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THE RIGHT REV. J. C. O'BRIEN

A few weeks since, the public press noted the passing of a prominent figure from the stage of Canadian public life, the sudden death of Hon. Raymond Prefontaine, Minister of Marine.

Now it is our sad duty to chronicle the passing of another equally prominent, but whose path of duty lay in the service of the Church; the demise of His Grace, Most Rev. J. C. O'Brien, Archbishop of Halifax. At his residence in that city at eleven o'clock on the night of the ninth of March he was suddenly and unexpectedly summoned Home.

For some years past His Grace had not been in vigorous health, but still he discharged his high and important duties with the selfsame force and power that



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ever characterized his Archbishop administration. There was no intimation of any serious lapsing of those vital energies, and the news of his sudden death came as a shock to the whole community. All, without distinction of class or creed, mourn his death, but it comes with especial pain to those whose interests, spiritual and temporal, as his flock it was his particular solicitude to foster and to guard.

His activities on their behalf continued to the end; only two Sundays before his death a lengthy Lenten Pastoral was read in all the churches of the Diocese, breathing the spirit of the "Good Shepherd" in every phrase, the product of his pen. To the last moment he was "about his Father's business."

For some time it even appeared to intimate acquaintances that his health was improving. With favorable weather he took his daily walks, and on the occasion of the State Funeral of the late Minister of Marine above referred to, the Archbishop, after conducting the religious ceremonies on board the battleship "Dominion," walked in the long procession with a step as light as any of his years.

True, for some days he had been under a doctor's care, but the malady which troubled him for some years was not the cause of his death; apoplexy was the form which the summons took to call him to his last long rest.

The deceased prelate was born on the fourth of May, 1843, of Irish parents, near new Glasgow, in that little province, Prince Edward Island, which has given to America among thousands of others less distinguished who first saw the light within its red-walled shores, Father MacKinnon, the peaceful hero of Manila Bay; Jacob G. Schurman, President of Cornell, and James Jeffrey Roche, the brilliant literary genius, now representing the Government of his adopted country in a distant land.

Although born in a state where all have plenty, though opulence is rare, still the parentage of all those men was what the world calls humble.

The future Archbishop commenced the struggle of life as a clerk in a country store in his native province; associated with him in this occupation was Jacob G. Schurman, another country boy. On common ground they grasped the ladder at its lowest rounds, and rose by innate merit, each in his

chosen calling, to the highest place they might attain.

As a boy the youthful O'Brien studied at the public schools, and at the age of nineteen entered St. Dunstan's College to study for the priesthood. Two years afterward he was selected by the Bishop of Prince Edward Island to fill a vacancy as student in the College of the Propaganda at Rome.

There his brilliant talents found wider scope; he carried off the highest prize for general excellence in a school which draws its students from every quarter of the globe, and he graduated as Doctor of Divinity and Philosophy.

In 1871 he returned, ordained a priest, to his old Alma Mater in the Island province. There he spent two years in preaching,—two memorable years, imparting to those drawn to him by his simple goodness and amiable zeal some portion of that intellectual treasure of which he had borne so rich a part from the banks of the classic Tiber.

The next year he spent at the cathedral of the capital city, Charlottetown. There his zeal as a pastor, combined with persuasive pulpit eloquence and moderation but firmness in every act, won the esteem of all with whom he came in contact.

But failing health required his transfer to less arduous duties, and accordingly he was assigned a country parish, Indian River, where the simple surroundings accorded well with his highly refined but pure and modest tastes. For eight years the parishioners of Indian River found in him a kind and zealous pastor. Here, too, other traits of his high and gifted character began to be unfolded, and many literary gems, more highly esteemed the better known, take "a habitation and a name" from this quiet country parish and its unassuming parish-priest.

Gifted with high literary taste, his more serious works show a depth of reasoning power which lends stability to philosophic thought, while his practical productions manifest the brightness of simple diction, inspired at once by a chaste imagination and a virile mind.

Of his former works the "Philosophy of the Bible Vindicated," published at Charlottetown in 1876, seems to be the most enduring monument by which posterity may know the author's name; while the sonnet, "St. Cecilia," which bore the palm from all Catholic poets of America at the time, may be taken as a sample of his truly poetic power:—

"A shell lies silent on a lonely shore;
High rocks and barren stand with frowning brow;
Hither no freighted ships e'er turn their prow
Their treasures on the fated sands to pour;
Afar the white robed sea gull loves to soar;
But, pure as victims for a nation's vow,
A lovely maiden strikes the shell, and now
Its music charms, and sadness reigns no more.
Thus, Christian Poesy, on pagan coasts
For ages mute had lain thy sacred lyre,
Untouched since from the prophet's hand it fell,
Till fair Cecilia, taught by angel hosts,
Attuned its music to the heavenly choir,
And gave a Christian voice to Clio's shell."

