

FOUR LECTURES ON MCGEE

By Rev. JOHN J. O'GORMAN, D. C. L. Copyrighted

THE BUFFALO CONVENTION

McGee now undertook to carry out for the Irish in America a gigantic undertaking which, had it succeeded, would have made him, in a sense, the Moses of the Irish in the United States, namely, a migration movement from the slums of the big cities of the East to the farms of the Middle West.

It was no fault of McGee's that the Buffalo Convention failed. This important gathering met in Buffalo February 12th, 1886. Some 95 Catholic Irishmen both from the United States and from Canada, 39 of whom were priests, and 56 laymen, attended it.

other race in America, and on a small scale by our own people. Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, every nursery of white population in America, was established on precisely the same plan. Kentucky and the Western Reserve were peopled precisely on the same plan.

It may be asked why this providential Exodus to the West, organized so capably by McGee, failed to achieve its purpose. The following picture of the whole movement, written by James G. Moylan, who was present at the Convention, tells the tale:

"In 1856 a Convention composed of well known and influential priests and leading Irish Catholics, from all parts of the United States met at Buffalo. The end in view was necessary and laudable. All who took an interest in the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of Irish emigrants who had arrived at Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, from the famine years, 1847-5, up to the year above mentioned, saw with pain and regret that vast numbers of them remained in the cities and towns. It was but evident (too) that this herding together in such large crowds, in congested localities, did not tend to improve their moral or social conditions.

lica of the United States, and no other could have done so much to make them realize that their interests for time and eternity required that they should make homes for themselves on the land. To imagine that questions of this kind concern religion and the ministers of religion is a fatal mistake. This is primarily and essentially a question of morality. The important consideration is: What surroundings will best protect the sanctity of the family, preserve the purity of childhood, and promote the growth of religious character?

"Toopoo, in the matter of settlement upon the land, what is supposed to be the natural order of artificial combinations—that is, to approve of the individual who buys a farm, but to condemn a number of individuals who enter into an association in order to secure along with the farm advantages of church, school and society, in upon the face of the matter, to take up an untenable position. If it is desirable that the poor should get homes upon the land, organized efforts to assist them in doing so cannot but be praiseworthy; and when there is question of settling in new and distant parts of the country it cannot be said that the natural order is to go on by one."

"The general truth which I have sought to develop is that the Irish Catholics are the most important element in the Church of this country and that their present surroundings and occupations are, for the most part, a hindrance to the fulfillment of the mission which God has given to them. It follows that all honest attempts to bring about a redistribution of our Catholic population are commendable. This is the object and aim of the Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the United States, which has also led me to write this little book."

It is a mistake, therefore, to claim as does Mrs. Skelton in her life of McGee, (p. 279), that nothing resulted from the Buffalo Convention or that McGee's undertaking was inherently defective. The field McGee ploughed, the greatest Irish American prelate of the West sowed and tilled; for John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, successfully carried out on a minor scale a scheme of Irish colonization in Minnesota, after the Civil War, along the lines which McGee had planned. The Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the United States organized at Chicago in May, 1870, was the heir of the Buffalo Convention of 1856. Unfortunately twenty-three fruitful years had been wasted. It was not McGee's fault.

Here it may be not out of place to summarize the reasons which induced D'Arcy McGee to leave the United States for the greatest Irish migration of Canadians into the United States and, in a smaller measure of Americans into Canada, is a phenomenon which has been occurring for over a century. The causes have been sometimes political but more usually economic. The United Empire Loyalists migrated northwards after the American Revolution in order to remain under the British Crown and it is quite possible that quite a number of Canadians of all racial origins have migrated southwards to get from beneath the British flag. But the principal reason which has induced a few million Canadians to migrate to the United States has been that they thought they would find there great economic opportunities. McGee's reasons for migrating from the United States to Canada were complex. First of all he came to the United States with a utopian conception of the glories of a republic and through bitter experience was forced to admit that there was just as much social injustice and religious bigotry in the United States as in England. Secondly, when late in 1851 he definitely abandoned revolutionary politics and adopted a calm Catholicism, in the best sense of the word, conservative outlook on human society, he began

