

## *The American Republic*

### P R E F A C E

In the volume which, with much diffidence, is here offered to the public, I have given, as far as I have considered it worth giving, my whole thought in a connected form on the nature, necessity, extent, authority, origin, ground, and constitution of government, and the unity, nationality, constitution, tendencies, and destiny of the American Republic. Many of the points treated have been from time to time discussed or touched upon, and many of the views have been presented, in my previous writings; but this work is newly and independently written from beginning to end, and is as complete on the topics treated as I have been able to make it.

I have taken nothing bodily from my previous essays, but I have used their thoughts as far as I have judged them sound and they came within the scope of my present work. I have not felt myself bound to adhere to my own past thoughts or expressions any farther than they coincide with my present convictions, and I have written as freely and as independently as if I had never written or published any thing before. I have never been the slave of my own past, and truth has always been dearer to me than my own opinions. This work is not only my latest, but will be my last on politics or government, and must be taken as the authentic, and the only authentic statement of my political views and convictions, and whatever in any of my previous writings conflicts with the principles defended in its pages, must be regarded as retracted, and rejected.

The work now produced is based on scientific principles; but it is an essay rather than a scientific treatise, and even good-natured critics will, no doubt, pronounce it an article or a series of articles designed for a review, rather than a book. It is hard to overcome the habits of a lifetime. I have taken some pains to exchange the reviewer for the author, but am fully conscious that I have not succeeded. My work can lay claim to very little artistic merit. It is full of repetitions; the same thought is frequently recurring—the result, to some extent, no doubt, of carelessness and the want of artistic skill; but to a greater extent, I fear, of "malice aforethought." In composing my work I have followed, rather than directed, the course of my thought, and, having very little confidence in the memory or industry of readers, I have preferred, when the completeness of the argument required it, to repeat myself to encumbering my pages with perpetual references to what has gone before.

That I attach some value to this work is evident from my consenting to its publication; but how much or how little of it is really mine, I am quite unable to say. I have, from my youth up, been reading, observing, thinking, reflecting, talking, I had almost said writing, at least by fits and starts, on political subjects, especially in their connection with philosophy, theology, history, and social progress, and have assimilated to my own mind what it would assimilate, without keeping any notes of the sources whence the materials assimilated were derived. I have written freely from my own mind as I find it now formed; but how it has been so formed, or whence I have borrowed, my readers know as well as I. All that is valuable in the thoughts set forth, it is safe to assume has been appropriated from others. Where I have been distinctly conscious of borrowing what has not become common property, I have given credit, or, at least, mentioned the author's name, with three important exceptions which I wish to note more formally.

I am principally indebted for the view of American nationality and the Federal Constitution I present, to hints and suggestions furnished by the remarkable work of John C. Hurd, Esq., on *The Law of Freedom and Bondage in the United States*, a work of rare learning and profound philosophic views. I could not have written my work without the aid derived from its suggestions, any more than I could without Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Suarez, Pierre Leroux, and the Abbate Gioberti. To these two last-named authors, one a humanitarian sophist, the other a Catholic priest, and certainly one of the profoundest philosophical writers of this century, I am much indebted, though I have followed the political system of neither. I have taken from Leroux the germs of the doctrine I set forth on the solidarity of the race, and from Gioberti the doctrine I defend in relation to the creative act, which is, after all, simply that of the *Credo* and the first verse of *Genesis*.

In treating the several questions which the preparation of this volume has brought up, in their connection, and in the light of first principles, I have changed or modified, on more than one important point, the views I had expressed in my previous writings, especially on the distinction between civilized and barbaric nations, the real basis of civilization itself, and the value to the world of the Græco-Roman civilization. I have ranked feudalism under the head of barbarism, rejected every species of political aristocracy, and represented the English constitution as essentially antagonistic to the American, not as its type. I have accepted universal suffrage in principle, and defended American democracy, which I define to be territorial democracy, and carefully distinguish from pure individualism on the one hand, and from pure socialism or humanitarianism on the other.

I reject the doctrine of State sovereignty, which I held and defended from 1828 to 1861, but still maintain that the sovereignty of the American Republic vests in the States, though in the States collectively, or united, not severally, and thus escape alike consolidation and disintegration. I find, with Mr. Madison, our most philosophic statesman, the originality of the American system in the division of powers between a General government having sole charge of the foreign and general, and particular or State governments having, within their respective territories, sole charge of the particular relations and interests of the American people; but I do not accept his concession that this division is of conventional origin, and maintain that it enters into the original Providential constitution of the American state, as I have done in my Review for October, 1863, and January and October, 1864.

