

THE TRUE WITNESS

AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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MICHAEL BURKE, President.

C. A. McDONNELL, Managing Director.

DIRECTORS:

Hon. EDWARD MURPHY, P. WRIGHT,
T. J. QUINLAN.

J. K. FORAN, LL.B., EDITOR.

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LENT.

Once more the Lenten season is at hand. To-day the ashes are sprinkled upon the heads of the faithful and those impressive words are pronounced: "*memorandum homo quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris*." "remember man that dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return." This is the time of penance and mortification. To prepare for His public mission Christ retired and spent forty days in the wilderness, where He fasted and prayed. The great event of Easter is approaching and in imitation of her Divine Founder the Church ordains that for forty days the faithful should practise mortification and in humility and penance prepare for the celebration of the glorious day of Resurrection. There is something peculiarly impressive about the ceremonies of the Catholic Church—whether they tend to awaken sentiments of awe or delight—and there is an appropriateness in each of them that bespeaks the perfection of the Institution founded by Divinity. The warning words of the priest on Ash Wednesday and the solemn significance of the act of placing ashes upon the forehead, tend to awaken serious thoughts in the Christian. We learn at the altar rail that we are but dust and that the day is not very distant—much nearer than we may imagine—when back into dust we shall crumble. With that awful truth before us, the entry upon the season of sacrifice and mortification marks a most important period in our short careers.

Having felt, in all its truthfulness, that death is certain, the mind pauses in dread before that other fact—the uncertainty of the hour, place and manner of our exit from life. Perhaps this is to be a last Ash Wednesday for many of our readers; most positively for a few their last Lent commences to-day. It is impossible to tell how many of us and which of us shall be dust again, when Ash Wednesday, 1895, dawns upon the world. Consequently it is wisdom to seize the opportunity that now presents itself; it may be the last.

In olden times the fasting, the mortifications, the sacrifice of Christians during the Lenten season were so severe that even the reading of them almost makes one feel inclined to believe that the accounts are exaggerated. In our age the prescribed penances are comparatively insignificant. According to circumstances the members of the hierarchy modify and change the rule and obligations of Lent in order to suit the health, the condition and the requirements of each individual. In times of epidemic the fast, and often the abstinence, may be dispensed with. In fact the modern Lent is very easy of observance; and yet there are hundreds who complain of the severity of the Church's laws, and seek to avoid, by every imaginable ex-

cuse, the proper fulfilment of the few simple regulations that are imposed. It would be profitable for such Catholics were they to meditate seriously upon the words of the priest, when imposing the ashes on the heads of the people. A person finds it difficult to abstain from flesh meat, or to follow the rules of fasting, during a period of forty days; let us suppose that this is the last Ash Wednesday, the last Lent for that person; how very much more satisfactory would be the "returning to dust" when the soul would have a few sacrifices and voluntary penances to present before God! But, apart from the ordinary fasts and abstinences of the Lenten season, there are many other acts of mortification and of merit which can be heaped up to one's credit in the treasury house of God. There are extra prayers to be said, special visits to the Church that can be made, fits of temper that may be curbed, evil thoughts to be banished, hot words to be left unsaid, cruel slanders to leave unuttered, and the creating of enmities to be avoided; there are also many extra acts of virtue to perform. There are charities to be given, soft words of consolation to be spoken, kind deeds to be performed, generous and holy thoughts to entertain. In fact there are a hundred and one ways in which a good Catholic can help to keep Lent. The will is all that is required; the opportunity is not wanting, nor is the capability. If you cannot fast, at least you can refrain from cursing, or lying, or slandering others, or using immoral language; if you cannot abstain, there is nothing to prevent you from saying a few extra prayers, or from omitting to give offence to the feelings of others. In a word the Catholic, who wishes to follow the example of the One who fasted during the forty days, can make Lent a season of countless blessings and graces, and even should it be his last one on earth, he can turn it into an autumn harvest of richest return.

THE CONFESSIONAL.

We regret that circumstances oblige us to give publicity in our columns to the name of Dr. Chiniquy, a man who makes a profession of calumniating the Catholic Church. But there are times when misrepresentation is pushed to a limit beyond endurance, and calumny is so barefaced that silence would be sinful. In Thursday evening's Daily Witness the apostate priest has another letter, in which he repeats, with audacity that beggars conception, his false statements and wicked assertions regarding the sacrament of penance. But as far as Dr. Chiniquy is concerned, the haste and delight with which the Witness fills its columns with his abuse of the Catholic Church, give his assertion a certain importance, especially when he attempts to back them up by the mention of authorities, and by texts without contexts, from authors on morals. Some one challenged Dr. Chiniquy to produce evidence of his statements regarding the evil results of immoral questions that priests are said to be obliged to ask in the confessional. In reply the fallen priest copies out some passages from such works on morals as Dens, Ligouri, Gury and Debreyne, and sends them to the Witness; he then pens a letter that is false in its foundation—and no man knows it better than he does—in which he says: "I ask them to get Ligouri, Dens, Debreyne, &c., or any of the theologians whom the priests of Rome must learn by heart before hearing confessions, and if they do not find that what I say is correct, I consent to be dragged by the neck with a rope over the streets of Montreal as an impostor." Nobody wants to injure the

poor old man, nor would we care to see him dragged, either by the neck or by the heels; but if the fact of being an impostor—and one of the deepest dye—deserves such harsh treatment, we are sorry for his sake that we feel bound to prove from his own assertions and assumptions that he is an impostor, a wilful misinterpreter of authorities, and a vindictive enemy of Truth.

