

THE POOR MAN OF ASSISI.

More than seven hundred years ago the son of a rich Italian merchant read the twenty-first verse of the nineteenth chapter of St. Matthew, and the words sank so deeply into his heart, and he caught their meaning so perfectly, that, after seven centuries, the memory of his heroic virtue still lingers round the Umbrian Hills and casts over his native town of Assisi a subtle charm which has been felt alike by men so different as Dante and Ernest Renan, St. Bonaventura and Paul Sabatier.

Thus it has come about, in our time, that of making many books concerning the Little Poor Man of Assisi there has been no end, and this is not only the reason why a person should be optimistic, even in this year of grace, nineteen hundred and four, even though now comes Mr. Chesterton, an English critic, with his volume of "Variety Types," containing an essay on St. Francis. This is one more added to the long and growing list of admirers of the Poverello. For a person may admire where he does not understand, and an unfriendly English critic frankly admits that, to those outside the Church, Catholic asceticism is a problem. The essay is short—only twelve pages—but it is rather novel in its point of view and altogether worthy of consideration.

It begins with a discussion of asceticism in general, raising the question as to why St. Francis was a monk and not a troubadour and finally points out an interesting resemblance between the genius of St. Francis and that of the poet Burns. "Asceticism, in the religious sense," Mr. Chesterton says, "is the repudiation of the great mass of human joys because of the supreme joyfulness of the one joy, the religious joy." This definition is not bad, though the word "repudiation" is not well chosen. Christian asceticism does not require "the repudiation of the great mass of human joys" so much as their transformation. Indeed, St. Francis insists that cheerfulness and love of the common duties of life are among the principal virtues to be cultivated by the Friars Minor, and he, himself, gave the brethren an unflinching good example. "For what be the servants of God," he asks, "but certain minstrels of His that do lift up the hearts of men and move them to spiritual gladness?" In the "Mirror of Perfection," the oldest life of the Poverello, we may read his description of a perfect Friar Minor, and a perfect Friar Minor is a good type of Catholic asceticism. "A good brother," says St. Francis, "would be one that had the life and conditions of these holy brethren to wit: the faith of Brother Bernard, the love of Brother Leo, the simplicity and purity of Brother Leo, that was in truth of a most holy purity; the courtesy of Brother Angelo, that was the first soldier to come into the Order, and was fulfilled of all courtesy and kindness; the gracious aspect and natural sense with fair and devout eloquence of Brother Masseo; the mind lifted up in contemplation that Brother Egidio had even to the highest perfection; the godly and continual activity of the holy Rufus, that did always pray without intermission, so as that asleep or at work his mind was always with the Lord; and the patience of Brother Juniper, that did attain to a state of perfect patience by reason of the renunciation of his own that did set before his eyes, and his surpassing desire to imitate Christ by the way of the Cross; the bodily and spiritual strength of Brother John de Landibus, that at that time was strong in the body above all men; the charity of Brother Rogers, whose whole life and conversation were in the fervency of Brother Lucio; that was ever passing solicitous and was never minded to stay in one place more than a month or so, but when he liked to stay in any place would forthwith depart therefrom, saying: "Not here, but in heaven, is our place of abiding. How easily here the merely natural becomes kindness; patience, renunciation; while even bodily strength is changed into spiritual fortitude.

But why was St. Francis a monk and not a troubadour? Mr. Chesterton answers his own question thus: "The two great parties in human affairs are only the party which sees life black against white and the party which sees white against black; the party which sees life black because the background is full of the blaze of an universal mercy; and the party which crowns itself with flowers and lights itself with bridal torches because it stands against a black curtain of incalculable night. The revelers are old and the monks are young." The revelers, no doubt, are the troubadours, and St. Francis chose to stand with the party "that sees life black against white." Certain it is that one saint loved Poverty better than Poetry. And yet who would say that to the dear St. Francis life was black? Was not the sun his brother and the moon his sister? "Sister Water" was "humble, precious and chaste" in his sight, and "Brother Fire, joyful and masterful and strong." "However urgent the necessity," his biographers tell us, "he would never put out a fire nor a lamp nor a candle, with so great pity he was moved towards them." Death, itself, to this blessed barefooted friar of the thirteenth century was but a loved sister for whom God should be thanked and praised. Who amid all the beautiful nature—poetry of the troubadour period shall we find anything more delicately quaint than his description of the crested lark, the bird he loved? "Sister Lark," he says, "hath a hood like the Religions, and a humble bird like she, for she gladly goeth by the way to find her a few grains of corn, and so she findeth them even among the dung; and she taketh them, therefrom, and eateth them. When she soareth she doth praise God right sweetly, even as the good Religious that doth look down on earthly things whose conversation is evermore in Heaven and whose intent is always towards the praise of God. Her garments, to wit,

