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Our Curbstone Observer

ON THE FIRST SNOW

THIS is the week of our first real snow. They had it in Quebec, to the east, and in Ottawa, to the west, of us, at least two full weeks before it came to stay with us. If this is to be favored, then Montreal is to be congratulated. But, if I am to judge from my personal observations I may say that Montreal would be glad to be excused, as the favor is not appreciated. In the first place, the merchants find that the absence of the snow is injurious to their business and affects the Christmas trade; the farmers find that lack of snow makes bad and rough roads; cabmen miss the snow on account of the wear and tear of wheeled vehicles in the muddy or frozen autumn season; the children miss the snow, because they cannot slide on the hilly sidewalks, and they cannot tumble on the street without soiling their clothes. In fact, at this special season every one wants to see the snow, because it is natural to our climate and is in accordance with what should be our share in the grand universal plan of the world and its variations. Consequently, we are all pleased to have the snow, and old Father Santa Claus will find it much more convenient for his big, heavily-laden sleighs!

THE CORPORATION.—I am now going to come down from generalities to some special instances that I have observed and from the observations of which I have made my own deductions. In the first place, I am confident that the corporation is happy to see the white snow coming down, and coming to stay. Of course the elections—I mean the municipal elections—are at hand, and it is much more pleasant for aldermen to run about in sleighs than to be perched up in wheeling vehicles. It is much easier to get in and out of a low sleigh, on a canvassing tour. Then there is something genial and generous in the merciful snow that covers, like a vast sheet, all the evidences of neglect that might be cast up, as sins are cast up in the faces of those who seek preferment and the popular confidence. It is so much more delightful to glance down the lanes, as you go past, and to see an avenue of more or less immaculate white, than to have your thoughts and ambitions and dreams disturbed and distracted by the ugly sight of garbage, refuse, mud, slime, broken barrels, rotten heaps of fever-engendering undecidable matter. The snow covers all that, and the alderman glides past in a comfortable sleigh, in quest of votes, and he is entirely oblivious of the evidences of all his sins of omission that the kindly snow has covered over. Then there are no complaints about dust and lack of carts to sprinkle the streets, nor about mud, inches thick, and lack of scrapers to remove it. In fine, a generous public has forgotten about all the inconveniences of the spring, summer, and autumn, and the City Father escapes these unpleasant and inconvenient reminders. What a delightful thing the snow, and no wonder that it should have been entitled, by common consent, "the beautiful."

THE SADDER THOUGHTS.—There are, however, some sadder reflections that come to the observant, with the coming of the snow. It was but a few days ago that I took a "constitutional" over the mountain. I descended by the northern slope, and passed through the cemetery and around by Cote-des-Neiges and Westmount. It was a very mournful sight that flashed upon my vision as I stood on the side of the hill, look out over the tomb-marked city of the dead, and watched the first snow falling slowly and in large flakes, upon the green mounds and the brown avenues between them. The crosses, the monuments, the vaults; the humble tombs and the pretentious mausoleums all seemed sadder, more silent, more deserted, more cold and uninviting than ever. All life seemed to have fled. The trees were devoid of leaves, the grass was almost covered, the birds had fled from the scene and sought out warmer climates, the clouds were ashen and funereal, and the air was cold and penetrating. The monuments of marble, granite and stone seemed to rise silently from the earth, like the

ghosts of the dead, and to point—each like an index—towards the region above, where we all hope to meet some day those who have taken precedence in their departure. A silence reigned such as I have rarely known, or felt; and it seemed to be accentuated by the falling of the snow and the gradual disappearance of the grass and mounds under its white cloak. I passed on through the cemetery, and at one place I crossed the track of the guardian who had recently passed over that quiet abode. His foot prints actually startled me, for they seemed to be the sole evidences that life still was to be found in this mournful enclosure. I felt almost like following him to seek more tangible evidence that death had not come to reign supreme in our midst. I passed out of the further gate. I will not go back that way until the suns of next spring shall have melted all the snow, until the grass again appears, until the birds begin to return, until the sap gain courses through the trees, and the foliage begins once more to appear. I will not go back till then—if ever I go back alive, for none of us can tell whether we shall see the vanishing of the snow that we now see fall. And as I moved away, looked back, for a last glimpse at that sad and instructive scene, I recalled lines read over a quarter of a century ago—I think from Beattie's "Hermit"—

"Nor yet for the ravage of winter I mourn;— Kind nature the embryo blossom shall save; But when shall spring visit the mouldering urn? Ah, when shall day dawn on the night of the grave?"

