

### CARDINAL MANNING ON THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MODERN SOCIETY.

Modern society presents many complicated problems. Everywhere there is an unsettlement of ideas. The present is an age of criticism and transition. The critical spirit born of the Reformation is still at work. The old order of things—the feudal system and mediæval church, the two moulds into which European life had been cast unable to contain and express the vital energy then awakened, were destined to be destroyed by it. The new wine must rend the old bottles. But the work of demolition was not accomplished in a century. It is still going on. Through terrible convulsions like the French Revolution, or more peaceably, the old political order of the feudal system has been broken up and is slowly passing away. Unlike the foundations of the mediæval church which corresponded to it are being rapidly undermined by the progress of the arts and sciences and the stream of quickened intellectual life which has everywhere set in. The age of superstitious faith is past; that of intelligence has come, when faiths and institutions which seemed to form a necessary part of the established order of the universe must justify themselves on clear and rational grounds. We thus live amidst the wreck and ashes of a former order. But at the same time in sight of a new and higher order slowly struggling to rise out of the ruins of the past. Men cannot rest permanently in criticism. A constructive era of necessity succeeds one of criticism and demolition. After John had done his work, came Jesus.

But the old order dies slowly; struggles hard with inevitable Destiny. Once and again it seems to become animated with new vigour. With the feeling of renewed strength comes the consciousness of a new lease of life and an undying force, which claims to rule the future as it had done the past. And amidst the chaos of ideas and conflict caused by the passing away of one and the growth of another order of things, it is interesting as it is also instructive to note how it all appears from the point of men of the decaying system. The article of Cardinal Manning, therefore, on the Church's attitude to modern society in the February number of the *North American Review* deserves more than passing notice, coming as it does from such a prominent advocate of the Roman Catholic Church's extremist claims. The object of the Cardinal Archbishop of London is to point out the relation of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century to the political society of the world in the nineteenth century, and to mark off the sphere of the social and political duties of the members of that church.

At and prior to the Reformation the Church enveloped and controlled the whole of human life. From the ruins of Imperial Rome, the Roman Papacy arose to wield a vaster power. Conquerors over the Empire of the Caesars, the barbarian Teutons were conquered by the representatives of an unseen, spiritual power. Leading captivity captive the Roman see and church speedily rose into prominence. To the political chaos that ensued on the fall of the empire, the church opposed a system of order and unity. To the rude life of the conquerors, the monastic ideal of obedience, chastity and poverty. The monastery, symbol of a higher life, offered a sharp contrast to the lawless life outside it. The barbarians were ignorant; therefore they implicitly received the dogmas of the church. Direct spiritual communion with God was impossible to them; therefore the Priest came as the daysman. Wordly affairs were secondary; the ideal life, that of the ascetic who renounced all earthly concerns. Under the influence of this spirit the church speedily rose till it became the one power in individual social and national life. The proudest and most powerful monarchs of Europe owned its power, and were content to remain the vassals of its head at Rome who "held the church and the world alike within his sway, and ruled with an undivided sceptre, unrivalled and alone."

The necessary consequence of the Reformation was the overthrow of the previously existing political and religious order. From Cardinal Manning's point of view, therefore, the modern political society of the nineteenth century is "the old society of the Christian world mutilated (!) by the character forced on it for the last three hundred years." From any point of view, however, a marked change of conditions has arisen. What then should be the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church under these new conditions? Formerly it had claimed to be and was "concentric, coextensive, and coincident" with human life in all its forms and relationships. It claims to be still. And Cardinal Manning urges on all its members the duty of realising that claim in actual fact as speedily and as far as possible in the present altered aspect of affairs. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, nor good Catholics with Heretics so long as they were able to dispose of them by burning at the stake. But the heretics having vindicated their right to exist, and established a political order without the church's pale, the members of the church have been compelled to recognise and enter into relationships with them. "The Church," so writes the Cardinal, "never withdraws from the state, but continues to save and uphold it, and, without taking the contagion, is in contact with its maladies to treat them." And hence he insists on all its members discharging their political and other citizen duties and using whatever power and influence they can command to further the claims and interests of the church on every possible occasion.

