

# The True Witness

AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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WEDNESDAY,.....DECEMBER 19, 1894.

## THE DEAD PREMIER.

In Windsor Castle, the historic, beneath the roof of Royalty, fresh from the reception of the highest honors that the Sovereign could confer upon a subject, amidst princely surroundings, having reached the top-most step on the stairway of success, suddenly, unexpectedly, the Angel of Death appeared upon the scene, and in the shadow of his wing the grand spirit of Canada's Premier—Sir John Thompson—went forth from this world. At noon he knelt before the glorious Queen whom he loved, honored and served, while receiving from her hand the grandest token of a monarch's appreciation of merit and distinction. An hour later he stood before the throne of that Eternal Sovereign, whose Faith he had accepted, whose commandments he had followed, whose laws he had obeyed, awaiting the undying, imperishable reward that is promised to every "good and faithful servant." There is something sublimely tragic in the contemplation of that scene and almost bewildering in the consideration of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding that closing of a virtuous, a noble, a useful, a patriotic and a truly Catholic life. Even now, eight days after the world-reverberating event, it is difficult to hold a steady pen when attempting to pay an humble tribute to the memory of the illustrious dead.

"It is not Death alone," wrote Gavan Duffy, "but Time and Death that canonized the patriot." We are yet too near to see his proportions truly; we must await the calmness that follows the first burst of deep sorrow, before attempting to express any opinion upon the wonderful, the comparatively short, and yet most remarkable career of Sir John Thompson. During the past week the whole British Empire has been alive with panegyrics of the dead statesman, jurist and patriot. In such a magnificent, harmonious and universal chorus—unmarred by any discordant note—it may seem difficult for us to make our humble voice be heard; yet we, too, wish to come and place a flower in the wreath which the hands of united admiration and affection have twined for the early bier of Canada's dead Premier.

When the news of the great blow was flashed across the ocean, we irresistibly found our lips murmuring those prophetic lines of Ireland's sweet singer:

"That even in the hour when enjoyment was keener,  
My lamp should quench suddenly, blessing in gloom;  
That even when my honors were brightest  
and greenest,  
A blith should rush over and scatter their bloom."

How truly great Sir John Thompson was did not dawn upon even his most intimate friends, until the curfew from Windsor tower gave the key-note of a

solemn knell that was carried along on the wings of sound from steeple to steeple and belfry to belfry until the remotest sections of the British Empire caught up the strain and sent it rolling back in answer across the wilderness of the Atlantic. What other colonial subject was ever so honored both in life and in death! Flags floated at half-mast from the central turret of the Royal Castle as well as from every public edifice in this Dominion of ours. The hand of the Queen raised him one day to the rank of a Privy Councillor and extended to him the exceptional honor of the hospitality of the Sovereign's palace; that same hand, on the next day, placed a wreath upon the mortal remains of the respected, beloved and honored subject. From out the portals of Windsor, through the gate of Henry VIII, amidst the most striking marks of mournful respect, with guards of the household presenting arms, and with the eye of the sorrowing Queen, dimmed with a sincere tear of grief, watching the funeral procession depart, the dead Premier of Canada was carried, like a leader who had died in the arms of victory on the field, bearing on his brow the laurels of earthly triumph, and surrounded by the evidences of unstinted, unprecedented respect.

Back to our Dominion they carry him, across the ocean on a British man-of-war; a final evidence of Royal favor. Well may Canada do him the honor of a state funeral; in so doing Canada but honors herself. In presence of such calamities as the death of this exceptional man political parties forget their strife, opposing battalions stack arms, on the field, and friend and opponent join in the sad but noble duty of burying the fallen and in recalling the virtues and grand characteristics of the dead. But while the country is paying honor to the memory of the great man whose life was consecrated to her advancement, glory and prosperity, it must not be forgotten that in the narrower circle of his immediate relatives, by the domestic fireside, where weep the members of his bereaved family, there is a shadow of grief too deep, too sacred for the world to intrude upon. For them no Merry Christmas in 1894; for them no joyous New Year, when 1895 comes smiling in. The most that sympathy and condolence can do is to pray that they may have the strength and the courage to withstand the shock, and that they may truly feel how universally the people of Canada are linked to them in the hour of terrible affliction.

Apart from the domestic life of Sir John Thompson—a life adorned by every ennobling virtue and set in a jewelling of the brightest examples,—apart from his public life, of which it is now superfluous to speak—for it is already one of the fairest chapters in the history of our young Dominion,—apart from these, there is another life, one that may more truly be called his own: it is the spiritual life of the great departed. The world knows that nearly half of Sir John Thompson's span of years was reached when he became a member of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. No matter how men may differ on questions of religion or politics, all concede that he must have taken that momentous step after careful study, due preparation, and as a logical consequence of the sincerest convictions. Pre-eminently remarkable for his judicial and impartial mind, his whole life since, whether on the bench, in the turmoil of political strife, as Minister of Justice, as Premier of the country, or even as a citizen, has most emphatically proven that his action was the result of honest conviction. While never ostentatious in matters of religious

practice, in the sanctuary of his soul he offered up a perpetual incense of prayer, and in his living example he preached an unceasing, silent, and potent sermon to the world.

