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— Luther and the Reformation.
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Reformation.**



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Catholic △ Truth △ Society.

LUTHER AND THE REFORMATION.

BY MOST REV. P. W. RIORDAN, D. D.

The Catholic Church is a body of doctrine and a form of government which interprets and explains the doctrine and applies it to the souls of men. The Reformation, in its beginnings, was a protest, not so much against the body of Catholic doctrine, as against the manner in which the government of the Church was administered. As it waxed strong, it was deemed necessary by its founders to place it upon a doctrinal basis, and make it seem the expression of a creed. A belief in something is the root principle of every society, and a creed is only that principle clothed in words.

The student of history is not surprised at finding that in the 16th century there was a defection from the authority of the Church on the part of many of its members. Such an event is nothing new or unexpected in its history.

It was predicted by St. Paul that defections would

take place; that now and then there would be uprisings of the mind of man against the teachings of the Church of Christ, and revolts against her authority.

We need not greatly wonder that such should be the case, when we reflect that many of her doctrines run directly counter to the passions of the human heart, and that the fundamental principle upon which her entire system of belief is built, and without which divine faith is an impossibility and Christian unity a mere illusion, namely, submission of the intellect to her guidance in matters of revealed truth, is calculated, from its very nature, to excite a formidable opposition from the most deeply rooted imperfection of the heart—pride.

It is not to be expected, in the present dispensation of Divine Providence, in which man's free will remains untrammelled even under the powerful action of divine grace, that all who receive the truths of the Christian revelation should retain them unimpaired.

Why man should alienate himself from the spirit of Christ the Savior, should refuse to drink of the waters that flow from the fountain of truth and morality, and consequently of true progress and civilization, is sufficiently accounted for by him who has the slightest knowledge of the contradictory elements that compose the heart of man. False guides and false prophets have in every age verified the prediction of the Savior of men. The history of the Church has always been marked by the history of heresies.

In the Very First Century

Of the Christian era, at the very time men were gathering around the Apostles, numbers who had received the faith lost it. The last writings of the well-beloved Apostle are of a controversial character against those who were once numbered among the children of the Church, and whom the spirit of evil had driven from its fold. The sects of the first cen-

ture, whose endeavor it was to engraft the errors of paganism on the Christian system, had scarcely passed away when they were replaced by others. Their adherents were sometimes few, sometimes many. Their numbers never depended on the character of the doctrines that were taught, but principally on causes prompted by human motives and devised for the attainment of worldly ends. Every attentive reader of history must be struck at this astonishing fact, that the more incomprehensible the doctrines broached, the farther removed from the sphere in which men move and act, the more speculative they were, the less influence they had on the practical affairs of life, the greater was the number of their partisans, for whom they became a watchword and a symbol of faith. We would naturally expect that doctrines of this nature would present but few attractions to the vast majority of mankind that are but little interested in them, and that if they consented to cut themselves loose from the Church they once professed to be the true Church of Christ and with whose spirit their early lives were so associated that it was interwoven in the warp and woof of their natures, it would be for doctrines, false though they might be, but at least conducive to promote their temporal interests. Such has never been the case. The heresies of the first centuries, which drew entire countries from their allegiance to the Church, originated, apparently, in the name of doctrines which their most ardent partisans never understood.

The rude barbarians, Vandals and Visigoths, who, in the fourth and fifth centuries, overran the fairest provinces of Southern Europe and destroyed every vestige of the once flourishing Church of Africa, gave the support of their arms to the propagation of a heresy, Arianism, whose primary doctrines they never understood and of which many of them had never heard. They rallied around a banner on which was inscribed a word written in an unknown tongue, and

whose meaning was far beyond their comprehension. It mattered not. They had a banner to follow. They cared not what was written on its folds.

Later on comes Nestorianism. Still later, Eutychianism. The same fact occurs. Those heresies were about abstruse facts of doctrine. The moment they were broached thousands rallied to their defence who had not the slightest notion of their meaning. Synod after Synod was convened, Council after Council held, but the spirit of the heresies outlived them all, and at the present day, in the far-off countries of the East, in the provinces of Scriptural Asia, thousands proclaim themselves disciples of Nestorius and of Eutyches. Who Nestorius and Eutyches were they know not, what they taught they know still less.

Still Later on the Greek Schism

Arises, most disastrous in its consequences, and which has retarded so much the progress of European civilization. The principal question at issue between the Roman and Greek Churches is an abstruse question concerning the Holy Trinity. Does the Third Person proceed from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son? Separated from the authority of the Church, which received it from God and proposes it to our belief, it contains no motives in itself to win our assent, and yet no heresy in ancient or modern times has been supported with the same tenacity or has succeeded in gathering to its obedience such a large number of adherents. Throughout the East, in every part of the vast empire of Russia, by millions of every class of society, this abstruse point of doctrine, far beyond the comprehension of the most acute intellect, is put forward as the very test doctrine of Christianity, upon whose acceptance the eternal hopes of mankind are founded.

