

Discourse 1. Introductory

1.

{1} IN addressing myself, Gentlemen, to the consideration of a question which has excited so much interest, and elicited so much discussion at the present day, as that of University Education, I feel some explanation is due from me for supposing, after such high ability and wide experience have been brought to bear upon it, that any field remains for the additional labours either of a disputant or of an inquirer. If, nevertheless, I still venture to ask permission to continue the discussion, already so protracted, it is because the subject of Liberal Education, and of the principles on which it must be conducted, has ever had a hold upon my own mind; and because I have lived the greater part of my life in a place which has all that time been occupied in a series of controversies both domestic and with strangers, and of measures, experimental or definitive, bearing upon it. About fifty years since, the English University, of which I was so long a member, after a century of inactivity, at length was roused, at a time when (as I may say) it was giving no education at all to the youth committed to its keeping, to a sense of the responsibilities which its profession and its station involved, and it presents to us {2} the singular example of an heterogeneous and an independent body of men, setting about a work of self-reformation, not from any pressure of public opinion, but because it was fitting and right to undertake it. Its initial efforts, begun and carried on amid many obstacles, were met from without, as often happens in such cases, by ungenerous and jealous criticisms, which, at the very moment that they were urged, were beginning to be unjust. Controversy did but bring out more clearly to its own apprehension the views on which its reformation was proceeding, and throw them into a philosophical form. The course of beneficial change made progress, and what was at first but the result of individual energy and an act of the academical corporation, gradually became popular, and was taken up and carried out by the separate collegiate bodies, of which the University is composed. This was the first stage of the controversy. Years passed away, and then political adversaries arose against it, and the system of education which it had established was a second time assailed; but still, since that contest was conducted for the most part through the medium, not of political acts, but of treatises and pamphlets, it happened as before that the threatened dangers, in the course of their repulse, did but afford fuller development and more exact delineation to the principles of which the University was the representative.

In the former of these two controversies the charge brought against its studies was their remoteness from the occupations and duties of life, to which they are the formal introduction, or, in other words, their *inutility*; in the latter, it was their connexion with a particular form of belief, or, in other words, their *religious exclusiveness*.

Living then so long as a witness, though hardly as an actor, in these scenes of intellectual conflict, I am able {3} to bear witness to views of University Education, without authority indeed in themselves, but not without value to a Catholic, and less familiar to him, as I conceive, than they deserve to be. And, while an argument originating in the controversies to which I have referred, may be serviceable at this

season to that great cause in which we are here so especially interested, to me personally it will afford satisfaction of a peculiar kind; for, though it has been my lot for many years to take a prominent, sometimes a presumptuous, part in theological discussions, yet the natural turn of my mind carries me off to trains of thought like those which I am now about to open, which, important though they be for Catholic objects, and admitting of a Catholic treatment, are sheltered from the extreme delicacy and peril which attach to disputations directly bearing on the subject-matter of Divine Revelation.

2.

There are several reasons why I should open the discussion with a reference to the lessons with which past years have supplied me. One reason is this: It would concern me, Gentlemen, were I supposed to have got up my opinions for the occasion. This, indeed, would have been no reflection on me personally, supposing I were persuaded of their truth, when at length addressing myself to the inquiry; but it would have destroyed, of course, the force of my testimony, and deprived such arguments, as I might adduce, of that moral persuasiveness which attends on tried and sustained conviction. It would have made me seem the advocate, rather than the cordial and deliberate maintainer and witness, of the doctrines which I was to support; and, though it might be said to evidence the faith I reposed in the practical {4} judgment of the Church, and the intimate concurrence of my own reason with the course she had authoritatively sanctioned, and the devotion with which I could promptly put myself at her disposal, it would have cast suspicion on the validity of reasonings and conclusions which rested on no independent inquiry, and appealed to no past experience. In that case it might have been plausibly objected by opponents that I was the serviceable expedient of an emergency, and never, after all, could be more than ingenious and adroit in the management of an argument which was not my own, and which I was sure to forget again as readily as I had mastered it. But this is not so. The views to which I have referred have grown into my whole system of thought, and are, as it were, part of myself. Many changes has my mind gone through: here it has known no variation or vacillation of opinion, and though this by itself is no proof of the truth of my principles, it puts a seal upon conviction, and is a justification of earnestness and zeal. Those principles, which I am now to set forth under the sanction of the Catholic Church, were my profession at that early period of my life, when religion was to me more a matter of feeling and experience than of faith. They did but take greater hold upon me, as I was introduced to the records of Christian Antiquity, and approached in sentiment and desire to Catholicism; and my sense of their correctness has been increased with the events of every year since I have been brought within its pale.

