

The New Spirits and Mythology in the New World.

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One trouble all emigrants have. When they try to settle down in their new country, many of their old words won't fit. They have to let them have new meanings, or else learn new words outright. In the greatest change ever made by the human race, the change from the old stationary "firmament," three-story tenement house of Theology to the new Infinity of modern Science, with its rotating and sun-encircling earth, of course a corresponding great word change must be made. Words are undergoing that process now, and we must recognize it and help it on, and not get left, or stupidly fight it. In the old Astronomy the sun, moon and stars used to move around the earth and "spheres." Now we know that there are no such motions or spheres, but we have found a plenty of uses for the word "sphere"—such as "spheres of influence," etc. Still, much of our old language still remains and expresses the reverse of the facts, as "sunrise," "sunset." Who will invent a convenient substitute for these falsehoods? So in Physics we still talk of thunderbolts and lightning, and in the organic world we speak of Life or "soul" as a thing or entity; and "death" as an entity or a person, or worse, the "King of Terrors." But we now know that they and the soul are processes, and death is the ceasing of the vital process—and no entity, or thing, or king at all. In the physical and biological domains these changes make trouble enough, but when we get to the domain of mind, Psychology, Sociology, Art, Esthetics, Religion, etc., we have the same difficulty as the fabled builders of Babel. We have not only different languages, but in each language ever so many words that only mis-describe the new processes, concepts and imaginings. "These airy nothings," which are the SYNTHESSES of feelings which build our governing or attracting Ideals, have now to get "their local habitation and name," and their very forms of being, from a world quite distinct from that in which they originated.

If we go to the bottom of things, things are all, even the stones, now known to be very different from what our Fathers supposed, and not a single word they used can possibly have the SAME meaning to us now that it did to them. The total change of worlds has made a total change in the meaning of the language by which we try to describe it to each other, so that we are only beginning to really live intelligently in it. We are beginning to get it through us that matter is active, that electricity is not a fluid, nor heat caloric,

nor light a corpuscle, nor a thunderbolt, any matter at all; and that Nature does not "abhor" a vacuum, and so on to the end of the "revelations" of Science.

But in the domain of religion how few words recognize that all the old Theology is now Mythology, that it is an old home of human thoughts and affections from which we have moved out and passed on. In the new world in which we are now living, the old meanings of God, Devil, Angel, Heaven, Hell, Soul, Judgment Day, Immortality, etc., have no application; there is nothing whatever left for them to apply to. So with Metaphysics, its world has faded into nothingness with the Theology, of which it was the minor rainbow reflection. There are no more "Spirits" or "entities," or "essences," "virtues," or "principles, or "auras," etc., etc.—now all, all gone "the dreams of things that were" not. The trouble is that the masses of mankind have not been thinkers, and have been and are now living upon these words as if they were things, realities, and upon them have rested all their hopes and physical existences. When Science sweeps them all down and out it seems as though the Scythe of Death had cut all of the flowers, fruits and seeds of life at one fell stroke. This is the greatest difficulty Liberalism has to meet. When the unthinker loses his meaning of a word he thinks he has lost all it stood for, and he looks upon the Scientific Philologist as a robber. The great Liberal Poets and Scientists have seen and felt this difficulty, and have done good work towards obviating it. Their method, in short, to give the new meanings to the old words, symbols and Mythologies, and so use them as bridges by which the thoughts, feelings, hopes—the Religious, Esthetic, imaginative and creative powers—may gradually pass over from the old so as to fit, fill up and make habitable, comfortable and joyous the life of the new world. They found that as the higher faculties of man evolve, his words and symbols must grow into a power to be the instruments and means of expression of their new requirements. And so the Mythologies of Theology and Metaphysics become the materials, the frames, canvas and pigments by which the new "spiritual" world is to be "bodied forth," as the new home of the human "soul." The cure for the "devastation of Iconoclastic Infidelity" is modern Scientific, constructive Art. That is the emotional realizer and exponent of the new "Religion," the Religion of Liberty, Science and Humanity. Let us take a long think over where we are. Homer, Virgil, The Bible, Dante and Milton were all poets of the old world—of the past theologies. They have all become mythologies. In the sense and for

