FOUR LECTURES ON McGEE

BY REV. JOHN J. O'GORMAN, D. C. L.

THE BUFFALO CONVENTION McGee now undertook to carry out for the Irish in America a gigantic undertaking which, had it ceeded, would have made him, in ense, the Moses of the Irish in the United States, namely, a migra-tion movement from the slums of the big cities of the East to the farms of the Middle West. The rish peasants, familiar only with them remained in the great cities of the East, where very many of them were herded into huge tenement houses, that were unhealthy for body and soul. McGee had long studied the industrial position of the Irish in America and he now determined to propose and soul was present at the soul of the Irish in America and he now determined to propose. determined to propose an effective remedy. A competent contempor-ary observer, Mrs. James Sadlier,

thus describes his effort : "Amongst other projects for the the men of their race in the several localities which they represented, Mr. McGee was confessedly the ruling spirit, the chief organizer; the movement. This might be called his debut in that senatorial career in which he subsequently attained so great distinction. Well nad it been for the Irish in America

It was no fault of McGee's that the Buffalo Convention failed. This important gathering met in Buffalo February 12th, 1856. Some 95 Catholic Irishmen both from the United States and from Canada, 39 of whom were priests, and 56 laymen, attended it. The Very Rev. Alexander Macdonell, the Vicar General of Kingston, C. W., presided. McGee had a well-thought-out scheme of affording financial assistance by which the Irish peasants then living in poverty and often in degradation in the big cities and industrial districts of the east, might acquire farms in the American or Canadian west, where spirited "Defense of Systematic Irish Emigration," published in the American Celt, April 11th, 1857, McGee aptly illustrated his subject by an appeal to world history:

If there is no advantage in organized emigration, the whole world has lived in vain, and every history is a fable. The story of mankind from the first sentence which follows the Divine prolego-mens 'go forth and fill the earth and subdue it,' is a story of organized emigration. The first books of Scripture—Genesis and Exodus are records of a divinely organized emigration. From Adam to Moses, all the Patriarchs were fully con-scious of their duty to provide for scious of their duty to provide for their posterity, a land apart, a fixed territory and a sacred city. We are told the son of Heber was called 'Phaleg' 'because in his days was the earth divided,' among the vigorous, far-spreading posterity of Noe. (Genesis 10, 25) Abraham in Canaan, Jacob at Salem, Joseph in Egypt, Moses among the Madianites, were pursuing the one great purpose of the Hebrew race in the divine economy. So, of all who went out from Egypt and pined for its flesh-pots in the wilderness, only Caleb and Josue, who refused to be disheartened by the foolish faction that magnified the obstacles to the conquest of Canaan-those brave spirits alone were permitted to enter the Promised Land. This is the story of a people whose mission was directly providential; but we have the authority of some of the highest names in the Church for considering the Irish emigrants the providential people. A Wiseman, a Newman, a Faber, have instituted the parallel which we merely indi-

McGee had no difficulty in con-firming his argument from the history of the colonization under-taken by the Greeks, the Romans

plan. Kentucky and the 'Western Reserve' were peopled precisely on the same plan. . . A small number of laborers, farmers, artificers and others predetermined to conquer an inheritance for their children, struck out from the more populous neighborhoods, went far enough to be out of everyone's way and there planted a roof tree and a hely when we deplore the poverty of our when we deplore the poverty of the poverty corner stone, flag staff and holy rood. And this not only in pre-Washingtonian times but within the memory of men still living."...

