

THE POLITICAL

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

OF THE PROTESTANT

“REFORMATION:”

A LECTURE.

BY THOMAS DARCY MCGEE.

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“The last revolution of doctrine and theory, which has happened in Europe, is the Reformation.
• • • • • The effect was to introduce other interests into all countries, than
those which arose from their locality and natural circumstances.”—BURKE.—“*Thoughts on French
Affairs in 1791.*”

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

The New York Catholic Institute have done me the honor to ask me to repeat before this larger audience, the lecture which I delivered to their members, in December last, on the "Political Causes and Consequences of the Protestant Reformation." Not being accustomed to read lectures, I cannot promise to repeat, word for word, what I then said, but the same arguments I used then, I mean to use to-night, because they are the only arguments on this subject which I believe to be sound and true.

Of the weight of the subject itself I need say nothing. We are affected by it, our fathers were affected by it, our children and their children will feel its remote consequences; every book, paper, and pamphlet we read is full of it; it mingles in every public debate, it comes up in every private conversation. Our public men speak of "before the Reformation," as describing one state of political facts, and "after the Reformation," as describing another and a very different state of facts. One would suppose a subject so much talked of ought to be well understood, yet such, I venture to assert, is not the case:—ninety-nine out of every hundred, who discourse so fluently of this great event, by all I could ever learn from their language, seem to be entirely ignorant of the circumstances under which it transpired, of the motives, the men, and the results, of what they call "The Reformation."

In what I shall say, Ladies and Gentlemen, I propose to avoid theological matter altogether. I trust I know my place as a lay.

man and a mere student of history, well enough to avoid treating the doctrinal questions, even if I were able to do so, which I am not. I propose only to consider the exterior conditions, the visible birth, parentage, and policy, of the Reform—to treat it as a temporal fact of human origin—as an insurrection of the worldly passions and purposes of men, aided, encouraged and established by an extraordinary conjunction of worldly circumstances, centering on the soil of Europe in the sixteenth century. I believe that it must forever remain inexplicable, except it is considered as a Germanic Revolution—a resurrection of barbarian pride and politics against the Divine Law and its Apostolic, Papal, Executive.

When I use the term *politics*, I use it in its best original sense. I am well aware it is capable of being degraded into the basest of trades, but I also believe it is capable of being exalted into the sublimest of sciences. Politics, the science of law, of government, of society, (next to theology, the science of salvation,) is the worthiest study of the created intellect. It is in this sense I endeavor to use it, and whoever would not be the mere mechanical repeater of the editors, or the demagogues of to-day, whoever scorns to fetch and carry things out of other men's mouths, must take up the record of the Reformation and study it for himself, if he would truly understand the central force of our modern politics.

The date of the "Reformation" is well fixed, it is the first half of the 16th Christian century. (Some give the exact year as 1517, when Professor Luther nailed his propositions against Tetzels to the gate of the great church of Wittenberg; others fix it at 1529, when the seceders from the Diet of Speyer, signed the *Protest*, from which the sects are called.) It must often have struck you as worthy of inquiry, why it should have begun in the 16th century, rather than in the 14th or the 17th, or any other? Why it should have begun in Germany, and of all Germany, why first in Saxony? These are historical facts certainly of high interest, but no book that I know of in our language fully answers these three questions.

Before, however, I come to particulars of time and place, I must present the causes of the event, and I think I will be able to show you, that the shifting politics of the 15th century—the singular state of European affairs—was the natural and necessary original of Protestantism: I think I can show you that the event would have been much the same, if Luther and his friends had never

been born—that the world had hardened its heart, that the combustibles were all gathered and arranged for the work, and that any bold, self-possessed incendiary, by applying the match, could have accomplished the schism and its consequences.

The 15th century was eminently commercial. It opened splendidly with the discovery of Madeira, in 1412, and closed magnificently with the discovery of America, and the African discoveries of the Portuguese. A new way was found to Asia, and a new world in the Western waters. The historic wealth of India, and the anticipated wealth of America, were the exclusive thoughts of men: all was discovered by Europeans, and all promised the world's wealth to Europe. The rush from every shore into every sea, was unparelled in our era: merchants became princes and princes merchants; chivalry advanced its banner into the wide sea field, and cavaliers, despising the ancient avenues to glory, forsook the crusade and gave the crescent peace, to seek through savage seas, new outlets to immortality.

I honor the first oceanic adventurers of that period—the world never saw braver or better men. It was not their fault, if every sordid passion, reared its evil head, and rushed upon the discoveries they had consecrated in the name of Christendom and the Cross. But such was the sad result: this sudden influx of Phœnician fortune, raised commercial over Christian objects—weakened by abrupt expansion the ancient bonds of Christian unity—created a desire for a true, trading religion, whose easy morality might be left to the private interpretation of the merchant, and the practice of sea-captains. In all cases we find the great trading cities, the schools, or the strongholds of this new sixteenth century religion.

About the middle of the century I speak of, it was plain that the princes and statesmen discovered a new world of policy, hitherto unknown to Christendom. Crusades were no longer possible, the Council of Florence appealed to the chivalry of the West, in vain, and a few years later Constantinople fell, without a latin lance broken in its defense. When, in 1545, Pope Nicholas V. made the Christian alliance at Lodi, for another Crusade, Venice, nine days after, made a secret compact with Mahomet, and the King forbade the Crusade to be preached in France. Ten years later the immortal Pope, Pius II. could not find a single Prince ready for the Holy war. He was obliged to be his own captain, or to let Italy share the fate of Constantinople and of Rhodes: carried

in his litter towards Ancona, he died in sight of the galleys, in which he was to embark, but from which no royal banner floated over the sea.