the purposes for which they were originally composed and written, there is not now a word of truth in them, for the world in and for which they were composed and written has vanished totally, worse than the baseless fabric of a dream, for they have been reversed. Nothing is true that was true. With the New World and Era of the Copernican and Bruno Astronomy (1600), came the Art prefiguring its new "Religion." Shakespeare was its morning star; then came Voltaire, its fighter; then Goethe, its reconciling realizer; and then Shelley and his compeers, its prophets. Now, this galaxy of Poetic Art has revived and paved the Soul of the New Era by methods of evolutionary transformation of words, myths and mythologies, as above intimated. All of the old has become to them the background, means and materials for expressing the higher mental, moral, social, esthetic, prophetic and even ecstatic forefelt realities of the New Heaven, the "Earthly Paradise." Shakespeare really commenced this New Era of the new religious art. "The Tempest" was written to lull and allay the discords and tempest of the past. It is the great poem of obliviscence, hope and prophecy on Earth, for "this place is Paradise; here let me live ever." Let "The Tempest" be re-read from this point of view. Notice how all of the old words and mythologies are simply painters' and poets' materials to help him to get the sunshine of Heaven on earth; and because Juno, Ceres and Iris were not sufficient, he invents Sycorax, Caliban and Ariel! The thing to notice is that the new state of mind and feeling, of immeasurable value in the peaceful evolution of the English and other peoples, could never have been realized and pictured to us except upon an "enchanted island," that no one has ever seen, and by an old and new Mythology, whose forms were "the baseless fabrics of the vision" they wore. There is not a word of truth in the materials and characters of "The Tempest," yet such was the creative power of the mighty imagination and fancy that "materialized" and used them that no higher truth or step has been taken towards the Heaven on Earth, "where Heaven never yet could be." Goethe afterwards, by similar artist materials and powers, starting with Ariel, disclosed by pictures, which were transformation scenes, the rise and progress of the individual and race "soul" of MAN in the second part of Faust; and then Shelley, also by similar Mythologic materials and power, fore-felt and adumbrated its future in his "Prometheus Unbound." Other great questions and means of progress there certainly are, but none higher than the evolution of the Future as the heaven and home of our Ideals,

by the great modern poets and artists. To understand them we must learn how religions become "materialized" into Theologies; how Science in time translates those into Mythologies; and then the creative, synthetic, artistic power of imaginative thought uses their old words, names and forms, as symbols and descriptions. Thus they become true names of and for the new processes, feelings, thoughts and ideals which make time a never-ending transformation scene before ever-growing MAN. The poets make no secret of this transforming of the old into the new, for the New World and its feelings, ideals and purposes. Goethe did it confessedly. Of his Iphigenia at Tauris, he gave the key to Krüger, its actor, in a presentation copy, thus:

What to this Book the Poet
Hopefully, believingly entrusted—
May it, through German Lands
By thy Artist work, be known:
So then in action, as in words,
Love inspired, proclaim it far—
That for all human failings
Pure Humanity atones.

The often quoted words by which Coleridge expanded the fine thought of Schiller, that "The old Fairy Forms (meaning the old gods and religions) have emigrated," should be re-read and preserved as scientific and practical Liberal education in Art; and in this grand work and duty of Ideal transformation:

The fair humanities of old religion,
The Power, the Beauty and the Majesty,
That had their haunts in dale or piny
mountain,
Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly
spring,
Or chasms and wat'ry depths; all these
have vanished.
They live no longer in the faith of reason!
But still the heart doth need a language;
still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old
names;
And to yon starry world they now are
gone,
Spirits or gods, that used to share this
earth
With man as with their friend; and to
the lover
Yonder they move, from yonder visible
sky
Shoot influence down: and even at this
day
'Tis Jupiter who brings whate'er is
great,
And Venus who brings everything that's
fair!

Such specimens as Iphigenia belong to the crowing flowers of this modern Art. But on the first page of this paper we give an introductory lesson from Shelley's Prometheus, which is unequalled in simplicity, beauty and prophetic power. It shows how the meaningless word, "spirit," like the word "soul," is to be saved for Liberal use by a new and true meaning. No longer a breath, gas, aura or "spook" of any kind, it describes now the continuous fact or process of feeling, impulses and purposes of life considered as the resultant of material nerve activity. As light is no longer a corpuscle, but a vibration of ether, so soul and spirit are no longer entities, but the continuous FACT of life and feeling, and so a part of and "come from the

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