



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. I.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 9, 1851.

NO. 39.

COMPARISON, NOT CONTROVERSY.

BY T. W. G. M.

(From the Catholic Herald.)

In a conversation with a Protestant friend, (an American,) a few days ago, I was told—and not for the first time by many—that religious influence was greater and more evident in Protestant than in Catholic countries. My friend had never lived in Italy, but he told me that those who had shared the same opinion with him, and I am aware that almost all English and American Protestant writers in Italy wish their readers to infer, that while they witnessed what they are pleased to term (and indeed have now a high authority for making use of the expression) *mummers* and superstitious practice, they found no real religion at all. How few foreign travellers make for themselves opportunities of judging whether it is so. An Italian might say, that in America a very great talk of religion is made in certain circles, which he, very naturally, is at a loss to understand; that in New England, particularly, they can boast of their learned theologians, their able preachers, their varieties and variations of doctrines, their *new* lights and much strange and useless controversy; but he would be quite at a loss for a general demonstration of religious influence. He would wonder that the houses of God are closed every day excepting Sunday, or, if opened, for an hour or two on some one or two evenings only, on week days, for prayer-meetings or preaching, when a certain class of persons frequent them, many, as their after conversation would fully prove, merely to criticize, not only the "minister" but the congregation there assembled, and that some go as a kind of *passé temps*. Now I would willingly endeavor to draw a comparison between two towns, one in Italy and one here; the former the capital of a small state, and the latter called a capital also, of one of the Eastern, United States. As I would speak of the influence of religion on society at large, I make, of course, allowance for the difference of national manners and customs, but I find that with regard to conventional distinctions of the different ranks and classes of society, strange to say, that in Italy, with an acknowledged, ancient and titled aristocracy, there is far less *invidious* distinction touching rank. In Italy, the churches are not peevish of—there are no "uppermost places in the synagogue." From early dawn the churches are open daily, the solemn unbloody sacrifice of the death of Christ is there celebrated, and a Princess and a Beggar may be, and are continually seen bowing down in adoration side by side before the same altar. The great have no cause to remember their greatness there, while the poor and the abject must feel consoled and elevated. It is the custom throughout Italy for the members of very many families to attend Mass daily, and among the class of laborers, market-people and others, the by far greater portion attend early Mass at some church before they enter upon their daily avocations. A person about to undertake a journey, perhaps of necessity, and on a Sunday or Holiday, can do so without neglecting his *first* duty, and depart with a blessing. For religion to exercise an influence over our lives, it must be our constant companion. We must be reminded of our means of salvation, step by step, as we are reminded hour by hour of our proness to sin, of the original curse, and as the best of us feel continually with the Blessed Paul—"the evil that we would not do, that we do." So, all classes in Italy are reminded by the Church, whose care and watchful guardianship (as promised by Christ) is ever over her children, that hour by hour as the day passes, so are we passing, and that we must "watch and pray." The announcement of the angel to the Blessed Virgin is enjoined to be repeated by the Faithful at dawn of day, at noon, at sunset and one hour after sunset. At these hours in Catholic countries the bells of all the churches ring out as well the glad tidings as the warning to us all to repeat humbly the salutation of the angel, finishing with the invocation to her whom "all nations shall call Blessed" to pray for us sinners. I know my Protestant readers will say "but we do not call that religion." I would here remind them that I promised not to enter into a controversy on religious belief, but to speak of the influence of religion, as far as we can judge, in different communities, and who will deny, that when we see all, even in the streets, pause for a minute and suspend their business to unite in a prayer for the aid of one, whose prayers, with those of the Saints, St. John speaks of in the Apocalypse as "incense" before the altar of God in Heaven,—who will deny that a religious influence is there, and that they who so pray show their dependence on a higher power—their dependence from dawn to sunset. There is, moreover, an obligation to attend divine worship on Sundays and Holidays appointed by the Church—and whatever Church man may call the Church, he must own that she has authority. "Hear the Church" is too explicit a command to admit of a

doubt of this. Religion, therefore, in Italy has this influence, that a rainy Sunday, a slight cold, or letters to write, form no excuse for a neglect of "assembling themselves together." True religion has also another direct influence—to make persons cheerful. A gloomy countenance and the forbidding of innocent recreation on holidays is no sign of the influence of faith on the soul—but, on the contrary, of assumed sanctity, of hypocrisy, and of ingratitude to the God of infinite kindness, "who knoweth our frame, who remembereth that we are but dust."

