependent on the continued ignorance and superstition of the masses; nay, too, the earnest, self-consecrated, saintly man,—the Saint Bernard perhaps,—who does not care an iota whether the world is round or square, beautiful or ugly, learned or ignorant, so that it can only be saved from the leprosy of sin, and who feels that all possible hope of salvation is supernaturally bound up in the dogmas of the Church,—why should not from all of these break forth a fierce and infuriated protest against the advancing movement? "This blasphemous prying into what God meant to keep secret must be put down." So the infuriated Franciscans cried to Roger Bacon. Mobs, papal anathemas, inquisitions, were in the very air.

We are now getting on to ground upon which it behooves us to tread very carefully, in order to be at once appreciative and just. These two great classes of the human race, which we now see confronted face to face, and glaring at one another with angry eyes, persist in every age,—the champions of the new, the champions of the old; the believers in

the future and the believers in the past; the men who trust in reason and think all things possible to it, and the men who distrust it, dread it, in certain fields abhor it. Each party has something to say for itself which it is well to heed. And so, first, a word for this latter party.

Not unlikely, quite a number of persons here present, addicted to pedestrianism, and yet short of stature, may — in the White Mountains, say — have noticed a certain tendency on the part of men six feet in their stockings to exaggerate the statement of the number of miles that may be reeled off per hour with positive comfort and without calling a halt. Laboriously accompanying one of these nine-league booters through a long day's march, does not the man of shorter stride and scantier breath feel, toward the contemplative hour of nightfall, irresistibly impelled to raise the question, "Is not my six-foot friend somewhat exposed to the danger of becoming the victim of what philosophers call 'his own subjectivity'?" Does he not, in fine, take a somewhat too transcendental view of average legs,—a view too much lifted into the realm of the absolute and unconditioned, and freed from all impertinences of time and space?" Now here is a simple reactionary feeling, which, duly extended from mere pedicular to intellectual and moral considerations, will serve to interpret vast conservative and even retrograde movements in human history.

We can easily see, then, why a whole range of such sublime sentiments as that "Truth is its own evidence," "Beauty its own witness," "Virtue its own reward," should commend themselves very rapturously to a class of highly spiritual minds, and seem very perplexing and irritating to a denser and opaquer. Oh, yes: only give us a picture, these last poor fellows pathetically cry, in which, as in the earliest human efforts at art, it was plainly written over every animal in the landscape, "This is a cow," or "This is a horse," and then we will freely admit that a cow or a horse is its own intrinsic evidence. Now, for one, I cannot but feel a certain tender and loving sympathy with this particular mental condition. The first awkward, fumbling

attempts of the human reason, like the first awkward and fumbling attempts at art, produce rather indiscriminate results. We all perfectly recall the bygone school-days, in which, after four times adding up a column of figures, and getting four entirely distinct answers, we felt a not unnatural uncertainty as to which one of the four might be in strictest accordance with immutable truth. But there was one infallible authority we regarded with as awful reverence as do devout Catholics the symbol of Saint Peter,—the Key to the arithmetic. One glance at this, and we could proudly say of the correct answer, “This is the cow,” “This is the horse,” and rejoice that truth now shone in its own light and had become its own intrinsic evidence.

But we are seemingly keeping too long away from New England, unless possibly it be on the principle that “the longest way round is often the shortest way home.”

The New England colonies were settled by a class of men and women who were a salient illustration of one aspect of the grand uprising of the Renaissance, considered from the point of view of the “whole transition from the conceptions of the Middle Ages to the conceptions of the modern world.” In flagrant defiance of the doctrine of the long-assumed divine rights of kings, here was a class of men on the high road to the discovery that kings had a “lith” in their necks. In many directions, their faith in the powers of human reason was emphatically pronounced. That men had abundant capacity for founding States, and that a town-meeting of ministers, lawyers, traders, and farmers was as august a body as a House of Parliament,—of this they rapidly became entirely convinced. In other directions, however, these self-same men were an equally salient instance of a distinct retrogression from the on-setting tide of the Renaissance,—a band of reactionary protesters against what they regarded as its inherent vice.

Every river has its current and its eddy, and so flows two ways at once. Look at its current, and you say it flows north. Look at its eddy, and you say, “No: south.” Like flint had the Puritans of England — spite of a few excep-

tions — set their faces against the joyous, the poetical, the beautiful, the scientific, the speculative and critical aspects of the Renaissance. They would have put a very different estimate on Shakespeare and “all his works” than do you and I, and would have thought his chances in the world to come far more promising if Mr. Ignatius Donnelly should only succeed in proving himself to be in the right.

