

The Catholic Record

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LONDON, SATURDAY, DEC. 1, 1917

THE CASE OF SISTER BASIL

The case of the ex-nun Johanna Curran, in religion Sister Mary Basil, has attracted a good deal of attention, and for the moment at least caused a good deal of a sensation. The press throughout the country gave considerable space to the testimony. Their summaries, however, were what many of their readers doubtless would consider interesting rather than a clear or complete presentation of both sides of the question in issue.

The Canadian Freeman, published in Kingston, says:

"The plaintiff in this action, Johanna Curran (Sister Basil), was for twenty-nine years a member of the Community of the Sisters of Charity of the city. For the greater part of that time, according to the sworn testimony of the Sisters, she has been an unruly and rebellious member of the Community. She adopted an attitude so directly contrary to the Rules and Constitutions of her Order as to become a source of scandal to her sisters in religion."

This being the condition of things a Catholic naturally wants to know why Sister Basil, if sane, did not ask for a dispensation from her vows and withdraw from the community, retaining her good standing as a Catholic. It appears that she did so. "She asked for a dispensation," says the Freeman. "The dispensation was granted, and then she refused to accept it." We understand that she was offered such dispensation many years ago by the predecessor of the present Archbishop. This would seem to throw a light on the peculiar temperament of Sister Basil. Still such a woman may consider this dog-in-the-manger attitude a virtue.

The Freeman thus summarizes the essential facts leading up to the civil action:

"The Superior-General swore that she purposed removing plaintiff to the Hospital of St. John of God in Montreal, an institution kept by Sisters of Charity similar to the Community to which she belonged. Her intention was to have plaintiff under medical care there so that the Community might be enabled to arrive at a decision as to her mental state. In the event of her being pronounced insane the Community would pay for her maintenance in this institution. If not, then they would be free to give her another chance or to dismiss her as an incorrigible subject. It should be borne in mind that the Hospital of St. John of God is not a lunatic asylum in the strict sense of the word. Lunatics are kept there, but there are other departments in this large institution apart from the lunatic department. Plaintiff was to be examined after her arrival by competent medical authority and assigned to the department to which the examiners decided she belonged. Why was not this examination made before her removal? (1) Because they were convinced that plaintiff would not consent to an examination, and (2), because certificates from Ontario doctors would be of no value in Quebec. Why was she not removed to an Ontario institution? Because there is no institution of this kind in Ontario. Witness testified that under the Constitutions she had power to dismiss plaintiff without a cent, and that this course was not followed because the Council was unable to decide as to plaintiff's ability to provide for herself if so dismissed."

"Plaintiff remained at the Orphanage for some time after the attempted removal, and then went to Belleville. The Superior at Belleville she considered her friend. For a time she was apparently contented enough, but after a few months she decided that life at Belleville was impossible, and she finally left the Community altogether and instituted proceedings in the civil courts. Her appeal to Rome was still pending. Father Mulhall, C. S. S. R., Toronto, had made an investigation and reported to the Sacred Congregation,

but apparently plaintiff decided that Rome would dismiss the action, so, without even withdrawing the case from the Roman Courts she initiated proceedings in the Civil Courts."

Briefly the jury decided that Sister Basil was not insane, that it was the intention of the defendants to remove her forcibly to an insane asylum; and they awarded her substantial damages. The Archbishop was found innocent of any complicity in the alleged conspiracy.

We have gone thus far into this question to comply with the wishes of several readers who wrote desiring information. Together with what has been furnished by the daily papers this is sufficient for them to understand the case. We have no opinion to offer as to whether this ex-religious is mentally unbalanced. Those who know her best seemed to be in doubt whether or not she was insane in that legal sense which would justify her incarceration in an insane asylum. The jury decided that she was not, in this sense at least, insane.

