

A SISTER OF CHARITY.

During one of the days of the year 1836, a solemn silence reigned under the lofty arches of Notre Dame de Paris. Thousands of auditors, agitated, attentive, troubled by the accents of a friar preacher, held in their breath, stifling thus even the pulsations of their hearts.

Leaning against one of the columns of the old edifice, I saw around me, hanging, as it were, on the lips of the priest who spoke, the greatest and most learned among the men, the most spiritual among the women, the most experienced among the old men, the most distinguished among the scholars.

The friar preacher conducted us, by the charm of his words, into that sphere from whence the soul, rocked on the wings of religion, flutters into space, and sees beneath it all human philosophies. The subject of the conference was, "The Means of Acquiring Faith."

"These words struck my mind—"The religious science is learned by the study of religious phenomena." The shock of that idea was for me as that of the steel upon the flint which crushes it—a brilliant sparkling.

I was under the impression, sorrowful, but at the same time voluptuous, that is given by a new idea, piercing an obscure doubt, and discovering a broad way of light, when formidable words resounded above my head, the preacher exclaimed: "Insects of a day, lost under a sprig of herbage, we exhaust ourselves in vain reasonings; we ask ourselves whence we came, whither we go."

The sprig of herbage was the cathedral of Paris, the stately church of a thousand years, immortal by the arts, immortal by religion! The insect of a day was that French society, forever renewed by its learning, by the splendor of its work, by its riches and its beauty.

The Abbe Lacordaire had subjugated my mind. The feeling of admiration could not be carried farther.

The next day a military duty led me to the hospital. I went there to visit a poor soldier, my sergeant of the Spahis of Constantinople, and whom a malady, contracted in Africa, conducted slowly to death.

Science became powerless, and passed inattentive and without stop by the pillow of the bed of my trooper.

The family absent, scattered, perhaps brought to nought, had never visited this solitary bed. Of friends and comrades, none were seen around the bed of that man who came from far-off countries. He was alone on the earth; none here pronounced his name, and they scarcely knew who he was.

The number twenty-three traced on a small board, was fastened by a nail to the head of the bed of that man. Two ciphers, which had served many a time, which will serve many a time again, distinguished this unfortunate from the others.

I had known him formerly full of strength; a jovial trooper, he enlivened our marches; a brave soldier, he bore life heartily. I liked him, and I had proved his attachment to me in many perilous conjunctures.

Nevertheless, when I stopped at the foot of his bed, he seemed that he did not know me. His eyes were fixed upon me, but no intelligence beamed from them; from his half-open lips, immovable and dry, an irregular respiration, checked, escaped with difficulty. His wasted hand, white and cold as marble, did not even thrill at the contact with mine.

At the aspect of that vast silent hall, inhabited by infirmity, I thought of the immense cathedral where the day before I heard the voice of Father Lacordaire. This crowd of sick, whose bodies and intelligences are almost brought to nought, made me think of that multitude of yesterday so powerful and happy. The sprig of herbage and the insect recurred to my memory.

Pensively I regarded that man, and, I confess to my shame, the elevated discourse of the illustrious Christian orator appeared to me insufficient.

I asked myself, Can genius descend sufficiently high to the earth to touch the sprig of herbage, and the look of the eagle, which is fixed upon the sun, can it, dazzled as it is by the luminous rays, distinguish the insect which dies under the blade of grass? I called to the sick man in a loud voice, but he remained deaf and immovable.

His looks were always fixed on mine, and all proved, nevertheless, that he saw me not. The soul still inhabited his body, but it was shrouded in the most secret recesses; it withdrew itself there, so that God alone could find it again. The senses, the interpreters of the soul, were all asleep.

A noise, light as that of the leaf fluttered by the breeze, came to me. That almost imperceptible sound which I scarcely perceived towards it, his face brightened, his lips sought to smile, and the blood circulating in his veins carried the life to his hands, which crossed themselves on his breast.

My look followed him, and I saw near me a Sister of Charity; the dying man had heard her first. The servant of God came to resuscitate that soul, as the invisible dew of morning revivifies the withered plant. Approaching the bed, the poor girl wiped off the cold sweat which covered the soldier's face, and, bending down to his ear, she said in a sweet voice: "Joseph, how are you?"

"No, 23"; for me he had always been the trooper Meyer; for her he was Joseph.

