

SAINT ANNE DE BEAUPRE.

For the CATHOLIC RECORD.

No keen observer of the opinions and actions of men can deny that we are living in a materialistic age. I have not reference solely to that gross materialism that would deny the existence of all supernatural agencies. There is another kind of materialism that exists even among those of the true fold, which consists not so much in the absence of faith, as in the absence of a lively faith. No Catholic will deny any article that the Church teaches, yet there are many who do not act as though they believed. Every Catholic believes that God is really present on our altars—Jesus Christ, the same Saviour who was born in Bethlehem, who lived with Mary and Joseph at Nazareth, and who, for love of us, was crucified on Mount Calvary. Notwithstanding this, how many are there who never think of entering a church except on Sunday, although they say they believe that Jesus Christ, their true Friend, is present there in the tabernacle. In their troubles they seek consolation from men, but never think of exposing their wants at the foot of the altar; and this because they have not a lively faith. It is recorded in the life of Saint Louis, King of France, that upon being informed, one day, that our Lord had appeared in the Blessed Sacrament in the royal chapel, he refused to go and witness the miracle, saying, "Thank God, I need nothing to convince me of the Real Presence." There are, it is true, many Christians in the world who, like this holy prince, need no miracles to strengthen their faith; but there are others who believe better when they see.

God, in His infinite mercy, has been ever ready to strengthen the faith of such as by sensible demonstrations of His omnipotence. During His stay upon earth He confirmed His doctrine by miracles, and throughout all ages He has been wont to strengthen the faith of His elect and silence infidelity by sensible manifestations of His power.

For this purpose He generally employs secondary causes. Chief among these are the relics of His saints, many of whom have been powerful in obtaining temporal and spiritual blessings for their brethren through the instrumentality of their relics. Every land has its patron saint; and we favored ones in Canada have for our intercessors in heaven two of the greatest saints in the calendar—Saint John the Baptist, of whom our Lord said, "Greater was not born of woman," and Saint Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin.

Ever since the Briton mariners, in fulfillment of their vow, erected in her honor a chapel, on the bank of the St. Lawrence, St. Anne has obtained many and singular blessings for this young land. We all in general have need to thank her, that our country has been delivered from the plagues, pestilences, and society evils, that have worked such havoc in other lands. But more particularly has she merited the gratitude of those pilgrims upon whom she has conferred such signal blessings, at her favorite shrine of Beaulieu.

During the Autumn of 1892 I witnessed at this holy place a miracle and a conversion, the particulars of which I am so well acquainted with that I have considered it my duty, in gratitude to the good St. Anne, to proclaim her praise to the Catholics of the Upper Province. I do this the more readily, since I consider the numerous pilgrims which she has been pleased to perform on the occasions of the few pilgrimages from Ontario—a sign that she is pleased to see her English-speaking children at her shrine, honoring her, as have done the good people of Quebec, since the early days of the Province.

My two fellow-pilgrims, to whose cases I have special reference in this article, I shall call for convenience sake Thomas and John. On the morning of the pilgrimage Thomas set out with me, to walk (true pilgrim fashion) to the railroad station, several miles distant. John, being paralyzed, went ahead in a carriage. Our conversation on the way, very naturally, turned upon St. Anne, each of us expressing the hope that she would lend a propitious ear to our petitions. We discussed the probability of our young friend, John's recovery, and from this we gradually turned to a discussion of the efficacy of Faith. I may here state that my friend, Thomas, though an excellent character, had, like his illustrious namesake of Apostolic memory, some difficulty in believing what did not occur to him through the medium of the senses. He had spent many years of his life in the far West, where the majority of the people, to say the best of them, are not great church-goers, and where the conceptions of the supernatural are limited to a few blood-curdling tales of ghosts. He did not, however, lose sight of God entirely during those years; for he informed me that although he went to church but seldom, yet he never closed his eyes in sleep without first offering up a prayer to God. This prayer had no doubt kept alive in him the light of Faith, although the atmosphere of infidelity had sadly dimmed its lustre. "I admit," he said to me, "that I am somewhat inclined to be sceptical in regard to religious matters. I am like a character in a story that I once heard. A peasant was walking along the bank of a stream, carrying an axe on his shoulder, when he met a philosopher, or philosopher, who, entering into a conversation with him on religious matters, said: 'If you were to throw your axe into that water and had faith that it would not sink, it would remain on the surface.' The peasant regarded him rather distrustfully for a moment,

