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## ARCHBISHOP HUGHES'S LECTURE, ON THE CATHOLIC CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.

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(From the N. Y. Freeman's Journal.)

American statesmen and orators are never more eloquent than when they dilate on the religious equality which has been guaranteed to all the people of this land, by the Magna Charter of their rights and privileges—the Constitution of the United States. This equality has not only been proclaimed in theory; it has been reduced to practice. The mode by which the framers of the Constitution proposed to secure it was simple, and, I may say, original. In other countries, whether Catholic or Protestant, there had been legislation establishing or recognising one predominant creed, but sometimes also granting toleration to dissenters from the doctrine of the state religion. In all such cases, the rights of conscience were secured by affirmative laws; here they have a wider scope and a better security, by the constitutional negation of all power to legislate on so sacred a subject. In other countries they are secured by some positive statute,—here they are safer, under a constitutional provision forbidding any such statute to be ever enacted. In other countries toleration was granted by the civil authority,—here the great men who framed the Constitution saw, with keen and delicate perception, that the right to tolerate implied the equal right to refuse toleration, and on behalf of the United States, as a civil government, they denied all right to legislate in the premises, one way or the other: "Congress shall make no law on the subject of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

As soon as the States had approved and confirmed the provisions of the Constitution, it was natural that they should adjust their local charters in accordance with the principles of the great instrument of federal Union. Already, in 1784, Rhode Island had removed the only blemish in her laws on this subject, a brief disqualifying clause against Roman Catholics. Pennsylvania and Delaware, I believe, were the only other States at that period which were not under the necessity of improving their legislative records, by expunging some clause similar to that which Rhode Island had repealed and erased before the general Constitution was adopted. At a very early day, however, several of them followed the example. Some twenty years ago, North Carolina expurgated her Constitution in this respect, in part, no doubt, owing to her esteem and regard for one of her own cherished sons, himself a Catholic, the late Judge Gaston, a man whose character was such that it could not but reflect honor on his native State and country. Within a recent period, New Jersey also, unprompted, and of her own accord, revised and improved her Constitution in this respect. New Hampshire, however, clings to her old unaltered charter, in which is a clause disabling Catholics, on account of their religion, from holding any office in the State. Her distinction, therefore, among her sister States, may be described in the words of the poet:—

"'Tis the last rose of summer,  
Left blooming alone,  
All its lovely companions'  
Not faded—but "gone."

The disqualifying clause is, I suppose, a dead letter; the Catholics of New Hampshire must be very few. On the whole, I have no doubt but that the liberality of the country at large has imbued the people of New Hampshire with kindest feelings towards even Catholics. It must also be said to her credit, that she was one of the three States who suggested to the framers of the Constitution the very clause which I have cited, and which guarantees to all the people of this widely extended Union the perfect and perpetual equality of religious rights, and freedom of conscience. It is only to be regretted that after having performed at so early a period, the function of index, pointing out at the cross-ways the true path in which her thirty sisters are now advancing peacefully and prosperously, she should have continued stationary, and be found the last to practise what she had been among the first to preach.

But it was not in re-adjusting the dead letter of written State Constitutions, that the people of this Union conformed to the new and liberal order which had been sanctioned by their authorised delegates in convention. They labored to imbue themselves, and those around them, with its spirit and its life. The Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary, the Pulpit, the Bar, vied with each other in cherishing and uttering sentiments of reverence for the sacredness of what had been sanctioned in the provisions of the Federal Constitution. It was the primitive age of American patriotism. I trust, however, that it may never deserve to be called in comparison with subsequent periods of possible degeneracy, the "Golden Age." But at all events, it was a period in which the great men of the country, of all professions,

brought their sentiments, their conversation, and actions, nay, controlled and brought even the very prejudices of their youth and education into harmony with the new order of civil, religious, and social life, which had been so wisely provided for in the Federal Covenant. Such an example could not fail to furnish a key-note for the universal tone of American patriotism, which it has not yet lost, and which, I trust, it never will forget or alter.

Catholics, at least, have every reason to remember and to cherish it. It is stated by one of our historians, that at the commencement of the Revolutionary war, except in the city of Penn, there was hardly another place in the colonies in which, by authority of the laws of the land, a Catholic Priest, could celebrate mass. Now there is no law against it any where.

In view of this wonderful change, it may be, indeed it has been asked, why Catholics, in America, do not procure, or at least petition for, similar alterations of the laws in favor of Protestants, in such countries as Italy, Spain, and Portugal? This, in my opinion, is a very silly question. Catholics in America have no more to do with the civil government of Italy, Spain, and Portugal, than they have to do with those of England, Russia, or Turkey. But the question may, perhaps, be best answered by putting to those who ask it another just as silly: Why do you, Protestants, not induce England and the Protestant States of Northern Europe, to imitate the example of this country, and abolish all legislation on the subject of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof?"

