

The True Witness.

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE,

IS PRINTED AND PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY BY THE PROPRIETORS,

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TERMS:

To all country subscribers, or subscribers receiving their papers through the post, or calling for them at the office, if paid in advance, Two Dollars; if not so paid, then Two Dollars and a-half.

Single copies, price, 3¢; can be had at this Office; Pickups News Depot, St. Francis Xavier Street; and at W. Dalton's, No. 3, St. Lawrence Main Street.

To all subscribers whose papers are delivered by carriers, Two Dollars and a-half, if paid in advance; but if not paid in advance, then Three Dollars.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DEC. 30, 1859.

TO OUR READERS—A "MERRY CHRISTMAS, AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR."—This is the formula prescribed for the season, the most ardent wish of our hearts. Not words of form merely, but words of honest truth and sincerity.

It is customary at this season to review the year that is past; to "take stock" as it were, and to balance one's accounts. If we refrain from so doing, it is because we would not revive unpleasant memories, because we have no intention of fanning into flame the now smouldering embers of strife. Only this would we say for ourselves, and in justification of our course: that we have always adhered with inflexible fidelity to our first principles, and that we have never swerved one hair's breadth from our ancient paths.

We are to day what we were yesterday; we are in every respect at the close of this year, what we were at the commencement of the last, and what we shall be to the last moment of our editorial existence. If unfortunately we have come into collision with others, it is because we have ever, in good repute and in evil repute, held one straightforward course, heedless of whom we might offend by so doing; because we could not veer about with every shifting gale, or trim our sails to catch the fickle breeze of popularity.

This is the head and front of our offending; and we feel that we owe, and should make, no excuse, no semblance of apology for our consistency, or for the terms in which we have expressed the profound contempt which we entertain for all trimmers and shufflers, for all time-servers, pledge-breakers, and place-hunters. These, and such as these, but none other, may have motives to complain of the TRUE WITNESS; but of what we have said of them, we would not retract or modify a single expression, for we have not said a word that is not strictly true.

As a hardened and impenitent sinner, therefore do we address ourselves to our readers; not to vindicate ourselves in their eyes, but to assure them that we shall still prove what we have hitherto approved ourselves; that discarding as too paltry for a moment's notice all considerations of secular politics, of nationalities, and of personal or party interests, we will still continue to advocate the cause of "Freedom of Education and Religion"—i.e., the emancipation of education and religion from all State control;—to vindicate the rights and honor of our religious and charitable institutions against the assaults and calumnies of our enemies; to assert the true principles of civil and religious liberty, of which the Catholic Church alone is the guarantee; and to resist to the best of our abilities, every attempt to set up a "Protestant Ascendancy" in Canada. Against secret societies of all kinds, but especially against "Ribbonism" and "Orangeism"—against all attacks upon the sanctity of the marriage tie, all restrictions upon the right of religious corporations to receive, or of individuals to give, our voice shall still be loud and earnest. To owe political allegiance to no man, to no party shall ever be our pride; whilst it is our prayer that we may ever and in all things be found obedient to that voice to which alone the Catholic journalist should give heed, or by which he should allow himself to be influenced—we mean the voice of the Church speaking through her divinely appointed pastors. These are the sole conditions upon which we would desire, or indeed condescend, to prolong our editorial career; and if these conditions are acceptable to our Catholic readers; if an independent Catholic journal, beyond the reach of all secular influences of any kind, be by them deemed worthy of their support—that support—appealing to our past as the guarantee for our future—would we respectfully bespeak for the TRUE WITNESS.

On one other point, but one of much, indeed we may say of vital importance to ourselves, would we touch. We mean the remissness of many of our subscribers in discharging their indebtedness to the printer. Thus delicately alluding to this defect, we would pray of our delinquent subscribers that "they would reform it altogether;" so may they rejoice at this festive season in the possession of a good conscience; so may the mince-pies, plum-puddings and other carnalities wherein they may see fit to indulge themselves, sit lightly on their respective stomachs.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

THE past week has been altogether sterile of events, and the news from Europe by the last steamers is altogether devoid of interest. All the Great Powers had given in their adhesion to the Congress, but whether amongst them they will be able to hit upon a plan for settling the Italian Question is very problematical. Confidence, as to the continuance of peace betwixt France and Great Britain is slowly gaining ground in spite of Louis Napoleon's pacific assurances, and trade was reviving. In other respects, there is nothing of importance by the last arrivals.

