



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. I.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1850.

NO. 4.

POETRY.

SISTER OF CHARITY.

BY RICHARD DALTON WILLIAMS,

(An Irish Poet of true genius, who has written over the anonymous signature "Shamrock.")

Sister of Charity! gentle and dutiful,
Loving as Seraphim, tender and mild,
In lumbleness strong, and in purity beautiful,
In spirit heroic, in manners a child;
Ever thy love, like an angel, reposes
With hovering wings o'er the sufferer here,
Till the arrows of death are half hidden in roses,
And Hope, speaking prophecy, smiles on the bier,
When life, like a vapor, is slowly retiring,
As clouds in the dawning to Heaven uproll'd,
Thy prayer, like a herald, precedes him expiring,
And the cross on thy bosom his last looks behold.
And, oh! as the Spouse to thy words of love listens,
What hundred-fold blessings descend o'er thee then,
Thus the flower-absorb'd dew in the bright Iris glistens,
And returns to the lilies more richly again.

Sister of Charity! Child of the Holiest!
Oh! for the loving soul, ardent as pure!
Mother of orphans, and friend of the lowliest,
Stay of the wretched, the guilty, the poor;
The embrace of the Godhead so plainly unfolds thee,
Sanctity's halo so shines thee around,
Daring the eye that shrinking beholds thee,
Nor droops in thy presence abashed to the ground.
Dim is the fire of the sunniest blushes,
Burning the breast of the maidenly rose.
To the exquisite bloom that thy pale beauty flushes
When the incense ascends and the sanctity glows;
And the music, that seems Heaven's language, is
pealing.
Adoration has bowed him in silence and sighs;
And man, intermingled with angels, is feeling
The passionless rapture that comes from the skies.
Oh! that this heart, whose unspeakable treasure
Of love hath been wasted so vainly on clay,
Like thine, unallured by the phantom of pleasure,
Could rend every earthly affection away!

And yet, in thy presence, the billows subsiding
Obey the strong effort of reason and will,
And my soul, in her pristine tranquillity gliding,
Is calm as when God bade the ocean "be still!"
Thy soothing, how gentle! thy pity, how tender!
Choir-music thy voice is, thy step angel grace,
And thy union with deity shines in a splendor
Subdued but unearthly, thy spiritual face.
When the frail chains are broken a captive that bound
Thee
Afar from thy home in the prison of clay,
Bride of the Lamb! and Earth's shadows around thee
Disperse in the blaze of eternity's day;
Still mindful, as now, of the sufferer's story,
Arresting the thunders of wrath ere they roll,
Intervene, as a cloud, between us and His glory,
And shield from His lightning the shuddering soul,
And mild as the moonbeam in autumn descending
That lightning, extinguished by mercy, shall fall,
While He hears with the wail of a penitent bleeding
Thy prayer, holy daughter of Vincent de Paul!

DISCOURSES

TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS.

BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN,

PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

DISCOURSE III.

MEN, NOT ANGELS, THE PRIESTS OF THE GOSPEL.

When Christ, the great Prophet, the great Preacher, the great Missionary, came into the world, He came in a way the most holy, the most august, and the most glorious. Though He came in humiliation, though He came to suffer, though He was born in a stable, though He was laid in a manger, yet He issued from the womb of an immaculate Mother, and His infant form shone with heavenly light. Sanctity marked every lineament of His character and every circumstance of His mission. Gabriel announced His incarnation; a Virgin conceived, a Virgin bore, a Virgin suckled Him; His foster-father was the pure and saintly Joseph; Angels proclaimed His birth; a luminous star spread the news among the heathen; the austere Baptist went before Him; and a crowd of shrunken penitents, clad in white garments and radiant with grace, followed Him, wherever He went. As the sun in heaven shines through the clouds, and is reflected in the landscape, so the eternal Sun of justice, when He rose upon the earth, turned night into day, and in His brightness made all things bright.