All such questions, on the other side, appear to me not only very absurd in themselves, but entirely out of place in a country like this. It is equally out of place, and altogether untrue, to assert or assume that this is a Catholic country or a Protestant country. It is neither. It is a land of religious freedom and equality; and I hope that, in this respect, it shall remain just what it now is to the latest posterity. There are, however, certain parties that have been only partially, even to this day, penetrated by the spirit of the Constitution, and of the primitive men of the Republic, who, by word, deed, and example, ushered it into the every-day business of the American national life. Even this portion of the public mind is constrained to exhibit, or seem to exhibit, on its narrow surface, a formal respect for public law and constitutional right. But still beneath that surface, and in the lower depths, there yet survives a certain vague, traditional memory of Protestant ascendancy, fed by a hereditary prejudice to the effect that, in a civilised state, where Protestants constitute the great majority of the people, Catholics ought to be satisfied with a subordinate position, and be very grateful, even at that, for the privileges which the liberality of Protestantism in this country permits them to enjoy.

To me it is a pleasure, as well as a duty, to feel and exhibit gratitude where gratitude is due. But no collector need ever call on me for a tribute of gratitude, unless he can show a better claim than this, on account of kind offices rendered. I am grateful, and bound to be loyal to the country at large, for the benefits which I enjoy in a legal and constitutional way. I am not a citizen by the birthright of nature. But the Constitution and laws have conferred on me the birthright of civil and political nativity. For this I am grateful. If I have understood the subject, this makes me equal, before the law, to any other citizen of the Union,—and what more need any one desire; what less should any one, who has been deemed worthy to be enrolled on the list of citizens, be willing to submit to? What Catholics are, therefore, in this country, they are not by the favor of spontaneous benevolence, but by positive right, whether natural and original, or legal and acquired.

The object of this lecture, then, will be to show that Catholics, as such, are by no means strangers and foreigners in this land. It is not unusual to hear persons of the description I have alluded to, assume, in conversation, that Catholics are new-comers, who enter the field at the eleventh hour, whereas they have borne the heat of the day. Not so. The Catholics have been here from the earliest dawn of the morning. They have shared in your sufferings, taken part in your labors, contributed to the common glory and prosperity of your country and theirs; and neither the first page, nor the last page, nor the middle page of your history would have been where and what it is without them.

At the period of the Revolution the Catholics of the British colonies were, no doubt, few. Still they were even then numerous enough to leave their mark both on the battle-field of freedom and on the Declaration of Independence. At that period, the Catholics in this country were probably forty thousand, out of three millions. At present my own opinion is, that they are not less than three millions and a half whole population. Emigration, no doubt, has con-

tributed much to this result. But has not the whole country been growing by supplies from this source, from the very beginning?

Even the oldest and statelyst family oak that now adorns the fields of early colonial plantation, though it has spread its branches far in American air, and struck its root deep into American earth, may be traced back to its feeble beginnings of growth from an European plant, transferred hither by emigration. And as it has been, so it will be with similar cases. Now this emigration has been going on since the commencement of the Colonies and of the Republic. But with or without this present emigration, the Catholics have been at all times sufficiently numerous to take part with their Protestant fellow-citizens in whatever was deemed essential to the interest and honor of the country. It is true that, as a general rule, they are seldom represented by members of their own creed in the halls of legislation, or in the high places of public office. If you look for them in such places, you will find them, at most,

"Ruriant in gurgite vasto."

But this is a slight affair. There are other departments of the public service in which, perhaps, a truer criterion is presented as the test of patriotism.—From the day on which the national flag was first unfurled in the name of independence, when the people of these colonies appealed to the sword, and left the issue of the struggle to Heaven's arbitration, until the day on which that same flag was seen triumphantly waving over the capital of Mexico, I think I shall be safe in saying that there has not been one important campaign or engagement in which Catholics have not bivouaced, fought, and fallen by the side of Protestants, in maintaining the rights and honor of their common country. On all these occasions, from a glance at the roll of the missing, or a gaze at the upturned faces of the dead, it would be easy to discover that, however small the constituency, the Catholic body never failed to furnish a comparatively numerous delegation to the battle-field; so that whether in defence of the country, or in discharging the duties of civil, social, commercial, or professional life, they have justified their title, as of right, to that perfect equality with their Protestant fellow-citizens which the Constitution has conferred indiscriminately on all.

But it may be said, that even the Constitution itself is a spontaneous concession, for which we are indebted to the liberality of Protestantism. If I had proofs of the contrary, what I deem due to the propriety of this occasion would prevent my making use of them. All credit and all gratitude to the liberality of the great men who framed that document, who were almost, if not altogether, exclusively Protestants.—But the matter was not one which they might dispose of according to the impulse of their own high and generous feelings,—and if there had been only one form of Protestantism professed in all the Colonies, I fear much that, even with Washington at their head, the Constitution would not have been what it is. Almost every Colony had its own form of Protestantism, and I am sorry to have to say that among them, even on religious matters, mutual charity was not always superabundant. Antagonisms from without would have defeated all the purposes of the confederation of States, if the Convention had attempted to favor any one of those forms at the expense of the others. But be this as it may, it is in the order of my subject to contend that, with or without the Constitution, there was no civil or religious immunity won by the success of the Revolution, in which Catholics were not morally and politically entitled, in their own right, to share equally with their Protestant fellow-citizens.

