

THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

“CHRISTIANITY is a fundamental condition of modern civilization.” The design of these pages is to bring into view its influence upon the State. It has been done before, and done ably; but a wholesome truth can bear repetition, even if the changes emerging from the current course of events did not furnish fresh illustrations and applications.

These influences properly are indirect and pure, not those flowing from the union of Church and State. Such a union may appear under one of three forms.

A theocracy—where the Church dominates the State—is today unknown, at least among a people of any name. A government of this kind God enjoined upon His ancient people, under circumstances that cannot reappear; and we are to distinguish between the supernatural order of their polity and the natural order of the polity of other nations. From the Israelites was to arise a spiritual Prince, to whom the history of the nation was to bear witness. A theocratic regime, that better answered this extraordinary and singularly exceptional end, is not a precedent for the same form of government under ordinary and totally changed conditions; and the bearing of the new law seems altogether another way.

In Russia, the State rules the Church; for the Czar nominates the members of the Holy Synod, over whose deliberations he presides, and whose decrees he ratifies. The centre of spiritual and political authority, he is theoretically the most august sovereign in Europe, yet the outlook is promising neither for the throne nor the altar. Nowhere is treason so thoroughly entrenched. The reigning emperor, a prisoner within his own realms, is ceaselessly guarded against the hand of the political assassin, by which his father fell. As for the Church, her attitude is neither spiritual nor aggressive. Despoiled of her wealth by Peter I. and Catherine II, her clergy, outside of a few centres, barely subsist. Serfdom, indeed, no longer exists, yet ignorance and idleness abound, and there is not a feature to recommend the existing form of rule.

The union between Church and State, which is more usual in modern history, is regulated by a Concordat. It is a treaty in regard to the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, between a temporal ruler and the head of a Church; and supposed to be necessary when the former finds himself confronted by a powerful

religious organization. Under the most favorable circumstances—where the people are a practical unit in religious belief—the *à priori* grounds against its utility are sustained by experience. To governments the administration of ecclesiastical affairs has been vast and vexatious; but the balance of disadvantage has been greatly on the Church's side. Support for the clergy, which is her consideration in the pact, is very dearly bought.* A State Church, especially to those in authority, tempts to formalism and hypocrisy, and "chills the life in her breast." A State Church so far forth surrenders her independence, is compelled often to sacrifice to state exigencies the better interests of religion, and retards development according to her true genius.

Hence, as the political world is now consolidated, either in fact or in its tendencies, which seem growing daily in intensity and loud utterance, the Church is not unwilling to accept the situation, and to allow the State to go free from what men call the "compulsory authority of religion." But she has a right to demand that this new polity must be founded in honesty and truth; and that if the State cease to be religious and Christian, it must not thereby become irreligious and anti-Christian. If it choose to devote itself solely to the development and promotion of material wealth and earthly advantages, it must not interfere with the Church, whose duty it is to make use of spiritual means to further man's best interests and eternal warfare.

So, it would appear, our Lord Himself taught. We speak here of His teachings as bearing upon the political order in His day. The subject of human law, it has been observed, and the relation of His mission to the State, must have been often in His consciousness. The immense pressure brought to bear upon Him, to declare Himself a temporal prince, is the ground of Renan's theory of the Temptation. In resisting the national aspirations of His countrymen, so profound and universal, He drew upon Himself complete isolation, and sympathy for His loneliness and admiration for His calm, heroic courage, mingle in the tribute to His unparalleled character. Yet, with these environments, He not even suggested a single State law. He disclosed the pith of moral and religious truth with a simplicity, depth, and precision "that leave nothing more to be said," but is silent upon human law and politics. For righting wrongs, reforming abuses, and the general discharge of political duty He sought to fit men by ennobling the interior motives. The independence of Church and State He expressly intimates: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's"—a memorable sentiment, that statesmen may still profitably ponder. Such are His teach-

ings, and our own great and growing country, where religion flourishes but forms no alliance with the State, illustrates their wisdom.

The indirect and pure influences of Christianity upon the State are as valuable as they are powerful and far-reaching. These are gathered under two heads: (1) The ideal of character which the example of Christ has originated; (2) The bearing of the doctrine of a Future Life upon social order.

A people cannot rise above their ideals. Religious ideas have been the dominant ideas in nations; and, as these ideas have created their ideals, we find nations standing, in the order of advancement, in strict accordance with their conception of religion. Where the religious intuition has received an earthy development, as among pagan nations, the ideas are of the earth. The ultra-fierce temper of the ancient Scandinavians, for example, accords with their belief, that those who enter heaven—their ideal characters—engage in perpetual war, and, after daily combat, repair to a spacious hall, to eat plentifully of the flesh of the wild boar, and drink beer from the skulls of their enemies.