This fact recurring in every age is most astonishing and humiliating, and suggests to every reflecting

mind this conclusion: That those heresies did not owe their rise or fall to the peculiar doctrines of which they claimed to be the embodiment; that the various doctrines of their creed were matters of mere indifference; that had they professed even contradictory doctrines their rise and progress would not have been materially affected; that they had their origin in causes not connected with religious doctrines, but rather arose out of the peculiar circumstances of the times. With them they rose and with them they fell.

At one time they seemed to overrun the entire of Christendom, but the tide began soon to ebb, and receded just in proportion as it had advanced. Sect after sect had disappeared, so that at the beginning of the 16th century the Church was in the ascendant: The nations of Europe obeyed but one spiritual head; a great reconciliation had just taken place in the Council of Constance, in which national jealousies and prejudices seemed to have been extinguished and rival claims adjusted. Church and State were again working harmoniously together. The Church giving the State the powerful support of her moral influence, sanctioning with her blessing its laws, and keeping uppermost in the minds of the people the great moral principles on which all governments must be built if they are to realize the ends for which they are established. The State, on the other hand, extended its protection to the Church, and took care that its laws were not violated with impunity. Its high posts of honor and trust, all the emoluments within its giving, were reserved for her faithful children. Christianity was the law of nations. The treasures of Grecian and Roman learning, that had long remained hidden, were once more brought to light, and became the study of the schools of Europe. The fine arts were revived, and took such a rapid expansion that before the lapse of half a century more had been effected than for the 1,500 years previous.

The Church and the Churchmen

Were not backward in the movement. They were its leaders. The palace of the Roman Pontiff was the finest school of Art in Christendom, and by a strange coincidence the age of the Reformation is known in history as the age of Leo X. Her missionary spirit was active. The same love of the Church and her saving doctrines, the same desire to make all mankind partakers of them, that formerly had sent the Apostles to the uttermost ends of the earth, and the Christians of the first ages to seek death with pleasure, animated her children now to cross the ocean in frail barks to communicate the blessings of Christianity to the inhabitants of those regions which the genius of Columbus had but a few years before discovered. To look at the surface of things we would imagine that only days of peace and prosperity were in store for the Church, such as had never been her lot before. That now, after the tremendous struggles she had survived, no one could dispute her claims again. But the greatest struggle was yet to come, her contest with that movement known in history as the Protestant Reformation.

The origin of the Reformation is familiar to you all. On the 31st day of October, 1517, Martin Luther, a monk of the Augustinian order, published certain theses against indulgences, and, before fifty years had elapsed, but one country of Northern Europe remained faithful to the See of Rome. In many parts of Southern Europe the spirit of revolt was rife, and for a time it was uncertain whether or not the Church could retain in them her ascendancy. Prussia, both Hessias, Wurtemberg, Saxony, Hanover, the Palatinate of the Rhine, part of Poland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, England, Scotland, a portion of Switzerland and parts of France had renounced not only their allegiance to the See of Rome, but all of them, with the exception of England, rejected nearly

every point of doctrine that the Church of Rome had for 1500 years held up to the belief of mankind, as truths revealed by God himself. Had the Reformation rejected merely one or other article of faith, its rapid success would not be so surprising, nor would it have been without its precedent in history. But it attacked the very Constitution of the Church. It eliminated all the elements that had hitherto been considered as essential to Christianity and that had distinguished it from Paganism, and yet its work was accomplished in less than half a century. Thousands who had in their early and mature years assisted with devotion at the Sacrifice of the Mass, received the Sacraments of the Church, believed as she did and were willing to give their lives in defense of their faith, went to their graves in the firm persuasion that her doctrines were idolatrous, her practices superstitious, and that, within her pale, salvation was impossible. How was the change accomplished? How did it happen that during fifty years the Protestant movement was triumphant, that it then suddenly stopped and ceased to make any further progress? Since it is to be remembered that the limits of Protestantism in Europe are the same to-day that they were half a century after the Reformation. How was its onward course arrested?

These are questions that have received and are receiving every day different answers according to the light in which they are viewed.

The Popular Protestant View

Of the question is that the Reformation was a noble effort for the freedom of human thought. That the mind of man, enslaved for centuries under the intellectual despotism of the Church of Rome, had grown restless under the yoke. Its energies had been slowly crushed until at last it rebelled against the strong hand that had been laid upon it, and with one bound

had achieved its emancipation from the slavery that enthralled it. There are others who ascribe the success of the Reformation to the genius, abilities and eloquence of Luther, who, as Mr. Ranke says in his history of the Reformation, was destined in the ways of Providence to discover the long concealed and heaven sent fire that in his hands was to again spread its flame and bring life and light to God's people. Others attribute it to the many abuses that existed in the Church, the immoderate publication of indulgences and the unbecoming lives of many of the clergy. Others, again, that it originated and was kept alive by the reading of the Bible, that hitherto had been a sealed book to the world, until Luther translated it into a language intelligible to the people, and then men for the first time read for themselves the pure and unadulterated truths of Christianity. Others, finally, that its success was mainly due to the support it received from the civil authorities; that in its inception and continuance it was not a religious movement for a purer doctrine, or a higher standard of morality, but purely a political and social movement for the furtherance of a change in the public civil policy of the age.

