A WORD ABOUT THE OLD SAINTS.

Why is it that people will not read the Lives of the Saints? St. Philip Neri bade his followers read authors who had S before their names; but that was in Italy, three hundred years ago, and he was talking to his contemporaries. *Nous avons change tout cela.* We are children of light and progress now, here in America, in the nineteenth century, and we read every author, but the particular "author with S before his name." We are eager enough to find heroes and worship them, but they are not of the canonized order.

In every other kind of biography there is a deep and growing interest. What a man or woman thinks and feels, where he has spent his life and how, the set of circumstances and ideals which have gone to make up his environment—all of this interests and attracts the general reader. If he have a taste for the introspective he will read Amiel, Maurice de Guerin or Marie Bashkirtseff; if a taste for history in its philosophic aspect, he takes up Plutarch, or Emerson's "Representative Men," or perhaps Carlyle's "Cromwell" or "Napoleon." Anything under the broad, blue sky, but the life of a saint.

If this indifference were confined to Protestants, one might with very little speculation get at the root of the matter. An American Protestant is hardly expected to care about the lives of our saints. He has been brought up either in indifference to them, or to believe that these great men and great women were a set of fanatics—part imbecile, part knave—around whom Rome has drawn the circle of her approbation. To him the middle ages are the Dark Ages. A distaste for the past, if not an actual prejudice against it, lurks in his mind, and I suppose it is asking a great deal of a people alienated from the Church—in a country with no historical back-ground, to care about the spiritual experiences of men and women long since dead. It is not so, however, in England. Many leading Protestants on the other side of the Atlantic have thought it worth their while to interest themselves in the biographies of the saints. In all the intellectual centres of England are to be found hagiologists of the genus Protestant as well as of the genus Catholic. Over there it is a question of culture and historical research. The English scholar can lay his hand upon the past in a way altogether unknown to the American. Running parallel with the line of his kings, and interwoven with the web of his political history, are the names of Popes, Bishops, scholars distinctly Catholic and saints. The architecture of England resolves itself very largely into the history of the Church. Cambridge, Oxford, Westminister, all belong to a Catholic or mediæval past. Some of the representative converts of England will point to a tower or cloister and say: "There, historically, I got hold of the Church." Continental Europe, too, is always accessible to the English scholar. An old fresco in Assisi will carry the mind back six centuries, until the life of St. Francis becomes as much a part of one's general culture as the art of Cimabue. And so on, down through the by-ways of art-stained glass, illuminated missals and wonderful choir-stalls carved in wood serving as interpreters, the stories of the saints become familiar and a genuine historical interest in their lives is established.

I have made this long excursion from the Catholic aspects of the case in order to show that when the intelligent Protestant becomes really interested in one of these great characters of the Catholic Church, he studies it as he would any other character that appeals to his heart or imagination. But with our Catholic young men and women the case is entirely different. Where the Protestant hails these lives as a discoverer, some Catholics deliberately keep away from them. Cold indifference characterizes their attitude towards them. "The Lives of the Saints?" Why, he has outgrown them long ago! Who are the saints anyway but a lot of old fogies who have been rendered obsolete by steam and electricity? In retrospect they are good enough: they were even part of his training, and they will still do for the uninitiated, for those devout persons who find all the philosophy they need in their catechisms; but for a broad and progressive individual, "in touch with his age," to read this trash and call it biography? Oh, no! he can be better employed. And the Catholic young man of Philistia takes the highway of steam and electricity, unmindful of the saints—of those great "messengers of God and masters of men, in whose arms the life of the world once lav."

I am not sure that this indifference—the indifference of many of us—is not due to the manner in which these lives were presented to us in the beginning. We were sent to them in order that we might imitiate them. But it is only now and then that the art of homiletics makes a saint. Enthusiasm, or better still, love, is at the root of every radical moral change. All of those distasteful precepts which we resented in the nursery and schoolroom came to be more or less identified with this class of biography. I know that Alban Butler was to me the worst type of an Inquisitor. His very name suggested hair-shirts, starvation, unreasonable vigils and flagellations. It was all too much of the horrible and too little of the entertaining or the picturesque. It is not in human nature, particularly in the nature of a child, not to resent so high and cold an ideal of perfection. Children have the same preference for the primrose way that their elders have. Indeed, chasing butterflies and reading the hard, dry, ascetical life of some old saint present a more disagreeable antithesis at the age of five than at the age of thirty-five. But it ought to be possible to win the child into an interest in these lives. There is no reason why a child's heart should not be won forever to St. Francis of Assisi by the story of the birds singing in the bushes out in the sand dunes of Venice, or captured forever by burly old St. Christopher carrying the Divine Child across the River Rhine. Can "the dust and pelf of years" ever quite crowd out of one's imagination that ideal picture of two children running along a dusty highway, one of them the little Teresa of Cepeda, who longed to be martyred by the Moors? Could anything be more natural than that we should want to hear of this child enthusiast again? Or of that wonderful boy of Aquino, who, wandering one day with his companions through the wooded hills of Monte Cassino, strayed off by himself, and when asked by the old monk upon what he was musing, lifted his solemn eyes and answered: "Tell me, master, what is God?"