then said, 'Well, here goes the axe; I have faith that it will not sink; but I'll bet you a dollar, it goes to the bottom.' My faith in St. Anne is very much like this peasant's; yet if I see our friend, John, lay down his crutches and walk, then will I believe."

During the journey we talked little of what was to be seen outside, for we felt that we were not on a pleasure excursion, and that although our mode of travelling differed from that of the old-time pilgrimages, yet we were pilgrims and not tourists. We found indeed within the car sufficient matter to occupy our attention and furnish us with suitable meditations. It was an Irish pilgrimage, and it would have been a source of gratification to any Catholic, and much more to any Irish Catholic, to have perceived in the conversation and actions of those good people that impulsive charity and lively faith that has ever been the characteristic of the Irish race. Notwithstanding that there were many sufferers among the pilgrims, all were cheerful and full of hope in the assistance of the good Saint Anne. An over-pious person might have considered the company a little too jovial for the occasion, but their lightheartedness was not the dissipated joy of worldly men and women, but that happy Christian gladness that sweetens life and makes suffering itself rejoice.

As a Catholic approaches, for the first time, the old city of Quebec, a pious feeling of awe and devotion comes over him at the sight of this cradle of Catholicity in Canada. His imagination carries him far back into the past. He sees, as in a dream, the bosom of that mighty river as yet unruffled, save by the floundering whale or the bark canoe of the savage, reflecting the giant arms of the primeval forest. He hears the fierce yells of the wild animals, mingled with the scarce less savage war-whoop of the red man, exulting over his scalped victim. In short, he sees before him Nature in all her primitive grandeur and beauty, and man, the constituted lord of nature, in all his depravity. But lo! there appears in the distance a little craft, manned by hardy French navigators, bearing to this wild land intrepid missionaries of the cross. Soon the scene is changed. The red man hearkens to the Gospel of Christ, and is baptized. The Healer of depraved nature works the wonders of His grace, and civilization and Christianity are established in Canada. What wonder that Catholics venerate that place where the first missionaries made their station, and from which shot forth as it were the first rays of that Faith which now brightens so many Catholic homes throughout this broad Dominion! And what wonder that St. Anne chose to have her shrine close to this place, that is associated with so many important events in the religious history of Canada!

Beaulieu (Beautiful Meadow) is situated about twenty-one miles below Quebec, on the left bank of the St. Lawrence. Nature seems to have concentrated in this little spot all her grandeur, beauty and simplicity. Those lofty mountains, echoing back over the smooth waters of that majestic river the Angelus bell, that calls the simple laborer to prayer, cannot but awaken devotion in the heart of the Catholic pilgrim. Everything that he sees is so full of Divine significance that he imagines himself transported from this material world. He feels that he is in a holy place, and, as a soldier, when he walks upon the field where was fought some great battle, feels a thrill of heroic emotion pass through him at the recollection of the heroes and battle-fields of the past; so is the Catholic reminded as he approaches this holy shrine of that little town of Galilee, where Divine Majesty came down and leagued with human simplicity and virtue to fight for men their battles against sin.

Upon our arrival at the shrine we found the place all astir with pilgrims who had come by boat from some other quarter. It were needless to say that we lost no time in looking about us, but hastened to present ourselves before that sanctuary which had been the subject of our thoughts, hopes and desires during the past week. John, especially, was eager to consummate his earnest prayers and his novena, by receiving Communion at the shrine of St. Anne, who, he was firmly convinced, would restore strength to his limbs. As we approached the church he was almost overcome by eager emotion. He thought of his widowed mother, his sisters and his brothers, who were praying for him at home, when he should be able to place his crutches in the continually accumulating pile, to be still another testimony of the many miracles wrought through the intercession of St. Anne.

