

Union Lectures.

America and American Institutions.

A LECTURE

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—It was a profound remark of Lord Bacon, that "The greatness of Kingdoms and Dominions in bulk and territory doth fall under demonstration that cannot err. But the just measure and estimate of the forces and power of an estate is a matter that the which there is nothing among civil affairs more subject to error, nor that error more subject to perilous consequences." And it seems to me that at the present time it becomes us as citizens of a great and growing nation, to understand the great principles of our polity and comprehend the fundamental basis of our organization. To this end I have chosen this evening to allude to one element of our National greatness too often overlooked or disregarded. The external indications of power are so apparent and present themselves so constantly before us, that our attention is apt to be diverted from the cause to the results; we fail to comprehend the initial force in the magnitude of its workings, and are in danger of substituting mere effects in place of the principles from which they proceed. The extent of our territory—the stability of our Union—the peace of our borders—the rapid increase of our population—the success of our agriculturists—the results of our mechanical industry—the wide domain of our Commerce—the spread of Education, and the freedom of religious toleration that we enjoy, are all elements of empire, but they are results not causes; they flow from a principle which lies at the foundation of our National existence, and is the great idea of our History. The philosopher who comprehends only the old governmental forms and is acquainted only with the principles they embodied, is at fault when he undertakes to apply them to our own land. In the lapse of time succeeding the existence of the old republics, new principles have been evolved and new ideas revealed, and the history and spirit of modern government is not to be comprehended apart from these. The old theories have now no force, no meaning, save as they incorporate these new germs and new principles, and to these new elements we are to look if we would explain the wonderful superiority of the present to the past.

And where are these elements to be found? Has human ingenuity contrived them? Has the mere progress of civilization evolved them? Have the old ideas acquired such transformation in the mere process of growth and extension as to become entirely changed so that they are not now to be identified? Surely not. A more rational explanation is to be found, a truer solution given. It is this, that the present condition of the world is the result of the action of Christianity upon the other elements of civilization and progress—an action which has been potent and wonderful—which has probed old systems to the core—pointed out their defects—supplied their weakness, and by infusing its own aggressive spirit, has developed from principles thus renewed and reorganized, an entirely new form of civilization.

It is not too much to say, that the condition of any portion of the world where Christianity has been published, must have been essentially different without it; that England, for instance, without Christianity would have differed as much from her present condition, as she does from China. It therefore becomes a matter of interest to ascertain what are the indications of its influence upon our history and progress, and what inferences may be drawn from the past with reference to our future destiny.

The whole history of our country from the embarkation of the Pilgrims to the conclusion of our revolutionary struggle, is not to be accounted for on ordinary principles, nor even to be understood by those who do not recognize the power of God in history.

The first colonists were men whose peculiar views of christianity drove them from their homes and firesides. In coming to these shores they sought what christianity taught them was the soul's birthright. Their enlarged ideas of religious freedom were not to be confined within the limits of an established church. "To know God, (says one) to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. They recognized no title to superiority but his favor. If they were unacquainted with the works of Philosophers and Poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not to be found in the registers of her-

alds, they felt assured that they were written in the book of life. On the rich and the eloquent, on nobles and on priests, they looked down with contempt, for they esteemed themselves rich in a more precious treasure, eloquent in a more sublime language, nobles by right of an earlier creation, and priests by the imposition of a mightier hand."

They embarked on board the Mayflower with prayer, inscribed on her sails the motto "God with us!" and came, midst the howlings of the winter storms to this rockbound coast, which though frozen and sterile had no bonds for conscience and no shackles for thought.

We can look back upon their history and trace the hand of Providence in all the varied trials through which they passed. But human ingenuity is baffled in its attempts to account for their preservation. The history of the world has no parallel with the success that has attended a beginning seemingly so inauspicious. The deductions of reason cannot account for the development of our present greatness from so feeble a source. The Philosopher who had witnessed their embarkation, had known their trials, and who knew the land to which they were coming, would not have believed that from them was to rise up a nation, great and powerful enough to control the action of a hemisphere.

