

Dr. Lambert Defends Jefferson.

Rev. L. A. Lambert, defending Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, said:

We come now to the meaning of the word "equal" as used in the Declaration. That word seems to be the cause of a great deal of confusion in the minds of some people. We see not why it should be, since the Declaration itself indicates clearly its meaning—that the equality asserted is equality in those natural rights of every man as against the encroachments of his fellow man, of society and of government; rights which spring from his nature, his personality, his responsibility to God, and his destiny. These rights belong to him because he is a man, and they are equal in all men because they are men. All are equal in the right of immunity from unjust aggression.

Dr. Brownson, in one of his profound essays, goes down to the theological reason of this equality asserted in the Declaration—a reason which we may well suppose did not enter into Jefferson's mind when he asserted it; which shows that he wrote wiser than he knew. In volume XVIII., pages 45 and 46, Brownson thus speaks of those natural rights which Jefferson sums up in the words "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness:"

"Man lives by communion with God, and he communes with God in the creative act and the incarnation, through his kind, and through nature. This threefold communion gives rise to three institutions—religion or the church, society or the state, and property. The life that man derives from God through religion and property is not derived from Him through society, and consequently so much of his life he holds independently of society; and this constitutes his rights as a man as distinguished from his rights as a citizen. In relation to society, as not held from God through her, these are termed his natural rights, which society must hold inviolable, and government protect, for every one, whatever his complexion or social position. These rights—the rights of conscience and the rights of property, with all their necessary implications—are limitations on the rights of society, and the individual has the right to plead them against the state. Society does not confer them and cannot take them away, for they are at least as sacred and as fundamental as her own."

Thus this great man of genius, familiar with Catholic theology, delves to the bottom of the problem. The rights here spoken of as deriving from communion with God through the creative act and through nature are, of course, common to all men and equal in all men who live in that communion through the creative act and through nature. But all men so live. Therefore those rights are equal in all.

Jefferson, therefore, in asserting this equality of natural rights as coming through the creative act, expressed a profound truth of Christian philosophy. Where did he get it? Certainly not from the French infidels. God sometimes uses men as instruments in works they do not fully understand the import of. In shaping the course of events out of which this republic, with a Providential mission, grew. He used as instruments men who were unconscious of or adverted not to His designs, and yet they did their parts to the consummation of the result as surely as Moses did his in obedience to the voice from the burning bush. Jefferson and the other fathers of this republic were near that fire and received more reflected light from it than they wot of. They were Providential men who, aside from their own personal motives, did their part in the unfolding of a divine plan, as Constantine did in his time and Charlemagne did in his.

The rights that we have seen have their root in communion with God, cannot be violated with impunity, whether by the individual, society or government. Retribution follows their violation as

the night the day. These birthrights of man must not be invaded, while he invades not the same rights in others. When they are so invaded a wrong is done, the natural dignity of man is outraged, the circle that the Creator has drawn round about his manhood is raided; a crime is committed not only against the human victim, but against his Maker, and against the order of His providence.

It is needless, or should be, to say that the Declaration, by the word of "equal," does not refer to adventitious differences, such as height, weight, strength, degrees of intelligence, wealth, poverty, etc. No particular height, weight, wealth, poverty or degree of intelligence is essential to man in order to be a man. The four-foot man is no less a man than the eight-foot man. The infant weeping on its mother's breast is, so far as natural rights are concerned, no less a man than he who, reeling and trembling with age, stumbles towards the grave. The starving beggar, thin as a lath, is no less a man than the ponderous statesman, the fat politician, or the sleek and juicy alderman. And the man with only sense enough to earn an honest living in the sweat of his face is as much a man as the great ones who, for better or for worse, ploughed deep furrows in the world's history. No, children, it was not ephemeral differences—all of which are plus man, and as unimportant as the difference between length of noses—that Jefferson denied. He was not a humorist, nor an idiot.

It is claimed that the rights of the Declaration belong to the abstract, not to the concrete man. Such a claim is groundless, for those rights belong only to men who live in communion with God through the creative act and through nature. Such men are created and therefore real or concrete men. That which is not has not and cannot have real rights. The rights of nonexistence are non-existent. The rights that a man cannot enjoy till he becomes an abstract are like Counselor Curran's definition of nothing—a footless boot without a leg, or a bodyless shirt without neck or sleeves; or, we might add, a soup made from the shadow of a bone in the abstract.