The Protestant press has a moral code of its own; distinct from, and indeed directly opposed to, that which regulates, or should regulate, the ordinary intercourse of mankind. Amongst simple unsophisticated persons, not tainted with evangelicalism, and not addicted to the practice of slandering their fellow-citizens, it is a moral axiom that he who makes an assertion derogatory to the honor of his neighbor, is, when called upon by the aggrieved party, bound, either to make good, or to retract, his injurious and derogatory assertion. Protestant editors alone seem to deem themselves bound by no such moral law; but assert for themselves on the contrary, the privilege to make any amount of injurious statements with regard to their Popish neighbors, without incurring thereby any obligation of either substantiating, or withdrawing, their accusations against Romanists. This, we say, is explicitly and unblushingly avowed by some of our cotemporaries; whilst it is to a considerable extent practised by all, but more especially by those amongst them who are chiefly distinguished by their pretensions to Godliness.

Thus the Coburg Star having made some injurious assertions with regard to Popery, was taken to task by a correspondent writing over the signature "Romanist," who called upon the editor of the Coburg Star "to prove the charge" advanced by the latter. To this, certainly not unreasonable request, our Protestant cotemporary replies as follows:—

"If we were to enter upon a set theological discussion with our respected correspondent we should feel called upon to sustain our assertion with suitable arguments. But we cannot admit the right of any one of our readers to call for detailed proof of every assertion we may choose to make editorially."—Coburg Star. The Italics are our own.

There is a sublimity of impudence in the above which is unapproachable; a contempt for all the laws of truth, honor and justice, which compels our admiration. To such a height of evangelical perfection has the writer attained, that he feels himself no longer bound by the laws to which profane persons of all denominations, and Romanists especially, yield allegiance; and conscious of his freedom from all such disagreeable restraints, he rebukes with stern majesty the impenitent Papist who calls upon him "to prove the charge" by him advanced against the latter. With such a one, so highly privileged, it is indeed in vain for Romanists to attempt to argue; he cannot condescend to their low estate; he cannot waive in their behalf his lofty privileges; neither will he submit to be called upon to prove his calumnious assertions against them. He is, in the peculiar phraseology of the conventicle, Christ's freeman, and, therefore, no longer in bondage to the law.

It is this position of moral irresponsibility for their utterances adopted by evangelical writers generally, that renders it so hopeless a task to engage with them in controversy. Deeming themselves at liberty to advance whatsoever things they please against Papists, and not deeming themselves bound, either to prove any of those things, or else to retract them—argument, history, facts are alike thrown away upon our traducers. How can argument in short be possible with men who do not admit the existence of any obligation to prove their assertions? and since argument is impossible with such men, how can the Catholic be taxed with want of proper courtesy, who treats them simply as liars? By their own act, by their refusal to be bound by the ordinary rules of morality, they have placed themselves on a plane beyond the reach of argument, and therefore beyond the reach of courtesy. By absolving themselves from the law to "prove all things" that they may advance, if called upon to do so, they have virtually absolved those whom they calumniate, and whose religion they traduce, from that other law which enjoins all men "to be courteous."

These considerations often prevent us from taking any notice of the incessant diatribes against Catholic faith and morality with which the columns of our evangelical cotemporaries are surcharged. Many a mendacious slander do we pass over with scorn, rather than engage in an idle logomachy with its silly and malicious utterer. For after all, we know that for the most part Protestants themselves do not believe one half of what they read in their own journals against Popery; and these same charges are often so self-evidently false, that they carry their own refutation along with them. So long therefore, as anti-Catholic writers content themselves with making bare assertions of whose truth they "cannot admit the right of any one of their readers to call for detailed proof;" it is often, if not always, prudent to allow those assertions to pass unchallenged. But when Protestants rashly enter into the domain of reason; when they substitute argument—or what they intend as argument—for declamation; when condescending to our lowliness, they abandon their vantage ground of irresponsibility—we feel ourselves in a manner called upon to accept the proffered combat; and for this reason will briefly notice the logic wherewith in its issue of the 24th inst., the Montreal Witness convicts the Catholic Church of idolatry, and seeks to justify the "Swaddlers" of the F. C. M. Society.