Upon entering the church an edifying spectacle met our gaze, in which there was so much of the supernatural that human words were inadequate to express the sentiments to which it gave birth. High Mass was being celebrated at the main altar, and priests were continually issuing from the sacristy to say Mass at some of the many side altars, or returning after Mass was said. The choir was singing a beautiful French hymn to St. Anne, full of tender sweetness and devotion. The pilgrims were all on their knees, absorbed in prayer. Some were kneeling in the aisle before the statue of St. Anne, praying fervently, as each waited for his turn to kiss the relic, exposed in front of the pedestal. Now and then a grey haired old man would give vent to his sentiments of humility, by stooping down and kissing the floor. Truly, thought I, there is much of heaven in this scene. After the Mass the pilgrims received Communion. It

is always a consoling sight to see people going to Communion. One can imagine that he hears the interior conversation of each soul with its God. Each makes his own poor efforts to entertain the Divine Visitor in the abode of his soul; and Jesus is at home with all who receive Him with humility and good will, for He has said that it is His delight to be with the children of men. It makes us joyful to think that we have in heaven an All-Powerful Friend, who says, "Come to Me all ye that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you;" who knows all our troubles, and from whom we are sure of assistance. On the occasion of a pilgrimage Communion is especially consoling; for God is wont at such times to be more lavish of His gifts, both temporal and spiritual; and it is then, more than at any other time, that Faith is repaid by miracles. Thomas was very much edified by the simple faith of those poor people whom he saw leading up to the altar rail a crippled father, a blind mother or some sick relative, who had come perhaps many hundreds of miles, led on by simple faith in St. Anne. John was all absorbed in prayer, as he waited anxiously for our Mass to begin. After the Mass we all received Communion. One of the Remedist Fathers, who have charge of the shrine, then announced that at 3 o'clock the veneration of the relic and the blessing of water, oil, medals, beads and other articles of devotion would take place. The water is obtained from several fountains, near the site of the old chapel, and every one that goes to St. Anne's takes away with him at least a small bottle of it. The most amusing character at the shrine is the pious old Irish woman, who carries away enough holy water to drive the devils out of seven parishes, and who cannot understand why the old Frenchmen behind the counter shrug their shoulders when she asks him half a dozen times, elevating each time quite perceptibly her tone of voice, for "a pair of bades and a bottle of lie." "Surely," she says, "I spake loud enough, but he does not seem to understand me."

We passed the afternoon in purchasing little articles of devotion for our friends at home, in visiting the building of the "Scala Sancta" and the old chapel, and in taking a general view of the place. Two or three small stores and a few open stands, where articles of devotion are sold, constitute the business part of the town; the rest is made up principally of boarding-houses and hotels. When you enter one of these latter, however, you find it very different from the ordinary nineteenth century hotel. There is no bar-room there, nor bar-room loafers. No intoxicating stench pollutes the air. Such a thing as intoxicating liquor is not to be found in St. Anne's, and only when the doctor's certificate is signed by the chief magistrate of the place, and by the Bishop, can it be obtained, in case of sickness. No barbarous caricatures or comedy company advertisements adorn the walls; but, on the contrary, the beautiful though simple pictures of the Immaculate Conception or of the Sacred Heart speak to the pilgrim of purity and love. In the evening we talked over the events of the day, in our boarding house. Thomas was very much pleased with what he had seen, and declared that he had never beheld a more edifying spectacle in his life. John, although his hoped-for cure was not yet realized, was by no means discouraged. "Who knows but I may do so yet?" he said to me, when I, with the view of encouraging him rather than of expressing my own opinion, said, "To-morrow, John, you will leave your crutches in the church."

