Thesis

Influence of the Church

required for the degree—

by

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In history we find no element so strongly influencing the course of civilization and the progress of the human race as the Church. From the beginning of the first century we see scarcely a germ, a little band of believers despised and persecuted, suffering the cruel and atrocious attacks of the pagan world; then we see her grow and rise through the brilliant but stormy centuries following, until to-day our imagination would fail to fathom the chaos and ignorance of a nineteenth century without the Church. In speaking of the Church, I do not refer to any of the various systems of faith or worship, but to the Church as an ecclesiastic organization, as an aggregate of religious influence in a community. How shall I consider it in its internal form, but externally in its relation with the civil society and with the state. In this connection we do not find the Church of any importance previous to the fourth century. It is the mere germ of future power and greatness, but even then we catch glimpses of its after influence. The first see the Church in connection with temporal power, ascending the throne with Constantine. Its childhood has now
passed, it stands on the threshold of manhood, ready to guide, protect, or combat the state. To demonstrate the subordination of the state to the Church, to prove that civil society is the application of its principles—a result, the Church paid dearly for the civil advantage bestowed by Constantine, by admitting temporal intervention into her affairs. After the lapse of ten centuries the verdict of many was, that the fatal gift of a Christian emperor had been the death sentence of all true religion. Constantine turned secular into ecclesiastical ambition by making offices of the Church more safe and more powerful than those of the state. The growth and progress of this institution is not due to any miraculous agency, but simply to that one powerful element of success—unity. The few centuries preceding the fall of the Roman Empire, we see Rome, separated into numerous factions, divided against herself. While we see the Church based on the three potent elements of unity, despotism, and infallibility fast becoming an invincible factor in future history. Oftentimes the fall of the old Roman Empire comes, we find her, the only power capable and ready.
to step forward and preserve the remnants of a once high civilization. Her clergy zealous and ambitious, reestablish on a firm foundation the society about to be swept away by mere brute force and implant in that society the two essential elements of all advancement, the cultivation of the intellect, and unity of action. She at the same time discards that injurious element of caste, admits into her ranks representatives from all classes of society, making only genuine worth, and moral character the basis of admission, thereby strengthening her own force by filling her offices with young, ambitious and active men.

