

G5466

SACERDOTALISM.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO THE MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
OF THE NATIONAL SUNDAY LEAGUE,

BY

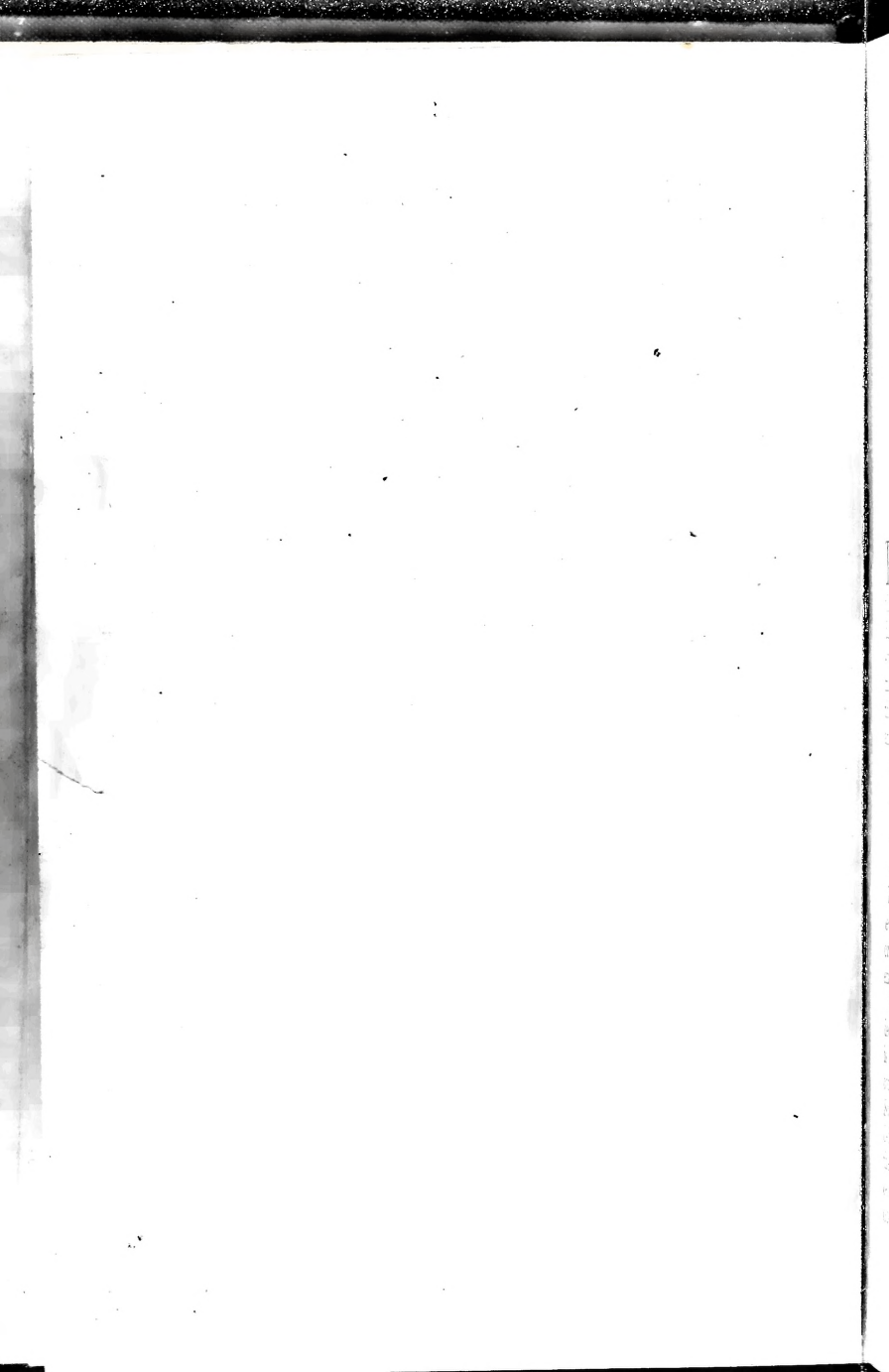
GEORGE J. WILD, LL.D.,

AT ST. GEORGE'S HALL, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1872.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
NO. 11, THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD,
UPPER NORWOOD, LONDON, S.E.

Price Threepence.



SACERDOTALISM.

THE experience of life teaches us that most things with which we have to do are of so varied a character, and display such different features in different circumstances that it is rash to pass too sweeping a judgment upon them. In history we find many instances where times and seasons have made all the difference between the good and evil of a system,—an advancement or retardation of growth have rendered that detrimental which before had been beneficial to a people.

The subject of the present lecture forms no exception to these remarks. It has its fair as well as its repulsive side. Those who regard only the former will always be its zealous defenders, those who look only on the evil it has produced will be apt to be no less indiscriminate in their condemnation and abuse. Let us endeavour to see where the truth lies between them.

