

## SUPERIORITY OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUAL WRITINGS.

By Rev. J. Spencer Northcote, D.D., in "Fourfold Difficulties of Anglicanism."

## VII.

The mention of the contemplative orders, with which my last letter concluded, naturally brings to the mind the subject of religious books, which I must not omit to notice, because the unquestioned superiority of the Roman to the English Church in this particular, is a fact deserving serious consideration. "Why cannot any of you write with feeling and unction such as this?" asked James I. of his bishops, when he had read the "Introduction a la vie devote," sent to him by Mary of Medici.

The private devotions of Archbishop Laud borrow largely from the prayers of Catholics,—the devotions of Hicke and Cosin are formed on their very model: some of the most valuable portion of Jeremy Taylor's works are founded on the great moral writers of the Continental Church,—using their very words and terms of expression, giving their advice and their cautions." In fact, the chapter on Meditation, of which this was especially said, is little more than an analysis of the scheme of the Spiritual Exercises, that all but inspired composition of St. Ignatius Loyola, which has been "wonderfully blest in the conversion of tens of thousands." Bishop Wilson recommended the use of the Spiritual Combat.—Thomas a Kempis has been edited even by some of the Evangelical party, and Fenelon is almost as familiar to Protestants as to Catholics themselves.

We read in the life of a late prominent member of your clergy (Rev. A. H. Mackonochie) that "he seemed fairly to have absorbed the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and two or three other Catholic Ascetical works, and that they supplied very frequently the plan of his retreats, missions, and courses of sermons, or the frame-work of simple meditation," and there is reason to believe that the same might be said with equal truth of a considerable number of your High Church clergy. Long ago it was found worth while to publish a series of translations from the works of our Ascetical writers, "adapted to the use of the English Church," and in the preface to some of the earlier volumes, Dr. Pusey wrote that "in contemplation and self discipline" (i. e., in the whole of religion practical and devotional, objective and subjective) "the spiritual writers of foreign churches have, as yet, some obvious advantages over our own." Fifty years have passed away since these words were written. "Is there any token that the balance of advantage is inclining to the other side?"

Thus far we have spoken of sanctity only in its higher degree; and on that we might fairly rest the whole question, because, as Aristotle says, "that kind is altogether best, whose excellence or pre-eminence is best," but it may be more satisfactory to you if we pursue the comparison further, and consider the respective religious condition of the multitudes whose vocation lies in the world—that is, of the main body of each communion. It is obvious, however, that to enter into so vast a subject with anything like detail would be far beyond the compass of a letter. I will only make one or two remarks upon it.

The first thing which struck me when I began to frequent Catholic Churches was the intense devotion of the half clad paupers, the very beggars, who are in daily attendance there: there is something in the expression of their faces, especially when they approach the Blessed Sacrament, utterly unlike anything I had ever before seen in real life, and only reminding one of the pictures of Catholic Saints. If you could witness this for yourself, and contrast it with the almost total absence of the very poor from your public worship, and especially from your communions, I think you could not doubt which of the two religions takes deepest root in the hearts of the poor, and, considering that "to the poor more especially" was the Gospel preached, there is surely a strong presumption that the Church of the poor is the Church of Christ. This fervour of devotion, however, though most striking in the poor, seems equally to pervade all classes, and indeed is acknowledged on all hands as a marked characteristic of Catholicism. Hear the remarks of a Presbyterian traveller on this subject. "Catholicism has certainly a much stronger hold over the human mind than Protestantism, the fact is visible and undeniable, and perhaps not unaccountable. The fervour of devotion among Catholics, the absence of worldly feelings in their religious acts, strikes every traveller who enters a Roman Catholic Church abroad. . . . In no place of worship do we witness the same intense abstraction in prayer, the same unaffected devotion of mind. . . . The public mind is evidently more religionized than in Protestant countries;" and he then proceeds to enquire: "Why should such strong devotional feeling be more widely diffused and more conspicuous among people holding erroneous doctrines, than among us Protestants holding right doctrines?" which very perplexing problem he at last solves thus. "Our belief is the working of judgment, theirs of imagination; and in this way we must account for the undeniably greater devotional fervor of Catholics than of Protestants."