But an organization like the Indian must be known by its fruits, solid as appeal to the facts in her history. She first appreciate her power when, like a bridge, she spans the dark and seemingly fathomless chasm that intervenes between the fifth and eleventh centuries. She was the bright star of the East to civilization in the darkness of the night of superstition, ignorance, and crime. She protected and nourished what remained of the former industries, societies,
Philosophies and arts, transmitting them to the succeeding generations. As the darkness passes away, and the dawn of our later civilization appears, we find her the only power capable of forming a government, and she justly claims her share in the administration of temporal affairs. The Church, however, gradually usurps an excess of temporal power, and authority establishes a tyrannical, and entirely monarchical form of hierarchy on church government, neglects thereby necessarily its higher mission and succumbs to the inevitable doom of such government through abuse of power—corruption. But this error is only temporary; the Church, proves her divine mission by purification from within in the Reformation comes, and restores the Church to its pristine purity and sublime destiny, by giving conscience as a guide and the Bible as a rule. Opening the fountain of man's noblest nature. It substitutes reason for the mandates of authority, defying the decrees of the Councils and the bulls of the Pope. It established religious freedom, and, as a result,
universal freedom followed. From this it was the first incentive, the first step toward freedom and progress. It sent new life through the masses and their civil institutions. It developed the intellectual as well as the physical nature; by sending new thoughts, new passions, new impulses, and new desires, thrilling through the human mind and heart. During the latter half of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh centuries we find Judaism at the height of its power, and after repeated attempts of the people and of the kings to overthrow it, we find the Church the only element capable of abolishing it. Its establishment is one of the most beneficial aids to the progress of the middle ages. Judaism at first, only the organization of a small society, had grown into one of the most powerful institutions of the time. At first glance, it seemed to have an influence for good on the people, by kindling European imagination, establishing poetry and literature and nowhere in the pages of the history of this period can we turn without finding high and noble sentiments, and the highest type of humanity. We even find as a result that grand institution of
Chivalry, although not totally different, was the offspring of Feudalism. But if this was true of the individual, how of the social system, and with civil society? Its influence for good on the former were far more than counterbalanced by its influence for evil on the latter. It restricted monarchical and popular power. It degraded the masses of the people, while at their expense, elevated a few nobles and Feudal proprietors. It opposed the greatest force in the progress of order and liberty. It was, at the same time, the cause and effect of the disorder and wretched state of society during the time it was in power. Though Feudalism was being formed a powerful society of nobles banded together and capable of overthrowing the state and gaining supremacy. From the Church Feudalism received its first blow and, it is due to her that at the beginning of the fourteenth century we find Feudalism, which had so strongly grown into dangerous power completely overthrown, and society again organized. It was under her influence also that the crusades were commenced and although they may be called a fanatical movement, they benefited the whole of Europe.
They diffused the knowledge and literature inclosed within the walls of the Church and monastery. They were great movements towards the emancipation of the mind. They tended towards enlarged and liberal ideas. They produced freedom of the individual and political unity. The West came in direct contact with the higher civilization of the East. I have cited only those offsprings of the Church in which nothing but the good has played a part. But I do not deny for a moment that to the Church may be attributed some of the most atrocious crimes, some of the most barbarous cruelties that have ever darkened the pages of any history. If three centuries ago we could have stood on the shores of Spain and listened to the toll of the great Cathedral bell sounding the death knell of more than thirteen thousand innocent men, women, and even children burned at the stake, guiltless of all other crimes than that of freedom of belief and freedom of thought, then might we well have asked can any good come from such inhuman persecution? And, doubt or even deny the power of any good coming from such a source. This inquisition bathed
all European surging waves of blood, but it is in Spain we find it in its most intense fury. Keenly the Spaniards were free and noble-minded. The Inquisition came and deluged with a flood of destruction that fair land. The rush of its tide was too great to bear, and, as a result, we have the Spanish character of today, without ambition, lacking enterprise, inactive, and indolent. But although the Church produced a Philip the II—that inhuman monstrosity—and a Duke of Alba, she also produced a William of Orange, and we will think less harshly of Ambrose, when we remember how he stood, face to face, with Theodosius the great holding him accountable for the massacres of seven thousand people slain in a passion. Convincing him that although he was in the Church and of the Church, that he was subordinate to and under her authority, and that might must kneel to right. We see, during the reign of Terror the clergy, disposing of the treasures of the Church in order that she may redeem slaves from captivity. Again, as another result of the persecution of the Church, we have the rise of Puritanism. At that time the
Puritans, scrupulous, severe, and terribly earnest were jeered at as fanatics, bigots, and hypocrites, from one side receiving nothing but rebuke, and from the other side ridicule. But in the Puritan character was concealed the germ of future growth and how great that growth has been we need only look at America today—the result of our Puritan forefathers fleeing the wrath of the Church. True, she has had her reign of Terror, her St. Bartholomew's day, her council of Blood has produced a Charles V, a Caligula, a Voltaire, and after eighteen years of imprisonment beheaded an innocent Queen. But on the other side she has produced a Richelieu, founder of the French Academy, a Calvin and a Luther, originators of two of the most powerful creeds of to-day. She gave us our monks of St. Benedict, our hospitals, our customs and manners of civilization. She raised woman from degradation to the throne of highest respect. She produced a Gregory VII, who established schools of music, regulated the Roman Liturgy, administered the affairs of the Church with precision and justice, set an example of alms giving and
charity), and ordered the Church property to be sold for the benefit of the poor. Indirectly the Church brought forth Cromwell, and although he may be accused of usurpation, treachery, hypocrisy, and fanaticism, all must admit him to be the greatest ruler that ever controlled England. The greatest diplomat and soldier of the age, he raised England to the highest standard of both intellectually and civilly, until every nation jeered and sought her friendship, while they dreaded her enmity. We can also judge of her power when the political Napoleon erected his imperial throne among the disorderly fragments of the French empire, immediately invited the return of the Papacy, and reestablished the faith. Admitting the evils, of which I have spoken, can we anywhere find an institution of such magnitude that during nineteen centuries will not necessarily have some dark stains? It is the law of nature. Nothing can be faultless, and these crimes only demonstrate the more complete by her power for good when that power is directed in the right channel. The course the Church has taken is like the course of
any great river. Look at it from any given standpoint—it will apparently be flowing in an opposite direction from the main course. But these eddies and ripples are only caused by an attempt to overcome some obstacle, and the course turns aside only that it may roll on in its general direction, with a greater force to the sea. So are the darkened pages in the history of the Church; only the eddies and ripples—and sometimes even the whirlpools—caused by her attempt to overcome fanaticism or some human monstrosity, turning aside that it might continue to flow, with even greater force, in her true course, of improvement and benefit until it mingles with and contributes its pure and cleansing waters to the sea of Eternity.