

Upon the whole, my last impression, on returning from a foreign country (Belgium) to our own, was, that I was coming out of a religious country to one of indifference; the open Churches of the former, the frequent services, the constant worshippers, the solemn ceremonial, the collected air of the clergy in their ministrations, the indubitable devotion and reverence of the people, their unhesitating confidence in their Church, has nothing approaching to a counterpart with us; I know nothing more disheartening (I speak of the effect produced upon myself) than a return to England after some time spent in Catholic countries; every thing seems so careless, so irreverent, so dead; with all my heart I wish, and especially for my children's sake, that I could see in this country some approximation to the solemnity, reverence, devotion, and earnestness which I have witnessed abroad.

All this may seem harsh towards my own country, and my own Church, but they are nevertheless the impressions which I have derived from what I have seen; I am of course liable to be swayed by prejudice as well as others, but so far as I know myself, my prejudices, both those of education and of family connexion, were all the other way, and I feel they have been overcome by facts which were irresistible.

I have now given you what you asked for, my impression of the Church on the Continent, and you are quite at liberty to make what use you please of it.

Believe me, dear Ward,

Yours faithfully,

#### LETTER II.

My dear Ward,

One of the first things that struck me in France, indeed it is obvious to any one—was the behaviour of the people in the Churches. There was something which one saw at once to be quite of another kind from that correct demeanour which a sense of propriety dictates. A general sense of the purpose for which we go to Church, and due consideration for others, will lead to a regulated and attentive conduct when there. But an attitude of active devotion cannot be mistaken for this; and to see, as you never fail to do on entering any Church, large or small, in France, many of the lowest class wrapt in that visible absorption of mind which shows at once that a real communication is going on between the soul and God, is indeed a cheering sight—a spirit of prayer and supplication is seen to belong as much now as ever to the body of the Christian people. Often the posture of the worshipper is careless, and would little meet the taste of those who dwell with rapture on the forms of middle age art, or whose ideas of prayer are formed on such representations as in the offensive archæological jargon are called 'a St Francis nimbed'—the regulations of the Church may be thought irreverential,

the system of chairs introduces a continual traffic, and the never-ending circuits of a noisy beadle, rattling the money he is collecting, sadly breaks up the ideal some are apt to form of the still and solemn ceremonial—with all this, there is that in the appearance of the people which shows at once that they come there not from curiosity, from habit, or from fashion, but for a definite act to join heart and soul at the great sacrifice in communion with the faithful living and dead. Fashion may carry the French to sermons, but not to Mass or to private prayer in the Church. The theory of Catholicism may be fashionable, but submission to its rules and practice is very far from being. It is not many years since a priest could not appear in his habit in the streets of Paris without risk of insult—and the king himself, though suspected of going privately, durst not go publicly to Mass, for fear of losing his character for good sense. The increase of popularity of the clergy, the crowds of intellectual young men, lawyers, and students of the University, who flocked to Notre Dame in Advent last to hear Lacordaire—signs of a change of feeling in the public which the French Catholic press is never tired of proclaiming—these are the mere ebb and flow on the surface—far more valuable is that genuine old Christian leaven deep in the heart of the country population, which even the Revolution could not root out, quite distinguishable from that fickle patronage which the present generation is disposed to a visionary middle-age theory. I felt much less satisfaction in seeing a crowded audience in Paris listening to a favourite preacher, than in entering early in the morning a village Church in a distant province, and seeing the country people drop in before going to work for a few minutes of private devotion. This was the genuine product of the religion—the harvest where St Martin had sown.

The same practical air was visible where I least expected it. I had fancied a procession as merely ornamental; a poetical portion of the ceremonial intended to aid and captivate the imagination. I was struck, therefore, with the business-like air it wore. Those engaged in it seemed performing a real act of devotion, to which they were given up, the assembly accompanying them with their prayers—the one party not thinking of adoring, the other not aiming at effect.

Every one notices the subdued, regulated manner almost universal in foreign priests. This arises from their habitual consideration of the Divine presence. It must be a very superficial observer who can think it accounted for by the constraint of the peculiar habit. But it is not any matter of surprise that they should be able to preserve this, when one sees the education they go through for the Priesthood. The Seminary of St Sulpice is the principal establishment for this purpose. Many persons are offended at continually recurring comparisons between our own institutions, and the corresponding Catholic ones, and attribute such to a fretful, captious spirit,