



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XIV. MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MAY 27, 1864. No. 42

OLIVER PLUNKETT.

SUBSTANCE OF A LECTURE DELIVERED BY A. M. SULLIVAN, ESQ., EDITOR OF THE DUBLIN "NATION," IN BELFAST, DUBLIN, LIVERPOOL, &c.

It is commonly said of us, by the writers of a neighboring country, that we Irish are always looking back; that we are worshippers of the past; whereas the nation against whom and by whom we are thus disparagingly compared, is remarkable for looking closely after the present.

we have to do with is the historical fact that a struggle, which, with varying fortune, had been intermittently prolonged for 420 years—the longest and most vehemently maintained struggle against invasion and subjugation recorded in modern history—about the period to which we are referring burst forth into an effort which, for military skill in its direction, bravery in its prosecution, and promise of success, surpassed all others, and showed a passionate love of national independence which four centuries of desperate but disastrous endeavor were unable to appal.

if a half a century could remove the effects of six hundred terrible years. Such as I have described, or endeavored to describe, was the condition of Ireland when Oliver Plunkett commenced life. I have dwelt upon the demoralisation and debasement which was produced, and which prevailed most largely, if not entirely, around the Pale, because, unfortunately, the story of his fate reveals but too plainly the fearful evidence of that demoralisation and debasement. They are revealed in the witnesses who came forward to swear him to the scaffold, amidst the shuddering abhorrence even of their hirers; and I have desired to anticipate, by ample explanation, the ignorant reproach—"Were not the perjurers who were procured to betray him Irishmen and Catholics—aye, friars and priests?"

Reflections like these arise to most minds at the mention of the Irish College at Rome, in which young Oliver Plunkett, as I have said, entered as divinity student in the year 1649. Dark as had been the tribulations of his unhappy country when he quitted home, darker far were those that succeeded. As Morough of the Burnings devastated in the south, and Cromwell butchered in the north, the island ran red with blood; and the young exile student, pacing the cloisters of the College in Rome, often fancied that he could hear borne upon the western breeze the wails of horror and despair. What an assemblage must have been the students in those halls. Here they had crossed Europe that they might find the means denied them at home of entering upon a vocation which they but too well knew was menaced by the dungeon, the rack, the gibbet, and the scaffold. With what characteristic tales they must have whiled their hours of intercourse in the intervals of study—stories of midnight masses in barn and cave, sentinelled by faithful scouts; of holy priests surprised and captured or slain. Day by day some new arrival came with his latest intelligence from the island so dearly loved even amidst such terror. Day by day some one of them set forth for it, to enter upon his perilous duties—

which might have seemed a shrinking from the ordeal. He hesitated, therefore, not a moment in accepting it, and was accordingly consecrated forthwith at Rome. He might have remained an exile, as many per force did, and administered the affairs of his diocese through a vicar-general, but such was not his choice. No sooner did the successor of St. Peter place the crozier in his hand than his face was turned homeward to Ireland with a heart resolved to face his fate.