The superiority of European civilization to that of the East has been properly attributed to a superiority in respect to religious ideas; and for this, it may be said in passing, Europe may be remotely indebted to a poet's pen. To the Homeric poems, sung throughout Greece, must be chiefly traced that martial spirit which enabled so small a state to repel, from the gateway to Europe, the colossal invasions of Persia, and save that continent from an oriental civilization, and an obstruction to the entrance of Christianity. Mark the difference in material development, and every advanced characteristic of a nation, between Turkey and those neighboring Christian powers, whose mutual jealousies are the sole guarantee for her existence. No cause is found either in the age or character of the Turks. In times comparatively recent they issued forth from that fruitful source of ethnic inundation, central Asia, and, before the faith of which they became the representative had time to bear permanent national fruit, won, as Saracens in the East and Moors in the West, a brilliant record in war and in literature. The decadence is due to an inferior religion and a low ideal.

Mahometanism teaches that slaying an unbeliever is an act of piety—that all knowledge is despicable save that found in the Koran—that polygamy is lawful—that heaven is a paradise of voluptuous joys, where the gross pleasures of earth are but enlarged and intensified. The necessary issue for the Turk has been a cruel, sensual, unlettered characteristic, and national decay.

Christianity offers the highest possible ideal; since, unlike a human science elaborated from crude beginnings, it came at once

perfect from the hand of God. The founder of Christianity we adore as divine, not by way of mission or authority merely, but in His essential nature. His religion has received no earthly or national elaboration. In anticipation, perhaps, of such a cavil, it was decreed that the political destruction of the people among whom it arose should be contemporaneous with its origin. Its teachings, traced by the very finger of God, remain unchanged and unchangeable. Some of these teachings (such as the essential brotherhood of men), taught by the Church from the first, the state is beginning slowly to recognize—an evidence that Christianity has led, not followed, civilization. Others (as the precepts respecting charity) the best school of modern criticism, while commending them as sublime illustrations of Christian virtue, puts aside as wholly impracticable within the domain of the State—an evidence that political science is to receive further accessions from Christian ethics. Preserved throughout its course by the divine agency that created it, Christianity maintains an integral existence in the world as the visible and complete manifestation of God, and furnishes a pre-eminent ideal—an ideal which, diffused through its sacred writings, gathers with unequalled splendor in the character of its Founder.

The perfection of character stands in the exhibition of contrasted virtues. Pascal, therefore, rates Epaminondas first among ancient heroes, because he combined the extremes of gentleness and valor. Jesus Christ, appearing at a point where three strongly marked peoples met, excludes the peculiarities of each, the spiritual pride of the Jew, the intellectual pride of the Greek, the political pride of the Roman, and reveals a character unequalled in its poise and sublimity. He touched at every point the circle of virtue, embracing all its contrasts. His purity and self-abnegation, His fortitude and composure, the strange reserve of power displayed by His ease in discomfiting the premeditated assaults of the subtlest adversaries, the simplicity, tenderness, and penetration of His teachings, which a child may understand, yet philosophers explore without finding their depths—are the vestibule of a temple within whose courts dwells God. His Person, wherein human nature is allied with the divine, reveals man's essential worth and dignity. In His mediatorial office we behold the essential brotherhood of the race, where, in the necessary elements of being, all are equals, and where, therefore, there is liberty, under guidance of law. His example is humility, moderation, self-restraint.

The ideal, therefore, which Christ has originated, is that of a freeman, conscious of a noble nature and a noble heritage, guided by the sympathies of a universal brotherhood, with passion restrained, appetite subdued.

Towards this ideal, within the pale of a divine society endowed with spiritual means, His followers consciously tend. But without the Church, upon the mass of men in a Christian state, the Christian ideal powerfully impresses itself. Character turns upon environments. The infant of a savage, transferred to an enlightened home, will lose the traces of savagery, and assume the hue of the surroundings. In a Christian state—where Christianity is generally recognized, where Christian sentiments, issuing from custom, law, literature, and religious institutions, glide into the common thought of the people—in such a state skeptic and anti-Christian unwillingly yield to the environments. They unconsciously take on the enveloping atmosphere, and become fashioned on a Christian model, more or less realized, and by whatever name called.

