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ITATION OF CHRIST."-WHY IS IT UNCERTAIN?

Rev. Reuben Parsons, D. D., in the Ave Maris Among the millions of books which have been composed since the day when man first took pen or stylus in his hand, two alone can be said, strictly speaking, to be of incalculable value. These are the Bible and the "Imitation of Christ." And since the former is a work of divine origin, the latter must be regarded among human lucubra-tions, as the one priceless, inestim-able book of books. In all probability, very few among the saints of God who ran their mortal careers since the first appearance of this stupendous creation do not owe, under God, their present transcendent happiness to their assiduous meditation on its instructions, and to that despair-banishing buoyancy of spirit which they derived from the encouragement which it ever instills in all hearts subjected to its soothing influence.

To praise this book to Catholics were a work of supererogation; the only excuse one could tender for so doing would have to be based upon those expansive feelings which, when one has just left this spiritual feast, call persistently for manifestation, yearning to participate their own gladness with all who are heavy-laden. Even Protestants who have read the truncated, well-nigh emasculated version of the "Imitation" which is reluctantly put into their hands by their timid guides, and of the dilution and mutilation of which most of them have no suspicion, generally succumb to its enchantments even though they may not show, by their conversion to the faith which it inculcates, that they have adequately seized its meaning.

But sublime as this work is, its author, strange to say, is unknown. Profound and often impassioned discussions have been held by men of sincerity and of unquestioned erudition, but not one of their evolved opinions has been supported by thoroughly convincing arguments. How comes it, one may inquire, that the author of so How comes it, estimable a book has not transmitted his name to posterity? To the stu-dent of the Middle Ages who has become penetrated by the spirit of that much misunderstood period, a probable answer to this demand readily occurs Our author did not wish to be known: his motto was Amo nesciri. Most eloquently had he counselled his readers to adopt this maxim, and he himself reduced it to practice. Probably he begged God to continue his obscur-

ity, and the prayer was granted.

In the Middle Age one of the salient characteristics of the faithful was a profound humility, and this virtue shone in an eminent degree in the writers and artists of the time. One of their least auxieties was for fame in the minds of posterity; and in innumerable instances their names were not affixed to their most creditable work. Many of the most subtime hymns which enrich and fructify the Catholic liturgy : many of the most entrancing sermons which have furnished material as well as inspiration to our best modern preachers; many of the most wonderful cathedrals and monastic edifices, are anonymous masterpieces. It was because of this fact so little understood that M. Lecoy de La Marche declared that he could never think of the "Imitation" without conjuring up in imagination the picture of a grandiose Gothic cathedral; and not merely because "these two monuments of so different orders belong to the same age, as because they are the adequate expression of the same faith and of the In the days of faith a right kind

dividuals reserved to themselves no portion of the material fruits of their labors and talents; literary and artistic proprietorship appear to Teas & Coffees have been scarcely known during that period. Take, for instance, the erection of the grand and tasteful Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres. In the construction of this edifice all the inhabitants, not only of the diocese, but of the neighboring districts as far as Normandy, assisted with their hands as well as with their purses; and when the work was completed, and pierced the skies with its towering spires, standing forth a glowing monument of almost preternatural order and unity, issued "from the very bowels of the national genius," the names of its architect and chief decorators were unspoken, and are unknown to this day. So with the author of the "Imitation" and we may safely say that the erudite will lose their time if they continue their endeavors to penetrate into his obscurity, for God heard and was

pleased with his prayer. There is, however, another reason, one more material than the one just indicated, for the mystery enshrouding the identity of our author. Not humility alone, but what seemed to him a fitness of things, might, and probably did, cause him to withold a signature which would draw personal praise to himself. His work, although drawn up by his own hand, and arranged with a sweet simplicity almost peculiar to himself, is not by any means an entirely original production. Very many passages are taken almost bodily Very from contemporary as well as more ancient writers, whose works are now almost all lost, but which were then on the lips of nearly every monk and scholar, passing indeed as common property. We are all guilty of this species of plagiarism when we use in