On our individual responsibility we intend to deal with this question. The editor of this paper takes upon himself to show that, in making the accusation of immorality of the Confessional and in trying to support that baseless and vile calumny by simply mentioning the names of some Catholic authorities or text-books of moral theology, and by taking extracts from them, Dr. Chiniquy is knowingly, maliciously, and with a cunning worthy of the Evil One, leading his readers astray and flinging the dust of false issues into their eyes. It is not a priest's hand that will pull the mask from his face—a priest would be contaminated by the contact; but now to the proof!

Take any special text of Scripture and ignore every other one and you can put half a dozen different interpretations upon it; take any article of the Civil Code, and ignore the remainder of that volume, and all statutory legislation, and you can make it suit almost any contention that you desire; take even an ordinary novel, select a few passages from its pages, ignoring all that precedes and all that follows each quotation, and you can make the world believe that the romance is good, bad, or indifferent, according as you please. Take the case of the physician: He is called in to attend a woman who has cut her finger; he has no need in that case of any knowledge of those special questions which must be asked to females in cases of a delicate nature; yet would he have been admitted to the profession simply on his knowledge of slight wounds? Would it be an excuse to say "I did not read, nor study the text books that treat of those particularly delicate subjects, because the majority of the cases I expect to attend will not require any such knowledge on my part?" What would the faculty of McGill say to a candidate for an M.D. who replied in such a manner? Come now, Mr. Chiniquy, what is a priest? Was it not to the priests the victim of leprosy was told to go, that he might be cleansed? Is not the priest the physician of the soul? Is he not in a spiritual sphere what the medical man is in a physical one? To cure the patient he must know the malady; he must know its symptoms; he must know every remedy; he must know the *materia medica* of the soul. In order to be able to detect the very first signs of the foul leprosy of sin, to perceive the symptoms of disease in the soul, it is necessary that he should study carefully all these indices and know the danger of each one of them. That he may be able to prescribe he must know the nature of the sickness and all the details of the patient's condition.

The medical man knows, or should know, all about the human system, the different ailments to which females are subject, the exact questions which should be asked and the circumstances under which they are to be asked. But no medical man would ever dream of asking a girl of eight or nine the same questions that he would ask her mother; nor would he trouble a girl, who was suffering from a toothache, with a dozen delicate questions that would be altogether pertinent and necessary were she the victim of certain other afflictions. No more—and Dr. Chiniquy knows it too

well—can a priest use his knowledge of the different spiritual ills and their remedies without discretion in the confessional. We talk out plainly simply because the case demands it; vile-ness such as that with which we have to contend demands that it be met and crushed in an uncompromising manner. Our readers will excuse us if we are obliged to step as far as we do to-day upon the path trod by that enemy of all that is pure and true in our Faith; but on his own ground we must meet him. No living man knows better than Dr. Chiniquy that the works of Ligouri, Dens, &c., are merely the necessary text books for the physician of the soul, the questions in which are only to be used according to the requirements of the case. Once more we return to the medical man. He is obliged by his professional rules to ask certain questions to one who is about to become a mother; does that mean that he must go over the same questions every time he is called in to treat a female, no matter how young or how old she may be, no matter what complaint she has, no matter how foreign to the case the questions are? A man who would so act would be a fit subject for a mad house. Dr. Chiniquy would have the world believe that every priest is obliged to ask every penitent—irrespective of circumstances—all the questions that must be asked in certain cases. He omits, however, to state that the priest is bound by most positive restrictions. So much so that as a rule if a confessor has a learning at all it is toward the omission of minute examinations of consciences. A young person of eight or twelve goes to confession; the nature of that person's life, the very slowness of the offences committed, indicate at once that no questions are necessary—merely advice and encouragement should be given. That person comes back at the age of sixteen; there are darker shadows floating over the young soul. It is then necessary to know what kind of company she frequents, what her tastes are, what her predominating inclination is likely to be—pride, jealousy, or any other evil passion—in order to point out the surest way to check the danger in its beginning. The same person comes at the age of twenty-five, after a few years of dizzy whirl in the world's vortex; she is perhaps on the verge of a precipice that she does not see; in her giddy excitement she does not notice the meshes of destruction that are being wound about her life. The moral authors dictate certain questions concerning her inclinations, her predilections, her surroundings and all particulars that may enable the confessor to point out to her the danger and check her steps before the fatal one is taken. Another person, who has spent years in sinfulness, whose soul is black with scales of sin, whose life has been the ruin of many a poor fellow-creature, and who has brought misery to more than one domestic fireside, comes to confession; she is repentant, she wants to know how she can repair the past in order to be worthy of God's forgiveness, the confessor must know how deeply she has sinned in order to gauge the penance and to advise for the future; it is necessary, in her case, to ask questions, such as are indicated by Chiniquy in his extracts from Dens, Gury and other authors, questions that can in no way corrupt, but which are absolutely necessary to enable the soul's physician to properly prescribe—questions which would not only be out of place in the previous cases, but which these same authorities strictly prohibit. Dr. Chiniquy knows better than we can tell him that the most severe and soul-binding obligations