The various causes here enumerated may be grouped under two heads, and by thus generalizing them, a clearer insight can be obtained into the effects they are supposed to have produced. Luther's Reformation was either a religious movement or it was a political and social movement. According to the non-Catholics it was a religious movement. And if so it must have been a movement to possess religious truth, which the Church from which it revolted either did not possess at all, or at least did not possess unless intermingled with error and superstition.

And again, if a religious movement, it must have been a movement towards a higher, purer and more vigorous standard of morality, towards a system in which the sinful passions of man are restrained more

efficaciously, his wayward inclinations corrected more easily, in which greater helps are given to the practice of virtue, and greater restraints imposed against the commission of crime. We cannot have a religious reformation without these conditions. A religious revolution may be from good to bad, but a religious reformation must be, and ought to be, from bad to good, or from good to something better, and since a religion possessing to be a religion of Christ must believe the truths that He revealed, and practice the morality that He commanded, it follows that if Luther's Reformation is to be classed with religious reformatory movements, it must have originated in a desire to possess those two conditions of a pure religious life, viz: The body of doctrine full and complete as revealed by the Divine Founder of the Christian religion, and a code of morality far superior to the moral code possessed by the Church of Rome. If not a religious reformatory movement for the possession of religious truth and an elevated system of morality, it must be classed as a political or social movement, originating in political or social causes, tending to the attainment of political or social ends, springing from human, worldly motives, and seeking the furtherance of purely worldly interests.

The manner in which we are to view it, is not to be decided on speculative grounds; but on historical grounds. It is a question of history.

Many Protestant Historians Freely Grant

That it was not of the former character. "That the Reformation was brought about by the civil powers," says Jurieu, "is incontestable. It was introduced into Geneva by the Senate; into other parts of Switzerland by the Grand Council of each Canton; into Holland by the States General; into Denmark, Sweden, England and Scotland by kings and Parliaments. Nor did the civil power merely guarantee full liberty

to the partisans of the Reformation; it took from the Papists their churches and forbade their worship." Mr. Hume says: "The rapid advance of the Lutheran doctrine and the violence with which it was embraced prove sufficiently that it owed not its success to reason and reflection."

Mr. Hallam: "The adherents of the Church of Rome have never failed to cast two reproaches on those who left them, one that the reform was brought about by intemperate and calumnious abuse, by outrages of an excited populace or by the tyranny of princes; the other, that, after stimulating the most ignorant to reject the authority of their Church, it instantly withdrew this liberty of judgment and devoted all who presume to swerve from the line drawn by law to virulent obliquy, and sometimes to bonds and death. These reproaches, it may be a shame for us to own, can be uttered and cannot be refuted."

Mr. Hallam again: "Whatever may be the bias of our minds as to the truth of Luther's doctrine, we should be careful not to be misled by the superficial misrepresentations we sometimes find in modern writers, such as that Luther, struck by the absurdity of prevailing superstition, was desirous of introducing a more rational system, or that he contended for freedom of inquiry, or the boundless privilege of individual judgment, or that his zeal for learning led him to attack the ignorance of the monks, and the crafty policy of the Church which withstood liberal studies. These notions are fallacious refinements, as everyone who considers the history of the Reformation must acknowledge."

M. Guizot frankly avows: "That the Reformation was not an attempt at religious amelioration, or the fruit of an Utopian humanity and virtue." Frederick the Great summed up the causes which produced it in different countries as follows: "In Germany it was self-interest; in England lust, and in France the love of novelty."

That There Were Abuses Existing

in the great Christian Commonwealth—numerous and flagrant abuses—no one can deny. Those abuses existed, not only in the nations of Northern Europe which embraced the Reformation, but also in the nations of the South which remained faithful to the Church. And it may be conceded that there is nothing in the history of the times, or in the history of Luther's life prior to his leaving the Church, to prevent us from believing that his first protest against indulgences may not have been actuated by a noble and honest endeavor to give expression to a desire nurtured for years by the most devoted friends of the Church. There is nothing to make us believe that Luther started out with the intention of changing any article of the faith of the Church. He may have grieved, as others did, at the many evils which had crept in among those who professed the Catholic faith, which had crept up to the first places of the sanctuary through the negligence of those who by their sacred calling were constituted the guardians of Christian morality.

The publication of his theses at the door of the Church at Wittemberg was in accordance with the custom of the age. And had the situation of affairs been correctly judged, there is scarcely a doubt that the great talents and extraordinary popular eloquence of Luther might not have been turned to uphold the interests of the Church with the zeal and activity with which they were afterwards turned to destroy them.

It was the common expression of the times that the Church needed a reform in her head and members, and the opening decree of the Council of Trent, stating the end for which it was convened, expressly mentions: "*Ad reformationem cleri ac populi.*" "The reform of the clergy and the people." And no reform is necessary where no abuse exists.

The central authority of the Church had not the

power to prevent the abuses of which non-Catholics complain, neither had it the power to uproot them, unless gradually and under a changed condition of the political and social world.

For years prior to the Reformation, the most zealous and energetic pastors under the guidance of the Supreme Pastor, had labored to eradicate existing abuses. In provincial Synod and in general Council measures stringent and far-reaching had been enacted to bring men back to the practice of the Christian virtues which the Church has always inculcated. But in vain.