"The church" indeed, he says, "can hold no relations with the revolutionary politics of France or Italy, nor with the civil power of any state under the domain of an erroneous religion or schism or royal supremacy. But under these lies national society in all its domestic, social and civil relations, and with these the church co-operates for the common good, having (1) to guard and conserve all of christian faith and morals remaining (2) to minimise the evils of their legislation or government, and (3) to recall them by all possible influences to a better condition."

All this sounds well. But it is only a repetition of the old pre-Reformation dogma, which it is the duty of every member of the church even now to apply as far as possible. The church abates no single jot of its intolerant claims. Cardinal Manning no doubt says that "perpetual hostility to the political order of any state is no duty of the church." But he significantly adds "unless such order be intrinsically anti-Christian or anti-Catholic, which to him will amount to much the same. Jesuitry has been well termed a perpetual conspiracy against the liberties of the state." And the Ultramontanism which is its latest progeny, is an enemy even to the institutions of those nations whose tolerance admits it to a place within their borders. The theory at first proceeded, and still proceeds on the assumption of a sharp antithesis between the world and church; the infinite superiority of the latter and its ends and purposes over the former, and the consequent inherent right the church possesses in the person of its Pope, absolutely to define the boundary line between them; and generally to control, direct and rule the State as in every way subordinate to and existing only for the church. Such a theory is utterly impracticable. An old man may become childish; he can never become a child again. National life too has its progressive stages of development; and the institutions suited to one stage of its growth become utterly useless, or a positive injury to another. The mediæval church was doubtless suited to the feudal system and mediæval order, and did a work of righteousness and truth in its day and generation. But that time has passed, and with a new order of things, the old ecclesiastical institutions are incomputible. Dogmatic Protestantism itself is an anomaly. It is not a permanent, but at best a temporary phase of things; a bathing ground in a process of transition. To the leaders of the new movement in the sixteenth century, the work of the Reformation was the substitution of one dogmatic system for another. In its universal aim and spirit it is the abolition of all dogmatism, and the assertion by the human intellect of its native right of untrammelled investigation and belief. And it is simply intolerable that any one shall ask the results of the criticism of the last 300 years to be abandoned for the dogmas of an infallible church, with which as M. Capel writes "to doubt wilfully any one article of faith, or to enter on the examination of any dogma with the intention of suspending belief until the conclusion of such examination, would be a deadly sin." Having with great difficulty secured its freedom, it is impossible the emancipated intellect can again allow itself to become entangled in a yoke of bondage so complete and detestable as that which the Roman Catholic Church imposes on its members.

The Reformation was the assertion of the liberty of the individual; of freedom of opinion against the thralldom of church dogmatism on the one hand, and political freedom against absolute despotism on the other. To Cardinal Manning the French Revolutionary doctrines of 1789 are false. They are the *proton kerdos* (the biggest lie) of the nineteenth century. But the Reformation inevitably tended to the modern idea that power and authority are ultimately vested in the people; that rulers and political institutions exist for the benefit of the public, and not *vice versa*; and to the various forms of *constitutional* that have superseded those of *absolute* and *despotic* government. The Cardinal is especially sore at the national systems of education having in so many instances been wrested from the church. He ignores the fact that the church has here ignominiously failed; that in countries like Spain and Ireland where its influence is greatest the most helpless ignorance and grossest superstitions prevail; and that the church's power diminishes in exact proportion as knowledge and culture are increased. He does not choose to see that if the citizens of any country are to become fit to discharge the duties arising from their newly acquired rights, it was imperative on their rulers to provide a national system of education entirely independent of the church and all its narrowing and repressing influences.

In short, it comes to this, that the world can get along without the Roman Catholic Church; that the future will be built up independently of it; and that though galvanized into seeming life for a time, it is slowly yielding to its inevitable destiny, and must finally disappear as one of the great formative forces in human life. To Cardinal Manning the prospect must be dismal. He has a keen eye to detect what influences are at work in the complex life of the present day. And much that he says concerning the disintegrating forces at present active in society is true, and should commend itself to the student of contemporary life and thought. "The depression of the moral order of righteousness and truth," he writes, "is the elevation of the material order of coercion and force. Behind the civil power there is one, invisible, everywhere at work, but not holy; and the Governments of the world are being impelled towards a precipice over which monarchies and law and the civil order of Christian society will go down together." This contains a deep and compre-