Therefore are amusements allowed on Sundays and holidays, and then again religion exercises her salutary influence. At all public places improper persons are strictly excluded, improper performances are disallowed, and even in the recreation of reading, by authority of the church, books, having the slightest improper tendencies, are withheld. To pass through the Italian town I alluded to, on a Sunday, and witness the cheerfulness and orderly engagement of the inhabitants, of all classes, mingling together without any apparent distinction, knowing that the first duty of man to his Maker has been performed by one and all, is indeed a pleasing sight; and although it might shock many rigid persons, brought up in ideas of being forbidden to do this, that, and the other, on account of "its being wicked to do so and so on Sunday," to know that the poor working man, as well as the rich man, would most likely, in the evening, attend a moral and instructive play, or enjoy, in company of his family, the music of some of his gifted countrymen's Operas. Yet look to the other side, my friends. Do you see a grog-shop open? Such things exist not. Do you see a drunken man? Never! I was much struck with an incident, the first time I sailed from Leghorn to Elba. A few of the Guardia Nobile of the Grand Duke of Tuscany had invited me to accompany them on a visit to a friend at the Island in question. We sailed in one of those small trading boats, half-decked, that ply from the port of Leghorn to Porto Ferrajo. We were, crew included, about a dozen on board. At the point of the Mole, leaving the harbor, is erected a shrine, with a large crucifix. When we arrived at this point, suddenly the sail flapped—there was a pause—and all uncovered their heads, made the sign of the cross, and repeated a short prayer. After that, a small box was handed round for "eleemosine," and then cheerily did the sailors sing, and merrily did the hours fleet by until we made Porto Ferrajo, the same evening. Again the same ceremony took place, and it was indeed touching. Was there not the influence of religion on those rough sailors? Was it not meet that, before sailing, they should direct a prayer for safety to Him who walked on the waters, to Him who stretched out His arm to Saint Peter, when he cried out to his Lord that he was sinking? And was it not a pious thought to say *Ave Maria* to the Virgin Mother of God; who is emphatically and beautifully styled "Star of the Sea?"

But if, in the pleasures and engagements of life, religious influence is there felt, how much more in the sorrows, afflictions and sicknesses which visit all born of woman! All have heard of the glorious Sisterhood of Mercy—but there is another Society in every city of Italy, called the "Misericordia," or Brotherhood of Mercy. All, or nearly all, the male portion of the community belong to it. Each person pays a small contribution towards its expenses, which are not great, and each person has his duty to perform in common with all. The prince and the workman have alike their turn. A certain number are on duty daily at the headquarters of their order—if I may so call it, and in case of an accident, sickness, a poor penitent at home, and without a nurse or any needful occasion, a message is sent, a bell is tolled to warn those on duty of the demand on them, and a certain number march out to the place where they are required, their person being concealed beneath a large black cotton dress, with a card and rosary around the waist, and their heads covered with a loose mask, as it were, with holes for the eyes, a slouched hat is generally hanging to their girdle, so that in very bad weather they hardly protect their heads. I have known so many instances where disease has been cured, where comfort has been administered by these voluntary, though concealed ministers of mercy, that I cannot think or speak too highly of such "charity that vaunteth not itself."

I would willingly rove along recapitulating the instances when religious influences are so touchingly displayed—when in all cases of sickness, the mother, the wife, the brother, the friend, starts away from the sick chamber to offer up prayers for the loved one in God's sanctuary—and when even after death "being mindful of the resurrection," the "holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead," has its calming and solemn influence, and encourages us that remain, "not to sorrow as those without hope," and reminds us that we must all pass that haven, and more-

over that we may all hope for that glorious immortality, when there will be no divided feeling, no other influence but the influence of religion.