her feathers, are like unto the earth, and she giveth example unto the Religious that they wear not delicate and gaudy garments, but such as be vile in color and price even as the earth is vile than the other elements." Is there not poetry in his very request to the brethren that in cutting firewood they cut the tree in such a way that part remains whole "for love of Him that did work out our salvation on the Cross?" And who is not familiar with his "Hymn of Creation," or "Canticle of the Sun," as it is sometimes called? Surely that one poem puts St. Francis in the front rank for all time and makes possible the decision that our Saint was both monk and troubadour.

It is easy to see that St. Francis has much in common with the earlier troubadours, especially those of Provence, but his resemblance to Burns may not be so obvious. Poor Burns! What a world of difference between his life and that of Friar Francis! And yet, "for a' that and a' that," the Ayrshire ploughman and the little Poor Man of Assisi are wonderfully alike in a certain exquisite sensitiveness to the beauty of natural objects and a charmingly naive way of addressing all things animate and inanimate as simple friends. The sympathy of Burns for the upturned mountain daisy recalls St. Francis' solicitude for the way-side worms, and the Saint's custom of removing them from the open paths where their unresisting bodies were in danger of being crushed. Burns has one great fault, however, which is to be found in all his poems—even his very best. It is a tendency to morbid introspection and self-centralization, something utterly foreign to the child-like heart of St. Francis, whose one ambition was to be counted least of the children of men, who from his boyhood had loved the Lady Poverty, and even in death chose to be buried with the criminals upon the Hill of Hell. Compare St. Francis' apostrophe to approaching death with Burns' lines on the same subject and note the concentration on self in the one and the utter selflessness in the other. Burns says:

"Why am I loth to leave this earthly scene? I have I found it full of pleasing charms; Some drop of joy with draughts of ill beset; Some gleams of sunshine 'mid renewing storms; Is it departing pang my soul alarms? Or death's unlovely, dreary, dark shade? For guilt, for guilt my terrors are in arms; I tremble to approach an angry God, And justly smart beneath His sin-avenging rod."

But listen to this; the pronoun "I" is conspicuous through its absence: "Praised be thou, O my Lord, of Sister Death, the death of the body from whom no man living may escape, but woe unto them that shall die in deadly sin, and blessed be they that shall walk according to Thy most holy will, for unto them shall the second death do no hurt. Praise ye and bless the Lord for Sister Death, and give thanks and serve him in all humbleness."

In all the world there is but one man who could have written these lines, and that man is Friar Francis, the Blessed Man of Assisi. MARIE A. DUNNE, in New World.

UNDERMINING PROTESTANTISM.

It was only the other day that Pius X. issued a brief in relation to the study of the Bible, for the encouragement of which he has ordered that a degree should be conferred upon Biblical students who, after a strict examination, shall show themselves masters of the sacred writings. The Holy Father is thus promoting the study of the Scriptures the Protestant sects, which formerly posed as the stoutest defenders of the Bible, are now engaged in tearing it to pieces.