The Christian principles which they brought with them took deep root in our virgin soil and became incorporated with our national character and polity. Crowds flocked to our shores, but as numbers increased so also increased the exactions of the English government, until the restraints of parental rule became irksome to these giant sons of freedom. And when the point was reached beyond which forbearance ceases to be a virtue, the American people argued in defence of a principle. It was a dark hour for our country, just emerging from the difficulties in which the Indian wars had involved it. It was called on to give up to despotism the homes which the best blood of the land had purchased. Hemmed in by the Indians, smarting under defeat and burning to wipe out disgrace in blood, and confronted by the ocean, covered with hostile fleets, our fathers, had they not trusted in the justice of their cause and the protection of Heaven, would have sunk in despair. Read the history of their sufferings at Valley Forge, number their privations, and then account for the fact, that though the ranks were daily thinned by famine, frost and foe, there were still left enough to strike for victory. What was the secret of success? What nerved the youthful arm to strike, and gave vigor to old age? What induced father and son, and aged sire, alike to share the labors of the camp and brave the dangers of the field? What sustained them amidst toils and disappointments, and at last brought them victory? Their simple trust in God: The legacy of the Pilgrims, cultivated by the fasts and thanksgivings ordered by the Continental Congress. They relied on Divine aid, with the simple faith that only Christian principle can impart and this was the secret of Success. This prompted the mother to bid her boy strike for his God and home. This went with him to the field, kindled the lightning of his eye—blazed in the flashing of his sword—rang in his shout of victory. And we owe our homes and firesides, our freedom, our high destiny, to the Christian faith of our fathers, to the might and purity of those brave patriot hearts that bled for freedom, for honor and for native land.

Thus God speaks in our History. And this voice is not unheard in our Constitution. That we may examine this the more closely, let us look at the work the framers of the Constitution had to do. Wise and true men as they were, they must have felt awed by the responsibility they had to meet. The past was to be investigated and materials collected from it adapted to the advanced state of the world, and the increased wants of the age; and more than this, the result must be capable of expanding with the steps of progress. Never was wisdom more necessary than when our fathers met to lay the cornerstone of our Constitutional liberties.

What lessons did the past teach?—It was filled with the ruins of kingdoms, the wrecks of empires and the tombs of republican governments. Kings and emperors were out of the question, for a land which had just thrown off the shackles of oppression and glowed with young and democratic aspirations. Our fathers turned to the republican forms as given us in history, and sought the causes of their decay, and found them in the lack of such strong virtuous principles as would preserve the people from the seductions of indolence, and the temptations of prosperity. It was evident that the people became the slaves of their own passions, before they yielded to any foreign force, or allowed the

seeds of discord to spring up into domestic strife. One great object to be secured then was such an individual responsibility in the government as would make each man feel that upon him in a measure rested the welfare of the whole nation.

Whence came this idea which has grown up into so new a political system? Where did the doctrine of the political equality of all men originate? It was not the result of philosophical investigation, though the thinkers of the world may have explained and enforced the truth when once known and published. But the idea was first embodied in the teachings of Christ, when he directed all his disciples, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, to look up to one common parent and say not my Father, but our Father. And where was this idea first embodied in governmental form? Such liberty as the old world had possessed was gone—its flame was echoed in history, and the ghosts of its former heroes might be seen at midnight round the tombs at Thermopylae, but it had decayed and had not revived in the institutions of modern Europe. The doctrine of equality was recognized in only one of the many institutions of the age, and that one was Christianity. Within its pale the baron and the serf knelt side by side, the lord of provinces was not superior to his humblest tenant. And within the church of Christ, purified by the Reformation, our fathers found this doctrine which the Reformation had made manifest by opening to all the book of life. Taking it as a central idea and carrying out its legitimate results, they made no provision for hereditary legislation, and gave no place to the absurd claims of primogeniture that had grown up in the dark ages—but made the government purely elective. The so called republics of antiquity were not founded upon such a basis, and in ancient or modern history there is no example before our own of a purely elective and representative system. The Grecian states were bound together as states, but not as constituting one people, nor as forming a union in which each inhabitant of the several states had an equal interest. The Amphictyonic Council was the nearest approach to a representation of the people, but it was composed of two delegates from each state, thus corresponding to our Senate, or State Representation, and not to our lower house of Congress, or our popular Representation. This idea is the necessary consequence of the admission of the doctrine of equality first taught, as I have before remarked, in the scriptures. That it is the direct result of Christian teachings is apparent from the fact, that the first appointment made by the followers of Christ, after his ascension, was made by popular vote; for we are told that when the Apostles found that attention to temporal affairs of the church interfered with the discharge of their apostolic duties, they "called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and proposed the election of seven men to attend to temporal matters. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they (the whole multitude) chose Stephen," &c. &c. And this election, the result of the first purely popular vote ever recorded, was the legitimate result of their peculiar system—the development of their distinguishing principles. It was an expression of the adoption of brotherhood in view of a common relation to the God of Heaven.

