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ARTICLE I.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE JESUITS.

There are certain periods in the history of the world, so prolific in great events, so abounding in mighty men, so fraught with portentous principles, that they seem engraved upon its pages in characters of light. They are periods when abstract ideas, long slumbering in the human bosom, have come gradually to assume a tangible form, and to work out changes in the social and moral condition of men. By the application of a practical philosophy, they have been brought to bear on the existing institutions of nations, and have effected those revolutions, mental and physical, which make these periods landmarks in history, eras in the progress of civilization.

Such was the epoch embracing the latter half of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century. Perhaps there have never been condensed in the short period of one hundred years so many wonderful events, so many important changes, and we might almost add, so many illustrious men. There was certainly never an age, which has exerted so powerful an influence on our own times. Within that short period, the reign of Charles VIII, in its varied course, laid the foundation of the present political condition of the several governments of Europe, and thus drew a broad line between the modern and the middle age. The freedom of the north was created by Gustavus Vasa. The religion of the south
was upheld by the iron hand of Leo de’ Medici. Columbus
and de Gama laid open the boundless continents of America
and India to European enterprise. And, greater than all, the
art of printing appears among the discoveries of this age.
But the fifteenth century contained the germ of still greater
things, which were to bud and blossom in the next,—for
which America and India were to furnish the ground of action,
and by which all Europe was to be shaken to its centre.

These were two grand, conflicting ideas; their weapons were
the press; their object, the rise or the ruin of Popery. The
freedom of the mind, on the one hand, the absolute submission
of the will to sovereign dictation, on the other, were the
two great principles then preparing to agitate the world.

In 1483, in the town of Eisleben, amidst the forests of
Germany, was born that man who was destined to be the
champion of intellectual liberty. Eight years after, rocked
in his cradle among the mountains of Biscay, slumbered the
incarnation of spiritual despotism. And surely there never
were two men on earth better fitted to become the leaders of
the powerful parties, that rallied under their separate and
opposing standards, than were Luther and Loyola. Men, alike
possessed of gigantic minds, of unconquerable energy of will,
of a determined perseverance which no obstacles could impede
and no fear could intimidate, they stand forth, the master-
spirits of the age. The morality of the church of Rome, for
a long period, had been such as to cast reproach upon the
Christian name. The holy zeal for the religious advance-
ment of their subjects, the stern virtue and uncompromising
integrity, which marked the earlier bishops of Rome, had
given place to a desire for temporal aggrandizement. Ever
since the ambitious Hildebrand had compelled the emperor
Henry IV to stand bareheaded three days in the blasts of an
Apennine winter, praying admittance, that he might humble
himself before him,—or Alexander III had placed his foot on
the neck of the haughty Frederic, with the expression,
“Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis,” the church of
Rome had descended from its high purpose, and stooped to
grasp at temporal dominion. A succession of daring pontiffs
had made the ancient capital of the world once more the
arbiter of Europe; and the sword they wielded over the heads
of kings and princes, for the last four centuries of the Middle
Ages, was hardly less potent than the power of Roman arms
over barbarian nations before the fall of the republic. But
power engendered luxury, and luxury corruption, until the
hierarchy, satisfied with the tranquil possession of authority
won for them by more virtuous or more energetic leaders,
relaxed its severe and purifying discipline; and, by an
extension of the doctrine of indulgences, connived at open
immorality and sensual gratification. A moral pestilence
 pervaded the entire mass of the Catholic church, and made
all Europe a prey to licentious passions. No efforts at
reform were made by the pontiffs. A refined dissipation had
assumed the throne of a holy religion. The study of the
fine arts, and the cultivation of belles-lettres, supplied the
place of religious zeal and theological inquiry. An old
statue, or a fine painting, was to them a higher source of
enjoyment than the spiritual beauty of their faith; and a
classic manuscript, discovered among the ruins of antiquity,
was, to their atheistic eyes, more venerable than the law
delivered amid the thunders of Sinai. Nor was Leo X an
exception to this. The son of Lorenzo de’ Medici inherited
the taste and genius of his father, and with them the refined
skepticism which prevailed among the Italian nobility of the
time. His predecessor, Julius II, had begun that vast
cathedral which received the name, and was to perpetuate
the worship, of the founder of the hierarchy. Every thing
which this brilliant era in the history of art could furnish,
was applied to adorn the holy temple. The coffers of Rome
were emptied, and St. Peter’s was scarcely begun. To
defray so enormous an expense, Leo resorted to a general
sale of indulgences; and, from the proceeds of this nefarious
traffic, the cathedral was completed. So gross an abuse of
the papal power met with a stern rebuke from the pen of
Luther,—and thus commenced the great Reformation in the
north. Up to this date, 1521, no measures, except those
prompted by the vindictive spirit of Leo, had been taken to
prevent a result, which a careful observer of the times might
have foreseen. But the keen eye of Loyola discovered the
remedy, and his intellect and energy planned and completed
the work. His early training had been such as to fit him for
the task. Born of a noble family, his youthful days had been
spent at the court of the Castilian queen, and had given him
the manner and address adapted to the polished circles in which
his influence was to be exerted. His early manhood was