

**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
CHURCH AND THE  
SCHOOL QUESTION**

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The Roman Catholic Church and the School Question by Edwin D. Mead

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**EDWIN D. MEAD**

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The Roman Catholic Church  
and the School Question.

UNIV. OF MICHIGAN

By EDWIN D. MEAD.

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and expanded.*

## The Roman Catholic Church and the School Question

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WHEN the foolish are hot, it is time for the wise to be cool. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, but a habit of viewing each midsummer explosion as the crack of doom is not the best qualification for the vigilance committee in the time of real danger. I trust I shall never be accused of political indifferentism; but sometimes in these heated weeks I count it expedient to say to some of my good friends, Republican friends and Democratic friends, that the present election seems to me the least important presidential election in our history, and that I think it makes very little difference whether Mr. Cleveland or Mr. Harrison be elected. There is no question in the country more important than the school question. There is no institution in the country, to my thinking, so important as the public school, none whose interests we should guard so vigilantly or so jealously. There is nothing in the country of which I am more jealous than the multiplication of Roman Catholic parochial schools. They will never give anything but a parochial education, never a catholic and broad, education, and the system is bad. I am jealous of the constant unfair and captious fault-finding with the public schools in large Roman Catholic circles, and the manifest disposition to multiply criticisms and controversies and make trouble, out of which grist shall somehow come to the parochial mill. In the general interests of science and freedom and progress, I have more criticism to make upon the Roman Catholic Church than upon any other of our churches. But much more jealous than I am of parochial schools, or of Catholic opposition to the

public schools, or of any Roman Catholic dogmas or aims or methods, am I that Catholic captiousness and unfairness, where they exist, shall not be met with feverish unfairness, but with justice and more than justice — with magnanimity. Arnold of Rugby used to say that the measure of his love for any institution was the measure of his desire to reform it. The measure of my love for any institution is always the measure of my resolution to defend it fairly and only fairly, and of my resentment of mere violent, blind abuse of its enemies or its critics. And it is because my devotion to the American public school is so sincere and so earnest, that I wish to express the hope, as a preface to such critical words as I shall have to speak, that there is not rife in this gathering, or in the association under whose auspices we here come together, anything of that spirit of wholesale, indiscriminate and wild denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church, which has characterized many recent meetings in Boston. However it may be with some of our Protestant clergymen, I trust that there is no woman in this league or in Boston who is bothered by the fear, which bothers one of our Protestant clergymen, that Archbishop Williams is sitting up some dungeons under the new cathedral. I trust there is no woman and no man here present who did not read with indignation and with shame the charge of one of our university professors to one of our large congregations last Sunday, that "Protestant men and women who have Catholic servants in their employ should say to them on the eve of election day that if they intended to vote at the dictation of the priests they must look for work elsewhere." You know what that means. It means the discharge of the man or the woman who don't vote as we do. It means the boycott and the inquisition. The man who talks thus in a time like this abdicates the function of the scholar and advertises himself an unsafe public guide. No Catholic word has been so bad as this. No Catholic word has been so bad as the utterances from the platform of Music Hall last Sunday by the Protestant clergyman whose fulminations there we have become used to. I refer to this, a fair sample of numberless such utter-



ances, simply because I think some of you may not know the pass to which this discussion has come. "The Mass a Roaring Farce" was the reverend gentleman's last Sunday subject, and this interesting episode is reported :

"He took from an envelope a little wafer, like those used in the Catholic Church, remarking that the communicant was not allowed to touch the wine cup, this being retained by the priest, who after the service generally got drunk on what was left. Romanists say that these wafers are the real Christ—these little bits of cracker, which are easily broken, that become lost, that fall in the mud, that are eaten by rats. If, as is claimed, each one of these wafers is Jesus Christ, then there are a hundred thousand Jesus Christs all over the known universe. There is no power in them, shouted the impassioned doctor, as he came to the edge of the platform and bent his body until his head almost touched his knees. If there were, I could not say these things against them. To show you it has no power, I will roll it over and break it."

