



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. VII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 1857.

No. 31.

"THE IRISH IN ENGLAND."

(From the Dublin Review.)

(CONCLUDED.)

"Such then is the great body of the Catholic poor of England in their material civilisation, their vices, and their virtues. As the Church upon earth does not consist exclusively of the just and of saints, we do not expect to find any large body of men without many a fault and many a sin. The tare has been sown in the same field with the wheat, and both must grow up together until the harvest. And therefore although it must ever be a source of pain to know that there are Catholics who are wholly ignorant of all that they ought to know and do, and that there are others who neglect and trample on the grace which has been so abundantly bestowed upon them, this can never cause offence or scandal to those who remember, what the Church of Christ really is, and is intended to be. Yet although the poorer Catholic classes in this country are not without their serious faults of ignorance and of vice, yet looking at them as a body, and on the whole, we have every reason to be thankful. They are not, as a body, inferior to the poor of any Catholic country, although they have had comparatively few advantages; and they contrast favorably in every respect, except the point of greater comfort, with the Protestant poor in the midst of whom they dwell.—The Established Church in England has told more severely in its effects upon the English poor, than upon any other class in the community. It has done them no good, even in a social point of view. It has, no doubt, distributed at certain seasons gifts and presents of money, and clothes and bread, to a selected few in the different parishes; but it has never been able to reach, and to come at, the large masses of poor hidden in the lanes and alleys of our great towns. It has simply stood between them and the only Body which could really give them a religion. It has acted towards them like the dog in the manger: it will not, and cannot, take care of them itself, and it will not allow the Catholic Church to enter in and to reclaim its own lost children. And what is the consequence? It is, that the heresy of three hundred years has made fearful and terrible havoc among the poor of England, who are naturally a religious people, and who possess many and many attractive qualities which claim our admiration and respect. The heresy of three hundred years has completely extinguished in them every spark of faith, and left them in a condition of almost hopeless indifference to all religious belief. It has left them in a state of ignorance which would be incredible, if we had not daily proof of its miserable existence. It has so loosened the very fundamental notions of moral obligations, that chastity is undervalued, thousands habitually live in concubinage, without even knowing it to be wrong, and the indissolubility of the marriage tie is denied, not only by the poor themselves, but even by their professed religious teachers. These teachers are very powerful to undo and to destroy, but they are impotent in their attempts to build up again.—They are wholly without influence among the very classes which stand in most need of pastoral superintendence, and who are so far from feeling any attraction towards those who are set over them by law, that they more commonly dislike and despise them. Thousands of the children of the poor live and die unbaptized; and more infants are lost to heaven out of Protestant England than from any other nominally Christian country in the world. And worse, perhaps, than all, it is the untaught and untaught for wives and daughters of these neglected poor, who year by year, are being added to the numbers of those ignorant creatures, who suffer themselves to become the deluded victims of the most loathsome form of Protestantism that has as yet appeared in the world. Such have been the effects of three hundred years' heresy. Such has been the work, most effectually, we must confess, achieved by an Established Religion, which has had in its favor, every advantage of wealth, power, influence, position, refinement, learning, and unbroken prosperity, which the money and the pride of England could bestow upon it.

The Catholic poor, on the other hand, have had neither money, nor clothes, nor bread. They are the Pariahs of society—the very poorest of the poor. In a strange and an unfriendly country, everything is against them. The very air is redolent of Protestantism, which loses no opportunity of treating, with a vulgar scorn, no where else to be found, the religion of Jesus Christ. Every year the nation gives itself up to an annual pastime of insult to the Catholic faith, and the public journals defend this systematic insult as a rational and proper amusement. The poor have to bear, as we have said before, incredible hardships for their Church, while, like all other men, they are exposed to the usual temptations to betray God for lucre's sake. Yet what is their normal condition, as a body and as a class in society? They are a people peculiarly open to impressions of religion. They have a clear, a definite, and an objective faith. They profess a religion, and they love it. They pray, and they frequent the public worship of God, from which the poor of the establishment either voluntarily absent themselves, or else are practically excluded. They are amenable to the control of the Church, and they respect, and have confidence in their clergy. The women are modest and chaste, and the seragios of the Mormonites do not receive their supplies from the daughters of Ireland. The men abstain from intoxicating liquors in the ratio of six hundred Catholics to three hundred Protestants. They have a desire to improve, to raise themselves in the scale of civilization, and they eagerly catch at any way of doing so, by means of learning and instruction. They have, as a general rule, no politics, are in no way connected with chartists, or revolutionists, or with any parties dangerous to the peace of the state. And they are all this in spite of the enormous disadvantages under which, socially and religiously, they labor in England. Surely then the Church may well regard these the poorest, but not the least faithful of her children, with some degree of pride and satisfaction. No one maintains, or would wish to maintain, that they are, in all respects, what they ought to be, and what they may yet become: but such as they are at the present moment, they form a good and an excellent material, which with comparative ease may be moulded into shape, and raised in the scale of Christian civilization. They need instruction, training and education. They have, indeed, a natural good breeding, and a courtesy of manner about them which is peculiarly attractive, and which, in the poor, never degenerates into vulgarity. But there are many other points in which they are deficient, and these they can only learn gradually, under the control of religion and the softening influence of good education. But as we have said, they constitute, as a whole, a good and an easy material to work upon. And when we speak of the Irish poor, we must remember that they have never had a chance of being other than they are. It is only within the present century that they have emerged from the heavy hand of oppression and of tyranny, such as no other nation in Europe ever groaned under; and therefore instead of being a worn out and clichee people, their future is still before them. What that future shall be, depends in some measure, upon what is done with the present generation in England and in Ireland. By a careful pastoral superintendence, by opening to them all the rich resources and sweet consolations of Catholic devotion, by accustoming them to the functions of the Church in all their beauty and magnificence, by solid and accurate catechetical and secular instruction, by education of the mind, and by accustoming the women to more feminine occupations, the Irish poor could be indefinitely elevated in the social scale; and as they would willingly meet half way the Catholic Church and the Catholic priests in their efforts to improve them, their future may very easily behold them an enlightened and happy Catholic nation, blending the manliness and energy of their Saxon neighbors, with the cheerfulness and softer traits of a Catholic people.

