

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SEED.

THAT the quality of the fruit depends upon the character of the seed which has been sown is the fundamental law of growth. *Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.* That we know from experience to be true of this world, and Scripture teaches that it is true of the next as well. It does not need explanation. But there is another law of growth, not quite so obvious, which equally governs the natural and the spiritual order, and which at first sight—but only at first sight—seems to contradict the law that we reap what we sow. It is énonciated by St. Paul in the words: *That which thou sowest is not that body which shall be.*

The fruit is not identical with the seed, although it is largely affected by the good or bad quality of the seed. An ordinary observer—one who has no special knowledge of botany or agriculture—were he shown the seed, could not even make a guess as to what the appearance of the fruit would be like. From the “bare grain” we could not predict, unless we had previous experience of its powers, what manner of fruit it would yield. There is entire continuity of life between the acorn and the oak; but continuity of growth does not mean identity of form. Nay, it is rather the other way. It is just because the acorn is alive, because its life is a continuous growth, that the beginning is unlike the end, the seedling unlike the fruit. The seed grows secretly, but it *grows*, although it is out of sight.

The Transformation of the Seed; that is a process which is exemplified daily in every department of human life and thought; and it is of importance that we should learn to recognize this law of transformation as a fundamental law of nature—that is, as a law of God.

1. And, first, it governs not only the vegetable kingdom, but the animal kingdom as well. During the last fifty years no truth has been more clearly revealed to scientific research than the truth of the continuity of life, amid the manifold variations of form and structure which the world of nature presents. It has become plain that, not only in this or that process of organic growth, but in *every* process the beginning is unlike the end. No living being can remain unchanged from day to day, from year to year; no race of living beings can remain unchanged from age to age. Even man himself, the highest in the scale of earthly beings, does not remain unchanged from generation to generation. And the whole course of his extraordinary history, beginning it may be with the mass of jelly on the shores of some primeval ocean and ascending step by step through all the grades of animal life, affords a stupendous illustration, from the history of our race, of the law that continuity is consistent with and even presupposes divergence of outward form. We look back to the beginning from the end which we have reached, and we feel tempted in pride to say, "It cannot be; this was not the seed of our race." But the words which St. Paul applied to a greater change make us pause, and his peremptory rebuke suggests to us that it is not Christianity which is at variance with scientific truth, but our own fond traditions. *Thou fool*, he says, *that which thou sowest is not the body which shall be.* The end is not like the beginning, for the seed has been transformed.

2. It is not only in outward nature that this law holds good; we may trace its operation in the history of human thought. For in the departments of politics and of religion alike, the ideas which live and propagate themselves are not forever confined to the form of embodiment which they assumed at the first. They are capable of endless adaptation and development, in correspondence with the changing

needs and circumstances of men. And the transformation is always disconcerting to those who have not realized that men's needs and circumstances *do* change as the generations pass, and that a new environment demands new applications of the old principles. But the true conservative is the man who is not afraid to put the old truth in the new form in which alone it can be understood by, or be profitable to, the people of his time. The fruit is unlike the seed to the superficial observer; but between seed and fruit there is a true continuity of growth.

It would be tempting to apply the principle to politics, were this the place for such digressions. But without entering into that field of controversy, it is worth while to consider this principle of the transformation of the seed in reference to two of the greatest revolutions that have taken place in human thought on religious matters.

(a) The transition from Judaism to Christianity, from Moses to Christ, may from one point of view be rightly styled a revolution. So it seemed at certain moments to St. Paul. He held the bondage of the law and the freedom of the gospel to be absolutely opposed to each other. He felt, and it was a sorrowful thought, that at his conversion he had broken with the historic past. And clearly there was much which might be urged in support of such a view. The spirit of Christianity was so different from that of Judaism in its liberality and in its large-heartedness, in its substitution of the ideal of universal brotherhood for the narrow patriotism of a petty province, that it were natural to say, *This* cannot be the outcome of *That*. Here is revolution, not evolution. But St. Paul himself, in other passages, expounds the truer conception of this great change. The law was a schoolmaster leading men to Christ; it was the necessary preliminary to the fuller and larger revelation. The gospel is unlike the law: there can be no doubt of it. But for all that it is the consummation

of the law. The Lord Christ did not come *to destroy the law and the prophets*, although people thought so. He came *to fulfil*; and He was Himself the fulfilment of the law. The ideal of a national Messiah of Israel was the seed of the larger and more splendid ideal of a Saviour of the world. The fruit was, indeed, unlike the seed; and yet it was the seed sown by the Providence of the Eternal in the early ages of Israel, which grew at last into this rich fruit.

