

The Father of Labor in Canada.

(Daniel P. Cahill, in New World.)

D. J. O'Donoghue, who died recently in Toronto at the age of sixty-three, was the father of the labor movement in Canada. For forty years he had been a conspicuous and aggressive advocate of the labor cause. His funeral was attended by ministers of the crown, members of Parliament, representatives of the Canadian judiciary, delegates from labor organizations and prominent citizens from all parts of the Dominion. The gathering was a striking testimony of the respect in which the memory of this remarkable man was held by all classes of the Canadian community.

In these days, when the path to fame is more often traveled by the unprincipled politician or the successful organizer of a stupendous trust, it is a relief to turn to the career of one who cared for none of the things esteemed by the politician or the organizer of trusts, who put them aside impatiently as if they were of no value, who preferred to employ his powers in a persistent effort to better the condition of the people about him. The virile, uncompromising Catholicism of Mr. O'Donoghue was as distinctive a feature of his character as was the intelligent sympathy he bestowed on those who bear the heat and burden of manual labor while enjoying but a small share of its fruits. He had no patience with those who accused the Church of failing adequately to support the cause of labor. His successful leadership of forty years was inspired by a real devotion to Catholic principles. He saw the inherent fallacy of socialist ideas and never swerved in opposition to socialism as a remedy for the grievances of the working classes. He frequently said that such criticism of the Church was born of a desire to excite mistrust in the minds of those whose real interests have always been her chief concern. The Church, in his opinion, was the most democratic institution known to men. He would reverently say that her founder chose the simple environment and commonplace conditions of one of the world's toilers as the starting point of His divine mission. And then he would lay emphasis upon the fact that the first Pope was a plain fisherman sprung from a class at the lowest round of the social scale.

"In our day," he once said, "is not the successor of Peter the son of a poor letter carrier?"

When he was told by a radical workman that the Church was the enemy of the masses, he rose to his feet and publicly said:

"The Church is and always has been the friend of the people. Her influence is steadily employed to improve their moral and material condition. Within her ranks class feeling is an impossibility. Before her altars all men are equal. Her most honored names and her highest dignitaries have been the offspring of laborers and mechanics. It was the Church which first taught the true dignity of labor, and it was the Church which emancipated the serf and struck the shackles from the limbs of the slaves."

Then he pointed out that the present condition of labor was not

caused by any act of the Church, for at no time was labor more respected than during the middle ages when Workmen were organized into guilds. "The Church," he added significantly, "is even now endeavoring to bring back to the workers the privileges they enjoyed before the Reformation introduced the commercial system which has degraded labor to the level of a commodity; and in performing this task she has the other task of combating the socialism which offers the laborer economic freedom at the price of its spiritual manhood."

He believed that the long centuries of Christian belief had so thoroughly permeated the masses that he was accustomed to say "The Catholic workman is the real, effective barrier against socialism."

We might add with truth that if it were not for the consistent Christianity of the Catholic masses the beliefs of socialism would be the beliefs of the vast majority of workmen. Perhaps this is truer of our own workmen than it is of the workmen of Europe. But it is true at any rate of those who compose the membership of the great labor organizations, and it is particularly true of many of their notable leaders.

The underlying Catholic spirit of the Knights of Labor in the days of its vigor has often been commented on, and it was the consequence in no small degree of the fervent Catholic spirit exhibited by its founder, Terence V. Powderly. One of Powderly's ablest lieutenants in that movement is the subject of this sketch, and, luckier than his former colleague, he retained his influence to the end of his life.

The life of a good man is the tree planted by the rivers of waters which brings forth its fruit in season, a figure not inappropriate in describing the career of D. J. O'Donoghue. For himself he did nothing materially, and yet spiritually few men have left a nobler legacy behind them. The progress achieved by the workmen of Canada in the last forty years is due to a considerable extent to his persistent labors. If to-day the workmen of the Dominion enjoy benefits unknown to workmen of other countries, it is because this disinterested man unweariedly toiled for their interests. When he began his career parliament was indifferent to the needs of the masses. The idea of legislating for them was repugnant to the majority of its members. When he closed his career conditions had entirely changed. Parliament had adopted the majority of the reforms he advocated and had established a ministry of labor to see that the labor laws were properly enforced. He lived to see the establishment of arbitration boards to settle labor disputes, and he himself became the principle officer whose duty it was to see that the workers engaged either directly or by contract in government work received fair wages and were not compelled to labor for unreasonable hours.

These great reforms, we may imagine, were not gained except by years of difficult labor, unremunerative for the most part, but cheerfully encountered for the sake of the cause that lay nearest his heart. When the history of the labor movement comes to be written the list of Irishmen who have fought its battles will be no meagre one. And while engaged in this uphill contest, these men, obscure for the most part, were never without a pathetic interest in the welfare of the motherland which had cradled them. Mr. O'Donoghue was one of a band of Irishmen in whom the passion for social improvement outweighed every other consideration.

