



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. IV.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 1854.

NO. 23.

"ON REVISITING ROME:" A SERMON DELIVERED BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL WISEMAN,

IN THE CHURCH OF ST. ANDREA DELLE FRATTE IN ROME, ON THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

(From the Catholic Standard.)

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten. Let my tongue cleave to my jaws if I do not remember thee; if I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joy."—Psalm cxxxvi, 5, 6.

To open the lips after many years in the place where first they were bidden to unloose and proclaim the things of God—to return after a long interval to the path which the foot, but not the heart, has long abandoned, the path which was trodden in the spring, when all its freshness, and beauty, and brightness were upon and around it—to return to tread it again in the autumn, and see if yet one can find there any of those flowers and those charms which then endeared and beautified it; to collect, once more, the thoughts which those days inspired, and to entwine and unite them with the ruder realities and the sterner experience of a later period; such, my brethren, is the task which is imposed upon me, in being commissioned to address you in your native tongue.—Many of you, no doubt, know how many of the best years of my life were spent in this city; and you cannot be surprised that my affections leap back over the intervening space, and endeavor to revive once more impressions which may have faded, but can never be effaced; to strengthen again bonds of sympathy which may have been weakened, but never broken; to gather once more, and revive to the utmost, those maxims and lessons which cannot but have exercised a constant and most important influence on every period of life.—And you cannot be surprised that these thoughts should take the form of voices, and that sounds which, during the whole of life, have been as whispered in my ear; words often spoken in those earlier days, when the mind of a student in this city is a fleece stretched forth to receive the dew of heavenly knowledge and wisdom that rains upon it; that words which again and again have presented themselves with thrilling interest on the banks, not of the rivers of Babylon where first they were uttered, whose waters were already choked with ruins, but of that stream whose course is almost checked by the tide of industry which floats upwards on its current; you cannot be surprised if words like these come back on this occasion, when, humbly, but not without gladness, I commence the task enjoined me, and that I say, "Let my right hand be forgotten, and my tongue cleave to my jaws, if I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joy."

It is to convey briefly and simply the thoughts and feelings which come back to my mind, after an absence of many years from this dearest spot, that I wish this evening rather to address to you some preliminary thoughts than to occupy your minds with anything requiring studious attention, or in which I can expect many of you to take great interest. It would be an insult to any educated mind, to suppose that the sight of this city does not strike chords in it which will remain unmoved in visiting any other place; or that it approaches Rome without feelings so peculiar to itself, that they cannot be experienced elsewhere. When you visit, for example, the other great city of central Italy—the capital of the neighboring Tuscan States, you are prepared to find the very home of art in its triple form, and allied familiarly with all that is graceful in literature and science. When you visit the Queen of the Adriatic, you are prepared, and without fear of disappointment, to see two at least of these forms developed in their greatest beauty, but handled by men who gave together with them proofs of unbounded enterprise and noble daring. And if you go to the South, you will find a city on which nature seems to have lavished whatever is most beautiful, from the most restless of mountains to the calmest of seas; and, in the midst of that unaltered region, ancient times are lived over again in cities discovered, and monuments collected together of an ancient population. But when you come to Rome, although you know that you will find more than elsewhere whatever is improving and beautiful in art, still you will feel that this is all but subservient to something greater; that these objects, which may elsewhere be worthy of reverence and almost worship, are here but landmarks and tributaries round a higher throne—that if they are brilliant stars in another firmament, here they are but satellites that revolve round a brighter luminary. You feel that you stand at once in the presence of a great religious power, existing not elsewhere; in the centre of a moral empire, exercising dominion in a mysterious and almost unseen manner over the whole world; an empire which does not depend on physical position, nor on the wealth of industry, nor on the might of worldly power; an empire in which you see

at once, that whatever is great and noble in the remains of the older, or beautiful in the creations of the new, are but symbolical tributaries to it, the one characterising the extent, the other the nature of its sway—an empire which holds itself firm, not by grasping this earth, but which, amidst invasions, and wars, and revolutions, and devastations, and overthrows, and discomfitures, shall remain poised in an unchanging and directing level, as the compass in the midst of a rocking and reeling vessel. Whence comes this? how can this be accounted for? When you have entered the interior of any of the great cities of this beautiful country, you endeavor to dive, if possible, into what may be considered its essential principles; you study its schools of art, the peculiar form and character of its monuments; you learn the history of its great men, of its very walls and all they contain. And will any of you reside in Rome, and not at once try and unravel the mystery of mysteries which makes this city so transcendent over every other, and gives a character as peculiar as that possessed by any of them, and a character, too, which is interesting, not merely on the spot, but of which every one must see the influence reaching to the utmost bounds of earth? Stability, firmness, unchangeableness, seem to be the characteristics that rule over all that you see here, ancient and modern, physical and moral. Go back with me over the few years that have just passed in that country from which you and I have come; and, before returning again to resume the threads of which I have but laid out the beginning, let us see, by way of contrast, what amount of these peculiar virtues, of these graces, of this character, if you please, is to be found among those who profess to hold up a different standard of religious belief.