He came and He went; and, seeing that He came to introduce a new and final dispensation into the world, He left behind Him preachers, teachers, and missionaries, in His stead. Well then, my brethren, you will say, since on His coming all about Him

was so glorious, such as He was, such must His servants be, such His representatives, His ministers, in His absence; as He was without sin, they too must be without sin; as He was the Son of God, they must surely be Angels. Angels, you will say, must be appointed to this high office; Angels alone are fit to preach the birth, the sufferings, the death of God. They might indeed have to hide their brightness, as He, their Lord and Master, had put on a disguise before them; they might come, as under the Old Covenant, in the garb of men; but still, men they could not be, if they were to be preachers of the everlasting Gospel, and dispensers of its mysteries. If they were to sacrifice, as He had sacrificed; to continue, repeat, apply, the very Sacrifice which He had offered; to take into their hands the very Victim which was He Himself; to bind and to loose, to bless and to ban, to receive the confessions of His people, and to give them absolution for their sins; to teach them the way of truth, and to guide them along the way of peace; who was sufficient for these things but an inhabitant of those blessed realms of which the Lord is the never-failing Light?

And yet, my brethren, so it is, He has sent forth, for the ministry of reconciliation, not Angels, but men; He has sent forth your brethren to you, not being of some unknown nature and some strange blood, but of your own bone and your own flesh, to preach to you. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Here is the royal style and tone in which Angels speak to men, even though these be Apostles; it is the tone of those who, having never sinned, speak from their lofty eminence to those who have. But such is not the tone of those whom Christ has sent; for it is your brethren whom He has appointed, and none else,—sons of Adam, sons of your nature, the same by nature, differing only in grace,—men, like you, exposed to temptations, to the same temptations, to the same warfare within and without; with the same three deadly enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil; with the same human, the same wayward heart; differing only as the power of God has changed and rules it. So it is; we are not Angels from Heaven that speak to you, but men, whom grace, and grace alone, has made to differ from you. Listen to the Apostles:—When the barbarous Lycaonians, seeing His miracles, would have sacrificed to him and St. Barnabas, as to gods, he rushed in among them, crying out, "O men, why do ye this? we too are mortals, men like to you;" or, as it is forcibly expressed in the Greek, "We are of like passions with you." And again to the Corinthians he writes, "We preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ the Lord; and ourselves your servants through Jesus. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, He hath shined in our hearts, for the illumination of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ Jesus; but we hold this treasure in earthen vessels." And further, he says of himself most wonderfully, that, "lest he should be exalted by the greatness of the revelations given him," there was "an angel of Satan in his flesh to buffet him." Such are your Ministers, your Preachers, your Priests; O my brethren; not Angels, not Saints, though not sinners, but those who would have been sinners except for God's grace, and who, though through God's mercy in training to be Saints hereafter, yet at present are in the midst of infirmity and temptation, and have no hope, except from the unmerited grace of God, of persevering unto the end.

What a strange, what a striking anomaly is this! All is perfect, all is heavenly, all is glorious, in the dispensation which Christ has vouchsafed us, but the persons of His Ministers. He dwells on our altars Himself, the Most Holy, the Most High, in light inaccessible, and Angels fall down before Him there; and out of visible substances and forms He chooses what is purest to represent and to hold Him. The finest wheat flour, and the choicest wine, are taken as His outward symbols; the most sacred and majestic words minister to the sacrificial rite; altar and sanctuary are adorned decently or splendidly, as our means allow, and the Priests perform their office in befitting vestments, lifting up chaste hearts and holy hands; yet those very Priests, so set apart, so consecrated, they, with their girde of celibacy and their mantle of sorrow, are sons of Adam, sons of sinners, of a fallen nature, which they have not lost, though it be renewed through grace. So that it is almost the definition of a Priest that he has sins of his own to offer for. "Every high priest," says the Apostle, "taken from among men, is appointed for men, in those things which pertain unto God; that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can condole with those who are in ignorance and error, because he also himself, is compassed with infirmity. And therefore he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." And hence in the Mass, when he offers up the Host before consecration, he says, *Suscipe, Sancte Pater, Omnipotens, aeternus Deus,* "Accept, Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God,

this immaculate Host, which I, Thine unworthy servant, offer to Thee, my Living and True God, for mine innumerable sins, offences and negligences, and for all who stand around, and for all faithful Christians, living and dead."