And here I am brought to a second and more important reason for referring, on this occasion, to the conclusions at which Protestants have arrived on the subject of Liberal Education; and it is as follows: Let it be observed, then, that the principles on which I would conduct the inquiry are attainable, as I have already implied, by {5} the mere experience of life. They do not come simply of theology; they imply no supernatural discernment; they have no special connexion with Revelation; they almost arise out of the nature of the case; they are dictated even by human prudence and wisdom, though

a divine illumination be absent, and they are recognized by common sense, even where self-interest is not present to quicken it; and, therefore, though true, and just, and good in themselves, they imply nothing whatever as to the religious profession of those who maintain them. They may be held by Protestants as well as by Catholics; nay, there is reason to anticipate that in certain times and places they will be more thoroughly investigated, and better understood, and held more firmly by Protestants than by ourselves.

It is natural to expect this from the very circumstance that the philosophy of Education is founded on truths in the natural order. Where the sun shines bright, in the warm climate of the south, the natives of the place know little of safeguards against cold and wet. They have, indeed, bleak and piercing blasts; they have chill and pouring rain, but only now and then, for a day or a week; they bear the inconvenience as they best may, but they have not made it an art to repel it; it is not worth their while; the science of calefaction and ventilation is reserved for the north. It is in this way that Catholics stand relatively to Protestants in the science of Education; Protestants depending on human means mainly, are led to make the most of them: their sole resource is to use what they have; "Knowledge is" their "power" and nothing else; they are the anxious cultivators of a rugged soil. It is otherwise with us; "*funes ceciderunt mihi in præclaris*." We have a goodly inheritance. This is apt to cause us—I do not mean to rely too much on {6} prayer, and the Divine Blessing, for that is impossible, but we sometimes forget that we shall please Him best, and get most from Him, when, according to the Fable, we "put our shoulder to the wheel," when we use what we have by nature to the utmost, at the same time that we look out for what is beyond nature in the confidence of faith and hope. However, we are sometimes tempted to let things take their course, as if they would in one way or another turn up right at last for certain; and so we go on, living from hand to mouth, getting into difficulties and getting out of them, succeeding certainly on the whole, but with failure in detail which might be avoided, and with much of imperfection or inferiority in our appointments and plans, and much disappointment, discouragement, and collision of opinion in consequence. If this be in any measure the state of the case, there is certainly so far a reason for availing ourselves of the investigations and experience of those who are not Catholics, when we have to address ourselves to the subject of Liberal Education.

Nor is there surely any thing derogatory to the position of a Catholic in such a proceeding. The Church has ever appealed and deferred to witnesses and authorities external to herself, in those matters in which she thought they had means of forming a judgment: and that on the principle, *Cuique in arte sua credendum*. She has even used unbelievers and pagans in evidence of her truth, as far as their testimony went. She avails herself of scholars, critics, and antiquarians, who are not of her communion. She has worded her theological teaching in the phraseology of Aristotle; Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, Origen, Eusebius, and Apollinaris, all more or less heterodox, have supplied materials for primitive exegetics. St. Cyprian called Tertullian his master; {7} St. Augustin refers to Ticonius; Bossuet, in modern times, complimented the labours of the Anglican Bull; the Benedictine editors of the Fathers are familiar with the labours of Fell, Ussher, Pearson, and Beveridge. Pope Benedict XIV. cites according to the

127 occasion the works of Protestants without reserve, and the late French collection of
128 Christian Apologists contains the writings of Locke, Burnet, Tillotson, and Paley. If, then,
129 I come forward in any degree as borrowing the views of certain Protestant schools on
130 the point which is to be discussed, I do so, Gentlemen, as believing, first, that the
131 Catholic Church has ever, in the plenitude of her divine illumination, made use of
132 whatever truth or wisdom she has found in their teaching or their measures; and next,
133 that in particular places or times her children are likely to profit from external
134 suggestions or lessons, which have not been provided for them by herself.