Knights of Coluumbus In Cornwall,

(By An Occasional Correspondent.)

On Sunday, November 29th, another new Council of this Order was established in Cornwall, Ontario, being the third established in Canada during the present year. Special trains were run by the Knights from Ottawa, Montreal and Kingston, and there were representatives also from Peterborough, Quebec, Sherbrooke, Ogdensburg and Malone Councils. In all about 300 Knights were present, including five Grand Knights and many other officers. At 10 a.m. the visiting Knights and the candidates, who numbered 45, assembled in front of the Oddfellows' Hall, and marched to St. Columban's Church, where High Mass was celebrated, and where special seats were reserved for them. After the Gospel, the pastor, Very Rev. Vicar-General Corbett, read a letter from His Lordship Bishop Macdonell, expressing his regret that illness prevented him from being present, and granting his blessing to the new Council. A very eloquent and powerful sermon on the subject of the Order, was preached by Rev. P. R. Macdonald, pastor of Crisler, Ont., and a member of Ottawa Council. After Mass the Knights and candidates marched back to the hall, and then separated for dinner.

At 2 p.m. all assembled in the Oddfellows' Hall, where the first degree was conferred by Grand Knight M. J. Gorman, Chancellor Hon. P. R. Latchford and Deputy Grand Knight E. J. Daly, of Ottawa Council. This was immediately followed by the second degree, which was given by W. McMahon, of Ottawa, and Rev. Father Shea, of Montreal. An adjournment was then had for supper, and at 8 p.m. the third degree was exemplified by State Deputy J. P. Dunne, of Ottawa, assisted by Captain T. F. Clancy, of Ottawa and staff, and State Warden A. J. MacCracken, of Montreal. At 11 p.m. everybody repaired to the Sons of Scotland rooms in the rear of the building, where a Lounful repast was spread. After full justice was done to the supper, all re-assembled in the hall, where a jolly hour was spent in songs and speeches. The new Knights were very eloquent in their expressions of delight over the experiences which they had just gone through. Among those initiated were Vicar-General Corbett of Cornwall, and Rev. Dr. Kehoe, rector of the Cathedral at Kingston, the latter having been prevented by the retreat then going on, from being initiated at Kingston on Labor Day.

ADVERSITY.

Sailors show their best skill, and the real ability of their ships, by using the winds that blow against them.

FREDERIC OZANAM.

In the "Catholic World Magazine" for December appears an eloquent and most instructive contribution, from the pen of Rev. Dr. Brann, on the life, work and influence of Frederic Ozanam. On account of the length of the article we are obliged, for lack of space, to curtail it in parts. But we cannot refrain from reproducing the major part of it in this issue. We will call special attention to the last portion of the essay, in which the gifted writer tells of Ozanam's magnificent appreciation of Ireland, and the saints and scholars which she sent out over Europe in the days of her glory. No grander tribute, and none more exact and conscientious has ever been paid to the sanctity and learning, as well as the missionary spirit of the Irish, than that which come from the fertile and accurate pen of the great Ozanam. Our readers will find pleasure in perusing these passages, and possibly may lead to a study, by some, of the works of this, the most gifted son of France, during the first half of the last century.

It is just ninety years since Napoleon the Great, after imprisoning the Pope, was scourged by divine vengeance in the disastrous retreat from Moscow, and crushed in the battle of Leipsig in 1813. It was on April 13 of that year that Frederic Ozanam, the second of fourteen children, was born, at Milan. He was the son of a voluntary French exile who had been a physician. The Ozanam family, although for centuries settled in France, near Lyons, were of Hebrew origin—that wonderful race which has given to the world the greatest poets, the greatest lawgivers, and the most illustrious characters in history. It was at Lyons that young Frederic began his studies. He showed ability, and wrote philosophical essays and good verses even in his early years. But unfortunately, like too many young Frenchmen of that time and since, influenced by infidel traditions and by the infidel teachings of many of the professors in the state schools and colleges, he lost his faith, so that like the contemporary philosopher, Jouffroy, he seemed at one time, as he tells us, to doubt "even his own existence." But at this crisis in his life Providence sent him a counsellor and friend in the Abbe Nolrot, an adept in guiding young men through the tangled wood of passion and incredulity to the open glades of virtue and religion. Frederic was the youngest of the able abbe's one hundred and thirty pupils, but soon shone at the head of them all; "an elect soul," as the venerable priest, who lived long after his favorite pupil's death, loved to call him.