Most strange is this in itself, my brethren, but not strange, when you consider it is the appointment of an all-merciful God; not strange in Him, because the Apostle gives the reason of it in the passage I have quoted. The Priests of the New Law are men, that they may "condole with those who are in ignorance and error, because they too are compassed with infirmity." Had Angels been your Priests, my brethren, they could not have condoled with you, sympathized with you, have had compassion on you, tenderly felt for you, and made allowances for you, as we can; they could not have been your patterns and guides, and have led you on from your old selves, into a new life, as they who come from the midst of you, who have been led on themselves as you are to be led, who can enter into your difficulties, who have had experience, at least of your temptations, if not of your sins, who know the strength of the flesh and the wiles of the devil, even though, unlike you, they have baffled them, who are disposed to take your part, and be indulgent towards you, and can advise you most practically, and warn you most seasonably and prudently. Therefore did He send you men to be ministers of reconciliation and intercession; and He Himself, though He could not sin, yet, by becoming man, took on Him, as far as was possible to God, man's burden of infirmity and trial in His own person. He could not be a sinner, but He could be a man, and He took to Himself a man's heart that we might intrust our hearts to Him, and "was tempted in all things for a pattern," or "after a similitude, yet without sin."

Ponder this truth well, my brethren, and let it be your comfort. Among the Preachers, among the Priests of the Gospel, there have been Apostles, there have been Martyrs, there have been Doctors;—Saints in plenty among them; yet out of them all, high as has been their sanctity, varied their graces, awful their powers, there has not been one who did not begin with the old Adam; not one of them who was not hewn out of the same rock as the most obdurate of reprobates; not one of them who was not fashioned into honor out of the same clay which has been the material of the most polluted and vile of sinners; not one who was not by nature brother of those poor souls who have now commenced an eternal fellowship with the devil, and are burning in hell. Grace has vanquished nature; that is the history of the Saints. Salutary thought for those who are tempted to pride themselves in what they do, and what they are; wonderful news for those who sorrowfully recognize in their hearts the vast difference that exists between them and the Saints; and joyful news, when men hate sin, and wish to escape from its miserable yoke, yet are tempted to think it impossible.

Come, my brethren, let us look at this truth more narrowly, and lay it to heart. First consider, that, since Adam fell, none of his seed but has been conceived in sin; none, save one. One exception there has been,—who is that one? not our Lord Jesus, for He was not conceived of man, but of the Holy Ghost; not our Lord, but I mean His Virgin Mother, who, though conceived and born of human parents, as others, yet was rescued by anticipation from the common condition of mankind, and never was partaker in fact of Adam's transgression. She was conceived in the way of nature, she was conceived as others are; but grace interfered and was beforehand with sin; it filled her soul from the first moment of her existence, so that the Evil One breathed not on her, nor stained the work of God. *Totalmente pura, et macula originis non est in te.* "Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the stain original is not in thee." But, putting aside the Most Blessed Mother of God, every one else, the most glorious Saints, and the most black and odious of sinners; I mean, the soul which, in the event, became the most glorious, and the soul which became the most devilish, were both born in one and the same original sin, both were children of wrath, both were unable to attain heaven by their natural powers, both had the prospect of meriting for themselves hell.

They were both born in sin; they both lay in sin; and the soul, which afterwards became a Saint, would have continued in sin, would have sinned wilfully, and would have been lost, but for the visitings of an unmerited supernatural influence upon it, which did for it what it could not do for itself. The poor infant, destined to be an heir of glory, lay feeble, sickly, fretful, wayward, and miserable; the child of sorrow; without hope, and without heavenly aid. So it lay for many a long and weary day ere it was born; and when at length it opened its eyes and saw the light, it shrank back, and wept aloud that it had seen it. But God heard its cry from heaven in this valley of tears, and He began that course of mercies towards it which

led it from earth to heaven. He sent His Priest to administer to it the first sacrament, and to baptize it with His grace. Then a great change took place in it, for, instead of its being under the thrall of Satan, it forthwith became a child of God; and had it died that minute, and before it came to the age of reason, it would have been carried to heaven without delay by Angels, and been admitted into the presence of God.

