

OUR LADY AND THE PROTESTANT POETS

A true authentic poet is not a mere rhymester or juggler of words. While he must of course know the technique of poetry, he must have primarily a soul that is open and responsive to beauty in all its forms.

Of all the spiritual visions that give human eyes to see, none save One is nobler than that of Mary, who unites in herself the soul-touching beauty of virginity and the compelling tenderness of motherhood.

It was not his puritanical training but the Catholic air which he breathed in Italy which made it possible for our Longfellow to sing thus of Mary in that soft melodious cadence that is his preeminently:

"Virgin and Mother of our dear Redeemer! All hearts are touched and softened at her name: And even as children who have much offended A too-indulgent Father, in great shame, Penitent, and yet not daring un-attended To go into His presence, at the gate Speak with their sister, and confiding wait Till she goes in before and inter-cedes! So men, repenting of their evil deeds, And yet not venturing rashly to draw near With their requests an angry father's ear, Offer to her their prayers and their confessions."

William Cullen Bryant has written a beautiful commentary on the words of the Hail Mary: "Blessed art thou amongst women. There is in 'The Mother's Hymn' a note of tenderness which we by no means find in most of his other poems. It must have been in a moment when he was thinking of his own mother that he was lifted out of himself into that rare atmosphere in which he saw the great Mother of the human race standing like a matriarch at the head of that endless procession of humanity which by the example of her life she tries to draw heavenwards:

"Lord, Who ordainest for mankind Benignant toils and tender cares, We thank Thee for the ties that bind The mother to the child she bears. "We thank Thee for the hopes that rise Within her heart, as, day by day, The dawning soul from those young eyes Looks with a clearer, steadier ray. "And grateful for the blessing given With that dear infant on her knee, She strains the eye to look to heaven, The voice to hush a prayer to Thee. "Such thanks the blessed Mary gave When from her lap the Holy Child Sent from on high to seek and save The lost of earth, looked up and smiled. "All-Gracious! grant to those who bear A mother's charge the strength and light To guide the feet that own them o'er In ways of Love and Truth and Right. "There is a note almost medieval in 'The Virgin's Cradle Hymn,' by Samuel Coleridge, suggested by a print of the Blessed Lady which he saw in a German village. Except by Francis Thompson whose Catholic heart was responsive to all appeals of religious sentiment, this poem has perhaps never been equalled for tenderness, deep feeling and sweet simplicity: "Sleep, sweet babe! my cares beguiling: Mother sits beside thee smiling: Sleep, my darling, tenderly! If thou sleep not, mother morneth, Singing as her wheel she turneth: Come, soft slumber, balmily!"

There is a rare figure in English literature whom we all know and love—Ben Jonson—who was good enough to have been a Catholic, even if he just missed coming into the Church. In a very narrow age, filled with small men, he looms big for his courage in praising Catholic practices which were universally derided. We need not be surprised, then, that Jonson gets closer to the true significance of Mary's life and mission than any other Protestant poet:

"Daughter, and Mother, and the Spouse of God, Alike of kin to that most blessed Trine Of Persons, yet in union One Divine, How are thy gifts and graces blazed abroad! Most holy, and pure Virgin, blessed Maid, Sweet Tree of Life, King David's Strength and Tower, The House of Gold, the Gate of Heaven's power, The Morning Star whose light our fall hath stayed."

"Great Queen of queens, most mild, most meek, most wise, Most Venerable, Cause of all our joy, Whose cheerful look our sadness doth destroy, And art the Spotted Mirror to man's eyes. "The Seat of Sapience, the most lovely Mother, And most to be admired of thy sex, Who made us happy, all, in thy reflex, By bringing forth God's only Son, no other. "Thou Throne of Glory, beauteous as the moon, The rosy morning or the rising sun, Who like a giant hastes his course to run, Till he hath reached his twofold point of noon."

