

CONSIDERATIONS ON CATHOLICISM.

By a Protestant Theologian.

Sacred Heart Review—CCXCIV.

We have seen how Eastern monasticism may indeed fairly be charged with having, from time to time, in the doctrinal disputes which absorbed so much attention for several centuries in the East, exercised, not merely influence, but a turbulent control over general society. However, as it then, at least within the Empire, lapsed into somnolence, and has had virtually no history for a thousand years or more, we need not dwell upon it.

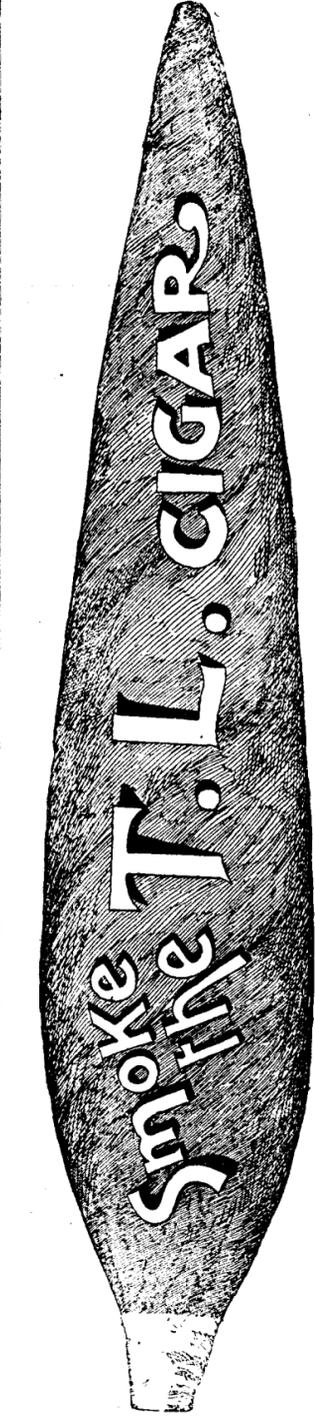
In the West, we have seen how Irish monasticism, and Benedictinism following it, converted Great Britain, Germany and Switzerland, and re-animated the Christianity of Italy, Spain and Gaul. We have seen also how these great converting and civilizing orders did, indeed, profoundly influence society, through the reverence felt for their mighty achievements, and for their piety, zeal and learning; but how far it is from just to charge them with having "controlled" society, in any illegitimate or violent way, allowing, of course, for local and temporary aberrations. We have seen how unreasonable it is to reflect upon monasticism, or upon the Church, any special credit or discredit for the individual characters of ministers of state supplied from the orders or from secular clergy. Becket, while still Chancellor, no more represented the Church, for good or evil, than Richelieu long afterwards, whose policy, indeed, bishop and cardinal though he was, was purely political, and almost Huguenot.

At the same time we may well acknowledge it as a healthy development when the wider spread of education supplied a larger proportion of laymen for lay affairs. As a strongly hierarchical writer says: A Bishop may inherit a peerage, but it is hardly well to make a Bishop a peer.

That great reformation of Benedictinism, the Cistercian order, which was largely concerned in the somewhat later conversion of the three Scandinavian kingdoms, appears to have been still more distinctly potent in the spread of the civilizing arts, especially of agriculture and architecture, than the mother-order itself. Here, in the person of that greatest of Cistercians, St. Bernard, we may mark the essential difference between a legitimate, however powerful, "influence," over the secular world, and an intriguing or violent "control." Before the word of the great Abbot, kings, princes, bishops, nay Popes, bent like reeds. Bernard's pupil Eugenius III., does not take umbrage that his master is commonly called "the Pope's pope." Neander shows how prodigious, and for the most part how deeply beneficent a power he exercised over universal society. From this eulogy, so extreme a Protestant as Paul Sabatier does not except his share in extinguishing the sullen and irrational system of Albigensianism.

Yet all this wonderful influence of the Abbot of Clairvaux, as shown by Neander, and by Dr. Storrs in his delightful little book, seems to have had the least possible alloy of "control." It does not compare in this with Calvin's government, at Geneva, even though his control also, as distinguished from his influence, is greatly exaggerated. As Macaulay says, while it is the glory of freemen to be impatient of a yoke it is equally their glory to submit themselves to the lead and moral influence of great men. This is more especially true when their leaders are both great and good. They are included among the saints and, as Dean Farrar says, the twenty-five thousand names in the "Acta Sanctorum" are twenty-five thousand heroes and heroines of disinterestedness. And, by the best of all possible rights, disinterestedness is in the end irresistible. More even than His miracles, the disinterestedness of our Lord has conquered the world, for "God is Love."

