

In the midst of the changes that mark the progress of society, there have always been found classes of men, who, with their ears doggedly closed to the behests of the age, have maintained a blind and devoted adherence to the Institutions of their fathers. Whenever the genius of the past has bowed to that of the present—when the common sense of humanity has declared that it is no longer man's monitor—those individuals have regarded this declaration with a pious horror; and gathering around the mangled relics of irrevocable time, have endeavored, by a species of intellectual galvanism, to instil a spasmodic and transitory energy into the lifeless carcass.

Upon the mind of man, constituted as it is with susceptibilities and longings after continual advancement, such a system of conservatism produces effects the most deplorable and paralyzing. With an origin celestial in nature—a destiny eternal in duration—a power stamped with the omnipotence of its Creator, and apparently too divine for the “servile mass of matter” it is linked to, it can but ill brook the restraints which impolitic legislation and imperious custom would inflict upon it. Look at the Celestial Empire with its population of two hundred and fifty million, every individual of whom thinks, lives, pursues the same avocation, wears apparel fashioned of the same material and in the same style, as did his ancestors thirty centuries removed, and then judge what are the consequences of a system which would chain down man's lofty aspirations, compel him to traverse the dull routine of vegetative existence, and be in itself an embodiment of man's short-sighted wisdom, as opposed to that law of change, which is recognized in every department of nature.

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The planet revolving, century after century, in its ever-varying orbit—the fiery-winged comet seeking the turning point of its career in the silent depths of interminable space—our own world, at one time but the unshapen gem of a life-teeming sphere, forever presenting a series of continually changing phenomenon, declares that the spirit which animates all nature is the spirit of change. The order which attends the transition of these bodies during their progress about their common centre—an order so perfect as to prompt the poetic imagination of the Old World Philosopher to deem that it could hear sublime and accordant strains of melody produced by the blended harmony of their various movements—bears witness, that so far from mutability being the cause of confusion, it can be co-existent with the highest degree of regularity—that instead of being productive of derangement, it is the balance established by an all-wise Providence to preserve the equilibrium of an infinitely extended dominion. Yet man, deaf to those constantly reiterated teachings, would establish a monotheism of folly, enthrone conservatism in undivided supremacy, and entail upon his own powers a paralysis, defying every external remedy, and neutralizing the healing influences of their own innate vitality.

Such is unmitigated conservatism—such are its evils. Judging from its debilitating influence, we rightly infer, that its opposite would afford a prevention of its pernicious tendencies. But change also can be productive of results most fatal to the welfare and destiny of man. Like the Cannava tree of the Indies, whose nutritive virtue is enhanced by the genial beams of that