A trifling incident out of the life of some saint, fastened upon the young imagination of a child, will do much toward leading it in later years into the study of that life; whereas the recital of excruciating pains, and the preaching of religious axioms and moral precepts, only tend to the distortion of what is really true and great; turning the most heroic conduct and sublimest ideals into bogie-men and scare-crows. And sometimes these hideous hallucinations last, and spoil a character for us forever. To this day I cannot think without a shudder of the sweet, austere St. Rose of Lima dipping her hands into lime. If I had been told that during the Dutch invasion of Lima she stood before the tabernacle and defended the Blessed Sacrament, heroism and not folly would be identified with her in my mind from the very beginning.

A recent English critic, commenting upon our American civilization, took the term "interesting" and subjected it to a very careful analysis To illustrate its best usage he told this anecdote about Carlyle:—

"The Carlyle family were poor, numerous and struggling. Thomas, the eldest son, a young man in wretched health, and worse spirits, was fighting his way in Edinburgh. One of his younger brothers talked of emigrating. The very best thing he could do, we should all say. Carlyle dissuaded him. 'You shall never,' he writes, 'you shall never seriously meditate crossing the great Salt Pool to plant yourself in the Yankeeland. Never dream of it. Could you banish yourself from all that is interesting to your mind, forget the glorious institutions, the noble principles of old Scotland, that you may eat a better dinner, perhaps?'"

"There," the English critic continues, "there is our word launched, the word 'interesting,' and I do but take note in it of a requirement, a cry of aspiration, a cry not sounding in the imaginative Carlyle's breast alone, but sure of response in his brother's breast also, and in human nature."

There is just a grain of truth in this sarcasm of Carlyle: and the American Catholic, if he but knew it, has a greater inheritance of those things which make up the interesting than his Protestant countryman. Perhaps we can best get at this inheritance by a parallel.

In the last fifty years three distinct movements have been made in England: the Oxford movement, broadly termed the Anglo-Catholic movement, the pre-Raphaelite movement in art, and the far-reaching Gothic revival. Pugin, Ruskin and John Henry Newman were the three prophets of this new era. Now, these movements were all different in their primary aims—how different the individually of their interpreters will attest—and yet they were in reality closely interwoven, and the best art critics of London to-day will tell you that the highest quality of impulse came from the religious revival at Oxford. The old university, then, after three hundred years of alienation from the source of real culture, leaned back into the past and became the fountain of those currents which have ever since told silently on the intellectual and æsthetic mind of England.

To carry our parallel back to our own country, it follows that all those elements of the beautiful and interesting which the Church has gathered up through the centuries and saved, are here in America with her, ready to be worked into our civilization to sweeten and enlighten it if we will. They are accessible to all, but the Catholic has a direct inheritance to them. The things of beauty, grace and distinction will grow up in America out of the Church, and whatever is crude, raw and hideous will be transformed by her here, as it was transformed centuries ago under different conditions in the old world.

Now, of all this interesting phenomena, the Lives of the Saints, as far as literature is concerned, are the most valuable to us. They open up the way to history and to art. They carry us into every century; they surrender for our imitation the experiences of ladies and gentlemen, teaching us manners as well as morals. Indeed, the biographies of these men and women hold the entire history of Europe.

It seems to me that if the ordinary reader could once be made to believe that the lives of the saints are the lives of interesting men and women, teeming with incident and adventure, full of color and poetic significance, he might be induced to read them more often than he does. In the average Catholic home they must be taken from a dusty corner of the shelf. I doubt if there is a Catholic family in the land which has not one or two faded, tattered lives thrown about. Time and neglect, not usage, have brought about this ruin. How full of pathos it all becomes when one reflects upon just how they got into the little household. A prize in Sunday school; a gift from some travelling priest; a thoughtful mother's investment at mission time; but never a deliberate purchase, and never from the town or parish library. This last would indicate a real living interest such as one takes in the magazines and in so-called current literature.

I never visit a public circulating library where I observe the members poking around among the latest books, that I do not think of Charles Lamb's delicious retort about new books: "Whenever a new book comes out I—I—I read an old one." This little whimsicality of Lamb is the best literary gospel I know, and invaluable for my purpose here. The reader who would study the Lives of the Saints must surely leave the nineteenth century behind him, for though there are saints in this century their biographies are not yet written.

