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AMERICAN CATHOLICS, AND CATHOLIC IRELAND.

(From the Metropolitan.)

A great deal has been said and written about the Irish in America, and the subject will perhaps continue to be discussed, as involving one of those elements in the population of the United States, which must necessarily have their influence upon the national character, and be felt in the determination of political measures and in the administration of the Church.

It is probable, that if the population of the United States were altogether free from the Irish element, and from all foreign composition whatever, the Catholic portion of the inhabitants would be still be viewed with the same fierce prejudices that now prevail so extensively among their fellow-citizens of other denominations. It is not opposition to foreigners as such, that has excited such a ferment in the public mind and given birth to a new political organization, the first systematic and powerful attempt to substitute a sectarian despotism for the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution; but it is the Catholicity of foreigners; it is the strength and development which the Catholic Church in this country has derived in a great measure from emigration; it is her steady progress under the favorable circumstances of our republican form of government, that have aroused the jealousy of her enemies, and rekindled the fires of religious bigotry and hatred.

If the foregoing observations are correct, it would seem that the efforts of Catholic writers might be very profitably directed to the elucidation of such topics, as would create a healthy and vigorous spirit in the Catholic body at large, in order to prepare it for those emergencies to which it is always liable in a country like this, where heresy and infidelity are predominant.

by removing prejudice to advance the interests of the true faith. But, whatever might be the advantages arising from such a policy, it cannot be denied that it is a point of infinitely greater importance to improve and elevate the condition of Catholics in general throughout the United States, whether Irish or American, English or German. In one case, it is drilling the whole army in the spiritual tactics which are the best guaranty of victory; while in the other, it is making but a brief truce with the enemy. Whether it be the lot of the Catholic Church in this country to continue the untrammelled action which she now exerts, or to be hampered by restrictive or persecuting laws, is a contingency which no human penetration can foresee.

The steady progress of Catholicity in the United States in point of numbers, has led to the impression that the members of the Church, as a body, are all that they should be in virtue of their profession, at all events are prepared for any emergency that may arise. It is supposed that their past success in building up churches, and establishing schools and other institutions, has removed the most formidable difficulties from their path. The triumphs already achieved are considered as the certain harbingers of more signal victories, and the future looms up before them glorious with every indication of prosperity and joy. We are far from being or wishing to appear alarmists; but we think that these sanguine views and expectations betray a very grave delusion. The real prosperity of the Church in any part of the world does not consist merely in large or increasing numbers, in the multiplication of churches and institutions, or in the grandeur and beauty which our growing resources may enable us to bestow upon them.

Without attending to these circumstances, we would be exposed to form a very erroneous judgment of the future that is in store for a Catholic nation or community; we might multiply the nation and not increase the joy.

casti gentem, et non magnificasti letitiam."—Isaiah ix., 3; for it is not the outward or material strength of a Catholic people that will support its dignity, its prosperity or its influence, but the inward life that animates it. What availed to England her noble cathedrals, those splendid achievements of art, with her numerous and wealthy clergy, and hosts of believers all united in the profession of the same faith, when the lust and avarice of a tyrant resolved to strike out the corner-stone of the religious structure? What has it profited the Catholic nations of South America to have studded one half of a continent with magnificent temples, to have possessed so many conventual and other institutions, and even to have shut out from their social system the organizations of sectarianism, when the light of faith, practically speaking, has well nigh become extinguished among them, and they themselves yielding to the corrupting influence of worldliness, have become as it were a bye-word to the nations, and a fatal stumbling-block to those who are not in the communion of the Church? The external glory of religion did not suffice to check the assaults of heresy and infidelity in one of these countries, nor to prevent in the other that torpor and degeneracy of faith which has given birth to the most crying scandals, and almost irremediable abuses. Have we not the same evils to fear for the United States? If the Church continue to enjoy her present freedom, is there not some reason to apprehend, lest, with the enlargement of her boundaries and the increase of her material resources, the piety and faith of her children may be seriously affected by the growing sensualism and corruption of the age? On the other hand, if she be destined to pass thro' the fiery ordeal of persecution, will her children prove firm and invincible in the hour of trial?—One of these battles they must inevitably sustain. In the event of a long continued peace in this country, the faith of Catholics, we mean their general adherence to that sound code of morals which is the only conservative element of social virtue, and can alone be effectual in improving our civilization, will meet with a formidable enemy in the increasing luxury and all devouring avarice of the times, while, if civil oppression be their lot, the sufferings and humiliations incident to such a condition, especially for those who once enjoyed all the privileges of freemen, will prove a dreadful temptation for many to renounce the Church, and to barter away their spiritual birthright for a mess of pottage. It is difficult to say which of these evils is the more to be dreaded. If the decline of faith, the "decaying of truth from among the children of men"—"Diminute sunt veritates a filiis hominum"—Ps. ii.—could produce the horrors of the French revolution, it may be considered a more fearful calamity for a nation than the violence of persecution; for, in the latter case, where a strong and practical attachment to the Catholic faith prevails among a people, nothing short of an exterminating policy can alter the state of things—this indeed may bring forth martyrs, while the decline of faith can only produce apostates. In the case of England, which lost her proud position among the Catholic nations of Europe at the time of the Reformation, it is not improbable that this disastrous revolution was occasioned more by the religious apathy of her population than by the tyranny and cruelty of the civil power. Certain it is, as history shows, that this was the principal cause that contributed at that period to the rapid diffusion of heresy over the continent.