In France, once the model Catholic nation, a despotic and immoral dynasty, a selfish and infidel aristocracy, and a clergy corrupted by secular intrusion into the sanctuary and by simoniacal practices, had dragged throne and altar into the mire. False systems in religion and in politics were everywhere rampant. In 1830 particularly the St. Simonians became a very numerous and noisy sect of social reformers. The policy and the teaching of the founder of this sect were to build a religion of the future on the ruins of Christianity. His disciples, Enfantin and Bazard, developed his socialistic theories and won over to their ideas many talented Frenchmen.

Ozanam tells us that he was the old, entered the lists against them, and in 1831 composed a refutation of their theories in a treatise which won the admiration and the praise of Lamartine. The condition of society at that time in France was deplorable, owing to the frequent revolutions which destroyed public order and filled the country with dreamers and sophists who, having rejected the safe, logical, and divine teachings of Christ, were tossed about by every wind of doctrine. Atheism reigned supreme in schools and colleges. Materialism swayed the masses, and Utopias in politics and religion were nightly dreamed and daily preached by the visionaries who undertook to lead the people. In the law school of Paris, when Ozanam entered it in 1831, he found only three Christians among his fellow-students. The rest were rationalists, atheists, or St. Simonians.

Ozanam tells us that he was the only one in his boarding-house who kept the law of abstinence on Friday. But he soon found a more congenial place of residence in the home of the celebrated mathematician, Andre Marie Ampere, a good Catholic, who afterwards became Frederic's father-in-law and faithful friend. Ampere was one of the few able men of his day who in France agreed with

the saying of the philosopher, Jouffroy, who, after years of scepticism, publicly confessed before his death "that all the systems put together are not worth one page of the catechism."

Frederic, surrounded on all sides by enemies of his faith, bravely defended its doctrinal and its moral principles from constant attack. But he felt that words were not the most efficacious weapons to use in defence of truth. Deeds are better.

The St. Simonians pointed particularly to the condition of the laboring classes and of the very poor, and taunted the Catholics with indifference to their welfare. The Revolution of 1789, the despotism of Napoleon, and the Voltairianism of the Bourbon restoration had effaced from men's minds the memory of the beneficent monasteries and of the countless charities of the church in the ages of faith, when her wealth was shared with the sick and the needy. "Show us your good works done for the poor!" cried the new quack doctors of poverty. Under the stimulus of this taunt the young law student, Ozanam, and two friends, Lallier and La Mache, determined to organize a society under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul, to visit and assist the poor. They were aided by Mr. Bailly, the very worthy proprietor of a small newspaper, the "Catholic Tribune," which became their organ. "Most of you," said Bailly to Ozanam and a group of his young friends, "are studying to be lawyers, some to be doctors; go help the poor, each in your special line; let your studies be of use to others as well as to yourselves; it is a good and easy way of commencing your apostolate as Christians in the world." But they had little experience until they made the acquaintance of good Sister Rosalie, a name held in benediction to this day even among the infidels of France for her devotion to the poor. She supplied work enough for these young gentlemen determined to be Christians in act as well as in word. It was at the very beginning of this apostolate to relieve the poor that Ozanam wrote to a friend the letter in which he used a phrase that characterized his whole life: "For some time past—above all since I have seen some very young men laid low by death—life has worn a different aspect to me. Although I gave up the practice of my religion, the idea of the other world had not sunk deeply enough into my heart, and I only began now to realize that I had not hitherto been mindful enough of two companions who are always walking by our side, even when we do not notice them—God and death."