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE "IM- tion. M. Arthur Loth, in an excellent almoner of the Visitandines at tion. M. Arthur Loth, in an excellent work on our subject, gives many instances of this unhesitating appropriation in the "Imitation." Thus the sayings, "He rides safely whom the grace of God guides;" "Biush, Sidon, says the sea; and if you ask wherefore, listen;" "Truly the life of a good monk is a crucifixion, but it leads to heaven;" "Thou art human, and not divine; thou art flesh, not an angel," "or each chapter, of reflections borrowed from the gentleman-saint, Francis de Sales—an ingenious proceeding divine; thou art flesh, not an angel," are metrical verses in the original Latin, and were current maxims of the which can not fail to produce a happy day, though placed by the author of the "Imitation" as prose in his text:

"Satis suaviter equitat.
Quem gratia Dei portat."

Erubesce, Sidon, ait mare ; Et si causam quæris, audi quare."

"Vere vita bont monachi crux est, Sed dux paradisi."

"Homo es, et non Deus ; Caro es, non angelus." Again, our author adopts entire pas-

sages, almost word for word, from the works of St. Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, St. Peter Damian, Pope Innocent III., St. Thomas Aquinas, Blessed Jacopone da Todi, and many others. Take, for example, the following from chapter ii, Book IV., and then compare it with a passage from a sermon of Cardinal James de Vitry, Bishop of Tusculum, found in a MS. as old as the middle of the thirteenth century. Speaking of the necessity for sacerdotal purity, our unknown says: "How clean ought to be the hands, how pure the mouth, how holy the body, how im-maculate the heart of the priest, into whom the Author of purity so often From the mouth of a priest nothing but what is holy, no word but what is becoming and profitable, ought to proceed, who so often receives the Sacrament of Christ. Simple and chaste should be those eyes which are accustomed to behold the Body of Pure and lifted up to heaven should be those hands which are used to handle the Creator of heaven and earth." Now, Cardinal de Vitry writes: "How free from all stain should be those hands which touch the Fruit of the womb of the Virgin, the God made man, the Word become a child, the Source and Author of the salvation of men! How modest ought to be the eyes of a priest! How strange to all petulance and to every gaze of vanity ought to be the eyes which contemplate, face to face, Sun of glory, though it be hidden under the veil of the Sacrament!"

M. Loth observes that it is no won der St. Bernard has been regarded by many as the author of the "Imitation, so many are the recurrences of writer to the works of the saint.\* to the passages borrowed from the Angelic Doctor, they follow the original text far more closely than do those taken from St. Bernard. The follow ing words of chapter 13, Book IV., are as exact a translation of an antiphon of St. Thomas in the Office of the Blessed Sacrament as they are of the original text of the "Imitation:" How sweet, O Lord, is Thy spirit who, to show Thy sweetness toward Thy children, vouchsafest to refresh them with that most delicious Bread which cometh down from heaven! In fact, nearly the whole of this fourth book of the great work was evidently inspired, if not fathered, by the sermon of St. Thomas on the Eucharist, which is read by the Church in the Office of Corpus Christi. In illustra tion of the appropriations from the Blessed Jacopone da Todi, we may cite one of that writer's Italian hymns:

"Vediti uno homo morire? Piu segnio non ve opporto Che tutti dovemo venire A quel medesimo porto."

In the first book, chapter 23, our writer translates this verse almost literally: "If thou hast at any time of communism was practiced in other conditions of life than the monastic state; very frequently inmonastic state; very frequently inpone left an unedited treatise, the first words of which are a perfect epitome of the "Imitation:" "Whoever wishes to arrive at a knowledge of God, and to come to truth by a short and straight road, as well as to the perfect posses sion of a peace of mind, must forgo all love of creatures, and even all love of self; so that he may throw himself entirely upon God, reserving nothing for himself.

The similarities and identities just indicated seem to prove that the anony mous author adopted a special method in composing his book—one which may be styled a method of appropriations and souvenirs, but which was not, in the Middle Age, either an isolated instance or a peculiar system ; for all the sermons of that period are filled with assessments levied upon other productions, both contemporary and of an older date. M. de La Marche, probably with good reason, discerns nothing strange in this fact, still less any justification for a charge of plagiar-ism; since he regards literary pro-prietorship as having then vanished before a Christian communism, or rather before a Christian fraternity. And he thinks that before commencing an endeavor to solve the insoluble problem of the authorship of the "Imitation," it were well to enter upon a patient and conscientious study of the sources from which the work is in great part derived. Assuredly, such study would edify us with a comparatively lucid manifestation of the literary and artistic communism of the Middle Age. Unfortunately for this kind of criticism, the patience and serious mindedness of the olden Benedictines are very rare, if at all discoverable, in our day.