In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries Europe was honeycombed with wildly fermenting opinions, of the most extravagant, and largely of the foulest kind. As is said in the "Divina



Commedia," "Christ's army was marching scattered and slow." There was a wide impression that the world was about to sink into moral chaos. From this God saved it by the agency of Francis and Dominic, guided by Innocent and Honorius, and aided in time by the other mendicant orders. Macaulay, whose opinions about "Popery," though not virulent, do not seem to differ much from those of his countrymen, nevertheless freely allows that had it not been for the great victory secured to the Church through the Minorites and Preachers and Augustinians and Carmelites, Europe might very probably have sunk under the sway of systems even grosser, and far wilder, than Mohammedanism. Certainly these four orders seem to deserve something else than a petulant reference to them as having uncomfortably controlled society in the past, which, except by a freely accepted influence, they can hardly be said to have done. It would be an unfair interpretation so to explain this gentleman's language, but his general tone suggests distinct disparagements from others.

Gioberti, although a priest, and a firm believer in the Roman Primacy, and in the definitions of the Church, is a Liberal of the Liberals. Yet he pronounces a detailed and eloquent panegyric on the Franciscans and Dominicans especially, and on their absolutely incalculable services to religion and civilization. His temperate but keen animadversions upon those who seem blind to their great place and work in the former world may well be pondered by those who are inclined to let fly at them. Whether or not they are now "decaying relics of the Middle Ages," as a somewhat incautious Jesuit has allowed himself to call them, is another question. Every order less extended than the universal priesthood had its birth long after Christ's first Coming, and may conceivably have its end long before His second. "Dies declarabit."

Yet we should not be too ready to declare that this or that monas-

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tic order has had its day, reflecting that, after their great achievements of the thirteenth century, and after they had sunk into a certain apathy and degeneracy, the mendicant orders revived in such energy as to Christianize the West, and to stay the exterminating ravages of Spanish adventurers. For this noble work former jealousies between the orders were forgotten. It was the Franciscan Ximenes who created the high office of Protector of the Indians and placed in it the incipient Dominican Las Casas. It was the Minorite Zumarraga who carried on the work of Las Casas in his diocese and province of Mexico, in the face of viceregal wrath. Whatever the dissensions of orders at home, Bartholomew knows them in the New World only as his unanimous helpers. This second culmination should deter us from too impatient a decision that there is no room for a third.

The sudden rise and spread of the Jesuits, and their extraordinary achievements, have for a long time thrown criticism on the other orders into the background, although now the French and Anglo-Saxon applauders of Combes begin to call for the decree of universal annihilation, until matters shall be ready for the destruction of the Catholic Church herself, in the Latin lands, and after that for the more leisurely extinction of such other fragments of religion as may be left in France and the two peninsulas. I notice that one far-

seeing Jacobin already projects enactments, not merely against religion, but against "the religious spirit." In due time, if this pious campaign of impiety goes on prosperously, we may look forward to seeing the tumbrils rolling on their grisly march filled with men and women "suspected of being suspicious," as showing touches of the religious temper. M. Combes signifies his wish to put down, in every form—and we are safe in saying by every means—this intolerable "recrudescence of religious faith."

To revert to the Jesuits, their case is "sui generis." It would be most unjust to treat all who dislike them as disliking the other orders. On the other hand there are admirers of theirs who would care little if every other congregation vanished out of the world. We remember that once, when the parliament of Paris asked them whether they were monks, friars, regular clerks, or what, they answered: "You must take us 'tels quels,' " "for such as we are." However their causes now seem likely to be merged in the general cause of religion itself. I might not be fond of Methodism—as indeed I am not—but how could I act if I discovered that its adherents were beginning to be persecuted, not as Methodists nor even as Arminians, nor even as Protestants, but as Christians?

I may remark that even in their prime, while the Jesuits certainly wielded a tremendous power over general society, it was not a "con-

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trol." They assumed no "jurisdiction" in secular matters. Their power was one of "influence." And the "Outlook" to the contrary notwithstanding, any man, and any body of men, has a natural right to use "influence," to the full extent to which it may be freely yielded. Against this the only remedy is the sword, or the axe, or the gallows, and England has shown that this is often ineffectual.

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