That Catholics should find the whole case and the way it was presented to the public extremely painful and in the nature of a scandal is most natural considering the affectionate esteem, the reverence, in which they hold the noble army of women who consecrate their lives to education and charity. They know the Sisters—their own sisters, daughters, relatives and friends. The happy and holy memories of childhood are for tens of thousands associated with their loving care, their heroic self-sacrifice.

But when all is said and done why does this case cause such a sensation?

Hysterical, unbalanced, wrong-headed women are unfortunately not so rare in life's experience. Nor, for that matter, are hysterical, unbalanced, wrong-headed men. Incompatibility of temper may have become a jest in these days of easy divorce; but for all that it is something tragically real at times. The breaking up of homes, divorces, murders even, are amongst the tragedies due to such sources and of everyday occurrence. The very fact—and we wish to place all possible emphasis upon it—the very fact that complications due to such human weaknesses and limitations, because nuns were concerned, caused such a tremendous sensation is the highest conceivable tribute to the sanity, the piety and the unobtrusive humility with which tens of thousands of these holy women fulfil the duties to which they have consecrated their lives.

That is the only sane view of the case; that is the only view that will be taken by self-respecting and fair-minded Protestants—the others don't matter.

"NO FAVORS FOR THIS MURDERER"

Saturday Night is usually fair and outspoken, indeed we should say unusually so. A lack of up-to-date information on Irish affairs in general and on Sinn Fein in particular is not the fault of Saturday Night but of the rigid censorship which places the sources of information—and misinformation—in the hands of those who would have shielded the murderer of Sheehy-Keffling from even the farcical punishment meted out to him.

In the honest and fearless article we reproduced on page one our esteemed contemporary refers to Sir Francis Vane, a brother officer who informed Kitchener of the facts of this cold-blooded murder which did so much to "utterly destroy confidence in the impartiality of British justice, so far as Ireland is concerned."

The murders of the journalists took place on the twenty-sixth of April; it was not until the sixth of May that any notice whatever was paid to this "insane" criminal, who was allowed to retain his command and his liberty, and to conduct himself privately and officially as his "insane" impulses might dictate. Major Vane exhausted every effort to have the military authorities in Dublin take some action, but absolutely without result. In desperation he went directly to the War Office, but to do so had to absent himself without leave, an offence for which he was promptly dismissed from the service; contrast this treatment with that accorded Bowen-Colthurst. And think it out a bit for yourselves; it makes Sinn Fein intelligible.

When it was no longer possible to avoid it Bowen-Colthurst was court-martialed, charged with murder, found guilty, but declared insane and ordered confined during the

King's pleasure. "British justice so far as Ireland is concerned" is a peculiar thing. The natural sense of justice and fair play of the English people would have indignantly blazed forth at any other time against many things done in its name in Ireland since the War began. Now appeal is made to that peculiar British justice to restore Bowen-Colthurst his liberty; but ex-Major Vane is still deprived of his commission. It is not too much to say that "British justice" is typified in the popular mind in Ireland by Bowen-Colthurst, and Sinn Fein by the natural indignation of Sir Francis Vane.

LUTHER AND LIBERTY

The celebration of the fourth centenary of Luther's posting of his theses against indulgences has been half-hearted, and half-abandoned of itself. Here and there an uncritical and ignorant outburst of praise for Luther as the great anti-Popery champion and the author of religious freedom appeared in the press; but it was something perfunctory addressed to the unthinking prejudice of the Protestant tradition.

Luther believed himself to be favored with a special illumination of the Holy Spirit and chosen by God to effect a great work. Uncritical Protestant tradition affirms that such great work he accomplished. Awkward is the question suggested by the common sense and natural logic of the average man: How then is it that Lutheran Prussia has now become the scourge of God to the world? He is answered sometimes that Prussia has fallen away from Luther's teaching. But we have Luther's own evidence and that of his Reforming contemporaries as to the immediate effects of his rebellious movement.