Joseph! His mother named him by this sweet name under the thatched roof cottage of the village; in this name, almost forgotten by the poor soldier himself, there were the dearest

remembrances of his life; his careless childhood in the forests of Alsatia, the play, the carresses, the happiness, the tears of the beloved family.

Joseph! Not here was he thus named, but by his sister, his brothers and his mother; it was only at the hamlet that his old friends knew Joseph.

Joseph! It was his name in heaven; the priest had given it to him, a protector near God. The trooper Meyer had not acknowledged his captain; the Christian Joseph recognized the Sister of Charity.

After having contemplated him for some moments, as a mother looks upon her child, the Sister opened a napkin which she carried, drew from it some flowers, and spread them on the bed of Joseph. The sick man thrilled, his eyes sparkled, and his hands wandered over the flowers, caressing them.

For the first time the Sister of Charity seemed to perceive me. Recognizing in me an officer of the army, she comprehended that we were of the same branch. Then, without preface, she said to me: "Joseph was a gardener before he entered the service."

Oh! Cathedral of Paris! magnificent accents of eloquence! illustrious auditory! I saw you again at this moment, and I thought of the sprig of herbage and of the insect.

The genius of Michael Angelo, the sublime eloquence of Bossuet, all the human sciences, could they equal that act of charity of that poor girl, who intuitively felt that the flowers were necessary for that dying gardener?

No doctor had printed that in his books, no philosopher had counselled it, and yet the Sister knew it. I had thought she brought some balm to alleviate the pains of the body, or some religious discourse to direct the soul towards heaven; I expected to find in her a reflex of the cares of physician, or the solicitude of the confessor; but instead of the sciences, human or divine, I found charity!

With curiosity, mingled with interest, I observed Sister Martha. Grown old by fatigue and labors, she seemed to be forty years of age, but she was scarcely thirty. Her wanness contrasted with an apparent and real strength; as for the rest, in her person there was nothing remarkable, if it was not that almost etherealized look, so pure and translucent, which the painters of Italy give to their Madonnas, and then a tone of voice, sweet but strangely melancholy.

Her large head dress of dazzling whiteness, her dark clothing, the chaplet suspended from her girdle, and her wooden crucifix—in short, the whole appearance and costume of the Sister are too well known to give here the least description of them.

My unfortunate soldier was the pretext and the subject of a very short conversation between the Sister and me. I informed her that Joseph Meyer had been one of my soldiers.

I knew that she was Sister Martha, a daughter of our country, poor and uneducated.

Like the soldier, the Sister of Charity had left her country to serve; he was a servant of the country, she the servant of the poor. Subjected both to rude privations, to painful labors, clad in coarsest materials, strangers both and for ever to the riches of the science of the world, they pass their existence in sleepless watches for society: the soldier in the camp, the Sister in the hospital; she kneeling by the bed of death, he standing on the frontier marches.

Twelve years after the time of which I have just conversed with you, on June 25, 1848, I rapidly directed my way, with the battalions which were confided to me, towards the Hotel de Ville of Paris, following the quays of the Seine. From the Port des Arts I found only solitude; thick clouds of smoke raised themselves slowly above Paris, and incessantly renewing themselves, rested almost immovable, crowning the edifices. Frightful detonations of musketry were heard, and from minute to minute the great voice of the cannon made itself heard over all the tumult. At a distance the fatal call of the tocsin responded to the roar of the artillery. We marched forward always without hearing a single human voice.

A merchant, whose shop was open, examined the space with an uneasy eye and attentive ear; he said to me: "Here it comes. Run! run!" Then the merchant closed his house, and I heard the sound of the bolts and the iron works of the door.

The battle had taken its most terrible development. Very soon we were in the presence of the insurgents. General Davivier, who had just been mortally wounded, and whom I saw, alas! for the last time, occupied the square of the Hotel de Ville; behind him two pieces of artillery swept a street. At the entrance of the square, on the side of the river, a battalion of young mobile guards, all bloody from its glorious combats of the day before, prepared itself for the attack of the barricades which enclosed us more and more.

The spectacle of destruction could not be more complete. The houses tumbled down, struck by the bullets. From those parts of the walls which still stood in the midst of the surges of dust, human bodies, living yet, glided rapidly to be enshrouded under the rubbish. Some of these insurgents got up again bruised, and seeking to flee in the shadow to rejoin their accomplices.