The influence of this ideal, entering everywhere, consciously or unconsciously, into the details of public and private life, has been powerfully felt by the State. By teaching princes and magistrates a sense of accountability, it has greatly lessened personal rule. It has humanized the action of governments and turned legislation towards the needs of the multitude. It has raised the subject and liberated the slave, not by abruptly breaking legal relations, but by a constant upward pressure—by creating a humane public opinion, the prelude to law.

Whatever good has been effected by infidel advocates of human rights, we freely own. That their teachings have been commonly associated with violent agencies, cannot be denied. To those whose eyes are clear to see the movement of the forces that form and sustain society, what these turbulent reformers have done for real liberty and sound government, is insignificant by the side of the political benefits which the spirit of Christianity has gradually achieved. The French Revolution (for example), conducted in the name of liberty, was a state of insanity, and dates, it is thought, a downward course in Gallic tendencies. Voltaire began the work, followed up by Rousseau in his "Contrat Social," "Nouvelle Heloise," and "Confessions." "Seduced by their sophisms, enchanted by the magic of the style, the higher classes of society, followed by all France, went madly astray. Two souvenirs remain of that period, the goddess Reason enthroned on the altar of Notre Dame, the scaffold dripping with blood in the public squares." The teachings of these apostles of liberty penetrated Hayti, the fairest colony France ever owned. The negro slaves, indeed, became free—but alas! how? Through scenes of uproar, butchery, and beastly outrage, unparalleled in the annals of the world. What a contrast between the course of affairs in this island and that in Jamaica, where, under the ripened Christian sentiment of England, the slaves, without material disturbance, were gradually emancipated

through a term of apprenticeship, and an award made to the owners of more than six millions of pounds! The subsequent histories of the islands are parallel with these methods of emancipation.

In closing this section, we call attention to two facts, emphasized by one of the best minds of the age: (1) that the sensible advance made in the religious character of Europe within the past hundred years is in correspondence with an improved political condition—with a more refined moral sense in individuals and nations—with a more humane conduct of war—with less open bribery in legislative bodies—and with less dissimulation in diplomatic intercourse; (2) that the course of Christianity in history is, after all, one of victory and glory—that the most powerful states now profess it—that the feeblest European state is the anti-Christian one—and that, should the Christian powers combine their physical forces, they could speedily subdue the world. It is the rise of nations towards a grand ideal.

The discussion of the remaining point—the bearing of the doctrine of a future state upon social order—brings into view those forces which, under divers names, are menacing the present structure of society.

Nihilism, by which Russian radicalism is commonly designated, is refused as a name by its adherents, who style themselves “revolutionists.” Originating in the ideas brought to the front by the French Revolution, it is ambitious to excel its parent. For years it has found favor among the young men and “short-haired” girls in the schools and universities of Russia. The attempt upon the life of Alexander II. in 1879, and his assassination two years later, rendered it notorious. It is a species of religion—its god being the “suffering people”; and its followers, in spreading the doctrines, show the zeal of devotees. To gain the vantage-ground of sympathy, Russians of birth and education, under assumed names, will take menial positions, as cooks and workmen, and descend with their mission to the side of the laborer and mechanic. In philosophy, it is materialism; in politics, radicalism, advanced to frightful extremes. In one aspect it is idealistic; for the visions of the Nihilists, founded upon the reorganization of society, discount the utopias. The details of this reorganization, however, they will not enter upon. Nothing (whence the name *Nihilism*) is to be done prior to the destruction of the present order, and this destruction the Nihilist proposes to make complete. A supreme pessimist, he sees only evil everywhere, and his doctrine is—down with the State, the Church, the King, and God, even to the ground.

Nihilism, as a whole, is peculiar to the Russian mind, which is

given to extremes, and to the despotic character of Russian politics, and a monster so odious could scarcely appear elsewhere. It may not be too late for political liberty to arrest it. The Russians, as a whole—especially the lower orders—are, or at least have been, distinguished for religious and political veneration; and had Alexander III. signalized his accession to the throne by granting a constitutional government, the back of this hideous conspiracy would in all likelihood have been broken.

Socialism is too vague a word for accurate definition. As a modified form of Communism, it assigns land and the implements of production to associations or the State; the fruits of labor, to the individual. Communism embodies a definite idea. It is wrong, it says, for one to possess wealth and live in jovial splendor merely by taking the trouble to be born, while others around him beg. It, therefore, takes from him who has, to give to him who has not, maintaining a perfect equality in the distribution of the means of living. The logical sequence is the universality of the idea. For to have things in common, men must labor in common—do tasks authoritatively imposed—lest individual freedom create an excess of production in this or that direction. Lest, too, the individual secretly use that portion of his product belonging to others, men must consume in common; and the family, as one writer expresses it, becomes transferred to the public square. In a word, under an enforced equality, pressing every thing to a level, all—goods, persons, education, love, religion—must be in common.

