

OUR CURBSTONE OBSERVER

DISCUSSES THE QUESTION OF SELF-RELIANCE.

Looking back over my life, a very humble one, indeed, I regret to find that I have never done anything likely to win me fame, or even notoriety. All of us, at some time during life, are under the impression that the world deals harshly and unjustly with us; but if we go down into the recesses of our natures, we discover that, very often, it is we who treat the world unfairly, by expecting it to overlook all our follies and to accord us great compensation for the very little good we sometimes do. What is true of individuals is equally true of peoples—a race is merely an aggregate of individuals. Possibly the only faculty of any worth that I have developed by dint of practice, is that of observation. I have always been more or less inclined to note the peculiarities of people and to draw my own conclusions from them. May be this observing has been of little practical benefit to me; but it has become a kind of hobby—and who but loves to straddle his hobby-horse at times?

The other day a Quebec gentleman remarked to me that we Irish Catholics are not an observant people. At first I felt inclined to dispute the point; but, on graver consideration, I found that he was right, and what is more, that we all suffer considerably in consequence. What is still worse—by observation and character study—I have found that we are neither observant, nor self-reliant, nor original. Of course, there are exceptions; but, as a rule, this is too truly the case.

It was otherwise with the pioneer generation of Irish Catholics. The men of half a century ago; the men who have nearly all passed away from the scenes of life; the men, even of thirty years since, the men who came here as emigrants with no prospects beyond those afforded by the illimitable opportunities that a young land presented, and no fortune but their robust constitutions and strong hearts; these men, even of thirty years since, had taken place in other communities, amongst other sections of the population, and as a consequence, they relied upon their own exertions and performed prodigies. They organized small settlements, they built churches, they erected schools, and they left to their sons a magnificent heritage, which in many cases has been ignored, or squandered, or otherwise lost. They knew the necessity of religion and of education. Their experience had taught them that a people without a practical faith could never be of any moment in the world; and their observation impressed upon them the necessity of educating their off-spring.

Have we degenerated? At least events of to-day would lead one to believe so. We of the present generation do not appear to have the same zeal for our faith that our fathers possessed; nor are we sufficiently devoted to the grand work of education. We are content to allow others to do our thinking and merely to follow along drifting with the current of events; we boast a great deal about our strength of character yet we do practically nothing to build up an influence for ourselves in this Dominion. We are not original; if you broach any subject of vital interest to the Irish Catholic element, not one in twenty will add to the matter the benefits of his experience; but nineteen in every twenty have some fault to find, some sharp criticism to make, some obstacle to raise.

We play into the hands of the very element that seeks in every way to divide us. We leave to our clergy the whole onus of church work; we neglect to continue in life the education which our sons have received in our schools; we subsidize, as it were, by our encouragement a press that is radically hostile to our interests, and we neglect in a most shameful manner anything that pretends to be a religious or national organ; our parlor tables are strewn with trash literature calculated to impart evil principles to our boys and girls, while a Catholic publication, an Irish magazine, or newspaper, is never placed under their notice. I might go on thus for columns pointing out examples of how unobservant, unself-reliant, and unproductive we are rapidly becoming. It is the very truth of what I here advance that lends a special and serious aspect to the position.

What I have specially observed is that we Irish Catholics lose half our opportunities through general patriotism and special antagonism. I wish to be fully understood, because it is for the benefit of my own people that I write. Whenever there is a question of general patriotic character no man in the world is more enthusiastic than an Irish Catholic. He loves the faith of his fathers, he loves the land of his ancestors, he would be ready to sacrifice his life for either the one or the other. So long as it remains a general matter of church and country he is heart and soul devoted to the cause, has only words of praise to pronounce, and is as steadfast as the needle to the pole. But once we leave the domain of the oratory and sentiment, and come down to the practical and effective sphere of action, at once he becomes an obstructionist. He criticizes every one and everything; he finds faults with the very men of his race and creed who are being honored by all classes of the community. Make a practical suggestion, and he at once delves down into his own nature to find some ground for opposition; mention the name of any representative man, and our patriot is sure to find some flaw in him, some reason for being opposed to him; speak of our national emblems, he is sure to belittle, ridicule, or condemn the same. Yet the same man thinks himself to be a model Catholic and a staunch Irishman.