To this end it will be expedient in the first place to decide what is meant by this term sacerdotalism. It is derived from a word which signifies set apart, consecrated, or dedicated to a deity,—so that the *Sacerdos* is the person in special relations with the deity,—the sacrifice is any *thing* offered to the deity,—the *sacra*, or sacred things include all the rites and ceremonies connected with the religious worship of the Gods. There are many other words derived from the

same source, but they all imply the idea of some special relation with deity. Now, sacerdotalism in its largest sense is the principle and spirit on which all these are founded, and by which they are pervaded : it is however generally more exclusively used in connection with sacred persons, that is to say, it implies the spirit of priesthood and the theory on which it is based.

The question, therefore, that I wish to suggest for our examination this evening, is whether this theory has been and is for the advantage or the detriment of society. In the compass of a brief paper only a very cursory view can be taken of so extensive a subject, but it may serve to call attention to some essential features of the enquiry. And let it not be thought that such an enquiry is of merely abstract and historical interest, since there is none I believe which more demands our attention under the circumstances of the present day.

In considering this question we must take care not to lose sight of the fact I have already stated, viz., that the root-principle of sacerdotalism, the assumption on which priesthoods and all their creeds are founded, is that of some special private relation with the deity, the possession of some particular privilege and power different from that of other men. Wherever in the world you find anything in the nature of a priesthood, you will find this, as a matter of fact, to be the case. In the hoary past we read of the Brahmins conveying this notion by the assertion that they were derived from the head of Brahma ; the Buddhist priest acts as a sort of necessary mediator to convey the prayers of the faithful votaries to the courts above. In the Mosaical religion the priests are represented as receiving a special revelation and commission at the mouth of God himself, who condescendingly comes down on the top of a mountain and enunciates his directions amidst thunder and lightning, and the sound

of a trumpet. The Greeks had their divine oracles of which priests were the ministers and promulgators, and the Romans their augurs who explained the significance of the auspices, and who were alone competent to decide whether they had been taken correctly ; and it has been the same in other nations. Moreover, all these races have had their sacred books supposed to contain revelations of the divine will of which persons connected with the Sacerdotal class were alone considered competent expositors. The Brahmins have their Vedas and Code of Manu ; the Buddhists their *Tripitaka* ; the Jews their books of the Law and Prophets ; the Ancient Persians their Zend-Avesta ; the Greeks and Romans their Books of the Sibylls. If we turn our view to Christendom we find similar phenomena. There, too, are divinely inspired writings, of which the Church,—the Church as used in this connection, meaning assemblies of the priestly body,—of which the Church is authoritatively declared to be the sole witness and keeper. There, too, according to the theory, is an order of men set apart by divine appointment and apostolic succession to be the means of conveying the highest blessings of religion to the world ; in the Romanist section of the Church, indeed, the *only* channels by which the divine presence can be secured in their mysteries, or pardoning grace be assured to the penitent ; among the majority of Protestants the same notion being held in a modified form, the authoritative exposition of doctrine, the declaratory power of absolution, and the communication of the benefits of the real presence in the sacrament being retained in the hands of priests. The Anglican conception of the power of the priesthood well appears in the statements addressed to them in the ordination service, one of which from the mouth of the Bishop is in these words, “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands.

Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven, and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God and of his holy sacraments."

In view of these facts, then, I think I am fully justified in the assertion, that wherever there is a priesthood there also is the assumption of some special relation to the deity, and a special authority thence derived.

I return then to the question, has this theory been beneficial to society or not? I must confess that I am not altogether prepared to say that there have not been certain advantages connected with it. In the early stages of savage life, when men were first beginning to emerge from a condition little above the brutes, there was an advantage in hedging round the most intelligent class with supposed divine sanctions. It is possible that this was the only way they had of commanding any respect or enforcing any kind of order among their savage associates, and that therefore this supposition was then a real necessity and an indispensable aid to human progress. It is, too, I think quite possible, that many of these early teachers and priests really believed themselves under the especial patronage and inspiration of some god. Contemplative and philanthropic minds meditating in the gloom of primeval forest or the solitude of boundless plains, while they sighed for the sorrows of their brethren and aspired after a day of deliverance and a happier land, may well have come to imagine that such a land was promised, and conceived that the thoughts kindling within them, and the voices ever sounding in their hearts, came from some power above. They unconsciously peopled the silence and the solitude with phantoms, and then mistook them for realities. Thus the tradition of divine inspiration and of God's speaking with men first arose, and thus it has descended to our times: it arose

at first in an honest belief, and though afterwards often mixed with fraud, yet it has seldom been wholly made up of conscious deceit,—for a thing utterly fraudulent would not have lasted so long. In early Egypt we read that the priests first taught the people the arts of life, and instructed them by a system of irrigation to convert those rising Nile waters, which they had before half dreaded as a peril, into a source of fertility and blessing. They too introduced the observation of the heavens by which the periods of rising might be foretold.

