The Charlottetown Herald.

NEW SERIES — CHARLOTTETOWN, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1892 — VOL XXII NO 2

The Charlottetown Herald
—IS PUBLISHED—
Every Wednesday
—BY—
Jas. McIsaac, Editor & Proprietor
FROM THE "HERALD" OFFICE,
CONNOLLY'S BUILDING,
Queen Street, Charlottetown, P. E. I.

Subscription: One Year, in Advance, $1.00

ADVERTISING RATES.—50 cents per inch for first insertion, and 20 cents for each continuation. Special notices 10 cents per line for each insertion.

Contracts made for Monthly, Quarterly, Half-yearly, or Yearly Advertisements, on application.

Remittances may be made by Draft, P. O. Order, or Registered Letter.

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THE EDITOR OR TO THE "HERALD"

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Catholic Letters.

The power of the press consists in the knowledge—or even in the ignorance cunningly disguised as knowledge—of those who write it multiplied into the number of those who read them. Its purpose should be the greatest enlightenment of the greatest number; so that, while we enjoy a free constitution, we should not degenerate into what Burke has denounced as a "frantic democracy," and that while art and science create a sound material civilization, the Christian Faith may carry it up to divine and everlasting heights. On this view Catholic writers are entitled to found their claims, and the prospect held out to them, if they do their part worthily, should be large enough to tempt the noblest ambition.

A SIGNIFICANT LIST.

There are, I reckon, in the British Empire and in the United States at least fifteen millions of English-speaking Catholics. More than five millions of these lie within easy reach of the city in which we are now assembled. And neither the five nor the fifteen millions are among the stupidest of mankind. On the contrary, they have quick brains and an unmistakable sense of literature, but can we maintain that literature, among Catholics, has a recognized position or is a career in which we should recommend even a man of genius to embark with any confidence? The previous speakers have brought out the difficulty of answering in the affirmative. And in the state of things which this answer implies I perceive our duty and our difficulty—a duty which, I must be allowed to say, clamors for fulfilment, and a difficulty such as only strenuous exertion in our schools, colleges, seminaries, reading-rooms and pulpits will enable us to overcome. We Catholics, I venture to say, have an excellent material from which to make our writers—lay, popular and unofficial, for this is what the times requires—as any body of men in the three kingdoms. The list of our well-known and even illustrious names will bear out our assertion, if it were disputed—which it will not be. But that list would be far longer could all those who happen to be Catholics and writers for the press add their signatures to it.

THE GREAT DRAWBACK OF CATHOLIC LITERATURE.

Men and women exist among us whose talent for literature is undeniable, but when they look for an audience or a market, they must look elsewhere than at home. They would willingly serve the altar, on the apostolic condition; which is as rate in their case as that of the clergy, that they should live by the altar—I do not say make a fortune out of sacred things, no, but have the assurance at least of food and raiment, and the means of carrying on their allotted task. To this one would suppose they were entitled. But this, from all I have seen and heard, is what they find it difficult to secure. A Catholic man of letters who should devote his services to Catholics alone would fail disastrously. Even those who, with private means, or earning their bread elsewhere, contribute to our journals, magazines and other literary enterprises, do so at a dead loss, for the most part. They give in a spirit of self sacrifice what they cannot always spare. Others who must live by their labor fall silent and turn their attention to pursuits which will reward them; while the cheap or gratuitous work alone, encouraged under the present system, fills our catalogues with productions the economic value of which it would be difficult to estimate in any market. Are these things not true, or will it be said that I am exaggerating? I appeal to publishers, editors and authors to bear witness if my contention is unsound.

IT IS THE AUDIENCE THAT ARE WANTING.

Now, I am aware that literature is no mere mechanical art; that genius is born and not made, nor soon recognized even where it really exists; and though I am not talking of genius, but of the more discernible thing called talent and average literary power, still I say that Catholics have not done their duty by it, and that it is the audience, not the teachers, who are wanting. What is the explanation? Is it not such as this—that few among us have realized the changed conditions under which religion must be preached to the world, from the good old days when it required nothing but a church with a pulpit in it? That we still believe in fighting modern artillery with bows and arrows? That knowing it to be the business of the clergy to explain or defend the great truths of religion, natural and supernatural, we go on to argue most illogically that it is not the business of any one else besides the clergy? And even the clergy themselves, are we not apt to think that the sermon and the catechism will afford them all the vantage-ground they can possibly desire, and that "literature" is, at the most, an ornament of their profession, a pastime, or a superfluous luxury? Are we not surprised, too, and perhaps a little scandalized, when some one tells us that the Catholic Faith, being alive and not a dead thing, cannot simply be stereotyped, printed off once for all and done with, but requires fresh and fresh study if it is to be preached—nay, if it is even to be thoroughly apprehended—in a day of increasing knowledge such as that we live in? Do we not feel a sort of indignation when, in addition to our already pressing burdens, we are asked to give material support—that is to say, definite sums of money—to pay our writers on a decent, if not an adequate scale?

