

Of Vicissitude Of Things

SOLOMON saith, There is no new thing upon the earth. So that as Plato had an imagination, That all knowledge was but remembrance; so Solomon giveth his sentence, That all novelty is but oblivion. Whereby you may see, that the river of Lethe runneth as well above ground as below. There is an abstruse astrologer that saith, If it were not for two things that are constant (the one is, that the fixed stars ever stand a like distance one from another, and never come nearer together, nor go further asunder; the other, that the diurnal motion perpetually keepeth time), no individual would last one moment. Certain it is, that the matter is in a perpetual flux, and never at a stay. The great winding-sheets, that bury all things in oblivion, are two; deluges and earthquakes. As for conflagrations and great droughts, they do not merely dispeople and destroy. Phaeton's car went but a day. And the three years' drought in the time of Elias, was but particular, and left people alive. As for the great burnings by lightnings, which are often in the West Indies, they are but narrow. But in the other two destructions, by deluge and earthquake, it is further to be noted, that the remnant of people which hap to be reserved, are commonly ignorant and mountainous people, that can give no account of the time past; so that the oblivion is all one, as if none had been left. If you consider well of the people of the West Indies, it is very probable that they are a newer or a younger people, than the people of the Old World. And it is much more likely, that the destruction that hath heretofore been there, was not by earthquakes (as the Egyptian priest told Solon concerning the island of Atlantis, that it was swallowed by an earthquake), but rather that it was desolated by a particular deluge. For earthquakes are seldom in those parts. But on the other side, they have such pouring rivers, as the rivers of Asia and Africk and Europe, are but brooks to them. Their Andes, likewise, or mountains, are far higher than those with us; whereby it seems, that the remnants of generation of men, were in such a particular deluge saved. As for the observation that Machiavel hath, that the jealousy of sects, doth much extinguish the memory of things; traducing Gregory the Great, that he did what in him lay, to extinguish all heathen antiquities; I do not find that those zeals do any great effects, nor last long; as it appeared in the succession of Sabinian, who did revive the former antiquities.

The vicissitude of mutations in the superior globe, are no fit matter for this present argument. It may be, Plato's great year, if the world should last so long, would have some effect; not in renewing the state of like individuals (for that is the fume of those, that conceive the celestial bodies have more accurate influences upon these things below, than indeed they have), but in gross. Comets, out of question, have likewise power and effect, over the gross and mass of things; but they are rather gazed upon, and waited upon in their journey, than wisely observed in their effects; specially in, their respective effects; that is, what kind of comet, for magnitude, color, version of the beams, placing in the reign of heaven, or lasting, produceth what kind of effects.

There is a toy which I have heard, and I would not have it given over, but waited upon a little. They say it is observed in the Low Countries (I know not in what part) that every five and thirty years, the same kind and suit of years and weathers come about again; as great frosts, great wet, great droughts, warm winters, summers with little heat, and the like; and they call it the Prime. It is a thing I do the rather mention, because, computing backwards, I have found some concurrence.

But to leave these points of nature, and to come to men. The greatest vicissitude of things amongst men, is the vicissitude of sects and religions. For those orbs rule in men's minds most. The true religion is built upon the rock; the rest are tossed, upon the waves of time. To speak, therefore, of the causes of

new sects; and to give some counsel concerning them, as far as the weakness of human judgment can give stay, to so great revolutions. When the religion formerly received, is rent by discords; and when the holiness of the professors of religion, is decayed and full of scandal; and withal the times be stupid, ignorant, and barbarous; you may doubt the springing up of a new sect; if then also, there should arise any extravagant and strange spirit, to make himself author thereof. All which points held, when Mahomet published his law. If a new sect have not two properties, fear it not; for it will not spread. The one is the supplanting, or the opposing, of authority established; for nothing is more popular than that. The other is the giving license to pleasures, and a voluptuous life. For as for speculative heresies (such as were in ancient times the Arians, and now the Arminians), though they work mightily upon men's wits, yet they do not produce any great alterations in states; except it be by the help of civil occasions. There be three manner of plantations of new sects. By the power of signs and miracles; by the eloquence, and wisdom, of speech and persuasion; and by the sword. For martyrdoms, I reckon them amongst miracles; because they seem to exceed the strength of human nature: and I may do the like, of superlative and admirable holiness of life. Surely there is no better way, to stop the rising of new sects and schisms, than to reform abuses; to compound the smaller differences; to proceed mildly, and not with sanguinary persecutions; and rather to take off the principal authors by winning and advancing them, than to enrage them by violence and bitterness.