The motive of Ozanam and his companions in founding the St. Vincent de Paul Society was derived from Christian faith and from Christian charity. There was nothing of mere humanitarianism or of mere natural philanthropy in their work. It was prompted by higher considerations and by nobler ideals. They loved the poor because they loved Jesus Christ.

Ozanam was a sound philosopher and a safe theologian as well as a good Christian, and consequently he was not misled by socialistic theories in his work. He knew that the real solution of the problem of poverty and of the questions disputed between capital and labor is found only in the gospel of Christ. In his study of Dante and of Dante's master in theology, Thomas Aquinas, the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society learned the essence the qualities, and the effects of the virtues of justice and of charity. From Thomas Aquinas, speaking for all the great philosophers, theologians, and statesmen of the world, he had learned that the right to private property, founded in the natural law, sanctioned by the universal custom and law of nations and by the canon law of the church, should be sacredly respected; that respect for this right stimulates private activity and public industry; preserves public order; for, this right being intact, each man knows his place and his limitations. This right promotes public peace by guaranteeing each one in the possession of what he was lawfully acquired. Defending this right stands justice with a drawn sword, preserving property from the thief and the unjust aggressor, whether he use the name of the state or his own in the attempt to despoil and to plunder. But all rights are limited. The right of property is not absolute. It is limited by God, by dea2h, and by the necessities of our fellow-men. The only absolute owner in the universe is God, for he alone is the Creator. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," and the Lord gives to every individual of the human species the right to live, and imposes on all men the obliga-

tion of helping their neighbor in distress or affliction.

The growth of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul was rapid. In 1833 there were only nine of them; in 1845 they had increased to nine thousand, six of which were in London. Ozanam intensely realized the importance of their work. The social question of class distinctions and of poverty for him was the great question. "It is a social question," he wrote in 1848; "do away with misery, Christianize the people, and you will make an end of revolutions." "It is the struggle of those who have nothing with those who have too much." "If it be the struggle of those who have nothing with those who have too much, if it be the violent shock of opulence and poverty which is making the ground tremble under our feet, our duty, as Christians, is to throw ourselves between these irreconcilable enemies, and to induce one side to give, in order to fulfil the law, and the other to receive as a benefit; to make one side cease to exact and the other cease to refuse; to render equality as general as it is possible amongst men." He never ceased during his life to occupy himself specially with the founding and organizing of new Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul.

Still, the foundation of these conferences for the spiritual and temporal relief of the poor was only an incident in the life of Ozanam. His chief claim to honor and fame is in his great literary talent, his numerous historical works, and his fidelity, from first to last, in an age and circle of infidelity, to the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church.

He became a professor in the University of the Sorbonne in 1840, when he was only twenty-seven years old, and he had for contemporaries men like Cousin, Guizot, and Villmain, who disagreed with him in religion, yet honored him for his genius and for his virtues. Among Catholics he could always count on the aid and sympathy of Montalembert, the eloquent and invincible lay champion of Catholic principles, and on Lacordaire, the greatest and the most influential preacher in France in the last century. For fifty years no practical Catholic had taught in the Sorbonne; while the voices of rationalists and Voltairians had rung through the halls of the once famous Catholic university, denouncing the Catholic Church, and misrepresenting her creed and her action in history and in philosophy. Cousin had taught pantheism, and Villmain had calumniated the church with the applause of crowds of listening students.

But now Ozanam entered the field. The crowd was against him. The students had been corrupted by infidel fathers at home, or by infidel teachers in the primary schools. It required great tact and great courage to stand up against self-interest and popular prejudice. Yet the young professor was not found wanting. He was gentle, but he made no compromise; he was calm, but he made no concessions. He knew the truth, he had studied well his subjects; he had facility, eloquence, magnetism, genius; and the infidels were dumb, while the Catholics applauded, for he spoke with the eloquence of conviction and of truth.

Even when engaged in the arduous work of a professor, and in the midst of most serious studies, Ozanam never forgot the poor. After his morning lecture at the Sorbonne he often spent his evenings lecturing in the basement of the Church of St. Sulpice to assemblies of laboring men. He took a deep interest in this work, and prepared himself as carefully for it as for the audience of cultured young men who listened to him in the university. "Let us see what Christianity has done for the workingman," said he in one of his St. Sulpice lectures.

