



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. III.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JULY 29, 1853.

NO. 51.

INTRODUCTION TO COUNT DE MONTALEMBERT'S LIFE OF ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY.

(Concluded.)

Yes, the world was, as it were, an immense volume wherein fifty generations inscribed during twelve centuries, their faith, their emotions, their dreams, with infinite tenderness and patience. Not only had every mystery of faith, every triumph of the cross its page therein, but also every flower, every fruit, every animal figured there in its turn. As in the ancient missals, and great anthem-books of the old Cathedrals, beside the brilliant paintings which portray with inspiration at once so warm and so profound the great scenes of the Life of Christ and of the Saints, the text of the laws of God and of His divine word, was seen surrounded by all the beauties of nature; all animated beings were there brought together to sing the praises of the Lord, and angels came forth for that purpose from the cup of every flower. This was the *Legend*, the reading of the poor and the simple, the Gospel adapted for their use, *Biblia pauperum!* Their innocent eyes discovered therein a thousand beauties the sense of which is now for ever lost; heaven and earth appeared therein peopled with the most exquisite skill; well might they sing with sincerity of heart: *Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua*—Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!

Who can calculate how impoverished life is since then? Who thinks now-a-days of the imagination of the poor, the heart of the ignorant.

Oh! the world was then wrapt up by faith, as it were, in a beneficent veil which concealed all earthly wounds, and became transparent for the splendors of heaven. Now, it is otherwise; the earth is all naked; heaven is all veiled.

To clothe the world in this consoling vesture, it required the complete and unreserved union of the two principles which were so wonderfully united in Elizabeth and her age; simplicity and faith. Now, as every one knows and says, they have disappeared from the mass of society; the former, especially, has been completely extirpated, not only from public life, but also from poetry, from private and domestic life from the few asylums where the other has remained. It was not without consummate skill that the atheistic science and impious philosophy of modern times pronounced their divorce before condemning them to die. When once their holy and sweet alliance had been broken up, those two celestial sisters could only meet in some few obscure souls, amongst some scattered and neglected populations; and then they walked separately to death.

It is unnecessary to say, however, that this death was only apparent—only exile. They kept in the bosom of the imperishable Church the cradle whence they went forth to people and decorate the world; all men may find them there; all men may likewise trace their course by the immortal relics which they scattered as they went, and which none have yet succeeded in annihilating. Their number is so great, their beauty so striking, that one might be tempted to believe that God had designedly permitted all the exterior charms of Catholicity to fall a moment into oblivion, so as that those who remained faithful to it through all the probations of modern times, might have the ineffable happiness of finding them out and revealing them anew.

There, then, lies a whole world to regain for history and poetry; even piety will find new treasures in it. Let none reproach us with stirring up ashes for ever extinguished, of searching amid irreparable ruins; that which would be true of human institutions has no application to the subject before us, at least as Catholics believe; for if it be true that the Church is undying, it follows that nothing that her hand has once touched, her breath inspired, can die for ever. It suffices that she has deposited there a germ of her own principle, a ray of the fadeless and immutable beauty which she received with her life. If it has once been so, it is in vain that the clouds darken around, that the snows of winter are heaped above it; it is always time to dig out the root, to shake off some modern dust, to break asunder some factitious bonds, to replant it in some genial soil, and restore to the flower the bloom and the perfume of former days.

We should not like to have it inferred, from the ideas which we have put forward, that we are blind admirers of the middle ages, that we see in them everything admirable, enviable and irreproachable, and that, in our own age, we consider the nations wholly incurable. Far be it from us to waste our energies in vain regrets and our sight in useless tears over the grave of generations passed away. We know that the Son of God died on the cross to save humanity, not for five or six centuries, but for the whole period of the world's existence. We think

not that the word of God has failed or that his arm is shortened. The mission of pure man remains the same; the Christian has still his salvation to work out and his neighbor to serve. We regret not then—though we admire them—any of the human institutions which have perished according to the lot of human things, but we do bitterly regret the soul, the divine breath whereby they were animated, and which has departed from those that have replaced them. We preach not then either the barren contemplation of the past, or a contempt for and base desertion of the present; once more we repeat, far be such a thought from our minds. But, as the exile banished from his native land for having remained faithful to the eternal laws, sends many a loving thought back to those who have loved him and who await his return to his native land; as the soldier fighting on distant shores, is inflamed at the recital of the victories gained there by his fathers; so it is permitted us, whom our faith renders as exiles amid modern society, to raise our hearts and eye towards the blessed inhabitants of our heavenly home, and humble soldiers as we are of the cause which has glorified them, to gather courage also from the remembrance of their struggles and their victories.