“And it is not true,” says M. Guizot, “that in the sixteenth century abuses, properly so-called, were more numerous, more crying, than they had been at other times.” Then again, they came in a great measure from those who had been forced by secular princes on the acceptance, and had been thrust, despite the most vigorous protests of the Roman See, into some of the greatest churches of Christendom. Abuses can only affect the external government of the Church, can only contaminate what is called the human element in the Church. As a writer of our day, Bishop Spalding, says: “There can, indeed, be no reformation or need of reformation in her essential life or constitution, in her doctrinal or moral teaching, in her Sacraments, or in the constitutive elements of her government. These have been fixed by the hand of God, and are unchangeable; but as it is her destiny to live in contact with human society in all its ever varying degrees of development and decay, it must also be her fate to find herself again and again surrounded and interpenetrated by abuses and disorders of all kinds.”

The Christian Church was Founded

not for angels, but for men; and not for the just among men, but for sinners also. They live will side by

side, as the wheat and tares in the field of the Gospel, and they will grow together until the Master comes and makes the final separation. To make war against the divine element in the great Christian Society, to reject the teachings of 1500 years, that had come down unchanged through an uninterrupted succession of pastors, was revolution, not reformation. It was the uprooting of the foundations laid by the hand of God, upon which the great Christian Church was built, and the substitution in their place of a foundation made by men. The success of the Reformation cannot be attributed to the character of the doctrines which Luther taught. He proposed doctrines in opposition to the doctrines held by the Church of Rome. But these doctrines were never considered as essential to the cause of Protestantism, but merely accidental. Luther started out with no definite system of religious belief, and whatever he may have held in the beginning had not for him so much of the sacred character of truth about it, that he was not willing to change it or drop it entirely when circumstances rendered it advisable. During the progress of the Reformation, he addressed the following words to Pope Leo X.: "Most Holy Father, I throw myself at the feet of your Holiness and submit myself to you with all that I have and all that I am. Destroy my cause, or espouse it; pronounce either for or against me; take my life or restore it, as you please; I will receive your voice as that of Christ Himself, Who presides and speaks through you. I declare it in the presence of God and of all the world, I never have sought and never will seek to weaken by force or artifice the power of the Roman Church or of your Holiness. I confess that there is nothing in heaven or on earth that should be preferred above that Church, save only Jesus Christ, the Lord of all."

The Confession of Augsburg, composed by Melancthon and approved of by Luther, rejected many of the doctrines which Luther held in the beginning. The

defense of the Confession of Augsburg repudiates many points which in the Confession itself are put forward as essential. The Reformation was never, in any stage of its development, so intimately bound up with any system of religious belief, with any fixed, unchangeable body of revealed doctrines that it was prepared to stand with them or fall. Point after point may be refuted; argument after argument admitted, but the spirit of protest against the great historic Church, over which, as Supreme Pastor, the Roman Pontiff presides, out of which the Reformation took its origin and its name, lives on. During the course of 400 years, doctrine after doctrine has been rejected, and to-day not one Church that traces its origin to the Reformation teaches that special point to which Luther attached so much importance that in one of his letters he declares that he cared not if all his doctrines were forgotten, provided the one denying free will in man were retained.

The Repeated Changes of Doctrine,

the rejection of some once held essential, the assumption of others, prove conclusively that doctrines were not essential to the movement. If the Reformers had taught doctrines altogether contradictory to the ones finally embodied in the confessions of faith; if they had in the 16th century revived the wild theories of the Gnostics of the 1st century, or the mysticism of the sects of the 12th and 13th centuries, the progress of the Reformation would not have been retarded a particle. The tie which binds those who glory in the Reformation to the denomination of which they are members, is not usually a tie of doctrine. Indeed, of so little account is doctrine or creed outside the Catholic Church, that religion is held to consist, not in knowledge, but in feeling or sentiment. As Cardinal Newman expresses it: "In proportion as the Lutheran leaven spread, it became

fashionable to say that faith was not an acceptance of revealed doctrine, not an act of the intellect, but a feeling, an emotion, an affection, an appetency. Thus man—who in all other and less important relations of life, is governed by principles which have their root and warrant in reason—is governed in his relations to the Supreme Being and in his moral relations to his fellow-beings, by taste or feeling, by custom or expediency.”

We are told by others that the Reformation was caused by the reading of the Sacred Scriptures. That Luther, having by his translation of the Sacred Scriptures into German, unlocked the treasures of divine wisdom, the spell which bound mankind to the Church was broken. This belief that the Reformation was produced by the reading of the Bible, has induced the Bible Societies of our times to employ the same means in the conversion of the heathen, with what success it is needless to mention. Luther's translation of the Scriptures was completed only in 1534, seventeen years after the Reformation had begun. And although at that period of its existence the Reformation had not obtained its full development, its leading features could be plainly recognized. It contained then everything essential to Protestantism.