The good old phrases "Christ's Kingdom," and "the Republic of God," had lost their meaning for the worldlings, who struggled for the treasures of the ocean and the earth, and this public indifference was accompanied by gross private immorality. Whether we examine the Republics or the Kingdoms, we find little else but assassinations and adulteries, among the powerful families: conspicuous as these horrid vices are, in the high places of that time, it is equally certain, that the politicians, so criminal in their own lives, were all signalized by "independence" of Rome. The Italian politicians had borrowed the theory of "a balance of power," from the prevalent study of Grecian politics. Gradually the chief European Courts accepted it, and the league of Cambray, for the partition of Venice, formed in 1508, is the type of all the Holy Alliances since projected. One of the chief parties to that compact, had publicly expressed a hope that the then "Pope would be the last of them," for "like all the rest, he was a scoundrel;" another struck a medal to record his hatred of Rome, with the motto—"Perish the name of Babylon." These personages were the most Christian King of France, and the Apostolic Emperor Maximilian, who may be reckoned, says D'Aubigne, "among those who prepared the way for the reformation." Compare the league of Cambray, with any of the Crusades, if you wish to see how far worldly interests had encroached on Christian principles in European politics.

"The balance of power," or "system of equilibrium," was certain to take from the Popes, the arbitrement of the internal disputes of Christendom, and to throw it into the hands of coalitions of princes. But this scheme could not work, so long as the bulk of their subjects were truly Catholic; a fact which the Jubilee of 1450, established. The moral power of the Pope was necessarily the highest political power so long as Europe remained one in faith, loyally bound to the presidential chair of Peter. It is therefore obvious, that princes and communities deeply interested in the new system of policy, and the new projects of commerce, would become natural patrons of Protestantism, as a political agent, as a counterpoise to Rome, and a basis of foreign coalitions.

As if to complete the conspiracy against the Church, the literature of the age, both popular and professional, had grown as

immoral as the princes and merchants. The ballads of Provence were as impure as the Greek odes of Italy. By the fall of Constantinople, a school of subtle refugees had been let loose upon the West—a school of aliens, in every case, to Catholic orthodoxy—a school who styled Plato the Divine, who in their discourses compared the Blessed Trinity to Jupiter and Apollo, and the Blessed Mother of God to Diana or Minerva. Not only these philosophic foreigners, but their European disciples, exalted this pagan literature above all sacred knowledge. The extent of the epidemic is illustrated by the fact that all who had pretensions to literature exchanged their Christian names for Greek. Thus, in Rome itself, we meet the Chamberlain Paris de Grassi with one brother called Agamemnon, and another called Achilles, both in high office; thus, in Germany, Gerhard becomes Erasmus, Schwarzerd becomes Melancthon, Kuhorn is changed to Bucer, and Hauschien to Ecolampadius. When Professor Luther entered the novitiate at Erfurt, after spending the evening at the Tavern, he brought only Plautus and Virgil in with him—a pretty pair of Pagan companions for a novice of the Order of St. Augustine! Long afterwards he said he never was a true monk at heart—one of the few true things he ever said.

The chief result of the oceanic discoveries, on the schools and studies of the Europeans, was to draw the most active minds to physical and from metaphysical inquiries. The observations made, and materials brought from, Africa and America, gave constant appetite and food for analogical reasoning. The ancient ideas of earth and ocean, once exploded by experiment, the unmoored mind drifted from tradition to conjecture—from faith to skepticism. Every innovator pleaded the precedents of Columbus and De Gama; (a famous anatomist at Bologna was styled, by way of distinction, “the Columbus of the human body;”) that desire to demonstrate every science to the satisfaction of the senses then grew up, which flowered in the system of Lord Bacon, and has since produced such perilous fruits of false science. The art of printing, in Luther's youth, was preparing men's minds, by these new studies, for innovations still more immoral.

These were some of the general conditions of Europe immediately “before the Reformation.” Bearing them in mind, it will not appear to you so strange why the Reformation succeeded at the time it did, and no sooner. We have still to consider why it broke out in Germany and not at Rome itself, or in France, or

Spain, or at a point farthest from Rome. If it was a real Reformation, one would suppose that it would have begun at the head, as Christianity did at Pagan Rome—or among the freest and simplest populations of some country farthest removed from Roman influence. Why Germany should begin it, why the first quarter of the 16th century should be the time of beginning, and why Saxony should be the first country—all these are important considerations.

Without disparaging German scholarship, it was then certainly inferior to that of France and Italy; without overrating the institutions of old Spain, they were, before the centralization, the freest in Europe. Without denying that there were pious people in Germany, it is quite certain that the Hungarians, Tyrolese, and Poles were proverbial throughout the continent for their devotion. Saxony—the State of Germany which first became Protestant—was most famous for good living. She had not as yet produced any eminent scholars, and had long ceased to contribute saints to the calendar. If it was a work of pure faith, or pure intellect, one would certainly not look first to Germany, and in Germany not first to Saxony. If it was a question of cookery or war it might be different, but it was not.

Protestantism, as I maintain, was a politician from the first. Germany, with “its anarchical constitution,” was the most active field of European politics, while its emperors were elective, and in Germany the spiritual and temporal powers met in marked conjunction. The emperors of Germany, claiming the title of “Roman and Apostolic,” were crowned by the hands of the Popes. This title, the first in dignity in Europe, was supposed to derive from the Holy Fathers, and to be a defective title until confirmed at Rome. (In speaking of such coronation we should always remember that it was only a ceremony, a very august ceremony, to be sure, but still far beneath the dignity, the responsibility, and the sanctity of a sacrament.)

Now, these emperors, elected by one power, and confirmed by the other, were sometimes at war with those who chose, sometimes with those who confirmed them. Generally speaking, as the Church and the world are opposed, and as the human heart since the beginning is prone to pride and to error, so the emperors came oftenest into collision with the Popes. The controversy “of the investitures”—whether the emperor had the right to invest bishops with “ring and crozier,” and hold their sees to be subject

fiefs, to be presented by the sovereign, occasioned the most serious quarrel Germany had with Rome, and its tradition had constantly goaded German pride, until the Reformation gave a revenge to the empire, which Maximilian was not slow to take.