I look back on a period of little more than twelve years, during which I have been absent from this city. What revolutions, what changes have taken place in the religious establishment of that country! There was in it, at the beginning of that time, an upheaving and fomentation of which God only could see the issue; but so promising were the first manifestations, so cheering its symptoms, that we could not but believe that the Master of the house had hidden, unseen by men, a little leaven in that paste, which was spreading through it only to make it savoury and wholesome, that it might be laid as an offering on His altar. During this period, brief as it is, I have no hesitation in saying, that so many men eminent in that body for their piety, for their learning, for their eloquence, and for their zeal in the ranks of the clergy—so many laymen, eminent not only for blamelessness of life, but for peculiar powers of reasoning and that sound judgment which made them oracles in temporal affairs; that so many of the other sex who, to the quiet and not easily changing domestic virtues of English life, added all that stability which social position gives in our country more than any other; so many of all ranks and ages, and positions in life, have abandoned that body, and joined the Catholic Church, that, if you will go back over the last three hundred years, including the so-called Reformation, and count up those who have left the Catholic Church, regretted by it beyond the sorrow for the loss of individual souls—who have been considered as a loss to the Church by the possession of signal virtues or extraordinary gifts; there have been more of this character who have come from the one side, in the last ten or twelve years, than you will find have taken the opposite course during the last three hundred years. And they have come, not one by one, but as men come from a water-logged vessel settling down in an unruffled sea, by boats full, steering towards the noble ship which is inviting them all to take a shelter within her ample bulwarks. And, while this has been taking place, so as to alter completely the features of the Establishment, so as to deprive it of much that formed its beauty, and in the eyes of many followers of its principal mark of grace, see what has happened within this short time, in the centre, in the heart and very life of that institution. While there has been much change in the doctrine and dogmas of that teaching body, you cannot trace any, either in the last three hundred, or the last thousand and more years of the Catholic Church's existence. That momentous, that tremendous, that, I may say, awful catastrophe in the Church of England which lopped off, not, as used to be the familiar language of men, a limb or a secondary, though useful part of the body, but which may be said to have cut off the very principle and source of vitality, by destroying within it the doctrine of baptismal regeneration; that catastrophe, for I can call it nothing else, has inflicted a wound upon it, not merely dangerous, but fatal. It has deprived it of the very principle of dogmatic teaching, for it has struck at the root of dogma. And what is to come next? What is being prepared at this moment?—Another great doctrine, that terrible dogma which

has for centuries wrought so powerfully on the troubled conscience, and from its depths brought forth saving sorrow unto life; another great doctrine, terrible indeed, but which has arrested the arm of the oppressor and the tyrant when going to strike his victim, by its threat or avenging the stroke, by plunging him into everlasting death; that doctrine which, it is admitted by all parties, has given a motive for sincerity and earnestness in virtue, and for a desire to avoid sin, because there was the fear of a gulf before the feet, into which he who is unfaithful to God's commands, or offends him grievously, was sure to fall; that great doctrine is now trembling in the balance, and men are speculating and doubting whether it also will not be banished from the belief of Christians, as far as secular decisions can banish it after 1,800 years of undisturbed possession. Yes, but it is not that alone which is trembling in the balance—it is not the eternity of torment which is now under deliberation: it is the eternity of joy as well, for it forms the counterpoise of the other; the reasons for the one are the reasons of the other; in the hands of the Imperial Judge the two stand poised equally. "And these shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just into everlasting life." (Mat. xxv. 47). Destroy the one and you annihilate the other.

All this is within a very short space of time; and if we could enter into the other considerations, we should see not only how this great body,—which rules so many consciences, and rules the belief of the larger portion of the nation,—but many others, which have gradually stolen on its domain, are in the same trouble; how the greatest Dissenting body, within the last ten years, has been gradually dividing and splitting in every direction, giving those notes of preparation to be heard in the ice of the northern rivers, when all know that in a short time will come a terrible upheaving of the stream, and the mass will be floating abroad on the waste of ocean.