Some cannon and fuses appeared stealthily at the windows, and, directed by invisible hands, struck down our companions. Loud cries arose on all sides, the cries of rage stifling those of anguish. On the side of the inclined roofs a spark appeared frequently,

and the ball struck at random among us. Then a well-directed bullet smashed the roofs and the shooters. The vent-holes of the cellars vomited the dead; the houses pierced open, tottering, seemed to balance themselves; the ground was strewn with diamonds of broken glass, which fantastically sparkled in the sun, and cracked under the feet; along the parapet of the quay the wounded, in their agony, begged us for a glass of water.

However formidable was the noise of the place where we stopped for an instant, a distant roar, more formidable still, reached us from all points of the horizon: Paris struggled in the grasp of a supreme crisis; civilization was then to die or live; those to whom reason had not told it divined it by instinct; it is this which explains the reciprocal fury of the battle.

In the meantime the soldiers brought in every moment prisoners, arrested with arms in their hands.

Our turn came to march to the barricades. A strong column, formed of troops of the line of mobile guards and national guards, run up from the Provinces, began to move. A score of mobile guards, children of Paris, formed the vanguard and the flankers. They took this post without an order, because it pleased them. One of them, whom I seized strong by the arm to hold him in his rank, said to me: "Hold, hold, I wish to see myself, and your grenadiers hinder me." This young fellow had certainly never read Charron, and he expressed the same idea in the same terms: Charron replies that a brave gentleman "mounted on the heaps of corpses to see more nearly."

Three barricades were successively carried; the fourth was a wall, a real embattled free-stone wall, that it was impossible to approach without artillery. The order was given to turn the position, and to walk by the houses; we therefore beat a retreat, a little precipitately, into the crossing streets.

I entered one of these streets at the same time as about thirty of the same batons, soldiers of the line, mobile guards and national guards of the Provinces; the rest of the column, thrown into disorder, sought a cover beyond the first barricade carried by us. The street in which we marched was so contiguous to the formidable barricade that we were still in the midst of the atmosphere of smoke produced by the general discharge. I comprehended suddenly that we rested on the ground of the insurrection, and that we would be taken if the defenders of the barricade, freeing themselves from the obstacle, attempted an offensive return.

I would wish that words could paint as rapidly as the facts I am about to attempt to recount unrolled themselves. All that was as prompt as thought.

In a damp and gloomy courtyard, on the bloody straw, the Sisters of Charity had established an ambulatory hospital. They were ignorant to which of the parties this corner of the earth belonged; they knelt near the wounded; soldiers, mobile guards, insurgents, or national guards, they dressed the wounded, praying to God for them. Sullen and overcast, the men, just now so terrible, abandoned themselves to the hands of these poor girls.

When, with one glance of the eye, I saw what I have written so slowly, two soldiers of the line brought in a mobile guard, whose shoulder had been shattered by a ball, and who sent forth piteous cries. He was a youth of sixteen years, with blue eyes, fair hair and fresh complexion.

A Sister of Charity, bent over a dying insurgent, rose up, supported the young man in her arms, and tore off his tunic quickly; she still held the uniform of the youth in her hand, when a band of insurgents issued tumultuously from the house which faced the ambulance, and of which the door had just fallen at our feet. The chief of that band, clad with a blue blouse, carried a hunting knife at his red girdle, a handkerchief rolled round his head; his mouth, blackened by the cartridges, gave him a strange appearance of ferocity. He saw before all the uniform of the mobile guard in the hands of the Sister of Charity; she had turned her back to me, and her face was hidden from me.

"Traitor," cried the insurgent, with a horrible imprecation, "thou diest."

Then he threw himself upon the mobile guard; the Parisian youth, crouched on his back, got up, seeking to shun the blade of the hunting knife; the man had thrown upon the ground his discharged fusee.

Raising herself, the Sister of Charity made the sign of the cross, and placed herself in front of the insurgent. But he was no longer a man—vengeance, intoxication, perhaps, and he struck the Sister of Charity with the blade of his cut-throat. She reeled, and, falling on her knees near the noble guard, she wished to protect him still with her body, for already the blade was raised for the second time.

Then a provincial national guard flung himself between the Sister and the assassin. With one stroke of the bayonet he extended the insurgent at his feet, whilst the blade of the cut-throat, directed toward the Sister, broke itself upon the cartridge box of the guard.