3.

135 And here I may mention a third reason for appealing at the outset to the proceedings of
136 Protestant bodies in regard to Liberal Education. It will serve to intimate the mode in
137 which I propose to handle my subject altogether. Observe then, Gentlemen, I have no
138 intention, in any thing I shall say, of bringing into the argument the authority of the
139 Church, or any authority at all; but I shall consider the question simply on the grounds of
140 human reason and human wisdom. I am investigating in the abstract, and am
141 determining what is in itself right and true. For the moment I know nothing, so to say, of
142 history. I take things as I find them; I have no concern with the past; I find myself here; I
143 set myself to the duties I find here; I set myself to further, by every means in my power,
144 doctrines and views, true in themselves, {8} recognized by Catholics as such, familiar to
145 my own mind; and to do this quite apart from the consideration of questions which have
146 been determined without me and before me. I am here the advocate and the minister of
147 a certain great principle; yet not merely advocate and minister, else had I not been here
148 at all. It has been my previous keen sense and hearty reception of that principle, that
149 has been at once the reason, as I must suppose, of my being selected for this office,
150 and is the cause of my accepting it. I am told on authority that a principle is expedient,
151 which I have ever felt to be true. And I argue in its behalf on its own merits, the
152 authority, which brings me here, being my opportunity for arguing, but not the ground of
153 my argument itself.

154 And a fourth reason is here suggested for consulting the history of Protestant
155 institutions, when I am going to speak of the object and nature of University Education.
156 It will serve to remind you, Gentlemen, that I am concerned with questions, not simply of
157 immutable truth, but of practice and expedience. It would ill have become me to
158 undertake a subject, on which points of dispute have arisen among persons so far
159 above me in authority and name, in relation to a state of society, about which I have so
160 much to learn, if it involved an appeal to sacred truths, or the determination of some
161 imperative rule of conduct. It would have been presumptuous in me so to have acted,
162 nor am I so acting. Even the question of the union of Theology with the secular
163 Sciences, which is its religious side, simple as it is of solution in the abstract, has,
164 according to difference of circumstances, been at different times differently decided.
165 Necessity has no law, and expedience is often one form of necessity. It is no principle
166 with sensible {9} men, of whatever cast of opinion, to do always what is abstractedly
167 best. Where no direct duty forbids, we may be obliged to do, as being best under
168 circumstances, what we murmur and rise against, while we do it. We see that to attempt

more is to effect less; that we must accept so much, or gain nothing; and so perforce we reconcile ourselves to what we would have far otherwise, if we could. Thus a system of what is called secular Education, in which Theology and the Sciences are taught separately, may, in a particular place or time, be the least of evils; it may be of long standing; it may be dangerous to meddle with; it may be professedly a temporary arrangement; it may be under a process of improvement; its disadvantages may be neutralized by the persons by whom, or the provisions under which, it is administered.

Hence it was, that in the early ages the Church allowed her children to attend the heathen schools for the acquisition of secular accomplishments, where, as no one can doubt, evils existed, at least as great as can attend on Mixed Education now. The gravest Fathers recommended for Christian youth the use of Pagan masters; the most saintly Bishops and most authoritative Doctors had been sent in their adolescence by Christian parents to Pagan lecture halls [\[Note 1\]](#). And, not to take other instances, at this very time, and in this very country, as regards at least the poorer classes of the community, whose secular acquirements ever must be limited, it has seemed best to the Irish Bishops, under the circumstances, to suffer the introduction into the country of a system of Mixed Education in the schools called National. Such a state of things, however, is passing away; as regards University education at least, {10} the highest authority has now decided that the plan, which is abstractedly best, is in this time and country also most expedient.

4.