But it did not die; it came to the age of reason, and, O shall we dare to say, though in some blessed cases it may be said, shall we dare to say, that it did not misuse the great talent, which had been given, profane the grace which dwelt in it, and fall into mortal sin? In some instances, praised be God! we dare affirm it; such seems to have been the case with my own dear Father, St. Philip, who surely kept his baptismal robe unsullied from the day he was clad in it, never lost his state of grace, from the day he was put into it and proceeded from strength to strength, and from merit to merit, and from glory to glory, through the whole course of his long life, till at the age of eighty he was summoned to his account, and went joyfully to it, and was carried across purgatory, without any scorching of its flames, straight to heaven.

Such certainly have sometimes been the dealings of God's grace with the souls of His elect; but more commonly, as if more intimately to associate them with their brethren, and to make the fulness of His favors to them a ground of hope and an encouragement to the penitent sinner, those who have ended in being miracles of sanctity, and heroes in the Church, have passed a time in wilful sin, have thrown themselves out of the light of God's countenance, have been led captive by this or that sin, and by this or that religious error, till at length they were in various ways recovered slowly or suddenly, and regained the state of grace, or rather a much higher state, than that which they had forfeited. Such was the blessed Magdalen, who had lived a life of blame; so much so, that even to be touched by her, was, according to the religious judgment of the day, a pollution. Happy in this world's goods, young, and passionate, she had given her heart to the creature, before the grace of God prevailed with her. Then she cut off her long hair, and put aside her gay apparel, and became so utterly what she had not been, that, had you known her before and after, you had said it was two persons you had seen, not one; for there was no trace of the sinner in the penitent, except the affectionate heart, now set on heaven and Christ; no trace besides, no memory of that glittering and seductive vision, in the modest form, the serene countenance, the composed gait, and the gentle voice of her who in the garden sought and found the Risen Saviour. Such too was he who from a publican became an Apostle and an Evangelist; one who for filthy lucre scrupled not to enter the service of the heathen Romans and oppress his own people. Nor were the rest of the Apostles made of better clay than the other sons of Adam; they were by nature animal, carnal, ignorant; left to themselves, they would, like the brutes, have grovelled on the earth, and gazed upon the earth, and fed on the earth, had not the grace of God taken possession of them, and set them on their feet, and raised their faces heavenward. And such was the learned Pharisee, who came to Jesus by night, well satisfied with his station, jealous of his reputation, confident in his reason; but the time at length came, when, even though disciples fled, he remained to anoint the abandoned corpse of Him, whom, when living, he had been ashamed to own. You see it was the grace of God that triumphed in Magdalen, in Matthew, and in Nicodemus; heavenly grace came upon corrupt nature; it subdued the flesh in the sinner, covetousness in the publican, fear of man in the Pharisee.

Let me speak of another celebrated conquest of God's grace in an after age, and you will see how it pleases Him to make a Confessor; a Saint, a Doctor of His Church, out of sin and heresy both together. It was not enough that the Father of the Western Schools, the author of a thousand works, the triumphant controversialist, the especial champion of grace, should have been once a poor slave of the flesh, but he was the victim of a perverted intellect also. He, who of all others, was to extol the grace of God, was left more than others to experience the helplessness of nature. The great St. Augustine, (I am not speaking of the holy missionary of the same name, who came to England and converted our pagan forefathers, the great African Bishop of that name, Augustine, I say, not being in earnest about his soul, not asking himself the question, how was sin to be washed away, but rather being desirous, while youth and strength lasted, to enjoy the flesh and the world, ambitious and sensual, judged of truth and falsehood by his private judgment and his private fancy; despised the Catholic Church, because it spoke so much of faith and subjection, thought to make his own reason the measure of all things, and accordingly