The changes and vicissitude in wars are many; but chiefly in three things; in the seats or stages of the war; in the weapons; and in the manner of the conduct. Wars, in ancient time, seemed more to move from east to west; for the Persians, Assyrians, Arabians, Tartars (which were the invaders) were all eastern people. It is true, the Gauls were western; but we read but of two incursions of theirs: the one to Gallo-Grecia, the other to Rome. But east and west have no certain points of heaven; and no more have the wars, either from the east or west, any certainty of observation. But north and south are fixed; and it hath seldom or never been seen that the far southern people have invaded the northern, but contrariwise. Whereby it is manifest that the northern tract of the world, is in nature the more martial region: be it in respect of the stars of that hemisphere; or of the great continents that are upon the north, whereas the south part, for aught that is known, is almost all sea; or (which is most apparent) of the cold of the northern parts, which is that which, without aid of discipline, doth make the bodies hardest, and the courages warmest.

Upon the breaking and shivering of a great state and empire, you may be sure to have wars. For great empires, while they stand, do enervate and destroy the forces of the natives which they have subdued, resting upon their own protecting forces; and then when they fail also, all goes to ruin, and they become a prey. So was it in the decay of the Roman empire; and likewise in the empire of Almaine, after Charles the Great, every bird taking a feather; and were not unlike to befall to Spain, if it should break. The great accessions and unions of kingdoms, do likewise stir up wars; for when a state grows to an over-power, it is like a great flood, that will be sure to overflow. As it hath been seen in the states of Rome, Turkey, Spain, and others. Look when the world hath fewest barbarous peoples, but such as commonly will not marry or generate, except they know means to live (as it is almost everywhere at this day, except Tartary), there is no danger of inundations of people; but when there be great shoals of people, which go on to populate, without foreseeing means of life and sustentation, it is of necessity that once in an age or two, they discharge a portion of their people upon other nations; which the ancient northern people were wont to do by lot; casting lots what part should stay at home, and what should seek their fortunes. When a warlike state grows soft and effeminate, they may be sure of a war. For commonly such states are grown rich in the time of their degenerating; and so the prey inviteth, and their decay in valor, encourageth a war.

As for the weapons, it hardly falleth under rule and observation: yet we see even they, have returns and vicissitudes. For certain it is, that ordnance was known in the city of the Oxidrakes in India; and was that, which the Macedonians called thunder and lightning, and magic. And it is well known that the use of ordnance, hath been in China above two thousand years. The conditions of weapons, and their improvement, are; First, the fetching afar off; for that outruns the danger; as it is seen in ordnance and muskets. Secondly, the strength of the percussion; wherein likewise ordnance do exceed all arietations and ancient inventions. The third is, the commodious use of them; as that they may serve in all weathers; that the carriage may be light and manageable; and the like.

For the conduct of the war: at the first, men rested extremely upon number: they did put the wars likewise upon main force and valor; pointing days for pitched fields, and so trying it out upon an even match and they were more ignorant in ranging and arraying their battles. After, they grew to rest upon number rather competent, than vast; they grew to advantages of place, cunning diversions, and the like: and they grew more skilful in the ordering of their battles.

In the youth of a state, arms do flourish; in the middle age of a state, learning; and then both of them together for a time; in the declining age of a state, mechanical arts and merchandize. Learning hath his infancy, when it is but beginning and almost childish; then his youth, when it is luxuriant and juvenile; then his strength of years, when it is solid and reduced; and lastly, his old age, when it waxeth dry and exhaust. But it is not good to look too long upon these turning wheels of vicissitude, lest we become giddy. As for the philology of them, that is but a circle of tales, and therefore not fit for this writing.

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