This I consider the reason why the Reformation ripened first in that empire. Why Saxony was the precise place, may be accounted for from the fact that in the first years of the 16th century, the balance of Germany turned upon the will of Saxony, which will, also, included protection to Dr. Luther and his cause.

Frederick of Saxony found Protestantism in the streets, and raised it to the level of his own throne. Having founded a university in his town of Wittenberg, he in 1508 called Martin Luther (then in his 25th year) from the Convent of Erfuth to a professor's chair. This Frederick was a great politician, in the meaner sense. His professor made a party in and beyond the bounds of Saxony, and he used the party when it was made. Luther understood and despised him, but like an adroit manager, was willing to be used, provided he might use others in turn. The relation between the professor and the prince is a curious example of clever diplomacy on both sides. They carry on their correspondence through a third party; the elector disclaims Luther's violence in public, but furnishes him hints in private. Luther complains of his patron's selfishness and worldliness in private letters, but exalts him in public as the hope of Germany and the saviour of religion. And this double meaning and dishonest intercourse characterizes all the acts and words of the two leading Reformers.

Now, Elector Frederick was the candidate for the empire, preferred (in the event of old Maximilian's death) by the native German party, who opposed Charles V. as a stranger and a Spanish prince. Maximilian devoted his last years to securing the succession to this grandson, and consequently paid all court to the prince, who alone could decide the election. Finally Charles V. was elected by Frederick resigning in his favor, and bringing his friends to vote for him. Thus, in the last years of Maximilian and first of Charles, Luther's patron and ally was the most powerful and active politician of Germany. It was precisely in these critical years that Protestantism, hovering about the political balance, formed its party, and began to exercise its evil influence in the political order. It is usual to consider Luther as a headlong, rash man, fearless of consequences. Nothing can be less correct. It is very true that he had a hot temper, and a vituperative style, but

all his essays and letters prove him to have been a capital party manager, one who used every sort of material that came to hand, and resorted to every stratagem to effect his object. He began by attacking Tetzels, whose patron had an hereditary quarrel with his patron; he used in turn the knights, like Hutten, against the nobles; the peasants of Swabia against both, and the nobles against the peasants and the Anabaptists. When he had established his short-lived Primacy at Wittenberg, and declared "that church and school" the centre of Protestant unity—he allowed every liberty to those who bowed to his chair, whether they were Bohemians, Moravians, Zwinglians, Bigamists, like Philip of Hesse, or public plunderers, like that Archduke Albert, who built the Prussian throne on the spoils of the Teutonic order, of which he was the foresworn Grand Master.

Another proof that Protestantism was in its origin political, is the fact that it has taken its generic name from a mere political *protest*, made by the Seceders from the Diet of Spires. That protest, signed by six Imperial Electors, near a hundred nobles, and a large number of free cities, is as strictly a State paper as a President's message, a Queen's speech, or a Parliamentary protest against a new law. It embodies the principles of the Reformation, but it does so logically; it asserts them as against the Diet and the emperor—it asserts them in the political order, upon grounds strictly political. To prove that the signers so understood it, we have only to remember that they retired from Spires to Smalkalde, made the first Protestant league there, drew up the plan of a campaign, dispersed to recruit their forces, and asserted their private judgment sword in hand.

To see more clearly the difference between Protestantism and Christianity, in their birth and in their growth, we have only to compare these indisputable facts with the early history of the Christian Church.

Pope St. Peter entered Rome on foot, in the reign of Claudius, and descended into the catacombs. There, like coral insects in the sea, the hunted, nameless Christians wrought invisibly on the foundations of the Church. They disclaimed with energy all designs against the State. Nothing could be more noiseless or inoffensive than their social attitude—nothing more resolute than their answers when questioned as to the faith—nothing more consistent than their whole conduct. From proconsuls and princes they received only abundant stripes and scorn, and gall and vinegar for

their refreshment. The cradle of Christianity was rocked amid the horrors of the catacombs—its infant eyes opened on tunnels of darkness, heaped with graves—its limbs were trained for the rack and the gibbet by the discipline of the desert, and all the rigors of primitive penance. Did the lion of the Amphitheatre howl of hunger? His Christian food was always at hand. Was Rome burned? The Christians did it. Was the city out of humor? A Christian sacrifice was grateful to the people or “the gods.” Did the army suffer defeat? A Christian sacrifice propitiated the angry deities. Did it triumph? They were offered up for a thanksgiving. Hated by the powerful—maligned by the philosophers—despised by the men of pleasure—assailed by the men of trade—Christianity made its way into the world. Unlike Protestantism, it had neither a Frederick of Saxony, a Reuchlin, an Erasmus, a Philip of Hesse, nor the magistrates and merchants of the free Imperial cities to form a girdle round it, and fight its battles with the sword.

It addressed itself to the slave, the convict, the sailor in his galley, the wayfarer on the road, the women, the children; it won its recruits one by one—except on miraculous occasions—it changed the individual first, then the family, then the congregation, then the city, and finally overspread the world, without a *protest*, or a battle fought on its account. It did not wait on Providence in the antechamber of kings; it promised mankind not new liberties but new restraints; it held out no secularization of Pagan property; it asked no treaty of Westphalia to recognize its existence in the civil order; it had itself, by its wonder-working spirit, reconstructed Rome and absorbed the Gothic deluge. All the dross of poor humanity had been poured, in successive ages, into its lap, and in the divine alembic of its infinite charity, the Church had turned it to pure gold, and virtue, and order.