FULL RECOGNITION ASKED FOR CATHOLIC WRITERS.

We admire the generous men and women who spend their thousands (I am afraid to say how many) on erecting beautiful stone caskets in this or that country town, or at a Protestant University with a view to the conversion of England. But where is the rich man—I have known one, Mr. W. G. Ward—but not a second who has dreams of laying out his thousands in establishing, or in supporting, a well-written, thoroughly-informed representative Catholic newspaper which would bring out the Church before the eyes of Englishmen, while teaching and enlightening their minds, and would help towards their conversion more than a dozen stone caskets, however carved and gilded. We have all heard of Victor Hugo's famous saying about the cathedral and the printing press: "This will make an end of that"—the Press will be the Church of the future. I am not now concerned with what is false or misleading in that prophecy; but we are all very much concerned with what is true in it. What do I ask for Catholic writers? Recognition, first, as exponents of saving truths, religious, philosophical, scientific, political, and social. Recognition from their own; and with recognition, honor and support. All this we could give, were our fifteen millions at home and abroad of one mind in the matter. The many should be taught to realize their obligations; and the few who are possessed of means which they desire to employ in the service of religion, should seriously meditate whether any more necessary or more fruitful employment can be found for their riches than in establishing the Catholic press.

THE POSSIBLE POWER OF THE CATHOLIC PRESS.

There can be no doubt on this head. The Catholic press—I do not mean books exclusively or mainly, which again, I say, is the outward visible form of the Catholic writer—is, in our day, and will become more and more as education spreads, the great religious order, the most effective propaganda, the instrument of expansion and progress, and an indispensable state and condition of life in the Catholic Church. We have had, and still have with us contemplative Orders, preaching Orders, missionary Orders. Why should I hesitate to avow that the Catholic writer who lives worthy of his vocation is at once a contemplative, a preacher, and a missionary? This is what I would put before you with all possible earnestness regarding the claims which, in my judgment, our writers may fairly insist upon as their due from us. But in what colors shall I paint their prospects? What has the future in store for them? Can I hold out any hopes that they will win that honorable place and the rewards, either of influence or of competence to which I believe they are entitled? Were I to argue simply from the record, I should feel by no means hopeful. There has been much earnest work done at the cost of private sacrifices which has had small recognition, and that when the great public had given the signal but seldom before. Real encouragement, I think, has been rare, although it is increasing, thanks largely to the Catholic Truth Society, which will more and more afford a market, as we hope, for our literature. We have one Catholic newspaper in England of which the circulation reaches fifty thousand. Why is it not two hundred thousand or more? And what is the united circulation of all the rest? I forbear to speak of magazines.

A FEW PAR-SEARCHING QUESTIONS.

As to general literature, the statistics of our society will furnish an instructive comment on the details both of demand and of supply. But never must it be forgotten that it is the demand, both as to quantity and to quality, which, if it cannot call forth works of genius, can at all events discourage and hinder their production by creating what scientific men would call an unfavorable environment for them. On one side, happily, the prospect is cheering. I need not enter into names, whether of the books or of those who have written them. But I do know that Catholic ideas, and ideals, are making a way for themselves outside the limits of Catholicism; and that while so many of us are careless and indifferent, there is a stir, an agitation, a return to principles and practices which for centuries were held in contempt. I see, as we must all be seeing, that the old stock Protestantism of "the Bible and the Bible only," is melting like ice in a thaw; and that, in spite of Prof. Huxley, or because of Prof. Huxley, self-confident agnosticism fails to satisfy those who will have a religion, even if they turn for it to the shade of Madame Blavatsky and the fable of the Mahatmas. The criticism of the Bible is becoming an inquiry into the claims of the Church. And the immense and inspiring ideas of a liturgy which shall be more than a sermon; of a sanctuary which is to be made the fountain of grace and life by a perpetual Divine Presence; of a fellowship of man which, unless it is wholly to disappoint us, shall be finally carried upward and transformed into a visible communion of saints—these aspirations, these ideals are taking possession of the English mind; they are urging men to what is called the reunion of the churches; they are threatening to grapple even with "Mammon, the master-idol of this realm;" while in many lives the asceticism of a sterner age is not lacking, and those who hesitate to bow the knee to Christ often live by His maxims. What do these things, so unexpected and far-reaching, portend? More, much more than the wisest among us can sketch in outline.