to realize that the principle of authority must be safeguarded as well as that of liberty, if there is to be any liberty at all. He saw the desirability of a strong unchanging centre of authority in a nation which would correspond in some measure to the position of the papacy in the Catholic Church. In the United States of 1857, then on the eve of perhaps the worst Civil War in history, this strong central authority, this cohesive centre of unity, was not as much in evidence as was, for example, the British Crown in the British Empire. In British North America he saw a group of Provinces where he considered the two principles of authority and liberty were harmoniously balanced. It is true that they lacked union, that they had not yet developed a common national feeling. To unite these Provinces into one great Northern Nation in which the pillar of liberty would be crowned by the capital of authority was a gigantic undertaking which appealed to the crusader-like spirit of McGee. He saw the need to go northwards and undertake Canada. Thirdly, many of his own people in the United States, such as his ecclesiastical superior, the Archbishop of New York and his former Young Ireland colleagues, Meagher and Mitchell, had little sympathy with his Irish American policy.

The Archbishop of New York considered the farm advantages of church, school and society, in upon the face of the matter, to take up an untenable position. If it is desirable that the poor should get homes upon the land, organized efforts to assist them in doing so cannot but be praiseworthy; and when there is question of settling in new and distant parts of the country it cannot be said that the natural order is to go on by one. He saw the need to go northwards and undertake Canada. There is no doubt that the bigotry of Know-Nothingism, the horrors of big city slums, the tactics of American pre-civil war politicians, the condemnation of the Buffalo Convention by Archbishop Hughes, and the bitter slanders poured on his head by Irish American extremists, all combined to make McGee do, settle in the Irish colonies of the United States. This also colored the view of the position of the Irish in the United States which McGee continued to hold until the end of his life. The harm done to body and soul in the crowded tenements of the big cities, the disintegrating influences of the public school and of the prevalent materialism of society on the Catholic children of half-educated immigrants—all this caused profound torture to McGee's sensitive soul and left him in the last decade of his life with altogether too pessimistic a view of the Irish in the United States. Yet it must be remembered that no one pictured with greater eloquence and sympathy the providential mission of the Irish immigrants as carriers of Catholicity in the American republic than did D'Arcy McGee during the period when his fellow countrymen and co-religionists there needed his greatest support, namely, during the dark Know-Nothing days of 1852-55 and that no one worked harder to improve their economic and social position than he did during the twelve years he lived among them.

It must also be remembered that when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and statesmanlike friendship, namely during the doubtful and discouraging days of 1861, Thomas D'Arcy McGee did not fail to do his share towards creating in Canada a hearty friendly feeling towards the sore-distressed American republic. Speaking at Ormatown, Chateaugay Co., July 17th, 1861, on "Our present and future Relations with the Americans," he said:

"We stand here on the historic soil of Chateaugay where De Salaberry, with his handful of volunteers, repulsed an army in the last War, as American armies were their number; we are here within two hours' ride of the American line; your relations and the relations of the adjoining counties, with our neighbors in Western New York, especially since the establishment of the Reciprocity Treaty, are of the most intimate and cordial character. Is it not so? Now, if this be the determination on both sides, there can be little possibility of a rupture, and I therefore entirely agree with the sentiments of those statesmen who think that the late infusion of a small standing army into our old garrisons was of questionable policy. I do not pretend to know upon what representations such an addition to the regular army of this country was made; but if it was made with any feeling of apprehension as to our relations with our neighbours across the line, I think it was premature and unnecessary. It may be what is called an error on the right side, but I confess I look for the preservation of peace between ourselves and the American people far more to the cultivation of a just and generous style of dealing with the national troubles of that people, than I would to the presence here of a few thousand regulars more or less. We have everything to lose, and nothing to gain by adopting any other tone or any other tactics, and I repeat here, at this the earliest opportunity I have had, what I said in my place in the last Parliament about the failure of the Republican experiment in the United States ought to be frowned