Grateful Europe in the age of Charlemagne beheld a “true progress” of humanity under the auspices of the Church. The family was consecrated by a sacrament—common ties were strengthened and extended by the law forbidding the intermarriage of near relations—agriculture revived under the lead of the Benedictines—architecture flourished, that monument of the genius of Christian order—domestic slavery began to melt in the genial glow of Christian fellowship—the chaos caused by the wreck of Rome, was reformed into a number of separate but united States, whose federal bond was allegiance to Rome. In the East, anti-Christian schism

had done its work and had given its warning. Photian was a right good Protestant, and he originated a far higher heresy than Luther's. The German appealed to the passions, railing against celibacy, fasting, and Church taxation; the Greek appealed to the intellect, projected subtle theories on lofty and obscure points of doctrine, luring the will away through the imagination and the reason. The principle of both was the same—the all-sufficiency of private judgment—the coronation of pride—the revolt of the individual from system, from prescription, from infallibility on Earth. Photian succeeded widely and prepared the path of Mahomet; Luther succeeded locally and prepared the path of Spinoza, of Voltaire, of Robespierre, of the Goddess of Reason, and the present German rationalism, which treats our Lord and Saviour as a myth, and tolerates Luther's own Bible chiefly on account of "the poetical passages."

Grateful Europe beholding, in the age of Charlemagne, that Paganism overran the schismatic East, as fire does flax, intimately knowing that Rome alone could give unity and a system to the Christian Nations, forced gifts, tributes, and territories on the Popes. From the days of Constantine they were the lords of the city, but from the days of Charlemagne their temporal power becomes apparent, not only in Italy but through Europe. The political influence which the first Apostles disclaimed in the Pagan world, was forced upon their remote predecessors by the grateful and much indebted Christian generations. And in this there is no inconsistency between St. Peter and St. Gregory. Before and after an event, the conduct of the same person may be very different and yet quite consistent with the rigid rule of duty. The beaten soldier may retreat with honor, the betrayed people may resist with justice, the outraged wife may leave her husband, and the abused child her father—upon certain grave contingencies, arising in each case. The Church of the Feudal Age, after a thousand years of civilizing services, could very consistently wield the temporal powers which the Primitive Church disclaimed. It does seem that there was no other alternative open for the Popes, consistently with Christian interests. The unanimous voice of Europe, both princes and people, hailed the Pope as vicar of Christ, and father of all true Christians. Could the father refuse to heal family quarrels? Could the chief who alone all agreed to honor, refuse to summon Christendom together in great councils, for the maintenance of order and law, or the common defense against

the barbarians and Mahomet? Papal interests were, by necessity, general interests; a Catholic in Ireland was as near and dear to the Pope as a Catholic in Italy; his interests were pacific as to the internal affairs of Christendom, aggressive only against the enemies of God and his gospel; his authority was solely moral, and to execute its own ordinances, had need to be always in the right. Where—I ask the creedless theorists of to-day—where would law, or letters, or civilization have been, but for that august succession of the chiefs of the Church? These gentlemen who now use their pulpits, or desks I should say, and their printing presses, and their lecture rooms; to defame the holy head of the only Christian Hierarchy on earth, would be like their Anglo-Saxon ancestors, who were in Cæsar's time the ugliest slaves in the Roman market, but whom the Popes of Rome changed from angles into angels.

I do not deny the modern progress of mankind in many useful arts, but I question whether many theories of social progress now so rife, are really sound, and I believe the direction pointed out to us is wrong. I am for progress with all my heart, but I want to know who is at the helm, and whether or not the steersman can “box the compass.” I am certainly not going to sea with a crew of land-lubbers, and a pilot who cannot tell how many points there are between S. S.W. and N. N. E. I am anxious to have a wise, experienced, and authoritative head and hand, in the leader of our progress now, and I am well content that that hand should be unfettered, and that head be crowned with the shining circlet of authority. All true Christians should act to-day, as Charlemagne did a thousand years ago, by the lawful head of Christendom, and instead of limiting, or begrudging the authority of our great Leader, we should keep as a motto forever before our eyes and those of our children, this short sentence—*More power to the Pope*. For I verily believe that if the ratio of right progress which pervaded the middle ages, from the age of the Barbarians to the Age of Chivalry—I verily believe if that ratio had not been checked by the German rebellion against Rome—that the Christian world would be to-day far more virtuous, more peaceful, more free, and more happy, than it is. And we have no right to assume that the ratio of Feudal progress would not have increased if the Reformation had never happened. The church could not have shut up the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic, or have obliterated the art of printing. All these discoveries were made before Luther, and were established facts before the *Protest*. All we can say is, that

Catholicity might have given these motives a different direction and law; but they were in the world, brought into it by her sons with her sanction, and a new direction and a law is the admitted want of modern progress. Protestantism has been the active guide of 16th Century ideas of progress, and where has it led us? To liberty? To peace? To the equalization of rights or fortunes? To the concord of nations? To the love and reverence for law? To the conquest of Mahomet? To the civilization of barbarous races? No! to none of these triumphs. Is it not clear then that Protestant progress is not a true but a false progress, and must, sooner or later, be exploded and abandoned.

Europe, before Protestantism, bears some general resemblance to this Federal Union. The princes could not be said to be subordinate to the Pope, though he naturally took precedence, and held in certain cases the initiative. As the Governors of New York stand related to our Presidents, so did the princes to the Pontiffs. A requisition from Rome, by the common law of Christendom, was respected at Vienna or London, as requisitions from Washington are at Harrisburgh or Albany. Our doctrine of State-rights as against Federal authority, was often asserted in European Christendom; the interdict and the forces of the States loyal to the Union were sometimes used against the Nullifiers; in every case before the Reformation, the Disunionist failed in the end, and the permanent politics of that continent from the 9th to the 15th Century, were decided by the supreme court at Rome.

Those were highly hopeful ages of Europe, before her household was divided or her faith in God grew cold. Those were the ages when she took full grown barbarism to her bosom, and set it down clothed with the red cross and the knightly vows of continence, obedience, and the protection of the poor. Those were the ages of the brotherhood of scholars, when all literature spoke one language, and the scholar might traverse every country and be everywhere at home. Those were the ages before the Crescent and the Koran were defended by apostate governments like that of England. Ages full of ardor, enthusiasm and promise, and not devoid of noble performances. Compare the savage that followed Pharamond, or Rollo, with the Christian burgher or knight of the 14th Century, and compare that burgher or knight with a European citizen or officer of our day, and tell me in which period true progress is most marked? You have specimens in New York of European officers of some rank, and citizens

who are considered educated—you can make the comparison when you please—I am not afraid that you will disagree with me, when I argue that true social progress has had no worse enemies, than the Reformer's who changed the channel and turned the stream aside, from the Roman direction.