We know but too well what crimes and sufferings and complaints there were in the ages which we have studied; as there always were, and always shall be, so long as the earth is peopled with fallen and sinful men. But we think that between the evils of those ages and those of our own times there are two incalculable differences. In the first place, the energy of evil was everywhere met by an energy of good which seemed to increase by being provoked to the combat, and by which it was incessantly and manifestly overcome. This glorious resistance had its origin in the force of convictions which were recognised in their influence over the entire life; to say that this force has not diminished according as faith and religious practice have departed from souls, would assuredly be in contradiction to the experience of history and the world's memory. We are far from disputing the splendid progress that is made under certain relations, but we will say with an eloquent writer of the present time, whose own words will acquit him of any partiality for by-gone ages: "Morality is, undoubtedly, more enlightened in these days; but is it stronger? Where is the heart that does not thrill with delight, seeing the triumph of equality? . . . I only fear that in taking so just a view of his rights, man may have lost somewhat of the sense of his duties. It is truly painful to see that, in this progress of all things, moral force has not increased."

Those evils from which the world then suffered and of which it justly complained, were all physical, all material. Person, property, bodily freedom, were exposed, outraged, trampled on more than they now are, in certain countries; this we are free to admit. But then the soul, the conscience, the heart, were sound, pure, untainted, free from that frightful inward disease by which they are now gnawed. Each one knew what he had to believe, what he might learn, what he was to think of all those problems of human life, and human destiny which are now so many sources of torment for the souls whom they have again succeeded in paganising. Misfortune, poverty, oppression, which are now no more extirpated than they formerly were, stood not up before the man of those times as a dread fatality of which he was the innocent victim. He suffered from them, but he understood them; he might be overwhelmed by them, but he never despaired; for heaven still remained to him, and man could interrupt none of the means of communication between the prison of his body and the home of his soul. There was a sound and robust moral health which neutralised all the diseases of the social body, opposing to them an all-powerful antidote,—a positive, a universal, a perpetual consolation—faith. That faith which had penetrated the world, which claimed all men without exception, which had infused itself into all the pores of society like a beneficent sap, offering to all infirmities a simple and an effectual remedy, the same for all; within reach of all, understood by all, accepted by all.

Now, the evil is still there; it is not only present, but known, studied, analysed with extreme care; its dissection would be perfect, its autopsy exact; but where are the remedies to prevent that vast body from becoming a corpse? Its new leeches have spent four hundred years in drying it up, in sucking out that divine and salutary sap which constituted its life. What substitute are they going to give?

It is now time to judge of the course which they have led humanity to pursue. Christian nations have allowed their mother to be dethroned; those tender and powerful hands which had a sword ever ready to avenge their wrongs, a balm to heal all their wounds, they have seen them loaded with chains; the wreath

of flowers has been torn from her brow, and soaked in the acid of *reason* till every leaf fell off, withered and lost. Philosophy, despotism and anarchy led her captive before men loading her with insult and contumely; then they shut her up in a dungeon which they called her tomb, and at its door all three kept watch.

And yet she has left in the world a void which nothing ever can fill; not only is it that all faithful hearts deplore her misfortunes, that every soul that is not yet contaminated sighs after a purer air than that of the world which her absence has made pestiferous; that all those who have not yet lost the sentiment of their dignity and of their immortal origin demand to be brought back to her fold; but, above all, those afflicted souls, who seek every where, but in vain, a remedy for their sorrows, an explanation of their dreary lot, who find no where aught save the empty and mournful place of ancient faith these who will not and cannot be consoled, *qui non sunt*.

Well! we firmly believe that a day will come when humanity will seek to emerge from the desert which has been made around her; she will ask for the songs that soothed her childhood; she will sigh to breathe again the perfumes of her youth, to moisten her parched lips at her mother's breast, and to taste once more before she dies that pure, fresh milk which nourished her infancy. And the gates of that mother's prison shall be broken by the shock of so many suffering souls; and she will go forth fairer, stronger, more benign than ever. She will no longer wear the fresh and simple beauty of her early years, when she had just escaped from the first bloody persecutions; hers will then be the grave and majestic loveliness of the strong woman, who has read over the histories of martyrs and confessors, and added thereto her own page. In her eyes shall be seen the traces of tears, and on her brow the deep furrows made by suffering; she will only appear more worthy the homage and adoration of those who have suffered like herself.

She will resume her new and glorious course, the end whereof is only known to God; but while awaiting the time when the world will again solicit her to preside over its affairs, her faithful children know that they can every day receive from her infinite help and consolation. Hence it is that they—the children of light—need not fear what a faithless world calls her decay; amidst the darkness which that world gathers around them, they will neither be dazzled nor led astray by any of the false meteors of the gloomy night. Calm and confident, they remain with their eyes fixed in steadfast hope on that eternal East which never ceases to shine for them, and where generations, seated in the shadow of death, shall also one day behold the only true and sacred Sun ready to overpower with his triumphant splendor the ingratitude of men.