The sappers and miners who are industriously engaged in undermining the foundations of Protestantism bid fair to bring the whole structure tumbling to the ground. One of them, Canon Henson, of Westminster, recently created a stir among Anglicans by an article he wrote for the Contemporary Review. The article, which is entitled "The Future of the Bible," advocates the total rejection of all Biblical miracles. These "prodigies," as Canon Henson sneeringly designates them, are to be eliminated wholly. He would have the clergy of the Church of England severely boycott everything in the Bible that savors in any way of the miraculous. He intimates that the "higher criticism" has effectually disposed of the supernatural element in the New Testament, and he would, therefore, have the Anglican clergy refrain from reading in their churches any passages of the Bible which deal with miracles.

The "higher criticism" has decreed that these miracles do not rest on historical evidence, and that, therefore, they must be classed among the fabulous stories which men long since ceased to believe. In this way Christianity itself is indirectly assailed. Pius X. in his recent encyclical on Gregory the Great calls attention to this when he says: "All supernatural order is denied which implies a denial of divine intervention in the order of creation, in the government of the world and in the possibility of miracles. In this way the foundations of the Christian religion are necessarily shaken."

In these words of the Vicar of Christ we have outlined for us the nature of the work the Canon Hensons are engaged in. They are enlisted in an anti-Christian crusade, which gradually but surely is undermining the faith of their fellow-Protestants. A story told by a minister at a recent meeting of Protestant ministers held in Baltimore, aptly illustrates the truth of the statement we have just made. Here is the story as it appeared in the Baltimore Sun:

For using the Bible so shockingly. The parishioner modestly replied: "It is all the result of your preaching. When I went home from church each Sunday I cut out of the book that which you had criticized in your sermon of that day. That verse on the Trinity was an interpolation; so out went the strong verse. Then the canonicity of this book and that was doubtful; so out went this book and that. John did not write the Gospel of John; so out went what was called the Gospel of John. This bit of history was not history, only allegory; so out went that false and deceiving thing. Positively, sir, I have been faithful with my shears, and this is all the Bible I have left—the two covers and a few tatters."

The bewildered parishioner who did his best to make his Bible conform with the preaching of his minister is a representative of the great body of Protestants in these opening years of the twentieth century. Pious souls who want to know the truth and to live up to it are shocked to learn from the lips of their ministers that the Bible, the very sheet anchor of Protestantism, is nothing more than a book in which they cannot place implicit reliance because it abounds in false statements of all kinds. It is easy to imagine the state of mind of earnest, sincere Protestants who have their faith thus shaken by the Canon Hensons. Naturally the question suggests itself to them, if the Bible on which Protestantism is founded is no longer credible, whither shall we turn in search of the truth revealed to men by God?—N. Y. Freeman's Journal.

HOW CONVERTS ARE CONVINCED.

Many and mysterious are the ways employed by our Blessed Lord to draw those without into the fold of His one true Church. With this Protestant it is perhaps some great sorrow which turns the heart; to that Church which promises consolation; with that, it is the claim of authority which the Church puts forward that receives examination and leads to conviction and conversion.

One is attracted by the Sacrament of Penance, another by the firm belief of Catholics that in the Blessed Eucharist we possess the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, the Almighty God of heaven and earth. We know of one such case where a Unitarian, a lady of profound culture, suddenly became interested in that (to her) most curious and unaccountable belief. She examined the matter; as she would any claim of extraordinary power, with no thought of reverence. She is a Catholic. And now we read that the Catholic doctrine of purgatory and prayers for the dead has won to the Church a convert down in Alabama.

The story as substantially related in these columns a couple of weeks ago, runs that Nathan Brown, a Methodist, living in Huntsville, heard through some Catholic friends of the Catholic practice of praying for the dead and was much taken with it. Not long ago he fell sick, whereupon his physician sent a Methodist minister around to see him. Mr. Brown received him kindly, but informed him that his services were not needed, as he wished to see a Catholic priest. "The Catholics pray for their dead," said he, "and I shall need prayers after I am gone." Father Burns, of Huntsville, was sent for, and the sick man's countenance fairly lighted up with joy as the priest entered the room. Being in immediate danger of death, he was conditionally baptized and anointed, but later rallied sufficiently to be instructed in the Catholic faith. He was baptized, and when he passed peacefully away.

