

Addendum

614.

Lecture, 1866, *The Cincinnati Commercial*, Feb. 18, 1866

Lecture delivered in Mozart Hall, Cincinnati, on the evening of February 18, 1866. This lecture was written down, as delivered, by a reporter for the Cincinnati Commercial and was run in the next day's issue. We thank William Kurtz, who is currently writing a biography of the bishop's brother, General William S. Rosecrans, for pointing this out to us. Dr. Kurtz is Managing Director and Digital Historian at the John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History, University of Virginia. Item 536 above is the only part of the lecture that was previously available to us.

Mozart Hall was "densely packed" for the lecture.

Our Country, from a Catholic Point of View

The distinguished speaker was presented by Arch-bishop Purcell, in a few pertinent remarks, in which he referred to the recent murderous assault upon that gentleman; and in announcing his subject Bishop Rosecrans observed that it was the result of thoughts partly arising out of the circumstance alluded to, and not the culling of other Catholics' ideas and views.

The first part of the lecture was devoted to a clear and comprehensive view of the extent, greatness and resources of the United States; a contrast of the new with the old world, and a logical argument for the necessity of forgetting the irritating circumstances of the war, and uniting as one common people in the development of the wealth of the land by the hand of industry. He defined true Democracy as not pulling down the exalted, but in raising up the lowly; and then passed on the principal part of his lecture,, which we produce entire.

The American Catholic is justly proud and gratified with the liberty the Church enjoys in his country. Not only we have the paper liberty of the Constitution, which forbids any distinction to be made between religious denominations, but we have, practically and substantially, full freedom to practice our faith. There may be local grievances, such as the School Law of this State, by which we are compelled, while supporting our own schools, to help educate the children of our neighbors; but these are trifles in comparison with the clogs that politicians and rulers tie to religion in the countries of Europe.

We have, substantially, full liberty. If we want to write to our Holy Father, the Pope, we have nobody's leave to ask, but only to put the letter, duely stamped, in the post-office. If a Bishop wants to instruct his clergy and people, he need not submit his pastoral to any policeman. If we want to build a church, or an asylum, or a college, we have but to raise the money to pay the workmen, and go ahead. Would to God they had as much liberty in any country of Europe!

But are we not afraid that liberty will degenerate into license? I am not. I am not afraid of any disaster that is going to befall us, from the refusal of our laws to attempt to control opinion, either as Catholics or citizens. If public sentiment is sound and healthy, leaning to moderation, justice, truth, and frowning down prejudice and violence, it needs no laws to control it. If it is unsound, no law can reach it.

The more liberty a good man has, the more good he will do. The more liberty a bad man has, the more liberty will those whom he attacks have to resist him.

The corruption that manifests itself in license is more boisterous, but not more hurtful, than that which hides behind the mask of law. The censor watches the press, but who shall watch the censor?

During the tremendous crisis we have just got through, not to leave any thing undone that might save the nation, we tried a little of censorship and arbitrary rule; and we found that little a little too much for us, and we do not want it any more.

As to any direct persecution of the Catholic Church, which some of our disappointed brethren in England and elsewhere have predicted so confidently, it is among the possibilities, indeed, but not among the probabilities now. We all have to die some day, and ought to be prepared to die any way that may please God, but there is at present no reason for apprehending that He is going to call on us to die for the faith.

In the first place, those who are *ex-officio* enemies of the Church--the preachers, I mean, of all grades and shades, are becoming more liberal and humane towards the Catholic Church than formerly. The fierce invectives, the monstrous misrepresentations of our belief and practices that used to be the staple of their pulpit harangues, have been going out of fashion of late. I have read entire sermons in which the Pope is not once called Anti-Christ.

A convention held in Pittsburgh a few months back, did indeed *resolve* us to be an evil in the land, but Wall street never heeded it, and not even a single constitutional amendment was proposed against us in consequence of the resolution!

But there is no reason for believing that the Pittsburgh preachers represented the majority of their class. On the contrary, a great number of them would oppose heartily

any policy of persecution, particularly those who may want to run for Congress, and know something about the "German and the Irish element."