And here I have an opportunity of recognizing once for all that higher view of approaching the subject of these Discourses, which, after this formal recognition, I mean to dispense with. Ecclesiastical authority, not argument, is the supreme rule and the appropriate guide for Catholics in matters of religion. It has always the right to interpose, and sometimes, in the conflict of parties and opinions, it is called on to exercise that right. It has lately exercised it in our own instance: it has interposed in favour of a pure University system for Catholic youth, forbidding compromise or accommodation of any kind. Of course its decision must be heartily accepted and obeyed, and that the more, because the decision proceeds, not simply from the Bishops of Ireland, great as their authority is, but the highest authority on earth, from the Chair of St. Peter.

Moreover, such a decision not only demands our submission, but has a claim upon our trust. It not only acts as a prohibition of any measures, but as an *ipso facto* confutation of any reasonings, inconsistent with it. It carries with it an earnest and an augury of its own expediency. For instance, I can fancy, Gentlemen, there may be some, among those who hear me, disposed to say that they are ready to acquit the principles of Education, which I am to advocate, of all fault whatever, except that of being impracticable. I can fancy them granting to me, that those principles are most correct and most obvious, simply irresistible on paper, but maintaining, nevertheless, that after all, they are nothing {11} more than the dreams of men who live out of the world, and who do not see the difficulty of keeping Catholicism anyhow afloat on the bosom of this

210 wonderful nineteenth century. Proved, indeed, those principles are, to demonstration,
211 but they will not work. Nay, it was my own admission just now, that, in a particular
212 instance, it might easily happen, that what is only second best is best practically,
213 because what is actually best is out of the question.

214 This, I hear you say to yourselves, is the state of things at present. You recount in detail
215 the numberless impediments, great and small, formidable or only vexatious, which at
216 every step embarrass the attempt to carry out ever so poorly a principle in itself so true
217 and ecclesiastical. You appeal in your defence to wise and sagacious intellects, who are
218 far from enemies to Catholicism, or to the Irish Hierarchy, and you have no hope, or
219 rather you absolutely disbelieve, that Education can possibly be conducted, here and
220 now, on a theological principle, or that youths of different religions can, under the
221 circumstances of the country, be educated apart from each other. The more you think
222 over the state of politics, the position of parties, the feelings of classes, and the
223 experience of the past, the more chimerical does it seem to you to aim at a University,
224 of which Catholicity is the fundamental principle. Nay, even if the attempt could
225 accidentally succeed, would not the mischief exceed the benefit of it? How great the
226 sacrifices, in how many ways, by which it would be preceded and followed! how many
227 wounds, open and secret, would it inflict upon the body politic! And, if it fails, which is to
228 be expected, then a double mischief will ensue from its recognition of evils which it has
229 been unable to remedy. These are your deep misgivings; {12} and, in proportion to the
230 force with which they come to you, is the concern and anxiety which you feel, that there
231 should be those whom you love, whom you revere, who from one cause or other refuse
232 to enter into them.

5.

233 This, I repeat, is what some good Catholics will say to me, and more than this. They will
234 express themselves better than I can speak for them in their behalf,—with more
235 earnestness and point, with more force of argument and fulness of detail; and I will
236 frankly and at once acknowledge, that I shall insist on the high theological view of a
237 University without attempting to give a direct answer to their arguments against its
238 present practicability. I do not say an answer cannot be given; on the contrary, I have a
239 confident expectation that, in proportion as those objections are looked in the face, they
240 will fade away. But, however this may be, it would not become me to argue the matter
241 with those who understand the circumstances of the problem so much better than
242 myself. What do I know of the state of things in Ireland, that I should presume to put
243 ideas of mine, which could not be right except by accident, by the side of theirs, who
244 speak in the country of their birth and their home? No, Gentlemen, you are natural
245 judges of the difficulties which beset us, and they are doubtless greater than I can even
246 fancy or forbode. Let me, for the sake of argument, admit all you say against our
247 enterprise, and a great deal more. Your proof of its intrinsic impossibility shall be to me
248 as cogent as my own of its theological advisableness. Why, then, should I be so rash
249 and perverse as to involve myself in trouble not properly mine? Why go out of my own
250 place? {13} Why so headstrong and reckless as to lay up for myself miscarriage and

251 disappointment, as though I were not sure to have enough of personal trial anyhow
252 without going about to seek for it?