What wonder was it that the men, who first discovered that the stars were thus subservient to human uses, as they gazed into those deep skies and read their celestial lessons, should dream that their radiant rulers were speaking to their hearts, should long to link their destiny to some “bright particular star,” or even dare to “claim a kindred with them?” And what wonder was it when the lowly toilers on the land heard from these star-gazers lessons of guidance and found them come true, that they should think their teachers conversed with deities on the solitary mountain top, or lofty tower, and exaggerate to their fellows the sanctity and the mystery of that knowledge which struck their simple minds with awe.

And still again at a later period we may be prepared to allow that the priestly class has done good service to mankind. When, for instance, at the period of the decline of the Roman Empire, it seemed as if all the fruits of civilisation, all the results of the long travail of 1500 years were to be overwhelmed in a tide of barbarism, and the arts, laws and accumulated learning of the past for ever lost, the Christian church in many places presented a barrier to the storm, and afforded shelter to treasures whose destruction would have been irreparable. These facts are allowed even by a witness so unexceptionable as the historian Gibbon.* Some indeed have thought that we are in-

* Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, c. 37.

debted to the clerical body for at least as much destruction as preservation of the monuments of ancient literature. Hallam in one place seems inclined to attribute the decay of learning "to the neglect of heathen literature by the Christian church,"* and elsewhere alluding to the stupidity and carelessness of ecclesiastics, in respect of the remains of ancient learning, he says "so gross and supine was the ignorance of the monks within whose walls these treasures were concealed that it was impossible to ascertain, except by indefatigable researches, the extent of what had been saved out of the great shipwreck of antiquity."† In another place, however, he acknowledges that if we be asked, "by what cause it happened that a few sparks of ancient learning survived throughout this long winter" of the middle ages, "we can only ascribe their preservation to the establishment of Christianity. Religion alone made a bridge, as it were, across the chaos and has linked the two periods of ancient and modern civilization.‡

At any rate, then, we may at least concede that in whatever degree the clergy in the dark ages *were* able to make a stand against barbarism and rescue the monuments of the past from destruction, they were indebted to the principle of which we are treating, which recognizes an order of men in special connection with the deity. For the barbarians in their native forests had long been accustomed to a superstitious regard for their own priests, and would thus be naturally inclined to shew a degree of forbearance to those who were protected by the insignia of religion, however ruthless they might be towards their unconsecrated opponents. They would apply the torch without scruple to a palace or a fortress, while they hesitated in front of a convent or a church. Such remnants of antiquity therefore as chanced to be sheltered in the latter had so far a better

* Hallam's Middle Ages, vol. ii. c. ix., pt. i. p. 337.

† *Ib.* c. ix., p. 519.

‡ *Ib.*, p. 355.

prospect of preservation than those contained in secular walls.

So far, then, we willingly grant that some degree of benefit has accrued to mankind from the sacerdotal principle in early stages of human development. Nor would we deny that other advantages of a less direct nature are traceable at the same period,* which space will not now allow us to particularize. We have yet to inquire whether the same advantages are perceptible as we descend to more civilised times.

That the notion of an order of men set apart and endowed with a divine authority over their fellows is one very capable of being abused, I suppose no unprejudiced person would deny. Considering it according to our general experience of human nature, what should we conceive to be the *probable* effect and tendency of such a notion? I think all candid persons will agree that without very searching and continuous checks, one very natural effect of such a notion must be to produce in those under its influence a high degree of spiritual pride. As time goes on, spiritual pride, like all other, has a natural tendency to display itself; this can only be done by the extension and consolidation of spiritual influence and power. In the first place then a priestly body under the influence of this feeling would look about for the means of gratifying it; ecclesiastics will ordinarily be deficient in direct physical force, they will often therefore be driven to attain their ends by a close alliance with the monarch, the warrior caste, or the aristocracy of a country; mutual concessions being made so that they may join hands for the continued repression of the vulgar.

But further, of all kinds of power, spiritual power is that which is most jealous of its rights and privileges.

* V. Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, Vol. II., 167, also Soame's Anglo-Saxon Church, c. IV. p. 215 and elsewhere, and Milman's History of Latin Christianity, Vol. VI., p. 433 *et seq.*, and also I. 440, and II. 96, 97.

Its representatives, ingrained with the idea that their dicta are derived from a divine source, and their rights conferred by a special appointment of God, are compelled to be uncompromising by the very theory of their origin. To allow that their words are questionable they think is to be unfaithful to the oracles of God, to be lax in maintaining their rights is to betray the divine honour. In fact they get so accustomed at last to identify the glory of God and their own that they become utterly unable to distinguish them. So that to decry the statements of priests is to be called blasphemy, or to touch their property in not common robbery but sacrilege.