At the present time when almost the entire world is at war, it may be well to recall a poem of Rudyard Kipling which opens up to our mind's eye a picture of medieval times when even just before the conflict threw themselves on their knees to recommend their souls to our Blessed Lady. The medieval chronicles, especially those of Florence, are full of just such themes as Kipling must have had in mind when he wrote this exquisite little hymn:

"Ah, Mary, pierced with sorrow, Remember reach and save The soul that comes tomorrow Before the God that gave! Since each was born of woman, For each of utter need— True comrade and true foe, Madonna, intercede! "If there is an English poet who by nature and temperament was predisposed to reverence our Blessed Lady, it was William Wordsworth. With a soul open to the most subtle and elusive beauties of nature, he could not but be quick to see the blending of all beauties in a true image of our Lady. These he shows forth in his exquisite poem, 'The Virgin,' than which perhaps nothing more beautiful has ever been composed: "Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncrossed With the least shade of thought to sin allied; Woman! above all woman glorified, Our tainted nature's solitary Boast; Purer than foam on central ocean tost; Brighter than eastern skies at day-break strewn With fancied roses, than the unblemished moon Before her name begins on heaven's blue coast; Thy image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween, Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend, As to a visible power, in which did blend All that was mixed and reconciled in thee Of mother's love with maiden purity, Of high with low, celestial with terrene!"

There was an unfortunate English poet who lived out in his life the revolt brought in by the Protestant Reformation—Oscar Wilde, the decadent, whose pathetic misuse of genius cannot but touch the heart. Had he but devoted consistently and exclusively to religious themes the talents which he prostituted to unworthy naturalistic ends, he might easily have become the finest religious singer in our tongue. It was probably the good Mother herself who, as a reward for the few moments that he spent in writing the following sonnet, obtained for him at the eleventh hour the grace of reception into the Church:

"Was this His coming? I had hoped to see A scene of wondrous glory, as was told Of some great God Who in a rain of gold Broke open bars and fell on Danal: Or a dread vision, as when Semele Sickenning for love and unappeased desire, Pray'd to see God's clear body and the fire Caught her white limbs and slew her utterly! With such glad dreams I sought this holy place, And now with wondering eyes and heart I stand Before this supreme mystery of Love: A kneeling girl with passionless pale face, An Angel with a lily in his hand, And over both, with outstretched wings, the Dove!"

There is an old Latin proverb which says that it is lawful to learn from one's enemies. From those who are enemies of our faith, and all that our faith stands for, from those who have been educated in an atmosphere that is frankly hostile to the cult of the Blessed Virgin, we Catholics may learn to sing of Mary's prerogatives, Mary's beauty, Mary's tenderness and Mary's mission. This little garland of poetical and garden must prove to us if it can prove anything at all, that Mary's beauty is so supernal and her virtue so fragrant that even those who have come to curse or scoff must fall down in loving wonderment at her who is; in very truth, "our tainted nature's solitary boast."—Thomas M. Schwertner, O. P., in Rosary Magazine.

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ELIZABETH OF BELGIUM

The Queens of Europe are sad and anxious women nowadays; and the bravest and best-loved of them all is perhaps the saddest and most anxious. The letters of a British major to his mother, published since his death at the front in the little volume entitled "From Dugout and Billet," give a brief but moving glimpse of Elizabeth of Belgium, to whom he was presented, not realizing at the moment that she was the Queen, or any one more imposing than the little fairy lady with a face full of soft womanliness and pale care."

They fell naturally and simply into conversation, and the major soon found that: "She only wanted to hear about two things—armies and soldiers. She talked of them with unassuming intimacy. "She said that from the beginning of the War she had been moving about; always moving, never in one place. All the time I could see that she was repressing her feelings. You could see she was suffering acutely. "Have you relatives fighting, madam?" I asked, greatly blundering. "All of my sons," she replied, "those who have not already fallen. "But, forgive me, madam, your sons must be children!" Her eyes filled. "My little ones are safe in England; but every Belgian, dead or fighting, is my son," she said with tremendous emotion. "I am Rachel, Monsieur le Capitaine, and I can not be comforted. I can only try to comfort. "And so only did I stumble on the truth I was in the presence of one of the most tragic of living figures, the indomitable little Queen of Belgium. I think the sun got into my eyes then."—Youth's Companion.

