

# The Catholic Weekly Review.

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CANADA

Reddite quæ sunt Cæsaris, Cæsari; et quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt 22: 21.

Vol V

Toronto, Saturday, July 25, 1891.

No 24

## PERE FELIX.

On Monday, July 4th, Pere Felix, the celebrated French preacher, died at Lille, at the great age of 85. He was born at Neuville on July 28, 1806, and made his studies at the Seminary of Cambrai. At the age of 27, then already in Holy Orders, he joined the society of Jesus, of which he became one of the chief ornaments. In 1855 he occupied the pulpit of Notre Dame with great success, still shadowed as it was by memories of Ravignan and Lacordaire. Apart from these conferences (*"Progres par le Christianisme"* collected afterwards in 16 volumes) Pere Felix published a large number of pamphlets, among which *"Socialisme devant la societe"* and *"Patriotisme"* are the most celebrated. By tongue and by writing he laboured during the whole of his life for the Catholic cause, and his reputation, deservedly great as it was, is little beside the great and solid work he has done. A correspondent of the *London Globe* contributes some notes on the great Jesuit, a portion of which we may give here:

Pere Felix, who has just died at the ripe age of 85, was a remarkable ecclesiastic in many respects. He was, perhaps, best known as one of the great *conferenciers* at Notre Dame, where he succeeded Lacordaire and Ravignan, and preceded Monsabre and d'Hulst. Son of a small farmer in the north, he was in a large measure self-taught, and did not join the Order of the Jesuits until he had attained his 27th year. As most persons are aware, the noviciate there is long and severe; in his case it lasted seventeen years, when he was allowed to take the vows. At that moment nothing in him presaged the celebrity he was destined to acquire in the Roman Catholic world. He was considered to be only an ordinary preacher, pious and correct, but deficient in the qualities necessary for high rank. He soon showed, however, that he was made of superior stuff, and, by dint of patient study and profound meditation, he gradually came to the front, and finally established his fame as both a preacher and an author. He was above everything a dialectician, being called the Bourdaloue of the 19th century; but the rigour of his syllogisms did not exclude either elegance or passion, and it could not be said of him as Madame de Sevigne said of another preacher, whose logic wearied her—"Rather than listen to him, I prefer to be converted at once." He possessed two characters, different from but completing each other. As a student he was the most amiable of men, but as a preacher, he was the most

serious that ever mounted the pulpit. The study and the pulpit were the two scenes of his existence, which alternated from grave to gay, from lively to severe, thus explaining the opposing tendencies of his nature. There was nothing particularly striking in his appearance. His face was pallid, like that of a man suffering, and at first sight he seemed cold and forbidding; but his bright black eyes soon spread warmth and lustre over his complexion, and one felt irresistibly drawn towards him. His voice was clear and musical, and nobody better than he knew how to fill the vast cathedral.

His life was one of labour, both with the tongue and the pen, and it is difficult to say with which he was the more indefatigable. As a preacher he began his career at St. Thomas d'Aquin, from which he moved to St. Germain des Pres, and thence to the pulpit of Notre Dame; this was in 1853. Eighteen years later he left the Cathedral, after having exposed his great thesis of *"Progres par le Christianisme,"* and *"Jesus Christ et la Critique Nouvelle."* A logician rather than a poet, and philosopher rather than theologian, he appeared at the time when the romantic movement no longer attracted minds towards the high ideal which Lacordaire preached so eloquently. At that moment it was with reason, and not imagination that the preacher had to deal, and for eighteen years he reasoned with his congregations, in spite of the lady members of his flock who, if we are to believe a writer in the *Gaulois*, were not at all pleased with his ponderous conferences. The rational and learned Christianity of the present day was one of the consequences of his teaching, but it was not his fault (*sic*) he had to keep within the narrow bounds marked out by contemporaneous faith, and he did so with as much courage as talent. "Pere



PERE FELIX,

From a Portrait taken in 1836.

Felix has ceased preaching and taken to writing," said somebody to Dupanloup, who, esteeming the talent of a writer superior to that of an orator, replied, "So much the better—we shall now have some books worth reading." But he did not leave the pulpit entirely, and often preached in the provincial cathedrals. The works he published were numerous, and are masterpieces in their way. At the same time he helped to found several religious institutions, including the *Oeuvre de St. Michel* for the propagation of healthy literature, which is in a flourishing condition. For many years he was the Superior of the Jesuits' College at Lille, but resigned the post on account of old age, and it was there that he died."