Settled down on the hard soil of New England, with Indians to fight, forests to fell, communities to found, churches to build, forced more or less to become jack-at-all-trades,—in farming, trading, legislation, law, medicine, and, erelong, even divinity,—a literally unexampled growth took place in practical confidence in the power of reason to deal with all kinds of emergencies. The Yankee habit of asking questions, and of always replying by asking another question, now made rapid headway. But, at one point, all this inquisitiveness, all this desire of learning something new, stopped short. The same man who would question with the most radical audacity the whole political tradition of past history would recoil in horror at the idea of questioning either the physical ability or the devout willingness of a foreordained whale to swallow Jonah. Here the mental arrest was absolute, here the paralysis of human reason entire.

Time will not serve me to enlarge on the logical consequences of a mental attitude like this, so radical and defiant in one direction, so conservative and submissive in another. You can readily see that it meant two distinct tribunals of judgment,—the tribunal of free reason, the tribunal of the written Scripture. Neither, farther, will time serve me to dwell—as I would much like to—on the retarding effect exercised on the development of many sides of the New England mind by the almost utter isolation in which it so long found itself, cut off, as it was, from the great circulating currents of European life,—from its refinements, its science, its art, its philosophy, its literature,—and shut up to a monotonous diet of politics and technical theology. Enough that all this necessitated a very narrow and starved

mental condition, and left whole sides of human nature un-
solaced and uninspired by any stimulating environment.

Now, unfortunately for any long-continued success in the establishment of a rigid and inflexible theocracy in New England, the very worst book in the world had been chosen to found it on,—the Bible. Strive as you may to overlay it and load it down with a whole *Ætna* of burnt-out dogmatic slag, scoriæ, and ashes, the Titans within are ever rending the mountain flanks and pouring out their indomitable insurgent hearts in fresh streams of fiery lava. And so New England had its perpetual, even though sporadic, witnesses to the inextinguishable hunger and thirst of the spirit after a fresh, spontaneous, originally creative, eye to eye, soul to soul, religious life of its own. The first Transcendentalist in New England, Emerson was always fond of saying, was Jonathan Edwards. A grim, cast-iron specimen of the breed! you will be tempted to say. Not at all. There are beautiful passages in his so generally lurid and terrific sermons, which I would agree — could I only make a private arrangement with Emerson's publishers — to insert in his essays, and which would be read by his most ardent devotees without a suspicion that they had not flowed straight out of the mind and heart of the Concord seer. Of course Jonathan Edwards would have put in his proviso. "Yes, this glorious power to see God eye to eye, 'to glorify him and enjoy him forever,' is all true. God is his own divine witness, his own clear interpreter,—but to *the elect alone.*" Of the Quakers, too, the same might have been said, and in an even broader sense. Their doctrine of the Inner Light, of the Spirit that judges all things, even the deep things of God,— what was this but a still bolder assertion of the indwelling power of the soul to rise above book, priest, formulated creed, and cry to the Eternal, "In thy Light I see light!"

Spite, however, of these not infrequent incursions of a freer and more subjective spirit,—among which I would certainly rank certain aspects of the personal experience doctrine of Methodism, under the lead of its fiery apostle,

Whitefield,—it will have to be confessed, I feel sure, that the tendency alike of thought and emotion in New England set steadily on towards a lower, a more literal, a more prosaic and commonplace level. For Calvinism in full eruption we must all feel, I think, the same half-sublime, half-terrific sense of glory and dread with which we look on Vesuvius or Ætna in fiery outbreak. For Calvinism, its craters dead, and its flanks one desert of monstrously contorted rocks and dreary, barren ashes, we must equally feel as we do when toiling up the sun-scorched heights of an extinct volcano of to-day. Such Calvinism in due time became,—a literal burnt-out volcano. Indeed, it would historically look as though the very capacity for deep and strong emotion had been annihilated in the New England heart, so long, so monotonously, and so remorselessly had the soil been religiously overcropped, so frightfully had it been seared and baked by revival fires. It must be suffered to lie fallow a generation or two, to recover heart.