"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 advancement of his own race, Mr. was necessary and laudable. All McGee had early conceived, and who took an interest in the welfare consistently advocated in the of the hundreds of thousands of Celt, that of colonizing—spreading Irish emigrants who had arrived at abroad and taking possession of the Boston, New York, Philadelphia land—making homes on the broad and Baltimore, from the famine prairies of the all-welcoming West, years, 1847-8, up to the year above instead of herding together in the mentioned, saw with pain and regret demoralizing 'tenement houses' of our great cities. To promote this most laudable end, Mr. McGee inaugurated what was called 'The Buffalo Convention' — namely, a meeting or senate of one hundred the state of the s Irish-American gentlemen, both lay social conditions. Many—alas, too and clerical, held in the border city many—fell into bad and disorderly and clerical, held in the border city above named, as being easy of access to delegates from both sides of the frontier line. In this Convention, composed of the most intelligent and distinguished amongst great evil and suggested a remedy, if not for its total removal at least for its abatement. He advised that those who could afford it would yet his characteristic modesty made him keep rather in the background, while others were placed in the van and made the apparent leaders of the movement. This might be who desired to follow agricultural water with the movement. who desired to follow agricultural pursuits but who were without means. It was to promote this excellent object that the meeting known as 'The Buffalo Convention' was held. Mr. McGee was the moving a held here the moving had the views and suggestions of the Buffalo Convention been more guiding as he had been the moving generally adopted." (Poems of McGee, pp. 28-9.) spirit of this assemblage. The proceedings were marked with the utmost harmony and good will. Clergymen whose names were household words and whose memory is still green and venerated, such as Fathers Kelly of Jersey City, Hart of Hartford, Ct., Curran of Astoria, Curran of Duane St., New York, and many others took an active part in the movement and in the deliber-ations attending it. The Convention adjourned to meet, in New York, whenever necessary. While attending some of these meetings, and as Secretary, pro tem, I had good opportunity to form an estimate of McGee's wonderful grasp of mind and analytical powers. He listened in silent atten-American or Canadian west, where they would group in colonies. McGee had no difficulty in showing that organized immigration is one of the oldest things in history. In a practical and to the point. He gave to his hearers along with his tangible snape, whatever had fallen in a desultory and undigested way from the previous speakers that was deserving of notice. As is well known, the object of the Buffalo Convention met with the discovered that McGee's undertaking was inherently defective. The first sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and statesmanlike friendship, namely during the doubtful and discouraging the days of 1801. The sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and statesmanlike friendship, namely during the doubtful and discouraging the days of 1801. The sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and statesmanlike friendship, namely during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is take, therefore, to claim when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is taked to be remembered that as does Mrs. Skelton in her life of assistance of his eloquent voice and during the doubtful and discouraging the sam is taked to be remembered that when the United States here and two candidates, including one United States here as the sam is taked to be remembered that when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and the sam is taked to be remembered that when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and the sam is taked to be remembered that when the United States needed the assistance of his eloquent voice and the sam is taked to be remember own views and in condensed and tangible shape, whatever had fallen Convention met with the disapproval of the late Archbishop Hughes, who published a strong manifesto against it. Mr. McGee though entertaining fixed and well considered views on the subject, out of deference to the Archbishop made no reply, though urged to do so by numerous friends. The course followed by the Archbishop in great measure, as he told me, led Mr. McGee to take up his permanent residence in Canada. He dreaded the possibility and the consequences of a collision with his ecclesiastical superior. As a good practical Catholic, he made the sacrifice of many and dear friends, old and cherished associations and bright and worldly prospect, which his great ability could not fail to

> cess, in the same direction." (Cited from the manuscript "Remin-iscences of Thomas D'Arcy McGee" by J. J. McGee.) The failure of McGee's effort to lead hundreds of thousands of Irish Catholic Americans from the cellars and sewers and mines of the East to the farms of the West was due chiefly, as stated above, to the condemnation of the movement by to the United States has been that Archbishop Hughes of New York.

secure in the neighboring Republic,

rather than run the risk mentioned

With the departure of Mr. McGee from New York, the results of the

Buffalo Convention, which had not been barren, ended. In recent years, Archbishop Ireland has been making efforts, and with great suc-

of which, in such an atmosphere, poverty is so often the occasion; and so through the whole argument the moral element is decisive. Now, religion rests upon morality; it is not the intellect but sin which

ment upon the land, what is sup-posed to be the natural order to 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, is upon the very 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 one by one. Here certainly the vae soli may be applied with special force. The point raised as to the unwisdom of attempting to establish exclusively Irish towns is of no importance. In the first place, this is not an aim of Irish Catholic colonization. No such national exclusiveness exists. Americans Germans, Norwegians, and others may, if they so desire, and in fact often do, settle in the Irish colonies of the West. Still there is no reason to fear that evil would result from exclusively Irish settlements. The Irish citizens of the United States are intensely American, and possession of the soil will but strengthen their spirit of patriotism." (1. c. 147-8.) Though Bishop Spalding does not mention McGee's name, his whole book, written twenty-four years after the Buffalo Convention, is a striking confirmation of McGee's policy. He puts the whole thing in a nut-shell in the following

paragraph in his preface: "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 fulfilment of the mission which God has given to them. It follows that all honest attempts to bring about a redistribution of our Catholic pop-ulation are commendable. This is the object and sim of the Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the United States, which has also led me to write this little book." (ibid. 13-14.)