I know one man, a gentleman of considerable means, and one who would be glad if he were considered a representative Irish Catholic. He makes it a point whenever he finds anything insulting or injurious, in our regard, in the secular press, to go purchase a copy of the "True Witness" to see how the matter has been treated. He thus buys about six copies in the year of this paper; during the other forty-six weeks he never sees the paper, but confines his reading and his purchases to the Protestant press. He never yet subscribed for the Irish Catholic organ; his excuse is a queer one. He says that he does not need the paper, except when our people are unjustly attacked, and then he can buy a copy. Yet this gentleman would feel highly offended if told that he was indifferent to a Catholic and unoppressive as an Irishman. However, the scriptural text stands good in secular life, as well as in religion: "Whosoever is not for me is against me."

BUSINESS AS A VOCATION.

This title seems both attractive and practical, and coming to us on the pages of "Donahoe's Magazine" and over an article from the pen of T. B. Fitzpatrick, we necessarily consider it deserving of more than a mere passing reference. Without stopping to consider Mr. Fitzpatrick's elaborate and instructive definitions and explanations of the nature of a vocation,—all of which applies generally to all vocations in life—we will come at once to his views concerning the entering of young men, or boys, into the great business, or commercial sphere. By what we quote it will be seen that he insists, in the first place, upon the importance of a youth securing all the education possible before going into the employ of a business house; also, upon the necessity for parents to carefully consider a boy's qualifications and aptitudes, as well as his inclinations or any certain vocation. He shows how business men to-day seek, in preference, the youth of higher educational acquirements, and how miniature boys frequently squander their youth, and destroy their lives by being bound at an early age to a business firm.

Not the least important part of this article will be found to be Mr. Fitzpatrick's assertions regarding the duties of employers towards young employees. We give the following extracts, and reserve for next week a still more important section of this treatise, upon which we will fully comment. Mr. Fitzpatrick's views may be found pretty fully expressed in these extracts:—

"What then does it require? It requires more than anything else—good common sense and industry. Industry, it may be said, is the motive power which develops and utilizes nearly every quality of mind and body. The opportunities which genius discovers, industry applies; and this constant harmony of the intuitive mind unfolding the duties of the present hour to willing hands, is a characteristic of strength and success by whomsoever possessed.

"Business employers would vastly

prefer boys of ordinary natural ability and a great deal of industry, than boys of marked genius, but lazy. It is the worker who wins, whether in business, in law, in medicine, in mechanics, or on the farm. Success is more than half won by him who knows how to think and act, and utilize time. If this quality of industry is shown in the school boy, it is one of his strongest recommendations for a business position. Merchants are finding it to their advantage to seek graduates of the High School when in need of boys to learn the mercantile business. And why graduates of High Schools? Let me explain, for I know there are many to whom this appears an inconsistent statement.

"I know it to be true that many able and successful business men never attended high school, and I do not represent it by any means as a necessity to-day. It is true, however, that if these same successful men in years gone by were favored with such opportunities as are everywhere afforded to the young men of the present day, they would undoubtedly in the main be the first and most earnest to avail themselves of such helps for their future progress. I think you will agree with me that it is a serious undertaking to learn any kind of a business, trade, or profession. To plan one's life work intelligently can hardly be regarded as the province of a boy fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years of age. There is such a thing as elective studies in High School and College, and many a boy is puzzled to know what to elect. When it comes, however, to the more difficult problem of applying the elective principle to the adoption of a particular pursuit for life, it calls for more serious thought and judgment. The average boy, fourteen or fifteen years of age, can hardly be expected to possess this.

