

LECTURE ON THE CELIBACY OF THE CLERGY.

On Sunday, the 24th inst., the Rev. George R. Northgraves, editor of the Catholic Record, delivered an able and interesting lecture on the celibacy of the clergy, in St. Mary's Church, Woodstock.

We give below a synopsis of the lecture, which was listened to with the greatest attention by an audience which completely filled the church, and about two-thirds of those present were Protestants.

His introductory remarks Father Northgraves said there was a slight error in the announcement of the lecture he was about to deliver. It was not his intention to make it a reply to a certain individual who had been lecturing through the country and in this town recently against the Catholic priesthood.

He took his text from Matthew xix: 11: "All receive not this word but they to whom it is given." These words were spoken by our Saviour to the Apostles on the subject of marriage. Jesus Christ had just explained to them the law of marriage as under the Christian dispensation.

He had explained that under the original law of marriage the union of husband and wife was indissoluble, but owing to the hardness of men's hearts Almighty God had made a dispensation allowing divorce for certain reasons, but that was not according to the original law of marriage.

In the Catholic Church marriage had been lifted up to the dignity of a sacrament which conferred grace on the husband and wife to live happily together and bring up the children in the fear and love of God the family which it might be God's will to commit to their care.

After Christ's statement the Apostles asked if it were not better not to marry, and it was in answer to that that He replied: "All men receive not this word but they to whom it is given."

him do so. These words alone show that the unmarried state if embraced for God is more perfect than the married state, holy as that is. The same doctrine is set forth by St. Paul when he says to fathers that he that gives his virgin in marriage doth well, but that he that doth not doth better, and also when he says to the widows and unmarried that it was better for them to remain so even as he was. Again, St. Paul compared the married man with the unmarried, the former being solicitous for the things of the world, how he might please his wife, the latter solicitous now he might please his God. And it was a fact that the married man had many cares that took his mind from God.

But it might be said by some that it was better to marry and bring up holy and devoted families. But the families of clergymen were not always holy and devoted. He had no statistics on the subject, but it was a fact that clergymen's children were not all saints. Married life distracted people from thoughts of God; there could be no doubt of that. And it was admitted by those not members of the Catholic Church that in the missionary fields of India, China, etc., the Catholic priests who had devoted themselves to missionary purposes, being unmarried, were able to do a great deal more than missionaries who had families to look after.

St. Paul, as already stated, declared the unmarried state to be the more perfect for those who undertook to battle in God's cause. And the object of the Church was that her priests should all be soldiers in the service of Christ. But it is said that virginity was impossible for men. Let us grant that it may be for some, but were there not some who could by their determination devote their whole lives to God, some souls willing to make sacrifices for God? Christianity must indeed be a poor institution if it could not produce some capable of heroic acts. Christianity had produced them. They were to be found in the Catholic Church. They were to be found in the convents, among the nuns, many of them drawn from the highest ranks, who, in the fever shade in the time of plague and on the battle-field in the time of war, had won for themselves the admiration of all mankind.

Only a few days ago President Carnot of France decorated three nuns with honors who were devoting their lives to the military hospitals. It could be read in the history of the war between the North and South how Sisters of Charity devoted themselves to the care of wounded soldiers and exposed their lives in so doing. Could they have done this had they been married women with families? As it was they were able to devote themselves entirely to God's work; they were truly soldiers of Christ. And so in the case of priests. Take, for instance, Father Damien, the martyr priest of Molokai. He devoted his life to the care of the lepers. And yet he was not free from attack. Not long ago the U. S. Vice Consul at Honolulu, Mr. Hastings, felt it his duty to reply to some calumnies raised against him (Father Damien) and declaring that there was not a respectable person in or near Honolulu who would have written so palpable a falsehood. But Father Damien was dead when the falsehood was written. He saw by the newspaper reports that the other day in this town certain falsehoods were uttered against another dead man (Archbishop Lynch). He need only say that this statement was also another falsehood.

The Church enjoined the celibacy of her clergy because she wished to have in them as large a measure of perfection as is possible in a human being. For the reason too her priests were carefully trained. After the students had completed the ordinary professional course they spent one, very often two, years in the study of philosophy and natural theology, and from three to five years in the direct study of theology. During this period, beside the moral training received previously they devoted their time to the study of things necessary for making them good priests, and in the special morality of the priest-hood. The student was obliged to rise early. His first duty was to go to prayers and meditation, for which he was carefully prepared. Then he attended Mass. He was placed with the wisest directors obtainable, men who had grown old in the service of God, and all were required to go to their directors for advice in cases of trouble or temptation. Then they went to confession every week, receiving advice and encouragement. Before going to dinner they examined their souls as to the faults of the day and during dinner hour they read from some good book, Church history, or moral conference, and after dinner came recreation. Then to their study again, and in the evening prayer and meditation. Such a preparation was calculated to make a man capable of heroic sacrifices for God.