The convict Beauregard, who was hung on the 16th inst., having nothing else to give, bequeathed to his wife, children, and parents—to be distributed amongst them—his crucifix, his rosary, and a few religious pictures which he had with

him in his cell; he also, after commending his soul to his Creator and Redeemer, humbly asking for forgiveness of his sins, implored in his behalf the intercession or prayers of the "Immaculate Virgin Mary," of his "angel guardian," of "St. Jean-Baptiste and all the Saints of Heaven," and of "all those who may have done or wished him good." He also addressed the Blessed Virgin by the title given to her in the Litany of Loretto, "Gate of Heaven—Janua Caeli;" and "resigned himself to the will of God." Hereupon our cotemporary's acute nose smells idolatry, and he breaks out as follows:—

"Here, then, we have an authentic public deliverance of the actual state of religious belief among Roman Catholics in the year 1859, and in Canada. And what is it? A catalogue of crucifixes, images, beads, and medals, accompanied by invocations addressed to the Saints, and especially the Virgin. An old Roman, with his household gods, was a sensible man when compared with a Roman Catholic of our times, with his 14 images left to his wife, and his small images to his children. The Hindoos or South Sea Islanders, idolatrous as they are, could not probably exceed, in regard for their idols, this French Canadian, instructed by our most enlightened priests.

"This poor man looks to Mary as the Gate of Heaven, when Jesus Christ expressly says, 'I am the door.' He also looks to her and the saints as his intercessors, when the Scripture says that the only mediator between God and man is the man, Christ Jesus.

"God's wrath is pronounced more distinctly against idolatry than any other sin or crime; whilst judgments, therefore, must we expect in Canada, and what a deep interest must every inhabitant of this country feel in the progress of the Gospel among French Canadians?"

Here then we have an offer at argument to convict the Catholic Church of idolatry. Papists are idolaters, argues in substance our cotemporary, because they invoke the prayers, or intercession with God, of the Saints, and of their fellow-creatures, in their behalf; because they use paintings or images, in which are set forth the sufferings of Christ for us, as aids to devotion towards their Redeemer; and because they apply to the B. Virgin, through whom they received Christ their Redeemer—to her who was the fellow-worker with God in the great mystery of the Incarnation—the title of "Gate of Heaven." These are the quasi reasons assigned by the Montreal Witness for branding the Catholic Church with the stigma of idolatry.

To answer him, the first thing to be done is to ascertain the meaning of the word "idolatry;" for two-thirds of the disputes in the world proceed from an improper use, and ignorance of the true value, of words. Now we think that the Witness will accept the following as a correct and exhaustive definition of idolatry. "Idolatry consists in the worshipping as God, that which is not God; or attributing to creature that which belongs exclusively to Creator." Do Catholics worship, or does their Church sanction their worshipping, as God that which is not God?—do they attribute, or does their Church sanction their attributing to any creature, even to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, the most exalted of all creatures, that which belongs exclusively to Creator? These are the questions which the Witness, for the reasons above assigned virtually answers in the affirmative; and it is because he has been so imprudent as to convict himself by giving his reasons for so doing, that we take the trouble of replying to him.

By invoking the prayers, or intercession with God, of the Saints, and of their fellow-creatures on earth, Catholics do not offer, either to the Saints, or to their fellow-creatures, that which is God's. Protestants even, in so far as invoking the intercession with God of their sinful fellow-creatures is concerned, do the same, and are therefore as much idolaters as are Papists; and if the intercession of sinful man with God, and in behalf of his sinful brother man, does not detract from the one mediatorship of Christ, so neither can the prayers, or intercession of the Saints with God, and in behalf of their fellow-creatures on earth, interfere with, or in any degree derogate from, the claims to be the sole Mediator betwixt God and man, of Jesus Christ—"qui solus noster redemptor et salvator est."—Conc. Trid. Sess. XXV.