But even if the preachers did desire a persecution, and could agree on a plan for commencing it, I do not believe that they have influence enough to set it in motion. In the first place, the American people, though not so well informed about religion as those who sympathize with them would desire, are far from being as unenlightened as they were in the times gone by. The day when a Beecher could frighten the Western people by drawing a picture of the Pope with horns, hoofs and scarlet robes, setting up a gigantic throne in the Mississippi valley, is past forever. There will never be sent another committee of citizens of Cincinnati to Holy Trinity church to search after Papist arms, and to look for brass field-pieces inside of the organ!

The American people certainly do not know exactly what Catholics believe; but they are at least beginning to see that they are like other people who flee from want or oppression in Europe, and desire nothing more than room, and labor, and shelter, and food, and freedom. In the second place, the events of the last few years have given an everlasting quietus to the old calumny that used to sharpen anti-Catholic prejudice in that country--namely, that Catholics are acting in concert under orders from the Pope for the subversion of our free institutions. How far their religion was from giving any bias to their political action was amply demonstrated in the late war. Catholics simply took sides with their section, where they acted at all. Catholics fought for the Union, and Catholics fought for the rebellion. I am not saying what I think of this fact, but only stating it; and the American people know it too well ever to be moved again by the idiotic cry that the Catholics are nourishing designs against the country, or any other political designs, in common.

In the action of Catholics, North and South, there was also much to prevent any very rancorous or unjust prejudice and suspicion ever bringing upon us persecution for the time to come. I do not refer to the heroism of Catholic soldiers, the courage and fidelity of Catholic officers--in whom patriotism was the uppermost thought--but to those deeds which Catholics did, prompted solely by their religion; I mean the deeds done by Catholic Chaplains and Religioius. I say it not in boasting, but as a historical fact, that Catholic chaplains were the only ones who, as a body, remained with their regiments in camp and march and battle-field, unflinchingly, from the beginning to the end of their service; and they were the only ones held in respect as clergymen, by the mass of the army. Why should the others be always with their men? They could not preach in the march, in the bivouac, in the skirmish and on the battle-field; and as they

had no sacraments to administer, what good could they do where bullets were flying, and blood was being poured out? I say nothing to their disparagement; many were doubtless good, well-meaning men, and drew their salaries with edifying punctuality; but they were not looked upon as being so devoted to their duties as were their fellow-chaplains of the Catholic Church.

In like manner the labors of the heroic and devoted Sisters, among the sick and wounded, have made an impression upon a multitude of men now mixed up, like leaven, in the mass of society, that must be effaced before any very vehement prejudice can be excited against Catholics in this country.

On the field of Shiloh, where Sisters from Cincinnati went to gather up the wounded, in the hospitals of Cairo, Nashville, St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, how many hardy and honest men of the West have learned the purity, the meekness, the patience, the tireless charity, that belongs to souls consecrated to God, and have carried back to their homes, on hillside and plain, in country and in towns, the proof that will silence, in their presence, the calumniators of women who have chosen Christ for their portion, and ask no more! In doing what they did, they had no thought to this effect, of course. When they glided from bedside to bedside, in the fetid wards, here fanning a fevered brow, there wiping the clammy sweat from a ghastly face, giving medicine, dressing wounds, speaking hopeful words, or writing letters to mother or sister at home; when they watched day after day, and night, tirelessly, doing a mother's office to each sick one--their only thought was the fulfillment of their vocation of imitating Him who went about doing good--and the recompence they looked to was the imperishable record of their deeds in the mind of the All-rewarding God. But, beside their design, they also wrought another great end--the clearing away of a great cloud of prejudice and unjust suspicion. There is now, perhaps, not a city or town in the West, or East, where a crowd could be gathered together, which would not contain some one who was in the war, and sick or wounded, and nursed by the Sisters; some to tell their virtues, to vindicate them from slander, and to put to shame their calumniators. And this again is a reason why I am not afraid of any persecution coming.

