

A SAINT SHRINED IN PROTESTANT HEARTS.

Impress of Francis of Assisi on Modern Thought. Witnessed in the Revival of the Charity Cult of the XIII. Century.—Treasury of the Church Enriched by Devotions Introduced by His Followers.

Catholic Columbian.

From advance sheets of an article written for a November Catholic magazine by Mr. Chas. Robinson, the *Columbian* is permitted to present these extracts:

Many writers such as Mde Pardo-Bazan, and Frederick Ozanam have undertaken the task of depicting St. Francis of Assisi, and they have failed. So did Mrs. Oliphant, for with all her sympathy for St. Francis she only half understands him, and as for Paul Sabatier, he does not understand him at all.

In the recently published translation of the Abbe le Moine's standard "History of St. Francis of Assisi," we have an almost ideal biography of the great thirteenth century reformer, who changed the face of Europe more effectively than Napoleon. The appearance of this work was doubtless hastened by the popularity of Sabatier's much heralded "Life"—a popularity which seems to have been due to the remarkable fact that the professor of theology in the Protestant University of Paris should have made St. Francis the subject of a book rather than to the intrinsic merits of the book itself. Indeed, as one of the keenest of modern critics pointed out at the time, we had to wait in vain for a really satisfactory life of St. Francis until the interest of non-Catholics was aroused in him.

It is now some years ago since a distinguished Oxford professor published an essay which first set our separated brethren talking about St. Francis. Since that time Protestant interest in the seraphic founder has been steadily growing in widening circles. Indeed the past decade has been remarkable for the interest which Protestant scholars have manifested in the spirit and work of St. Francis. It is not difficult, however, to account for the influence which St. Francis wields over the cultured and thoughtful intellects of our day. As a well-known writer has remarked: "There is a universal sentiment evoked by the name of St. Francis of Assisi. While other saints canonized by the Catholic Church seem exclusively saints of that Church, St. Francis is the saint of the whole world—canonized in the heart of humanity." There is indeed a strong human interest in the life of St. Francis which can hardly fail to attract readers of the most different habits of mind. It is not the Catholic, it is not the Italian, it is the man we meet who holds and draws our thoughts with a sense of personal sympathy.

MESSAGE OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI. This essay which St. Francis has held over human hearts for well nigh seven centuries and which is one of the marvels of history is largely due to the fact that he so closely resembled his Divine Master. "St. Francis of Assisi," says Ernest Renan, "that man of all men who by his exquisite goodness and his sympathy, delicate, refined and tender, with universal life, has most resembled Jesus." To quote the words of the present enlightened Pontiff: "Even in externals, like Jesus Christ, it so happened that St. Francis was born in a stable; a little child as he was, his couch was of straw on the ground. And it is also related that, at that moment, the presence of angelic choirs and melodies wafted through the air completed this resemblance. Again, like Christ and His apostles, Francis united himself with some chosen disciples, whom he sent to traverse the earth as messengers of Christian peace and eternal salvation. Bored of all, mocked, cast off by his own, he had again this great point in common with Jesus Christ—he would not have a corner wherein he might lay his head. As a last mark of resemblance, he received on his Calvary, Mt. Alvernum (by a miracle till then unheard of), the sacred stigmata, and was thus, so to speak, crucified."

Thus exclaimed Tennyson long ago, and it is a hopeful sign to find such a paper as the Indianapolis *Journal* echoing this cry in the present year of grace and turning aside from politics and the latest scandal to discuss the need of another St. Francis in such terms as these:

A SECULAR JOURNAL'S TRIBUTE. "With all the worldliness that faces us, it is still true that now, as in all times in the history of mankind, there are here and there souls ready for all heroisms—men and women who find themselves out of touch with the materialistic drift, and are yet, singly, unable to resist it. Under leaders in whom they have confidence—men of singleness of purpose, serene faith, and high aim—they are capable of giving the world new and ennobling views of the life that is, as well as the life to come. In almost every period of the world's history some one has risen to unite such scattered forces, and make of them a power whose influence has swept over the world and has continued down the ages. St. Francis of Assisi was one of these Heaven-sent leaders; and in reading his life the wonder irresistibly arises as to what the experience of a man so Christ-like would be under the present changed conditions."

Continuing, the journal declares that St. Francis, could he re-appear in the world, would be followed by admiring crowds of high-minded, noble-souled men and women, and concludes by proclaiming that "it is not a new religion that people want, nor a teacher of new doctrine; it is that they need to be roused from lethargy, and taught anew the beauties of the religion that was given them eighteen hundred years ago."

The force of this refreshingly sane observation is very clearly demonstrated in a recent anonymous article in *Macmillan's Magazine* which is perhaps the most important contribution to the periodical literature of the Franciscan revival. The writer begins with the following interesting examination of the public conscience:

"With the material triumphs, the complexity of life, the hurry and deafening noise of our age, what a distance are we from St. Francis; how far from us those modest graces of the spirit which were dear to him. Was he, this Umbrian vision of sanctity, only a foolish dreamer or a madman? And are we on the way to a better resting-place for the spirit, by means of the mastery we are gaining over the forces of nature? Forty years ago men of science believed so; but even they, at last, are losing hope. Is it possible, after all, that the day of the saints is coming?"