The unchaining of the Word of God, as it is found in the Holy Scriptures, is claimed as one of the special glories of the Reformation. It must be admitted that in the days of Luther the Holy Scriptures were not as accessible to the people as they are at the present day. The art of printing was in its infancy. A copy of the Bible was within the reach only of the largest fortunes. But much had been done to multiply copies of it, and splendidly printed copies of the Scriptures—placed in the churches and in public institutions of learning—were within the reach of all. At the Caxton exhibition held in London in 1878 sixty (60) different editions of it printed in

Latin and German were exhibited, all printed before the year 1503.

Mr. Strong, an English traveler, says that in Bohemia alone there were seven (7) editions of the Scriptures before Luther began his German Bible. The library of the Duke of Wirtenberg contains 33 editions in German prior to Luther's. The celebrated German Bibliographer, Panzer, in his annals of ancient German literature, counts 11 editions, none of which are posterior to the year 1480—three years before Luther's birth. A few years ago an ancient Spanish Bible was discovered which was printed at Valencia in the year 1477. There is an ancient version of the Gospel of St. John in the Saxon language by the venerable Bede, of the 8th century. There is another version in the Anglo-Saxon which dates as far back as the 10th century.

There never was and never will be a whole people converted to Christianity by the sole reading of the Scriptures. Individuals may indeed form from them an exalted notion of the Christian system, may entertain a high respect for its teachings, and they will look for that Church of which the Scriptures speak and whose characteristics they give, and ask of God that grace without which they will not enter its fold. But on a whole people, with respect to determining their religious belief, and especially with respect to inducing them to practice from motives of conscience the morality which it incalculates, it can have but little or no effect. The letter of the Gospel is in itself dead and can communicate no life unless made to live in the great society called the Church. The Bible is no doubt the word of God, the Book of books, the Book by excellence, guarded by the Catholic Church, without whose tender care it would have been lost long before Luther's time. It is the Magna Charta of our religious liberties and of our moral greatness. In it are contained all the principles whose spirit must be embodied in the character of every man who

lays claim to morality and in the constitution of every country which makes any pretension to true progress and civilization.

But far beyond the letter of the Bible is the mighty power of the Church of Christ, which is the perfect embodiment of the spirit of the Bible; the living organism in which and through which the Bible acts. This is the power which has brought men to a knowledge of the Christian law, which has regenerated the world morally and politically, and made civilization coterminous with Christianity. Not the dead words of the Gospel placed in the hands of the people, but their spirit acting through the Church, manifesting itself in her Sacraments, in her liturgy, breathing in her prayers and devotional exercises, speaking through those who in the name and authority of the Son of God were commissioned to carry the truths of salvation to the uttermost bounds of the earth. The Bible, or rather its principles may be called the soul of religion, but the soul acts not without the body, without some organism which it quickens. It may be said to hold the same place in a religious society that a constitution does in a civil society; and in the civil order the government and constitution mutually support each other, the one giving life and the other applying it to the various requirements of those who live beneath its protection. Of what avail would our constitution be with all the precious liberties it guarantees without some definite form of government, without some body politic to animate? It would have no more practical influence on the destinies of mankind than if it had never existed. In the same way the Bible and the Church support each other. As long as they remain together they will withstand the assaults of man. Separate them and they must fall.

The Reformation Therefore Was Not a Religious Movement.

Its success was not due to the character of the doc-

trines which it taught, nor can the abuse which existed in the Church explain it. They who were foremost in creating and upholding the abuses against which so much indignation was expended were the most zealous partisans of the Reform. It was not caused by the reading of the Scriptures. What, then, were the causes to which is owed its existence? The causes were entirely political and social, arising from the peculiar political state of European society at the beginning of the 16th century.

From them did the Reformation receive its essential characteristics. It could not have appeared a century before it did. Luther or anybody else might indeed have preached against one or many of the doctrines of the Catholic Church in any century. Many persons would follow such a leader, but whole nations would not at his word have broken off allegiance to the See of Rome. It would have been impossible a century later. He who has read the history of the last 300 years with the slightest degree of attention must have been struck at a singular phenomenon which has not escaped the notice of anti-Catholic writers. Macauley, in his review of Ranke's history of the Popes, says: "It is surely remarkable that neither the moral revolution of the 18th century, nor the moral counter revolution of the 19 century, should in any perceptible degree have added to the domain of Protestantism. During the former period whatever was lost to Catholicism was lost also to Christianity. During the latter whatever was regained by Catholic countries was regained also by Catholicism. It is a most remarkable fact," he adds, "that no Christian nation which did not adopt the principles of the Reformation before the end of the 16 century should ever have adopted them. Catholic communities have since that time become infidel and Catholic again, but none has become Protestant."

The Reformation came at an epoch of political transformation. Old systems of political life were

passing away to be replaced by new forms, the world had grown tired of and at last rebelled against the feudal form of government, and carried its hatred towards every institution or body of men identified with it, or wedded to its perpetuity.. And since the external regime of the great Christian society, and many of its dignitaries, especially in Germany, were for centuries identified with feudalism, the new movement towards the Monarchical system was from the outset hostile to the Church. Churchmen looked on the sudden transition as prejudicial to their interests. They desired a gradual development into a more perfect form according as the wants of each people and country required it, and under the influence of the Church, from which Europe up to that time had received its education. Civil society, like all things human, is susceptible of change, and as every government ought to be in its outward form adapted to the wants of the people for whom it is established, and whose temporal interests it seeks to promote, its form depends on the nature of the interests it endeavors to secure. One form may be adapted to a low stage of civilization, securing order and tranquility among an unenlightened and uneducated people; another form may be better adapted to secure the same results among those who have reached a high order of refinement and civilization. A form suited to the wants of children is looked upon as a despotism when applied to men full grown.