Another reason why there is no present prospect of an Anti-Catholic combination among us, is the feeling of fellowship produced among the masses by the fact of their having shared common hardships and common dangers in the same good cause. There were native regiments, and German regiments, and Irish regiments, but the nationalities were really not separated in the struggle. There were Germans in the Irish regiments, and Irish in the native regiments, and natives scattered through them all. Jonathan and

Patrick and Herman were together in the war, in the siege, the march, the scout, the battle and the hospital. Together they shared hunger, thirst, cold, rain, heat, whole rations, half rations, and no rations at all--and they are not going to cross swords with each other, now that peace is won by all.

The corruption of public opinion may reach its lowest depth, and bring on, in the course of time, a war against the Church. If individuals lose conscience and the desire of doing right, society will be ready to wage war upon faith. The time may come when preachers, finding their influence gone not only in religion, but in secular matters, may unite with the infidels in a crusade against all religion, but that time is seemingly generations away, and when it comes, when the attempt is made, believers will be as free to defend religion as unbelievers to assail it; and should it succeed, it will do so, not from any defect of our free institutions, but from want of virtue in the masses of the people.

From what has been said, it is manifest that American Catholics are well-satisfied with the present and prospective of our Republic, with the plenty they have, the treatment they receive, the liberty they enjoy, and the future they look forward to. They share with other citizens the solicitude about the financial condition of the Government, and the great question of perfecting peace. But they share, also, in the hope that these questions will find their solution, in a way favorable to the continuance of free and just government.

I would seem to some, perhaps, to have studiously shunned the great topic of the day, did I close without any allusion to "our colored brother." I will not shrink from speaking of him, though one can scarcely utter his thoughts on the subject without being dragged forward as the supporter of this or that political faction. Let me repeat what I have said already: I belong to no political party, since the Union is safe, and our soldier-boys away from danger. I care nothing about who is in and who is out, beyond the reminiscences the war has left. Speaking of the negro,--I do not propose to say anything about his right of suffrage, much less that matter of taste, the social equality of colors. Suffrage is a right not found in nature, but in law; and social life is all a matter of fashion and conventionality. But I speak of natural rights--of the rights that belong to a man because he has God for his Creator, Jesus Christ for his Redeemer, and the beatific vision of [for] his final destiny. All the men of the earth are of one blood--sprung from Adam and Noe; all the men of the earth are born under sentence of death, and unless born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, shall not enter into the kingdom of God. In the curse of the outraged Deity all are equal. So also are they equal in the

blessing. Christ died for all. God wills all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Every man has, therefore, a God-given right to learn what his Creator wills him to believe and to do in order to be saved. That is to say, every man has the right to religious instruction, to the sacraments of the Church, and to be unmolested in practicing all the duties of a Christian, no matter what his nation, his rank, his form, or his color. These rights the negro has, and no man can deny them to him and be a Catholic. The Church knows no distinctions but those appointed by Christ when he instituted the hierarchy. Baptism, penance, the holy eucharist, extreme unction, holy orders, matrimony, belong to all her children, alike. You have seen white people and black people going to communion together, side by side. I myself was ordained sub-deacon, deacon and priest, in Rome, in 1852, side by side with a negro from Guinea. No flesh can glory in the sight of God. If being born under a curse would make men black, there would be no one white. It is not for you and me, my friends, to pretend to have fathomed the designs of God, and to affect co-operation with Him, while we indulge our spleen and prejudice. Let us mind our own interests, and save our own souls; taking care to deprive no man of what belongs to him under any pretext.

The black race, in this country, it seems to me, is, perhaps, even more unfortunate in its friends than in its enemies. The men who have made political capital out of them, have no happiness to give them. As soon as they cease to be a stepping-stone to notoriety and power they will be as little talked of in the newspapers, and as little thought of as poor white men; and then they will find that they are but in the beginning of sorrow.

What relief they get, if, indeed, they ever get any, will come to them through the Church of Christ. That Church once abolished slavery all over Europe so gently that, like the end of night in dawn, no one could tell when it happened, yet so thoroughly that it took the Reformation nearly three centuries to bring back a *quasi* slavery upon the poor. And if the present revolution is not to end fatally for the weaker party, that Church must stand as the cause.