THE ERA OF UNBELIEF PASSING AWAY.

But certain it is that Providence will take its own way in restoring to our world of industries and democracies the undying religious idea which is embodied in the Catholic Church; that the Most High will do this great thing with us if we are ready and willing to share in the work—but without us if we are not. The doors of our communion, let us remember, cannot be closed on strangers. If they desire a portion of our inheritance, we are not suffered to say them nay. The promises were made, not to a people or a race, but to all those who are led by the Spirit—a wide and free charter, which is in our keeping, not under our dominion. I can imagine—it has come to pass in other times, and may come to pass again—that a singular transformation is impending; that the alien shall learn wisdom from the prophets who have been without honor in their own country, and the mere hereditary believers lapse, at the rate of thousands, into the ranks of the unbeliever, of the indifferent and degraded, of the "submerged tenth," while the truths upon which they should have nurtured themselves are making a fresh dawn of religion round about them. For religion is not a matter of inheritance, but of faith. And, therefore, the Catholic writer has a prospect in front of him which abounds in hope. The Church of the land is beginning to be lifted, if not broken, upon the waves of what its stanchest friends perceive to be "the inrushing tide of Catholicism." Is it not high time then to spread the best literature we possess, to stimulate and award exertion in so fruitful a province, and to wake from the sleep of futile and antiquated ideas? Again, the growing weakness, presaging near defeat, of materialistic and agnostic science in the presence of deadly superstitions, does it not announce that the era of blank unbelief is passing away? Who shall occupy the room it is leaving?

WHERE THE ROOTS OF CATHOLIC LITERATURE MUST BE PLANTED.

Everyone of our writers who can, in this critical time, expound with force and freshness, in a language level to the common, yet not vulgar mind, any principle of religion, of philosophy, of moral or social science, will be helping to scatter the darkness into which millions have gone down for want of such teaching. Reward from his own side; or perhaps from any side, he may not receive; but if he has light, it is his duty, and it must be his recompense, to spread it where he may. And let him bear in mind that it is only knowledge that can enlighten, and "it is the Spirit of the Lord that giveth understanding," not place or office, though place and office have their prerogative. If St. Augustine has taught many centuries and Cardinal Newman a whole generation, it was not because the one was Bishop of Hippo and the other Cardinal of St. George, but because they were Newman and Augustine, with the Catholic Church behind them to secure their freedom by guarding against error. The greatest name in Catholic literature, if it is not Shakespeare, is Dante. Can we say, then, that only the clergy need concern themselves to show forth religion in its most taking form? The layman of to-morrow will be trained in our schools, the priests in our seminaries. If literature is to flourish the roots must be planted in both these wide fields.

A PRIMER OF CATHOLIC LITERATURE NEEDED.

Would it not be a grand thing if from the beginning it were admitted on all hands that the career of a Catholic writer is not only honorable, but worthy of reward; that it can be made such only by the multitude of Catholic readers eager and willing to accept what he offers them, and prepared to pay a price for it, as they are prepared without grudging to support church and school now? Persons in authority can do much;—the Hierarchies of Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, the United States, Australia, what could they not do if they thought it advisable to stir in the matter? We, who are met here, can do something. I conclude that we require, first, a Catholic Treasury in prose and verse for our elementary schools—a primer of Catholic literature—second, a higher course for colleges and seminaries, which should fairly judge modern literature and exhibit the spirit of our own; and lastly, as the shortest way to this consummation, an access of members to our society.

LITERATURE TO BE REGARDED AS A SACRED CALLING.

But at last it depends on Catholics themselves, on the wage-earners in this democratic time who can spend their earnings how they will and where they will—on them it depends whether we shall have a literature not unworthy of the Faith and of the nation we would win back to the Faith. Numbers are not wanting in us, nor material resources, nor talent, nor industry in those who possess talent. Why, then, should we fail? We shall not fail—and this meeting is a proof that we have no intention of failing. But, if we are to succeed, I affirm that literature must be recognized amongst us as a sacred calling, with its own place and prerogatives, and a befitting sustenance.—*Rev. William Barry, D. D., in Liverpool Catholic Times.*

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ABSOLUTELY PURE

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Minard's Liniment for Rheumatism.

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The fall of the year is a trying season for elderly people. The many cheerless, dark, dismal days act depressingly, not to say injuriously, on both old and young. Now is the time to re-enforce the vital energies with Ayer's Sarsaparilla—the best of all blood medicines.

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