In 1580 Justus Jonas, friend and constant companion of Luther, wrote: "Those who call themselves evangelicals are becoming utterly depraved and not only is there no longer any fear of God among them but there is no respect for outward appearances either; they are weary and disgusted with preachers and treat them like dirt and dust in the streets."

And Melancthon's friend Camerarius, a little later, says: "Mankind have now attained the goal of their desires, boundless liberty to think and act as they please. Reason, moderation, law, morality and duty have lost all value."

And Luther himself, in his Hauspostille quoted by Father Grisar, admits and confirms the facts to which others bore testimony: "This (evangelical) preaching ought by rights to be accepted and listened to with joy, and everyone ought to improve himself thereby, and become more pious. But unfortunately the reverse is now the case, and the longer it endures the worse the world becomes; this is the work of the devil himself, for now we see people becoming more infamous, more avaricious, more unmerciful, more unchaste, and worse in every way than they were under Popery."

The law of liberty not working out, the Reformers soon invoked the authority of the State in matters of conscience and by the time of the Treaty of Westphalia this odious tyranny was accepted in the well-known formula: Cujus regio ejus religio. The State is supreme in matters of conscience. The divine right of the Kaiser to dominate and reform the world is no better or no worse than the right of Luther to impose by the authority of princes a new gospel on the people; and the one is a logical outgrowth of the other.

Interesting in this connection is a letter from the Duke of Argyll to the Glasgow Herald of October 18 commending the Free Church Presbytery of Edinburgh for refusing to identify itself with the celebration of the Luther centenary:

"It is a strange mania," writes the Duke, "that Scotsmen who have a Columbia, a Margaret, and a Kentigern of their own should wish to commemorate a couple of long dead Aliens (Luther and Calvin) who worked nothing but evil and destruction in their lives, and whose fruits we see in the charnel house of Europe and the ashes of the shrines of France, centuries after they have passed to their account. There is a direct chain of causation between Luther's bloodthirsty ravings against the German peasantry and the recent horrors which shocked civilized nations at Wittenberg itself. . . . This gaping back at the sinister figures of Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther,

the apostates who tore the unity of the West in twain, is the attitude of a type of professor who feels a whole world slipping away from him."

SACRIFICING PRINCIPLES

The past few weeks, and especially the past few months, have witnessed some revolting episodes in the public life of Canada. We have seen the most brazen graft go unwhipped of justice. We have seen political trickery that would cause the members of that legislative body, designated by a certain western paper as "The Town Council of Hooch," to blush for shame. We have seen hypocrisy decked out in the mantle of patriotism, with one hand in the public chest and the other holding aloft the flag. We have seen the leading newspapers of the country substituting vituperation and sophistry for argument, vainly striving to conceal under rills of oily eloquence and cataclysms of declamation their dearth of information and good sense. Time there was when a leading newspaper exercised a great influence in forming public opinion; but a venal and truth-concealing press has brought matters to such a pass that its advocacy of a public measure or of a public man but weakens the cause of both. All this is enough to disgust any normal individual.

But this is not the worst. It is wrong to steal, but to condone stealing is a greater evil; for thereby the safeguard is removed that protects a man in his earthly possessions. It is a crime to commit murder, but it is a much greater crime to father the proposition that, under certain circumstances, murder is justifiable; for the sacredness and security of human life is thereby jeopardized. The same applies to our rights as citizens. To deprive a man of his civic rights, without due cause, is to do him an injustice, but to defend such action on the ground of expediency tends to undermine the work of generations, our national constitution that secures us in our liberties.