This necessity of their position in the same way requires them to withstand all suggestions of improvement, or advancements of knowledge which do not proceed from themselves. They are the divinely commissioned teachers, they possess the heavenly oracles, out of which they have instructed the people on the world's origin and their own, on their destiny, the laws which should regulate their lives, on what is good and what evil. If they allow their dogmas to be at best doubtful, or grant for a moment that from some other source, sounder knowledge may be derived, their pride of place, their occupation is gone: there ceases to be any reason for their existence. "For why," might men say, "do we want messengers from the gods to teach us, when we increase in knowledge without them, when we can even perceive that much of their pretended knowledge is erroneous?" The logic of their position, therefore, irresistibly compels priestly bodies to crush inquiry, and if possible stifle its results. In some cases of course these results are absolutely undeniable. Then there will arise a strong temptation to keep up the credit of their oracles by forced interpretations or crafty interpolations which may bring them into conformity with science. But every fresh discovery has a more unsettling effect, every escape of new light reason-

ably makes them tremble for their security. But power which thus feels itself unstable is naturally dissatisfied; it could not be expected to remain passive under the slow and painful process of dissolution, and smilingly look on till the last vestige of its influence was stolen away. It instinctively perceives that to retain the dominion it still has undiminished it must fight hard to extend it, that it must throw out its roots and strive to interweave its fibres with the very groundwork of human existence. It will endeavour, therefore, to make every relation of society so intimately dependent on itself, that to interfere with it in the slightest degree shall seem to conservative minds like risking every security of social order; it must have a voice, and a function, and a hand everywhere, so that no war can be undertaken without its benison, no law passed without its sanction, no property change hands by transference or succession without its confirmation, no family relationship be incurred without its authority and permission, above all, no education proceed without its direction. And where, perchance from want of watchfulness, customs have crept in which tend to nullify its privileges and bring its ministers down to the level of common men, no pains must be spared by the wily introduction of new laws, or by the invention of fresh legal subtleties to countervail their effect. But as the world grows in enlightenment, perhaps all these measures fail and the situation is daily becoming more critical. It becomes then at last more and more apparent to the priestly order that they must demur at no means, however questionable or desperate, to hold together their waning dominion. Restive princes must be won by flattery, the vulgar dazzled by pomps or cowed by more awful terrors; both flattery and fear must be applied to unlock the chest of wealth, that most unailing source of power,—if all else fail, the zeal of fanatics must be invoked and divisions kindled among brethren, that the light of new-dawning and

dangerous truths may be smothered in the fumes of bigoted passions and civic slaughters. *Divide et impera*, divide and command, is a maxim which sacerdotalism has more than once known how to use in her exigencies; it may become dangerous for her that her subjects should be too united, and a little heresy has often been serviceable to warm up the cooling zeal of the elect.

Such, or something like this, a philosopher in a by-gone age might *a priori* have conjectured would be the course to which the sacerdotal principle would be driven by the necessity of its position as society progressed. And we shall find that such a conjecture would have been strictly verified by fact. Though, indeed, facts reveal to us an extent of unscrupulousness and a superfluity of craft and violence which no imagination could have foreseen. Amongst a large number I can now only refer you to a few salient examples which will serve to verify the principles I have pointed out. First, then, as to the tendency of priesthood to coalesce with the kingly or aristocratic class in order to keep under the mass of the people. Of this we have a variety of instances. Among the Brahmins there was a certain antagonism at an early period between the priestly and warrior castes, but they at length found it expedient to reconcile their differences and join hands in support of a creed which was so well adapted to keep the lower castes in their proper places.* At a later period, however, by *combining* with the lower, the Brahmins seem to have crushed the leading caste and got all power into their own hands. It is supposed by some that in like manner the next move of sacerdotalists in Europe will be to court and seek to ally themselves with the democracies. I can only advise all sagacious liberals to beware of them. Among the early Egyptians there seems to have arisen at times a similar antagonism, but

