

BIGOTRY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE.

"Tell me what you have sowed to-day, and I will tell you what you will reap to-morrow."

—CERVANTES.

"The past does not live a second time, but the future is made of it."



SHOULD anyone be so short-sighted as to imagine that the present ebullition of bigotry and prejudice which is sweeping over North America in the form of the American Protective Association in the United States, and the Protestant Protective Association in Canada, is a mere ephemeral and independent evidence of phenomena having only local or actual existing causes, he is profoundly mistaken. The era of religious intolerance dates far back in history. Various movements having for their object the extinction of Catholicity spring up from time to time, and live, until blighted by the breath of a wholesome public opinion.

A century had not elapsed since the Declaration of Independence, when the founders of the Know-nothing movement fanned the smouldering embers of religious hate into a flame that burned so fiercely round the homes of American Catholics, and the descendants of the men who played the noblest part in the great struggle for freedom, were persecuted for their faith by an ungrateful posterity. The Orange Order in Canada had for its end a purpose similar to that of its sister organization in the United States. But it, too, met an inglorious defeat at the hands of broad-minded and enlightened Canadians. So rife has been the spirit of bigotry in these two countries, especially in the former, that it has found its way into their literature, and some of the greatest of American authors prostituted their genius by catering to the tastes of partizan readers. Ever since Americans began to devote themselves to the art of

literature, poets and prose writers have seemed to vie with each other in scattering broadcast the seeds of religious discord that so quickly took root and sprung up all over the land.

And in speaking of American poets, the name of William Cullen Bryant at once strikes the mind as if by magic. The Father of American song and the pioneer poet of this country, his poetry has many beauties and few defects. Yet this is the man who scrupled not to compose a most bigoted poem, and had the effrontery to deliver it before the Alumni of Harvard College. I refer to his longest production, "The Ages." In this poem the author surveys the past history of the world and by comparing the successive advances made by mankind in civilization and happiness predicts a bright future for coming ages. Contrary to the commonly received verdict of historians he tells us that an impenetrable darkness hung round the Middle Ages, and adds calumny to insult when he says

"And priestly hands, for Jesus' blessed sake,
Were red with blood, and charity became,
In that stern war of forms, a mockery and a name."

The following lines in reference to the monasteries of the same period and their inmates, show the poet to have been blindly prejudiced.

"The well-fed inmates pattered prayers, and slept,
And sinned, and liked their easy penance well.
Where pleasant was the spot for men to dwell,
Amid its fair broad lands the abbey lay,
Sheltering dark orgies that were shame to tell,
And cowed and barefoot beggars swarmed the way,
All in their convent weeds, of black and white
and grey."