

**THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH ONE,
UNDER ALL THE SUCCESSIVE FORMS
OF CHRISTIANITY: A DISCOURSE,
PRONOUNCED AT THE OPENING OF THE
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL AT GENEVA**

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The Voice of the Church One, Under All the Successive Forms of Christianity: A Discourse,
Pronounced at the Opening of the Theological School at Geneva by J. H. Merle d'Aubigne

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J. H. MERLE D 'AUBIGNE

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Jean Linte

By J. H. MERLE D'AUBIGNE, D. D.

AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION IN THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY."

[TRANSLATED BY REV. R. SMITH, WATERFORD, N. Y.]

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THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH ONE.

WHAT astonishing labours — what untiring activities — what varied efforts, do men employ on earth ! But time passes its level, for the most part, over their productions ; while they imagine themselves to be building a tower which shall reach to the heavens, their proud works are confounded, after a few generations, with the sands of the desert. .

There is nothing stable here, but Christianity. That alone is immovable, like its Author. It is this rock against which have broken, and are still breaking, waves ever new, without being able to shake it.

If, then, there is any one who wishes to give stability to his work on earth, let him connect it with Religion : it will receive from this connexion an impress of immortality.

I am aware, Gentlemen, that these are truths not generally recognized among men. There are two prevailing errors on this subject. There are those who find nothing unchangeable even in the essence of Christianity. "The Christian doctrine," say they, "is only a particular development of the religious sentiment. This form has succeeded to a previous one, and will, in turn, be succeeded by another. The Religion of Christ sprang necessarily out of the state of humanity in the time of the Cæsars, as a tree in Spring produces buds and flowers." Singular error of Rationalism ; but which history refutes in the clearest manner. History shows that Christianity was not in accordance with the directions of the human mind, at the time it

appeared, but in direct opposition to them. The wisdom of the world did not give Christianity birth ; — it sought to crush it. Christianity was not the child of the times : it was, on the contrary, its adversary and regenerator ; and as it was not from the dust of the earth that this precious fruit sprang, it cannot of course return thither again. Then did the Heavens give a treasure to the world, which successive generations ought to transmit uncorrupted from hand to hand. This is the treasure which we have received ; which we are to hold with fear and reverence in earthen vessels ; and we, in turn, must transmit it to our posterity, still unchanged and unchangeable amongst millions of men, “ until the heavens and the earth flee away, and there is found no more place for them.”

But if we encounter, on the one hand, the triflers with Christianity, we meet, on the other, with those who would give to it a uni-

formity of appearance in all ages. There is something, undoubtedly, which never changes in Christianity, and that is its essence; but there is something also, which does change, and that is its appearance: and it is for want of properly understanding this distinction, that so many have erred in regard to the invariableness of Christ's religion. A man changes his *appearance* at different ages of his life: his essence, never: — he is still the same man.

The Christian Religion, at the time it came from heaven, was under the necessity, as is every thing else in this world, of clothing itself in a human form. The external circumstances of different epochs, must exercise an influence upon the successive developments of Christian truth. To such a form must succeed such another; nor could these forms be things altogether indifferent. Some have been better than others; but the same

essential verities have been found in all past varieties, and will be, in all which are to come.

Gentlemen — the work in which we are engaged, and of which I am to give you some account to-day, is, in itself, a feeble, an humble work ; but here is its glory, that it belongs to the work of eternity. If we attach ourselves to that which belongs to the *appearance* of Religion only, we can have no security for that which we labour to defend. The first revolution of society would sweep our work to the tomb. But if we address ourselves to the essence of Christianity, the cause to which we devote ourselves partakes of the perpetuity of the work of God. *We* may fail ; and being mortal, we shall fail : our school may fail ; but the cause to which it is devoted shall not fail, neither in this place, nor in all the earth. To that cause, according to the ancient oracle, “ the gather-