This great work has set in already; it has begun in the right direction, and in the right manner. Speaking of England alone—to which we are at present restricted—we apprehend that the work which has been done by the Church within our own time is almost marvellous—marvellous when you consider what has been actually accomplished, and the poverty of those who have had to accomplish it. Wherever, too, a mission has been started, there a congregation springs up, and children are brought together; and the laborer receives encouragement to practise his religion; and confessions are heard, and outcasts are reclaimed; and some check is put upon the acts of proselytizers, and thus a good beginning is made: the bread is cast upon the waters, which is to be found after many days.

A good beginning is made, but it is only a beginning. The work which the Catholic Church must try and do in England is, for magnitude and importance, beyond all calculation. It must endeavor to bring home the duties and the blessings of religion to every Catholic house and family throughout the land. It must endeavor to reclaim those poor orphans and destitute boys, who, at present, form the staple supply of the rogues, and the thieves, and the bad characters of London. It must endeavor to rescue from their deplorable misery those fallen women, who were born in her communion, but who have so fearfully sinned against their own souls. It must educate the people, morally, religiously, socially. It must train up every Catholic boy and every Catholic girl throughout the country in good and holy principles. This is the work that lies before it, and stands pre-eminent, even as compared with that other great work of endeavoring to reclaim from heresy those who are not less really her children, because they have been, for the present, lost to her fold. But how is this gigantic task to be accomplished? We speak not, now, of that supernatural assistance which ever accompanies and attends the Church of Christ, which supports her in her difficulties, and manns her for her holy work. She is always sure to have the Divine blessing preceding, accompanying, and following her steps; but as God Almighty works through human instrumentality, and by visible means, the Church must be assisted in her mighty labors, by the prayers, the exertions, and the energies of all her members. There is not a single Catholic in the country who has not a direct interest in furthering to the utmost of his power the education, training, social amelioration, and religious superintendence of the Irish in England. The poor constitute the wealth of the Church, in the same way as political economists tell us that a large population is the wealth of a nation. When St. Lawrence was commanded to exhibit and surrender to the pagan governor the treasures of his Church, he brought forth the poor who were under his charge, adding, that these were the treasures of the Church, and it was no human inspiration which suggested him to give this noble answer. Politically and religiously the poor are the wealth of the Church. It is the poor which enable missions to be started, and the practical working of Catholicism to be exhibited in the midst of an heretical population. It is the poor which affords to the Church an opportunity of bringing into play her various organized methods of employing her members in labors of charity—her converts, for education, her Christian Brothers, her sisters of charity, her orphanages, and her convents of the Good Shepherd. It is the poor which call into exercise the charity of the priestly office, and by the care and attention which they demand and receive, manifest to the whole world the intrinsic difference that exists between the Catholic priest, who lives for the good and the benefit of the people, and the heretical minister whose time and thoughts are occupied by the cares of a wife and family. The poor, therefore, are essential to the energetic and efficient working of the Church; and a community which loses its title to be "the Church of the poor," loses one of the noblest characteristics of the true Church of Jesus Christ. All, therefore, who love the Church, will love the poor, and will labor willingly for their improvement. You have them at your very doors, ready and willing to be taught, if you will only set about it in the right way.—Give them schools, and give them priests; educate them mentally and socially; bring to bear upon them all these kinder and gentler influences, to which they have too long been strangers; condescend to go among them, and visit them at their homes, to say a friendly word to them, to listen to their little complaints and troubles, and to laugh them out of their faults and prejudices. Do not be too austere in your censures of their many failings, nor expect to meet with perfection in the crowded alleys and lanes of London. You must, indeed, remember that we are all but men, and high and low have equally their faults and sins. You must prepare yourself to meet with much disappointment, and with some ingratitude. Those in whom you took the greatest interest will now and then turn out contrary to all your expectations. Some will go on well for a time, and afterwards take a sudden turn, and fall away. Well, these things are hard to be borne, but it will do you good to learn these practical lessons, if you are taught by them to labor not for yourself, nor for man, but for God alone. Depend upon it, however, that in the long run, you will have consolation enough. No man ever yet repented of having devoted his time, his labor, and his money, to God, the Church, and the poor. It is certainly a far more rational course of life than to pass one's days in mere vanity and selfishness. It is a more profitable investment of wealth, than to waste it upon silks and satins, and the fables of dress.—And as every man has his day of reckoning, his day of darkness and distress, his day of preparation for future judgment, we must add one further reflection. To have given heart and soul, and time and money, to God and the poor, will doubtless afford you happier thoughts in 'that day,' and a more pleasant retrospective, and a more tranquil conscience, and a more joyful hope, than if, hanging on the outskirts of fashionable society, you had expended your last sixpence in devoted attendance upon all the lord lieutenants' who ever entered the Castle of Dublin, or in obsequious waiting on all those second-rate noblemen who did you the honor to admit you into their houses in town.