The fact, in and this is the secret of the whole matter, the Catholic Church, founded by Christ Himself, and sustained and informed by the Holy Spirit answers every need of the human heart. There is no place of human thought or feeling whether grave or gay, sad or rejoicing, which is not responded to by the great, all-embracing Church of God.—Catholic Columbian.

THE CATHOLIC ATMOSPHERE.

Some reflections published in the June number of the Messenger of the Sacred Heart (England) awaken the reader to the evil effects of that easy-going spirit among Catholics, in the characteristic of the time. In one article, headed "Half-Hearted Catholicity," by one who signs "A. I. G.," the timidity, coldness and time-serving spirit of Catholics, married and single, form the theme of some sombre anticipations as to the final outcome of such a craven tendency. In another, headed "Catholics in Spain," and translated from the "German Review," Ewig Auhetung, the Infanta of Spain, Princess Louise Ferdinand of Bavaria, describes how the people of the Old Iberian Church make the Real Presence a Real Presence indeed, by proving to all beholders, English, American, Mohammedan, Buddhist or Atheist, that when the Blessed Sacrament is borne through the streets the Spanish people, from the King to the cab-driver, recognize that it is Christ Himself who is moving here, veiled, in their midst and publicly pay that homage they would render Him could they really behold Him as He walked in the streets of the Holy City and Bethlehem. This is the living faith of the Catholic country; in lands where there is a mixture of denominations the quality or sentiment called "human respect" operates to make many Catholics diffident about proving the integrity of their faith so pronounced a manner as to account. Moreover, there are, any vacillation in faith because they do not ostentatiously exhibit it in such a way. We must make allowances for the want of the "Catholic atmosphere." Where this is absent, the danger of having insult offered to Our Blessed Lord in the sacrament must be taken into account. Moreover, there are plenty who do not know how to meet the sneers that might be flung at their religion, were the open devotion practised in Catholic countries to be attempted in others where there is a mixture, with dissent in the majority. The points raised by "A. I. G." are

however, apart from this. They relate chiefly to the evil effects of a negative sort of Catholicism, and the surrender of parents to the promoting of worldly wisdom in choosing careers for their sons and daughters. English Catholics do not seem to develop that ambition for the dedication of children to God's service which is the pride of the Irish mother's heart. There seems to be an indifference on the subject, as far as England is concerned, that augurs ill for the future of the Church there. Many mothers think that if a girl cannot get well married it is a good thing to let her go into a convent, yet it is much better to find her a Catholic husband and bring up her children well. This idea is condemned by St. Paul and the Council of Trent. It is an idea far too commonly entertained. Its existence reminds us of the immense power the woman holds in the fate of humanity, and it ought to remind women also of the dread responsibility which rests on them, on the matter of deciding their children's vocations.—Philadelphia Catholic Standard and Times.

AN ALASKAN MISSIONARY.

Rev. Jules Jette, a Canadian Jesuit, will leave soon for his mission on the Upper Yukon, on the Alaskan side of the boundary, after a year's stay in Winnipeg, where he was teacher of mathematics at St. Boniface College. His object in point in Alaska is the farthest north mission of the Church on this continent. Father Jette is a son of Sir Louis Jette, Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, with whom he is now visiting. During his stay in Winnipeg he looked after the publication of a prayer book, catechism and hymn book in the Indian dialect of that portion of the country. This is the first complete translation into the language of the Indians of his wide parish. Translations have already been made into a dialect somewhat akin to this one by Archbishop Macdonald, of the Church of England. The excellence of these books encouraged Father Jette in attempting translations into the more difficult language of his Indians. He himself speaks and understands their language perfectly, though it took him fully three years to acquire this knowledge of it.

Father Jette's missionary district is four hundred miles in length and two hundred miles wide. Over his immense parish he is traveling almost continuously, in summer by canoe, in winter by dog train. He visits each settlement at least once a year, but some of the nearer and more accessible can be given two or three visits a year. The mission headquarters are at Nahato, on the Yukon river, and of this place the missionary is postmaster. Father Jette is devoted to his work in the far North, arduous though it be, and hopes to accomplish much good among the Indians, for whom he has a genuine regard.