The record proves that the political consequences of the Reformation were Christian disunion, partial anarchy, national centralization, standing armies, despotism, increased functionarism, excessive taxation, the wider separation of classes, "revolution," and, finally, socialism. Even in the brief limits of a single lecture, I think I can show how every one of these unhappy characteristics of modern Europe, is the natural offspring of "the religious revolution," as it is sometimes called, of the sixteenth century.

As to our own country, I think I can show that our noble constitution owes absolutely nothing to the politics of the Reformers; that it is the product of the natural and local circumstances of North America and its first settlers, in entire harmony with Catholic principles, and has no enemy to fear so much as Protestantism carried into politics.

As to fallen Asia and the barbarian world, I hold that the restoration of the Christian religion in the one, and its propagation in the other region, has been seriously retarded by the Reformation and its consequences. With this last argument I shall close, preferring not to drag you round the world, to that paradise of parsons, the Sandwich Islands.

To begin with Europe—where the subject itself begins:

That "the Reformation" divided Christian Europe into two great camps, and so destroyed the unity of Christendom, is self-evident. The Diets of Worms and Spires, the Holy Council of Trent, Bossuet and Liebnitz, and other good and great men, have labored in vain to restore unity to Christendom. Whatever virtue there is in unity, whatever strength, whatever safety, Protestantism took away at the very outset.

We, in America, are in a good position to judge the merits of a Reform, of which disunion is the first requisite. We live on a continent larger than Europe; we have one official language; we are divided into many independent states containing various races, of unequal political powers; we are united under a federal head, who can do nothing for a state, except what it cannot do for itself; we have opposite sectional interests to conciliate, compromise, and keep together. There are among us also Reformers

—the legitimate successors of Professor Luther, whose pedigree I could give were it necessary—and these Reformers speak of the unity of the government, as a thing that ought to be sacrificed to a larger liberty; they speak of the President, the Congress, and Acts which were necessary in order to execute provisions of the Constitution, much as Luther and his imitators spoke of Rome and the sacred College, in the sixteenth century. Suppose they succeeded in separating one-third of the States from the Union, what would be the consequence? Disunion would produce partial anarchy; rivalry and estrangement, would require armed frontiers and internal centralization; the small States would be incorporated by the great ones; these would require increased taxes and functionarism; classes would be created; social enmities would arise; and a succession of armed insurrections would probably follow.

As a matter of fact, what did the Disunionists do for Europe? It is sometimes said they enlarged its civil liberties. I ask when and where did they do so? Did the countries that continued Catholic become more free? Were not Italy and Spain, as free in the fourteenth as in the seventeenth century? Did the countries which became wholly Protestant, derive new liberties from the change? Did Sweden and Denmark? Did Holland? Did centralized England, the slave of London? On the contrary you will find the hands of the dynasties strengthened in all these countries, municipal liberties abridged, provincial parliaments suppressed, direct taxation abolished, standing armies raised, great cities swollen with unnatural fullness, spontaneous local loyalty exchanged for stipendiary officials—for a standing army in colored clothes, who are fed out of the excessive taxes of each separated State. As the history of our own century is characterized by the word *revolution*, so that of the century after Luther, is expressed in the word, *centralization*. As the spendthrift succeeds to the miser's estate, so the men who opposed all state authority, were the true heirs of those who claimed everything for the State.

You may ask, how Protestantism caused this state of things, especially in Catholic countries? It was thus: When "the Reformation" rendered the Roman Medium powerless for arbitration, or compromise, *it made centralization a State necessity* to every European power. The Presidential power of the Popes, depended on the common consent of the Christian states: when Germany, England and Holland revolted, the Presidency was

abolished, not only for them but for France, Spain and Austria. There was no longer any use in one party referring to Rome, when the other refused to acknowledge the authority of the tribunal. Each State had now only to depend on its own internal forces; whoever could raise and keep up the largest standing army, had greatest power; the strong hand, as in the days of the barbarians, became the sole safeguard to Catholic as to Protestant Princes. Each had to do as their neighbors did, in order to meet force with force. Thus we will find the Tudors and Stuarts, the Vasa in Sweden, the house of Orange in Holland, the house of Brandenburg in Prussia, as intent on arbitrary power, as Louis XIV. or Charles V. Protestantism made internal centralization a state necessity—drove the Kings and Cabinets on in that direction—a direction they were eager enough to take in former times, but which the common law of Christendom, and the easier resort to a Supreme Court at Rome, gave them no opportunity of seizing in the ages of Catholic unity.

(When I speak of those ages, I do not wish to be understood as having any particular reverence for their practical politics. Politics then as now was often a game played by the few at the expense of the many; men of the world were then, as now, hard-hearted and self-seeking; there were oppressions, miseries and crimes enough. But there was among politicians, even the worst and most worldly, a sense of responsibility to a powerful tribunal; there was, throughout the governed, a latent conviction of fellowship capable on great occasions of great generosity; there was a sanctuary where the collared serf might rest in safety while his coroneted master thundered in vain at the gate; there was a Supreme Court, where tyrants could be impeached, as Donald O'Neil impeached the Plantagenets: to say all in one sentence, moral power had gradually subdued the barbarian power of brute force, had given mankind a right direction, a progress with a head to it, that knew where it was going and what it wanted, not like the giddy, undirected chimera which calls itself progress in these days.)

