

THE CANADIAN

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Members are invited to send us items of news or information that will be of benefit to the Association. Communications upon subjects of interest to the M. B. A. members will always be welcome, but anonymous letters and letters which the Manager does not consider for the welfare of the Association will not be published.

Correspondents will please remember that copy must reach us before the 15th of the month, if intended for publication in the following month's issue, and that space is limited and brevity much desired.

Address all communications to
S. B. BROWN,
Editor and Manager,
Cote Block, Dundas Street,
London, Ont.

LONDON, DECEMBER, 1898.

THE CANADIAN wishes all our C. M. B. A. Brothers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

THE PRIEST.

From a Sermon Delivered at Dubuque, Iowa, by Father Robert Powers.

From the entrance to the exit of life—from the hour of baptism to the last dying benediction—the priest is the "dispenser of the mysteries of God," he is the shepherd of the flock, the physician of the sick, the judge of the self-accusing, the "father" of all. The very first act of his ordination expresses that he abandons the world, and takes the "Lord for his portion and his inheritance." He is ever afterwards alienated from the affairs of earth, and devoted to the service of heaven. Like Abraham, he leaves his home, and kindred, and country and goes into a strange land and strange people, where, like the ancient Melchisedec, he shall be without father, and without mother. Up to this moment he had a home.

Home! The recollection of that dear old spot makes every heart swell, and every eye wim. Home! There where the willing work of a horny handed father, and the tender care of a loving gray-haired mother. Home! There the fields and trees, and streams and stones, and lanes and flowers. O God be with them all; our six young Levites are turning their backs on them for evermore: Like their divine Master, their future days shall be spent "going about doing good," without "whereon to lay their heads." Not only exiles from "the cot where they were born," around which twine so many affections of childhood; but they shall be without the hope of a home to the day of their death.

How happy is the man who has a home! How is it with the priest? Not one of those six shall ever close their eyes in his own house; not one of them shall see a check unnoticed beside his bed of agony; not one of them shall ever cause a heart sigh as his bones sink into the ground; not one of them shall ever feel above his head the weight of a monument erected through pure love; not a friendly hand shall ever be stretched to pull the tall weeds that hide the little mound under which he shall be buried; not a mass, nor a prayer or a public mention, nor scarcely a remembrance of their names shall be heard, even from their own successors in office, after the last "requiescat in pace" of their month's memory service.

During life the priest is an armed soldier on sentry. He is a slave of duty. For twenty-four hours of every day; as long as the sun rises and sets above his head, he must be ready to answer the beck of his people. He is verily the *servus servorum Dei*. He is detailed to keep constant guard over the flock that may be committed to his care. And God help him; and the devil only knows his punishment, if found asleep at his post.

Ah! It is a great mistake to think that the position of a priest is child's play. The danger is that even we ourselves make too light of it. Come with me for a moment to the dread tribunal of justice beyond the stars, and see there a priest arraigned for trial. Other defendants of course are called to that bar too. They have only their own sins to render an account for. Some plea of defense is feasible for them. And no matter how wicked they are, the presiding judge will see the red of his own heart's blood mixed with the scarlet of their sin, and must be inclined to temper justice with mercy. But the man of God! His trial! He whom God had chosen out of worthy thousands; who swore before the altar that "the Lord should be his portion and his inheritance"; who vowed that the last drop which trickled through his heart should not be dearer to him than the interests of his office; who looking in the chalice daily gazed on the blood of God's Incarnate Son; who handled, broke, and distributed the crucified body of the Saviour; who was blessed with educational advantages, and countless graces, who was disciplined, directed, and perfected, as far as human flesh and blood can be made perfect; who was finally placed in the charge of souls purchased at the price of crucifixion; who shall have hundreds, perhaps thousands, of witnesses to give evidence for, or against him. It is not his own single soul he has to account for. Where are all the others entrusted to his safe keeping? Come forth, ye witnesses, and give your testimony, pro or con. Come ye that were young in the early eighties: come your children, and children's children unto numberless generations yet unborn, down unto the day of general judgment; come from the four quarters of the globe, and from the waters under the earth, come ye that cry out in the fiery caverns of the damned; come in your thousands, and testify whether this man did well and worthily the work for which he was ordained, and on which the salvation of so many souls largely depended. Unlike others, he was placed on a pinnacle—the observed of all observers—to be tried by human and divine justice. To him much was given, of him much will be required. For every soul lost by his neglect, blood will be on his hands.

How can the priest—poor polluted breath—dust—how can he stand up for the ordeal of trial? Who will call his life easy, or his labors light?

The priest is ordained to the noblest of noble work. His labors are far reaching and everlasting. The three persons of the Blessed Trinity consulted to make man. "Let us make man." They made him "according to their own image and likeness." The priest receives each new creature from the hands of the Creator, and gives it a second birth "in water and the Holy Ghost." His people's children are his children. They are his Christian heritage from God. He implants in the soil of their young hearts a seed of knowledge which "surpasseth human understanding," which grows and

fructifies in the soul for an eternity of weal or woe.