Were there no particular grounds for apprehending the degeneracy of Catholic society in the United States, the general causes which have produced such a result in some other countries, would suffice to excite our just alarms. But, the growing materialism and luxury of the age and the peculiarity of our social system, furnish additional reasons for supposing our liability to the evil in question. It cannot be denied, that the American people are unequalled, save perhaps by the English nation, for love and pursuit of mammon, and this devotion to worldly interests must naturally, by force of habit, increase, take a stronger hold upon the popular mind, and produce a corresponding alienation of thought and affection from spiritual things. We have only to compare the people of our day with the past generation or that which preceded it, to be convinced that all classes of society have greater wants than were felt by their forefathers. This increasing ardor for material objects is encouraged in no small degree by the particular structure of American society; for De Tocqueville has well observed, that in countries where social distinctions are clearly and permanently marked, the aristocracy have no anxious aspiration after the comforts of life, because these comforts constitute as it were their very existence; while the lower classes, aware of their inability to attain rank, feel no incitement to the ardent pursuit of worldly enjoyment. But, in a country like ours it is vastly different. Here, every man is part of the sovereign people; here, the highest honors of the State are open to the ambition of all; here, the humblest individual in the community

may rise, by his successful industry, to the most brilliant circles of society. Hence, the enjoyments of life are for Americans a prospect always before them, an end which is always inciting their ambition, and we may imagine how powerfully the continual aspiration after this end must operate, flattering as it is to the pride, vanity and other passions of the human heart. With such difficulties to contend with, we may conceive that it is not impossible for American Catholics to degenerate, and to become, like their brethren in some other parts of the world, languid in faith and altogether unfit for the great battles which Catholicity has to fight in these modern times.—There are reflecting persons who fancy that they already perceive in the Catholic body symptoms of this spiritual decline. The increasing want of reverence for the ecclesiastical character and office in the higher classes; the neglect of parents to instil virtuous sentiments into their children from the earliest age, and later in life to restrain their worldly desires; the general disregard of parental authority, and almost universal want of knowledge in regard to the relations between authority and obedience; the constant thirst after pleasure as an end of life; the loathing of religious instruction; the habit of divorcing secular affairs from the spiritual, as if the former were altogether independent of the latter; the practice of confining religion to external duties, and overlooking its essential spirit—these with other indications which cannot be mentioned here, prognosticate no good and will never secure a Catholic people against the dangers which we have described.

Under these circumstances, what is to be done? The answer to this question may be promptly given in those words of the Psalmist, "beatus populus cuius Dominus Deus ejus"—"happy is that people whose God is the Lord."—Ps. ii.—The only means of insuring a bright and glorious future to the Church in the United States, is the elevation of the popular mind to the true standard of Catholic sentiment. The god mammon must be dethroned and the true God substituted in its place. The spiritual and divine element must become dominant in the heart of the people. They must be made to know and feel the superiority of heaven over earth, of eternal things over temporal, of God over the world. For this purpose it will be necessary to give religion a more ample part in the education of youth, to follow up the lessons of the catechism with a fuller and more intelligent exposition of the doctrines of faith, of the grounds on which they rest, and of the various obligations which they impose. Men must become deeply convinced, that the study and practice of religion belong not only to children, but to persons of every age and condition in life; that as the dignity and happiness of individuals in all stations and professions, and therefore the interests of social order, depend altogether upon the practical regard that is shown to her teachings, she is essentially the noblest, the worthiest, the most interesting and the most profitable object that can occupy their thoughts; that there are no circumstances in which it is lawful to be divorced from her authority—no business, no undertaking that must not be subjected to her guidance; that the Church as the depository and exponent of revealed truth, as the mother that brought us forth to a life of grace and will conduct us by her vigilant care and heavenly ministrations to a life of glory hereafter, should hold the highest place in our esteem and affection, and should receive from us every mark of obedience and respect. To produce this enlarged, active and lively conviction of divine truth, the pulpit, the school-room, the domestic fireside, must all concur, in their respective departments, with a zeal and fidelity commensurate with their grave obligations and worthy of so exalted an end.