down, wherever it appears, by the Canadian public. I am not a Republican in politics; long before these recent troubles came to a head in the American Union, I had ceased to dogmatise upon any abstract scheme of government; but I have no hesitation in declaring my own hope and belief—a belief founded on evidence accumulated through several years of observation—that the American system, so far from having proved a failure—that that system may emerge from this, its first great domestic trial, purified, consolidated, disciplined, for greater usefulness and greater achievements than before. It is then, it seems to me, the duty of Canadian statesmen to look through the temporary to the lasting relations we are to sustain to our next neighbors; to suppress and discountenance all ungenerous exultation at the trials and tribulations which they are now undergoing; to show them, on the contrary, in this the day of their adversity, that while preferring on rational grounds the system of constitutional monarchy for ourselves and our children, while preferring to lodge within the precincts of the Constitution elaborated through ages by the highest wisdom of the British Islands, we can at the same time be just, nay, generous, to the merits of the kindred system, founded by their fathers, in the defensive and justifiable war of their Revolution. If we are foremost to are they; and the public clamor which befalls one free people can never be matter of exultation to another, so long as the world is half darkened by despotism, as it is. The American system is the product of the highest political experience of modern times, working in the freest field, cast adrift from all European ties, by the madness of an arbitrary monarch blind to all circumstances of time and place, if that fabric should be destined to fall—as I firmly believe it will not in our day, nor at any early day,—the whole world must feel the shock, and all the civilized parts of the earth might well be clothed in mourning, if they only understood the value of what they had lost. I am told there are several American citizens here present; I was not before aware of the fact; but if there are, I beg them to take from me, as one of the public men of this Province, that, so far as I am aware, with few and unimportant exceptions, the press and people of Canada are anxiously and sincerely desirous that they may be able soon to settle their domestic troubles, and that the future course of their Confederation may be as free from anarchical dangers as it has been hitherto, since the days of Washington." (Speeches and Addresses, pp. 10-11.)

TO BE CONTINUED

SISTERS ENTER COUNTRY AFTER MONTHS OF STRUGGLE

New York.—Forty-three Sisters, in three groups, have passed through this port in recent weeks destined to Catholic hospitals and schools, after striving in some instances for twenty months to come to the United States under the new Restrictive Immigration Quota Act.

A group of ten Sisters and two candidates, including one United States-born and two returning residents, arrived from Germany and proceeded to Cleveland, where they will labor at the Notre Dame convent. They are Sisters of Notre Dame, and have been endeavoring to get across to relieve a serious shortage at Cleveland since July, 1924.

Twenty Hospital Sisters of St. Francis, also from Germany, arrived for duty in St. John's Hospital, Springfield, Ill., after a wait which began in April, 1924. Eleven Dominican Sisters came in the third group to join the corps at Bishop Carroll's Mt. St. Charles College at Windsor, Mont. They have been endeavoring to obtain quota visas since February, 1924, and the college has labored under a great handicap because of the delay in their arrival.

In all these cases, N. C. W. C. Bureau of Immigration workers aided the Sisters wherever possible, after the Bureau had endeavored for months to have them admitted. All of the Sisters have the status of regular immigrants, since they did not come under the ruling of about a year ago giving non quota status to nuns who could qualify as "professors" under the Immigration Act. A "professor" is described in the Act as a "person who is qualified to teach and who for two years immediately prior to applying for admission to the United States has taught some recognized subject in an institution of learning which corresponds to a college, academy, seminary or university as these terms are understood in the United States, and who is coming to the United States solely for the purpose of carrying on such a vocation here." This is the only classification under which Sisters are at present entitled to non-quota status.

We should follow the precept of the Lord Jesus: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal." Believe me, a man who seeks first the kingdom of God, will never want abundance of opportunities of human prosperity.—St. Francis Xavier.

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