Having made a life study of the great moral questions, which other people have not the time, nor the talent, nor the taste, to devote themselves to, he is prepared to give decisions on those subjects to his children; and hence he stands out to them, and to all people, as their "guide, philosopher, and friend"—the safest and most reliable friend, as he has no motive but the love of God and no aim but the salvation of souls. He directs the people; he instructs the children: he teaches the poor to be resigned, the rich to be merciful, the servants to be faithful, the master to be considerate—all to be just. He inculcates sobriety, reconciles the family, encourages industry, rejoices in prosperity, and blesses the products of the season. He sets a seal on the lawful contract which man may make, but which man cannot rend asunder—whereby two hearts beat as one in "the only bliss of paradise which survived the fall." His ripe education, profound reflection, and common sense, together with all his years of experience—his whole life, his days and his nights, are expended unreservedly for the well-being of his parishioners. He reminds, requests, rebukes, reprimands, punishes "as one having authority"—precisely what Jesus did and would do—any means best to reform a prodigal or recall a perverser. He looks into the very mind of the Almighty, and pledging his own soul for the righteousness of his words, he pronounces a sentence which the God of justice will ratify. He appears in the Egyptian gloom of approaching death, and his presence helps to spread light in the darkness, and soften a burden too heavy to be borne. He stands over the open grave, and utters the last solemn words which link together the two worlds—"earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." "Blessed are the dead: They may rest from their labors; for their works follow them." He penetrates even beyond the confines of life; he goes before the great white throne of the Eternal, and there pleads the cause of imprisoned and suffering souls; he hastens the moment of their release, and their admission among the "just made perfect," in the glorious paradise prepared from the foundation of the world.

Now take into mind the sum and substance of all these avocations. They are each amazing, immense, supernatural functions. Yet they make the ordinary, every-day life of a priest. So his time runs. Such are his daily duties.

Compare the man who discharges these duties with any other man. Contrast him with the man whose eyes are never raised from the ground under his feet—who plows and sows, and reaps and mows—with no further solution of life's problem than to sink down at last into the earth, and mingle with the soil his plow share turns up. Contrast him with the merchant who trades and traffics in knick-knacks, notions, and other "rinkets," which he wraps up in lies and misrepresentations, and passes over the counter from dawn till dark, from morn till midnight, when the seller opens his drawer to reckon the dimes and nickles, opens his account book to reckon his dead-heads.

Contrast him with the politician, who plots, and plans, and pleads, and spouts,

"Cracking his throat,
To persuade Tommy Townsend to give him a vote."

but no sooner elected to office than he is obliged to swallow his words, stifle his conscience and his independence, sell or swap his influence, make the same promises to a dozen different applicants, trying to imitate the Saviour in multiplying a few metaphorical loaves and fishes to feed five thousand starving constituents. Compare the priestly office with any other class. Ah! There is no comparison between them. His work is as far above thine as heaven is above earth; and in the greater number of instances, as far as heaven is above hell. Their toil is for time; his work is for eternity. This earth and all the things of earth, shall pass away. Man, the masterpiece of creation, shall be reduced to dust as he was. The stars of heaven shall fall, and the sun shall be turned to blood. But the labors of the priest shall not pass away. They shall last as long as the heaven stands, as long as God shall be God.

The world knows not the amount of good accomplished by a priest. He ambitions not to blazen forth his deeds before mortal gaze. He seeks not the world's praises. He goes about his business,—he does good stealthily—does it for God's sake; because it is his simple duty. It matters little to him if his labors are unknown, or unappreciated. Conscious of right, he keeps the even tenor of his way unmoved by adverse criticism or well-merited praise. Like Moses of old he leads his people from the slavery of Egypt into the Land of Promise. He pilots them over the dark tempestuous sea of life into the haven of rest, where all danger of shipwreck is at an end. He breaks their chains of bondage, and grants them to rejoice in the liberty of the children of God. He bridges over the great chasm between heaven and earth. He negotiates peace between God and the sinner. He withholds the stroke of the uplifted avenging divine arm, and wins the culprit from a career of crime.

Who, let me ask, is a man's best friend? My hearers: when you are stretched on a bed of contagion; when your acquaintances, relatives, and even your own children are afraid of their dear lives to look in at the door—and well may they, for behold a roacing angel stands inside lifting in hand the flaming sword of pestilence and death when nevertheless a soul steeped in sin is hanging on the verge of eternity, in fact looking straight into the wide open jaws of hell, when there is not a moment of time to lose,—now is the point—will any man, like Jesus volunteer to lay down his life for that friend? There is one, and only one man willing to do it, and that man is the Catholic priest. He will lay down his life upon the altar of duty. He scorns warning threats; he pushes aside the hand of opposition; he unfastens locked doors, and entering in he administers to that dying sinner the last consolations of religion. He will do it in spite of fate; though the patient be beyond all hope of recovery, ay, though he be in the very agony of death. He will do it even if assured beforehand by an angel from heaven, that his own life must be the forfeit of his action. He will not consider his own life; little matters it. He thinks only of saving a soul for God. Where is the man who shows greater love than this?

In falling sheets of rain, and raging torrents, where storms roar in fury, in drifting snow, scorching heat, at all hours of day or night, you know, brethren, as well as I, the priest is at