

## A BRILLIANT ADDRESS

## ON THE LIFE OF CARDINAL NEWMAN

Delivered by Mr. John Stapleton, of  
Sheton, Conn., at the Commence-  
ment Exercises in Montreal  
College.

The distinction of such an audience as this speaks well for the attention and indulgence the young speaker claims for a few remarks while he puts to feeble words the admiration he holds for a grand name, one of the grandest of our century and the pride and glory of the language he calls his own. It is not necessary to be English to know and admire such a man. England with all her possessions was too small to circumscribe his fame (and reputation), it crossed the limits and resounded like a sweet music through the world. So that in putting before you the noble figure of J. H. Newman, I am convinced that you have only to recall a souvenir, a souvenir of him who by a single step undid the work of centuries in England and struck, in the name of Truth, a blow such as primitive times alone record. Indeed, wiser brains and richer endowments could alone do justice to such a name, but admiration this time must compensate for defect of talent and experience in praising him who, through love of truth, found it, and having found it through love, defended it.

Poets compare this life to a battlefield where man finds arrayed against him the powers of darkness, the flesh and ignorance. We all fight; some more, some less. And while the destiny of the talker seems so inexorable, Providence nevertheless compensates the latter with special gifts and graces for the deprivation of light. And it may be soon, it may be late, but such souls must needs reach the end desired and deserved: for the just man shall not perish.

To young Newman light was denied; but in its stead, in that young heart beat the noblest sentiments, and in that young mind were the grandest aspirations. While but a child, he tells us he loved the Bible, and poured over its sacred pages like an ordinary boy would over Robinson Crusoe. He wished the Arabian tales were true, himself an angel, and all this world a deception. 'Twas not the most enchanting, but the most serious books that caught his eye, and at an age when most lads rarely trouble themselves about grave matter, he was studying the deepest questions in religion. No obscurity, no obstacle, could check him: he thought, sounded, unraveled, and was only content when at the bottom of the difficulty. The boy was a theologian in his teens. Such a cast of mind few could comprehend; nor was it anything but the workings of Divine Providence in a soul-elect, the sowing of seeds that would one day bring forth such beautiful fruits. In after years men doubted his sincerity, laughed at his opinions; but never had they two opinions of his vast intellectual powers. Providence thus had given him that which is next best after truth and light—a longing desire to find them.

Have you ever read what wise books tell us of some of those heavenly tapers that deck the sky at night? How they coursed for thousands of years through the space of the Infinite, guided by that unerring hand, before casting at last their benignant rays upon the world? And the star that rose over Albion in 1845, what deserts had it to traverse, how long and how wearisome the peregrination? But the same finger led both and could no more lead one astray than the other. Where did it lead Newman? To Oxford. Strange place say you, to seek light and the very nursery of a heretical creed, the gymnasium of its ablest champions, the rendezvous of the talent of Anglicanism. But it was among this gay and proud galaxy of fellows that Newman was to lay the foundations of his great work. There at its fountain-head, to seek deep into everything grave and serious on religion and doctrine, there to live in contact, to converse with and hear the opinions of the clever men of the day, the Puseys, the Frudes, the Keble, there in a word, to give the final touches to his bark before launching it on the wave. How far were they from thinking the sages of Oxford, what giant proportions would one day take the keen-witted youth that entered their antique and venerated precincts! The scholar,

in one step he reached the foremost; in another, left far behind him the brightest talents of the University. The tutor, the anxious and boiling activity and workings of his mind left him no rest. Science, letters, politics, antiquity threw open their portals at his fearless knock. Nothing too vast, nothing too trivial, he was always better informed on every topic, says University tradition, and every word that fell from his lips was treasured as an intellectual diamond. The Idol of Oxford, he ruled as a King; and for nine-tenths of the fellows the genuine symbol of faith was "Credo in Newmanum." It was here that he acquired that self-control, that profoundly philosophical cast of mind, that invincible logic of which the libellers of the faith have so often confessed that force in the bitterness of defeat, of a logic, too, symptoms of which for the first time, were found to savor of the politics of Rome. At first it was an expressive nod, then whisperings that soon grew into a hue and cry. And strangest of all he was publicly accused of apostasy, he who regarded the Roman Creed with a sacred honor. But how well were the suspicions founded! Gradually a veil, he called it liberalism, fell over him; little by little the worm gnawed at his heart and his steps began to totter and deviate, unknown to himself, from Anglicanism. Could it be material influence? None ever dared hazard the opinion. No, it was the same instinct, I mistake, it was the same infused grace, the same finger that led him to Oxford. Like the carrier-pigeon, circling round and round before taking its direction, Newman, arrived at a climax, felt his ideas undergo the same revolution. Was truth on earth? He knew it, and while yet a boy had proved it to himself. Where was it? His searchings convinced him that it was in the Primitive Church, the church of Anastasius and Augustine. Where is it now? One by one every doctrine passed before his eyes. Arianism, Nestorianism, Calvinism! he stamped them false. There was one left, Romanism. It is either Rome or England that possesses it? But off, off, had he detected on the monument raised by Henry VIII., spots that told of hidden corruption and decay. Of the interior life of the Catholics he knew nothing. It was a lost church, invaded by the Evil Spirit, profaned, gross and cruel. And then he was driven back into himself and felt his isolation. Once the Oxford divine looked forth with a troubled gaze on the phenomena at work around him, and with a heavy heart he saw or thought he saw the grand theory of truth swept away by the storms of passion and error. Here stopped the giant intellect of Newman. The human could go no farther. The divine must come to his aid. What struggles, what pangs were in that soul. None can tell. But that there were pangs, and mortal ones, you have but to read in that furrowed, worn-out, never-to-be-forgotten face. With a cry almost of despair: "All is divine save the soul of man," and he bent beneath the awful force of his own word.