Man shall not live by volcanoes alone. This thousands on thousands were now beginning to feel. Parishes began negatively to express their sense of fatigue by seeking relief in *not* settling “men of strong doctrine.” Life had grown to be far more comfortable. Material wealth had witnessed a great increase. A smug, unheroic, average-citizen temperament had been generated. The sensation philosophy of John Locke had won a numerous following. Reason — that is to say, reason within reasonable limits — had gained increased respect. Arminianism began to creep in, and gradually to work on towards Unitarianism. And never, perhaps,—as Rev. O. B. Frothingham so clearly points out in his invaluable *History of Transcendentalism*, a book I would earnestly commend to your reading as the only full and adequate account of this important movement,—never, perhaps, had what I have ventured to call “reason within reasonable limits” so admirable a quarry to disport itself with as was now furnished to Unitarian polemics in the dried and desiccated mummy of Calvinism.

For a time “reason within reasonable limits” held high

carnival. Now came the days of its young espousals. So delightful was the sense of the privilege of exercising reason on what had hitherto been forbidden fruit, such a fresh and unwonted sensation did it communicate, that no wonder it drew so many able men to embrace the profession of the ministry. The moral argument against Calvinism,—what a glory in heroically calling (and it was heroism then) right, right, and cruelty, cruelty, and tyranny, tyranny, in their own intrinsic nature! The contradictions and absurdities of the received doctrine of the Trinity,—what a fine intellectual invigoration in subjecting these to the canons of a rational logic! Then, too, the rehabilitation of a pure and good life, the loyal championship of it as above all creeds and professions, the stripping off from the dethroned and beggared heir of God the “rags of filthy righteousness,” and throwing over his shoulders the royal purple,—who shall tell what a discovery of a new world, of a new man, this was to thousands! Perpetual honor to the early leaders of this movement,—the Worcesters, Channings, Nortons, Noyeses, Deweys, Greenwoods, Ephraim Peabodys, and a host of others. Without the solid foundations of sanity, character, and piety they laid, the more ebullient movement that was to succeed would have run great dangers of eventuating in license and excess.

As time went by, however, the original impulse of Unitarianism began to lose its first vitality. You cannot call a new thing new forever. There is a first cry of “Land! land!” which not even a Columbus can raise a second time. People became accustomed to the exercise of “reason within reasonable limits,” and to feel the stirrings of a call to “fresh hills and pastures new,”—that is, a limited number did. As for the bulk of the body, it began to manifest a strong disposition to settle down in a traditional way. Channing, with his high-wrought prophetic sense of the new glory that was to break forth, expressed the keenest disappointment over this state of arrested development, and declared he felt less and less interest in Unitarianism. “Reason within reasonable limits” had grown highly re-

spectable; its adherents were the prosperous and honored; it had its scholars, whose conclusions were to be insisted on as impregnable and final; it had established noble charities and entered energetically on the work of a more rational education and of wiser and better institutions for the pauper, the felon, the insane,—what more could reasonably be asked of it? Why could it not be suffered to enjoy its laurels?

Ah, friends, laurels wither, when long since plucked from the living tree. As a momentary symbol, and while green and glistening, how beautiful! when dry, sere, and rattling, what a mockery! Unitarianism had always had carried with it one serious limitation and drawback. It had the note of provincialism; it was cut off from the grand circulating currents of the world's larger life; it lacked alike the prophetic sense of its own fuller mission and the spiritual imagination to build its inspiring ideal. It was abandoned to no infinite principle. It was to be the leaven of Orthodoxy, its work accomplished when it had taught Orthodoxy to make the same kind of bread with itself. This bread had come to be a certain regulation loaf, with whose size, weight, and easy digestibility the majority were entirely satisfied. Its Channing, whom it never half comprehended, and in many ways hampered and distressed, was to it the utmost limit of the horizon, if not a suspicious degree beyond. Its look was turned backwards. And so it began to ossify. Angry recriminations were now to be heard against any proposal of innovation; and, while no hands were more munificent in subscriptions for building the tombs of its past prophets, none were handier with a brick or an egg for the reception of new prophets. The mercantile influence, the mercantile standard of spiritual values, was paralyzing it. I beg everybody's pardon, but one more generation of the like, and Unitarianism would have degenerated into a simple gospel for the Philistines. Transcendentalism, we now see clearly enough, saved it, by breathing into it the spirit of a newer and larger life.