The exclusion of the Popes from the moral government of Christendom, left a great void in its stead. The Netherlands, that common cock-pit of Europe, felt this want most, and accordingly the low Dutch jurists invented the code now known as "the Laws of Nations." As the peace Congress feels in our age, so Grotius

Barbeyrac, and de Puffendorf, felt in theirs, how bare and lawless Europe was without an arbitrator. They compiled their code, which derived a certain authority from their honored names, but, it wanted the logical complement of every code, an executive to enforce its provisions: to entertain conflicting claims—to act upon cases for which there is no precedent—to overcome discontented parties—to protect the weak who are right, against the strong who are aggressors—there must be an executive. The first writers on the law of nations felt that it was a dead letter, without an international executive. Grotius, though a Protestant, boldly declares the necessity for a Supreme Court at Rome, and he quotes, Melancthon as one of his authorities; Leibnitz quotes and defends this opinion of Grotius; Seckenberg, of the same school, maintains in his *Jurisprudence* that “it is right there should be a system of government among Christians, and it is right that there should be a head to preside over it; and none else can be more qualified for this office than the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the representative of the blessed Peter, through an uninterrupted succession of Apostles.”

It is very demonstrable that this absence of an international executive has led to those sinister coalitions of great States, known as Congresses; that it has helped to the partition of Italy, and the partition of Poland; that it has been a diversion in favor of Mahometanism, which it secured in Asia long after its proselytizing force was spent; that it has prolonged the African slave trade; that it tended to make war more common and more deadly; produced French fraternities, and all the irregular interference by one people in the affairs of another, so much to be deplored in modern politics.

The military history of modern Europe is an additional argument in favor of an International Executive. No State can now afford to reduce its standing army, fearing lest others will not disband. The modern motto among Christians is—“In time of peace prepare for war.” No nation can trust another’s good faith; and the solemn invocation “in the name of the Most Holy Trinity,” with which treaties still begin, is considered a mere form, not binding beyond the hour of convenience or necessity, and to which even Unitarian envoys might sign their names. If a *casus belli* arises, to strike the first blow—a most anti-Christian sentiment—seems the first thought on both sides. Look at the war-debts, and military memoirs of Europe, since the Germans in Bourbon’s army

proclaimed Luther at Rome, amid the terrors of a barbarous pillage. Look at the Thirty Year's War, the Wars of the Succession, of Louis XIV., and of the French Revolution. Three similar centuries were never seen in the old "United States" of Europe. From the reign of Constantine to that of Charles V., a general internal war was unknown in Christendom. The border wars of France and England, France, Spain, the Italian States, and the emperors. were mere tournaments compared to those horrid slaughters which Wallenstein, Marlborough, Frederick, and Napoleon directed. "In the bloodiest battle of the 15th century," says Michelet, "there were only one thousand men killed." The whole energies of Christendom then were used, not in internal wars, but chiefly against exterior Paganism and Heathenism, the believer in Odin, and the believer in Mahomet. The great battles were fought by united Christian champions in the plains of Palestine, on the vega of Granada, about the iron gate of the Danube, or on the sands of Africa, where the crescent was so often trodden out under the burning feet of Christian conquerors.

How great the change in Europe since those ages, miscalled dark! They were meditative rather than speaking ages; they were ages of social contentment and simple pleasures; men, like Dante and St. Thomas, thought less of fame than of duty in their works, and by that very means secured the noblest wreaths of fame—for those laurels only are perennial on which religion breathes her beatifying breath. By appealing to that barbarian pride which the Church had long held in check, social contentment was rooted out; every man thought himself the best man; every prize was held out for every hand to pluck at. Great cities sprung up like Jonah's gourd; country life was thrown into the shade; the new doctrine of marriage left the door of divorce always on the jar; poverty became a criminal, and was locked up, lest its importunities should vex the prosperous people of the world, or interrupt merchants in the market-place. A trading theology and a Pagan philosophy went hand in hand through the world, displacing the ancient unity of duties and rights; the political consequences have been, as I said, disunion, partial anarchy, centralization, and counter-centralization; lastly, those lamentable European revolutions, of which, I trust in God, we have heard the last in our time.

Let me sum up the case as to Europe. Germany, the first offender against Christian unity, has been appropriately punished by

its own dis-unity. It has lived in a perpetual vortex, devoured by its own diseased activity. A pathetic German voice has asked—"Where is the German's fatherland?" And the only answer the poet could find was this:—

"Where'er resounds the German tongue,
Where German hymns to God are sung,
Where German is the name for friend,
And Frenchman is the name for fiend,
There gallant brother take your stand,
That is the German's fartherland."

But hymns and hatred will not define a political existence, so this answer is no answer. I could have told Dr. Arndt where his fatherland is: it was murdered at Wittenberg, buried at Augsburg, and the inscription on its tomb was the treaty of Westphalia. I can tell him besides who were the murderers. They were Professor Luther and his brotherhood of assassins.

The Reformation early entered Switzerland: in 1529, by the compact of Berne, it divided the Swiss people with a gulf never since closed. From the attraction of opposing influences, Switzerland has kept a foothold on her Alps, but what is her interior history? Canton against canton, league against league, and city against city. Every true Switzer is born in fear, lives in doubt, and dies in anxiety, for his country. When the descendants of Zwinglius and Calvin go up in tears and sackcloth to the shrine of St. Gall, or to the chapel of William Tell, and do penance there, Switzerland may recover her unity, but she never can otherwise.

In 1535, the Reformation entered England. For three hundred years, it has had everything its own way in that State! Where now is the old Saxon constitution, the courts leet and baron, the assemblies of Durham, York, Lancaster, Chester, and Cornwall? All absorbed by London—that great central sponge, which lies in the heart of the empire, drinking through its thirsty pores all the energies of the provinces, and giving nothing out, except under the strong pressure of democratical agitation.

What are the estates of England to day? The crown is a mere sign-board, the House of Lords an old curiosity shop, the Commons, a club of men well to do in the world. The Bank of England is the true government of England—Manchester is the heart of the nation—the yard-stick is the true sceptre, the ledger, cash-

book, day-book, and blotter, the four gospels of this new chosen people—these sublime missionaries of a calico civilization.