Such has been the aspect which our own country has exhibited within a few years in its religious world. I come back after these years of change, and turmoil, and religious revolution, in which it may be said a new system has been gradually created, and a broad path laid for infidelity and rationalism, to walk into the hearts of our population—and what do I find here? Is there change? Has there been in this time any new form of doctrine introduced? Has there been any revolution of any tribunals to blot out an iota from the Church's teaching, or to cause a void of one sentence in her old and stable canons? Not a change do I hear of. Not one do I see. All is as when I left.—There is new beauty, new grace, a new, and, in many respects, improved aspect of religious things; but change, overthrow, revolution—none! What am I to conclude, and in what way am I to explain this? Is it that ten or twelve years, or half a quarter of a century, which may do much in a northern country, can act but little on the people of this country? Then test it by a far longer period. Go back to a far remoter age; and I will endeavor to give you my thoughts, by putting before you a reflection, a meditation, if I may so speak, which came into my mind—not here, after my return, but some months ago, when I little thought of visiting this spot. It was on the day when the Church was celebrating the festival of two Saints, almost unknown in the English Church, martyrs of Rome. I was asked to say a few words of instruction on the festival of the day—that of Saints Nereus and Achilleus. What are they to us moderns? it seemed to me might be asked. What are two slaves of Nero to the English of the hard 19th century? What sympathy, what tie between the two? How can anything relating to them bear on this century? And yet the mind going naturally to the spot of their martyrdom, would find no difficulty in seeing how much even they could contribute towards strengthening our faith in this cold and unbelieving age. I went back in spirit to their little church on the Latin way, near the gate where St. John suffered martyrdom. I remembered its quiet and apparently neglected beauty, seldom trodden by the foot of pilgrim or stranger, and yet there standing in an integrity hardly to be equalled by any other ancient monument of Rome. I entered there in mind, and recalled to myself that altar detached and looking towards the people, the ambones from which the Epistle and Gospel have been read by ancient sages; and I beheld the episcopal chair which is yet behind the altar, and I read engraven upon that chair that very homily which I had read in the Breviary that day, and which was uttered from that chair by St. Gregory the Great; and I remembered how St. Gregory spoke of those Saints as belonging to a remote period of the Church. If the Saints were old after 400 years had elapsed, yet their memory was still fresh; a church had been built over them, and it had been preserved to the days of St. Gregory. And he spoke of the differ-

ence of the times—how those Saints had seen the world in the grandeur and beauty of the Roman empire, while he and those surrounding him saw it in its perishing decay. And then he described the symptoms, as he supposed, of the coming of the last day; and wondered how men could cling to the world which was withered and faded, while those Saints despised it when it was flourishing and green. And this holy Pontiff, when he spoke those words, believed in their truth; for at that time the melancholy impression was common, that the elements of destruction—invasion, eruption, and earthquakes, that were destroying the ancient world—were the forerunners of the immediate coming of the eternal Judge. "And then with the world," must he have thought, "ends the terrestrial Church.—Why, then, need we trouble ourselves to support that which is on the verge of destruction?" Perhaps it was on that very day, after speaking those words, that he went forth, and passing through the neighboring forum he saw some youthful captives, and, charmed with their natural grace, enquired who they were, and learnt that they were Saxons, brought from a far island to be sold in the slave market of Rome. And did he any longer remember that earthquakes, and plagues, and wars were threatening the instant end of the world and of the Church? Oh, no! He went home to his Colian monastery; he called Austin and Justus, and Paulinus, and Mellitus, and he sent them forth as if he had lived in the days of Nero, when the Church was in its infancy, and as if the Church, instead of approaching the term of its existence, were just starting on its errand of converting nations. What boldness, what stability in the Church of God! These Apostles went forth, and you well know they converted the Saxon race. That nation soon covered the island with ministers and churches. Some, perhaps, of them still remain. The first stone church, as venerable Bede tells us, erected at Larningham, by S. Ceadda, now forms, perhaps, the crypt of the modern structure in that place. And perhaps the original Church of S. Wilfrid is found in a little nook in Ripon Minster. But generation succeeded generation. The Danes came and swept the country clean of its religious memorials; they destroyed its monuments, and often buried their occupiers beneath them.

When the storm had passed away, they came forth, like ants, industrious and active, to reconstruct their crushed and utterly ruined nests. And churches arose again, and more magnificent than before; when the Normans, with their grander ideas and more beautiful types, came into the land, and then again they rebuilt or remodelled without destroying. Ages passed on, and those solid and magnificent churches had become old, and by degrees were going into decay; they were renewed with greater beauty, and it may be said that almost every church and every cathedral in England was reconstructed, to meet new tastes, and adopt fresh styles, a second and even a third time! And now nearly a thousand years had elapsed from the time that Saint Gregory sent his Apostles, to that day, when a tyrant made up his mind to efface and destroy the whole work; and then those churches which some may say had lasted their fair share of time, were indeed despoiled and defaced. And by degrees altars were destroyed or broken, and all that recalled the faith and practice of those that built them was clean removed away.

And now look at the contrast? At the very time when Henry the VIII. and his daughter were plundering and ruining those, to England, ancient churches we find Cardinal Baronius, the titular of the church of Saint Nereus and Achilleus, restoring that little church. It was the same in which Saint Gregory had preached, with the same chair, the same ambones, the same divisions for the different classes of worshippers; and as he restored it according to the ancient model of churches, Cardinal Baronius, in an inscription yet to be read there, entreated his successors, Cardinals of that title, should they have occasion, in course of time, to make other repairs, not to depart from that beautiful type. One little church on the side of the Latin road had outlived four successions of magnificent churches in England, and was merely being put back as it was two or three hundred years before the time of Saint Gregory, when men in England were tired of seeing the beauty of God's house, and thought it high time to deface it. What a contrast between the two? And will you tell me that it is because the climate or the soil is here more favorable to the preservation of monuments, while our cathedrals are obliged to be propped up and restored, not so much because neglected for ages as because natural causes have hastened their destruction? Some ground for this difference no doubt exists, but not enough to account for results. Have you stood by this little church and looked around you, and seen what records of destruction are on every side! Have you wandered among those