

TRIFLUVIAN NOTES.

In and Around the Monastery.

Rules and Regulations—The Health and Good Spirits of the Nuns—The Chapel and its Paintings—Mass in a Cloister—Two Branches of the Order—Pleasant Souvenirs of the Peaceful and Edifying Scenes Inside the Gray Old Walls.

WE are still inside the Ursuline monastery of Three Rivers; between us and the great bustling, wicked world rise the grim old walls that have felt the storms of nearly two hundred years sweep about and over them. There is asacred silence in the cloister, every stone of which could tell an interesting story of the past, every corridor and room of which is peopled with memories of the days long gone. Standing in presence of the grated doors and partitions and looking in upon the order, cleanliness, simple perfection of fith-inspiring decorations, and the calm but nobly animated forms of the moving, living, zealous inhabitants of that wonderful abode, we feel that the separating grates serve more to protect the religiouses from the distracting din and useless confusion of a vnity-poisoned world than to prevent the "cold-eyed many" from penetrating into the precincts that they are not calculated to appreciate. It is not to keep the nuns inside the limits of a given space, rather is it to protect the sanctity of the place from the desecration that the frivolous and thoughtless might perpetrate if admitted within, that those barriers are raised between the world of meditation and the world of heedless rush, between the world where God reigns, in the silence that He loves, and the world where men have not time to dream of eternity, nor a moment to give to the Author of all. Well might yonder black-robed, bright-faced, light-footed, mild-eyed silent virgin recall the words of the Poet Priest:

"I walk down the Valley of Silence—
Down the dim, voiceless valley alone!
And I hear not the fall of a footstep
Around me, save God's and my own;
And the hush of my heart is as holy
As hovers where angels have flown!

"Long ago was I weary of voices
Whose music my heart could not win;
Long ago was I weary of noises
That fretted my soul with their din;
Long ago was I weary of places
Where I met but the human—and sin.

"But far on the deep there are billows
That never shall break on the beach;
And I have heard songs in the Silence,
That never shall float into speech;
And I have had dreams in that valley,
Too lofty for language to reach.

"Do you ask me the place of that valley,
Ye hearts that are harrowed with Care?
It lieth afar between mountains,
And God and His angels are there;
And one is the dark mount of Sorrow,
And one the bright mountain of Prayer."

The first question that one naturally asks concerns the mode of life and the wonderful health and spirits of the cloistered ladies. How comes it that they are all so apparently strong and active despite the monotonous existence inside those walls? It is due to the perfection of their rules and regulations. How very little that great external world knows about that smaller, and yet much greater, internal world! In our sphere we are cloistered in reality, for the limits of land and ocean surround us: we can roam at will over this little globe of ours, but even it is insignificant compared to the universe, and we are still more insignificant compared to it. But beyond its confines we cannot go; neither can we ascend into space nor descend into the earth; our vision is checked by the narrow horizon around us; and, at least, we can only enjoy our world for a few short years—from the cradle to the grave there are but a couple of steps; the bells that rang for our baptism generally toll our knell. In the monastery the cloistered worker is freer, has a grander field, a more illimitable expanse of action; the mountain ranges check not her mission, nor does the ocean bar her progress; time is but the vestibule of eternity; earth is merely a planet rolling in space; the canopy of heaven, bespangled with the billion jewels of night, overhangs her, and beyond its blue her spirit of Faith soars sublimely; she breathes an atmosphere richer, more invigorating and purer than ours, for its very soul is

heaven-born; Faith destroys the barriers of Time; Hope imparts a forecast of endless peace; and Love—that glorious Charity of the holy—animates an existence that knows no sorrows, for it belongs to God.

For a long number of years we might say the infirmary of the monastery has been unoccupied. Of course there are periods when the most healthy individual requires rest, or a special treatment; headaches, and minor fits of passing indisposition will occur; old age will come on with its weakness and its troubles; but there are no feeble, ailing, suffering, languishing creatures in that establishment. The glow of health is upon their faces and the smile of contentment upon their lips. How explain this!

MONASTIC RULES AND REGULATIONS.

The first source of such vitality is found in the regularity of life. The abundance of exercise in the open air, in the delightful gardens and parterres of the monastery. Unseen by the world thousands of the brightest flowers bloom along the walks, and the green grass forms a carpet for the sanctified ground. The pure breezes from the broad St. Lawrence sweep up to the old grey walls and, over the magnificent gardens within, the invigorating breath from the Laurentian hills meets the spirit of the waters, and both play amongst the tall elms and waving maples of the cloister-grounds. And even in the coldest days of winter the house is so arranged that from its balconies the inmates may enjoy the benefits of the air without having to suffer from the inclemency of the severe storms. But out-door exercise and fresh air are not all the necessary ingredients; something else must be taken into consideration. What we are now about to tell, although it concerns the Ursulines in particular, applies to almost every religious community that is sanctioned by the Church.