From both sides the other with the muzzles to the opposing breasts; they batted hand to hand, and very shortly the smoke became so thick that we could no longer distinguish friends from enemies. But not a cry, not a word. They lasted only two minutes, but they were two terrible minutes. The onset was heard by our troops, and then the military tramp was heard; the chasseurs a foot appeared at the

end of the street, the insurgents precipitated themselves into the house whence they came, barricading themselves in it.

Swept away by the breeze, the smoke began to ascend; between the two blue clouds, which curl upward into space, I saw Sister Martha on her knees, with blood on her breast, her countenance calm; standing near her, leaning upon his fusée, I saw the trooper, Joseph Meyer, who also looked up to heaven with her.

God had permitted that the Sister of Charity might preserve the soldier, and that the soldier might serve the Sister of Charity.

Before his departure from Paris, when the struggle was finished, I saw Joseph Meyer again, who for a long time I had believed dead. I learned from him how, by dint of watchings, of cares, of flowers, charity of words, charity of tears, charity of hopes, Sister Martha had restored him to life.

During fifteen months Sister Martha disputed with death for the poor soldier who was unknown to her. For that man, poor as she was, ignorant as she was, the Sister was prodigal of the treasures of charity. Sometimes, in the spring, it was a ray of the sun that with difficulty she directed around him, to make his heart young again; in the winter, she brought some vine branches, which cracked on the hearth, and of which the sparkles, dancing idly, re-awakened in the memory of Joseph happy recollections, for he smiled; in summer, Sister Martha had mellow fruit for the poor soldier.

The succor of science might have been powerless, the tears of the family might have been insufficient; charity worked the miracle.

Joseph Meyer at last retook the road so his native village, carrying away in the bottom of his knapsack the image of St. Joseph, rudely engraved in lead, which Sister Martha had got blessed for him. In this knapsack the Sister slipped some large woollen stockings, that the traveller might not be cold in crossing the Vosges.

"Joseph," said she to him, on the day of departure, "be ye always charitable."

When my soldier had finished his recital, I thought of what Father Lacordaire said: "The religious science is learned by the study of the religious phenomena."

That idea brought me back again to the sprig of herbage and the insect; then to the Cathedral of Notre Dame of Paris, and to the people I had seen there—illustrious people, rich people, learned people, and who, perhaps, can never comprehend the difference which God has put between alms and charity.

Joseph Meyer had told me of his happiness. A happy husband, father of a charming family, laborious workman, he saw comfort surrounding his homestead as with a frame, and joy springing up around him. A man of virtue and courage, he had not hesitated in the hour of danger to the country; he seized his fusée, and hastened to the call of France. God had recompensed him. — Translated from the French, by John Stawal.

IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND.

Lord Halifax Working for Reunion With Rome.

The *Church Times*, London, Eng., Feb. 15, contains the full text of a remarkable address delivered before the Church Union Society of England by Lord Halifax, President of the above society. The article numbers about twelve thousand words, and is, in the opinion of the *London Times*, "the most important article respecting the reunion of the Church of England with the Roman Catholic Church that has appeared in a century. Coming from one of the soundest thinkers and most eloquent speakers in the Church of England, it is destined to create a movement which may result in a practical reunion on the basis proposed by Leo XIII."

In the opening of his address, Lord Halifax lays the axe at the roots of the "Branch Theory of Anglicanism" in the following eloquent words:

"When for controversial purposes it is attempted to discover an origin for the English Church other than that of Rome, or to prove that England from the earliest times down to the sixteenth century was not united to Rome by the closest links of an external unity and a common faith, those who are acquainted with the facts are tempted to doubt our honesty or at least the trustworthiness of our historical methods."

Speaking of the unity of the Church, further on in the article, he says: "The unity of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ lasted one thousand five hundred years. For one thousand five hundred years men might talk of the Church of England, the Church of France or the Church of Spain, but all knew that as there was but one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism and one Eucharist, so there was but one Church, and all looked to Rome as the great central See, grouped around which the different Churches were supported in the profession of a common faith, by the link of an external authority which, binding them to itself, bound them close to one another."

JAMES I. AND THE PRIMACY OF THE POPE.

