

## THE CANADIAN

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Members are invited to send us items of news or information of a local character to the Association. Contributions upon subjects of interest to the Association will always be welcome, but anonymous letters and those which the Manager does not consider to be of value to the Association will not be published.

Correspondents will please remember that copy must reach us before the 10th of the month, if intended for publication in the following month's issue, and that space is limited and every line is precious.

Address all communications to

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LONDON, NOVEMBER, 1895.

## The Rise of Guilds and Mutual Benefit Associations.

By GRAND CHANCELLOR MAC ABLE.

IV.

RELIGIOUS GUILDS.

Religious guilds were among the earliest of the great order of guilds. Throughout the middle ages they existed in great numbers in every country of Europe. They took a prominent part in all the works of religion and charity inaugurated by the Church. The object of these guilds was to unite the members in every public profession of the Faith; but more particularly on special festival days and saints' days. Accordingly, we find these guilds placed, everywhere, under the patronage of the Holy Trinity, or of the Holy Cross, or of the Blessed Sacrament, or of certain saints.

In honor of these patrons the churches on festival days were decorated, the altars illuminated; and High Mass was offered up with all the pomp and ceremony befitting the occasion. Indeed, minor guilds were formed for the sole purpose of keeping up these celebrations in perpetuity.

Beyond the procession and attendance at church, and, occasionally, a feast somewhat later in the day, an important feature of the festival was the performance of a scripture piece, or as it was called a "Mystery" or "Miracle play." As is well known, it is from these miracle plays have been developed theatrical performances as we now have them. These miracle plays were due to the clergy. They arose out of a perception that what we see with our eyes makes a greater impression upon us than what we merely hear with our ears. It was seen that many events in the life of Our Saviour, as well as events chronicled in the Old Testament and in the history of the Church, would easily admit of being dramatised; and thus brought home, as it were, to the feelings and consciences of men more effectively than by sermons. As to books, they, of course, were, at the time now spoken of, accessible only to the few. Such subjects as the creation, the fall of man, the deluge, Abraham's trial, scenes from the life of Daniel, the raising of Lazarus were dramatised. The passion play of Ober Ammergau in Bavaria, now played every tenth year only, and another in Spain, are modern instances of these plays.

In this connection, it may not be out of place to briefly describe the passion play of Ober Ammergau. This village is situated among the mountains of Upper Bavaria, nearly three thousand feet above the level of the

sea. In 1840 it contained 1319 inhabitants, who were mainly engaged in making toys, and in carving crucifixes, images of the saints, and rosaries. Many of the houses were adorned with quaint frescoes of Bible subjects. The interest of Ober Ammergau to the outer world is derived from the Passion Play which is performed here at intervals of ten years (the last in 1890), and is now attended by many thousands of European and American visitors.

The play is a dramatic representation of the passion and death of our Blessed Lord. It took its rise in a vow made by the inhabitants of the village in 1634, for the purpose of staying a plague then raging. From the general suppression of such performances, by an order of the Bavarian Government, this play has been exempted. The performances take place on the Sundays of summer, in a large open air theatre, holding six thousand persons, and each lasts about nine hours, with a short intermission at noon. Each scene from the history of our Blessed Lord is prefaced by a tableau of typical import from the Old Testament. About seven hundred actors are required, all belonging to the village.

The proceeds of the performances are devoted to the good of the community after defraying expenses, and the payment of a small sum to the actors. The villagers regard the passion play as a solemn act of religious worship; and the performances are characterised by the greatest reverence. The principal parts are, usually, hereditary in certain families, and are assigned with regard to moral character, as much as to dramatic ability. It is considered a disgrace not to be allowed to take part in the play; and, as we may well understand, the part of our Blessed Saviour is looked upon as one of the greatest of earthly honors. In the years intervening between the representations, the villagers are carefully drilled in dramatic performances by the priest, who is the organiser, manager and general superintendent of everything in connection with the play. And all witnesses agree in rating very highly the results produced by the combined religious fervor, and artistic instinct of these simple Alpine villagers.

Returning to Religious Guilds, we find that people of all ranks became members. The members often had a special livery, as is still the case with certain fraternities in Rome. These liveries were worn on the ecclesiastical festivals already alluded to.

The following extract from Dr. Rock's "Church of our Fathers" is a defence of these religious festivals in England, and their influence on mankind. He says: "Each guild's first steps were bent towards their church, where solemn High Mass was chanted; thence went all the brotherhood to their hall for festive dinner. The processions on the occasion and other amusements so dear to the people, were meant to be edifying and instructive, and helped religion to make her children both good and happy through even their recreations. The present age, with its chill heart, dull eye, and hard, iron like feelings, that sees nought but idleness in a few hours' idleness pause from toil, and knows nothing but unthriftness in money spent in pious ceremonial, and thinks that the God who sprinkled the blue heaven with silvery stars, and strewed the green earth with sweet-smelling flowers of a thousand hues, and taught birds to make every grove ring with their blithe songs and told the little

brook to run forth with a glad some ripple all in worship of Himself, can be best and most honored by the richest and noblest of His wonderful works—the soul of man—the more gloomy, the more morbid, the sorer it is; such an age will not understand the good which, in a moral and social point of view, was bestowed on this country (England) by the religious pageants, and pious plays and interludes of a bygone epoch. Through such means, however, not only were the people furnished with a needful relaxation; but their merry-makings instructed, while they diverted.