Who are the Philistines? —peace to the shade of Matthew Arnold after all his effort to define them! They are an eminently respectable body of half-vitalized men and women, good fathers, good mothers, good citizens, exposed to the perpetual danger of perishing of dry rot through the prosaic, commonplace, and utterly unimaginative character of their constitutional temperament and actual environment. Woe to the world that does not possess solid masses of them! and woe equally to themselves, if, for their own best good, their Canaan is not every now and then invaded, conquered, and reconstructed by the children of light!

Who, again, are the children of light? They are the mobile, impressionable, and impassioned temperaments of every age, the diviners of the signs of the oncoming future, the cordial welcomers of every promise of a fuller, richer, more spiritually imaginative life, the believers in the things eye hath not yet seen nor ear heard. And such were the early leaders of Transcendentalism in New England. I need but to enumerate such names as those of Emerson, Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs. Ripley, Dr. Hedge, Dr. Furness, George Ripley, Dwight, Cranch, Caleb Stetson, Clarke, Bartol,—almost all Unitarians by nurture. Faithful to the best that had come down to them from their inheritance in the past, they yet turned eager, anticipating eyes towards a diviner future, and from their heart of hearts prayed the prayer,—

“ Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,
But *vaster*.”

Now we have already taken notice of certain signs in the past of what Emerson recognized as having the note of genuine Transcendentalism,—the confidence, namely, of the spirit in itself. But it was only in a very restricted way that this confidence of the spirit in itself held true. The Quakers, with their emphasized doctrine of the function of

the Inner Light, made the nearest approach to it. These Quakers as a body were, however, spite of a few very beautiful exceptions, a narrow, ignorant, and fanatical class of men and women, who most unhappily thought that the more completely they cut themselves off from nature, literature, beauty, art, science, and philosophy, the brighter would be the shining of the Inner Light. Indeed, in the Quaker horror of such profanities as music and dancing, there could hardly have sprung up among them, and been told of one of their prophets and one of their prophetesses, such a myth as that which records the story of how, on witnessing together the exquisite aërial evolutions of the Viennese *danseuse*, Ellsler, as she came down tiptoe, with "a station like the herald Mercury, new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill," Mr. Emerson bent over with effusion to Miss Fuller, and exclaimed, "Margaret, this is poetry!" while she, in turn, breathlessly ejaculated, "Ralph, it is religion!"

This, of course, is simple travesty. And yet what an ill historical student would he be, who did not reckon alike with the travesties and with the broadest comic caricatures of any period he studies! seeing how, under exaggerated and laughable aspects, these are so many illustrations of the popular feeling of the day. What is really hit at, in this especial one I have cited, is the entirely novel and unrestricted ranges of experience on which, in contrast with the sober earlier New England habit of mind, the Transcendentalists began to insist as sources of light and inspiration. In point of fact, we are here directly led to what must be emphasized as the *most characteristic feature* of the Transcendental Movement in New England; namely, that it took its rise among a class of men and women at once *highly impressionable* and *broadly cultivated*. Their Bible had to be a very large one, and with very little line of distinction between its canonical and apocryphal books.

Now, for all the clearly enunciated belief of the votaries of the new movement in their own eyes and ears, just as significant a fact was it that they believed equally in the eyes and ears of a vast range of other authoritative teachers.

Their attitude was quite as much docile and reverential as it was self-assertive. Communications were beginning to be re-established between isolated, provincial New England and the grand circulating currents of European literature, art, philosophy, and science. Through the writings of Coleridge—especially that epoch-making book of his, the *Biographia Literaria*—aspiring young minds in New England were beginning to get hints, and more or less satisfying outlines, of a grand order of thinking, inaugurated in Germany by men of the stamp of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. Such shorter pamphlets of Fichte as “The Vocation of the Scholar” and “The Destination of Man” rang like the battle-call of the bugle in their ears. The volcanic mind of Carlyle had, moreover, broken out in full eruption; and, in the lurid clouds of fuliginous smoke with which he seemed to fill the whole canopy,—clouds lighted up with the fiery glare of the crater burning in his own breast,—sensitive spirits seemed to read once more the revelation of a world sublime and awful as that of Calvinism, but with its symbols plucked out of the fiery heart of the nineteenth century instead of out of the heart of the Middle Ages.