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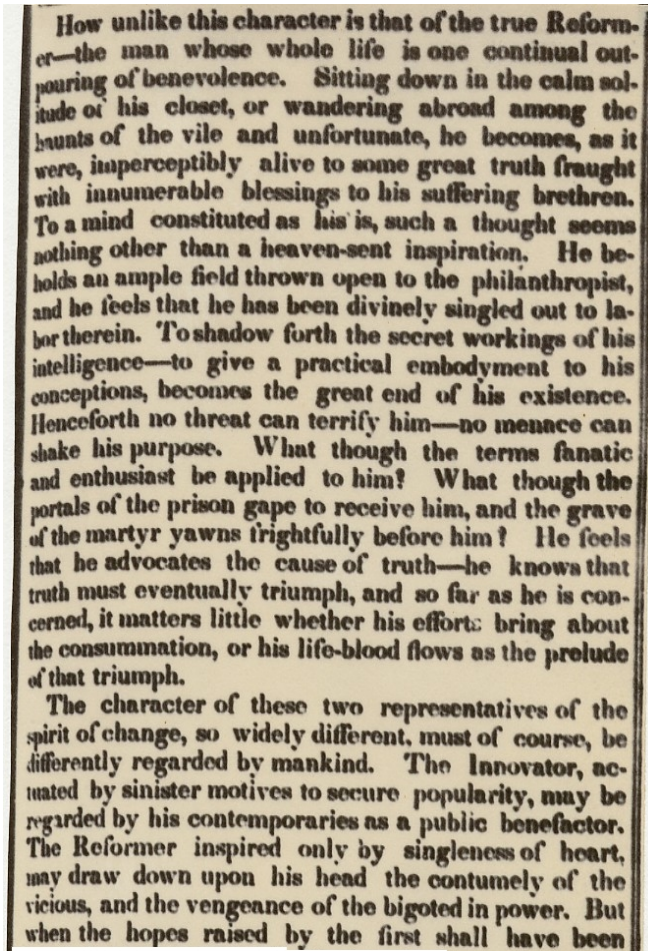
sun whose scorching rays cause poisonous juices to circulate through its every fibre, the spirit of change contains within it two principles entirely opposite. The one is most baneful in its influences; the other most propitious to the interests of any community. The first is the principle of innovation; the last, of rational reform. The man who is instigated by the former of these, is, of all individuals, the one most to be dreaded. He may be possessed of talents capable of executing all the plans that the most gigantic mind could originate, of an energy that laughs to scorn all the oppositions advanced by inferior intellects, of a genius sufficient to enable him to shine as one of the brightest luminaries in the firmament of science. Yet his talents, his energy and his genius are but as funeral lamps casting a lurid glare over the charnel-vault of self-love. Like Erostratus of old, he snatches a brand from the altar of sacrilege; and with no higher motive than that of having his name enrolled with the famed among the nations, does not hesitate to lay a wonder of the world in ashes. It is of but little moment to him, how sacred may be the institution against which he directs his unholy crusade, how hallowed may be the remembrances which cluster around it, how consecrated it may have been by the blood of patriots shed in its establishment and maintenance, how beneficial it may have been to the human family, or how great may be the likelihood of benefits resulting from it, let him but entertain the idea that by its destruction his own interest may be advanced, and immediately all the powers, all the energies of his being become a box like that of the fabled Pandora, from whence all the horrid elements, requisite to curse the world, may issue.

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How unlike this character is that of the true Reformer—the man whose whole life is one continual outpouring of benevolence. Sitting down in the calm solitude of his closet, or wandering abroad among the haunts of the vile and unfortunate, he becomes, as it were, imperceptibly alive to some great truth fraught with innumerable blessings to his suffering brethren. To a mind constituted as his is, such a thought seems nothing other than a heaven-sent inspiration. He beholds an ample field thrown open to the philanthropist, and he feels that he has been divinely singled out to labor therein. To shadow forth the secret workings of his intelligence—to give a practical embodiment to his conceptions, becomes the great end of his existence. Henceforth no threat can terrify him—no menace can shake his purpose. What though the terms fanatic and enthusiast be applied to him? What though the portals of the prison gape to receive him, and the grave of the martyr yawns frightfully before him? He feels that he advocates the cause of truth—he knows that truth must eventually triumph, and so far as he is concerned, it matters little whether his efforts bring about the consummation, or his life-blood flows as the prelude of that triumph.

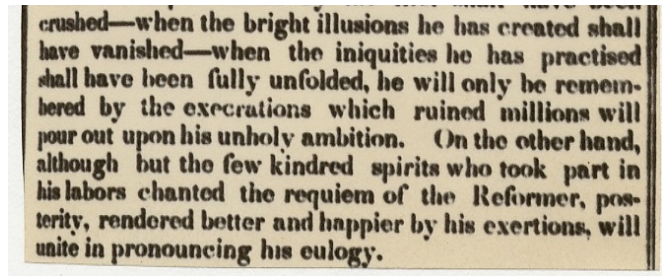
The character of these two representatives of the spirit of change, so widely different, must of course, be differently regarded by mankind. The Innovator, actuated by sinister motives to secure popularity, may be regarded by his contemporaries as a public benefactor. The Reformer inspired only by singleness of heart, may draw down upon his head the contumely of the vicious, and the vengeance of the bigoted in power. But when the hopes raised by the first shall have been



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