All serious folk are agreed upon the past as the domain of the best, the indispensible books: and yet we are satisfied to dawdle away our time and energy in pursuit of what is young and ephemeral. Once let us cultivate a relish for old books, and if we had any versatility of taste we shall find ourselves as much interested in the stories of the saints as in the chronicles of kings and queens.

It is pleasant to make a Round Table of the contemporary characters of a century. How many of us know that Luther, Columbus and St. Ignatius lived at the same time?—that St. Ignatius was born in the year 1491, just a twelvemonth before Columbus sailed for America, and that Luther was eight years old when St. Ignatius was born? Think of that great soldier of Christ, a baby when the Santa Maria set sail from the port of Palos! Think of him again in 1503, a page in the court of Ferdinand when Martin Luther was taking his degree in philosophy at the University of Erfurt. "Two years after Luther takes the Augustinian habit, while the future saint is wearing three-piled velvet slashed with satin. In 1513 Don Inigo Gracia enters upon his military career while the Augustinian monk, now a priest, is saying that Mass which he afterwards learnt to revile in terms unutterable." And off in Italy another saint was born—St. Philip Neri,

"The saint of gentleness and kindness,
Cheerful in penance, and in precept winning,
Patiently healing of their pride and blindness
Souls that are sinning.
This is the saint who, when the world allures us,
Cries her false wares and opes her magic coffers.
Points to a better city, and secures us
With richer offers."

In these four distinguished contemporaries the meanest-visioned can see God's hand. This is not the place, or I should like to speculate upon the opening up of a new world when heresy was about to blight the spiritual prospects of the old and to follow up the Luther disaster with the repairing influence of the two great men—St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Philip of Neri.

The historical value of these lives is not to be over-estimated. If you know the history of St. Catherine of Sienna, you know the history of the stormy days of Gregory XI. and the explanation of the removal of the See from Rome to Avignon and back again. If you know the splendid drama of St. Dominic and St. Francis, you know, that period of mediæval history which has been termed the most interesting in the history of the world after primitive Christianity. If you know the life of St. Jane de Chantal—most lovable and impetuous of women—you know French history through the four Henrys; and to have mastered the life of St. Bernard is to know the tenth and eleventh centuries, for St. Bernard was the practical director of his age.

It was Matthew Arnold who first made the life of St. Francis of Assisi interesting to me. In the first place, he called him a poet. Now, it is a long time ago, and in those days I did not know that a saint is always a poet and a poet in many respects more or less a saint. It was a chapter on pagan and mediæval sentiment, and a comparison was drawn between a hymn by Theocritus and the "*Canticum Solis*" of St. Francis. It was a delight and a surprise to find St. Francis there as a literary type; a type as distinct and formal as Dante at the end of the thirteenth century, or Heinrich Heine in Germany at the beginning of this.

Sometimes we learn more of a character through a single anecdote than by pages of analysis. Joseph Calasanctius was only five years old when he led a troop of children through the streets of aragon to find the devil and kill him. Here we have in epitome the history of this saint. He made warriors of the children. In the Pious Schools of Rome their little souls were equipped for that tremendous conflict which is always going on between the spirits of good and evil. And then St. Francis of Assisi, walking by an ant-hill, with just a trifle of scorn in that great loving heart for the ants and their solicitude in heaping up in summer an abundant store of grain for the winter. Nothing could be more characteristic of him as saint and idealist than this disdain for the utilitarian spirit, and that he should like the birds better "because they do not lay by anything to-day for to-morrow."

The poets, who are quick to known everything, have seized upon what is picturesque and beautiful in these lives and turned it into verse. Longfellow, the poet of mediævalism, has left us unrivalled lines in his "Santa Filomena" and "The Ladder of St. Augustine." Matthew Arnold, Browning, Tennyson—all of them—have touched exquisitely upon the lives of the saints. But it is curious and amusing to note how the Protestant or unbelieving mind will not acknowledge the term saint. It smacks too much of Rome. Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas of Aquin; but never St. Francis, St. Bernard or St. Thomas. I suppose it is the scholar's concession to middle-class English Protestantism, and as such, a Catholic should be magnanimous and forgive. They have all been guilty of it: Mrs. Oliphant, James Addington Symonds, Carlyle—where he has deigned to notice a saint at all—and even Dr. Jessop; though he lays down the sword he does so apologetically. In his "Coming of the Friars," a just and beautiful treatment of the old monks, he says: "From this time Giovanni Bernandone passes out of sight, and from the ashes of the dead past, from the seed that has withered that the new life might germinate and fructify, Francis—why grudge to call him Saint Francis?—of Assisi rises."