He professed to have made an Alpine, a Himalayan discovery. A new mind had come into the world, an original creation fresh from the hand of God,—a mind towering to the zenith, continental in the base of its foundations, its flanks all glorious with forests and gorges and fertile valleys, teeming with corn and wine. This Mont Blanc, this Mount Everest, he named by the name of Goethe, and cried to the world, “Lo! the man who has experienced everything, suffered everything, closed in Jacob wrestle with everything, only to triumph at last in clear, loving, utterly reconciled Olympian serenity over them all!” There was in those days a note in the voice of Carlyle as of some Titanic Promethean sufferer, long riveted to the bleak rocks of Caucasus, to whom has at last come the glorious prophecy of deliverance; and mightily it stirred the hearts of others.

Still not alone in the way of indirect importation, through the medium of the English intellect were the influences

coming in that were to throw the more susceptible minds of New England into ferment. Aspiring young scholars, like George Bancroft, were beginning to cross the ocean to learn the tongue of Germany, and to come into direct contact with its masters in theology, philosophy, and historical criticism. It may seem out of place to name Mr. Bancroft as a force in the development of the Transcendental movement; but such a force he indirectly was through the broader style of thinking, the more ideal philosophy, and the fresher and more vital views of the right interpretation of history he brought back with him from Germany. But along with him went, in a boy of thirteen, to be placed at school there, a boy who had got ready for college at so irrationally early an age that his father was at his wits' ends to know what to do with him till he should be old enough to enter,—one who was destined to exert a still more direct and profound influence on the New England movement. I speak, of course, of Dr. Frederic H. Hedge. There, on its native soil, he laid the foundations of that thorough and idiomatic acquaintance with the German language which, later in life, when he came to be settled as a minister in what is now Arlington, Mass., enabled him to deal at first hand, and as one “to the manner born,” with the treasures of German criticism, philosophy, and literature. Still another example in the same way I might instance in Mr. John S. Dwight, who, crossing the ocean and coming under the spell of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, did such invaluable work through a long lifetime in helping on the grand march of the Musical Renaissance, from the day of “Old Hundred” and “Coronation” to the day of the St. Matthew Passion Music and of the Fifth and Seventh Symphonies.

A most serious mistake, however, would it be to regard the Transcendental movement as a simple importation from abroad, a servile imitation of English, French, or German ideas. It was at the last remove from this, and was full of the sap of a spontaneity and freshness all its own. Vasari's old story, of how one sight of a gloriously sculptured Greek sarcophagus in the Campo Santo of Pisa so wrought on the

susceptible soul of Niccolò Pisano that, from the hour, all Italian sculpture was revolutionized, was simply repeated on New England soil. Nine-tenths of the early Transcendentalists rubbed but lightly against Plato, Plotinus, Saadi, Firdusi, Kant, Fichte, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Schelling; but it was fructifying pollen they bore away from the contact, and by it their own minds were vitally impregnated. And so it was a genuine Columbus cry of, "The New World! the New World!" even though later voyagers were to discover that it was raised only over San Salvador and not over the whole new continent. For better or worse, then, I repeat it, Mr. Alcott had got hold of Plotinus, Margaret Fuller of Plato and the Greek legends, Dr. Hedge of Kant and Fichte, Emerson of the Hindu and Persian mystics, Mr. Dwight of Goethe and Beethoven, Mr. Ripley of Schleiermacher and, later on, of the works of great French socialistic leaders, Theodore Parker of De Wette, James Freeman Clarke and others of the ethics of Jouffroy and the writings of Cousin. From all alike came the cry, "Oh, brave new world that hath such spirits in it!" Simply impossible was it that such men should not begin to see visions and dream dreams of a new and better order of things,—some of them confining themselves to trying to knead the new leaven into the old lump; others demanding, as in the Brook Farm experiment, the outright inauguration of a new social era.

It will be the pleasant task of other lecturers to speak to you in detail of the bearing on Unitarianism of the various special directions into which the new movement soon branched, and on their domain I must not trespass. Enough for me, if I can make vivid to you the essential spirit and inevitable trend of New England Transcendentalism. First and foremost, it can only be rightly conceived as an intellectual, æsthetic, and spiritual *ferment*, not a *strictly reasoned doctrine*. It was a Renaissance of conscious, living faith in the power of reason, in the reality of spiritual insight, in the privilege, beauty, and glory of life. Perhaps, when Emerson described it as the "very Saturnalia of faith," he touched the centre, alike in the characteristics of its ecstasy

and of its excesses. To understand its full significance, therefore, it is absolutely necessary that we summon clearly before the imagination alike what it reacted against in the past and what it sprang eagerly forward to greet in the future. And the readiest and most picturesque way to do this is to call to our aid the presence of two powerful personalities,—the Achilles and the Hector of the war of two distinct intellectual civilizations that had now joined in the issue of battle. They must unhesitatingly be Ralph Waldo Emerson and Professor Andrews Norton.