Governments do not deal with men in the abstract. They can neither sue nor be sued, hanged nor sent to congress. Be a right ever so patent and ample, the abstract man cannot enjoy it. An essential condition to the enjoyment of rights in concreteness, real existence. When the Declaration speaks of rights it has reference to real, live men of flesh and blood. The dead part has no practical use for mundane rights, and the potential or abstract man can enjoy them only when he ceases to be potential or abstract and takes a cognizable place in the procession from the cradle to the grave. When Jefferson wrote the Declaration he wisely refrained from dealing with metaphysical potentials.

We would remind Father Sheahan that inequality of glory of the saints in heaven does not prove that he quotes St. Paul to prove, namely, the inequality of the saints themselves. They may be unequal, but his argument does not prove it; it only proves the inequality of glory. Nor does inequality of torments prove inequality in the damned. He confounds the conditions with the conditioned—a serious lapse from close thinking.

"The equality of men is a creation of our minds."

No, it is, as we have seen, an apprehension or judgment of the mind corresponding with objective reality.

"Jefferson's preamble contains the principles of anarchy."

This, we presume, refers to the principle that the just powers of governments are derived from the consent of the governed. If this principle be anarchic, then Bellarmine, Suarez and the theologians generally are anarchists, for they held and taught that the authority to rule comes directly from the people to the ruler; that the people,

though not the creators of the authority, their consent is the medium through which it comes to the ruler. It is important to observe here that the Declaration does not say that the people are the creators or ultimate source of authority. It simply states that "the just power to govern comes from the consent of the governed," without considering further its ultimate source. The statement, then, is true, according to the theologians we have named.

We will now quote a few extracts from some well known and weighty theologians on how the power comes to the ruler.

Bellarmin: "The divine right has not given this power (of ruling) to any man in particular, for it has given it to the multitude; besides the positive law being taken away, there is no reason why one man should rule rather than another, among a great number of equal men (mark "equal men"); therefore power belongs to the whole multitude." Having pointed out where this power exists as in its subject, the great cardinal goes on to show how it passes from the multitude to the ruler or body of rulers, thus: "In the third place, observe that the multitude transfers this power to one person or more by natural right. Observe, in the fourth place, that particular forms of governments are by the law of nations, and not by divine law, since it depends on the consent of the multitude to place over themselves a king, consuls or other magistrates, as is clear; and for a legitimate reason, they can change royalty into aristocracy, or into democracy, or vice versa, as it was done in Rome."

Suarez: "In the second place, it follows from what has been said that the civil power, whenever it is found in a man or prince, has emanated according to usual and legitimate law from the people and the community, either directly or remotely, and that it cannot otherwise be justly possessed."

Concina: "It is evident therefore that the power existing in the prince, the king, or in many persons, whether nobles or plebeians, emanates from the community itself, directly or indirectly."

We will conclude these quotations with an extract from Compendium Salmaticense, a text book on ethics in its time in Catholic colleges and universities: "It is universally admitted that princes receive this power (of ruling) from God; but, at the same time, it is maintained with more truth that they do not receive it directly, but through the medium of the people's consent; for all men are naturally equal, and there is no natural distinction of superiority or inferiority. Since nature has not given any individual power over another, God has conferred this power upon the community, which, as it may think proper, to be ruled by one or by many appointed persons."

We submit that in view of these vigorous and exact statements, the proposition of Jefferson in the Declaration seems tame.

Were all these Catholic theologians anarchists, and did they teach the principles of anarchy? If not, then Jefferson did not.

If we have devoted more time and space than the article we have commented on calls for, it is because we are in times when the public mind, inflated by commercial success and successful criminal aggression, is on a common drunk, and under the Malayan impulse to run amuck with swaggering disregard to the time-honored principles imbedded in the Declaration and constitution; principles that should be to us what the compass is to the mariner when his ship is in the fog; principles that stand as a bar to anarchy on the one hand, and government absolutism on the other. At such a time to weaken those pillars on which the grand structure of the republic rests is to play blind Samson over again, and invite his fate.

Poor Human Nature.

"What would you do if you had a million dollars?" said one plain, everyday man.

"Oh," replied the other, "I suppose I'd put in most of my time comparing myself with some one who had a billion and feeling discontented."—Washington Star.