

OBITUARY NOTICES.

BY OUR CURBSTONE OBSERVER.

From time to time I have been requested by friends to write out paragraphs for the press, descriptive of a wedding, or some other event of similar importance to the family; but more frequently has it fallen to my lot to write brief obituary notices of the departed relatives or associates of those requesting the same. To my mind there is nothing in all the range of journalism so difficult to satisfactorily compose as an obituary. This may sound strange to the person who has had but very rare occasions to lament the deaths of near and dear ones; but when one individual is obliged to pen paragraphs about all manner of people, priests and laymen, prominent citizens and humble laborers, old men whose lives have outnumbered the allotted years of man and young men whose feet have scarcely entered upon the avenue of life, mothers of whose children's children gather around other theirs sorrow and bright, promising girls whose young lives have been the consolation and the hope of their aged parents, husbands who have been snatched away in their prime leaving widows and tiny children to mourn their loss, and wives, almost brides, who have been taken from their tender husbands and dependent infants, when, week after week arise cases, so very different in details, yet so very similar in the bereavements, the loneliness, the untimely breaks caused to those who survive, and so very similar in the one eternal routine of agony, departure, funeral, burial, and too frequently subsequent oblivion, it becomes a matter of the most extreme difficulty to avoid repeating the same comments, and yet sutting the tribute to the wishes and sentiments of the immediately interested. As I glance over the daily papers and count the vast number of obituaries that appear each week, I am astonished at the variety of circumstances and the sameness of expressions.

One can readily conceive how in each particular case, the immediate relatives of the lamented deceased could tell exactly what would be most acceptable as a tribute to his or her memory. But it is entirely different when it comes to an entire stranger attempting to give fitting expression to sentiments entertained by those who were, in life, most closely attached to the one who died. A writer may possess the enviable faculty of entering into the spirit of others and placing himself, for the time being, in their position, feel as they feel, all that they naturally expect to see in the obituary paragraph of sentiment falls short of the required intensity when applied in a special case. I can fully appreciate the sorrow of a young family for a beloved and cherished mother; but I cannot be expected, in each individual case, to express when I never knew the deceased personally, to have that intense grief which alone can suggest expressions in accord with the bereavement of those children. Yet, I am expected "to do justice," as the saying goes, to the subject, and to write an obituary paragraph, or column, as the case may be, which will contain everything that the members of that same family would wish to have expressed.

Then comes the question of sameness of eternal reiteration. In each instance the circumstances differ. It is easy enough to secure some notes telling of the manner in which death occurred, the age of the deceased, the nationality, the birth place, the leading events of his or her life, the works with which he, or she was associated, the number of near relatives left, the place in which the funeral service was held, even the names of those taking part in that last sad rite, the date of the interment, and other like details. But once these cold facts are recorded, the writer steps into the beaten path. There is the same lesson to be drawn, the same consolations to be afforded, the same prayers to be expressed, the same sympathy to be conveyed, the same hopes in the future, the same Faith to be held up as an example for others, the same Charity to be recalled. Multiply expressions as you may, twist and turn phrases as best you can, it is ever the same story that is to be told, varied in some of its details, longer or shorter according to the importance of the one whose loss you recorded. Hence, I repeat, the tremendous difficulty of writing obituaries.

Then comes in the question of judgment or selection. That which would be highly appropriate in one case might, if applied in another, be grotesque and even comical. No doubt the ordinary, every day laborer, may feel as intensely, and possibly more intensely, the loss of a parent, or spouse, or other dear one, as would the son of a very prominent personage, some leading representative, some conspicuous public benefactor. Yet, that which the circumstances in the latter case would justify could not be written in the former case, without risk of turning a sincere tribute into a piece of ridicule. Here again comes in the question of grave importance—that of sutting the expression to the situation. The old Latin axiom, "sicut moritur, sic vivatur," is a very safe rule, if the writer would avoid trouble for himself as