So with images and paintings. If we use them as aids to devotion, as recalling forcibly the benefits conferred upon us by the Cross and Passion of our Redeemer, we are no more guilty of idolatry, or giving to creature that which is God's, than is the Protestant who uses the printed text of the New Testament for the same purpose. Images or paintings are the books of the unlettered, and often imprint upon the mind more firmly than can any form of words, the great events they are intended to commemorate. So also the Papist—who, when an image or painting suggests to him the idea "Jesus," lowly and reverently bows his head—is no more guilty of idolatry than is the Protestant who bows as he hears pronounced the name of Jesus. In the one case, the idea Jesus is suggested through a sign addressed to the eyes, and in the other, through a sign addressed to the ears; but in both, the signification and the moral value of the act of bowing are identical. Printing and painting, type setting and image carving, are all methods for conveying by means of sensible signs a knowledge of historical and religious truth. The use of one of these is not more idolatrous than is the use of the other—whilst there are many who are more vividly impressed by an image than by a paragraph, by a painting of the Crucifixion, than by the sublime language of the Evangelists; and as the Protestant is certainly innocent of idolatry in kissing and treating with due reverence the Bible, or collection of sensible signs, wherewith through the medium of printed characters addressed to the eye the history of Man's redemption is set forth, so neither is the Papist guilty of idolatry who pays the same reverence or honor to any other set of sensible signs or symbols, wherewith the same history is so luminously propounded.

The Church applies—and without derogating from the honor due to Creator, or assigning any of His peculiar attributes to creature—the title "Gate of Heaven" to the B. Virgin; seeing that it was through her, as the door, that we received Him Who is "the way, the truth, and the life."—St. JOHN xiv. 6; because she is the Woman of whom it was predicted that she should crush the head of the serpent—GEN. iii.

15; and because therefore it is through her, as the Mother of Our Redeemer, that we receive all graces, all heavenly gifts; since in the Son of Mary are combined all graces, all gifts, and all of which are with Him received. As it is therefore solely with reference to her divine maternity that the Catholic Church ascribes to the B. Virgin any peculiar excellence; as it is solely because of her Son, and therefore relatively, that the Church applies to her those titles of dignity which shock the ears of Protestants, and which no doubt shock the ears of the devils in hell, if they can reach the ears of the latter—so in so honoring the B. Virgin there can be no robbery of God, no attributing to a creature that which in the exclusive attribute of the Creator. To convict us of idolatry in applying to the Mother of God the title of "Janua Caeli" or "Gate of Heaven," the Witness must show one of two things: either that there is access to Heaven except through an Incarnate God; or that it was not of Mary and of her flesh, that the second Person of the Trinity because Incarnate by the Holy Ghost and took flesh. When he shall have succeeded in either of these things, our cotemporary will indeed have given a rude blow to Popery, but he will have upset Christianity.

And this leads us to the reason why we so earnestly deprecate the action of the "swaddlers." We do so because all experience of the result of their labor confirms what reason teaches—that the Papist who renounces Popery renounces Christianity. Nor can it be otherwise, seeing that other than the authority of an infallible Church for believing in any mystery of religion, for accepting any fact in the supernatural order, there is and can be none. Prove to us that the Church is in error in calling Mary the "Gate of Heaven" and you will have proved to us that the Church may be in error in asserting the Divinity of Christ, and His Vicarious Atonement; prove in short that the Catholic Church is in, or can fall into, error in matters of faith, and you will have conclusively proved to us that the founder of Christianity was either a dupe, or a miserable impostor.

THE CASE OF THERESE LABELLE.—Under this caption the Montreal Herald of Wednesday publishes a communication from a Protestant correspondent at St. Andrews, which we subjoin, and which fully bears out our statements of the 16th instant:—

To the Editor of the Montreal Herald.

