

JAMES LANE ALLEN VS. THE SILENT BROTHERHOOD.

THE LEAVEN OF THE ANCIENT PHARISEES IN THE SOUL
OF A MODERN SENSUALIST.



HE Catholic readers of *The Century* who, if their name is not legion, are certainly not few and far between, experienced a sort of mild surprise some five or six weeks ago, when they opened their August numbers of that worthy periodical and beheld upon its not intensely Catholic pages, a lengthy and detailed account of a Catholic Monastery in Kentucky. It may seem odd to the uninitiated that there should be anything in such a procedure to excite the astonishment of Catholics, or anybody else, for we are said to live in an age and an atmosphere where the small prejudices of other times and other countries cannot thrive; but for all that the "lines of life" are pretty strongly marked in America, thanks to the vigorous and cursedly adaptive nature of a certain noxious social weed, which though it has lost much of its original virulence in the transplantation from the pestilential soil of the motherland, to the rich nourishing earth of our virgin continent, still exhales enough noisome effluvium to enfeeble our national constitution, and prevent its numerous and widely-varying elements from working as they should work, if the precept that union makes strength is worth the time it takes to utter it!

There are influences at work in America, which are mightier than those of the State, which sway the lives and destinies of men and nations for better or for worse and which it is next to impossible to regulate, much less to control. Of these, for there are several, there is none which has a more awful potency and crushing responsibility than the many-phased literature of the day. Men have abandoned the old coarse manner of wrangling over their various bones of contention since it has been proclaimed to them, on good authority, that the pen is mightier than the sword, and where they once fought gory duels in vain defense of an honor that had never been impeached save by their own rascally deeds, they now

wage bloodless but fearfully fatal wars from the leathern-padded arm-chairs of their sanctums.

This brings us to our starting-point and to the sketch of the Catholic Monastery which appeared in the August issue of *The Century*. James Lane Allen, the author of the article, is a typical contributor to the popular journals of the day, whose motive in catering to the tastes of a promiscuous lot of readers may be best expressed by an *inversion* of Shelley's line "Avid of gold, but greedier of renown." But gold amid the lower strata of the literary profession of our age means sensualism, sensationalism and a wholesale ultraism, so it is not to be wondered at that those who undertake to manufacture so much startling reading-matter in a given time, should, when forced to draw so heavily upon their resources, ambition a much larger proportion of gold than of renown. With what motives Mr. Allen wended his way to The Home of the Silent Brotherhood it is hard to say, or rather it is better not to say. The readers of his sketch would, I am sure, have done him the justice of believing that he was animated by a perfectly legitimate curiosity, and seduced by the very incomprehensibility of the mystery he had set himself to solve, if he had not anticipated such a flattering possibility, and by a further contribution in the September issue shown himself in a new, and to the Catholics a pronouncedly unfavorable light. Under what pretences Mr. Allen sought and obtained his minutæ can be more easily surmised when one has read his later effort, which, unlike the first one, has none of the vulgarity of common place fact, but much of the wanton licentiousness of fiction. In his Home of the Silent Brotherhood, Mr. Allen offers us the uncondensed results of his researches into the life of a Trappist Monk. He leaves nothing out, not even the fortnightly shave, which is artistically illustrated for the benefit of those who could not otherwise form the slightest idea of how a *fortnightly* shave is conducted. Then there