To effect this, the State is the necessary agent, armed with extreme authority, and furnished with an immense capital, to be drawn from no other source than the unprofitable spirit of coercive fraternity. Such, essentially, is the plan of society presented by Robert Owen, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc, Leroux, and others.

Successful organizations, founded on the "in common" principle, have existed. But these have been either voluntary associations, with free ingress and egress; or religious communities, distinguished by the spirit of discipline and self-denial; and neither has force as a precedent for the State.

The fundamental error of Communism is the attempt to reach equality by suppressing liberty. The sole equality among men resides in liberty. Equality in the state is regulated liberty. Outside of liberty there are only inequalities in the individual. These will be recognized by sound statecraft, and given free play, creating here and there *those* surpluses of wealth, essential to industry, commerce, science, and art. Communism, starting from a capital fallacy, finds its end in the slavery of the individual and destruction of natural rights, under the artificial regime of a limitless

despotism. Of late years, it has been assuming, more and more, the form of political conspiracy.

Under a supposable oppressive state of affairs it might acquire a temporary ascendancy; but such a monster can never permanently influence the social order. A meeting in one of our cities, presided over by a negro woman, the wife of a white communist, and met to laud the London explosions, and glorify "a few cents' worth of a little hog's grease and a little nitric acid," as the avenging agent for the "fourth estate"—is the glimpse of a picture that ordinary human nature cannot be made to fancy. Unless the entire history of morals and of political thought is without a lesson, the instincts of the heart, and the deductions of reason, confirmed by the widest experience, will rouse the average public conscience to reject the communistic doctrine in any of its essential forms.

The advocates of revolutionary Communism are comparatively few, yet admit it we must, that among the working classes generally there is unrest, great and growing—a fact which has procured a hearing for those ultra plans of human society which, in modern times, have been drawn from Plato's "Republic"; and it requires wise recognition to avoid outbreaks and infinite trouble. Popular education has roused, among the masses, an ambitious spirit, and multiplied artificial wants, while, under the current conditions of labor, the poor have become relatively poorer. The working classes were told, in the pinching days of the past, that the application of steam would so increase production as to put the industrious man beyond a reasonable fear of want. The result has been bitterly disappointing.

It appears that as nations advance in wealth, the space between rich and poor widens. The profitable use of steam requires expensive machinery. Competition and narrow margins extend individual operations and outlay; and the benefits of steam force have been concentrating, more and more, in the hands of capitalists. No blame can attach to capital. At the peril of existence, it has been impelled towards such an issue. It is the outcome of its own powers and antagonisms.

The superior intelligence usually found associated with wealth, stimulated by the keen emulation of the age, has naturally won from this powerful steam agent disproportionate results for the moneyed class; and labor unions became necessary to save workingmen from being ground to powder between the unavoidable rivalries of wealth. Confessedly, the richest among nations, where laws have been modified in every way to cheapen food, and where steam has wrought its best work, is England. Yet the late Postmaster-General of that country, an authority on labor questions, thus

speaks of the condition of workingmen: "A majority of the people of England have a severe struggle for existence, and no inconsiderable minority live in abject misery and in degrading poverty. One out of every twenty is a pauper. To a great proportion of our laboring classes a life of incessant toil yields no other result than an old age of dependent mendicancy. In many rural districts horses are stabled far more comfortably than laborers are housed; and in cities the poor are so crowded and huddled together that in countless cases families herd together in a single room." The statement is true, in the main, respecting the condition of workingmen throughout Europe and in America.

Sympathy, too, between employer and employed has almost disappeared. In times past the manufacturer dwelt near his workmen, and was, so to speak, the head of a family among them. He now commonly lives far away, seldom sees his men, is personally unknown to most of them,—“the relation between them is commercial only, and labor is bought and sold like merchandise.”

The workman broods over his social position. He finds himself stationary, or relatively losing ground, in the midst of the manifold inventions of the age, which wealth appropriates to augment wealth, and build up vast corporations, whose heads are hedged about with antechambers and ushers, after the manner of kings. The feeling is deep-set that the logical development of society is against him; and while he may own that there must be material inequality, yet he cannot be persuaded that the actual inequality is not disproportionate, and that, through State agency, ways should not be provided to make some of the redundance of the super-rich ease his lot.

In this sense "Socialism" has ground to rest on; its aims are pure and lofty; and its adherents are the multitude. It presents the problem of the age, and, unless wise measures of betterment are devised, the fear is that this vast body may, in a moment of despair and madness, go over to the ultra-Socialists, and seek relief through the violent overthrow of existing order.