WORKS MADE MANIFEST.

GOD'S WAYS THAT BRINGS LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS. Rev. D. J. Stafford, D. D. Pray not to avoid evil, but for strength to bear it. Not that the chance may pass, but that you may shrink and hold back. For human nature is weak and abhors suffering, and did shrink in the person of the Son of God. That will not condemn us, and the cost enhances it. Brutus, it is said, wept for what it cost him when he returned to his home to his deserted fireside. The gods, a pagan writer says, saw that he had abandoned them, for he had founded Rome.

The law of God's providence seems to be to get good out of evil here below, and the final triumph of good over evil hereafter. The great evil was Adam's sin, out of which came the Redemption; the great evil was the crucifixion of Christ, out of it—salvation. And in the long history of sin, suffering, calamity, conflagration, revolution—scarcely one event of evil can be found out of which the careful historian does not trace beneficent results.

Now, if I can believe that Providence gets good out of evil here in this world, and that ultimately compensation will be made for all suffering, I can at least wait. If I can find it reasonable that God should make use of suffering and misfortune as the means of perfecting man and leading him to his final happiness, and even reason is not without glimpses of it. For it is the dictate of my moral nature that it must be so. How I know not, when I care not; but this I potentially believe, and my heart and mind cry out that it must be so, that God in His own good time will make compensation for all suffering and manifest the words of His providence and show His wondrous ways. "Neither this man hath sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God may be made manifest in him."

Think of it, beloved, when misfortune comes to you. Think of it when all your life's labor melts away like smoke. Think of it when the being dearer to you than life is taken from you. Think of it, mothers, when you sit by the deathbed of your child. Think of it, child, when you close the eyes that have looked on you from childhood and blessed you. Think of it when all that gave life a meaning or made it sweet is lost forever. Think of it when loathsome disease smites your home and your happiness, and the cruellest, the most seemingly unjust, most horrible suffering comes to you. Think of it, citizens, when your city meets sudden calamity. Think of it all sad hearts, all broken lives from whom everything has been taken; think of it and believe in it and cling to it to the end—for all such God in His own good time will make compensation. "Neither this man hath sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God may be made manifest in him."

Many of the things which we regard as evils are disguised opportunities for good. It frequently depends upon ourselves which we shall make them.

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BROADMINDEDNESS AND THE CHURCH.

Is it broad-minded to try to pare down the positive doctrine of the Church to such dimensions as will not too greatly antagonize Protestant or agnostical prejudices? Some educated women think it is, and thus do much harm to the cause of truth. It is a want of faith to act as if the truth of God could not vindicate itself. Converts never have been made by minimizing the teachings of the Church. Is it broad-minded while holding to the Catholic name, to make it a point to be as much as possible against the mind of the Church? That it is, is a very common delusion. How often is it heard from foolish women, "I am a Catholic, of course; but I have no sympathy with the attitude of the Bishops and priests on the school question."

Or, "I deprecate the narrowness of Catholic Church legislation on mixed marriages, or against burials of those not of the fold in Catholic family lots, or against cremation, or what not."

There are some Catholic women, commonly those educated under purely secular influences, who consider an habitually "agin the government" attitude, where Church government is concerned, as a most striking proof of breadth of mind; whereas it proves nothing but a lack of power to appreciate law and order—the first conditions necessary for the exercise of true liberty. The only corrective for these badly formed minds, if they could be enlisted on their need, is a deep study of Catholic doctrine, and the history of the Church. Then they would know what the Church is, and the acquisition of this knowledge would compel a mental broadening. How hard it is to be patient with the young High School or Academy graduate dilating on essential Catholic "narrowness," and forgetting that the great minds of Dante, Michael Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare and Cardinal Newman found superabundant scope for the exercise of all their gifts within the metes and bounds of faith! The intelligent reader of history, if he be honest with himself, is forced to the conclusion that the Catholic Church is the only Church "with room about her hearth for all mankind," to use James Russell Lowell's patriotic hyperbole for the United States in the literal meaning of the words for our holy Faith—Boston Pilot.

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