To this he appended, with characteristic modesty, the simple signature, "C. O'Brien," and when the judges rendered the decision they did not know for a time that the prize went to one who might have supplemented the merit of his contribution with the influence of a more weighty name. Virtue, the keynote of his life, here as elsewhere brought its own reward.

Twenty-three years ago, on the death of the Most Reverend Michael Hannan, the bishops of this ecclesiastical province recommended the then young Rev. Dr. O'Brien as his successor in the Archbishopric throne. Rome, not unmindful of his brilliant record, responded to their wish. His consecration as Archbishop took place at St. Mary's Cathedral, Halifax, on January twenty-first, 1883, and year after year since

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For almost a quarter of a century, His Grace manifested an indefatigable activity in the administration of his extensive diocese. In the city here churches, schools and institutes of charity stand as material monuments to his devoted zeal; and more admirable than even those will be cherished the memory of his many kindly deeds, the sweet aroma of unostentatious virtue lingering as a hallowed benison when his earthly form is known to us no more.

Of the various charges entrusted to his care he was ever a zealous guardian; fearless and uncompromising in the defence of right; "A faithful watchman on the towers of Israel." But on the part of those who might hold different opinions this aggressive spirit produced no bitterness: they rather admired his unflinching courage and the open candor with which his convictions were expressed.

Archbishop O'Brien was an earnest and eminent prelate; he was more,—he was a public-spirited citizen, taking a deep and active interest in all that concerned the welfare of his country or of the Empire of which it forms a part.

With parents from the Emerald Isle, it was but natural he should be deeply interested in all that appertained to the relief of his kinsmen struggling there. He was a champion of their cause, but that sympathy did not impair his unwavering loyalty to institutions of British rule.

He was a prominent member, during its existence, of the Imperial Federation League, and a Vice-President for Nova Scotia of the British Empire League in Canada. At the funeral of Sir John Thompson, Premier of Canada, who died at Windsor Castle in 1898, he preached the State sermon, and in the following year he was elected President of the Royal Society of Canada.

But large a space as his influence occupied in the affairs both of Church and State, he was ever the same kindly, unpretentious and noble-minded friend to all. Hospitable in his private life, the magnanimous instincts of his philanthropic mind extended to embrace the needs and pains of all humanity. His was the knowledge "that buildeth up," without a trace of the pride "that puffeth up."

Thoroughly imbued with deep religious fervor, he was at the same time possessed to an admirable degree of those indefinable traits of character indispensable to genuine popularity, all so blending in his person as to win at once respect and love.

Whatever he did, he did well; but the kindly voice is now hushed forever, and the friendly hand is now stilled in death. The Church is bereft of a worthy prelate; Canada in particular, and the Empire at large, has lost one of her truest and ablest sons. To both he leaves the legacy of a memory from which generations yet unborn may draw the inspiration of a higher and truer life; a tradition fragrant with the influence of noble deeds, wafted down through the corridors of distant time, and destined to endure to that appointed day when all voices shall be silent and every tongue shall cease.

In a closing chapter of one of his latest works the deceased Archbishop wrote: "It is appointed unto all men once

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to die,' declares the Apostle, and weak human nature, taught by every-day events and warned by its own consciousness of decay, practically takes up the refrain and sounds it down the centuries. A stern reality is this death, whether borne on angel wings to kiss into consciousness a lovely child, or whirled in a chariot of fire to smite a vigorous youth, or carried slowly forward in the wallet of time to gently garner the ripened fruit of a well spent life. A dispeller of illusions, too, is this restless pursuer of the human family. . . . Yet there is a triumphant ring in the dying cry of the vanquished, 'Non omnis moriar,' (not all of me shall die,) is the challenge the expiring Christian throws down to victorious Death, as he calmly passes to a life and a state more real, though less material, than the present."

So wrote the departed prelate. Death came, too, to him, to "garner the fruits of a well spent life." He came though not "as a chariot of fire," or a restless pursuer "carried slowly forward." He came of a sudden, "to kiss into consciousness" of a wider life the soul that in all its earthly course ever kept in view this last and great transition. He, too, passed calmly to that "State more real," and the benign expression of his now pallid countenance that even the accoutrements of the grave can not dispel, shows in what mood the "faithful servant" forsook this clay abode to receive the reward of work "well done."

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