When, in the summer of 1838, Mr. Emerson gave before the Cambridge Divinity School that marvellous address, whose perennial beauty and perfume are as entrancing to-day as though exhaled from a fresh-plucked rose or lily, it wrought on a limited class of highly susceptible minds with a sensation only to be paralleled with that of an escape from the crowds, heat, and dust of the stifling city to the scent of the pines and balsams of the forest or to the stimulating iodine and boundless horizon of the seashore. "Behold, new heavens and a new earth!" was their literally ecstatic cry. It had given them back, they said, nature, life, Jesus, God. Here was one, they declared, who saw these ineffable presences and shining ones with his own eyes, interpreted them from his own heart, and adored them in the sanctity of his own conscience.

Far differently, however, did this address act on the minds of others, notably on that of their most stalwart champion, Professor Andrews Norton. To him Emerson's utterance stood for a wild, visionary, and utterly reckless assault on the very foundations of religious faith. Peremptorily did he challenge and deny its every premise. "Nothing is left," he declared, "that can be called Christianity, if its miraculous character be denied. Its essence is gone: its evidence is annihilated. . . . There can be no intuition, no direct perception of the truth of Christianity, no metaphysical certainty. . . . No proof of his [Christ's] divine commission could be afforded but through miraculous displays of God's power."

Now, of Professor Andrews Norton no competent man will ever speak but in terms of the highest intellectual and moral respect. His piety, moreover, was of a deep, tender, and inward stamp, as is witnessed by some of his hymns, so uplifting to the devout heart. But here, nevertheless, he stood; and this was his philosophy, or reasoned account of his ground of faith. It was the old Lockian doctrine. Man gets all his ideas through the medium of the senses. These bear witness to the reality of the Now and Here. There must, then, be a direct outward sensation from another realm, to introduce into the world trustworthy confidence in a commissioned revealer of the Elsewhere. A miracle is such outward sensation. The suspension, or outright infraction of, the order of nature is a sense-impression introduced from another realm. The teacher who can do what no other man can — turn water into wine, rebuke the tempest, raise the dead — has hereby produced his credentials from on high, and to him must all hearken.

I do not raise this issue here as a preliminary towards a discussion of the question of miracles, but simply in the way of the elucidation of my own subject,— that of “Transcendentalism,” — whose essential root-principle is here involved. A conversion by miracle? Why, it is a profanation of the soul! It is outright denial of the whole foundation of religion in the reason, heart, conscience, spiritual yearning of men. Such was Emerson’s high-wrought and passionate feeling on the subject. And it was, I think,— in its broad implications,— the fundamental issue of Transcendentalism.

Ah! this whole question of external authority and inward recognition, how infinitely wider a one is it than men suspect! what endless practical issues does it raise in life! How often I used to meditate its full import in the picture-galleries of Europe, where, in a fresh shape, it was forced on my attention! There hanging on the walls are the master-pieces of Raphael, Titian, Correggio, Rembrandt, Rubens, along with no end of inferior works. What shall the poor, unaided mind do, turned loose in such a labyrinth? What

assurance that the soul shall not "dilate with the wrong emotion" before an inferior work mistaken for a superior, before a Palma Giovane mistaken for a Titian? Ah! is there not a commissioned and duly authenticated Baedeker, guide-book, philosopher, and friend? Open his pages, and lo! before every picture marked with *one star* you can feel peacefully assured that you are in the presence of something great, and before every one marked with *two stars* of something superlative. No fear, then, of abandoning yourself to an unjustifiable emotion. Yes; and, duly subordinated to the spirit, it is an admirable contrivance for saving time and for reserving one's vitality for what is presumably excellent. And yet—and yet—it must never be forgotten what inherent evils there are in having one's work thus done beforehand for him. The pictures one finds out for himself through vital elective-affinity,—those are the ones that make the fructifying impression. Only look at those poor mortals in the gallery who have yielded themselves unconditionally to the courses of the stars. What a lacklustre in their eyes! What a barren conventionality in their tones!