And we read that the great audience of three thousand people, presumably all Protestant people, citizens of this "Athens of America," presumably graduates of our public schools, here broke into the wildest kind of applause, which lasted fully a minute and started afresh whenever the doctor attempted to resume his remarks. I do not know, ladies and gentlemen, what some of you may think of a spectacle like this in Boston; I do not think it edifying. It is told of Dr. Johnson that when somebody expounded Berkeley's idealism to him, he brought his big cane or his heavy foot down solidly upon the earth and declared that thus he refuted it; and he has imitators in this method of dealing with metaphysical questions, to this day. But Dr. Johnson would never have got through the freshman year in a theological school without knowing that such a representation of the doctrine of the real presence or of transubstantiation as that here reported is as untrue—the doctrine, when truly stated, is to the minds of most of us a gross error—as the method of representation is vulgar and offensive. Equally offensive and untrue are the representations of the Catholic Church and the Pope of Rome as the targets for sundry very uncomplimentary epithets from certain Old and New Testament prophets—epithets which have been bandied about not a little

by some of our Protestant clergymen in this summer's discussions about the schools. I read a speech by one of our clergymen, at one of the Faneuil Hall or Tremont Temple meetings, which was largely devoted to arguing that the book of Revelation and even the book of Daniel denounce the Pope of Rome; and last Sunday another announced that the "mystery of iniquity" and "that Wicked," spoken of by St. Paul, in Second Thessalonians, was none other than this same Pope of Rome — evidently overlooking the apostle's remark that the said mystery of iniquity "doth already work." Now most of us hate to have a case against us "clinched with Scripture," most of us having a very high regard for the apostles and prophets and desiring to stand well with them. Appeals to the Bible therefore against our adversaries had generally better be as few as possible. So far as the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope are concerned, no thought of either ever entered the head of any Bible writer; the notion that there could have is ridiculous. When you hear any ingenious Protestant clergyman going back to Daniel or Second Thessalonians or the Apocalypse for arguments on the question of parochial schools or of the Boston School Board, I would suggest that you urge him, for the sake of economy in time, to skip that part of his talk.

And we have heard altogether too much in these days about the impossibility of a man being at once a good Catholic and a good American. The answer to such charges is the vast number of sincere and earnest Catholics who are among our most useful, faithful and loyal citizens. If we remember the doctrine of papal infallibility and the papal assertion of the supremacy of the church to the state, and if we press the logic of creeds and definitions to the extreme, we certainly come to a dilemma which the thoughtful Roman Catholic would do well to meditate upon. I fully endorse the conclusions of Mr. Gladstone, in his pamphlet on the Vatican Decrees, even to where he says that "no one can become the convert of Rome without renouncing his moral and mental freedom and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the mercy of another." This, I

say, is the ultimate logic of the doctrine of papal infallibility and of ecclesiastical supremacy. But there is not a single church in the Evangelical Alliance which was represented in the recent remonstrance before the School Board which can abide the logic of its creed. "John Ward" was a Presbyterian who carried his creed into life with the honest relentlessness of the syllogism. I respect John Ward as much as I pity him and hate his creed and its logic. But many who are pledged to his creed do not hesitate to declare his course inhuman, in my ears; and sure it is that if the men who hold his creed should begin to live it out with inexorable logic, Boston would soon become a much worse place to live in than it is ever likely to become as the result of the Roman Catholic doctrine about church and state, to the ultimate logical issues of which doctrine so many of our Protestant clergymen are now endeavoring to crowd their simple Catholic neighbors. If a man did logically and absolutely appropriate the Calvinistic doctrines of total depravity, predestination and the eternal damnation of the majority, which are the nominal and standard doctrines of half the churches belonging to the Evangelical Alliance, I should say that he was an immoral, an inhuman and an irreligious man if he allowed himself to marry the woman he loves and become the father of children. But as matter of fact almost no Calvinist does or ever did hold those doctrines in their naked and logical severity. They are always modified and complemented in life and in thought by other doctrines, often held all unconsciously, by other great imperatives and truths of human nature and currents from the nature of things; and it would never occur to me to say, unless in scholastic disputation, that my neighbor could not be at the same time an honest Presbyterian and a good man. The radical had better not tell his Baptist or Methodist brother too often that he "renounces his mental freedom" when he subscribes to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible, as truly as his Catholic brother who accepts the infallibility of the Pope. If the writer of Genesis could make no mistake, why may not Leo XIII also be miraculously shielded? Personally I should expect his