But is it not a command of God to increase and multiply? These words are not a command for all to marry certainly; they are a blessing upon God's creatures, but no one supposes that in consequence of them they are bound to marry. There were a great many people unmarried who were not priests. There were many such people in Woodstock, I imagine. Are we to infer they are immoral? Or some of them would if they could, but others chose to remain as they were. Must we therefore call them immoral? Jesus Christ was not married. His mother was a virgin. All the Apostles of Christ were unmarried, with the single exception of Peter. But it may be said that St. Peter was head of the Church. Yes, but he was not married after the law was made, and one is not asked to obey a law before it is made. Further, we find that Peter left all things—this includes his wife—to follow Jesus. Tertullian has a whole book written in praise of celibacy which all would do well to read.

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What do you think of the fact that the unmarried state is more perfect than the married state, holy as that is. The same doctrine is set forth by St. Paul when he says to fathers that he that gives his virgin in marriage doth well, but that he that doth not doth better, and also when he says to the widows and unmarried that it was better for them to remain so even as he was.

BRUCE AND I.

Bruce and I were vagabonds both. He was always getting into trouble by reason of his wandering tendencies. So was I. Bruce came to me in disgrace. He was a fine, black, smooth-haired retriever, and his crime was that he would not retrieve. Perhaps he was like myself, he didn't care to have anything to do with that form of pleasure which is connected with suffering and death. I fancy some one must have peeped him with disgust at his unexpected non sporting qualities, for he never heard a gun fired without cutting home as fast as he could. I have a stupid habit of lingering by wayside, stone heaps, and poking among the stones, if happily I may find some flat implement or fossil. A sand pit or stone quarry has a similar attraction for me, and a sallow has for other men. Bruce can't pass one. Bruce soon found out all these weaknesses. On a country ramble, if he were ahead, he never passed a stone heap or a sand-pit, he stood there till I came up and said as plainly as an intelligent dog could, "Master, are you going in here this morning?" I have seen that look hundreds of times, and said to him, "Not this morning, Bruce;" whereupon he wagged his huge tail at the compliment that he was understood, and proceeded on his own canine investigations. I used to say to my friends, "Bruce knows as much about geology as most men," upon which some of the easily surprised, said: "Indeed!" and others, who were conscious that they knew no more of geology than my dog did, laughed at my weak joke.

We had been friends and companions for three years. We so thoroughly understood each other, that we rarely quarrelled—for quarrels are always the result of misunderstanding. My dog had nothing human about him, and was, therefore, an ideal dog. He never stooped to anything mean, or low, or cowardly. He was unpunctual sometimes in his returns from calling on his friends; but nobody would have known it if his own conscience had not forced him to assume that depressed appearance we call "hang dog." Nor did he come up to Professor Huxley's definition of a dog as an "arrant cad"—one which only barked at people who were ragged, and reserved his attentions for the well-clad. Bruce did prefer well-dressed and good-mannered people—who does not? That was all. As he used to lie on the sidewalk outside my house, with his fore-legs stretched out, and his magnificent black square head between his paws, there were few who did not stop to pat him, and say, "Bruce, good Bruce!" and Bruce responded by a gentle twitch of his great leathery tail, which sent the flies spinning. The babies tottered up to him and pulled his long silken ears, and gave him biscuits. Even the cats passed him by without setting out their backs, for they had found out that Bruce was harmless.

Bruce was my literary friend. He has lain hours and days at my feet, whilst I have been writing. He has listened with one twitching ear, whilst I have read aloud to myself some sentence or two written, which I thought unusually good. And afterwards dropped it, wondering what it was all about and what good in the world it was to a dog! How well he knew me! I had my moments of depression, of anxiety, of low-spiritedness—often brought on by over-work and over-worry. Bruce knew I often had his silent throat his great cold, black nose into my hands at such times. I know what he meant—"Cheer up, master."

The last time Bruce appeared in public (for he frequently made his way surreptitiously into public meetings and other places where I was present as a representative of the press), was at a Press Club entertainment in London, England. I was called upon to propose a vote of thanks to some of our amateur friends. The people called out "plat form," and on to the platform I went. There was a large audience, and they cheered me. Then just as I was speaking, there was a snort, a gasp, and for Bruce, who had followed me, and now confronting the audience I was addressing, greeting their cheers with a few short, but vigorous barks. The more they cheered, the more he barked at them—until, at a word from me, he coiled himself up, and the subsequent proceedings interested him no more. After that exploit he was elected a bona fide member of the London Press Club. He was as intimate with the mysteries of Red Lion Court and the Cheshire Cheese as the oldest member could be, and he frequently took his part. But he did not live long, poor fellow, to enjoy his privileges. One morning I found him lying on the little plot of grass in front of the house—dead. Evidently he had been poisoned, and I don't envy the brute who killed him. I felt that another friend had joined those on the silent shore! But I am thankful that I ever had the friendship of Bruce.

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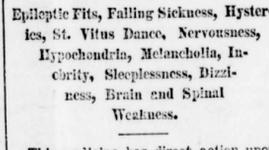
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