Sometimes, indeed, this absolute subjection to accredited authority works utterly paralyzing results. There is, for example, in the Accademia of Venice, a picture by Carpaccio, about which Ruskin fulminates in his Mount Sinai way,—fulminates in substance, for I quote him from memory, and confess to far less proficiency in the use of thunder and lightning than he: "Whoever places himself before this picture will be judged by it forever. If he does not see at a glance that here painting reaches its highest culminating apex, let him lay it down as adamant truth that he is by nature totally destitute of any and every capacity for ever hoping to cherish one true feeling for art." I have given only feebly what is expressed by Ruskin himself with all the vigor of the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed. Well, we know how the Athanasian Creed has always worked on the free development of private sentiment in the Church. Now for the way in which its imitation works

on the free development of genuine feeling for beauty. Here come along the gallery, for example, four or five sweet, peach-bloom, demure-looking English girls, each with her Ruskin devoutly in her hands. They have manifestly read their Athanasius; for *Dies iræ, dies illa*,—"The Day of Wrath, that Dreadful Day,"—is visibly written on every face. And no wonder! "To be or not to be" in the glorious kingdom of beauty is now the question; and there hangs the painting, and over it the flaming sentence of the infallible Judge. They take their seats in awful silence, and hardly dare to lift their eyes. Do they really like the picture? It is hard to tell; for under such stupendous conditions the fledgling maiden mind does not work spontaneously. Anyhow, like it they must, or else, "without doubt, perish everlastingly." And so they think they do, and go away so relieved.

"Oh! you dear, sweet, silly girls," I was often impelled to cry over such a group, "it is all right that you should be under authority, but why not under the authority of some one who has an inkling at least of the law of the natural development of the human mind? Why, instead of this annihilating Ruskin, should you not have some sensible father, uncle, or elder brother, who would merely turn you loose here, and say: 'Now, girls, fearlessly and honestly, try for yourselves what you really enjoy and what you do not enjoy; no matter whether it be only the simplest face or the simplest figure, so long as it is your own genuine impression. From one genuine impression, you may go on to another, and another, and still another; and who knows at what height you may arrive at last in your enjoyment of the beauty, pathos, and sublimity of these masterpieces? But this simple travesty of education, why, it is falsifying, it is paralyzing your natural capacities from the very start.'"

And now, in conclusion, let me say that I do not know of any better way of illustrating what seems to me the root-idea of New England Transcendentalism than through just this picture-gallery experience of my own in Europe. It is an illustration which gives to the discussion the real breadth

I would like to impart to it. In truth, it was no simple theological issue these eager men and women were debating in the question of miracles or in the question of any external authority like that insisted on for the Bible. Many of them had no objection to the admission of miracles, so long as they were not made tests of truth. It was a far wider reaching question, and one that affects our attitude to all that is beautiful, noble, and divine in life,—namely, that of the competency of mind to spontaneously recognize it. At this point, Transcendentalism took resolute and final stand. With your own eyes must you see. If color-blind, then in vain for you arches the prismatic glory of the rainbow, even though Iris herself should glide down to assure you it is beautiful. Now, in what way this differs from the absolute imperative of the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount I confess myself constitutionally incapable of perceiving. But it was the crowning glory of the Transcendentalists that they made this principle co-terminous with the universe, prophetically anticipating in the spirit those later material revelations of the spectroscope, which proclaim how precisely the same elements that are burning and shining in our own little planet are burning and shining in Sirius and the Sun. What! shall we ban and bar a rose because it originated in Persia, or a lotus because it first floated on the bosom of the Nile? was their instinctive thought. Why, then, ban and bar any beautiful flower of the spirit, because first unfolding its petals and breathing forth its perfume in a Hindu, Parsee, or Sufi garden of the soul? Theirs as Transcendentalists to justify their name by simply transcending all those arbitrary boundaries of creed, race, nationality, local self-conceit, which narrow, harden, and poison the human mind, till it becomes constitutionally incapable of truly knowing and loving Him of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, to whom be glory forever. And so, in this direction, the service of Transcendentalism to the future development of Unitarianism was priceless; and for one I most heartily concur in the words with which Rev. Joseph Henry Allen sums up his own

conviction on the subject. "Transcendentalism," he says, "melted quite thoroughly the crust that was beginning to form on the somewhat chilly current of liberal theology. . . . Indeed, "it is the great felicity of free religious thought in this country, in its later unfolding, that it had its birth in a sentiment so poetic, so generous, so devout, so open to all the humanities as well as to the widest sympathies of philosophy and the higher literature."

Am I not right, then, in characterizing Transcendentalism as the New England Renaissance?

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