It has taken the Protestant world a long time to get back to its old ideals—the ideals of its forefathers in Catholic days. Two hundred years ago in England it was almost death to classify a saint or a martyr with a great national hero. What would Cromwell think if he could see the restored images of saints in the niches of Westminister? or the statue of Our Lady surmounting the reredos of St. Paul's? or if he should happen in at the British Museum and take up a volume of Mrs. Oliphant's "Life of Francis of Assisi?" The old regicide was not, to be sure, much of a *litterateur*, and still less of an artist, but some of our modern historians are fond of quoting him as a Protestant of the healthiest and most robust type. It is pleasing, therefore, to speculate upon the changes in letter and in spirit since the stormy, aggressive seventeenth century days in which he lived.

The instinct of hero-worship has found expression in one of the most orthodox sects of the present day. The English Positivists ask themselves whether a greater engine of civilization has ever been devised than the moral power of a good man, or a body of good men? whether it is not akin to the deepest recesses of our nature, and "whether, whilst human nature exists, it must not be organized and ordered"? Now, this is exactly what the Church has been doing for centuries in the canonization of her saints. If not, what is the meaning of that distinct policy kept up by Rome as to who is and who is not worthy of recognition? Mr. Frederic Harrison has given us a unique phrase in "organized and ordered." It is the modern English for the very old process of canonization. And so, as St. Hilary of Arles wrote fifteen centuries ago, heretics are continually fighting the battles of the Church. For, in advocating certain broken portions of the truth, and in combating in other heretics those very points which the faith of the Church condemns, their victories over one another are the triumphs of the Church over them all. This hero-worship in the theory of the Positivists is one thing to which we may appeal as a victory for the faith. They are not sure about God; and, since the instinct of worship cries out for an object, they expend themselves on human nature, and so, in a manner, justify our devotion to the saints.

The novelist of this philosophico-religious system has left us in her most remarkable poem—the one bearing most on positivism—something like an Apologia for our devotion to the saints. It is the theory, as our litany is akin to the practice of hero-worship. If, without audacity, I can add a meaning to George Eliot, I should like to say that the music of her "choir invisible" is for the most part made up of the voices of our own beloved old saints. For, if we sift out the past we shall find in their lives more "deeds of daring rectitude," more "scorn for miserable aims that end in self," than is met with in any other of the more formidable careers of the world's history.

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A MINISTER ON IRELAND.

In a copy of the *Memphis Avalanche* (Tenn.) we read an interesting lecture delivered by the Rev. David Walk, to the congregation of the Linden street Christian church in that city. The lecture was the result of a tour through Europe, and the rev. gentleman thus speaks of his feelings when he first beheld the coast of Ireland:

"The coast of Ireland! How the words thrilled me. I no longer heard the rush of the water; I no longer noted the rolling and tossing of the ship; I ceased to think of the laboring groaning engines. I thought only on the blessed solid earth on which my eyes were feasting. Yes, there could be no mistake; those are the towering hills of Ireland. There she stands like a dear mother, stretching forth her arms over the stormy deep, inviting her children to her breast; rising up from the ocean like a beautiful goddess, she is the first to offer rest to weather-beaten mariners, and to give the traveler of the New World a welcome. Long live old Ireland! Green be her fields; bright be her skies, and happiness be the portion of her sons and daughters."

Alluding to Catholic and Protestant Ireland, he said: "My business is to state facts—not to make them. Of course, I had ever been taught—in fact, I had read it in the Sunday school book—that the North of Ireland, which is supposed to be Protestant, is greatly superior to the South of Ireland, which is supposed to be Catholic. Now, I have been through Ireland from the extreme South to the extreme North, and I aver upon the honor of a gentleman and a Christian, that a greater fraud than the assumed superiority of the Protestant over the Catholic population of Ireland was never palmed off upon an innocent and unsuspecting public. It is pitiful when men attempt to coin religious capital out of such material. On the other hand, I saw more squalor, more abject misery, more poverty and wretchedness in Glasgow and Edinburgh than in the whole of Ireland put together. Scotland is Protestant; Ireland is Catholic. I say it is my duty to state facts as I see them, and not to allow religious prejudice to blind my eyes to the truth. The sun of heaven shines on no fairer spot than the South of Ireland. From Mallow, on the Blackwater, to Cork on the Lee, it was pure and beautiful as a dream in the heart of a sinless maiden. I saw just two cities in Europe which you should care to live in. One of these is Dundee, in Scotland, the other Cork, in Ireland—with a decided preference for Cork. Everywhere in Ireland I was treated like a gentleman. Never for a instant was I mistreated by a human being."

To have no sense of the poetical is, so far as the imagination is concerned, to lack the happier and larger interpretation of all that is around us. A merely prosaic version of human life is far from being the true one. Were it such, the Father of Light, Himself the Living Father, would not, in creating man, have constituted the imagination one of his most powerful faculties, neither would He have taught by parables.
—*Aubrey de Vere.*

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