well as the risk of doing an irreparable injustice. But there is the danger, on the other hand, of running into an enthusiasm of admiration, a fulsome praise, an extravagance of lamentation, which would prove more irritating than soothing, and would tend more to stamp the obituary with the seal of insincerity than to impart to it a character of earnestness. To more easily explain my meaning, on this point, I will turn, for a moment, to another subject skin to this one. Let us suppose that a very dear friend of yours has suddenly lost a beloved parent, a cherished wife (or husband), or an idolized child; you are at once anxious to convey the expression of your sympathy to tell how you participate in the sorrow, to make your friend feel that your heart beats in harmony with his, or hers, under the cloud of bereavement that has arisen. It is very easy to take pen and paper, and sit down to write that letter. But how are you going to express your feelings? You do not want to intrude upon your friend's hour of sorrow with a long epistle, full of protestations of condolence—you know that the time is not suited for aught of the kind. On the other hand you fear that a short note would appear too formal, and might cause your friend to rank you with ordinary acquaintances, whose words of sympathy are often a mere matter of politeness, or courtesy. Then again, if you are silent, and do not write at all, your friend might impute an entirely wrong motive to your course, and believe you indifferent and heartless. On the whole, you know, in your soul, that no matter what you write, your friend is aware that no words can convey your true sentiments. In presence of all these contingencies I now ask you: "how would you write that letter of condolence?" To say the least, it would give you subject for serious reflection, and if such is the case, when you have only an ordinary letter to a friend to write, how much more embarrassing must it not be when it is a tribute to be read by thousands that has to be written?

Allow me to relate an incident that took place several years ago. An old man, a real pioneer, a patriot of the stormy days of '37 and '38, died at the age of 92, in a village not far from Montreal. His wife, now 88 years of age, still survives him. His sons are men advanced in life and prominent in business circles. One is a rich merchant or store-keeper in Montreal; the other, a highly educated man, who once intended to become a priest, felt it a duty to look after his aged parents, and to them he consecrated his life. On the death of the old gentleman I took the liberty of writing a somewhat elaborate obituary, to which I added some verses of an "In memoriam" character. Before sending this notice, or sketch to the press, I allowed the son to look over it, expecting that he might find some details of facts to correct, or amend. The next day he came to me and said: "If you please I will keep this obituary as a souvenir of our good father; we will treasure it in our family chest. But we prefer not to have it published." I asked him why. He said: "It is too good for the circumstances. Of course, it is all very true; but our father's position in life was too humble to allow of such a biographical sketch. Had he been known in the great world of politics, or in some public sphere, it would be all right; but his simple and unknown life was not of the kind to make such a tribute appropriate in the eyes of the world." I accepted that wise decision of those two highly respected men, and I admitted the justice of what he had said. Every line of that obituary was true, every word in it was deserved; but the great reading world would have found ground for criticism, on account of the humble sphere in which the deceased had moved; and, naturally, such criticism would have marred all the pleasure that the just tribute had created. Thus it may be seen that to write an obituary is no easy task; and, unfortunately, death is so busy in our midst, that the occasions for them are only too frequent.

THE APOLOGIZING CATHOLIC One of the greatest obstacles to the triumph of Catholicity is the apologizing Catholic—the man who is always minimizing Catholic truth and explaining the life out of it to fit the ideas of Protestants or good-for-nothing Catholics like himself—Catholic Universe.

BUSINESS MEN'S PATRON SAINT. Our Catholic business men should have a particular devotion to St. Homobonus, the merchant. The saint's name signifies the Good Man. He was engaged in business in Lombardy in the twelfth century. He looked upon his business as an employment given him by God; he regulated all his transactions according to His laws; he abhorred the very shadow of a commercial untruth, injustice or double-dealing. By his great probity he attained to high sanctity. God recompensed him with great success in his business, rewarding his charities by multiplying his stock of goods, and even

confering on him the gift of miracles. He died while hearing Mass. At the Gloria in excelsis he was seen to stretch out his arms in the form of a cross; in this attitude he calmly expired.—Catholic Record, Louisville.