* V. M. Muller's History of Sanskrit Literature pp. 77-81, also p. 207, p. 485 *seq.*

eventually with the same result, of a consolidation of the sacerdotal power. Even among a people with so many democratic instincts as the Romans, and who were nominally republicans, we find that for many generations there was a close league between the aristocratic and sacerdotal classes. No one could be a Pontiff or an Augur unless he were also a Patrician, and thus the whole power of war and peace, the sanction of laws, and the partition of land, was retained in the ruling hands. This artful exclusion of the Plebeians was indeed eventually abolished by the Ogulnian law, though even then the Pontifex Maximus must still be a Patrician: however, no sooner was the Empire established than we find the Priestly class in close alliance with it, the Emperor either himself monopolising or exclusively appointing to its influential offices. In the Christian Church the same spectacle presents itself. Hardly has the Christian priesthood established its influence and obtained a numerous body of votaries in the great cities of the Empire, than we find it in close alliance with an imperial pretender; and henceforth its prelates "rear their mitred fronts in courts and palaces," and the controversies of the faith take their place amongst the intrigues of eunuchs and clamour of courtiers. For their after successes against the yet widely prevalent paganism, the Christian priesthood are still largely dependent on the same principle of currying favour with Kings or King's wives. Charlemagne is induced to convert the Saxons with fire and sword,—Clovis and his Franks rescue the sacred fold from the incursion of the heretics,—from another royal hand is obtained the patrimony of St. Peter,—and others consecrate the fruits of the earth to the service of heaven in the institution of tithes. Truly the Church had good reason for her adoption of the maxim, "the powers that be are ordained of God!"

By what arts the clergy endeavoured to consoli-

date their power and extend its influence in every sphere of society, the history of every country in Europe and our own land furnishes innumerable examples. We find them not seldom instigating revolts of young princes against their fathers who had attempted to moderate clerical pretensions, teaching wives to plot against their husbands, laying counties and kingdoms under interdict, excommunicating magistrates on all sorts of frivolous pretences, concocting and dissolving marriages to further priestly encroachments, manœuvring the laity out of their voice in church affairs, and often, by artful concordats, monarchs out of their rights of investiture; they brought it about that clerics and their dependents should be exempt from the jurisdiction of the lay courts, they obtained for their own courts exclusive jurisdiction in all causes matrimonial, and the right of interference in all matters connected with the nuptial contract, marriage portions, and dower; wills and testaments were brought under their sway: in many places to the exclusion of the lay courts they obtained jurisdiction over a large number of crimes, under pretence of their being spiritual causes: they even had their own prisons for lay offenders. Moreover, by artful contracts, and working on the superstitious fears of the dying, they acquired in all countries enormous accumulations of land, which no statutes of mortmain could check. The English Statute Book in earlier reigns is crowded with acts intended to control clerical rapacity, but all in vain.

Common recoveries and uses and trusts still find a place in our law books as monuments of priestly ingenuity. It would detain us too long to go into further particulars under this head; but any unacquainted with the subject I earnestly recommend to read the seventh chapter of Hallam's *History of the Middle Ages*, and any good edition of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, under the title *Mortmain*.

We have yet to give examples of the tendency of a priestly class to oppose itself to discovery and intellectual advancement. Once upon a time the now sleepy Buddhists were reformers ; but the high priestly party in India, then represented by the Brahmins, eventually extirpated these innovators by force of arms. The religious authorities of Athens will never escape the shame of having persecuted to the death "Socrates," a good man, who they thought "subverted the people." Of the Jewish priesthood it would be superfluous to speak, for "which of the prophets had not their fathers persecuted?" as one of their last victims asked them. Since their days of misfortune, indeed, the Jews have been mostly called to endure the persecutions of others, and they have often set a bright example to the rest of the world. But in ancient times the Romans seem to have been the only people who saw the necessity of keeping the priesthood in order, and had some notion of the principle of toleration. We must turn again to the Christian Churches if we would find the most striking examples of the tendency of sacerdotal bodies to oppose themselves to all outside light. Their greatest father, St. Augustine,* who may be considered almost the creator of Western theology, denounced the belief in the Antipodes on the ground that no such people are mentioned in scripture among the descendants of Adam, and he was a true prototype of most of his followers. Boniface, Archbishop of Mentz applied to the Pope for a public censure of the same dangerous doctrine. The stock instance often referred to is that of Galileo, who was imprisoned for affirming the motion of the earth. Though so often alluded to I quite agree with a recent able lecturer in this hall that it is a story which should never be allowed to slip from men's memories, for it shows in a

* De Civ. Dei., xvi. 9. V. also Lactantius (Inst. III. 24), and Pascal's Satirical Allusion (*Provinciales*, Let. 18.)