A principle is a very sacred thing. Men are dying by thousands on the field of Flanders to defend a principle, to perpetuate an ideal. The spokesmen of the allied nations have declared that their purpose is to safeguard human liberties and to make the world safe for democracy. The Church has permitted whole nations to be separated from her rather than substitute expediency for a principle that was part of her constitution. Subsequent history and the testimony of the ablest minds of to-day bear testimony to her wisdom. This passage from "Orthodoxy," by Gilbert Chesterton, is very apropos. "It is exactly this," he says, "which explains what is so inexplicable to the modern critics of the history of Christianity. I mean the monstrous wars about small points of doctrine. It was only a matter of an inch; but an inch is everything when you are balancing. The Church could not afford to swerve a hair's breadth on some things if she was to maintain her equilibrium. Once let one idea become less powerful, and soon some other idea would become too powerful. If some mistake was made in doctrine, huge blunders might be made in human happiness. A sentence phrased wrong about the nature of symbolism would have broken all the best statutes in Europe. Doctrines had to be defined within strict limits, even in order that man might enjoy general human liberties. The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless."

The same applies, with some limitations it is true, to our federal constitution. Interfere with that safeguard to our democracy, and our country may not be safe for democracy; there may be more than statutes broken. It is not from good Catholics that we need fear this; for they are slow to resist authority, imbued as they are with true ethical principles and resting secure in the practice of their faith and the serene consciousness that the Church will not fail amid the clash of arms and the overthrow of nations. It is rather from those masses that are swayed by emotion and prejudice, and unrestrained by religion. Patriotism is the only religion many of those poor people know. They are generously and almost hysterically patriotic. But let it once be brought home to them that they have been deceived, and our domestic peace will be endangered.

Never was there a time since the days of the Family Compact that our liberties were treated with such contempt. This is true of the mass of

our citizens, irrespective of their religion. We must not lose sight of the fact that not only the rank and file, but many among the leaders of thought in the country, are blind to the dangers ahead of them. They may be perfectly sincere, as we are afflicted by their training and education to grapple with the situation. It is surely a time when Catholic public men, who are heirs to the Church's centuries of experience, should not hide their light under a bushel, but, eschewing the attitude of "bated breath and whispering humbleness," manfully proclaim those principles of democracy that have made Canada a happy and a prosperous land.

"What crime have I committed," said O'Connell, "that The Times should praise me?" There are some amongst us who should examine their consciences, and ask themselves the same question. If some one of our Canadian co-religionists speaks out in arguments that are irrefutable and in terms that we would applaud in a Belgian or a Serbian, we heap contumely upon him, that thereby foresooth we may gain the applause of self-seeking worldlings. When principles are at stake, a man is a traitor to his country who takes shelter in cowardly silence, or makes cheap appeals to popular sentiment to gain the plaudits of the unthinking. Ah! but the people are thinking. They have intelligences, and truth is the adequate object of the intellect. Why should we, therefore, fear to speak? The great majority of them will be glad to hear it. Proclaim the truth and the truth will make us free. It is a duty we owe to our country, especially in this hour of trial and uncertainty.

THE GLEANER

NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE WEEKLY Bulletin of the Department of Trade and Commerce reproduces from Mr. Watson Griffin's "Canada the Country of the Twentieth Century," published in 1915, some interesting figures regarding the geographical extent of the country and its possibilities for living up to its destiny as one of the world's great centres of population in the years to come. It is fitting and proper that attention should be called to the subject at this time, in view of the stream of immigration which, all authorities agree, is likely to flow to this continent when peace returns, and war-riven Europe has had time to readjust itself after the great stress.

WE HAVE in these columns expressed the opinion that as to the inflow of population from Europe expectations are liable to be disappointed. This, however, refers to the years immediately following upon the restoration of peace. The decimated man-power of Europe will have its hands full perhaps for years to come, in rebuilding ruined cities, restoring the land to cultivation and in re-organizing social order. The fearful havoc made in the male population will, it is only reasonable to suppose, necessitate the retention at home of those who have come safely through the fiery ordeal, and it may be many years ere the tide of emigration turns again to the Western Hemisphere. Whether this conjecture is right or not, must be left to the future to decide. But that in due time Canada will come into its inheritance, and become the home of millions yet in their youth or unborn, seeking escape from the thralldom of class which still sits enthroned in the older lands, is scarcely open to question. And with this prospect in view Mr. Griffin's figures are of absorbing interest.

