

## PROSPECTION.

BY CHARLES H. PORTER.

CHILDHOOD gives scarcely any thought of yesterday and but little of to-morrow. Childhood is an ever present life, hence its cheerfulness or poignancy. But childlife, like all life, is ever passing. Youth, manhood, age, follow in quick succession, each bringing its compensations. Birth and childhood are at the beginning of the course, age and death at the end.

There is a time in life, varying with individuals, when a relatively larger measure of pleasurable thought is given to retrospection. Looking backward, or the relation of experiences, has present as well as future value, and age, generally, is the period when retrospection is strongest. We would not, if we could, remove childhood from its natural domain, or disturb age in the pleasures of retrospection.

In manhood is developed prospection, or the habit of looking forward,—planning and hoping for better things. Usually its first bent is upon material things, or wealth or power; and later, ambitions for material accomplishments still persisting, the mental, moral, or spiritual finds a steady growth. It is not unusual to find all these constituents in the early prospectings of youth, but their development is left for maturer years. Howsoever, or at whatever time, environment begins to show its influence upon the faculties or the emotions, it is generally accepted that the conditions of childhood are all important. The philosopher and the moralist may set up beacon lights at danger points, but it is not always possible for those who are responsible to see them, or seeing them, to be guided by them. Hence it is always more or less true that we shape our own destinies.

The prospectings of life afford probably its keenest pleasures, and their foundation is hope. They are unlimited as to time and are projected into eternity. Because of this illimitability and the

fruitfulness of mind, the varied conditions of social life have evolved various standards of morals or religion. No revelation was necessary to produce these results, and possibly what is spoken of as divine revelation may itself be only a fruition. In this it is as unnecessary to deny, as it is impossible for human intelligence to affirm, with knowledge, that there is God. We hope there is God and our prospections picture him to us. We adore and worship this God, and He is God. Examine the subject as closely as we may our conclusions can not reach beyond this.

Religion is something more than form. It is the office of the Church to foster religion. The principal means to this end is the inculcation of previously conceived doctrines. In this there has been measurable and worthy success. How much is due to these for the good that has been done it would be impossible to tell, and how much some of us owe to them for our pleasurable prospections we do not know. For this reason we will not malign them even though they are no longer necessary or useful for us.

The insoluble problems of scholastic theology are fast losing their terrors for numbers of thoughtful men. To their minds, faith, according to the Church's exposition of it, is without meaning. They have deep impressions of what seems to be the truth without the element of absolute certainty. They recognize faith as an emotion not as a fact or as a power. Faith is not absolutely trustworthy. It may contain error. Of itself it can accomplish nothing. As land, capital, wealth, can accomplish nothing without its complement, labor, so faith without work is dead. As faith may contain error it may also influence to deleterious action, even though it be consistent with religious form or doctrine. They conceive it to be not essential to believe or to disbelieve that which would not affect conduct or some course of action; and if the belief or disbelief would affect conduct contrary to accepted standards the subject of belief or disbelief must be very critically examined, and if necessary the standards must be modified to make them consistent. This process is in continual operation.

To the cultured and thoughtful man the heaven or hell of orthodoxy is unnecessary. A passage from the autobiography of Dr. Moncure D. Conway is to the point. He says:

"No class of men in the modern world are of higher character in all the relations of life, private and public, than the men of science. The man of science lives in the presence of tremendous forces; he is trained in the knowledge of cause and effect; his hourly instruction is in laws that fail not and which no prayer or penitence can escape; he knows that his every action to

man or woman or child is taken up by forces impartial between good and evil, pain and pleasure, and carried on to unending results. Science alone understands the reality in this world of that hell and heaven which superstition has located in a future world where they have lost actuality in the minds they once controlled....

"Were it possible that the masses of mankind could be developed out of the mass and become individual thinkers, science would surely reach them with its saving grace of self-restraint, while delivering them from the ethical fictions which obstruct the moral freedom essential to happiness."

With those whose prospections have thus found God there is harmony and satisfaction, and they probably feel no need for a system of religion. It is probable that the number is not large of those who find themselves in this stage of development, but even if their number were sufficiently large they would not likely wish to violently disturb the existing order. They are conscious of the pleasures of prospection, and are not worried with the conflicting doctrines of a system whose aims, though altruistic, are not always supported by sound reason. Though the number who delight in such prospections may be relatively small they are powerful. Development along this line goes on continually, and every now and then is discerned some bright light falling away from orthodoxy to add to the accumulating power. This is natural evolution and is unharmful. There need be no fear that the established order will meet with rude shocks to shake their foundations or to render them precarious. When established systems disintegrate and die there will be religion of a higher order, even though we may not be able to predict its form.