He was born in Kerry in 1844, a period of sad importance in the history of Ireland. Eight years later his parents emigrated to Canada and settled in Bytown, now Ottawa, the capital of the Dominion. When a lad scarcely out of his teens he entered a newspaper office to learn the business of typesetting. His wanderjahr was spent in the United States, where he became interested in the Typographical Union. On his return home he established the Typographical Union of Ottawa, the first of its kind in Canada. In the years that followed he was active in promoting the labor movement, and his work attracted widespread attention, so that when he was nominated for the Ontario Parliament in 1874 on the labor platform he was elected by a large majority. He was the first labor representative that ever sat in a Canadian legislative assembly, and one of the first to enjoy that distinction anywhere in the English-speaking world. His work in parliament has already been referred to

but it was in the general organization of labor bodies that he really excelled. Fertile in resources, brimming over with ideas and suggestions, his presence stimulated men to action, and yet he never thrust himself forward and assumed the position of leader, preferring to allow the honor and emoluments to go to other men, provided the principles he contended for were accepted. The finest fruit of his incessant labor, though others share the honor, was the establishment of trades councils in all the important cities of Canada. Later on this led to the establishment of the Dominion Trades and Labor Congress, whose annual meetings are events of conspicuous national importance to Canada. An unnoticed result of the labor movement in Canada, and yet one for which Mr. O'Donoghue earnestly strove, was the gradual extinction of the intensely bitter feeling that formerly existed between Catholic and Protestant, and, in a smaller degree, between the French and English-speaking workmen. This was the natural outcome of their new association, but the old feeling threatened at times to wreck the fortunes of the labor movement. And it was not accomplished by paltering in the least with Catholic principles, but by avowing them boldly and uncompromisingly and appealing to the intelligence and sense of fair play of the opposite side.

As the editor of a leading paper he had many opportunities for furthering the labor cause and with unflinching zeal he fought the battle of labor in its columns. His position also enabled him to promote the Irish movement in the capital of Canada, and he was instrumental in securing for it the powerful support of Canada's chief political leaders on many a momentous occasion.

There were few movements, however, for the betterment of the human race in which Mr. O'Donoghue did not take a delighted and enthusiastic part. By no means an orator, he was yet a shrewd, straightforward speaker who went straight to the heart of his subject, illuminating it as he went with touches of sprightly Irish humor. Beyond his particular interest in labor and Ireland, he was deeply concerned in the subject of technical schools. Along with others he secured the establishment of a technical school in Toronto, and became one of its first directors. This was another instance of his genuine interest in the welfare of the workers. He valued improvements in their material condition, but he valued still more everything that tended to elevate them to a higher moral and spiritual plane. The technical school evoked the sympathetic, kindly Irish side of his nature, for he had the feeling that individuals are more than a cause, and that no man could think that he had done his full duty unless he actually conferred a direct benefit on some particular person. But he felt still more that it was incumbent on him as a Catholic to take part in the social movements of his time. His was a vigorous and outspoken Catholicity, yet withal generous and free from the slightest tinge of bitterness. It delighted him to show that the best social influences of the day are of Catholic origin, and that nowhere does the Church exhibit her mission to greater advantage than where political institutions are freest. How well Mr. O'Donoghue preserved the respect of all classes of the Canadian community is shown by the remarkable eulogy passed upon him by Chief Justice Mulock, of the Canadian Supreme bench, who said:

"I have known Mr. O'Donoghue for many years, and during my tenure of office, as minister of labor was brought into close association with him and had opportunities of knowing well both his worth and character. He was a man of pure life and high ideals, and was devoted to the uplifting of his fellow workmen. He exerted on all occasions a moderating influence against extreme views, believing that in moderation and fairness a cause was best advanced. He was just and impartial in all his dealings, and in the adjustment of conflicting interests between employer and employee was guided by a single eye to what he believed was equitable and right. A man of modest exterior, he was of truly noble character, sterling in his integrity, loyal in his devotion to cause and friends, upright, honest and fearless; a man whom to know was to love, admire and respect. His memory ought never to be forgotten by those to whose betterment and to the advancement of whose cause his whole life was devoted."

No one who is at all interested in the welfare of his fellows can read these words of Mr. Mulock without feeling that the death of Mr. O'Donoghue is a public loss, though a loss unaccompanied by the keen regrets it has for those who knew him well in

life. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more, but the Catholic spirit which vitalized his acts in life will never die, and the labor movement will be better and stronger for the faith that he had in it, and the love that he gave it, during forty years of a useful public career.

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