

THE CATHOLIC.

QUOD SEMPER, QUOD UBIQUE, QUOD AB OMNIBUS CREDITUM EST.—WHAT ALWAYS, AND EVERY WHERE, AND BY ALL IS BELIEVED

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THE CATHOLIC

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THE VERY REVEREND WILLIAM P. MACDONALD, V. O.
EDITOR.

From the U. S. Catholic Magazine,

ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S. J. (1595.)

BY W. JOS. WALTER, AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SIR THOMAS MORE," ETC.

"And smit with feelings of the olden days,
Revive the music of neglected lays."

Daniel, (1595.)

Born at St. Faith's, in Norfolk, 1561.—Sent to Paris for his education, 1576.—Enters the Society of Jesus, 1578.—Enters the Mission in England, 1586.—Suffers martyrdom at Tyburn, February 21st, 1595.

The eloquent Burke has said, that, "it is a more than pleasing, it is a generous labor to attend to the neglected, and to remember the forgotten." The charming writer, whom we feel proud to make the subject of our opening article, enjoyed the favor of the public in his day;—in those dark days of persecution, when it might have been thought, that they who held the religion of the author in such abhorrence, would not "have listened to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely."—And yet, that Robert Southwell's writings were the favorite of all creeds and professions, is evident from the numerous editions of his works, from the sale of the first publication in 1587, to his latest in 1592, numbering above twenty editions. We are credibly informed, that the great arch-persecutor herself, the stern Elizabeth, she whose hand signed the poet's death warrant, was a devoted admirer of his productions, and carried a copy about with her in her progresses; nay more, Father More and others assure us, that, in spite of her characteristic parsimony, she caused an edition of his poems to be printed at her private expense. It is matter of surprise and regret, that productions once so popular, should have been suffered to slumber among forgotten things. Let us endeavour, to the best of our power, to atone for the neglect, by making some of Southwell's beauties familiar to our readers, and at the same time, by making them acquainted with the writer.

Robert Southwell, third son of Sir Richard and Brigit Southwell, was descended of an ancient family, distinguished in the annals of his country.† He was born at

*In a letter from Bishop Milner to the writer (dated St. Mary's college, Oscott, October 20th, 1822), he says, "I return you thanks for your very acceptable present of a copy of the poems of the blessed Southwell. The smoothness of his verses, in Elizabeth's reign, is the best argument that can be found for the genuineness of Chatterton's Rowley. How that female monster could tear in pieces so sweet a Philomel (admitting her to be destitute of all religious feeling), it is hard to conceive. Accept of my best wishes for the success of your endeavors to direct attention to works that have been but too long neglected, in a most elegant language is made the vehicle of religious sentiments, and in which to use the words of the blessed Southwell himself, "it may be seen how well verse and virtue can be made to sit together."

†The family of Southwell derives its name from the manor and town of that name, in Nottinghamshire. Two of its members were privy councillors to Henry VIII, and to Queen Mary. In 1717, Sir Thomas Southwell was raised to the peerage, and in 1776, the title was created Viscount Southwell. In the English "Catholic Directory" of the present year, the name of Viscount Southwell is seen heading the list of the Catholic clergies of the country. In 1637, the author of this article had occasion to consult his lordship respecting an

St. Faith's, in Norfolk, in the year 1561. We learn from one of his letters, preserved in the archives of the college in Romo, that, when he was little more than a year old, a Gipsy woman made her way into the room where he lay in his cradle, and stole him away; but that fortunately his nurse, who had quitted the apartment but for a moment, returned in time to perceive the vagrant and recover her charge. He is said to have been a very beautiful child,—an attraction which was no doubt speculated upon by the woman who stole him. In after years, Southwell was more than once heard to return thanks to God for his deliverance from what might have proved a career of turpitude and vice. One of his first cares after his return to his native country, was to inquire for his good old nurse, to whose watchful care he was so deeply indebted—a trait of character highly honorable to his feelings. But he did not rest content with inquiries after her temporal well-being; learning that she had fallen away from the faith, and embraced the new religion,—a system more congenial to flesh and blood, he exerted himself, and with success, in bringing her back to those ways of peace, which rendered her last moments happy.