inherently defective. The 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, 1879, was the legitimate heir of the Buffalo Convention of 1856. tunately twenty-three fateful years had been wasted. It was not McGee's fault.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES Here it may be not out of place to summarize the reasons which induced D'Arcy McGee to leave the United States for Canada. The migration of Canadians into the United States and, in a smaller measure of Americans into Canada, rupture, and I therefore entirely regular immigrants, since they did is a phenomenon which has been occurring for over a century. 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 McGee had no difficulty in confirming his argument from the history of the colonization undertaken by the Greeks, the Romans and the British. To the argument that his scheme was impracticable and un-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American, he had but to refer to the history of the United States with a utopian dun-American people iar more to the cultivation of a just and the United States to Canada were complex. First of all he came to the United States with a utopian dun-American people iar more of the cultivation of a just and the United States to Enanda were complex. First of all he came to the United States with a utopian dun-American people iar more to the united States to Enanda were complex. First of all he came to a few thousand regulars more or a few thousand regulars more or a few thousand regulars more or and the England Secondly, when late in 1905 each the United States and I would to the presence were assert that the united States with a utopian

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. A small test 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 ine that questions of this kind do not concern religion and the ministrate of support of the down, wherever it appears, by the cority 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 but I have no hesitation in declaring 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 control of the event of the control of the contro the eve of perhaps the worst Civil through several years of observa-War in history, this strong central tion—that the American system, so authority, this cohesive centre of unity, was not as much in evidence that that system may emerge from the growth of religious character? When we deplore the poverty of our people in the cities we are thinking above all of the sin and degradation of which, in such an atmospherical ways, 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 activities. 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 it is not the intellect but sin which undermines faith; and to seek to exclude the priest from active participation. In movements which exclude the priest from active participation in movements which affect the moral welfare of his people is to condemn him to impotence.

"Tooppose, in the matter of settlement upon the land, what is supthe United States, such as his exclesiastical superior, the Arch-bishop of New York and his former highest wisdom of the British Young Ireland colleagues, Meagher and Mitchell, had little sympathy with his Irish American policy. The Archbishop of New York considered that McGee's Western colonization scheme was based on too pessimistic a view of the future of the children of the Catholics or the children of the Catholics living in the crowded districts of the big citles of the East, and Meagher, Mitchell and perhaps the majority of the Irish Americans disapproved of McGee's abandonment of physical force as a remedy for Irish grievances and distrusted his newly conceived admiration for the British Constitution in Canada. by the madness of an arbitrary minister blind to all circumstances the British Constitution in 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 dissatisfied with his position in 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 disin-tegrading 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 laft him in the last deceded. 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 sym-

> lived among them. ing days of 1861, Thomas D'Arcy McGee did not fail to do his share towards creating in Canada a heartily friendly feeling towards the sore-distressed American republic. Speaking at Ormstown, Chateauguay Co., July 17th, 1861, on "Our present and future Relations with the Americans," he said: "We stand here on the historic

pathy 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 compatriots 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

soil of Chateauguay where De Salaberry, with his handful of volunteers, repulsed an army in the last War, as American armies were then numbered; we are here within two hours' ride of the American line; your relations and the relations of 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 are he little possibilities and the sisters wherever possible, after the Bureau had endeavored for months to have them admitted. rupture, and I therefore enturely 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 the Act as a "person who is qualitionable policy. I do not pretend to know upon what representations such an addition to the regular sarmy in this country was made; ressors under the immigration Act. A "professor" is described in the Act as a "person who is qualified to teach and who for two years army in this country was made;

army in this country was made, but if it was made with any feeling of apprehension as to our relations taught some recognized subject in an institution of learning which are in 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 second between the confess. Archbishop Hughes of New York. We are fortunate in possessing the considered judgment of one of the deepest thinkers of the American Hierarchy of the nineteenth center of the process of the considered judgment of the deepest thinkers of the American people far more to the cultivation of a just and the United States to Canada were generous style of dealing with the

this, its first great domestic trial purified, consolidated, disciplined for greater usefulness and greater achievements than before. 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 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 freemen so are they; and public calamities which befall 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, of time and place; if that fabric should be destined to fall—as fall I 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 uninfluential exceptions, the press and people of Canada are anxiously and sincerely desirous that the may be able soon to settle their domestic troubles, and that the future course of their Confederation may be as free from anarchia 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 Act.

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Bureau of Immigration workers aided the Sisters wherever possible, seminary or university as 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 classifica-tion under which Sisters are at



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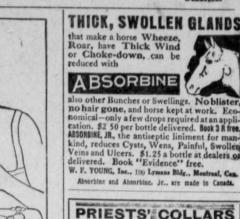
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