I maintain, after Mr. Senator Sumner, one of the most philosophic and accomplished living American statesmen, that "State secession is State suicide," but modify the opinion I too hastily expressed that the political death of a State dissolves civil society within its territory and abrogates all rights held under it, and accept the doctrine that the laws in force at the time of secession remain in force till superseded or abrogated by competent authority, and also that, till the State is revived and restored as a State in the Union, the only authority, under the American system, competent to supersede or abrogate them is the United States, not Congress, far less the Executive. The error of the Government is not in recognizing the territorial laws as surviving secession, but in counting a State that has seceded as still a State in the Union, with the right to be counted as one of the United States in amending the Constitution. Such State goes out of the Union, but comes *under* it.

I have endeavored throughout to refer my particular political views to their general principles and to show that the general principles asserted have their origin and ground in the great, universal, and unchanging principles of the universe itself. Hence, I have labored to show the scientific relations of political to theological principles, the real principles of all science, as of all reality. An atheist, I have said, may be a politician; but if there were no God, there could be no politics. This may offend the sciolists of the age, but I must follow science where it leads, and cannot be arrested by those who mistake their darkness for light.

I write throughout as a Christian, because I am a Christian; as a Catholic, because all Christian principles, nay, all real principles are catholic, and there is nothing sectarian either in nature or revelation. I am a Catholic by God's grace and great goodness, and must write as I am. I could not write otherwise if I would, and would not if I could. I have not obtruded my religion, and have referred to it only where my argument demanded it; but I have had neither the weakness nor the bad taste to seek to conceal or disguise it. I could never have written my book without the knowledge I have, as a Catholic, of Catholic theology, and my acquaintance, slight as it is, with the great fathers and doctors of the church, the great masters of all that is solid or permanent in modern thought, either with Catholics or non-Catholics.

Moreover, though I write for all Americans, without distinction of sect or party, I have had more especially in view the people of my own religious communion. It is no discredit to a man in the United States at the present day to be a firm, sincere, and devout Catholic. The old sectarian prejudice may remain with a few, "whose eyes," as Emerson says, "are in their hind-head, not in their fore-head;" but the American people are not at heart sectarian, and the nothingarianism so prevalent among them only marks their state of transition from sectarian opinions to positive Catholic faith. At any rate, it can no longer be denied that Catholics are an integral, living, and growing element in the American population, quite too numerous, too wealthy, and too influential to be ignored. They have played too conspicuous a part in the late troubles of the country, and poured out too freely and too much of their richest and noblest blood in defence of the unity of the nation and the integrity of its domain, for that. Catholics henceforth must be treated as standing, in all respects, on a footing of equality with any other class of American citizens, and their views of political science, or of any other science, be counted of equal importance, and listened to with equal attention.

I have no fears that my book will be neglected because avowedly by a Catholic author, and from a Catholic publishing house. They who are not Catholics will read it, and it will enter into the current of American literature, if it is one they must read in order to be up with the living and growing thought of the age. If it is not a book of that sort, it is not worth reading by any one.

Furthermore, I am ambitious, even in my old age, and I wish to exert an influence on the future of my country, for which I have made, or, rather, my family have made, some sacrifices, and which I tenderly love. Now, I believe that he who can exert the most influence on our Catholic population, especially in giving tone and direction to our Catholic youth, will exert the most influence in forming the character and shaping the future destiny of the American Republic. Ambition and patriotism alike, as well as my own Catholic faith and sympathies, induce me to address myself primarily to Catholics. I quarrel with none of the sects; I honor virtue wherever I see it, and accept truth wherever I find it; but, in my belief, no sect is destined to a long life, or a permanent possession. I engage in no controversy with any one not of my religion, for, if the positive, affirmative truth is

brought out and placed in a clear light before the public, whatever is sectarian in any of the sects will disappear as the morning mists before the rising sun.

I expect the most intelligent and satisfactory appreciation of my book from the thinking and educated classes among Catholics; but I speak to my countrymen at large. I could not personally serve my country in the field: my habits as well as my infirmities prevented, to say nothing of my age; but I have endeavored in this humble work to add my contribution, small though it may be, to political science, and to discharge, as far as I am able, my debt of loyalty and patriotism. I would the book were more of a book, more worthy of my countrymen, and a more weighty proof of the love I bear them, and with which I have written it. All I can say is, that it is an honest book, a sincere book, and contains my best thoughts on the subjects treated. If well received, I shall be grateful; if neglected, I shall endeavor to practise resignation, as I have so often done.

— O. A. Brownson  
Elizabeth, N. J.  
September 16, 1865