Sir,—Having this day seen your paper of the 19th inst., which contains an extract from the "True Witness" in reference to the above case with your editorial comments thereon, I am induced to offer a few particulars which do not seem to have been known to yourself or your cotemporary. Perhaps it may appear from what I am about to state that none of the parties concerned were guilty of either injustice or cruelty to the unfortunate woman.—Therese Labelle, alias Besnait, (R.C.) is not a native or permanent resident of St. Andrews, but had lived in the village and vicinity a few months at service. Some weeks ago she left the house where she was employed in possession of comfortable clothing, but utterly insane and incapable of taking care of herself. She stated that she was cousin to a mechanic of the same family name in the village, but this she denied, and attributed the statement to her foolishness (sa folie). She stated that she had brothers and a daughter in different parts of the country, but whereabouts could not be satisfactorily ascertained. In the meantime she was wandering about the streets and from house to house in a state of great destitution, having destroyed or lost parts of her clothing, and was in danger of perishing from cold or hunger, and of setting fire to houses, which she seemed disposed to do. She would walk bare headed, carrying her shoes in her hand through snow and rain, make hideous noises in the streets at night, and was a terror to the women and children of the village. Wherever she staid at night people were obliged to sit up to watch her. A few of the inhabitants subscribed some money and signed a requisition to D. De Hertel, Esq., J.P. (R.U.) for her removal to a place of safety, which place was understood to be the Montreal jail, from which she would probably be removed to Beauport. The mayor and the writer (Protestant) called on Mr. De Hertel with the requisition, when that gentleman suggested that if application was made to the Rev. Mr. Thibeaudier (R.C.) he would probably grant a letter which would insure her reception by the Sisters of Charity of Montreal. The mayor went immediately to Mr. T. who seemed pleased that steps were being taken to care for the unfortunate woman. He enquired if she was a Catholic, and being told that she was, granted without hesitation a letter addressed to "Mme. la Supérieure de l'Hôpital General de Montreal." It was thought by some that the driver should be provided with papers to enable him to place her in the custody of Mr. McGinn in case she was not received by the sisters. But the answer to this suggestion was, M. le Curé has requested the Sisters to take charge of her or have her provided for, and surely they will not refuse to comply with his request. The woman was provided with some articles of clothing, and the driver carefully conveyed her to Montreal, where he presented her and the letter at the doors of the Grey Nuns' Hospital. He was told that she could not be received, that he must take her back to St. Andrews, and a letter was given him addressed to Mr. Thibeaudier, which was afterwards placed in the Post office here. The driver was now at a loss to know what to do. To bring her back was useless as there was no institution here into which she could be received, and she would be in the same danger of perishing as before. He applied to every party he could think of for information how to proceed, and was told to take her back. He did not inhumanly abandon her (at least so he states), but took her to an hotel where he paid for her lodging. Here she kept up a continual uproar through the night, and the next day, before he left the city, she was handed over to the police. It is to be hoped she is now in the right place, (dans la maison qui lui convient), and will be duly cared for, and the publicity which has been given to the case may lead to her being claimed by her relations. It will be seen from the above, that Therese Labelle was in circumstances which prevented her being retained here. We have poor people among us. Their wants are cared for by our citizens who would never think of trusting them on other communities. If the clergyman (who is identical with the "gentleman of St. Andrews" mentioned by the True Witness) erred, it was in miscalculating on the good offices of his cotemporaries, the ladies of the Grey Nunnery, in behalf of a miserable being of their own sex and creed. The driver, if his statement is true, and I believe it is, did not abandon her in the streets, and it is to be hoped the mayor and "good people of St. Andrews" will at least be held guiltless of any intentional wrong-doing.

I am Sir, Yours respectfully, A VILLAGER.

St. Andrews, C.E., Dec. 21, 1859.

From a perusal of the above it will be seen, by the passages we have ventured to mark in Italics, that the woman in question was "utterly insane," violent and dangerous, a "terror to

women and children," and therefore a person whom it was utterly impossible, upon any consideration, to admit within the walls of an asylum such as the Grey Nunnery, whose inmates are aged women and orphan children. Her insanity also seems to have developed itself in the form of a passion for incendiarism; and such being the case, the Grey Nuns would have been guilty of something far worse than imprudence had they received her into their establishment wherein are so many bed-ridden and impotent persons; they would have been guilty of a serious moral offence, had they even recommended her—seeing her dangerous propensities—to the care of any other charitable institution. In short the letter of the Herald's correspondent is a complete vindication of the conduct of the Grey Nuns.