Now the Catholic Church has no recognised theory on the subject of forms of civil government. The little Republic of San Marino has preserved its independence and its republican forms for fourteen hundred years, in the very heart of the Papal States. The Church, however, is not an approver of revolutions, except when they are clearly justifiable.—Having experienced singular protection in all the vicissitudes and revolutions of the social and political world during eighteen centuries, she has the consciousness that she lives by an inherent vitality within herself, of more than human origin. This has sufficed her during the past,—it is sufficient for the present, and she is never troubled with doubts or misgivings in regard to her position in the future, which God has in His own hands, and can dispose of as He will. The first impression which the influence of her doctrine in regard to the principle of revolution would produce, I think, would be a presumption in favor of existing authority, until cause to the contrary should appear. Yet the principle of passive obedience on the part of subjects, or of absolute and irresponsible authority on that of sovereigns, never was, and certainly never will be, an approved principle of hers. She seems to have little confidence in theoretical systems which assume that great or enduring benefit

is to result from those sudden and unexpected excitements, even of a religious kind,—those enthusiasms in favor of new schemes—those irregular starts and leaps, and bounds of popular ardor—now in one direction, now in another, and not unfrequently in different and even opposite directions at the same time—by which the peace of society is to be preternaturally quickened in the path of universal progress. In short, having witnessed so many experiments tried on poor credulous humanity by new doctors who turned out to have been only quack, panaceas are not by her highly valued. She has had such long and universal experience, and such opportunities of studying her subject, that she knows what is in the heart of man, the bad as well as the good, much better than he knows it himself. She is inclined to suspect or distrust all those crudely conceived political changes which disturb the peace of communities and nations, without improving the condition. Oh, how many of these abortive and disastrous changes has she not witnessed throughout the whole world during her life of eighteen hundred years!

But a revolution begun under such circumstances as marked the commencement, the prosecution, and completion of the American struggle for freedom, it would be impossible for her to condemn. It was admitted by the wisest statesmen of the English Senate, that the authority of the British Constitution was on the side of the colonists, and directly opposed to the violent course of their own infatuated government, in regard to the principle for the maintenance of which the Americans took up arms. Accordingly the Catholics—clergy and lay—were among the first and most ardent to join their countrymen in defence of common rights. Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, signed the Declaration of Independence, with a bold and steady hand, risking his immense property, as well as his life, in the cause of his country. His cousin, the Rev. John Carroll, then a priest and a Jesuit, afterwards the venerated first Archbishop of Baltimore, was associated with Franklin, Chase, and Charles Carroll, on a mission to conciliate, pending the war, the good-will, or at least the neutrality of the Canadians, who were Catholics. John Barry, of Philadelphia, a most devout Catholic, a native of Wexford, in Ireland, was appointed to command the Lexington, the first vessel of war owned by the Continental Congress. And so well did he acquit himself, that he received special thanks and commendations from Washington himself. He was raised to the highest rank; the first who ever obtained from this government the title which is popularly known as Commodore; his memory is held in respect by his gallant successor, and he is not unfrequently designated as the father of the American Navy.

But not to speak of others who took a distinguished, though less prominent, part in the struggle, who, I may be allowed to ask, were your allies? Catholics. The troops furnished by Catholic France, to aid in the war of American Independence, I find it stated, amounted in all to thirteen thousand. The vessels furnished by the same government, for the naval service of the young Republic, are set down in all at forty-five ships of the line, besides frigates. But money was as necessary as men; and when the exchequer of Congress was empty, when the paper issues had ceased to represent any positive value, loans were advanced by that same country, amounting in all to seven millions of dollars. Neither was this yet all. I find another account of three ships dispatched from France to this country, laden with military stores, including two hundred pieces of artillery, four thousand tents, and clothing for thirty thousand men. It may be said that France did all this from political motives, with a view to damage the power of England. But I have intended only to state the fact, not to discuss the motive. Supposing the motive to be what you say,—the Colonies were actuated by the same desire; they, too, wished to damage and cripple the power of England, so as to prevent her from being able to despoil them of their constitutional rights as freeborn men.

According to all popular ideas, at least on this side of the Atlantic, the issue involved in the War of Independence was a choice, as England presented it to the colonists, between political freedom and political slavery. During the contest, so far as religion is concerned, who were your allies and your friends? I answer, Catholics,—and, if I may be permitted to add, none but Catholics. Of course, I do not mean to exclude by this remark the chivalrous men of different nations, who risked their lives and fortunes in your cause, and I would be especially ungrateful, if among them I omitted to mention the name of the gallant Montgomery, who fell at Quebec. I speak of your allies and friends in their national, public character. On the other hand, in this contest between slavery and freedom, who were your enemies? Protestants,—and, if I may say it without offence, none, but Protestants. Let me prove this. It is known