CATHOLICITY IN THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIES.

A correspondent writing from New Zealand to several American Catholic newspapers gives the following interesting sketch of Catholic progress made in the Australian colonies during the last half of the past century. "True indeed," he says, "it had been a hard struggle during many years for the priests and people. The Catholics were, comparatively speaking, the poorest section of the community and whilst many of the non-Catholic denominations, with the encouragement of governors and government officials when the various states which now comprise the Commonwealth of Australia were Crown Colonies, were able to secure ample endowments of land for church and school purposes, the Catholic body had practically to commence at the very beginning and purchase sites for churches and schools, build these and then pay for the education of their own children, while at the same time they had to contribute through the medium of general taxation to the education of the children of their more wealthy non-Catholic neighbors.

Last year there were in these colonies nearly 800 Catholic primary schools, with an attendance of about 113,000 children. Now as it costs the state close on \$25 per head to educate children in the public schools, it will be seen at a glance that the Catholic body saves the taxpayers of the Australian Colonies over half a million sterling per annum by educating their own children. But this is only a tithe of what our co-religionists are doing for the cause of education. They have 130 boarding schools for girls, 160 superior day schools, in addition to orphanages of various kinds where the waifs and strays and the homeless and neglected are trained for the education of their own children. The charitable institutions of all kinds, including Magdalen homes, hospitals, hospices for incurables, asylums for the deaf and dumb and foundling homes, number seventy-five. Higher education is also well provided for, each of the ecclesiastical provinces having two or more of such institutions within its borders. Sydney has 8, Melbourne 5, Adelaide 2, Queensland 3, and New Zealand 2. In addition to these there are seminaries and ecclesiastical colleges in various centres where those who are blessed with a vocation are educated for the priesthood. St. Patrick's ecclesiastical college in the archdiocese of Sydney has just had a record of 100 at a close of close on \$50,000.

In judging of our progress in these colonies the fact should not be lost sight of that what we have done is the work of the past fifty years or so. Until then the Church might be said to have been, figuratively speaking, in a state of suspended animation in the middle of the last century. That it is within the memory of many of our old settlers, it was practically a struggle for existence outside one or two of the principal centres. Had there been but a few million Catholics, sacrificed our conscientious convictions and sent our children to the public schools, what immense sums of money would have been available for church building all over the colonies. During the last fifty years must have spent many millions in the building and maintenance of our primary schools. In one archdiocese alone, that of Melbourne, in the period 1873-1898, nearly three quarters of a million pounds sterling (about \$3,750,000) were spent in the cause of Catholic primary education, and even this immense outlay did not represent all that had been done on behalf of education, for in addition the complete wiring order of seventy superior schools and of colleges had to be provided for. In the same archdiocese the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have expended in buildings alone since their introduction in 1863, no less a sum than \$110,000 (over half a million dollars).

In these days mere assertions count for little, and if we desire that our statements should be accepted as indisputable facts, we must be prepared to back them up by figures. To assert that the Catholics of these colonies are holding their own, notwithstanding the heavy handicap, in competition with the generously endowed state schools, without advancing any proof in support of such an assertion, might leave room for doubt. Here, however, is the latest proof to hand:

The results of the New South Wales University Junior Examinations were made known the other day, and out of the 690 old passes, nearly 140 were credited to Catholic schools and colleges. As the Catholics are in the ratio of one to five in that state it will be seen that they fully maintained their proportion in these examinations. This is all the more creditable when we remember that the state schools have relatively a much larger number of pupils to draw upon than the Catholic schools. The state schools are frequented by the children of people who are better off in the world than the parents of Catholic children, and consequently the former are left at school for a longer period than the latter, which in itself gives a decided advantage to the state institutions. As I said before, the activity of the Catholics of these colonies is