It is clear we say, that a furious mad woman, whose insanity had assumed the form of a disposition to set "fire to houses," was not an object of charity in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but of strict police surveillance; that it was not so much an asylum that was required for her, as a place of forcible detention. Such a place, we need scarcely add, it is out of the power of any of our religious or charitable communities to furnish; and the only marvel is, how it could have entered the imagination of any one to thrust such a dangerous lunatic as Therese Labelle upon one of those communities—seeing that neither directly nor indirectly, had they any means of providing her with the only accommodation that was suited to her peculiar case. The authorities of Saint Andrews seem to have been aware of this; and their first intention—from which it is a pity that they ever deviated—was to send their very dangerous charge to "the Montreal jail, from which she would probably be removed to Beauport." The "jail" in short, in default of the mad-house, was the only place to which such a woman as Therese Labelle could be admitted without great danger to the public. We can fancy what an outcry, and not without good reason, there would have been raised against the Grey Nuns, if at their instigation she had been placed in any private institution of this city, and had there indulged that taste for incendiarism which had rendered her so unwelcome a resident of St. Andrews. Indeed it appears from the Herald—so troublesome and dangerous a guest did she approve herself in the hotel in which the driver who brought her to Montreal placed her for the night, that the landlord was obliged to hand her over to the police, to whose charge, and not to that of the Grey Nuns, she should have been committed in the first instance.

And this circumstance completely refutes the original statement that appeared in the Herald of the 12th instant—that which gave to the case of Therese Labelle its peculiar painful interest—to the effect that she was found lying on the snow, on which she had "sunk down" exhausted, after having "wandered about" the streets. Of this statement not a word was true. Therese Labelle was not turned adrift, but was lodged for the night in an hotel; she was not found lying exhausted in the snow, but was handed over to the police because, so violent was she in her madness that the people of the hotel where she was lodged were obliged in self-defence, to get rid of her, as soon as possible. The Herald indeed, informed its readers in its article of Monday the 12th inst., that, "yesterday morning, the poor old woman was delirious,"—thus leaving it to be inferred that her delirium was subsequent to, perhaps in consequence of, the sufferings of the previous night; but he did not inform his readers that she had long been "utterly insane;" that she was in fact a dangerous maniac, and as such had been sent off from St. Andrews—although this was the leading feature of the case, and the reason why it was morally impossible to provide her with food and shelter in any charitable institution, or private establishment in this city.

In so far therefore as the Grey Nuns are concerned, their vindication is complete. They were bound not to admit a dangerous maniac, a "terror to women and children," and given to incendiarism, within their premises; they could not, in conscience, have recommended her to the care of any other institution, or private establishment; and it certainly is not the proper business of Sisters of Charity to take upon themselves the functions of the police, and to commit to jail. No matter where lodged, or under what roof sheltered, the case of Therese Labelle imperatively required physical restraint; and as that restraint the Sisters of Charity have neither the legal right, nor the power to impose, it was out of their power to interfere in any manner in her case. If guilty of any error at all, it was simply an error of judgment, in not telling the driver who brought her to town to take her at once to jail; but then these words would have been out of place in their mouths, for it is not the business of Sisters of Charity to send people to jail.

In so far as the authorities of St. Andrews are concerned, we fully acquit them of any cruelty or harshness; though we do think that they erred greatly in judgment in not sending Therese Labelle to jail at once, from whence she might have been committed to the Beauport asylum; and that they were guilty of a still greater blunder in sending a woman "utterly insane," and disposed to set "fire to houses," to a religious community charged with the care of children, and of aged and impotent persons, amongst whom it would be as prudent to introduce a dangerous maniac, as it would be to smoke a pipe in a powder magazine. Indeed it seems to us incredible that any one could for a moment have entertained the idea that the Ladies of the Grey Nunnery could either themselves have taken charge, or have induced others to take charge, of such a person as Therese Labelle is now declared to be, by the Herald's correspondent;—and it is much to be regretted that the very sensible suggestion of those who proposed that her driver "should be provided with papers to enable him to place her in the custody of Mr. McGinn," was not adopted. She might have been committed to jail by a Magistrate; in jail she would have been under due restraint; there her physical wants would have been ministered to; and from thence in due time she would have been transferred to Beauport, where a permanent shel-