In conclusion, we would remark that among the innumerable editions of the

cis de Sales-an ingenious proceeding effect on the mind of the reader; for no two writers seek each other's companionship more naturally than the author of the "Imitation" and the composer of the "Introduction to a Devout Life." One other edition of the "Imitation" should be mentioned before we leave our subject, and that is the one due to the labors of Lamennais, before the grand Catholic apolog ist had become a fallen angel. † all else which came from the pen of this genuis before the sad catastrophe of his career, this production is free in interpretation, original in style, highly colored, and inflamed; and had the unfortunate editor possessed a little of the sweet spirit of S. F. the sweet spirit of St. Francis de Sales, our imagination fails to picture what charms would have characterized his commentaries. But probably other saints than St. Francis will yet add an infusion of their own spirit to what is already well-nigh perfect. Even then, perhaps the great masterpiece among books of devotion will remain the same. -Aliusque et idem.

-Paris, 1814, 8vo. +An erudite controversialist in th R-vue des Questions Historiques for January, 1871, re-marks: "The Imitation appears to me to be only a reproduction and analysis of the writ-ings of St. Bernard."

THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND HOME RULE.

An Anomaly and an Anachronism.

Under the head of "The Useless House of Lords," Justin McCarthy, M. P., in the course of a timely and interesting article in the North-American Review for August says:

The House of Lords is the champion anomaly of the British constitution. The day of its destiny is over ; the star of its fate has declined. In former times there was indeed a grandiose and high-sounding Tory doctrine about the mission of the House of Lords. The theory was that the House of Lords was an institution of something very like heavenly origin, the function of which was to step in between a blinded and maddened nation and that nation's self-destruction. But the theory has fallen into sad disrepute of late years even among the Tories. The House of Lords interfered to save the State from Lord Grey's Reform Bill, and it had to pass the Bill all the same. It will never, perhaps, be known with any precision how near, how very near, England may have come to a terrible revolution while the House of Lords was trying to resist the passing of the Reform Bill. Well, but if the House of Lords has to give way whenever the people loudly and firmly demand anything, what is the particular use of the House of Lords? The part of a savior of society is no doubt a very responsible and a very noble part; but of what possible advantage is a constituted savior of society who cannot save? Nobody believes any more that the Lords can prevent the passing of any popular measure. The House of Commons is slow enough, in all conscience, about measures of reform. Its natural inclination is to postpone everything, if not, indeed, to oppose everything, in the way of reform. The majority of the House of Lords is composed of steady-going, respectable

They are inclined to think every man a fanatic or a bore who has ideas of his own on public questions, or, most often, a fanatic and a bore combined. But the majority of the House of Commons are practical men, and are responsible to their constituents, and they very soon find it borne in upon them that their constituents are really in earnest about some particular measure, and are determined to have it passed into law. What could the American public think of an institution that has resisted and delayed every great reform proposed by English statesmanship? For that English statesmanship? For that is not an exaggerated description of the career of the House of Lords. The House of Lords is a chamber composed almost exclusively of one class-the landlord class I have already admitted that the Lords always have to give in to the House of Commons in the end. But this very fact is only one other argument to show the absurdity of such an institution. If the House of Lords must knuckle down at last to the House of Commons, what becomes of the theory of a saving upper chamber? But, although the House of Lords can not finally resist or reject, it can delay, it can obstruct, it can annoy and even exasperate, it can tamper with and mutilate and spoil good measures to repair the harm the Lords have done. There is something provoking-I cannot find any better word to express what I mean-in the habitual policy of the House of Lords. It will pass anything the moment the country gets angry and makes a row. It will oppose or postpone, or mutilate or emasculate, any measure of genuine reform if it seems at all likely that such a course can be taken with impunity.