So perfect are the rules that they correspond with the requirements of each individual member of the Order; nor is the slightest possible circumstance left unprovided for. The regularity—the clock-work exactness—of every move assists greatly in the preservation of physical strength. The same hour to rise—the same hours for meals—the same hours for recreation—the same hour to retire; there is nothing to disturb that perfect regularity. The food, if not a murderous compound of destructive dainties, is of the most wholesome, solid and natural kind. There is no danger of any adulteration nor of any poisonous decoctions that are merely the breeders of indigestion and sufferings. And that food is regulated according to the requirements of each individual. The nun—for example—who has a certain amount of study and of teaching to do, is allowed all that is considered necessary to conserve health and enable her to perform in a most efficient manner the duties of her position. Should she need more sleep, more recreation, different food, or any change, the rules are not broken for her, because the rule itself is there that she shall have the proper and prescribed regime. Then the work is so well divided that no one individual has more than her constitution is reasonably calculated to support. The consequence is that instead of pale and emaciated creatures—such as our non-Catholic cartoonists try to picture the members of a community—we find strong and spirited women, able to do work that would shame the pampered ladies of the world, and able to train a couple of generations of young people in all the elements of refinement, culture and usefulness. There you find the really "healthy mind in the healthy body." There are no vain longings after the unattainable; no shatterings of the nerves in the whirl of giddy unrest; no mock vitality such as the inhabitants of the outside world pretend to enjoy.

Looking in upon such a picture and recalling the past, such a poet as poor Williams might well sing:

"But I have learn'd rude lessons since then,
In life's disenchanting hall;
I have scan'd the motives and ways of men,
And a skeleton grins through all.
Of the great heart-treasures of life and trust,
I exulted to feel mine own;
There remains in this down-trod temple of dust,
But Faith in God alone.
I have seen too often the domino torn
And the mask from the face of men,
To have aught but a smile of tranquill scorn
For all I believed in then."

There is a queer idea abroad that the life in a cloister, or in any community, is one of constant suffering, of endless martyrdom, of cruel tyranny. The Maria Monks, Mrs. Shepherds and all the army of "ex-nuns" and "escaped"—(lunatics we should say)—impostors, seek to paint the workings of convent existence in all the horrid colors that their fevered imaginations and perverted minds could conjure up. Yet there is nothing more free, more democratic than the government of a religious order. Each individual's rights are respected; each has her vote; a secret ballot she holds and its secrecy is inviolate. The members of the community elect—by their free votes—their senate, or chapter, which consists of ten, twenty, thirty or forty members, according to the numerical strength of the Order. This Chapter, by free and secret ballot, elects the Superior, the assistants and all who compose the governing body. There is no coercion, no intimidation, no bribery, no favoritism. The independence is such that were it to prevail in the political world there would be no longer any room for Anarchism or Communism on earth.

THE CHAPEL AND THE MASS.

But we must not dwell too long upon this subject or some of our more suspicious critics may think that we have a special commission to boom the religious Orders and to secure subjects for their novitiates. We will step for a moment into the gem-like chapel of the monastery. This is a public place of worship where many of the inhabitants of Three Rivers come to hear the early Masses. It is a most elegant little shrine; it has about it the air of antiquity, and one feels as if transported to the Middle Ages, to the "Ages of Faith," when walking down its clean and venerable aisles. Over the high altar is a beautiful picture illustrative of scenes beyond the realms of this world, and on either side hang the portraits of the two great saints of the Order—Ste. Ursule and Ste. Angele. The stations of the cross wear an ancient look and a kind of medievalism belongs to their exquisite designs. Dim and age-besmeared sacred tableaux hang upon the sanctuary walls, while the contrast with the glitter and splendor of the richly adorned altar is most striking. A wonderful silence pervades the place, and even the worshippers seem to drink in the spirit of the surroundings and to pray in undertones that would not disturb the sleep of an infant.

