

THE TRAPPISTS.

DUBLIN REVIEW, Dec. 1844. Art. I.

The first article in the Dublin Review for last December is an interesting paper on the *Life of the famous Abbe de Rance*, founder of the Trappists, by the gifted and well known Chateaubriand. We saw a notice of this work in some of the French Religious papers a few months ago, and the censure then expressed seems fully borne out by what we can learn of the work from the present more copious review. Chateaubriand has given us a dissertation on the life of De Rance, rather than an account of the life itself. It displays too no small portion of that egotism which is seen in nearly all of the later writings of the author of the *Genie de Christianisme*. The most serious fault is, however, its unnecessary dwelling on the dissipation and licentiousness of De Rance's early career while he was one of the leaders of a dissipated court. The work, we are told, was written at the injunction of the late pious abbe Seguin, as a reparation for the lighter productions of the author's pen; and was consequently intended, in some measure, to be a religious work, what then can be more unappropriate in its pages than a warm and glowing description of all the seductions, and voluptuousness of such a life as that of the young De Rance.

Armand Jean Bouthillier de Rance was born at Paris in 1626 of one of the most noble families of France. Cardinal Richlieu was his god-father.

"A child with such expectations deserved and obtained the best education which the schools of Paris could afford. He had one tutor to teach him Greek, another to teach him Latin, and a third to teach him virtue. The latter, we are sorry to say, does not seem to have been as successful or as diligent as the others. The young Armand had scarcely put off the dress of childhood, when he was able to translate the poets of Greece and Rome. We are told that a benefice of some value was then vacant; the name of the godson of Richlieu was, of course, put on the list for promotion. A violation of propriety so outrageous was made the subject of remark: the clergy remonstrated, and the people were scandalized. Caussin, a Jesuit, the king's confessor, sent for the boy. He had a copy of Homer on the table when he came, and requested him to translate a passage, which he placed before him. The youth did it so much to his satisfaction, that he supposed at first that he read it out of the Latin translation at the bottom of the page. This he covered with his hand: but finding that he translated as fluently as before, he exclaimed, "Habes lynceos oculos," embraced him with affection, and made no further opposition to his preferment. He was only twelve years of age

when he published an edition of Anacreon, which he dedicated to the Cardinal Richlieu. A body of such promise and such patronage was on the high road to preferment."

He was accordingly promoted. He pursued his studies at the Sarbonne, where he was one of the class-fellows of the distinguished Bossuet; and was ordained priest in 1651. He seems to have commenced his sacerdotal career with fervour. But the seductions of the court proved too much for his virtue. And after a time if he did not give up the name, he at least almost entirely withdrew from the duties of a clergyman.

"We have hitherto contemplated only the young and gifted cleric, climbing the rugged steep of ambition, and striving for those honours, which his great connexions promised to secure for him. We have seen him the victim of pride, ambition, perhaps of other and less worthy influences. A great mind, and a noble generous heart, were perverted from their high purpose, as many such have been perverted; and we turn with pleasure to the consideration of those events by which they were brought back to God. Why should not we rejoice at such a salutary change in one who is of our own flesh and blood, when even seraphs are filled with joy, on seeing from their starry thrones some poor erring child of Adam returning from the evil of his ways?"

Chateaubriand thus speaks of the first feelings of the convert.

"Veretz, which was once so agreeable a residence, now became insupportable to De Rance. Its magnificence was revolting to him. The furniture which everywhere sparkled with silver and gold,—the gorgeous beds, where even luxury—to use the words of a standard writer of the times—would have found itself too comfortable. The room hung with pictures of great price, the gardens exquisitely laid out, were too much for a man who looked at everything through a shower of falling tears. He resolved on reforming everything. For the sumptuousness of his table he substituted the strictest frugality. He dismissed the greater part of his servants, gave up hunting, and even drawing, an art of which he was passionately fond, was abandoned. Some maps and landscapes from his pencil have reached our times. Some friends who, like himself, had to weep over past excess, joined him in his mode of living, and in the practices of those austerities of which he was subsequently to give so great an example. He seemed to be taking lessons, as it were, in the science of mortification before he began to teach it seriously to others. A man struggling with himself, and seek-

* The part omitted will be found in No. 15, under the head of "Conversion of De Rance, &c."