The Church in Her Internal Life

is independent of any particular form. For three hundred years it existed without the assistance of the civil powers, yea, in spite of their efforts to crush her. In fact, she thrives more on opposition than on protection. In the transformation of civil society, up to the ninth century, her relations with the State were not so intimate that she should be affected by

them. When the vast empire of Charlemagne was dismembered, a form of political life, known under the name of *Feudalism*, was established on its ruins. The relations of the Church with Feudalism were of the most intimate character. The Roman Pontiff was the most potent Feudal lord in Christendom. Princes received from his hand the investiture of their kingdoms, and the Emperor himself took the oath of fealty to him. He was chosen arbiter between contending parties, and weak rulers placed their territories within his safe keeping. Not the Roman Pontiffs alone, but also numerous Bishops and Abbots throughout Europe, held the title and its privileges. In Germany, four out of seven of the Prince electors of the Empire were Bishops, viz. of Salzeburg, Cologne, Trier and Mentz—and temporal sovereigns of the finest portions of the land. This extensive power came to the Church from the piety and munificence of her children. She had brought them to the knowledge of the faith of Christ; she had opened to their possession the store-house of sacred and profane learning. Amidst the general chaos in which all society was plunged, she alone remained unchanged, and when at last society settled down to pursue the interests for which Providence has destined it, it confided to her sacred trust the body of laws which governed it and gave her a share of its temporal possessions. Thus the Church, in her Bishops and Abbots, became the most important element of Feudalism. Now it must strike every one that such an order of things could not suddenly be changed, especially when powerful ecclesiastical rulers sought to avert a change without great detriment to the spiritual interests of the Church.

As Far Back as the Thirteenth Century

the Emperors of the house of Hohenstaufen sought to centralize, in a great monarchy, all civil power wield-

ed by the feudal lords of Germany. The Church, whose temporal interests were connected with the maintenance of feudalism, gave its powerful aid, both spiritual and temporal, to the feudal barons, and monarchy was, for a moment, crushed. The desire was not extinct. In the 16th century the great national monarchies began to form. But the influence of the Roman Pontiff had been broken. He no longer wielded the ample powers which he had at his command in the contest with the great Frederick. The long residence of the Pope at Avignon; the great schism of the West during which two, and sometimes three, rival Pontiffs claimed themselves successors of St. Peter, had divided and weakened the allegiance which Christian nations owed him; the principles proclaimed in the Council of Basle, which had been studiously circulated among the German people; all tended to diminish his authority and deprive him of that immense moral influence with which at one time he swayed the destinies of Europe. Add to this that at the very time the princes of Germany were shielding Luther and encouraging him in his opposition against the Church, an estrangement took place between the Pope and the only man who was able to uphold the cause of society and the Church, Charles V. He, too, was viewed with suspicion by the German princes. They viewed his increasing power with anxiety for their own. He was always looked on as a stranger. Although he passed the most vigorous and efficient part of his life in Germany, his thoughts and interests were centered in the prosperity of a land, the character of whose people, their traditions and their language, were wholly different from those of the people with whom he lived. Various causes, all political, contributed to insure the success of any cause hostile to the existing condition of political life. The hostility of the Teutonic peoples was not in the beginning to the Church as a great spiritual power, not to any particular doctrine or body of doctrine,

but to the Church as the most powerful element of the feudal system of government.

As Bishop Spalding writes: "When Luther made no-Popery his war-cry he but gave utterance to the feelings of hatred and bitterness with which the hearts of multitudes were swelling. And when at length the name of Protestant was hit upon, as by chance, it was recognized on all sides that this word embodied the very soul of the whole movement, which was a protest against the Pope both as a feudal sovereign and as the Vicar of Christ; and this protest was all the more vehement, because, during the quarrels and confusion of the past hundred years men had grown accustomed to look upon the Papacy as something extraneous to the Church and Christian religion. Religious passion may be excited by hatred as well as by faith and love, and it was hate and not faith and love which fired the zeal of the Reformers and their followers." ("Lectures and Discourses.")

The Church does not look on any particular form of civil life as absolutely necessary to carry out her divine mission on earth. Instituted for peoples living under every form of government, she is specially wedded to none. She had existed and flourished before the name of feudalism was heard, and she exists and flourishes to-day when not one vestige of the system remains. But the Church was not instituted for angels, but for men; and includes in her constitution a human element which is susceptible of change. The two elements should not be confounded, nor should hostility to the human variable element engender hostility to the divine. The Church, in her Sacraments and in her doctrines, is unchangeable.