253 Reflections such as these would be decisive even with the boldest and most capable
254 minds, but for one consideration. In the midst of our difficulties I have one ground of
255 hope, just one stay, but, as I think, a sufficient one, which serves me in the stead of all
256 other argument whatever, which hardens me against criticism, which supports me if I
257 begin to despond, and to which I ever come round, when the question of the possible
258 and the expedient is brought into discussion. It is the decision of the Holy See; St. Peter
259 has spoken, it is he who has enjoined that which seems to us so unpromising. He has
260 spoken, and has a claim on us to trust him. He is no recluse, no solitary student, no
261 dreamer about the past, no doter upon the dead and gone, no projector of the visionary.
262 He for eighteen hundred years has lived in the world; he has seen all fortunes, he has
263 encountered all adversaries, he has shaped himself for all emergencies. If ever there
264 was a power on earth who had an eye for the times, who has confined himself to the
265 practicable, and has been happy in his anticipations, whose words have been facts, and
266 whose commands prophecies, such is he in the history of ages, who sits from
267 generation to generation in the Chair of the Apostles, as the Vicar of Christ, and the
268 Doctor of His Church.

6.

269 These are not the words of rhetoric, Gentlemen, but of history. All who take part with the
270 Apostle, are on the winning side. He has long since given warrants for the {14}
271 confidence which he claims. From the first he has looked through the wide world, of
272 which he has the burden; and, according to the need of the day, and the inspirations of
273 his Lord, he has set himself now to one thing, now to another; but to all in season, and
274 to nothing in vain. He came first upon an age of refinement and luxury like our own, and,
275 in spite of the persecutor, fertile in the resources of his cruelty, he soon gathered, out of
276 all classes of society, the slave, the soldier, the high-born lady, and the sophist,
277 materials enough to form a people to his Master's honour. The savage hordes came
278 down in torrents from the north, and Peter went out to meet them, and by his very eye
279 he sobered them, and backed them in their full career. They turned aside and flooded
280 the whole earth, but only to be more surely civilized by him, and to be made ten times
281 more his children even than the older populations which they had overwhelmed.
282 Lawless kings arose, sagacious as the Roman, passionate as the Hun, yet in him they
283 found their match, and were shattered, and he lived on. The gates of the earth were
284 opened to the east and west, and men poured out to take possession; but he went with
285 them by his missionaries, to China, to Mexico, carried along by zeal and charity, as far
286 as those children of men were led by enterprise, covetousness, or ambition. Has he
287 failed in his successes up to this hour? Did he, in our fathers' day, fail in his struggle
288 with Joseph of Germany and his confederates, with Napoleon, a greater name, and his
289 dependent kings, that, though in another kind of fight, he should fail in ours? What grey
290 hairs are on the head of Judah, whose youth is renewed like the eagle's, whose feet are
291 like the feet of harts, and underneath the Everlasting arms?

292 In the first centuries of the Church all this practical {15} sagacity of Holy Church was
293 mere matter of faith, but every age, as it has come, has confirmed faith by actual sight;
294 and shame on us, if, with the accumulated testimony of eighteen centuries, our eyes are
295 too gross to see those victories which the Saints have ever seen by anticipation. Least
296 of all can we, the Catholics of islands which have in the cultivation and diffusion of
297 Knowledge heretofore been so singularly united under the auspices of the Apostolic
298 See, least of all can we be the men to distrust its wisdom and to predict its failure, when
299 it sends us on a similar mission now. I cannot forget that, at a time when Celt and
300 Saxon were alike savage, it was the See of Peter that gave both of them, first faith, then
301 civilization; and then again bound them together in one by the seal of a joint commission
302 to convert and illuminate in their turn the pagan continent. I cannot forget how it was
303 from Rome that the glorious St. Patrick was sent to Ireland, and did a work so great that
304 he could not have a successor in it, the sanctity and learning and zeal and charity which
305 followed on his death being but the result of the one impulse which he gave. I cannot
306 forget how, in no long time, under the fostering breath of the Vicar of Christ, a country of
307 heathen superstitions became the very wonder and asylum of all people,—the wonder
308 by reason of its knowledge, sacred and profane, and the asylum of religion, literature
309 and science, when chased away from the continent by the barbarian invaders. I
310 recollect its hospitality, freely accorded to the pilgrim; its volumes munificently presented
311 to the foreign student; and the prayers, the blessings, the holy rites, the solemn chants,
312 which sanctified the while both giver and receiver.