His early years are represented as giving promise of future excellence. Obedience to his parents, docility to his instructors, and gentleness to all, won him every heart. The liveness of his manner was, at the same time, tempered by a gravity beyond his age. In his celebrated letter to his father, we have a pleasing allusion to his early years. His words are: "He may be a father to the soul, who is a son to the body. 'Let him,' says St. Chymacus, 'be thy father, who both can and will disburthen thee of thy sins.' Now, such a father you may have in your own son, to enter your family in the preconcerted affinity, of which it was happily a significant presage, or boding of the future event, that, even from my infancy, you were wont, in merriment, to call me your father; such being the customary style allotted to my present estate [Father of the Society of Jesus]."—In another part of the same letter, he beautifully observes: "God measureth not his endowments by number of years. Hoary senses are oftimes couched under youthful looks, and some are riper in the spring, than others in the autumn of their age. The Scripture teacheth us, that God unveileth to little ones that which he concealeth from the wisest sages. His truth is not abashed by the minority of the speaker; for out of the mouths of infants and sucklings we can perfect his praise."

At the age of fifteen, he was sent by his father to Paris, for his education, knowing the dangers to which his faith would be exposed in the colleges at home. "In doing this," to use the words of Father Bartole, the biographer of the order, "the father little dreamed that he was providing for his own salvation in that of his son; and yet such was the fact. Sir Robert Southwell, after the death of his first wife, had married a lady, who was one of the dames of honor to Queen Elizabeth. This brought him in contact with a court, in the looseness of whose morality, and in the contagion of whose bad example, he had every thing to fear for the integrity of his faith. The consequence was such as there was too great reason to apprehend; Sir Robert fell away from the original MS. of Father Southwell in his possession. On this occasion he declared, with much warmth, that he felt more proud in pointing to such a name in his pedigree, than of all the rest of the family hanged together.

faith of his fathers, and accepted an appointment in the queen's household. Nothing could exceed the grief of his son Robert, when he heard of his father's apostacy. Not content with pouring forth daily prayers for his return to the truth, he addressed a letter to him, which is a model of that eloquence which goes directly to the heart. His father had but to read it, in order to enter into himself, acknowledge his error, and atone for the past by newness of life."

In Paris, Southwell was placed under the care of Mr. John Cotton, a member of the distinguished family of that name. Under his roof he had the good fortune to become acquainted with Father Darbisher, of the Society of Jesus, to whom he became warmly attached, and from whom he no doubt imbibed that love for the order, which afterwards ripened into the most enthusiastic attachment. His turn of mind becoming known to the gentleman who had the charge of him, he was closely watched, and every obstacle thrown in the way of his following what he conscientiously considered to be his vocation. He, however, found means to elude the vigilance of his guardian, and not having money sufficient to defray the expenses of a journey to Rome, travelled the greater part of the way on foot.

A college for the supply of missionaries to his native country, had, by the pious zeal of the good Cardinal Allen, been recently established in the capitol of the Christian world. Anticipating, as it were, the crown of martyrdom that was to be awarded to his zeal, our young enthusiast felt ambitious to enrol his name among the members of the infant community, into which he was received, on the 18th of October, 1578, being then in his eighteenth year. In this retreat, he was enabled to satisfy that thirst for knowledge, which seems early to have taken possession of his heart. His assiduity was unbounded, and he successively outstripped his competitors in the classes of poetry, rhetoric and theology. He at the same time applied himself closely to the study of his native language, an acquirement that was, in general, but too much neglected by those educated abroad. What degree of proficiency he made, is abundantly proved by his numerous productions both in prose and verse, to make our readers acquainted with which is the principal object of the present article.

At the age of twenty-two, he was appointed prefect of studies, an office that he filled with a capability, "which," to use the words of Father More, "was rendered necessary by the number of talented youth of which the English college in Rome could at that time boast." And he adds, "He won the hearts of all by the suavity of his manners and by that modest dignity which is the best guardian of discipline and authority, and far better calculated to effect its purpose than austerity of manners."

But a new scene was opening for the labors of Southwell. He was to quit the shade of academic bowers, and to bear the heat and burden of the day in a trying field of action. In 1586, Father Persons, a name familiar to every reader of English history, wrote to Aquaviva, the general of the order, that laborers were needed for the English mission, the ranks of those zealous soldiers of the faith, who perilled life and limb to carry the succors of religion to their needy brethren, being daily thinned by the sword of persecution. The lot fell upon Henry Garnet and Robert Southwell. But in the order of God's providence, the work never was