

OBLITERATING HISTORICAL DIFFERENCES.

(By a Regular Contributor.)

One of our prominent American contemporaries asks the question: "Will the day come when independent scholarship will obliterate the differences between Protestants and Roman Catholics?" It adds that "a beginning in this direction has been made in the department of Church history, and the representatives of both bodies are finding a higher unity as they proceed in their search for historical truth." The question as asked and the evidence adduced in support of the second proposition are entirely too general. It is quite possible that in the domain of historical research a better understanding may be arrived at between the Protestant and the Catholic sections of the world; all that is needed is sincerity and an absence of prejudices on the part of the writers of sacred and Church history. But as to the fundamental differences between Protestantism and Catholicity—that is to say the differences in religious principles and dogma, there can be no possible obliteration, save in the obliteration of one or the other of the systems of religion. And as far as Catholicity is concerned we know perfectly well that obliteration is an impossibility—for Christ has promised perpetuity to the Church. Therefore, the entire disappearance of Protestantism can alone affect the obliteration of the differences that of necessity exist between truth and error. But much improvement may be looked for in the line of honest and unbiased historical research.

It has been pointed out that the recent discussions on the Jesuits by the Protestant Professor Zockler, in the new edition of the Herzog Encyclopaedia, indicate a positive desire to do justice to that long and much maligned order of Catholic priests. That an eminent Protestant historian should discover and manfully assert that the Jesuit community has ever been the object of misrepresentation and calumny, is not a new discovery, but it is a discovery that has long since been discovered by the honest and apparently honest Protestant writers should not have long since discovered the injustice and falsehood of the senseless and baseless attacks upon the Jesuits.

It is claimed that Professor Ernst Schaefer, of the University of Rostock, who has just completed a three-volume work on the Spanish Inquisition, has dispelled much of the prejudice that has been created in Protestant minds, against the Catholic Church, on account of that medieval institution. Our contemporary says, that "it is certainly noteworthy that a Protestant scholar can pass the following sober judgment on the work of Torquemada and his followers"—and the judgment of Dr. Schaefer is thus translated:—

"An unbiased examination of the official documents pertaining to the Spanish Inquisition shows that the current view held by the Protestants on this matter is at least grossly exaggerated. While it is indeed true that Catholic scholars are mistaken in their effort to show that the Inquisition was the tool not of the church but of the state, it is equally true that the Protestant pictures of the illegal persecutions practised by the church leaders are at least overdrawn. It is, however, significant that even such Protestant historians as Ranke share with the Roman Catholic Hefele, Gams, and others, the view that the Inquisition was altogether an institution of the state. A close examination of the acts of ten districts of the Spanish Inquisition shows that the forms of order and law were observed in all the trials managed by the Inquisition fathers.

Witnesses were heard on both sides, those charged with heresy were permitted to defend themselves, and legal procedure was observed throughout, although modern ideas can not approve some of the methods applied, such as the use of torture, which sprang from the character of the ages; nor can it be shown that the church was not guilty of inciting the Inquisition fathers against Protestantism. But justice requires that the ideas entertained in many Protestant circles concerning the character of the work of the Inquisition be modified."

This is decidedly liberal when we consider the Protestant source whence it comes; and while we see in it some faint traces still lingering of the olden prejudices, still, on the whole, we must admit that the author of that work has set a very admirable example, and his volumes may go a long way in effacing religious and anti-Catholic prejudices, which have never had any other basis than exaggeration and falsehood. But all this does not indicate the obliteration of the differences, nor the bridging of the chasm, that exist between Protestantism and Catholicity.

The very same writer says:—"Probably even more significant than the position of these Protestant scholars are the opinions entertained by certain Roman Catholic scholars on the history of Protestantism and of non-Catholic movements. The best expression of this independent scholarship on the part of Roman Catholic historians is the series of volumes called 'Weltgeschichte in Charakterbildern,' written by the Roman Catholic professors Kampers, Merkle, and Spahn, and published by the Roman Catholic house of Kirchheim, in Mayence. This series of volumes is a history of the world in the shape of biographies of leading characters, and of the last two volumes issued, one is on Cavour, the Italian statesman, by the recently deceased Prof. Franz X. Kraus, and another is on Frederick William of Brandenburg, 'the Great Elector,' by Dr. Spahn. The subjects of both these volumes were preeminently known for their opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, but they are handled here by Catholic scholars in a way that indicates that the theologian has been absorbed by the historian."

And, in speaking of Prof. Spahn, he says:—

"Even in the representation of the Thirty Years' War and of such characters as Wallenstein, traditional anti-Protestant views are frequently discarded."

