

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SCOTLAND.

HISTORY OF ST. MARGARET'S CONVENT, EDINBURGH.*

We have had much pleasure in welcoming this handsome volume from across the Atlantic, from that land which has always been looked upon as the stronghold of the Presbyterian heresy and the dire enemy of everything Catholic. Scotland was indeed long alienated from her true mother the Church, but ever amidst her trials and faithlessness she retained some few faithful children in her bosom, and the prayers of these good souls has at length borne fruit in the shape of a most wonderful revival of Catholicism and the re-establishment of a Catholic Hierarchy in her midst.

The volume before us is extremely well written and is got up in a superior style. Much contained in it is of purely local interest, but even though this be the case the narrative does not flag nor become tiresome. Every Scotch heart must warm to the recital of how this first religious house since the so-called Reformation took root so firmly that within the succeeding fifty years eighteen other houses of religious men and women were to be found within the bounds of that Scotland which had given birth to John Knox and had also been the scene of so much bitter persecution.

To the general Catholic there is much of deepest import contained in these pages, and, we may say, there is much of encouragement to the Canadian Catholics of the present day. In many parts of Canada our religion and institutions are being villified and misrepresented most unsparingly but we have not yet suffered anything to be compared with what the small faithful remnant in Scotland had to undergo for nearly 300 years. Patience, virtuous endurance, judicious action, and most of all, prayer, have done their work and a change has come over the land of the Bruce and the Stuart. The blood of martyrs has cried to Heaven and has fertilized the soil it sprinkled. The Catholic Church has lifted her graceful head anew; she has laid aside the veil wherewith she had been covered, and which had hidden her tears, and now she smiles encouragingly on her beloved Scotmen. She is now again a reigning power; she is once more recognized as the Bride of Christ by many thousands of loving children, whilst earth and Heaven may rejoice together, for she that was nearly lost has been found, and Scotland is now once more a land where the Catholic ritual is becoming wider and wider known, where the consolations of religion are no longer inaccessible to the humblest child of the Church, and where a Hierarchy is watching over the dearest interests of souls. All Catholic minorities may take fresh comfort by studying the account given in this work of the utter destruction which the Reformation worked to everything Catholic in Scotland, a destruction which can scarcely ever arrive to our Canadian institutions, since times have altered and the capabilities of evil among our enemies are kept in check by public opinion and other causes which we will not here discuss. How the faithful few kept alive their faith amid the general ruin is a marvel, almost a miracle, and we favoured children of the Church can only realize how faithful those few were by consulting the history and chronicles of those times, specially the private chronicles of certain families. If ever the history of the "faithful few" should be written we shall peruse a record of heroic deeds done for souls' sakes which will put to shame all half-hearted Catholicity and teach us the true and inestimable value of our own privileges, and our own "freedom to worship God."

The late saintly Bishop Gillis, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland, was so impressed with the powers for good of religious orders that he left nothing undone to carry out his designs of establishing them in his diocese as soon as ever circumstances permitted. We will here note that the Bishop was a native of Montreal and an old pupil of the Sulpicians in that city and that many of his fellow-students bore names familiar to us in Canada because well known in their after life. For a detailed account of the edifying life of Bishop Gillis we refer our readers to the book itself as we must hasten on.

We are told by our author that "the founding of St. Margaret's Convent meant something more than is implied in the founding of a convent at the present day," and also that the founder had "to face obstacles laid in his way by Catholics as well as Protestants; the timidity of the former being at times as great a hindrance as the bigotry of the latter; but feeling that his inspiration to undertake the great work came from God Himself, he trusted in God's power to provide all that was necessary to its fulfillment." During a retreat which the young priest, as he then was, made in the Monastery of La Trappe in France he became acquainted with Monsigneur Soyer, Bishop of Lucon, who in turn presented him to the Rev. Louis Marie Baudouin (now declared Venerable by the Church), a holy priest who had done much to repair the evil wrought by the storm of infidel fury in France. Among other institutions Abbe Baudouin had founded a congregation of religious women, called Ursulines of Jesus, devoted chiefly to the instruction of youth. The name of Ursulines of Jesus was given to this Congregation on account of the French government of those days (after the Revolution) not sanctioning any religious Order but that of the Ursulines. This Congregation, therefore, applied for official approbation under the name of "Ursulines of Jesus."

On Father Gillis becoming acquainted with the rules, &c., of this order, he was so impressed in its favour that he "determined to solicit the consent of his own ecclesiastical superior to establish one of its houses in Edinburgh." He obtained the desired permission but the difficulties to be overcome before he could expect to behold the fruition of his hopes would have impeded a less zealous and devoted priest from pursuing his design. The law of the land forbade the existence of religious houses in Scotland.

"He was himself but a young priest without influence, experience or worldly means. He knew the timidity of Catholics and how even they would oppose the introduction of monks and nuns as being unpracticable. But he felt that when the time came for the work to be done, God would Himself prepare the way and send the means."

To provide the funds for the undertaking he started on a collecting tour through France, Spain and Italy and returned home with a considerable sum wherewith to begin his work.

Money was not, however, the only thing necessary for founding the contemplated convent. A suitable building had to be obtained and most of all he had to find religious ladies with special and appropriate vocations, who could speak the language of the country. It is a very different thing to enter the novitiate of a well-ordered convent and to found a new order in a country so thoroughly Protestant as Scotland. However, that God who had inspired Father Gillis with the idea of founding a convent, now raised up efficient spiritual helpmeets in his work. From the very first, material and pecuniary help had been bestowed by benefactors of the work, and now Father Gillis found two admirable ladies whose heart's desire was to give their lives to working for God in this convent about to be founded in their own land. Both of these ladies were eminently adapted for the task they were undertaking, and the history of the conversion of Miss Trail (Sister Agnes Xavier) from Presbyterianism to Catholicity is one of the most interesting parts of this interesting book.

It was Dec. 26, 1834, that the little community took possession of its long desired home, and on St. Margaret's Day, June 16th, 1835, the chapel was opened and the religious habit given to the numerous postulants who had anxiously looked forward to their admission to the religious state. St. Margaret's Convent was now an established fact, and of its career from 1835 up to its Golden Jubilee in 1886, we have a most interesting account in the pages before us. Royalty and nobility visited its walls, valuable presents were made, &c., &c., and amid all this the religious ladies of the "Ursulines of Jesus" continued to "do good unto all," and to multiply their endeavours to meet the wants of the growing Catholic community. Conversions from Protestantism and vocations to the religious state were frequent and a wonderful amount of good was worked in every direction, but we must refer our readers to the book itself to learn about all this. We can assure them they will read interesting, well-written pages and that whilst there is much that concerns all Catholics there is also much that more closely concerns Scotch Catholics, to whom many of the names to be met with in this book

*The Revival of Conventual Life in Scotland. History of St. Margaret's Convent, Edinburgh, with a preface by the Most Rev. William Smith, D.D., Archbishop of St. Andrew's and Edinburgh. Published by John Chisholm, Edinburgh and London.