Ozanam in his beautiful work on the Franciscan Poets brings out strongly the love of poverty which characterized that perfect follower of Christ, St. Francis of Assisi; and Ozanam was always fond of offering him as a model to the laboring class and to the rich, for the life and example of this thirteenth century saint, if imitated by Christians, would leave this world free from conflicts between capital and labor. Ozanam saw these conflicts in the streets of Paris in 1848.

There is no more interesting scene in his life than the death of Monseigneur Affre, the Archbishop of Paris, in the revolution of that blood-stained year. The streets of Paris were deluged with blood. All the evil elements of that turbulent

capital had risen in insurrection, had formed barricades, and were defying and holding in check the regular army which defended the government. On Sunday, June 25, Ozanam, with two other friends who were on duty as national guards, thought it would be a good plan to get the archbishop to come to the barricades and intervene as a peacemaker between the two factions. The brave prelate acceded at once to their request and went with them towards the Faubourg St. Antoine, then the worst quarter of Paris, where the rebels held absolute sway. The people saluted the archbishop in the streets, applauded him as he passed, and many knelt for his blessing. For the Frenchman, no matter what may be his defects, loves courage, a virtue never lacking in the sons of Gaul. General Cavaignac, in command of the regular forces, warned the archbishop that his life would be in danger if he went to the barricades. The insurgents behind them had already made a prisoner of General Brea, although he carried a flag of truce. But to every remonstrance the archbishop answered, "I am going." He was cool and determined to the end. He would allow no one to accompany him or share the danger, but reputed as he went along, "The good shepherd giveth his life for his flock." He climbed up the nearest barricade in the Place de la Bastille, holding up the branch of a tree to which a white handkerchief had been attached, as a flag of truce and a sign of pardon, when suddenly a shot, from a window over his head, struck him and he fell back, exclaiming as he died, "May my blood be the last shed!" The news of the death filled Ozanam with remorse, for it was he and his friends who had suggested the archbishop's intervention. But his blood quenched the fires of the insurrection, which was really a civil war, the most dangerous of all wars, as we know by our own sad experience.

Ozanam continued his arduous studies and labors in the Sorbonne until 1852, when a fatal illness, which had been destroying his health for some time, compelled him to retire to Eaux-Bonnes, in the south of France. There he stayed for some time, and then travelled through Spain. It was on this trip that he wrote these beautiful words: "In this land, where man has done little, I see only the works of God, and I now say, with all the might of my faith, that God is not only the great Geometer, the great Legislator, He is also the great, the Supreme Artist. He has poured it over creation in the floods, and if He wished the world to be good, He also meant it to be beautiful."

The evidence of this Christian faith and Christian spirit runs through all his works; and on this account the pleasantest task of one who undertakes to study his life is the perusal of his writings, as well on account of the learning which they manifest as of their polished style. An admirer of Dante, Ozanam's Dante and Catholic Philosophy is a master work on the subject. St. Francis and the Franciscan Poets is a gem of literary beauty. Civilization of the Fifth Century and German studies are the works of an erudite, conscientious, and impartial historian, who writes in the most elegant and classic French. The matter as well as the form of his writings is perfect; for he was a painstaking, hard-working scholar, who had the virtue of application as well as the gift of genius. The second part of the German studies is devoted to civilization among the Franks. In this work there is one especially interesting chapter on the labors of the Irish missionaries of the sixth century. Ozanam loved the land, the race, and the character of those wonderful Western Celts, who may be said to have reconquered Europe after the barbarian invasion and the destruction of the Roman Empire. The heart of one whose blood, lineage, and faith are derived from "the same Celtic source as these apostles derived theirs, cannot read their fascinating story in the beautiful pages of Ozanam without palpitating with love for the noble and Christian Frenchman who made the faithful record of their labors, their sufferings, and their glory.

In his luminous book we follow these Irish missionaries across the Irish Sea to England and to Scotland; we see them build schools and religious houses for the education of the Caledonians and the Saxons. Then we follow them across the Channel, up the Rhine to South Germany, into France, into Switzerland, up the Alps, over them to Southern Italy; making their way by institutions of learning at Malmedy, Luxeuil, and Stavelo, at St. Gall, and at Bobbio; braving the wrath of the vicious and the ignorant, half-savage