This is a question, primarily, for the State. Let us point out, briefly, how Christianity comes to its aid.

If Christianity, in advancing the estimate of personal worth, advances sensitiveness to wrong and injustice, it applies the palliative in the Future Life it reveals.

The heaven of the Christians is a final home, which God has made worthy of Himself, where His throne is fixed and His unveiled glory displayed. The individual will remain himself, but himself wonderfully expanded—life unfolding under conditions as far superior to the present as these are to those of life before birth. Made possible by the Blood of the Cross, its attainment is due to no accident of wealth or station, but to the presence of certain in-

terior affections—as love, joy, peace, long-suffering—which constitute the spiritual life, and whose cultivation is alike within the reach of all.

The vivid apprehension of this truth finds expression in the confessors and martyrs. From such spirits the faith descends, with diminishing effect, through the various grades of Christians, and passes out, as an impression, into the general mass in a Christian State, unconsciously influencing character.

Its total effect upon social order is prodigious. The absence of all thought in respect to a future state and its dread sanctions, would be the harbinger of “political disintegration, and rise of individual passion and anarchy.” It would render the rule of life utterly of the world, exacting towards others, indulgent towards self. It would retire the nobler tendencies, and make the animal emphatic, stimulating those tendencies towards brute force that only brute force can keep subdued.

The general presence of the thought sheds a calming, quieting influence upon society. The body of conscious Christians have a share in shaping public opinion far exceeding their proportion of the population, and their faith must here be taken fully into account. Not only does it promise an offset to the inequalities and ills of life, but sees in the endurance of these ills an enrichment of the reward. Hence, suffering is the expression of religion; and the union of the individual streams of Christian sentiment sends a powerful and preserving current through society.

But beyond a conscious personal faith, the general impression of a future life, entering into the habitual thought of a people has a material political bearing. It strengthens a principle which England illustrates more, perhaps, than any other modern nation—the organizing principle, or patience to work out reforms in a circumspect and orderly way, rather than resort to violent methods. When reforms are effected in this manner, they promise to be sound as well as abiding. Time and discussion test their merits, and settle them in the popular consciousness.

In fine, the influence of Christianity upon the State lies in general lifting tendencies, whose action is gradual, yet, acting continuously, aggregate vast results. Necessarily it is a movement toward reforms. Where reforms become practicable, the tendencies are towards rational and pacific means. Otherwise, the tendencies are to suffer. The conclusion, therefore, is fairly warrantable that, if a social crisis be near—such as the logical course of affairs apparently threatens—the wisdom of the solution will largely turn upon the prevalence and purity of the Christian element.

Let the discussion close with the following reflections from Bluntschli: That Christianity is a force which, at the end of two thousand years we find still spreading, and with to-day more vitality

than ever before to extend itself; that the opponents of Christianity speak of it now with more respect than they did a hundred years ago; that the assaults of criticism have revealed an unexpected wealth of spiritual and moral force; that Christianity has fairly kept abreast of intellectual progress; that it was a deceptive thought that modern civilization has so far gone ahead of Christianity as to be able to do without it; that in its essential idea there is a wealth and power which has not yet attained its highest development; and that its opponents should learn to respect a system which has guided them in their intellectual advance, and infinitely promoted their civilization.

THE CRISIS IN ENGLAND.

WHEN all is said and done, no doubt remains on the mind of any reasonable and impartial man in England that the recent defeat of the Liberals was a godsend to the Gladstone government. It seems to be a law of English administrations that they shall, when the fifth year of their existence comes, have fallen so low in the estimate of the English nation that any change is regarded as an improvement. The Gladstone government, instead of being an exception, was a striking exemplification of this law. It would scarcely be possible to mention an administration which in modern times had committed mistakes more disastrous, had met fortunes so stormy, had violated all the promises and pledges of its inauguration so absolutely. The loss of its prestige without had had the usual effect of provoking dissension within. It is the universal experience of political parties that while success brings union, defeat brings division. So it was with the Gladstone government. For several months past no people have been more disgusted with the government of Mr. Gladstone than many of the members of that government itself. Composed of heterogeneous elements, it required but small cause to bring about collision of principle and still more of temper. Between men like Mr. Chamberlain, on the one side, and Sir William Harcourt and Lord Spencer, on the other, there are differences of opinion almost as complete as those that separate the ordinary Liberal from the ordinary Conservative. Then Mr. Chamberlain is not a man to conciliate political opponents by personal demeanor. He is a man of