From this difference between Catholicism and Protestantism it may surely be expected to result, that those who "have not faith," under the one system will alter Christianity to suit their own mind, and under the other will reject it altogether, because they find it unalterable. Then, again, in practice; there is little comparatively

in Protestantism which requires self-sacrifice; a member of the Church of England, for instance, may be thoroughly irreligious at heart, and yet feel nothing in the system of his Church grievous enough to rouse him to the exertion of publicly renouncing it. To fulfil his ordinary social duties, and even to attend public worship and go through the customary round of religious observance, can be no great hardship to him; and as long as he does this, none dare call him an infidel, and he may never be led to think enough on the subject of religion to be altogether conscious to himself that he is such; but, if this person had to fast for the forty days of Lent, to kneel at the tribunal of penance, and there confess his most secret sins, and crave the blessing of absolution, he would soon find himself, as it were, forced into a position of open rebellion; and it is, I believe, because the Catholic rules of practice are thus searching and stringent, and enter so minutely into the details of daily life, that they are absolutely intolerable to the love of indulgence, and especially to the pride of the worldly heart; and therefore in Catholic countries, the opposition between the Church and the world is far more distinct than in England.

To be Continued.

## REV. THEOBALD MATHEW.

The "Apostle of Temperance" claims a place here, not as a politician, not as a famous author, not even as a great orator—for his victories over hearts were due to no eloquence but that of a pure purpose—but as one who loved his countrymen, and taught them to triumph over a besetting sin. Theobald Mathew was born on the 10th of October, 1790, at Thomastown Castle in Kilkenny, where his father, James Mathew, resided with his kinsman George Mathew, afterwards Earl of Llandaff. In boyhood, as afterwards in manhood, a gentleness and amiability of disposition, combined with utter unselfishness, endeared him to all hearts, and Lady Elizabeth, the Earl's daughter, determined to educate him at her own cost. At twelve years of age he was placed by her at school in Kilkenny; at nineteen he entered Kilkenny College, and partly in Maynooth, and later under the care of the Rev. Celestine Corcoran of Dublin, he completed his studies for the priesthood, to which office he had dedicated himself at an early age. In 1814 he was ordained by Archbishop Murray.

After fulfilling the duties of his sacred calling for a short time in Kilkenny he was removed to Cork, which was destined to be the permanent field of his labours. There he became assistant to the Rev. Francis Donovan, a member of the Capuchin order, to which Father Mathew belonged. The little friary where they resided was situated in one of the most lowly parts of the city. Here the untiring zeal and devotion of the young priest began to bear fruit, and his fame as a spiritual director spread far and wide. Mr. Maguire his biographer mentions as one of the current sayings of the town, that "if a carman from Kerry brought a firkin of butter into the Cork market, he would not return home till he had gone to confession to Father Mathew." The absence of all sectarian bitterness in his character was well known, and his benevolence was not confined to those of his own faith. An instance of this is his conduct on the question of burial fees. At that time those fees fell very heavily on the poor of the locality. By Father Mathew's exertions a cemetery was opened, a considerable portion of which was given gratuitously to the needy of every religious persuasion.

In 1832 Asiatic cholera made its appearance in Cork, and during the visitation of that awful scourge the zeal and devotion of Mathew found an ample field. He was to be seen at all hours in the most wretched of the plague stricken localities, assisting assiduously in meeting the spiritual and temporal necessities of the sufferers. One remarkable instance has been placed on record by his biographer. Returning one night to the temporary hospital, he found a patient whom he had visited there during the day removed to the dead house. Feeling convinced that the patient could not be dead, he at once proceeded to the mortuary, and arrived there just as the attendants—who were necessarily intoxicated to induce them to perform their fearful task had wrapped the body in the tarred sheet previous to placing it in the coffin. Father Mathew ordered them to lay down their burden, and, to his great joy, found on examining the body that the heart still beat. In a few days the man was quite recovered, and full of gratitude to his preserver. When the plague was stayed, and the city restored to its normal condition, Father Mathew still found room for his charity in the relief of widows and orphans. His appeals on behalf of the necessities were generously responded to, from the well-known fact that the preacher practised what he taught.

But a wider and a greater work was yet in store for him. The cause of temperance had already found advocates in Cork. A church clergyman, a Unitarian gentleman, and a Quaker named William Martin had combined to form a temperance society, but the work made very slow progress. Father Mathew's influence was known to be enormous, and Mr. Martin made urgent appeals to him to give his assistance. "Oh, Theobald Mathew, if thou would but take the cause in hand," he would say, "thou could do such good to these poor creatures." The priest deeply reflected on this appeal, and having