But as we have said the poor are not only the wealth of the Church, seen from a religious point of view, they also form its strength regarded politically. Whatever political consideration the Catholics in this country can expect to receive from the governments of the day, is entirely due to the fact that they are the co-religionists of the poorest and lowest class in the community. No government at the present day can afford to deal out any very hard measures against the Church of a large minority of the poorer classes. Whatever their private feelings may be, at all events they can have no desire that the vast Catholic population of London should be left without spiritual superintendence, to sink into vice and immorality, and to swell the numbers of our public criminals. At present they know them to be upon the whole a peaceable body of men, who trouble themselves but little with the politics of the country; but if the Irish were once to lose their faith, to cease to entertain any respect for their priests, and to become infidels and Protestants, they would at the same time join the ranks of Chartists and revolutionists, and would be distinguished even among such companions for their still greater violence and desperation. All politicians, and all aspirants to the government of this country, are aware of this, and therefore they would be the last persons to press too heavily upon the Catholic Church in England. It is not because they love us, but because they fear the poor, and because they know that we alone can train and control them. But take away the Catholic poor from our large towns and cities, send them all back to their own country, or transport them to the furthest ends of the world, and then what treatment should we receive from Protestant England? We should be either left alone, because our numbers and our consequence would be alike contemptible, or we should be a second time trodden to the dust, because it could be done with impunity. In either case we should have no political status or consideration whatsoever, since without the poor of Ireland our numbers would not exceed those of many of the Protestant sects. It is the same also with America and the British colonies. Wherever the English tongue is spoken, there the Celtic Catholic carries the cross of Christ. Mr. Gladstone may dream of a new Catholicity hereafter to spring up, and to be founded upon the similarity of language, and the community of commercial interest. The writers in the Times may look forward to that distant period when England and America, the mother and the daughter, united under the banner of a common language and a common Protestantism, shall dictate laws to the world, and overthrow the See of Rome, but we apprehend that these dreams and visions are never destined to be realized. Whatever troubles may hereafter be permitted to afflict the Holy See, it is extremely improbable that they will come from the union of America with England. Protestantism must change its nature before it can ever become a bond of union; and the political interests of America are not likely to be exactly coincident with those of England. But Providence is making use of the English language and of English enterprise, although for a purpose which will not meet with the approbation either of Mr. Gladstone or the Times.—The English carry with them wherever they go the Irish Catholic poor; and he brings his religion along with him, and builds churches and founds missions in America, Australia, and New Zealand. In these strange lands the Irish rise to comfort, wealth, and influence; and their political consequence is even now beginning to be felt throughout the empire. Thus then we see that even politically, and speaking humanly, the poor are the wealth and the strength of the Church. Be it our part to fit them for their new positions and their new places. Be it ours to improve them ere they leave our shores, that they may not carry with them the faults and the habits which in this country bring them into so much trouble, and often cause them to be called by harsher names than they deserve. Be it ours to keep alive the band of brotherhood which unites the scattered members of the Church in one communion and fellowship, by a holier and a stronger bond than a similarity of language, and a unity of commercial relations. Above all, be it our most anxious care, that go where they may throughout the world, they may know, understand, and practice their holy religion; and retaining unimpaired that wonderful faith, which they have inherited from their fathers, may illustrate it by gentleness, and purity, and love, and by all the virtues of a genuine Catholic people.

PROSELYTISM AT WORK IN IRELAND.

PART II.

(From the Weekly Register.)

Resuming the account of the "operations," I purpose now "joining company" with some of these same "Scripture Readers, who prow about in pairs."

It is ten o'clock, and a Monday morning. A bright midsummer sun shines on the river Liffey, and a solitary lounge leans over the bars of the "metal bridge," glancing gloomily towards the ripple on the muddy waters beneath him. The Metal bridge is a capital rendezvous. A charge of one-halfpenny being made for each foot passenger, and there being no carriage traffic allowed over it, the bridge is always sufficiently lonely, and just the spot to choose for a quiet chat, to arrange plans which may have anything

London Labor, &c., vol. i., p. 114.