One day he found himself, he scarce knew how, under the Italian skies in an English barque. 'Twas an image of himself, the heart-sick worn-out sailor tossed on the sea of life. How near Rome! But how little he thought of it! The wave was calm for a moment, and the firmament above lit up by a single star that sent its feeble rays across the deep. His soul for a moment forgot its grief; it could not resist the poetic charm of the scene prepared for the stroke of grace, and opening the very bottom of his yearning heart in one cry he sang:

"One step, aye, unknowingly he confessed it L. K. L. and where? To home, to England. I have work to do in England. I have never sinned against light." In that moment his soul was changed. For a time he had hesitated before believing truth to be on earth. A voice, the voice of his own tired soul now told him it was. To England! To England! Fly, take wings; O my barque, fly home. And standing on the prow, his anxious gaze piercing the horizon, he seemed to say: "It exists, then. Truth; then I'll plant the fallen column upon its basis; I will raise it from the dust; I'll tear the cobwebs from its desecrated cornices and sustain it 'gainst wind and storm, earth and hell." It was no longer the shy Oxford student, 'twas, 'twas Achilles flying to the fight after Patrocle's death; 'twas a lioness seeking the ravisher of her young. Arms he had; 'twas his heart and will with an honest

manhood of 44 years on his brow. A leader he had; 'twas the kindly light he invoked. Ah! fight noble champion of truth; fight for a cause such as makes heroes; fight, for the kindly light will show you to victory. 'Twas a beautiful spectacle. Newman was in his element! "Twas," says he, "from a human point of view, the grandest, happiest moment of his life. Hotter and hotter it waxed. The world looked on in amazement, while onward, onward the tide of battle flowed. A step farther and it comes into collision with the State and the religion of the State. 'Twas the moment, fixed from eternity, for one of mercy's strokes. The heavens opened, a flash parted, a flash of grace from the heart of Him who redeemed man; it found its mark in a creature's heart. And when the din had ceased, the smoke of strife cleared away, England beheld her once adorned champion the hero of the day. Where? at the feet of a Roman priest."

At last, at last, the kindly light had led his storm-beaten barque to the port. He found not the *via media*, but the straight path to Rome. He won, at last, in the gigantic struggle, all that is inappreciable to man, his salvation and his strong unwavering faith, and Providence smiling on the gallant heart, showed him that the bed of thorns on which he had so long laid was but a bed of roses. I will not intrude on the sacred silence of that ecstatic soul; that peace, that joy. None but he who passed thro' it can define. Leave him a moment with his soul and his God; the powers of darkness howl without.

If ever a nation, or church, was interested in the workings of one man's mind, 'twas England, and the English church in Newman's. His conversion, by some, was expected, foreseen, predicted, but for the greater number the news of it came down like a clap of thunder. Men who thought they understood him found out their mistake, and Newman was held up to vehemence of abuse. It was rumored he was mad. The country was ablaze against the "apostate." But Newman heard not at that hour, he was drinking at the source of divine grace. For the first time, the sacred Body and Blood passed thro' his lips, his soul was being fortified for the struggles to come. He would take the field again to adore what he had burned and to burn what he had adored and put at the feet of his newly-found and true mother his homage of fidelity, of that mother whose love becomes, as if it were magnetised, to draw her children to her bosom. On that bosom St. Augustine found repose, and peace and strength for his soul. Torch of truth, its benignant rays dispel the darkness of error and transform the soul under its sublime influence. It healed the wounded, ulcered soul of Newman, poured therein the soothing balm of grace and the oil of fortitude, and then: Go forth and battle, you have found my love through grace; show you are deserving.