Now I am told religion asserts a more powerful and evident influence in Protestant countries, and the American town I have alluded to to compare with that of Italy in this respect, claims to be pre-eminent. Before I say a word in comparison, I most cheerfully avow that the inhabitants of this place are undoubtedly a worthy, respectable set of persons, learned also, and the state of society generally, especially what is considered "the first," remarkable for intelligence, and widely differing from the pseudo-fashionable circles in large American cities. And although one does not find the warmth of heart which seems more naturally to belong to the "sunny south," yet there is a steady civility and a justness of bearing to all, even in the most pitted and probably despised Papist.

Here there are many places of worship belonging to persons of different denominations, and on Sunday, generally speaking, unless the weather is very bad, they are all more or less well attended.

The great object in going to church is to hear a good preacher, and among the congregationalists a minister, fluent in extemporaneous prayer is much sought after. The "gift of prayer" is much spoken of. Sunday is ushered in by the tolling of bells, and a most decorous silence pervades the city. To see the people going to church at half-past 10, A. M., a foreigner would be at a loss to reconcile the contradiction of the very gay dresses and the very dismal faces. Every one seems as if it were thought a sin to smile. Many think it right to frequent some place of worship three times during the day, and certainly as this day alone of all the week is given up to religious worship, it does not seem unreasonable, besides, every kind of amusement is strictly prohibited. The young people generally would be glad to escape, but nothing is left for them, for even a walk is against rule, and to admire the beauties of nature, and to find the most innocent relaxation in a walk, are not deemed worthy of the *Christian Sabbath!*

I forgot—there is a recreation permitted—to canvass the merits of the preacher—his style, his doctrine, &c., with a flippancy perfectly astonishing. "What church do you attend?" is a question naturally among the first between acquaintances. The answer will be,—"I used to attend Mr. So-and-so's, but I got tired of his preaching, and now I sit under Dr.—." "Dear me," may be the reply, "do you really? why I am told his doctrine respecting predestination is very strange, and has not there been a split lately in the congregation?" "Oh yes, but I quite agree with him, and his manner is so impressive," &c. Such is the influence that some of the preachers have over their hearers, and such is the style of conversation respecting what should be the most important matter for consideration,—the solemn worship of Almighty God. With many, it is far otherwise, and in sincerity do they adore in the manner they suppose to be most acceptable to their Creator. But their lives and religious services, which might be very edifying, is but little so, because, however their conduct may be admired by all, their devotion is either considered useless or ridiculous by the majority, because their opinions on certain points of faith and forms of worship are widely different.

The Sunday over, the churches are shut up, no festival ever occurs to remind the thoughtless of the various epochs in the life of Christ—no day hallowed by a commemoration of the piety of his Saints. Instead of a holiday being hailed with joy, a Sunday casts a gloom over almost every family, and "dull as Sunday" has passed into a proverb. Among certain sects, Episcopalians, for instance, there is something like authority acknowledged by themselves in their clergy as a body, but the intercourse between the clergyman and the congregation is comparatively slight, and chiefly between himself and persons of his own standing whom his wife can receive!

The perpetual disputes and controversies between clergymen and others, of opposite sects, must naturally weaken the influence of the religion of the gospel, as taught by them, on the masses, and the few points of sound doctrine retained among them are so perpetually disputed upon, as to some peculiar meaning that they lose the hold on men's faith which they ought to have, and any specious argument against the whole fabric of the Christian religion and divine revelation, may therefore quickly overthrow both. That many here are active and zealous in charitable efforts no one can deny; but the want of unity is felt. Worldly feeling, worldly respectability are thought much of. Large subscriptions are raised to provide clothing and instruction for the poor. Ladies lend their aid, and sewing societies are established. Many kind hearted souls visit the sick, and of their abundance administer to the wants of the indigent. But the poor and the ignorant will be taught one thing by one set of benefactors, and another by another,

To be set down as *religious*, implies a denouncing almost of every social feeling, and a total giving up of every amusement, excepting of hearing celebrated preachers. How often do we hear young men, just entering the world, say, when asked when they have been to church on the last Sunday—"Oh, I had enough of that at home; the old folks made me go to meeting enough to last a long while."

