

THE RELIGION OF PARKER

"The Religion of Theodore Parker" was the subject of the sermon by Rev. William Thurston Brown, in Unitarian hall Sunday.

After quoting from the words of Emerson and Wendell Phillips spoken at the memorial service for Theodore Parker, June 17, 1860, and showing how the verdict of time had justified every utterance of these great souls, Mr. Brown outlined the career of Parker in the light of the so-called religious teaching of the middle of the nineteenth century and in the light of the social and economic institutions upon which the civilization of America then rested—a religious teaching which at its best made God a non-moral being and at its worst a fiend; an economic and industrial order resting squarely upon the idea that man may hold property in man. Against that religion-destroying teaching of the American pulpit and that demoralizing social order the life of Theodore Parker was one strenuous conflict.

It was affirmed that as the religion of Theodore Parker had all its virtue in the fact that he saw and felt the fatal infidelity of any teaching which made it impossible to believe in a good God and in his vivid consciousness of the terrible moral menace of the slave system, regardless of what the personal character of master or slave might be; so the same type and quality of religion today will be that which is morally sensitive to the sterile religious teaching of the present and as keenly conscious of the latent immorality of a social order which divides mankind into exploiters and exploited.

"Here is a boy. Let us suppose him a boy of good intelligence. He has ability, ambition. What happens? What is he going to be and what will determine his future, his destiny, his character? Does he bring these with him? In no sense. Where will he get his moral and ethical ideas? In the Sunday school? Not at all. In the home? No. He will get them in the form of society in which he lives. Every man who stays in business plays the game. He isn't there primarily for his health nor as a philanthropist. He may later on pose as one, may even think he is one. But if he attempts in his business to put in practice the principles of the sermon on the mount, he will very quickly be out of business and on the town. If Jesus lived today and attempted to act out his alleged Palestinian life, he would be arrested as a vagrant and put to work on the stone pile. There isn't a business firm on earth today which would have a man in its employ who avowed his determination to act under all circumstances on the principles taught by Jesus. Such a man would not be employed simply because any sane business man wants to keep out of the poor house.

"No, your boy is going to accept the moral code of the world as he finds it, the code dictated by the conditions of a fierce industrial competition, or he is going to become a useless piece of lumber. But he doesn't want to be that. It is as natural and right for him to desire the approval of society, to be looked up to and honored by the community, to exercise power, to receive honors, as it is to breathe. And he

finds that there is one "open sesame," and only one, to success or honor or power—one thing by virtue of which more than anything else he may be honored and praised and worshiped by the world about him, and that one thing is money. He finds, too, that it doesn't make any difference how he gets this money, if only he gets enough of it. If he is so foolish as to be a "high-grader" in a Goldfield mine, as some are, he may fall in his purpose. He cannot get the money fast enough that way. And, besides, he is doomed to live in a society whose moral code condemns that kind and degree of "high grading." But if he can prove himself a "high-grader" in the stock exchanges of the country, like a score of men whose names occur to you at once, if he can be a high grader in the matter of stealing a legislature and a seat in the United States senate, or a high grader in railroads, like Mr. Harman and others, there is hardly anything in the way of honor which he may not possess. How many people in Salt Lake City or Utah would receive into their homes and treat with courtesy those men in Goldfield who have been guilty of stealing some of the rich ore they dug down under the ground, in ground the title to which rests finally in force or fraud? How many people in this city or state would not go to great lengths rather than offend one of the gigantic "high-graders" of finance or industry or politics, whose examples of successful stealing have already done infinitely more to corrupt and debase the minds and souls of millions of young men than all the petty thievings of a century?

"This boy finds that it doesn't make any difference how he gets his money, if only he gets enough—and that, too, in a society which is extremely sensitive about the petty high-grading of

ignorant miners. Not even his father and mother will scrutinize his dollars or ask how or where he got them. Their hearts will swell with pride over his success. And the more he gets and the faster, the happier they are.

"But it is almost inevitable that in this very process this boy, and millions of other boys, will lose that fine sense of honor, that perception of moral values, that broad sympathy, that devotion to high ideals, which most of us agree to be the noblest fulfillment of a life. Does any one expect me to believe that this law of our commercialized civilization is an exhibition of a loving, divine intelligence, controlling the universe? If he does, he expects altogether too much. If I were the devil—supposing such a being to exist—and wanted to arrange things in such a way as to insure the propagation of a race of atheists, I don't believe I could do any better than employ the preachers of the world to defend, as many of them are now doing, our existing commercialism as an exhibition of the activity of a God. Besides, if our social order is an exhibition of divine intelligence, the law which governs in our best homes between the members of those homes, is not an exhibition of such an intelligence. For nothing could be more diametrically different.

"The vision which commands our devotion today is incomparably greater than that which compelled and inspired the heroic service of Theodore Parker. The whole problem is changed. It is no longer a personal problem, it is a social problem, for we have no excuse for not knowing that today there is no moral or ethical salvation except for all. The age of individualism in religion is gone by, and they who are parroting its watchwords are but echoing the dead voices of the past. If this human world

of ours has any divine meaning for you and me, any sacred task to consecrate our lives, it is in no sense whatever the task of getting men and women into some future heaven, which no one has ever seen, much less the task of inducing them to accept any creed or religious theory so far conceived. It is the task of making a higher type of man and woman, the task of going on and up to a higher level of moral and spiritual being, of affording the fullest possible expression of every noble faculty of our natures. It may be tragic, but it is true nevertheless, that the pathway of humanity up through the ages is marked by the empty and shattered shells of discarded religious faiths. With the growing light of larger knowledge the ghosts of ignorance and superstition have vanished, one by one. It may be well that many of all of the religious theories we cherish today will go as the rest have gone. But if the upward evolution of the race means that into our minds is to come that creative consciousness which before we imagined to be in some intelligence external to us, and we are to be glorified with the sense that we ourselves are social creators, that together we can wield higher and ever higher forces for the happiness and spiritual enrichment of all, may it not be that the gain will infinitely compensate for the seeming loss? May it not be that this way lies the pathway to the higher and better religion that is to be?"

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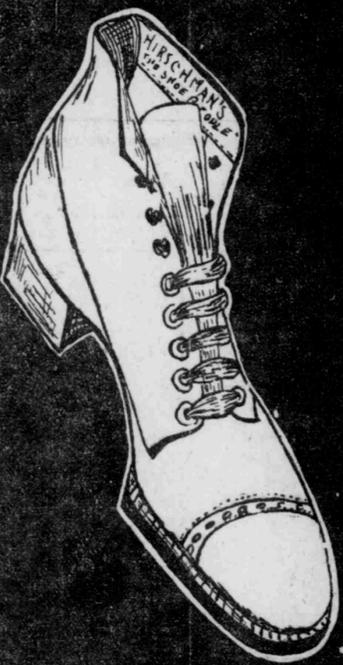
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