"To take him from school during these years, and place him with an employer at any permanent occupation, is, I believe, in the greater number of instances, a cruel wrong and a grievous misfortune. These are

the years when he should be at his books and at his play, developing mind and body through the agencies of healthful home and school environment. They are the years which God evidently intended as the Holiday of a boy's or girl's lifetime,—years for joy, and games, and freedom from care. Do not then stifle the boy's growth,—his physical and intellectual,—and dwarf his future possibilities by putting him in the harness too young, and shutting out from his youth forever a chapter in his life which God and Nature intended should brighten and ennoble the years of his manhood. I do not wish it understood that the spirit of this recommendation is observed by the parent, who, while encouraging his boy to attend school or college, yet is indifferent or helpless in the moral training of the boy, allowing him the society of the street for his entertainment, rather than wedding him to the atmosphere of the enlightened Christian home. Proper home influence and training have, I believe, more to do with the development of a boy's character and success in life than all other agencies combined. Although church and school are powerful factors to supplement home influence and training, yet parents deceive themselves and victimize their children by believing that either or both of these great agencies can apply to the boy or girl what belongs to the function of the parent home to give.

"I believe, therefore, that a boy who intends to learn a business, should be first of all, of a sufficiently serious age to warrant serious application. This should be about his eighteenth or nineteenth year, or the age of his majority, and he should be the High School. Aside from being the proper age to commence the routine of business life, employers reason that a boy, who has the ambition to get an education and compete for an honorable place in the class room, is made of the fibre that usually develops into the successful book-keeper, salesman, buyer or manager of a department. If he possess the qualifications that will insure to him any of these positions, he will not necessarily come in contact with merchants, manufacturers, bankers and others in good social and commercial standing. In these relations he should be so equipped as to do credit alike to his own personality and to the firm he represents. To do this properly, he should have as a basis, at least, a High School education.

"Let me present another forcible reason why it is injudicious to send boys of a premature age to learn business. We will assume that a parent after his fifteen-year-old boy graduates from the grammar school, seeks to get him into a mercantile house to learn the business. Finding an opening, the boy starts in at the stereotyped salary of two or three dollars per week for the first year. He sweeps, dusts, runs errands, assists in opening bundles and cases of merchandise and placing the goods in stock. He helps to care for this open stock, and is frequently called upon to assist salesmen with their customers. If he remains, this is the routine work for at least three years, and he averages boy does it in a most mechanical manner. So mechanical in fact, that he learns but little about the business way of doing business things. As I stated before, he starts in too young to be serious, and does not make the progress that he would if he had a well-trained, logical mind. Each year for the first five or six years he receives from one or two dollars a week advance in pay. Thus he will earn nine or ten dollars per week when he is twenty or twenty-one years of age, but here his salary is likely to remain stationary for a longer time than usual. The fact of the matter is, that neither his age nor his capabilities entitle him to other than very moderate pay.

"Another young man who entered the employ of the firm at the same time, but who had the advantage in point of age and educational equipment, is far less likely to have any such drawback to his position or salary. Therefore, I will again strongly emphasize the recommendation that boys be of a suitable age, and equipped with reasonable educational attainments before engaging in business occupations.

"Here it may be proper to say that there is unquestionably very great injustice done boys by many business employers, in the class of work they are required to do. For instance, it was the custom for many years, by the wholesale dry goods trade to oblige boys who entered to learn the business, to work a year or more in the packing room, to carry heavy bundles and to do other manual labor, and all this for two dollars a week pay. This is not boys' work; it is men's work, and should command pay accordingly.

"The boy who engages to learn a business—wholesale or retail—should be dealt with in good faith by the firm employing him, and the firm should honor every part of the contract, by giving the boy the opportunity to accomplish the purpose mutually understood at the time of the engagement. He works for small wages, not enough to pay for his dinners and rent, and therefore, at the end of the month or year, unless he has gained something in actual business knowledge, he has absolutely nothing to show for the investment of his time.

"Proprietors and department managers have in this connection a very serious responsibility, and boys have a right to expect and demand of them reasonable instruction in the classes and qualities of goods they handle, and in business methods as well.

implies, is substantially a great trading mart, made up of many departments, each one complete in itself. It emphasizes the fact that this is an age of specialties; not only in business, but in the professions and mechanical pursuits as well. It is not therefore the versatile man who is in demand to-day; it is the man who concentrates his energies upon one line of work, and does this well."