most striking manner the ingrained tendency of all priesthoods.*

Science and scientific men cannot indeed now be dealt with in the summary method of past days, but who that remembers the bitterness with which the truths of geology were formerly assailed on account of their divergence from our sacred books, who that is acquainted with the animosity aroused by the science of historical criticism, and recollects the persecution of Bishop Colenso and the "Essayists and Reviewers," can doubt that the old spirit is still existent? Indeed as long as priesthoods of any sort remain it always *must* exist, since the principle of science and the principle of sacerdotalism are mutually exclusive of each other. I recommend whoever doubts this to read the Encyclical Letter and the Syllabus issued by the present Pope not very long ago. If finally evidence be demanded of those cruel and extreme measures to which, as I before stated, sacerdotalism, which is determined to maintain its pride of place must at length be driven, instances crowd so thickly upon the memory that the only difficulty is in selection. Read the accounts of the horrible massacres of De Montfort, where Christian priests bore the cross in advance to inspire the ruthless soldiers to their bloody work. What memories are evoked by the day of St. Bartholomew! the dungeons of the Inquisition! the gate of Constance! the revocation of the Edict of Nantes! the fires of Smithfield! And if you say these are Papal enormities, and nothing like them is found outside of the Church of Rome,—turn to the history of the Church of Geneva, and read of Michael Servetus, an accomplished physician, and the anticipator of Harvey in the theory of the circulation of the

* For details of this story see the notes to Mr. Elley Finch's valuable lecture, "The Inductive Philosophy," or Whewell's History of the Inductive Sciences, book v., c. 3, sec. 4.

blood,—witness such a man slaughtered at the hand of the pious and Protestant Calvin! Read of the burnings of Puritans, of the sufferings of the ejected nonconformists, of Bunyan's cell at Bedford, of Cartwright and others harried from city to city,—read the trials and imprisonment of free-thinking men whose only crime was in printing books opposed to the orthodox opinions, and you will see that Protestant priesthoods though debarred from the *trenchant* blade of their predecessors, have not been wanting in the will though lacking the power to apply that *ultima ratio*, that last unanswerable argument of sacerdotalism. Surely the priestly principle ought to have produced some untold unimaginable benefit to the world, in some degree to compensate, or to make it possible for men to condone such a long and weary catalogue of suffering and tyranny! I submit therefore to your judgment, that whatever advantages this principle may have possessed in the infancy of our race, whether as society progresses it does not become greatly evil. Until the citizen is developed the priest has a function, but when men have risen to the dignity of citizens he is no more a help but a hindrance.

I have endeavoured to show you what was naturally to be expected from sacerdotalism, when childhood was left behind and men began to think and question for themselves, and adduced incontrovertible facts which prove that it considerably more than fulfilled such expectations. And the experience is the same in all parts of the world, under all forms of government, and in all religions. It must have been so. A principle which attributes divine authority and a control over the conscience and over knowledge to a particular order of men, could never have existed in a world intended to move on, without producing collision, distress, and convulsion. And as long as only a hundred men remain in a nation who cherish that principle in their breast, they will be in their measure a source of

weakness to the body politic, a hindrance to progress, an impediment to the free and natural growth of citizen life. But this principle is very far at present from being reduced to such narrow limits in this or any country. On the contrary it plumes itself and stalks abroad; powerful and even threatening parties are still under its sway in this country and elsewhere. In modern times however, its processes are so much conducted under elaborate schemes of legislation and forms of law, and so skilfully woven up with many of the most essential interests of society, such as education, the care of the poor, the sick, and the criminal, that men do not often observe its working. But that it is no bugbear of the fancy the late course of legislation in almost every country on the continent must convince the most incredulous. Within the last few years the governments of Spain, Italy, and Switzerland have been engaged in measures to restrain the pretensions or guard against the renewed artifices of the clerical order. Germany has been legislating on the subject within the last month: in Belgium at this present minute, clerical machinations have brought affairs to a crisis. Read M. Lavelye's article in the November number of the "Fortnightly" if you wish to see how dangerous the arts of a clergy may be to civil liberty. Our own ministry have got a few sacerdotal nuts to crack in Ireland, which I fear will damage their teeth, with respect to education and the conflict of Papal and English law,—and you may depend upon it we have not heard the last of it in relation to Education in England.

But I must leave further consideration of these *greater* matters as to which sacerdotalism hinders harmonious progress and obstructs the working of the laws of the land, and proceed in conclusion to mention one or two of the minor evils which also result from it.

One salient form in which the sacerdotal principle

is opposed to the welfare of modern society, is that it breeds a class of men pledged to a foregone conclusion. It cannot but be an evil, that as our ever-increasing experience introduces us to fresh facts, there should be an influentially placed class whose first question will always be, not, what one would think must be the right and natural one,—are these things true? but, how do they square with what we teach? Will they in any way discredit our time-honoured assertions? And if they are thought to do so, will this class try and raise a prejudice, and prevent the real merits of the case from being seen where things cannot be absolutely denied? Is not this to weight knowledge very heavily in its already sufficiently difficult progress? But the theory of an infallible record in the hands of a divinely appointed order of men necessarily drives them to such proceedings. They suppose that their office lays them under an obligation to maintain that what they have handed down is right; to admit that they might have been wrong is calculated, therefore they think, not only to breed suspicion without, but hesitation and defection within their own camp. It seems to them, therefore, absolutely necessary to present a bold front to the outside world,—as they say, “to magnify their office.” So we read of a clerical dignitary in a debate on one of the petitions against the Athanasian Creed; speaking against any concession he said, “the office of the Church is not to please but to teach the people.” Who does not see lurking in these words the old theory, that the priestly body has some divine infallible source of information distinct and superior to that of study and scientific examination, which are the only means open to ordinary men and mere worldly students and philosophers? To maintain this attitude they must do their utmost to exclude differences and secure uniformity of teaching in their own body, and under these circumstances the most professionally hide-bound and uncompromising naturally take the lead. They see the necessity for increased care in the training