In conclusion, far be it from us to attempt solving what is called "the problem of the age," or giving a key to all the conflicting intelligence of our days.—Our ideas are not so ambitious. We are rather of opinion that all such presumptuous projects are struck with radical sterility. All the vast and most progressive systems which human wisdom has brought forth, as substitutes for religion, have never succeeded in interesting any but the learned, the ambitious, or, at most, the prosperous and happy. But the great majority of mankind can never come under these categories. The great majority of men is suffering, and suffering from moral as well as physical evils.—Man's first bread is grief, and his first want is consolation. Now, which of these systems has ever consoled an afflicted heart, or re-peopled a lonely one? Which of their teachers has ever shown men how to wipe away a tear? Christianity alone has, from the beginning, promised to console man in the sorrows incidental to life, by purifying the inclinations of his heart; and she alone has kept her promise. Thus, let us bear in mind that, before we think of re-placing her, we should commence by clearing the earth of pain and sorrow.

Such are the thoughts which animated us while writing the life of Elizabeth of Hungary, who loved much and suffered much, but whose afflictions were all purified by religion, and her sufferings all consoled. We offer to our brethren in the faith a book differing in its subject and in its form from the spirit of the age in which we live. But simplicity, humility and charity, whose wonders we are about to relate, are, like the God who inspires them, above all times and places. We only ask that this work may bear to some simple or sorrowful souls a reflection of the sweet emotions which we have enjoyed while writing it! May it ascend to the eternal throne as an humble and timid spark from that old Catholic flame which is not yet extinct in all hearts!

My 1st, 1836.

Anniversary of the Translation of St. Elizabeth,

LETTER OF THE REV. J. MAHER, P.P.

The following admirable letter from the Rev. J. Maher of Carlow to Dr. Whately, was elicited by some remarks of the latter upon the numbers of the late conversions from Catholicity to Protestantism and *vice versa*, and on the nature and character of the converts:—

TO THE REV. DR. WHATELY.

My Lord—Speeches or pastorals coming from one in your high position command, of course, great attention. I have read your last charge with care. It is meant to be your vindication, before the country, against the charge of your having, most unjustly and without a shadow of provocation, aspersed the character of the most virtuous ladies in society. You might, my lord, have passed them by. They cost the State nothing. They serve God and their neighbor gratuitously. You deprecate, with a feeling of soreness which it were better to conceal, the attacks to which you have been subjected on this head. "Bitter complaints (you write) were made of the cruel and unfounded charges brought, especially by myself, against Roman Catholic convents." Does it surprise your lordship? Were Irishmen to sit in silence when the House of Lords was made to ring with calumnies against their sisters and relatives? Before you entered upon your defence—to which we shall presently revert—you dwelt at considerable length upon another interesting topic, namely, "conversions," and counter conversions, a subject which I thought you would have avoided as cautiously as you do a discussion on the Trinity. You dash, however, into it with an episcopal air, and I shall be most happy to accompany your lordship step by step.

I must, however, at the outset, remonstrate with your lordship on the use of the word, "Romanism" as applied to our creed. You might, my lord, without any overstretch of courtesy, employ its legal designation, "The Roman Catholic religion." It is easy to retort, if we felt so disposed, by designating your creed, from the residence of its head, Londonism, Canterburyism, or Queenery; but Catholicity disclaims such aids. Besides, it betrays a want of gentlemanly manners. We will not, however, stop to dispute upon this point.

"The conversions to Romanism of late years, especially in England (you observe) have exceeded very far anything that can be remembered by the present generation, or by the preceding." Very true; but your church-going people, who have heard this denied a thousand times, will be not a little surprised to hear it on your lordship's authority. The number of conversions in the opposite direction, you add, is very much greater still. You admit, also, that the converts belong to the intelligent, educated, opulent classes, who have time for thought, discussion, and reading. "Secessions to the Church of Rome (you say) have been chiefly among the gentry and the clergy."

Conversions to the State Church have taken place amongst the destitute, the uneducated, the ignorant, the starving mendicants. They embrace the Thirty-nine Articles, of which they never heard a word. They adopt your liturgy, which you and your clergy in part reject. They say their Ave Marias in private, as of old. They are extraordinary converts. They are the best you have.

Now, from this state of facts, what is your conclusion? It is one which has thoroughly surprised me, and will, I doubt not, strike others with equal surprise. I must give it in your own words. "The humblest peasants," that is your converts, "are evidently bearing far stronger testimony in favor of the faith they adopt, than even ten times as many of the best informed and most intelligent of the human species." This is your naked conclusion. The reasoning or sophistry on which it rests, I shall presently proceed to review.

To help your readers to adopt your strange conclusion, you indulge in half a column of a gross and palpable misrepresentation (I use my lord, the mildest word) as ever it has been my lot to consider.

You represent Catholic converts "as repudiating the use of reason." "Argumentative powers and learning," you admit, "several of them possess in a high degree;" but you add, "they think themselves bound to lay them aside, and to disparage them, in all that appertains to religion. Although men of talent and education, they decry all appeal to evidence, and they have no more reason for the hope that is in them, than Pagans have for their belief." "They are led, and consider it right to be led, by a craving for the beautiful, the splendid, and the picturesque." "They abstain from all rational inquiry and reflection, and give themselves up to the guidance of their feelings." "The Catholic convert is confessedly making his religious faith a matter of mere feeling and taste." You then proceed to tell us, that all this interesting information you have from the converts themselves.