313 Nor can I forget either, how my own England had meanwhile become the solicitude of
314 the same unwearied {16} eye: how Augustine was sent to us by Gregory; how he
315 fainted in the way at the tidings of our fierceness, and, but for the Pope, would have
316 shrunk as from an impossible expedition; how he was forced on "in weakness and in
317 fear and in much trembling," until he had achieved the conquest of the island to Christ.
318 Nor, again, how it came to pass that, when Augustine died and his work slackened,
319 another Pope, unwearied still, sent three saints from Rome, to ennoble and refine the
320 people Augustine had converted. Three holy men set out for England together, of
321 different nations: Theodore, an Asiatic Greek, from Tarsus; Adrian, an African; Bennett
322 alone a Saxon, for Peter knows no distinction of races in his ecumenical work. They
323 came with theology and science in their train; with relics, with pictures, with manuscripts
324 of the Holy Fathers and the Greek classics; and Theodore and Adrian founded schools,
325 secular and monastic, all over England, while Bennett brought to the north the large
326 library he had collected in foreign parts, and, with plans and ornamental work from
327 France, erected a church of stone, under the invocation of St. Peter, after the Roman
328 fashion, "which," says the historian [\[Note 2\]](#), "he most affected." I call to mind how St.
329 Wilfrid, St. John of Beverley, St. Bede, and other saintly men, carried on the good work
330 in the following generations, and how from that time forth the two islands, England and
331 Ireland, in a dark and dreary age, were the two lights of Christendom, and had no
332 claims on each other, and no thought of self, save in the interchange of kind offices and
333 the rivalry of love.

7.

334 O memorable time, when St. Aidan and the Irish {17} monks went up to Lindisfarne and
335 Melrose, and taught the Saxon youth, and when a St. Cuthbert and a St. Eata repaid
336 their charitable toil! O blessed days of peace and confidence, when the Celtic Mailduf
337 penetrated to Malmesbury in the south, which has inherited his name, and founded
338 there the famous school which gave birth to the great St. Aldhelm! O precious seal and
339 testimony of Gospel unity, when, as Aldhelm in turn tells us, the English went to Ireland
340 "numerous as bees;" when the Saxon St. Egbert and St. Willibrod, preachers to the
341 heathen Frisons, made the voyage to Ireland to prepare themselves for their work; and
342 when from Ireland went forth to Germany the two noble Ewalds, Saxons also, to earn
343 the crown of martyrdom! Such a period, indeed, so rich in grace, in peace, in love, and
344 in good works, could only last for a season; but, even when the light was to pass away
345 from them, the sister islands were destined, not to forfeit, but to transmit it together. The
346 time came when the neighbouring continental country was in turn to hold the mission
347 which they had exercised so long and well; and when to it they made over their
348 honourable office, faithful to the alliance of two hundred years, they made it a joint act.
349 Alcuin was the pupil both of the English and of the Irish schools; and when
350 Charlemagne would revive science and letters in his own France, it was Alcuin, the
351 representative both of the Saxon and the Celt, who was the chief of those who went
352 forth to supply the need of the great Emperor. Such was the foundation of the School of
353 Paris, from which, in the course of centuries, sprang the famous University, the glory of
354 the middle ages.

355 The past never returns; the course of events, old in {18} its texture, is ever new in its
356 colouring and fashion. England and Ireland are not what they once were, but Rome is
357 where it was, and St. Peter is the same: his zeal, his charity, his mission, his gifts are all
358 the same. He of old made the two islands one by giving them joint work of teaching; and
359 now surely he is giving us a like mission, and we shall become one again, while we
360 zealously and lovingly fulfil it.

361 [Notes](#)

362 1. *Vide* M. L'Abbé Lalanne's recent work.

363 2. Cressy.