THE HOUSE OF LORDS WILL NOT FIGHT. species of plagiarism when we use in our prayers the words of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and even of less eminent persons who have composed the orisons in our books of devo- Its text, edited by the Abbe Petitin, alike forbid them. To pass such a bill, The distant only pain alling strengths

would make them accomplices in the destruction of England's safety and England's glory. The voices of the past, present and the future alike forbid the House of Lords to sauction the dead would such legislation. The dead would arise from beneath their marble tombe and their monumental brasses to forbid such a sacrifice of all that English tradition holds most dear. So the heroic attitude is maintained for one session Then the next session comes and the House of Lords will pass the very same bill without a murmur of serious dis sent or objection—and will leave the illustrious dead to sleep beneath their marble tombs and their monumenta brasses. I firmly believe that the House of Lords is responsible directly for the worst disturbance that prevailed In Ireland during from 18s1 to 1885. I can imagine ar American reader asking why any Liberal Government allows the House of Lords to mutilate its good measures in this reckless and wholesale fashion Why do not Liberal Governments stand out and insist that measures which have been carried through the Commons SHALL NOT BE MANGLED AND SPOILED in the House of Lords? The reason can be easily given, although I do not think the justification can be quite so easily found. Our over-incumbered system of legislation in our centralized Parliament at Westminster forces us to do everything in a hurry. We ar always in a race against time. bill gets thrown out this session, it may

be very hard, unless it is a measure of the most immediate importance, to find a place for it in the next session. Even if it is a measure of great importance, still there are various other measures of great importance waiting and pressing for their turn. fore the Government will do almost anything for the sake of carrying the principle of a bill within the season during which it has been introduced. I think if I were a Liberal Prime Minister I would put my foot down and refuse to allow any of my important measures to be tinkered and spoiled by the House of Lords. I think I would let the bill be postponed for once, and give the country to clearly understand why it was postponed. I would throw on the House of Lords

THE FULL RESPONSIBILITY

for its postponement. A lesson of that kind would cure the House of Lords very soon of its passion for spoiling good measures. Ireland has, of course, been always a happy hunt ing ground for the House of Lords It has been much safer to spoil, or even altogether reject, a good bill for Ireland than to spoil or reject a good bill for England. Until within last few years Ireland had hardly any strong friends in Parliament. The House of Lords might cut any capers it liked where merely Irish legislation was concerned. No outcry loud was concerned. No outcry loud enough to reach the ears of the big British public could well be made over a rejected measure to improve the condition of the Irish laborers, or to establish in Ireland a satisfactory method for the registration of votes or to amend the hideous defects and anomalies of the Irish grand jury Therefore, the history system. of legislation records an unbroken succession of annual instances to show what the Lords have done with any and all attempts made by Irish members of Parliament to intro duce domestic reforms into their own country. There are reforms still unaccomplished for the Irish governing system which have been the subject of legislation during all the sessions of Parliament that I can remember. They were not important enough, in majority of the House of Lords is composed of steady-going, respectable

MEN WITHOUT TWO IDEAS IN THEIR

The imperial sense, to arouse a national enthusiasm and to provoke by their rejection a national clamor, and peers did not care three straws for any outcry made by the Irish people. But the Irish people have gained what Wordsworth calls "great allies" in England. They have carried the best

> Radicalism and democracy of Great Britain. Their allies are the people of England, Scotland and Wales. IRELAND WILL SOON BE FREE to settle her domestic legislation for herself. It may be asked whether, then, I see no countervailing advantage to the country in the existence of the House of Lords. Admitting all the defects, are there actually no advan tages? I only give my own opinion, and I say no—none whatever. I am not now discussing the wider question as to the value of a second chamber in the legislation of a State. I am think ing merely of the House of Lords in its present form, or in any form like to that; and I can only say that I see in its existence much evil to the national interests and no good; no-none what ever.

English statesmanship with them; and,

better even than that, they have won

to their side the whole Liberalism and

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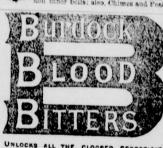
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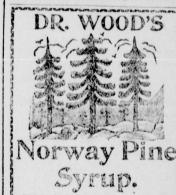
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