It would be irrelevant to our purpose to enter more fully into the means of accomplishing so desirable a result; our object is chiefly to show, that however laudable may be the views and motives of those who aim at the reformation of a class in the community, there is a want amongst us, a necessity of far greater moment, touching as it does the very vitals of Catholic society and extending through the whole Catholic body, and that the enlightened activity of the press should combine with the varied appliances of religion to meet this emergency, both in its present and prospective relations. There are those who indulge the pleasing fancy, that the people of this country will in course of time be aggregated to "the one fold under one Shepherd." This is unquestionably a consummation most devoutly to be wished, and to be solicited by the most earnest prayers. The most laborious and the ablest Catholic writer in America, has more than once endeavored to represent it as an end to which we are specially called, and one deserving of our most active efforts. But, while he finds reason to hope for this glorious result, he is "saddened as well as gladdened" at the prospect before us, because it is not to be realized without "all the strength of Catholic faith, Catholic charity, and Catholic zeal."—Brownson's Review, Jan.

1857. Assuredly, if the Catholics of the United States be not fortified, by a better knowledge and more ardent love of religion, against the dangers that await them, far from becoming instrumental under God in the conversion of their fellow-men, they will not be able even to hold their own. We have no hesitation in asserting, that the Catholics of this country as a body are not half educated, considering the wants of their position and the great work that is before them, and that a much deeper attachment to their faith and more visible evidences of its heavenly power will be requisite, to gain the love of our proud and worldly-minded population.

But, is there a Catholic people on earth that may be proposed as a model to their American brethren? Is there any Catholic nation that exhibits and has always exhibited that fervor and constancy of Christian faith, which is the richest element of a true civilization and the best safeguard of national dignity and popular worth? We unhesitatingly answer, yea: the people of Ireland stand out pre-eminently great in those traits of character which claim the imitation of Catholics in this country and throughout the world. There is something in the history of that people which raises it to a much higher level, than that at which we are accustomed to survey and estimate the nations of the earth. How through the long lapse of centuries, amid cloud and sunshine, and especially amid the dark storm of persecution which for ages swept over the land, the Irish have clung to the faith of their fathers and become bound to it perhaps by still stronger ties, is a moral phenomenon well worthy the study of the Christian philosopher, and suggestive of the most significant and practical lessons for any Christian people. Were we to say, that the writer of these remarks is not of Irish birth nor even of Irish extraction for several generations back, and that he is far from thinking that the Irish people are destitute of faults, we would only assert what is necessary to forestall at least one objection from a rabid and inconsiderate criticism. Let it be admitted that the Irish have their faults; but let it be admitted also, that as a Christian nation they possess superior and enviable qualities—traits of excellence that cast all other Christian nations into the shade. The Irish have their imperfections as well as other people; but how do these defects dwindle into insignificance when we consider, that of all the Catholic countries upon the globe, Ireland is the only one whose people, as a body, are characterized by an unqualified submission to the voice of their pastors, by a profound veneration for the priestly character and office, and by a warm and thorough appreciation of sacred things, especially the sacraments of religion, the sources of spiritual life. We may smile perhaps at the simplicity of the man who, stricken down by disease despatches a messenger for the priest of God, and upon being told by him that he should send for a physician, replies: "Och! you are the best doctor;" but these words contain a mine of wisdom, and are more than sufficient to confute all the sophistry of infidels and worldlings. Let it be remembered that the Irish know, emphatically, how to esteem and requite the services of their clergy, and will never under any plea whatever turn away a priest from their door who appeals to them in the name of religion or humanity. Every thing that religion touches, is great and paramount in the estimate of an Irishman, and no human respect, no fear of the world will prevent him from showing this fond attachment which he cherishes for the blessing of the Church. It is this deep, sovereign and all-controlling love of their holy faith, that renders the Irish people great and admirable at home, and makes them, after emigrating to foreign climes, the founders of churches and other religious institutions, and the most zealous and generous co-operators in every effort of missionary enterprise. There is scarcely a corner of the inhabitable globe whither they have not penetrated, driven from their emerald isle by the ruthless hand of oppression; but, wherever they are found, there have they erected, for the refreshment of their own hearts, and for the consolation of all who are travelling the gloomy pilgrimage of life, the cross of Christ, the symbol of redemption, the pledge of immortal life. When we contemplate in the Irish nation that deep, warm, and abiding love of the Church and every thing appertaining to her faith and discipline, and reflect that these extraordinary impressions of divine truth remain in all their intensity and efficiency, after every machination of earth and hell combined has been exhausted in endeavoring to crush out Catholicity from the popular heart, we are led to think that Divine Providence has reserved for the Irish people some great and glorious mission; and, as in the times preceding the advent of the Saviour the family of Abraham were set apart, to perpetuate the original promise of a Redeemer, and to preserve amid the darkness of heathenism the knowledge and worship of the true God; so in modern ages, amid the desolating influence of infidelity which threatens in so many forms the purity and efficacy of Christian faith, the children of St. Patrick