From the Day She Was Founded

by her Divine Master, to the end of time, she will announce the same revealed truths and administer the

same life-giving Sacraments. But as certain relations must arise between her as a visible society and other societies, there is introduced an element, variable and temporary, which takes its form and color from the ever-changing condition of the societies upon which she is called to exercise her influence. To attempt to clothe those relations with the permanency and stability which belong to Divine faith, or oppose any innovation in them, is to condemn the Church to sterility. In the sixteenth century Churchmen had acquired, under the feudal system, a vast influence in temporal matters, which they were fearful of losing in any transformation which might take place. Their vested rights were secured, or so they imagined, by the continuance of the system. But the temper of the age had changed; the tide of public opinion, the aspirations of nationality were against the system, and Protestantism caught the tide at its flow and was carried along with it. It was triumphant during the period of transition, which lasted scarcely half a century. When the change was accomplished the movement ceased to make any further progress. The line which, at the close of the Thirty Years' War, divided Protestant from Catholic countries, is the same which divides them to-day—a fact difficult of explanation if we admit what non-Catholic writers would fain make us believe, that the Reformation was a religious movement towards a higher and nobler life; that it inaugurated a new era in the history of mankind, and yet the progress and enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should have added nothing to its domain.

It was, therefore, essentially a practical movement. It cared nothing about doctrine. It was more of a rebellion than a heresy. It had no desire to abolish abuses. They who were the foremost in creating them were the very ones who first left the Church. It was, in its leaders and promoters, a revolt against historic Christianity for purposes of lust and aggrandizement.

It never had, even in its least imperfect forms, anything like the character which the Church of Christ manifested when it made its first appearance in the world. It instinctively sought the protection of the State, and its rise is marked by a cringing subserviency to the secular powers, and wherever it retained anything like compactness and unity it owed them to the State. History will bear me out in the statement that the alliance between the sects born of the Reformation and the State to which they owed their success, was the most potent cause of the extinction of liberty in nearly every country of Europe. In all the States of Europe that accepted the principles of the Reformation, the civil ruler held both spiritual and temporal power, and liberty of conscience was declared a crime of high treason. At the beginning of the 17th century nearly every country in Europe had assumed the form of an absolute monarchy. The restraints which, in the days of the feudal system, existed in the authority of the chief ruler, had disappeared. There was no longer an appeal possible from the unjust exactions of the civil power to the interpreter of a higher law, before whose decisions all controversies were formerly wont to cease. The monarch became the interpreter of the law of God and gave it the meaning his interests suggested. Certainly this is a strange consequence of a movement that is held to have been a successful effort for the freedom of the human mind and the beginning of the golden age of Liberty.

But We Need Feel No Surprise

that such was the result. Any man who gives the subject a moment's thought will be convinced that dogmatic Protestantism, as it was elaborated in the brain of its founder, could not construct a theory or system of progress for man. It is not only essentially unprogressive, but essentially incompatible with progress. It was founded on the destruction of the

fundamental principle of progress, namely, free will in man and the partial goodness of human nature. Maintain that there is no free will in man, maintain the total depravity of human nature, as the first Reformers did, and you dry up the fountains of all progress. Man becomes the victim of fate, his whole life controlled by a destiny that nothing can change, no wickedness can mar, no goodness improve, no apathy deteriorate, no industry ameliorate. He floats along the current of a stream; he is carried by an irresistible power; all energy is repressed, because useless; there is nothing to stimulate ambition, or to reward labor; there is a reward without an effort, a punishment without an offense. That Protestant nations have, since the Reformation, attained to a high order of material progress, is an evidence how little hold the principles of the Reformation ever had on the intellect of the world.

In every order of things, effects must bear an analogy to the causes that produce them. And if the movement of the 16th century is to be considered a movement from despotism to liberty, from intellectual servitude to freedom of thought, from superstition to the pure worship of truth, it is a phenomenon which writers will find difficult to explain that it was followed by the downfall of every free constitution in Europe; by the introduction into the statute books of that principle of religious intolerance that the prince has a right to impose his own religion on his people: "*Cujus regio illius et religio.*" That it was followed by a breaking up of the religious unity of Christendom into more sects than there are articles of faith, each one proclaiming itself the true religion of Christ; that it was followed by the gradual yet steady elimination of nearly every article of Christian faith, so that at the present day the religious controversy is not between Catholicity and Protestantism, but between Christianity and Infidelity.

I have scarcely alluded to the character of Martin

Luther. He was rather an accident than the moving cause of the Reformation. He came upon an age when everything was ripe for a rebellion against the authority of the Christian Church. He did not produce it. It produced him and others like him. He caught if you will the spirit of the age and thought its thoughts and spoke its language. He found a mass of materials ready for the burning. He applied the torch and set them on fire. His power was destructive not constructive. The consequences of his work are thus described by the great Schiller: "It ended in a devastating war of thirty years, which depopulated territories, destroyed harvests, and laid villages and cities in ashes from the interior of Bohemia to the mouth of the Scheld, from the banks of the Po to the shores of the German ocean; a war in which many combatants perished and which extinguished the sparks of civilization in Germany for half a century, and reduced the reviving morality of the people to the condition of former barbarian wilderness." No wonder the mild Melancthon wept over the evils which followed in its track: "The Elbe," said he, "with all its waves could not furnish tears enough to weep over the miseries of the distracted Reformation." Arrogant and defiant before his enemies when their hands were tied, Luther cringed at the feet of every petty prince who had any power to injure him.