CONTRASTING CANADA, the "country of the Twentieth Century" with the United States the "country of the Nineteenth Century," as regards rapid increase of population and development of natural resources, it is pointed out that in the year 1810 the population of the latter was 7,239,881, whereas the population of Canada in 1911 was 7,206,643. The population of the United States at the close of the nineteenth century was a little over 75,000,000. There is reason to believe that Canada will have attained that figure long before the close of the twentieth, and for this reason. In the early days of settlement in the United States the population of the British Isles and continental Europe was very much less than now. Ireland alone is the exception to this rule, and the causes thereof form one of the tragedies of history. With the lesser population of Europe as a whole, however, im-

migration from there was necessarily less than in later years.

IT SHOULD also be remembered that a century ago emigrants had to cross the wide Atlantic in slow-going sailing vessels entailing discomforts and hardships unknown in our time, and, in addition, the United States had no well-settled neighboring country from which to draw settlers. Canada, on the other hand, drew from the United States in 1914 over 107,000 settlers, and as the great Republic becomes more densely populated Canada will receive from that quarter a steady stream of settlers looking for new opportunities in this vast North Land.

IT IS also pointed out that while in 1913, 402,432 immigrants landed on our shores, and 384,878 in 1914, it was not until the year 1842 that immigration to the United States passed the 100,000 mark, and that in no year prior to 1850 did it reach 300,000. A very small number arrived during the first quarter of the century, and in the year 1825 the total was but 10,199. For 5 years thereafter the average was 20,587. It was after 1850 that the tide really set in and from then on until the close of the century it came in ever-increasing streams. The high water mark was reached in the decade 1881-1890, when 5,245,613 immigrants landed in the United States.

DURING THE ten years ending with 1914 the total immigration to Canada was 2,530,799, as compared with 2,577,580 arriving in the United States during the decade ending with 1890, when that country had a population of 31,443,321. During the decade ending with 1870, with a population of 38,558,871, the immigration into the United States was 250,000 less than that to Canada in the decade ending 1914, when our population was under nine millions. For the decade ending 1880, when the population of the States was over fifty millions, the immigration averaged only 28,189 more annually than the Canadian average for the decade ending 1914. "These figures," remarks the Bulletin, "have great significance in considering the probable growth of Canada during the present century. The development of the United States in the nineteenth century was regarded as more marvelous than that of any other country in the world's history, but the percentage of growth of Canada since the beginning of the twentieth century has been far greater than that of the United States in any period of equal length during the last century."

WHAT FACILITIES has Canada, it may be asked, for absorbing and sustaining the great population which scientific statisticians predict for her? It has come to be an axiom that our material resources are practically inexhaustible, and that in the matter of their development we have as yet merely scratched the surface. Leaving figures in this regard aside for the present, Mr. Watson Griffin's comparison of our geographical extent and density of population with the countries of Europe may be glanced at. Prince Edward Island, the pigmy among our Provinces, with over thirty-one times the area of Jersey and Guernsey and nearly the whole of it very fertile, might have a population of over three millions, and still be less densely populated than these Channel Islands. Nova Scotia is almost as large as Belgium and Holland combined, which together have over twelve million people. And (what may surprise some people), Nova Scotia's most northern point is several degrees farther south than the most southern point of the British Islands. New Brunswick is almost as large as Scotland, which has nearly five million people. No part of the Province is as far north as Paris, and Saint John, the chief Atlantic port of Canada, is farther south than Venice.