Can any one deny this? Can any one say I exaggerate? With all the moral bearing of this town—with all the laws which exist to enforce morals—although no theatrical performance even is legal—yet, how much dissatisfaction prevails, especially on Sundays!

And I maintain that if there were unity in religion and authority in church, no dislike would be evinced to religion. She would regain her influence, a holiday would not be made a fast day, and cheerfulness and gaiety would replace dissipation and debauchery.

I am aware that Protestants say that we, Catholics, have no charity, are not liberal! I shall be condemned now as illiberal for what I have said. As for charity, whose bounties do those of the Church of England enjoy and revel in? The sums given for charitable purposes by their own Catholic ancestors. It were idle talking. Monuments of Catholic piety and charity in every age exist every where. And for liberality, let me ask what is meant? It is *we*, not *they*, who have to complain. If they denounce us as illiberal, because we do not say "it matters not what a man believes, if he be a good man;" and that it is illiberal to refuse to send Catholic children to Protestant schools—according to their notions, we are illiberal. The mission of the Church was, and is, to convert all nations—not to tell people—which she might to heathens also, according to that reasoning—that it matters not what they believe.

No, the influence of religion is too valuable in this life, as well as in the next, for us to become liberal to that extent. But in charity we may, nay, must be, with all men, if we are true Catholics. It is by the charity of God we are preserved, and that His charity may abide in us, and preserve the blessed influence of his holy religion, wherever his Church has planted the sacred banner of the Cross, is our fervent prayer, as well as that all nations may speedily be reunited in the faith once delivered to the Saints.

THE POLICY OF PERSECUTION—THE "IRISH VOTE."

(From a Western Correspondent of the Freeman.)

Now, that the storm of politico-theological disputation, of which the House of Commons has lately been the ill-selected arena, is succeeded by a temporary calm, and that the mist raised is by degrees clearing away, it may not be deemed intrusive to ask a small space in your columns for the purpose of informing your readers in England, and elsewhere, what is and has been thought of the whole affair by the Catholic inhabitants of the western province.— Upon ordinary topics of a political kind the influence upon public opinion of a province so bereft of mercantile and industrial wealth, and shaken to its very centre by a combination of disorganizing elements, might be with safety disregarded. But when it is borne in mind that the population is almost exclusively Catholic, and that the inhabitants comprise the descendants of the Catholic and purely Celtic families who have been driven, during previous persecutions, to this side of the Shannon by successive tyrannical encroachments on the part of our English rulers, their views upon a new penal bill may not be unworthy of attention even from British statesmen. By a truism, which has now become an axiom in parliamentary maneuvering, Ireland is the difficulty of England; and during the late years of famine, and even at this moment, we may say that the helpless poverty of the south and west may be termed the difficulties of Ireland. Here is a large amount of population, whom the government cannot root out all at once by the sword and the bayonet, although that would be more humane than to permit them to starve in thousands in the very midst of plenty. This population is intensely Catholic. They are firmly united in bonds of reciprocal affection to their clergy and bishops. Although, therefore, upon other matters, as I stated before, their feelings might be disregarded, yet when it becomes a question of religion, the case is altered. I have heard several persons say during the late debate, that England took away every thing else worth having in Ireland but the faith planted by St. Patrick, and that they are ready to die in defence of this last hope which binds them to Heaven. Thus their very poverty, with the recklessness it often engenders, will prove the strength of the inhabitants of unfortunate Connaught in the event of any attempt being made to enforce the provisions of the new penal law. We did not surely require this new ingredient to be poured into our cup of bitterness in