In the morning, after Mass and Communion, the veneration of the relic again took place. On this occasion I happened to be separated from my two friends. Upon leaving the church to go to breakfast I noticed Thomas standing in front of the main fountain, which was encircled by pilgrims, each waiting eagerly for his turn to fill his bottle of water. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, and he appeared quite unconscious of what was going on around him. I shall never forget that scene. I thought of the Well of Jacob, where our Lord converted the Samaritan woman, who came to draw water. Perhaps, thought I, this same Saviour has performed another miracle of His love this morning. "Where is John?" I said to him. He answered, without raising his head, "He has gone down the street to the hotel;" and he added in an absent-minded way, as if he were telling me that he had lost a nickel, "He has left his crutches in the church." I made him no reply, but, leaving him alone in his meditation, hurried on to congratulate John. I could scarcely believe my senses, when I saw him on the street ahead of me, walking along quite briskly without sign of lameness. With grateful hearts we knelt down in our room and thanked God. After the first moments of joy and congratulation were over Thomas told me that John had kissed the relic he handed him his crutches, whereupon he replied, "I have no need of them."

John left St. Anne's perfectly cured, and many a "Praise be to God" came from the lips of his fellow-pilgrims, who were eye-witnesses of the miracle. Thomas said and believed. A lively faith now enables him to perceive, in all things, the hand of an all-powerful and all-good God.

We left St. Anne's for Quebec that afternoon. While waiting for the train we stood listening to a blind violinist who was singing the "Magnificat." Never before did I hear anything so sweet. I would have listened longer, but the train was starting. The last words I heard as I entered the door of the car were

"Esurientes implerit bonis, et divites dimisit inanes."

"Farewell, beloved shrine," said we in our hearts, as the spires faded from our view. "We must leave you now, but we will come again to visit you, if God permits, and bring others with us if we can." For this purpose do I write, that Catholics of Ontario may not be unmindful of their great benefactress, and may come to her shrine to honor her and receive the favors that she never fails to bestow upon her children. "Come to Saint Anne," I say, "ye who are in affliction, and she will console you. Come to St. Anne, ye who are infirm of body, and if it be for your good, your health will be restored; but if bodily infirmity be more conducive to your salvation, or if you can serve God better by your sufferings than by your exertions, as is often the case, rest assured that you will receive some other favor more precious still. Come to St. Anne, ye whose hearts are torn asunder by temptations, and she will conquer the enemy for you. Come to St. Anne, ye in whose souls the faith has grown cold and who see but dimly by its light, and she will dispel the clouds of doubt so that ye may see the Truth, the Way and the Life. Lastly, come ye whose faith is lively, who feel the presence of God and know that He is thinking of you, but who say within yourselves, 'God is present, because it is His nature not to be absent, and He thinks of me because He cannot cease to think of me. God is too grand and too mighty to be concerned about my little troubles. He only rules over and regulates things in a general way.' Come ye, I say, and behold God telling you, by a sensible sign addressed to your hearing or sight, 'I am here, my child. I am with you wherever you go. I am with you in your trials and your temptations. Even when you feel most abandoned, then am I at your side. It is I who give you strength to bear up in adversity. Think not that I am unmindful of you because I permit the enemy to afflict you much. I have watched your struggle, have lifted you up when you have fallen and have been pleased at your victory. Trust in Me, and you shall always conquer. It is not necessary always to feel sensible consolation in this land of trial. It is enough to be conscious that you are doing My will. I will always give you sufficient light to see the right path, 'and the encircling gloom.' Come one, come all, and behold and feel the power, the glory and the goodness of God, made manifest to man though His faithful servant, Saint Anne."

"To kneel at this altar in faith we draw near. Led on by Mary, thy daughter so dear, Good St. Anne, we call on thy name. Thy praises loud thy children proclaim. Of old when our fathers touched Canada's shore, They named thee their patron and saint evermore. To all who invoke thee then lendest an ear. Thou soothest the sorrow of all who draw near. Saint Anne, we implore thee to list to our prayer."

IN TIME OF temptation take us in thy care. In this life obtain for us that which is best, And bring us at last to our heavenly rest. A PILGRIM.

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