(b) May not something similar be said of the great religious movements of the sixteenth century? When at the Reformation the English Church repudiated the increasing and intolerable claims of the See of Rome, it must have seemed to many a simple son of the Church as if an irrevocable breach with the historic past had been made. The new forms of public worship were unlike the old in much that appealed to the eye and to the ear. And, what is of more importance, there were some doctrinal differences between mediæval Christianity and the Christianity of the Renaissance and the Reformation. It would have been natural enough for an imperfectly instructed churchman to acquiesce in that view of the situation which, then as ever since, was advanced by Rome, and to accept the position that he was, in fact, the advocate of a new religion. But not so did the great leaders of the Reformation speak. They knew that to maintain the essentials of life, it may be necessary to discard the excrescences which have gathered round the living body. They were not afraid of being told that the fruit was unlike the seed in outward form. And so in these countries, at least, a real continuity with Catholic antiquity was preserved by the Reformed Church of England, a continuity of faith and organism alike. The church of the seventeenth century emerged as the true heir of the church of the fifteenth. *The old things had passed away*, but they were not lost; *they became new*.

They lived, and do live for us and our children, in that form which God's providence had prepared.

3. But St. Paul's thought of the transformation of the seed must not be confined to the history of ideas, however profound and significant. It is true of the growth of the individual soul, here and hereafter. As to the future, his application of the parable is not to be mistaken. As Christ (he explains) was raised from the dead, the same, yet not the same, so shall it be with those who are saved by His mercy and protection. They shall rise again after the great crises of death and judgment to a new and glorified life. Is it to be thought of as a bodily life? Yes, for we cannot otherwise be our very selves. We shall bring with us all that we have been, all that we have made ourselves. But is it to be the same material body of flesh and blood, the persistent questioner asks? And St. Paul is almost angry at the stupid misunderstanding that could take so gross a view. *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not that body that shall be.* This fruit is not the same as the seed. This is the lesson of the ages, of nature and of history, taught by God in His universal providence. Resurrection is Evolution, the rising out of what we were to higher and nobler opportunities. *God giveth the seed a body as it pleased Him (ἡθέλησεν)*—not of arbitrary will or caprice, but as it pleased Him, at that epoch of creation when He ordained the laws by which nature is ruled. *Each seed a body of its own*; for as each type of faculty has its own peculiar type of bodily environment here, suitable to its needs, so shall it be hereafter. To every seed its own spiritual body, a body which is the inevitable consequent of its previous history, and which for all that is not comparable to the old body of earth. Resurrection is Evolution; for the old is not destroyed, but transfigured and transformed.

4. *That which thou sowest is not that body which shall be.*

Here is the secret of hope for each man who desires to do something with his life, his gifts and his opportunities, for God and his fellows, for his country, for his Church. Which of us all does not desire it? But we do not reach our ideals. We toil and strive, with courage and resolution—it may well be; but in one fashion or another disappointment awaits us day by day. We look for the promise of the harvest, and lo! it is not what we had tried to sow. Much of the seed has been wasted; none of it has come to perfection. Nay, for the end is not yet. *Shew Thy servants Thy work and their children Thy glory* is the prayer of faith and courage. We must be content with sowing, and leave the harvest for our children to reap. That which we sow is no true measure of that which they will gather; and it cannot measure at all the fruition of the seed in the fulness of time. So is it too with our own poor lives; so is it with the growth of our own souls.

And if we desire to lift up our own eyes in hope to

... "that one far off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves,"

to that vision of the future harvest when the ripe fruit shall be gathered, while the utterly bad is cast away, we shall do well to burn into our hearts the thought that the process of growth is always going on, secretly but surely, growth which is either an evolution or a degradation. In any case, the fruit cannot be what we see, or what others think they see; it will be either better or worse than the seed. Here is our warning and our hope. *That which thou sowest is not the body that shall be.*

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