

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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Occasional papers by Patrick Francis Moran

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PATRICK FRANCIS MORAN

**OCCASIONAL
PAPERS**

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BY

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MORAN,

ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY, N.S.W.

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I.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL PROGRESS.

*(Lecture in St. Patrick's Hall, Perth, Wednesday,
3rd February, 1887.)*

THE statesmen and philosophers of the old centres of civilization in Europe, though they may differ among themselves on many points, are all agreed in asserting that they and their friends are the promoters and true champions of Social Progress. But many of them are not content with this. They will go farther; and, whilst at home and abroad the motto, "Social Progress," is emblazoned on their banners, they will proclaim that the Catholic Church is their great obstacle in the paths of civilization—the one common enemy of human progress, whom all should conspire to overthrow.

We, who are the children of the Catholic Church, know full well how groundless this accusation is. We believe that the diadem of truth is hers; that her mission is divine; the light of heaven is on her brow, the seal of wisdom upon her lips, and the blessings of redemption are the inheritance of her children; and we are convinced that, though proud men may ignore the Church, and wicked men may cast aside her salutary influence, yet, even in matters which do not come within her immediate sphere, her influence cannot be but for good.

I will ask you this evening to consider this question in

the light of facts. For 1800 years the Church has exercised a paramount influence on society. What has been the result of her influence? Does the witness of history justify the accusation made by the Church's enemies? Far from it. The voice of history attests and loudly proclaims that amid the growth and decay of nations, the changes of dynasties, and the overthrow of empires, at every stage of the world's history, the Church has proved herself the devoted friend of true progress; she is at all times to be found among the foremost in her patronage of everything that could adorn social life and ennoble man—of everything that could elevate, purify, and perfect his noblest faculties, advance his interests, or promote his welfare.

When the Church went forth from Jerusalem on her beneficent career, the pagan civilization of imperial Rome was in the zenith of its triumphs. But no matter how perfect that civilization might appear to be, there was corruption at the core, and its gold was mere glittering dross. I need name but three conditions of society in those days to justify this statement. Poverty was branded as a crime; more than this, slavery was the very corner-stone of the social fabric; and, above all, despotism, unchecked and uncontrolled, ruled supreme. All this was changed through the influence of the Catholic Church; but it was not by a wrench of society, or by stirring up commotion in the existing order of things, that she achieved so happy a result. She was content to announce the teachings of divine truth, and to repeat those sacred principles which, in due time, were destined to renew society, and to leaven the whole order of civilization. "The spirit of Christianity," writes Mr. Lecky, in his *History of Rationalism*, "moved over the chaotic society of paganism, and not merely alleviated the evils that convulsed it, but also reorganised it on a new basis. It did this in three ways: it abolished slavery, it created charity, it inculcated self-sacrifice."

The Church proclaimed that all men are equal before God ; all have the one Father who is in heaven, kneel at the same altar, are sanctified by the same sacraments, walk in the same paths of piety, and aspire to the same heavenly destiny. Hear the golden words of Lactantius : " God has imposed on all the same condition of living : He has formed all to wisdom : He has promised immortality to all : no one is cut off from His heavenly gifts. For, as He distributes to all alike His one light, to all sends forth His fountains, supplies food, and gives the most refreshing rest of sleep ; so He bestows on all equity and virtue. In His sight no one is a slave, no one a master ; for, if all have the same Father, by equal right we are all His children. No one is poor in the sight of God, but he who is without justice ; no one is rich, but he who is full of virtue . . . Some one will say : Are there not among you some poor and others rich , some servants and others masters ? Is there not some difference between individuals ? There is none ; nor is there any other cause why we mutually bestow upon each other the name of brethren, except that we believe ourselves to be equal. Riches do not render men illustrious, except that they are able to make them more conspicuous by good works ; for men are rich, not because they possess riches, but because they employ them on works of justice." It is, in a certain way, like the vine and the elm-tree in the vineyard that the poor and the rich are both alike necessary for the well-being of society. The vineyard elm has of itself neither beauty nor fruitfulness to commend it. The vine, without the elm to support it, will produce but little fruit. But entwine them together and the vineyard becomes arrayed in all its full richness and comeliness.

Let us see how this teaching of the Church was carried into practice. St. Lawrence was led before the Prefect of Rome, and commanded to surrender the riches of the Church entrusted to his care. At his request, three days

were granted him that he might gather to an appointed place all his treasures. At the fixed time, the Prefect sees marshalled before him the widows and orphans, the helpless, the poor, the aged, and the infirm: "These," cried out St. Lawrence, "these are our riches, these our jewels, these the treasures that we prize." Again, we read of a Christian empress, in those days, who went about visiting the sick and the poor, and with her own hands ministered to their wants and relieved their distress. Some would remonstrate with her: "It was enough," they said, "that the emperor should bestow alms." She replied: "To give silver or gold is the part of the emperor; but it is mine to serve the poor, in order that heaven may bless the empire." I will mention but one other fact. A Christian prince, whilst hunting in the forest, found a blind man who had lost his way, and cried aloud for help. Without making himself known, the prince, heedless of the excitement of the chase, dismounted, and, taking the poor man by the hand, led him to the beaten path. The blind man, exhausted through anxiety and fatigue, asked for a drink of water. The prince went in search of a spring, and, when he had found it, gave him to drink. The blind man no sooner tasted the water, and bathed his eyes with it, than his sight was restored. Such was the blessing of heaven upon the true charity of that Christian prince.

As regards slavery, let us take the instance of St. Paulinus. He was of Pretorian rank, and had held the office of Imperial Prefect of Rome. Nevertheless, he sold out all his possessions and distributed the price among the poor. In after years, a widow's son, her only support, was carried off and sold as a slave. Having no other means at his command, Paulinus, to purchase the freedom of the slave, gave himself as a substitute into slavery, that thus the slave might be set free, to bring consolation to his sorrowing mother. Of this heroism of charity there have been many examples

in the Church; and even a religious order was established whose brethren bound themselves by vow to devote their labour, and to sacrifice their liberty, if necessary, to procure the liberation of Christian slaves.

When St. Martin, the great patron of Gaul, was as yet in the army and a Catechumen, passing by the gate of the city of Amiens, he met a beggar, almost naked through extreme poverty. Full of compassion, he drew his sword, and cutting his military mantle in twain, gave half of it to the poor man. The bystanders jeered and laughed; but that night St. Martin saw in a vision our Saviour seated on His throne, surrounded by the hosts of heaven, and wearing the half mantle which He had received from the hands of Martin, and which now beamed with light brighter than the sun. In after years, St. Martin chose for the site of his monastery Marmoutier, a lovely spot on the banks of the Loire, shut in by sandstone cliffs and by the forest, and only to be reached by a narrow path. Rich and poor flocked to him thither to be his disciples, were enrolled among the brethren, and had all things in common. Whilst the saint sojourned there, the Count Avitianus dragged to Tours a long chain of captives, who the following day were to suffer torture or death. St. Martin hastened to the city, and, though the night was far advanced, proceeded to the palace door, which he besieged with his prayers and cries. The attendants paid no heed to his clamour; but the count, who had heard those cries, and was impatient at his servants' carelessness, hurried to the door himself, and found the venerable bishop, with bare head, and prostrate at the threshold, and his hands stretched out in supplication. The count recognized St. Martin, and said to him: "Do not even speak; I know thy request. Every prisoner shall be spared. For thy sake I grant them their lives and liberty."

To remove the stain of slavery, and to lessen the hardships which it involved, has ever been the aim of the