WHAT HAS BECOME OF HELL?

In the "North American" for June, Rev. Dr. Shinn discusses this question in a manner that has called forth some very strong and favorable criticism. We are in perfect accord with the Providence "Visitor," when it says:—

Dr. Shinn is to be commended for speaking thus frankly on a subject so utterly distasteful to his co-religionists. We hope his deacons or elders or vestrymen will appreciate his zeal in the cause of truth—that they will not be scandalized by his assertion that ceasing to believe in hell does not abolish hell. For the rest, we submit that had he more knowledge he would have made a more telling article. The argument from the visible law of retribution is good as far as it goes, but there are others far more cogent, which can readily be found in any treatise on Catholic doctrine. Why men of his stamp can content themselves with groping in the dusk of half-knowledge when the light is at hand, is one of the things which we have never been able to understand."

Dr. Shinn's article has special reference to the various Protestant denunciations, and its purpose is to show that they seem to have, of late, practically discarded the idea of Hell—as a place of eternal punishment. While he does not deal with the subject as affecting Catholics, still it seems to us that there is room for another strong article, upon the same subject, from a Catholic standpoint. Leaving such able men as the eminent writer above mentioned to deal with Protestantism, we consider it timely to have our own say concerning Catholics. Of course, we cannot take the matter up from the same angle as does Dr. Shinn; he has to do with Protestantism as much as with Catholics; we have to do more with individual Catholics than with the Church. He notes the great decline, as far as Protestant teaching and preaching go, of the belief in a real Hell. The Catholic Church, can be subjected to no such criticism. She maintains as strongly as ever, and as constantly preaches the doctrine

of Hell. Nor do we believe that any true Catholic conceives a single doubt in regard to the great truth thus discussed. The trouble with us, is that Catholics like to lull ourselves into a kind of imaginary security, and purposely seek to deceive ourselves on the question of such an eternal punishment as that of Hell. We do not like the idea; it is repulsive to our nature; it is distasteful even for a short meditation. We would be glad were we able to show that the idea of Hell is baseless, and that the Church's teachings are mere exaggerations. In our anxiety to do away with the uncomfortable dogma of a Hell, we use every imaginable excuse for our own sake, and we convince ourselves that there is really no such place as the unending Hell of the Scriptures. Many, who will not go so far as to positively deny that dogma, actually live in complete oblivion of the fact that such a place of punishment awaits all who die in mortal enmity with God. And some try to persuade themselves that the state of punishment is more a figurative than a real one. This is certainly foolish in the extreme, yet it is none the less a fact. The sin of those Catholics is one of presumption. They presume too much on God's mercy, and they allow golden opportunities of salvation to slip past unheeded and unemployed.

As a rule, the Catholics to whom we specially refer have a great distaste for this subject. They do not want to read about it; they avoid all conversation upon it; they feel shocked and worried if the priest preached that doctrine at High Mass; they do not relish missions, because Hell is invariably one of the topics upon which the preacher of the mission must dwell; they grow to consider it almost an impertinence on the part of a clergyman to preach such an uncomfortable doctrine. The result is that they grow lax in their religious duties; they avoid Sunday Masses at all costs; sermons are preached; they find excuses for prolonged absence whenever a mission is announced; they shun the confessional; they neglect their very prayers, and they wind up by taking the direct road to Hell while most anxious to obliterate the place of their almost certain destination. For many Hell is a source of salvation, for truly is the "fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom," and the fear of Hell is the wisest sentiment they could ever entertain.

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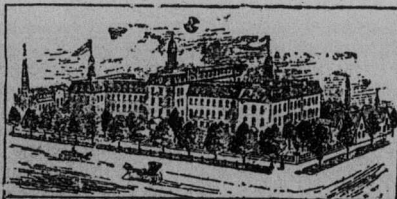
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