COMING TO the larger Provinces, Quebec is contrasted with continental Europe. It is larger than the combined areas of Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Austria-Hungary, which together had a population of over 140,000,000 before the War began. It lies in the same latitude as Russia-in-Europe from the Black Sea to the White Sea. Ontario is nearly as large as Germany and France combined, and, at the same ratio, could sustain a population of over 100,000,000. The part of the Province lying south of the Georgian Bay and French River is as large as England. Toronto is farther

South than Florence, and Hamilton is in about the same latitude as Marseille.

IT HAS been conjectured that the Western Provinces of Canada could house the population of Europe. What is certain is that Manitoba alone is larger than Germany, Belgium, Holland and Switzerland combined, and that, notwithstanding its severe winters, Winnipeg is farther south than any city in the British Isles. Saskatchewan is as large as Austria-Hungary with half of Serbia added, and Regina is farther south than Portsmouth, on the English Channel. The area of Alberta exceeds that of Italy, Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Roumania and Bulgaria combined, and Edmonton, its capital, is in about the same latitude as Manchester.

BRITISH COLUMBIA and the Yukon are as large as the combined area of the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden, which together have a population of over 135,000,000. Vancouver Island is more than sixteen times as large as the State of Rhode Island, and if as densely populated would have 9,000,000 people. Victoria is farther south than Paris, and its climate more nearly approximate to that of southern France than that of any other part of Canada. Of the great and wholly undeveloped Northwest Territories it may at least be said that they are as capable of sustaining a white population as the northern provinces of Russia, and of Canada as a whole, that she is not only one of the great granaries of the world but is capable of sustaining within her own borders a population almost if not quite equal to that of China. If she is but true to her destiny, and eschews worship of the material her future is secure.

ON THE BATTLE LINE

BYNG'S GREAT VICTORY

DURING THE week a smashing victory by the British under General Byng broke through the Hindenburg line on a wide front. Eight thousand prisoners and scores of guns fell into the hands of the victors. This great battle was unique in the War. It was preceded by no bombardment, tanks taking its place to break down the enemy wire entanglements. For this reason the long absent element of complete surprise enabled the English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh troops engaged to achieve the impossible. General Byng's army is again on the move, with success in its operations west of Cambrai. Last night's brief report says that these operations on the "Somme front," as the bulletins designate the area, were attended with success, and are developing satisfactorily. The enemy artillery has shown great activity in the neighborhood of Passchendaele, where it was probably intended to conduct a counter-offensive in the hope of drawing the British from other areas. Unofficial dispatches tell of hard fighting continuing at a number of points, notably in the vicinity of Crevecoeur, Moerwaert and Bourlon Wood. Near Moerwaert a hill dominating a large section of the canal running east of the town, which is still in German hands, was the scene of a heavy battle in which the British drove off the attackers. Consolidation work was still going on.

THE ITALIAN FRONT

ON BOTH the Asiago and the upper Piave River front Italian forces are still holding their own magnificently. In the former sector the enemy, having received reinforcements, passed from the defensive enforced upon him by the aggressiveness of the Italians and began a great attack with the idea of conducting an encircling movement against a height position, the loss of which would have endangered the whole Italian line along this front. The result of a great victory by the enemy here would be not only the driving of an enormous wedge between the forces on the Piave and those a considerable distance to the west, but the over-running of great sections of industrial Italy. Our Allies would thus suffer a loss of territory of vast importance and a military disaster hardly equalled in the war. The Italians, however, rose to the occasion, and in a series of counter-attacks, and despite the enemy's use of fear-producing shells and heavy artillery, held all their positions, and captured a few prisoners. To the east, between the Brenta and the Piave Rivers, dense waves of enemy infantry made an equally unsuccessful series of attempts to smash the Piave line. Some positions were lost here and retaken in gallant style. In the end, Rome declares, the attacks were definitely checked. If the Italians can hold out for a few more days they will be able to declare that the invasion has been halted, and to enter upon the task of driving out the invaders, with every prospect of success. The tenacity of the Austro-German attacks show that they will not give up the attempt to smash the Italian armies unless they in turn are so badly