



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. III.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 1853.

NO. 36.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY THOMAS DARCY M'GEE,

BEFORE THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF NEW YORK, AT THE TABERNACLE, BROADWAY, ON THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROTESTANT "REFORMATION."

Having discussed the causes which led to the great Apostasy of the XVI century, and answered the question—"Why it should have begun in the XVI, rather than in the XIV, or in the XVII, or any other, century," the Lecturer sought for the reasons, "why it should have begun in Germany, and of all Germany, why first, in Saxony?" The gross sensual nature of the Germans was admirably adapted for the reception of the gross sensual doctrines of the Protestant Reformers; naturally then a system so essentially carnal, which appeals to the mere animal man, to his belly, and his lusts, would be most readily welcomed by the most ignorant, and the most sensual nations in Europe:—

"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 oftentimes 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 Frederic 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 his 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 Tezel, 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 forsworn Grand Master."

The characteristic difference betwixt the Eastern and Western heresies is next insisted upon.

"In the East, anti-Christian schism had done its work and had given its warning. Photian was a right good Protestant, but 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.'"

And what has the Reformation done for mankind, for the cause of order, and civilisation?

"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 fatherland."*

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 Durlain, 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 democratic 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 *collier* 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.

Small I write 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 encyclopaedia, 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 sufficient 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 hither 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 arose 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 Alonso 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 luxurious 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