But while thus prompt to recognize the great principles of Christianity, and embody them in our Constitution, our fathers did not err in common with the nations of Europe, and combine the discordant elements of national polity with the outward form of Christianity. But comprehending the true spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom, and remembering, it would seem, that its author had proclaimed it not of this world, they made no provision for the unholy alliance of church and state. Here was an event for history to record, a people building a constitution upon Christian principles, and yet so truly understanding the genius of Christianity as to leave it unshackled and untrammelled by legal enactments. I know that it is denied that we are a Christian nation, because God and the Bible are not made statutes in our Constitution, but to my mind this very fact clearly indicates the purity of the Christianity of those who framed it. Had they been devoid of principle, the quality taught by Christianity had not been found there; had they been bigots the outward form of Christianity had been recognized; and precisely because they were imbued with a true and pure Protestant Christianity, they embodied political truth in the Constitution and left free and untrammelled the form in which that truth should make its moral and religious development. There was no such thing known in Europe—the monarchs of its kingdoms claimed to be, by Divine right, heads of the nation and the church. And in ancient times qualifications for priesthood were requisite for appointment to the kingly office among the Greeks, and the great na-

tional council regulated at the same time international difficulties and religious affairs. The nation in which Christianity had its origin was the only one that excluded its kings from the priestly office—and the spirit of Christianity was averse to the commingling of things sacred and common, sacred as pertaining to God, and common as relating to mere human affairs. The separation of Church from State, was therefore the result of the true and lofty conception, which our fathers entertained, of the purity of Christianity, and of the adaptation of its truths to prosper under Divine guidance without national enactment and statutory provisions.

Thus the great leading truths of our political system, are the direct result of Christ's teachings; they had their origin in the days of "the Son of Man," but their first incorporation into national existence when our Constitution was formed. And through them God speaks to the world.

If these positions be correct it will at once be evident that no just parallel can be drawn between the republics of antiquity, and our own; nor can any deductions from their history be properly applied in inquiries concerning our future destiny.

In the past we have experienced a prosperity unrivalled, a unity and peace without a precedent; improvement more rapid; intelligence and happiness more diffused and equalized than the world ever before witnessed; and for the future, we may remember that our principles are instinct with life; that the power of the voice that "to the world gave being," speaks in the truths which guide us—that our flight is upward, for our eye is on the sun!

The opportunity for a noble destiny is before us. Greece, among the nations of antiquity was most celebrated for the splendor of her achievements in art, and the elevation of her literature; let it also be remembered that she was the most free. Of all the ages of Babylonian despotism, not one was lightened by a name that has come down to us. The alphabet was invented in the East, but Grecian literature has preserved it. The eastern astronomers erected lofty towers, and built vast observatories, yet they reflected no light that now illumines the world. A republican Greek first calculated an eclipse and measured the year. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, Demosthenes, Philinus and Praxiteles, all carry our minds back to the days of Grecian freedom, to the time when the democracy of Athens met in the Agora, counselled in the theatre of Bacchus, and ruled the destinies of the world. The growth of genius in more modern times has taken the same direction. In England, the land where there has been most constitutional liberty, has alone produced Shakespeare and Milton, Bacon and Newton, Arkwright and Watt. This has been done, in the one case, with all the elements that finally destroyed freedom, at work, and in the other, under the blighting influence of the despotism of authority which seems almost necessarily connected with an aristocratic monarchy. There is hope then for America where there is a surer morality, a truer patriotism, a firmer union, and a more extended freedom.