Here we have Catholic historians returning the compliment to the Protestant historical writers of the same country. All this is admirable, and we certainly will be the first to welcome an era of frank and unbiased historical study. But we repeat, that all this has nothing to do with the differences that are essential to a state of religious antagonism such as exists between the Protestantism of modern ages and the Catholicity of all the Christian ages. Light may be thrown upon facts of history, preconceived ideas may be modified, and misconceptions may be corrected, justice may be done and falsehoods may be exposed; but still the fundamentals of the two distinct systems of religion can never be brought one iota nearer to each other. The whole mistake of the commentator is to be found in that one sentence, "the theologian has been absorbed by the historian." As far as the Catholic Church is concerned history cannot absorb theology, no more than the smaller fish can swallow the greater one.

An Oblate Knight.

(By a Subscriber.)

We in Canada owe an immense debt to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. As educators and especially as missionaries, their works are all so many columns upon which rests the greatness of our Dominion. The story of the great North-West is simply the annals of the Oblate missionaries, the Tache's, the Lacombe's and the hundreds whose names are engraved upon the rocks that border ever lake and stream from the Ottawa to the Fraser. The same Order has been carrying on similar missions throughout the United

States and in South Africa. News comes that the King of England has conferred the knighthood of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, upon Rev. Father Hecht, O.M.I., who was chaplain to some British regiments during the recent Boer war.

A French commentator says:—"This action, on the part of the King of England, seems to us to well merit being proclaimed abroad by our press (in France), especially if we reflect, on the other hand, that the French priest who has just been decorated by a foreign monarch, may possibly be brutally ejected tomorrow from his cell, by the government of a disowned one, it is difficult not to perceive in the very noble act of Edward VII. a real lesson, even if only implied, which our strange ministers would do well to take to heart."

Father Hecht is from Alsace, and

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was ordained in 1893. He was sent to South Africa to one of the Oblate missions in the Orange Free State. His heroism and his magnificent charity and deeds of worth during the war, won for him the unexpected knighthood. Rev. Father Augier, the Superior-General of the Oblates, in Paris, being interviewed on the subject said that it is the first time that such a title was ever conferred on any clergyman, and that it is the more remarkable in view of the fact that Father Hecht is both a member of a religious community and a Frenchman. This Order of knighthood has scarcely more than three hundred members. The decoration has been always reserved for sovereigns, princes of royal blood, and governors of British colonies. Consequently the honor is still more significant in this instance.

While Father Hecht, young as he is, has the right to prefix the title "Sir" to his Christian name, it is evident that he feels more real happiness in writing after his own name the letters "O.M.I." He, in the sublime language of Bossuet, "returns to God the glory that He sent him," and appreciates the distinction in proportion as it reflects upon the Mother of God, in whose special service the Oblates have enlisted themselves, and upon the community of which he is a member, as well as upon the Church whose militant branch numbers such noble soldiers of Christ. We heartily congratulate Father Hecht and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

More than half a million dollars, to be exact, \$616,618.82 was put in the strong rooms of the big ocean steamships Kronprinz Wilhelm and Umbria, which cleared the port of New York last week bound for Bremen and Liverpool respectively. This money is in the shape of 34,442 postal money orders, drawn by the New York Post Office on fifteen countries of Europe and sent home as Christmas money to fathers, mothers and friends by former residents of those countries who now make the United States their home, and who are anxious to share the general prosperity of this country with those at home."

LONGEVITY AND RICHES.

The vital statistics of England for the year now drawing to a close reveal the following interesting facts: During the present year 206 persons died, leaving estates valued at more than \$500,000 each, the aggregate value being \$800,000,000. The average age at death of the persons who had at their disposition these \$800,000,000 was nearly 73 years. One-fourth of them had lived for source was \$28,500,000, the best on these six had passed their ninetieth year.

The chancellor of the exchequer is likely to reap as rich a harvest from the death duties this year as in the preceding financial twelve months, when the revenue from this source was \$82,500,000, the best on record.

The Montreal City & District Savings Bank.

Notice is hereby given that a dividend of eight dollars and a bonus of two dollars per share of the Capital Stock of this Institution have been declared, and the same will be payable at its Banking House in this city, on and after Friday, the 2nd day of January, 1904.

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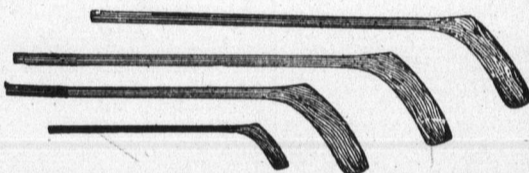
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