Moreover, as Dr. Brownson has well said—"England, economically considered, includes Ireland and India"—the establishment kept up by bayonets, and the car of Juggernaut, the *ryot* starving amid his rice, and the *cottier* perishing in the furrow of the field, which English law has decreed shall bear no other harvest but rents, tithes, and taxes. No impartial observer—no student of the sources of our information—none but a second-hand repeater of a man, will venture to hold up England as a sample of the salutary consequences of Protestant politics.

Shall I invite you to the Baltic countries—the coldest and most licentious in Europe. It is enough to refer you to the authority of a gifted Scotchman—a sound and manly thinker, and a candid reporter of what he has seen—I mean Malcolm Laing's book on Sweden and Norway.

Need I speak of Holland, that sand-bank snatched from the sea by Catholic generations, now sinking out of sight under the incubus of its own intolerance? Was it Spanish or Orange oppression that sent the De Witts and Barnaveldts to the scaffold? Was it Spanish oppression caused Belgium to separate her fate from her natural associate? In Holland, also, we are disappointed when we look for the Protestant regeneration of the human race.

The Reformation entered France with Calvin, Coligny, and Henry IV. It made a powerful party, and caused many years of war. Richelieu extinguished it only by extinguishing the provincial liberties, which it had excited even to anarchy. He centralized France to save France; centralization of course led to abuses, to luxury, to skepticism, to the encyclopedia, to the guillotine revolution. "Sire," said a wise minister to Louis XV., "the philosophers are ruining France." Who were these philosophers? The legitimate offspring of Switzerland and Germany. They were at home in Geneva and Berlin, and in their own rapid way they carried out, in France, the principles which the slower Saxons and Swiss had been centuries in developing. "The most perfect Protestant," as Burke observes, "is he who protests against the whole Christian religion"—the French Deist is, therefore, the most consistent Protestant. Voltaire and his school completed what Luther and his school commenced. Reason was deified in Paris, and Rationalism in Germany; the only difference on the opposite sides

of the Rhine was between an idea and its form—the French embodied unbelief like artists, while the Germans left it in a dense metaphysical fog, hanging somewhere over the Black Forest of their own pathless and melancholy speculations.

To sum up in one sentence—the worldlings of Europe, in the 1600th year after Christ, rose against His Church. They would have liberty without authority—they got it; they would have progress without conscience—they got it; they would undo the bonds of unity, and as a providential punishment they have supped full of the horrors of anarchy. Like the Theban farmer, who prayed to Jupiter to have his own will of the weather, and when he got his request knew not what to do with what he so much desired, so also the Protestant part of Christendom, if they ever will be wise, ought now to see that God's Anointed are the only safe depositories of the power to teach, to subdue, and to govern the mob of passions and propensities which grows up in every new generation of mankind.

I come now to a topic nearer home—to inquire whether our American liberties owe their origin to Protestantism or not.

But before I do so, let me say here that there seems a disposition in certain quarters, among certain editors and orators, whom I do not name, because current names would but distract our attention from the great subject, there seems a disposition to charge us, who are loyal Catholics as well as loyal citizens, with a coldness, or even an enmity, to the institutions of the United States. Some gentlemen, who ought to be with us and of us, instead of fluttering over the balance of an uncertain liberalism—have given a sort of sanction to this—I will call it—this fabrication of folly mixed with malice. Because our religion informs us that political duties are conscientious duties; because conscience and common sense forbid us to believe in any patent form of government fit for every people under the sun; because we cannot bow down before the idol of the hour, whose front of brass dazzles those who do not look at his feet of clay; because we cannot curse the man who has saved society in France, and given her the first principle of all government, *Authority*; because we cannot shout hosannas after democracy with a feather in its hat and a sentry at its door—*therefore* we are indifferent republicans. I ask your pardon for this allusion to a charge so very absurd and so very false, that it really deserves no other answer than to be silently spat upon.

In considering the origin of American liberty, I think suffi-

cient attention has not been paid to the influence of the circumstances of the first colonists: coming from England, they would naturally bring with them the general idea of representative government; but standing in the presence of the northern wilderness, they necessarily learnt the lessons of self-government. The monarchy did not emigrate here as to Brazil; the aristocracy did not emigrate as to Cuba and Mexico; the working men alone emigrated. There was from the first, a natural equality among them: the best shot, the best craftsman was the only *aristo* possible in the forest of the North. In the smallest township, as now in the greatest State, there existed the principles of the Republican system—they elected their select men, reeves and path-masters, as you do your Mayor, President, or Legislators. American Democracy began with the beginning of the country, it is a native here, its constitution is formed to the climate, its growth was regular and orderly—it is never to be confounded with the ferocious and chimerical Democracy of old monarchical States. In the European sense there was no American *revolution*, for the European term means a double act, an undoing and a doing, a tearing down of the old, to make room for the new, as if a nationality was an old house or an old boiler, that could be taken asunder in such a fashion: the American revolution means only that, the King who never was here, never was a practical part of the colonial system, having innovated on the native, necessary rights of the people—that they rose up, completed the fabric of their incomplete liberties, and told the King of England to manage his own country, as they meant in future to manage theirs. The word *revolution* so stinks in the nostrils of every sane man, that it is necessary frequently to repeat this distinction between its American and European sense, in order to take the illustrious authors of our constitution, out of the bloody and ignominious catalogue of European radicalism.

But if northern democracy grew in the woods and ran in the rivers, why did it not do so in South America? This habit of comparing dissimilar things is one of the leading delusions of our times. Let us look at the facts by themselves. Martin Alonzo Pinzon advised Columbus to sail south with the Gulf Stream instead of north, and so, for ends known only to Providence, the Spaniards struck the tropical region of America. They settled under a sky which clothed all under it, on a soil bursting with the precious metals. The aborigines they encountered were a semi-civilized

people with whom, at least, the common Spaniard might, without disgrace, intermarry; a great many young Don's of better family than fortune, got royal grants in the colonies, and thus entailed a military aristocracy upon the new country. Better for the Spanish settler he had never landed with such captains on a soil so rich in minerals, or under a climate so luxuriant and enervating! But, as if to complete their unhappy experience, the frenzy of the 18th century seized them, and they too should have their paper republic. They rent their green branch untimely from the parent tree—they planted their olives too much to the north—"they were rotten before they were ripe"—they rebelled without sufficient cause, and have lived ever since without law or government. South America wants A MAN—wants a master, and for her own sake I hope she may get one soon, not from abroad, but from among her own gifted children.