The only fear is, that we mistake the true ground on which to depend for the maintenance of our liberties. We must not expect to be preserved by the elements that proved the destruction of Greece and Rome; we must rely upon other and more powerful agencies. And no ideas of wealth or power, or intelligence, should lead us to forget our Christianity. Providence has been lavish of its gifts, our own mountains are stored with hidden treasures, our inland streams bear the subsistence of nations on their bosoms. The results of our mechanical industry are enormous, and our commerce extends to all lands. But however desirable wealth may be, it is not the one thing needful; it may fortify our cities, and supply our armies, but it cannot give them efficiency. The republics of antiquity possessed it, and it proved an element of destruction. It naturally produced luxury, increased effeminacy, and created licentiousness; and thus sapped the foundation of the republic, and proved the deadliest foe to freedom. We are a powerful people—but the great efficiency of our power is in the union that exists between its elements. As the might of the Grecian states increased, their separate interests conflicted, and each used its energies to subdue its neighbor, and thus, all paved the way for their final destruction. If strength and internal resources were our only dependence for the preservation of liberties, the separate interests of the different portions of our nation would so conflict that harmony would be impossible. Intelligence is a strong hold of freedom, and the wide spread diffusion of the blessing of education may lead us to rely upon its power, but we cannot safely trust it to preserve us free. The testimony of Greece and Rome, from out the very tombs of literature

and science forbids this. Where is Egypt, once the repository of learning, and the cradle of the arts? The pyramids still rise, attesting the lofty aspirations of their builders, but the Sphinx looks in melancholy sadness on the neglected fields, the cheerless homes and degraded forms, that now are found, where once the arts flourished, and where there were temples of science. Sad testimonials are these of the inefficiency of learning to preserve us free. But the great guard and safety of our land is not to be found in any or all of these elements combined; not in the wealth of our cities, or the strength of our armies; nor even in the village school house, but in the influence of the village church.

The morals of Christianity, and the power of Christian truth must preserve us or we are lost. The liberties of Greece were shackled by the vices of her people; the life of her freedom was destroyed by the want of life in their morals. Indulgence in vice not only deadened her perception of danger, but deprived her of the power of resistance.

The French revolution carries with it a lesson of instruction as important as its results were disastrous. "It sprang up in the spirit of infidelity; it was early steeped in crime; it reached the unparalleled height of general atheism, and shook all the thrones of the world by the fiery passions which it awakened." What practical good has resulted from all the violence of the republicans? How has the condition of France been improved by the blood shed in that revolution? The French can never establish a free government securely, until there is Christianity enough in the land to sustain it. Their popular elections must be held on other days than the Holy Sabbath, and their libations be poured before another shrine than that of the Goddess Liberty.

New life has been given to us by the revealed energy of the word of God. And the great chart of national life and prosperity is not to be found in the libraries of antiquity, nor deduced from the reasoning of the school men but is recorded in the Bible. In that book is found the truth of the equality of all men; "there are revealed the laws of reciprocity, which form the basis of all union;" and "there is found the only motive strong enough to induce men to obey the laws of love and charity—the voice from the Eternal throne, and the prophetic teachings of the retributions of Eternity." By the adoption of this spirit our liberties were secured; by the influence of these truths our government has been maintained. Christianity is the element that was wanted in the republics of antiquity—they had the light of experience, the voice of time for their guidance, the stars of hope beamed smilingly on them, but they had no light from the star of Bethlehem, no voices praising God in the highest, bringing glad tidings, and publishing peace.

This position being established, the question as to the perpetuity of our freedom is reduced to the one which decides how we shall, as a people, best cultivate and cherish the Christian elements which underlie our political structure. And to this end there are two points which appear to me to be particularly worthy of attention; for from one quarter we are in danger of the extension of indifference, and from another we are threatened with opposition to our fundamental truths. The incorporation of foreigners as a portion of our body politic occasions the first. They come in ceaseless tide upon our shores, from lands where the Divine right is understood as belonging to Kings and not to the people, and gratified with the admirable working of our affairs and their own participation in them, they often fail to understand the solemn teachings of our past history and the necessities of our present condition. They learn to glory in the result without comprehending any thing of the causes which produce it. They pass a few years of residence and then too often participate in the affairs of a government based upon Christian principle without perceiving the force of Christian obligation. Before they cease to be aliens they are made citizens, and, though remaining foreigners in thought and feeling they vote as Americans. The open and palpable bids that were made in the last Presidential canvass for foreign votes tells significantly the truth to which I would call attention. No foreigner is competent to discharge the duties of an American until he ceases to be identified with the land which gave him birth. Such men are valuable additions as residents improving the condition and adding to the strength and integrity of our inhabitants, but they cannot be expected in a period so brief as that now fixed by our present naturalization laws, to uproot the ideas of a life in another land with other ideas and other principles, and in addition to this, to learn the principles and acquire the spirit of native born citizens. Christianity does not lie at

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