CATHOLICISM ROMAN AND ANGLICAN

In his book "Catholicism Roman and Anglican, Professor A. M. Fairbairn, a non-Catholic, says: "I freely admit the pre-eminence of Catholicism as an imperial institution; here she is without a rival, or a peer. If to be at once the most permanent and extensive, the most plastic and inflexible ecclesiastical organization were the same thing as the most perfect embodiment, and vehicle of religion, then the claim of Catholicism were simply indisputable. The man in search of an authoritative church may not hesitate; once let him assume that a visible and audible authority is of the essence of religion, and he has no choice; he must become or get himself reckoned a Catholic. "The Roman Church assails his understanding with invincible charms. Her sons proudly say to him: 'She alone is Catholic, continuous, venerable, august, the very Church Christ founded and His Apostles instituted and organized. She possesses all the attributes and notes of Catholicity—an unbroken apostolic succession, an infallible chair, unity, sanctity, truth, an inviolable priesthood, a holy sacrifice and efficacious sacraments. "The Protestant churches are but of yesterday, without authority, whose confused voices but protest their own insufficiency, whose impotence almost atones for their own sin of schism by the way it sets off the might, the majesty and the unity of Rome. In contrast, the Catholic Church stands where her Master placed her on the rock, endowed with the prerogatives and powers He gave her, and against her the gates of hell shall not prevail. "Supernatural grace is hers; it watched over her cradle, has followed her in all her ways through all her centuries, and has not forsaken her yet. She is not, like Protestantism, a concession to the negative spirit, an unholy compromise with naturalism. Everything about her is positive and transcendent; she is the bearer of divine truth, the representative of divine order, the supernatural living in the very heart, and before her very fact of the natural. The saints, too, are hers, and the man she receives joins their communion, enjoys their godly fellowship, feels their influence, participates in their merit and the blessings they distribute. Their earthly life made the past of the Church illustrious, their heavenly activity binds the visible and the invisible into unity, and lifts time into eternity. To honor the saints is to honor sanctity; the Church which teaches man to live holy, helps him to love holiness. And the

WEARY FOR WANT OF WORK

"One of the most pitiable objects in the world is the jaded rich man," remarks the Casket. "Some people may find it hard to believe that a rich man can be jaded; can be tired of things that his money buys; can be discontented. 'I'd like to try it,' says some one; 'I'll bet you I'd not get tired of it.' But, tired, jaded, rich men are to be met with every day in populous communities. They are tired of their automobiles, of their pianos, of their yachts, of their theatres, and opera and ball; tired of pleasure; tired of everything. This is the curse of a too great devotion to money or to pleasure. Make a god of them, and the god turns his back on you and leaves you lonely and disappointed."

THE CATHOLIC OFTEN TO BLAME

If the Catholic party to a mixed marriage had had more zeal and a better knowledge of what the Church teaches, the non-Catholic might have had the grace of conversion. In many cases too much thought is given to the mere material things—income, house and furnishings, clothes, guests, etc., and the difference of religion is comfortably set aside until "after the wedding." The young Catholic wife or husband has lost the golden opportunity, and the coming of children only widens the breach that difference in religious belief is sure to make. Dealing with the problem, a writer in the Ave Maria expresses his conviction as follows: "Mixed marriages for our young people are, in the greater part, wholly unnecessary and many of them now take place solely because of the lack of a little reasonable effort on the part of those directly and indirectly concerned. "Charging a complete lack of effort on the part of the slothful, negligent Catholic partner to interest the non-Catholic in his or her religion, this writer draws upon instances that came under his observation: "More than once I have personally known non-Catholic young men and young women who were absolutely indifferent on the question of coming into the Church," he says. "I have known them to assert that the question of their becoming Catholic was 'up to the Catholic prospective partner'; and it has been at times an amazement to me that young Catholics, naturally ignorant of the pitfalls

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