of young ecclesiastics, so as to render them more imperious to outside impressions and zealous to carry on the warfare against free-thought. Hence, they must be caught young, and carefully indoctrinated, not in the open air and under the mixed influences of great universities, but in the close atmosphere of theological colleges, where they can be thoroughly ingrained with the foregone conclusions they will have to maintain. Hence, the carefully edited class-books, where everything disagreeing with their own view is stigmatised as a heresy, and each point is carefully classified, and supplied with a pat answer, with the exactitude of a theological Bradshaw. Hence, the dusty shelves groaning under ponderous tomes of sham and exploded learning, to encourage the neophytes to believe that if they cannot find an answer to all objections within the limits of their own knowledge, that somewhere, at least, in those endless folios, there is the wherewithal to confound all adversaries. Under these influences a tribe of young sacerdotalists is created well drilled to answer the ecclesiastical rally, and to supply the deficiencies of an older, more dispassionate, and as they consider secular-minded class of clergy. Here will always be found a serviceable body apt in all the arts of ecclesiastical warfare, well skilled to amuse "women with saintly trifles," and work on the superstitious fears of the weak-minded, —active to go from house to house and muster their allies in drawing-room and cottage, to persuade them that in fulfilling their behests they are doing God service, wary to teach them the ready watch-words, and breathe beforehand suspicions against new truths; here too, may be found the men who have a keen scent for the first savour of liberalism in a too candid comrade, who can convey clerical delation with a shrug and indicate heterodoxy with an ogle, who crowd clerical meetings in close and steady order, and howl down in concert every protest and remonstrance of their more sensible and moderate brethren.

A further evil of which this sacerdotal principle is

fruitful in society, is that it creates in many minds a tendency to fanciful distinctions which have little relation to truth and reality. Thus there is the Church and the world, the one sanctified and sacred, the other common and unclean ; literature, which connects itself in any way with *scripture*, though perhaps utterly foolish and frivolous if not harmful, is religious and sacred, other writings, however noble in spirit, if not so connected, are profane ; *this* amusement is allowable, *that* is wicked,—you may go to a concert, but not to a theatre, to a tea-party, but not to a ball ; the same music is at one time secular, at another sacred ; some days are holy, others are common ; this ground is hallowed, that is only ordinary earth, as God made it. Thus men become hampered and bound up with a crowd of empty distinctions and sham sanctities bringing forth a crop of imaginary and artificial sins which enervate weak consciences, and give scope for the sour and censorious.

You yourselves are competent witnesses to this last fact ; for who could have instigated the recent attempt to shut you out from this hall, but some one under the influence of the melancholy delusion, that what was innocent and improving recreation on common days was sinful on Sunday evenings ?

The same thing produces in some circles of society an exaggeration of trifles, a misperception of the true proportion of things, and not seldom an absolute anility of mind. Thus, with some, every little matter connected with the Church, whether colour, shape, place, or dress, is considered an essential of devotion, and an object of clerical emulation and energy. With others, every trumpery incident is magnified into a critical moment for religion, the world with them is everlastingly coming to an end, the gas-strike and Hyde Park spouters are “signs of the latter days,” and parsons donning red petticoats are a fulfilment of prophecy. If some stone is dug up in Palestine or Mesopotamia with a

Bible name on it, immediately it must be dragged into the ranks as a witness for scripture ; forthwith there is a muster of the initiated, and a premonitory rustle round serious tea-tables, and soon arises over it such a clatter of tongues that one would think the very ark of the faith had been rescued from the Philistines.

But a more serious matter than these lively diversions is that social bitterness and exclusiveness of which the sacerdotal principle is so often the root. There are circles in what is called the religious world, where almost every offence against society is excusable except one. A man may be a bad father, or a profligate and worthless son, he may be a heartless seducer, an unprincipled rascal, a getter up of bubble companies, a scientific swindler,—all these things may be forgiven him, but if he be an infidel the door of hope is shut ;—this is the one unpardonable crime that no good qualities can compensate ; though he is the soul of benevolence and the model of every virtue, unselfish, brave, learned, courteous and manly,—put him at the very best he is but a wolf in sheep's clothing, a limb of Satan in the garb of an angel of light. There are some even who carry their dread of contamination and their desire to demonstrate their own clearness from all lax principles to almost ludicrous extremes. In that house so spotless in its stucco and whose whole aspect is radiant with respectable orthodoxy, nothing that defileth shall ever enter in : no pudding-headed foot-boy or buxom house-maid shall ever be there engaged, unless put through their doctrinal paces and catechised on the articles of their belief,—their shoes shall not be mended by a free-thinking cobbler, and they suspect the produce of a heterodox butterman,—the scullion must be a strict communicant and value the privileges of a serious family, where the very horses have learnt to look down their noses, and no dog upon the premises dare wag his solemn tail upon a Sunday.