It was in connection with these festivals that fairs are supposed to have their origin, being held on saints' days, and not unfrequently in the church-yards, or in locations immediately adjoining. The Irish Pattern (patron saint's day) is a case in point.

The festivals known as Wakes were first held on saints' days to commemorate the dedication of churches. These probably occurred only where there was no religious guild in existence to help in the ceremony. They were placed under religious regulations in 1536, and gradually died out, as associated with the churches. They are still retained in some countries; but have only a lingering association (in name only) with religious observances.

The next paper will discuss "Social Guilds."

## OLDEST CATHOLIC SOCIETY.

The German Verein has been Growing for Forty Years.

INDEPENDENT SOCIETIES SPRANG UP IN NEW YORK, MILWAUKEE, ST. LOUIS, ALLEGHENY, PITTSBURG, BALTIMORE AND BIRMINGHAM WHICH WERE FINALLY UNITED INTO THE GREAT VEREIN IN BALTIMORE IN 1855—\$1,007,014 SPENT FOR CHARITY, AND 70,229 CASES OF SICKNESS RELIEVED.

The German Roman Catholic Central Society of the United States, which has been in convention assembled in this city since Sunday, and whose convention to-day's session ends, is the oldest Catholic benevolent society in the United States. In 1842 the St. Georgius Society was founded in the St. Nicolaus congregation of New York, and three years later this society was merged into the St. Joseph's Benevolent Society. In the same year the St. Bernard's Society of Covington, Ky., was organized, and also the Bonifacius, of Quincy, Ill.

Other German societies were organized in quick succession in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Allegheny, Pittsburg, Baltimore, Buffalo and Birmingham. As immigration increased the number of societies multiplied. Most of the new comers to America's shores were in woe condition, and the societies did much to relieve them from the actual sufferings of poverty. Up to this time there had been no thought of organizing the scattered societies into a national order, but in the early fifties the existence of a hostile force made closer communication a necessity. This force was the Know Nothing party, which at that time was greatly agitating the entire country. This party showed its hatred of foreign born citizens and especially of Catholics, not only in words but in acts of lawless violence.

In 1851 representatives of several of the societies were assembled in Rochester, and the matter was broached of

establishing a closer connection between the societies. The matter was agitated until on the afternoon of Easter Sunday, 1855, the representatives of seventeen societies met in St. Alphonsus Hall, in Baltimore, and there a constitution was drawn up and officers elected of the Central Society of the United States.

The scope and object of the society as outlined in the constitution is, first, to foster the practice of religious duties and a Christian life, and to promote Catholic interests; second, to unite German Roman Catholic societies in works of charity and benevolence, and societies, when in actual need, in giving aid and assistance to their members, to nurse the sick and bury the dead; third, to provide for a widows' and orphans' fund, for the benefit of the widows and orphans of deceased members.

Up to 1865, when the tenth annual convention was held in Buffalo, the growth of the society was very slow on account of hard times, the prevalence of cholera, and the war. From that time, however, affairs took a prosperous turn and the society now has 551 local societies in twenty nine states. The society has helped thousands of German Catholics who were needy, and from 1873 to 1895 the books show the large sum of \$1,067,041.76 expended in 70,229 cases of sickness, and during these twenty-two years the still larger sum of \$1,745,865.05 went to the widows and children of 9,229 members who have died during that time. Thousands of dollars have also been spent in other charitable causes. The society, during its forty years, has had but nine Presidents. It has always been on exceedingly friendly terms with the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union, and the two join hands in giving aid to needy Catholics.—The State.

## Proposed Great Irish Convention.

His Grace Archbishop Walsh of Toronto, Grand Spiritual Adviser of the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association of Canada, seeing the necessity of unity among Irishmen, if Home Rule is to triumph, has written the following important letter to Hon. Edward Blake, M.P., for South Longford. Mr. Blake, in reply, thanks His Grace for his kindly personal references, agrees with him that unity of aim is the chief thing necessary to the success of Irish aspirations, and indorses the view that a great national convention, such as he suggests, would powerfully stimulate the movement for Irish self-government:

St. Michael's Palace, Toronto, October 8, 1895.

Hon. Edward Blake, Q. C., M. P., Humewood, Toronto:

My Dear Mr. Blake—I regret exceedingly to learn that you are very much run down in health, and that, in consequence of nervous prostration, brought on by excessive work, you have felt obliged to decline the public reception with which the citizens of Toronto intended to greet your return and to give you a hearty welcome home. I regret that this reception had to be abandoned for this reason also, that the leading citizens of Toronto wished to give public endorsement to the course you have pursued in advocating the cause of Home Rule for Ireland, and because they wished to repel with righteous indignation the malignant attacks made upon you, not so much by political antagonists as by false brethren and treacherous co-laborers. The sacrifices you have