"If, then, St. Francis, having made poverty his bride, having foregone all luxury and selfish pleasure, could even in this find an extra means of quickening the life of the spirit in which the riddle of the world is solved; if thus he could spend a life so exalted, yet so full of meekness and affection, as to gain for himself an everlasting place among the comforters and helpers of the human family; if, indeed, this be true (and it is true), who shall say there is in the story of such a life no meaning for a generation like ours?"

In that tale of sanctity what a reproach for all those among us (and great is the number of them) who are filled with envy and discontent, who cry out for luxury and vulgar pleasures, and in their despair flee for comfort to the demagogue—in whom is no comfort! Poor, trusting souls, that give your pence to the agitator, what is your reward? Foolish talk, and vain promises, and fresh fuel for your discontent. Not through these passionate men will peace come to you; the peace you long for is the secret of the saints."

"And it is here, it seems to us, that we should seek the message of Francis to our own time. In that narrative of the saint and his first followers, with their enthusiasm and purity, their romance, their poverty and joyousness, is there not a lesson for us? To the politician, with his millennium of cakes and ale; to the man of science with his millennium of intellect, what a better way is shown by the Saint of Assisi!"

TO COMFORT THE POOR. The life of St. Francis was signalized by two great virtues that are sadly needed among men to-day. There is poverty in the world now as then, and there will always be poverty. To quote the words of a writer in the *Ave Maria*: "No legislation, no system of political economy, will ever succeed in changing a condition which depends as much upon natural necessity as upon indolence, selfishness, or the weakness of individual character. When the world was more religious than it is now; when the poor man believed that poverty, honestly and patiently borne upon earth, was an earnest of unspeakable riches in heaven, statesmanship was not so difficult. But in our age poverty is not so understood. The poor, alienated from religious influences, rebel against a fate which offers them no comfort in the present and promises them nothing in the future."

Now the life of St. Francis proves that poverty is no hindrance but rather an aid to the growth of the religious spirit. It was in the ever-present thought of the poor that he found his work. But before he could efficiently help them he felt that he must be one of them. So he renounced all that he had once enjoyed and became a mendicant. The fondness entertained by St. Francis for sports and tournaments suddenly gave place to the most perfect contempt for things of earth and was replaced by an ardent zeal for the glory of God's kingdom. Having given all his possessions to the poor he was disinherited by his own and looked upon by the world as a fanatic. We all remember that supreme and celebrated scene in which he was brought by his own father before the justice of the town and prosecuted for having given away what did not belong to him. The Bishops exhorted him to return to his father all that was rightly his. St. Francis instantly stripped himself naked, and laying his clothes and his money in a little heap before the Bishop, cried to the surrounding crowd: "Listen and understand! Up to this moment I have called Pietro Bernardone my father. I now return to him his money and the garments I have received from him, and from this day I will only say, Our Father who art in heaven."

And the Franciscan Order was there and then founded by one naked man. A GLORIOUS LINEAGE. That order has since given to the Church eleven Popes, eighty-five canonized saints, including such glorious names as St. Anthony of Padua, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine, St. Peter of Alcantara and St. Francis Solanus, the patron of American missions, besides Roger Bacon, Alexander of Hales, and John Duns Scotus; and over seventeen hundred martyrs. It has also given to the world poets and painters, scientific discoverers, and from the day of its foundation, six hundred and seventy-two years ago, it has without a stain upon its records been a missionary of universal love and

peace. The untiring activity of these truly apostolic friars and their close observation of rule have made them an object of the affection and admiration of all good men. During the past two decades the Order of St. Francis seems to be infused with new vigor in this country, once so fruitful of blessed results by the labor of its devoted sons.

WORK OF WOMEN IN THE ORDER. As is well known the Franciscan order is not confined to men. During the lifetime of its founder many pious virgins under the direction of St. Clare subjected themselves to the rule of St. Francis, and in these luxurious and effeminate days of ours his daughters still bear the noble title of Poor and preach by their daily lives the poverty of Jesus Christ. Moreover, in the course of time another branch of the order was established for persons who, though living in the world, yet followed a special rule laid down by St. Francis himself, and put themselves under the direction of the Franciscans.

The foundation of this Third Order was a protest against the luxury of the period. Simplicity of life, the putting of the spirit first, and the showing of the crib, the humble manger, to the people as a reminder of this humility—we need these now. As Prof. Maurice F. Egan, whose writings display a rare appreciation of the Franciscan spirit, has well remarked, we need a new St. Francis, not only to solve the social question but to teach our young people that the little things of life are admirably worth attending to. Why, he asks, should not all children have a Christmas tree see the manger beneath its branches, and the kneeling animals, and the grave St. Joseph, and the Mother of God, and the star in the East? Why should the beautiful symbols of St. Francis be replaced by the glittering gewgaws of the toyshops? For it should not be forgotten that the Christmas crib is the gift of St. Francis.

ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTMAS CRIE. The origin of this beautiful devotion is thus described: "Late in the autumn of the year 1223, being at Rome, he sought and obtained from the Pontiff Honorius III. permission to honor the Feast of the Nativity in a novel way. He then journeyed to Greccio, a little spot in the Apennines, there to celebrate his ideal Christmas. On the mountain side near Greccio a large stable was roughly built; carved wooden images of the Divine Child, the Virgin Mother, and St. Joseph were placed in it; the floor was covered with straw; an altar was erected. Toward midnight some shepherds arrived, leading an ox and an ass, which they tied up under this rude shelter. The place was thronged with the friars from the neighboring convent and the country people from the hamlets around, who had brought torches, which illuminated the mountain side; they brought with them also musical instruments, and the wild, sweet Christmas carols resounded through the dark forests and awakened the echoes of the rocks."

"FORTY HOURS DEVOTION" INSTITUTED BY A FRANCISCAN. The Forty Hours' Devotion, concerning which Cardinal Wiseman says, "In no other time or place is the sublimity of our religion so touchingly felt," is another legacy from the Franciscans. It was instituted in 1537 by Father Joseph A. Terno, a friar of Milan, and the rules for its observance were drawn up some years later by St. Charles Borromeo, himself a Franciscan of the Third Order.

WAY OF THE CROSS INTRODUCED BY THE ORDER. So again the Franciscans were the first to introduce into their churches throughout Europe the devotion known as the Way of the Cross, or fourteen stations. Clement XII. extended this devotion to the universal Church; reserving to the Order of St. Francis, or whomever the General of it should designate, the right to bless and erect the stations.

FIRST TO SAY THE ANGELUS. For the Angelus, which has been aptly called the very poetry of prayer, we are indebted to St. Bonaventure, who, in 1262, being then General of the Franciscans, commanded the friars at the general chapter of his order at Pisa to recite at the sound of the evening bell three aves in honor of the mystery of the Incarnation. The same was ordered for morning and noon. This was the origin of the Angelus.

ANOTHER GIFT OF THE FRANCISCANS. The privileged prayer, the "Sacrosanctus," with which every priest concludes the daily office of the Breviary, is also a gift from St. Bonaventure. The devotion to the Holy Name and to the Immaculate Conception are also, as is well known, of Franciscan origin. PORTIUNCULA CAME THROUGH THEM. But the crowning grace of devotions which we owe to the Franciscans is the divinely given Indulgence of the Portiuncula, concerning which the great Jesuit theologian, Bourdaloue, says: "I assert that of all Indulgences that of the Portiuncula is the most authentic and valid in the Church because it is an Indulgence directly granted by Jesus Christ Himself." All other indulgences whatever have been derived from Sovereign Pontiffs, this one alone was given directly by God Himself to the loving and lowly St. Francis.

DIES IRÆ AND THE STABAT MATER. Nor should it be forgotten in this pathetic "Dies Iræ," which forms part of the "Requiem" for the dead, was composed by a Franciscan, Father Thomas de Celano, and that the "Stabat Mater," which is the most beautiful of all hymns in honor of Our Lady, is also the production of a Franciscan—the Italian poet, Jacopo da

Todi. Indeed few Catholics know how much they owe to St. Francis and the Franciscans.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THEORIES. If the world is to profit by the present revival of interest in St. Francis that interest must be more than mere sentiment. St. Francis lived his life, not that we should talk about him, but that we should carry out his work more broadly and deeply. Some practical method of doing this must be sought out and adopted. What more efficacious means could Catholics employ in this direction than in applying themselves with zeal to spreading the Third Order of St. Francis? No time has ever been more opportune for doing so than the present. The Holy Father has repeatedly expressed his conviction that the Third Order is destined to exercise great influence for the regeneration of society.

"Work hard," he says, "for the spread of the Third Order, for it is the Third Order of St. Francis which is to renew the world." In the principal church of the Franciscans in Rome, there is a notable painting representing Leo XIII. dedicating his family to the Third Order of St. Francis, for which His Holiness himself composed the following verse:

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ST. ANTHONY'S BREAD. The leaders of the new anti-Masonic crusade in Europe are looking hopefully to the Third Order to replace the secret societies, and in Paris the great work of personally distributing St. Anthony's Bread is wholly in the hands of the Tertiaries. The present writer has described in another place the workings of this great charitable movement which has been productive of such immeasurable good among the poorer classes in France, and which is shortly to be introduced into this country by the Franciscan Fathers.

The extraordinary growth of this special form of devotion to St. Anthony of Padua, whose example, after that of the Seraph of Assisi, seems most powerful to inspire detachment from the world, is one of the most consoling signs of the times. It seems, moreover, to supply a special need of our day. Who knows but that this new fervor towards the great Wonder-worker of the Order of Friars Minor, which is but another notable manifestation of the Franciscan revival, may not ultimately result in consolidating our non-Catholic brethren in the faith of St. Francis and St. Anthony? For the Franciscan spirit of self-denial and brotherly love which permeates this devotion has the happy effect of eliminating acrimony from the minds of men so that they more easily discern where truth resides, and it may thus be a short cut to the True Church while "the way which knowledge leads is but a roundabout."

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James E. Nicholson.

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