Referring to the primacy of St. Peter, Lord Halifax says, that King James I., of England, "owned the Pope as Patriarch of the West," saying, in a speech delivered in 1603, "Let him be *Primus Episcoporum inter Episcopos*

or *Princeps Episcoporum*, so that it be no otherwise than Peter was *Princeps Apostolorum*."

We can not, if we would, shut our eyes to the fact that there is in Great Britain and Germany a rising tide of opinion which is setting towards what Cardinal Gibbons has aptly termed "The Faith of Our Fathers." The scattered sheep wandering in the wilderness of doubt and dissent have heard the voice of the great shepherd of the sheepfold, and are longing for the peace of that strong fold against which vulpine foes rage in vain, and against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. In England the Established Church is beset by a cry for disestablishment, by fees without and false teachers within. In Scotland, Presbyterianism has no hold upon more than 10 per cent. of the people, and that the doctrines of Calvin, Knox and others of that ilk are scorned and condemned by the brightest and best of the young men and women of Scotland and that part of the north of Ireland settled by the Presbyterians—the drift is towards the Catholic Church or infidelity. In Germany, the Protestant sects, in the opinion of many Protestant ministers and professors of Lutheran theology, are steeped in agnosticism, and the people are drifting to sensuality and paganism. There was a time when American-Protestant theological students were sent to Berlin, for a finishing course in theology, but to-day, Protestant ministers throughout the United States would as soon think of sending students to a small pox hospital as to the so-called theological schools of Germany, which are the hot-houses of materialism and all manner of ungodliness. The present condition of the Protestants in Germany was foreseen by that wonderful man of gigantic brain power, Leibnitz, who, in a letter to Bossuet, on the subject of reunion with the Church of Rome, said, "Reunion will yet take place; it is the will of God." Bossuet, in a letter written on the 12th of August, 1671, "expresses a hope that the time is not distant when all Germany shall rejoice in the restoration of Catholic unity."

In 1821, Bishop Doyle, of Kildare, writing of Church reunion in Ireland, said, "The union is not so difficult as may appear to many; its points of agreement are many. Its failure will be due more to State policy than to a difference of belief."

PRICES THE FOES OF RELIGIOUS UNITY.

The latest news from England is that Cardinal Vaughan, who is inclined to be sceptical about a reunion with the Church of England, will accompany to Rome the several English Catholic Bishops who have been summoned to appear before Leo XIII., and give their views relative to a reunion with the Anglican body. The undertaking is very dear to the heart of the Supreme Pontiff, who recently caused to be placed before him the documents filed during the pontificate of Urban VII., who sent many prominent ecclesiastics into England and Germany to bring about a reunion, which might have been accomplished but for the wiles of the statesmen of those countries, who, for selfish reasons, desired to keep the fires of religious discord burning. As was well said by one of the Cardinals who visited Germany in 1632 for the purpose of bringing about a reunion, "The foes of religious unity are not as many as supposed, priests, but princes." In this critical age when everything is weighed, measured, or analyzed, men and women who are sound thinkers are asking themselves it is wise to trust ourselves to so-called religious teachers who are blown about like chaff in every wind of vain doctrine, who change their views of doctrines as rapidly as a chameleon changes color? And is it not best to knock at the little wicket gate in the Temple of Truth where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light of God's most holy sight? Let everything that man can do be done to speed the day when there shall be but one Church throughout the world. The humblest can do something toward the work in hand.—G. Wilfred Pearce in Boston Pilot.

CHURCH OF THE FUTURE.

A Prominent Chicago Protestant Predicts It Will Be the Catholic Church.

At a meeting of the Sunset Club in Chicago, last Thursday, the subject of discussion was "The Church of the Future." C. C. Bonney, president of the Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair, presided and speeches were made by a number of Protestant divines, all pointing to the Church of the future as a liberal Church bound together by the fundamental truths of religion. Howard L. Smith, a prominent Protestant, surprised his hearers by predicting that the Church of the future would be the Catholic Church. He based this not so much on his knowledge of Catholicism. The Church of the future would be due to organization. The Catholic Church, he said, would overcome the broken, disorganized sects of Protestantism as easily as the regular army would defeat a mob of strikers. Independence of religion was chaos in religion. Let each man be his own pope and you have religious anarchy, which is the same thing as sectarianism. Catholicism and agnosticism would divide the twentieth century between them.

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