In 1887, a few days prior to his departure for Washington on the mission that subsequently became so famous, the writer had a conversation with Sir John, and in the course of different subjects that came up, the attractions of the American capital were discussed. In speaking of the many great cities of the world—a subject that naturally sprang from the original topic of conversation—Sir John said: "There is only one city I would like to visit before I die—it is Rome." It was easy to see that his great Catholic heart longed to beat, were it only for a few moments, inside the walls of the Eternal City. Wonderful to say; it was granted to him as he desired. Only a few days before the sudden closing of his earthly career, Sir John Thompson stood in the centre of Christendom, he walked the Corso, he gazed upon St. Peter's cross-crowned dome, he rambled by the historic Tiber, he knelt at the central shrine of that Faith which he had accepted with a courage and a determination, even as did Saul of Tarsus, when from God's heaven it flashed upon him.

Did he know at that hour, when his soul drank in the delicious sensations so long desired, that the shadow of doom was hovering over him? We know not. What feelings possessed that bosom; what thoughts flashed through that mind; what pulsations agitated that heart as he beheld the triumphs of Faith exemplified in the grandeur of the Vatican, and in the stupendous ruins of pagan glory? We cannot say. But we feel assured that he was no mere idle sight-seer, nor did he depart from Rome without registering a confession of Faith such as the world, in all its din and confusion, cannot comprehend. Be that as it may; in his religious as well as in his political life, he seemed to act upon the maxim, *nunquam non paratus*—never unprepared.

It is true that the summons from the Supreme Sovereign of the Universe came with a rapidity of the thunderbolt, that no time was allowed for the desired consolation of priestly assistance; but the great and good man was always ready. He was prepared to obey the command of his earthly sovereign; equally so was he prepared to answer the message from the Infinite Judge. It is not to awaken any question of Sir John's religious faith that we touch upon this matter; rather is it, as a Catholic journal, that we wish to point out to our co-religionists the magnificent lesson that both the life and the death of the lamented Premier teach. As children of the Church we have reason to be grateful to God for the model he has given us; as Irish Catholics we may well feel proud of the two-fold honor that the life just extinguished conferred upon our creed and race; and as Canadians we can but participate in the glory that he shed upon our country.

In Windsor Castle, on the night that was to have seen him a special guest of the monarch, by command of the Queen the Catholic chaplain of St. Edward's sang a *Libera* over the remains of Sir John. Of all the honors conferred upon him this seems to us the most significant and grand. The elevation to the post of Privy Councillor, the invitation to the palace as a guest, the royal sorrow, the wreath from Her Majesty's hand, the grandeur of imposing ceremony as the sad pageant departed, the warship detailed to convey his remains to the land of his love—great as all these appear, there is yet something more exceptional in the tribute paid to the Faith of the dead statesman. There, in the palace

from which during long centuries Catholic worship was excluded, with his crucifix, image of Christ, and rosary, that were found upon him, the departed received the last ceremonies that the Church performs over her dead. What a lesson! In his lifetime there were not a few, who through professed devotion to the Sovereign assailed the one who had become a member of Christ's Catholic Church, in presence of death that same noble-minded Sovereign gave an example to the world, that were it only taken to heart would result in blessings untold to humanity. Even there, from his death-couch, under the roof-tree of Protestant royalty, the departed statesman preached a sermon of tolerance and respect for honest religious convictions. May all subjects learn to imitate their monarch!

But all is now over! Sir John Thompson's career has passed into Canadian history. The first four years of this century's last decade will be sadly memorable as far as this Dominion is concerned. In rapid succession three Premiers have passed away, and all within the span of one parliament. And of the three, considering the years of public life of each, and the circumstances that surrounded them all, we doubt if Sir John Thompson was not the most remarkable. His sorrowing family will receive the sympathy of all—from the Queen to the humblest subject; the public, whom he served, irrespective of political divisions, will pay him the highest honors that a people can confer upon a departed statesman. But for us—who belong to the Ancient Faith—there is another and a more imposing duty to perform. We believe, as did the one we lament, that there is a mystic chain of sympathy between the living and the dead, that Prayer binds the soldiers of the Church Militant to the army of the Church Triumphant, while combining the forces of both in aid of the Church Suffering. Our sympathy stops not at the grave; our spiritual union leaps the confines of time. Let us then follow the dead Premier into the realms beyond, and uniting our voices with the Church of God, let us ask in her sublime words that his "soul may rest in peace." In thus closing our humble tribute, in twining this poor garland upon the memory of the departed, truly can we apply to him the words that fell from the pen of another of Canada's Irish Catholic statesmen—McGee:

"His Faith was as the tested gold,  
His Hope assured, not over-bold,  
His Charities past count, untold,  
*Miserere Domine.*

"Well may they grieve, who laid him there,  
Where shall they find his equal? Where?  
Nought can avail him now but Prayer,  
*Miserere Domine.*"

THERE are certain orders of religious in the Catholic Church, the members of which have performed wonders in the cause of Christ and have reaped immortal renown even in this world for their communities—if not for themselves individually. Of such is the Order of St. Benedict. Out of the 256 successors to St. Peter, not less than forty-nine were members of the Benedictine community. The first one to ascend the throne of the Popes was Benedict I., A.D. 578. Amongst the others were Gregory the Great, Calixtus II., St. Peter Celestine, Innocent II., Leo III., and Gregory VII. Twenty-three of the Benedictine Popes have been canonized and fourteen have been beatified. In this century two of the Popes were Benedictines: Pius VII. and Gregory XVI. During all the period since the dawn of Catholicity the Church has been governed for 887 years by members of the Order of St. Benedict. Truly might it be styled the Order of Rulers,