A very few words as to Protestantism in relation to Asia and the barbarian world. Who divided Europe at the very hour the Turks were concentrating upon it? The Luthers who cried with the Dutch democrats of to-day—"The Turk rather than the Pope." Who has kept the Crescent and the Koran where they are these last two centuries? Protestant England. To go further, who has made the Christian name odious in India and China? England, the opium-seller. Who tramples on the cross annually in Japan? The Dutch, who alone had an entry there for two centuries. Who pensions Juggernaut in India, and makes the faithless Christian blush in the presence of honorable Turks? Protestant England.

Has any Protestant government since the Reformation, made a solitary effort to rescue the holy places in Palestine from pollution? Not one. With all their boasted love for the Bible, have they not suffered the land of the Bible to remain a prey to the Heathen, and the monuments of the Bible to be, in many cases, destroyed or defaced? France alone in our days has attempted to rescue and redeem the Holy Sepulchre. Protestantism could arm for the city of Pericles and Demosthenes, but it had no care for the city over which "Jesus wept;" the modern Pagan turns fondly to Athens as to his mother, but if he visits the city of David, it is to carve his worthless name upon the trees that grow in the Garden of Gethseminai, or to take out his telescope and "survey the country" from Mount Calvary.

Not only has the Reformation made a successful diversion in favor of Mahomet and Buddha, but it has no charm to lure the savage from his lair. Not to speak of remote and obscure regions, look at its consequences to our own Indians. It is the disgrace of our present civilization that we have never rescued one savage from the wilderness. We have destroyed, we could not convert. And why? We began with the redman's clothing, his manners, and his language. Instead of beginning as Toth and Cadmus, and Numa of old, with his religion; instead of doing as St. Gregory did with the Saxons, and St. Leo, with the Huns—beginning with a religion. If the inner Indian was changed, the costume would have come of itself. But those who preceded us in America, seemed to consider a sack coat, a round hat, and a gloved hand, the outward and visible marks of a true Christian. There was, at one period, a prospect of the redemption of the redmen—redemption which all who believe them to have souls, must admit was possible. The Jesuits understood them, but the civilized savage ordered the Jesuits out of the wilderness, denied them the luxury of the scalping-knife and the burning stake, and because the Jesuit was hated, the Indian was lost.

I do not deny that attempts were made in good faith by Protestants to reclaim the redmen, but it is a fact, that the Protestant merchant, with his rum and his rifle, was too powerful for the Protestant missionary, and that nothing permanent was done.

I have now, ladies and gentlemen, described the outline of this subject, and must leave to the unconvinced or the curious to fill up the details. It would require not one, but a course of lectures, fully to illustrate the political causes and consequences of the Protestant Reformation.

Before I close, let me say a word to those friends (some of whom I see here) who remember when I maintained some opinions different from those I have expressed. Some years ago I went into the discussion of great questions, of government and revolution, with all the rash confidence of one-and-twenty. I deeply regret that I did so. I fear I gave offence where I should have rendered obedience, and pain where I should have given pleasure. I may have misled others, since I so misguided myself. What excited my apprehension was, that those whom I knew to be the social enemies of our religion and race, applauded my career. I hesitated—I reflected—I repented. I then resolved never again to

speak or write upon such subjects, without a careful and conscientious study of the facts and principles in each case. If perplexities arise as to principle, then we have the Christian doctrine, or the living voice of the Church, to refer to for the decision of our doubts. In this spirit I have of late read history, and in this spirit I have meditated upon the subject, which I have had the honor to present to you to-night.

I am convinced that no great historical or human interest, can now be safely discussed without the exposition of first principles, of Catholic principles. It is an age which takes nothing for granted, except its own self-sufficiency: it cannot be too often brought to the touchstone of theological science.

I am convinced there is such a science as Christian politics; I am certain that it is the science of true progress, of general peace, of legal liberty. I am equally convinced that the constant repetition round us of English, German, and Parisian ideas—which are at bottom Protestant ideas—have misled many Catholic young men into adopting rules and maxims of private and public life which they cannot defend by reason, or in conscience, and which religion emphatically condemns. I believe, further, that to hold and talk politics, which are unreasonable and irreligious, is unworthy of any man who calls himself a Christian, and most unworthy of all in an Irish Catholic. For we are of the soil that once produced the harvest of saints every year; we have in our hearts a kindred blood, purified through their holy lives. Our fathers in the days of Henry, of Elizabeth, of Anne, would disown us as their descendants, if they heard us parrot the wretched politics of revolutionary Protestantism. They would, I think, arise from their graves, if Providence permitted, to point out to us the lost path of our inheritance—the path beside which the Holy Well gushes up to meet the thirsty traveller's lip, and where the way-side cross beckons him to kneel down and pray. These fathers were sorely tried in their day, but they never equivocated one hair's breadth. Theirs was no thistle-down faith, that any passing puff might blow away, but a hardy laurel, that drank of the blood of the martyrs, and became as immortal as its food; which neither summer's heat could parch, nor winter's cold could chill; it struck root in the rock, it blossomed in darkness, it waved like a triumphant banner above the ruined breach at Drogheda and Limerick. Our fathers left us this divine faith for our

sole inheritance—it is at once our history, our consolation, and our glory.

“ They left us a treasure of pity and wrath,
A spur to our cold blood set,
And we'll tread their path
With a spirit that hath
Assurance of victory yet.”