not confined to building churches and schools, for on all sides we see hospitals, homes and asylums conducted by devoted religious for the reception of those who stand in need of corporal or spiritual administration. Take the archdiocese of Sydney with its Catholic population of 150,000 and see what has been done there in half a century by way of works of charity. There are six orphanages, one reformatory, two industrial schools and hostels for learning trades, fever hospitals, one of which has accommodation for over 220 patients, one sanatorium, one hospice for the dying, one foundling hospital, one home for the aged poor, one home for the blind, two Magdalen retreats, one servants' home, one home for mental invalids, one night refuge, and a home for aged and infirm priests. Similar work is being done in other centres, those afflicted in body or mind, those who have strayed from the paths of virtue, those who have been dealt with unkindly by fortune in their declining years, are tended and cared for and nursed by communities of religious who have been very aptly styled "God's Army of Charity." During the first three years of the episcopate of Cardinal Moran eight religious orders were introduced and nearly \$1,500,000 expended in religious undertakings in the archdiocese of Sydney, and this, too, in a period of financial depression.

NOTES FOR THE HOUSEHOLD

DOMESTIC TRAINING.—According to the Detroit "News-Tribune," the establishment of housekeeping schools throughout the cities and towns is beginning to show good results. Teaching of housework has become a branch of many educational institutions, and especially is this favored by girls who know that they will take up this work for a living, and wish to be able to do it well. Many a woman who is the wife of a workman sees the folly of not having thoroughly learned the intricacies of housework in girlhood, and glad is she to have her daughter escape some of the pitfalls which has beset her way in this home.

One great trouble in our homes is that we put untrained girls into the kitchen and expect them to accomplish first-class work, and cook our food in a first-class manner. It has been again and again pointed out in no other profession does the employer expect his employees to do good work without first learning. Of course, if a girl has a mother who is an excellent housekeeper, she may begin her education at an early age; that she hardly knows when it commences, and is thus doubly fortunate in her education and in the vital interest taken in her progress by her teacher. Then again, many women seem to expect a maid to know everything while at the same time she is not able to direct the work because of her own ignorance regarding housekeeping. This is a deplorable situation. Every woman who enters a home of her own should know how to govern and direct that home. She should understand every branch of housework and be quite capable of teaching a maid how to do the work, from the cooking of a potato to the ironing of the finest bit of lingerie. If there were more good housekeepers among mistresses there would be less trouble with domestic help, and housekeeping schools are moving the situation in the right direction.

PERSONAL NEATNESS.—If girls could once fully appreciate the almost dazzling enhancement of their natural charm which is produced by radiant, fragrant neatness, they would fairly walk with heads in their shoes to secure it, if it could not be obtained in any other way, is the excellent suggestion offered by a friend of young women, and which is quite applicable in its general meaning to all who desire to please. But if neatness is admirable in any one, by the young woman it is indispensable. The fairness of youth, particularly feminine youth, attracts every eye. When dimmed by mussed hair, uncare-for teeth or nails, a skin that shows that 10 minutes in the bath is not a part of the weekly routine, it is as if the perfection of a fine picture were clouded with spots and blemishes.

Not all girls can be beautiful, but every girl can be radiantly and exquisitely clean. This means, first, absolute bodily cleanliness, easily possible with a daily bath, frequent washings of the hair, constant care of the nails and teeth, and after that, clean, carefully brushed and often renewed clothes. A vital part of the moment to care so much is found in the neckbands now enjoying such wide vogue. They were to protect delicate ribbons and chiffons from too soon soiling. It seems likely that something will have to be devised to protect these, in turn, from too long wearing. Missy, rumpled ties, vest fronts, bodices and finery of an sort, are an abomination and should not be permitted in these days of easy renovation or replacement. The habits of neatness should extend to this care of belongings as well as to their wear.

Prayer is the wing wherewith the soul flies to Heaven and meditation the eye with which we see God.

The secret of life is not to do what one likes, but to try to like that which one has to do, and one does come to like it—in time.

Many build as cathedrals were built, the part nearest the ground finished, but that part which soars towards Heaven, the turrets and spires, forever incomplete.

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