Before I close may I be allowed to impress upon you

one caution. From what I have said of the evils great and small arising from sacerdotalism, it must not be supposed that I intend anything like an attack upon the clerical classes whether of the Established Church or any other body. This caution is necessary, because some persons seem to find it difficult to distinguish between a principle and those who may happen to be connected with it. To me it appears perfectly legitimate to remark upon the evil of a system, and to illustrate it by allusion to certain prominent types past or present, without being considered to assail classes or individuals. For some of the worst features of sacerdotalism, such as its exclusiveness, its spiritual assumption, its dishonesty in dealing with evidence and others, may distinguish laity as well as clergy. But whatever the evil may be, no body of men living at the present time is responsible for it: in its first origin it was a natural growth and however much in the course of history it has been aggravated by violence and fraud, it has *descended* to us as part of our national heritage and education, and we have been born under its influence. In old countries things which have thus grown with their growth can only be got rid of by patience and mutual forbearance: by degrees we may hope that light will permeate the darkest quarters, but the progress of illumination will only be retarded by personal bitterness. And in this country we have all the greater reason for patience in these matters, inasmuch as our clergy as a body have certainly been less under the influence of sacerdotalism than any other,—many of them indeed have offered a steady resistance to its advance, and have been its most resolute and efficient opponents. And at the darkest period in nearly every Church, there have been men who were better than the spirit of their *own* age, and who would have been ornaments to any. At the same period that ecclesiastical fanatics were urging on the cruel revocation of Nantes, the saintly Fenelon had been advocating

toleration, for which indeed not long after he became himself a sufferer. The immortal Pascal and the two devoted Arnaulds, Henri and Angelique, had adorned the same Church not long before.

So, too, at the present, amongst ourselves, there are among the clergy of all denominations men of large and liberal minds, and notwithstanding occasional outbursts of professional zeal or exalted notions in this or that direction, a large body throughout the country whose virtuous and benevolent lives every man of right feeling must respect. We do not therefore revile men but principles and systems; and even those most under subjection to the system we are glad to acknowledge have many claims on our regard, and are inclined to consider it not so much their fault as their misfortune. But when we behold amiable and in many cases acute minds under the sway of principles which we conscientiously consider, and which history proves to be, utterly deleterious, may we not be allowed to regard a system with all the more indignation and dislike, which thus warps God's fairest gifts, which turns those who might have been the benefactors and teachers of mankind into narrow religious recluses, and poisons hearts of natural gentleness and benevolence with theological hatred and the gall of the persecutor.

For myself, at any rate, I cannot but confess that I consider this sacerdotal principle,—which is at the root of much that is called religion and which may infect laymen as well as clerics, which in its essence is the assumption of special divine favour and prerogatives, a usurpation over men's consciences, and a blasphemy against those powers of reason and that light of science with which God has blessed our race,—I consider this sacerdotal principle the very direst evil and the bitterest curse of civilised society. Through the false distinctions it creates, and the assumptions to which it gives rise it often embitters all social life, it destroys the peace of families, it makes foes in a man's own household, set-

ting the father against the son, the child against the parents, the wife against the husband,—it is the very bane and spoiler of all good fellowship, all open-heartedness and kindly feeling.

And if as the old story tells us, there is an evil one, an inveterate foe to man who roams about seeking whom he may devour, entering human souls and dwelling there, and when he enters “keeping his house” with such tenacity, that none can dislodge him, surely it is that foul fiend, that accursed spirit of sacerdotal pride and priestly assumption which sits in the living temple of God, if not quite daring to proclaim that he is God, yet inspiring his infatuated victims to declare, “the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are” we!

If there is anything that would justify the denunciation of the French satirist, it is assuredly this atrocious principle, not this particular religion nor that religion, but that evil spirit which has too much prevailed in all, that monstrous assumption which has raised its head wherever priesthoods have been found. When I perceive in every place the difficulty, disorganization and hindrance it is still creating, and when I remember the long tragedy of the past, the terrible sum of misery,—the tortured bodies, the broken hearts, the ruined intellects,—for which it is responsible, the exclamation almost rises involuntarily to the lips, crush the infamous, “*écrasez l’infame!*”