The cries of the disappointed school that called him were soon answered. With a leap the newly-born athlete bounded in the arena. 'Twas an unequal contest. A nation stood armed with hatred against him; he had committed the unpardonable sin in England. The schools of theology arrayed against him the weapons of controversy, bitterness and scorn. The sore was fresh, the gap was wide that he made, and 'twas felt keenly, though not until later years, long after, did they realize the injury done. Alone against the fearful odds he stood like the barbarian regenerated and became a Crusader. His weapons were still sharp; he had learned to use them in a good school, and as he stood there he surpassed by a head the host of his adversaries. He hit and hit hard. Fervid eloquence, flashy wit, keen irony, subtle and deep logic steadied his sword of polemics.

Cicero in his Catilinares was not more vehement than Newman, the priest, when he vindicated the church from the foul aspersions of an immoral renegade, the notorious Achilles. It was, say his historians, as if he used the lightning of the whip, so terrible and scathing was the quality of his scorn. Never was such a specimen of crushing ironical and pitiless controversial skill displayed than in his tilt with Kingsley. Had the imprudent knight known his adversary, "so cunning of fence," he would have taken measures to prevent the encounter and would have been spared the farewell salute that Newman's skill drew from some enthusiastic student: "Go to the shades, old man, and boast that Achilles

sent thee thither." And another day came when England's future Prime Minister, the grand old man of to-day, for a moment launched on a venturesome wave, found at his hands some things to think over and to digest. But twenty years of fidelity to a cause for which he had made such enormous sacrifices and broken such affectionate ties should, it seems, have insured him from attack. But the old warrior thought every blow aimed at him to be aimed at the church, and he never recoiled. At last people found out the mettle of the Roman lion and gave up trying to understand what they evidently could not comprehend. One day, however, a Protestant minister sends a pompous invitation to Newman to dispute with him. "I have small skill in controversy," replied the great convert, "and must decline to enter the lists with so formidable a champion; however, my friends credit me with some power in playing the violin, and I would be happy to meet the challenger at a trial of strength on that instrument." There was no dispute.

But that voice that thundered with such eloquence, that shook England in controversy, with what unction, what charm, it poured forth from the pulpit the teachings of the Church! He seemed a patriarch, a man of another age, giving forth with a silvery tongue the fruits of his pains, study and experience. His sermons were dramas, better, they were poems. He seemed to hold a wand o'er his audience, and penetrating into every heart expose the wounds that pride kept hidden. And sometimes finding accents worthy of a Chrysostom in a burst of fervid passion, to which nothing could insist, engraved there a souvenir never to be effaced. On one of those calm Sunday afternoons, it seemed as if the angels and the dead were his audience, that voice thrilled young hearts and that living presence drew to itself all that was noble of purpose or high and chivalrous in devotions.

Raphael is said to have thanked God that he lived in the day of Michael Angelo. There are hundreds and thousands who thank God that they lived in Newman's time, especially to have been able to catch from his lips a spark of that eloquence that flowed as from an inexhaustible source. But Newman belongs to posterity. And what his voice could not, his pen was to do. His century would believe him, would positively do so. That antipathy born and nourished in Protestant hearts against the "apostate," that eloquence would fail to dispel,—that would live. It had to be answered, and Newman gave to the world his "Apologia," styled the boldest and most touching of modern biographies, a book of final appeal; where future ages can read the secret workings of a grand heart exposed to public view. 'Twas a giant's efforts; they might compare it to Plato's Apology of Socrates, where pagan ideas were susceptible of comparison with the sublime truths of Christianity. Hardly do the confessions of St. Augustine more vividly retrace the struggles of his life and the times of the great African bishops. "I give the key of my whole life away with you. My calumniators fly with space and leave me with my God." More beautiful classical English was never written. He cast the glamor of high imagination over the most tiresome and intricate subjects, and worn out and long-forgotten subjects took life at his magic touch.

His Anglican writings may have been clear and cold, but when he became a Catholic all was glow and sunshine. What an example is his last Calista,—worthy counterpart of another great convert's masterpiece, *Fabiola*. At a time when the general tone of religious literature was nerveless and impotent, it was then that Newman struck an original chord and woke up in the hearts of a people a music long unknown in England. Now he draws from the arid pages of another age and traces those admirable volumes that are honey to the English tongue, "The library of the Fathers;" now the epistolary, he fights and loves, laughs and cries and cries with eloquence in a dozen lines of familiar conversation. Their merit no eulogium can enhance. But convertist or orator, writer or historian, 'twas always the same stamp of mind, 'twas Newman. But the pen had long ceased to be a sword in his hands, and the same that demolished Kingsley and confounded Achilles—the same wrote the dream, *Gerontius*.

Though having passed his whole life in warfare, the soldier was a poet and no one can refuse a place on Parnassus to