The Agent of God, as he called himself, his public and private discourses were so scurrilous and indecent that they must be classed among the obscenities of literature, and no man who glories in the so-called Reformation would read to his children the language of the great purifier of his religion, which came from his lips as he sat with his boon companions almost every evening for fifteen years in the Black Eagle Tavern of Wittenberg, drank his beer, applied to the Pope the most opprobrious epithets, and held up to the laughter of his friends, in words too filthy to be spoken, the most sacred institutions of Christianity.

No wonder the Reformed Church of Zurich, of which Zuinglius was the founder, wrote of him: "It is clearer than the sun, and cannot be denied, that no mortal ever wrote more foully, more uncivilly or more indecently than Luther, and this beyond all limits of Christian modesty and sobriety."

I do not wish to distract from or lessen in the least the qualities of character without which he could not have occupied or retained his position as a popular leader of men.

I willingly admit that his intellectual attainments were of a very high order. He was a great popular orator, spoke a language which people understood, was gifted with a voice whose ringing tones went to the limits of the largest gatherings, a power of homely illustration which provoked attention and created sympathy, and a manner which enkindled enthusiasm, since he appealed to the national prejudices of the Teutonic race against the Latin. He appealed to passions easily awakened, with difficulty allayed; passions of lust and rapine.

He engendered hate in the hearts of his followers, not love. He lured them on by promises of earthly gains. But he did not tell what they had to do in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

His energy and industry were unbounded, and brought into play all his mental resources. I am willing to subscribe to the judgment of the eminent Frederick von Schlegel on his abilities:

"In the first place, it is evident of itself that a man who accomplished so mighty a revolution in the human mind, and in his age, could have been endowed with no common powers of character. Even his writings display an astonishing boldness and energy of thought, united with a spirit of impetuous, passionate and convulsive enthusiasm. The latter qualities are indeed not very compatible with a prudent, enlightened and dispassionate judgment."

But the question is not; Was he a great orator, or

a great popular leader? The question is: Was he a man raised up, in the providence of God, to reform religion, to teach men the beauties of virtue, to lift men above the influence of debasing passions? Was he a prophet whose lips were touched by a fire from heaven, that they might be pure to announce the message of an all holy God? Was there anything in his life or character to make men think of the meek and lowly Savior of the world, Who came in gentleness and poverty, and in His blood founded the Christian religion? Did he reproduce the traits of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, to whom he is likened; and upon whose theology he is said to have founded his religious system?

“From whose sweet harp flew forth
Immortal harmonies, of power to still
All passions born on earth,
And draw the ardent will
Its destiny of goodness to fulfill.”

Was he of the number of those of whom St. Paul writes in his letter to the Hebrews, who walked by faith and not by sight, and, trusting in God, they knew that in due time the victory would come? Oh, no. History has been of late too busy with his life to make such comparisons any longer more than a mere mockery.

But I must bring this already too protracted discourse to a close. Four hundred years have passed and the effects of this revolution are still visible. The articles of faith, though brought in as an afterthought, which served as the intellectual basis of the sects, which sprung up in the track of the Reformation, have disappeared one by one from the intellectual life of their adherents. Individualism in religion has produced its logical effects—the destruction of all faith. In the sixteenth century men denied the Church. In the nineteenth every Christian dogma is rejected and the very Scriptures are held by the majority of men

outside the Catholic Church as mere historical works with no character of sanctity and inspiration.

Religion has been taken out of the domain of intellect and has become a feeling or sentiment. There is a tendency everywhere to eliminate more and more of the Catholic Dogma and to reduce the supernatural order to the natural. The idea that the Church of Christ is a divine institution with authority to teach and govern; the Kingdom of God set up in the world, to bring to man through its teachings the knowledge of God's law, and through the grace of its Sacraments—the divine helps without which he was created—is rejected with disdain as a doctrine antiquated, a remnant of Popish superstition, which simple-minded people may still entertain, but which men living in the full blaze of the progress and enlightenment of the nineteenth century cannot seriously consider. But the Church against whose authority Luther rebelled, is still in the world. Dead she is not, but living. Not one article of her creed has been dropped or modified. Sending her missionaries to the East and West, as in the days when all men who bore the name of Christian acknowledged her as their spiritual Mother. Filling the entire world with her presence, and, amidst the endless religious dissensions, becoming every day more numerous—challenging the admiration of men by her incomparable unity.

There was never a time in her long history when her Supreme Pontiff, though despoiled of his earthly possessions and abandoned by Kings and Princes, had a stronger grasp on the love and affection of his children. There never was a time when the august successor of the Fisherman, from the very solitariness of his position, announced with greater clearness and independence the duties of rulers and subjects, denouncing the tyranny and unjust exactions of the one, and the communistic excesses of the other. An independence of all human authorities in the exercise of

its right to proclaim the truth of Christ to all men,
which has always been the secret of the greatness of

“That Crown august, which, like a star,
O'er all things and through all things shone,
Was regal, feudal, popular,
Was friend to each, and slave to none.”

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