The Mass commences, the Holy Eucharist is placed in the ostensorium and raised to a stand above the tabernacle; the thurifer swings the censer; the white vapor curls around the lighted tapers and the profusion of natural flowers that are brought from the monastery gardens; then the dark curtains behind the immense grating are drawn aside by a veiled religious. Holy Communion is given to the members of the community, who come silently to the little opening at the end of the sanctuary. Portion only of the curtain is left suspended between the inner and the outer worlds. The Mass commences: *Introibo ad Altare Dei*—and the priest ascends the altar. Magnificent are the sacerdotal vestments—all worked by the hands of the fervent adorers within the grating, behind the curtains. The *Gloria*, the *Epistle*, the *Gospel*; when lo! from a distance, even as if coming from some remote sphere where angels alone hover and God's saints alone walk, comes the sweet, soft, heavenly strains of a love-inspired canticle of devotion to her whose glorious Assumption the Church celebrates. It is enchanting; it lifts us out of time and away beyond the horizons of this world. The ladder of prayer most sacred—like the one Jacob of old beheld—reaches from the altar to the heavens, and up its rungs rush the messengers bearing petitions from the cloister, down its rounds come God's envoys carrying the graces and benedictions of the Most High. The little bell rings silvery-toned, and it startles the meditative congregation; the large curtain is completely drawn back;

an extra taper is lighted by the hand of a nun; the holy moment of Consecration is at hand; the music and the singing die gradually into silence; soul-burdened petitions float aloft; the frontier hosts of heaven seem to pause and listen; God has descended upon the altar! Once more the dark curtain is closed, and the world of meditation is cut off from the world of irreflection. The Mass is over: *Te, Missa Est*. Again comes the solemn, distant strain of harmony; the voices are of women; the spirit of the hymn is celestial—it is the *Salve Regina*! One would imagine that the very image of the Immaculate Mother replied to that request—"illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte"—and turned those eyes of love and mercy upon us. Silence once more reigns in the chapel—the vision has passed, and the worshippers go forth into God's sunlight feeling that they have been nearer heaven than ever before in life.

EDITOR TRUE WITNESS.

FRATERNAL AFFECTION.

If it be delightful to enjoy the continued friendship of those who are endeared to us by the intimacy of many years, who can discourse with us of the frolics of the school, of the adventures and studies of the college, of the years when we first ranked ourselves with men in the free society of the world, how delightful must be the friendship of those who accompany us through all this long period, with closer union than any casual friend, can go still further back, from the school to the very nursery which witnessed our common pastimes; who have had an interest in every event that has related to us, and in every person that has excited our love or hatred; who have honored with us those to whom we have paid every filial honor in life, and wept with us over those whose death has been to us the most lasting sorrow of our hearts! Such, in its wide, unbroken sympathy, is the friendship of brothers, considered even as friendship only; and how many circumstances of additional interest does this union receive from the common relationship to those who have original claims to our still higher regard. Every dissension of man with man excites in us a painful feeling. But we feel a peculiar melancholy in the discord of those whom one roof has continued to shelter during life, and whose dust is afterwards to be mingled under the same stone.—*Irish American*.

OUR LADY OF KNOCK.

Some years ago the Most Rev. Dr. Lynch, Archbishop of Toronto, in thanksgiving for a signal cure obtained through the intercession of Our Lady of Knock, presented to Archdeacon Cavanagh, of Knock, a beautiful banner on which was inscribed in letters of gold, on a ground of emerald green satin, "Toronto is grateful." Visitors to the famous shrine are now gladdened and encouraged by the sight of yet another emblem of an Archbishop's faith and devotion. Dr. Murphy, of Hobart, Tasmania, a venerable octogenarian prelate, left his far distant diocese for Knock suffering from impaired vision that baffled the skill of the most celebrated opticians. After his visit to our Lady's shrine in the West the eyes that then knew but darkness saw the light, independent of optician's aid, and the wonderful change the Archbishop naturally attributes to the intercession of Our Lady of Knock. As a token of his gratitude he has, within the past few weeks, sent a beautiful painting in oil, more than nine feet in length, and over seven feet in width, reproducing from the most authentic sources the original apparition. This continuity of testimony to the mercy of Our Lady of Knock emanating from such sources is certainly remarkable.—*Irish American*.

A local band was one day playing at Dumfermline, when an old weaver came up and asked the bandmaster what was that they were playing. "That is the 'Death of Nelson,'" solemnly replied the bandmaster. "Ay, man," remarked the weaver, "ye ha'e gi'en him an awfu' death."—*Dundee News*.

Mr. Timmid—"How would a girl feel if she received a proposal by letter?" Friend—"If she didn't care for you, she'd feel insulted." "Um—well—er—suppose she did care for me?" "She'd say yes by telegraph."—*New York Weekly*.