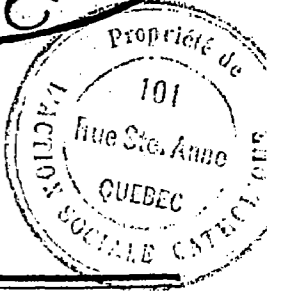


CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.



VOL. VIII. MONTREAL, FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 1857. No. 1.

THE KNIGHT OF THE SHEEP.

By Gerald Griffin.

CHAPTER I.

In the days of our ancestors it was the custom, when a "strong farmer" had arrived at a certain degree of independence by his agricultural pursuits, to confer upon him a title in the Irish language, which is literally translated, "The Knight of the Sheep."

In one of the most fertile townlands in one of our inland counties, lived a person of this class, bearing the name of Bryan Taafe. No less than three spacious tenements acknowledged his sway, by the culture of which he had acquired, in the course of a long life, a quantity of wealth more than sufficient for any purpose to which he might wish to apply it.

Mr. Taafe had three sons, on whose education he had lavished all the care and expense which could have been expected from the most affectionate father in his walk of life.

Accordingly, the best teachers that Kerry and Limerick could afford were employed to teach them the classics, mathematics, and such other branches of science and letters as were current in those parts. The two elder sons showed a remarkable quickness in all their studies; but the youngest, though his favorite, disappointed both him and his instructors.

One day as Mr. Taafe was walking in his garden, taking the air before breakfast in the morning, he called Jerry Fogarty, his steward, and told him he wanted to speak with him.

"Jerry," says Mr. Taafe, after they had taken two or three turns on the walk together, "I don't know in the world what'll I do with Garret."

"Why so, master?" "Ah, I'm kilt from him. You know yourself what a great opinion I always had o' the learning. A man, in fact, isn't considered worth spakin' to in these times that hasn't it."

"I'll tell you what it is, master," said Jerry, "there's a dale, that's not over bright at the book, an' that would be very 'cute for all in their own minds. May be Master Garret would be one o' them, an' we not to know it. I remember myself one Motry Hierlohee, that not hap'orth o' good could be got o' him goin' to school, an' he turned out one of the greatest janiuses in the parish after. There isn't his equals in Munster now at a lamentation or the likes. Their raal janiuses does be always so full of their own thoughts, they can't bring themselves as it were, to take notice of those of other people."

"Maybe, you're right, Jerry," answered Mr. Taafe. "I'll take an opportunity of trying."

his orchard, his kitchen-garden, his pantry, and his cellar, could afford, was placed before them in abundance; and seldom did a merrier company assemble together to enjoy the hospitality of an Irish farmer.

When the dinner was over, and the guests busily occupied in conversation, the Knight of the Sheep, who sat at the head of the table, stood up with a grave air, as if he were about to address something of importance to the company.

"In the first place, gentlemen, I have to return you all thanks for giving me the pleasure of your company here to-day, which I do with all my heart. And I feel the more honored and gratified because I take it for granted you have come here, not so much from any personal feeling towards myself, but because you know that I have always endeavored, so far as my poor means would enable me, to show my respect for men of parts and learning. Well, then, here you are all met, grammarians, geometricians, arithmeticians, geographers, astronomers, philosophers, Latinists, Grecians, and men of more sciences than perhaps I ever heard the names of. Now there's no doubt learning is a fine thing, but what good is all the learning in the world without what they call mother-wit to make use of it? An ounce o' mother-wit would buy an' sell a stone-weight of learning at any fair in Munster. Now there are you all scholars, an' here am I a poor country farmer that hardly ever got more teaching than to read and write, and maybe a course of Voster, and yet I'll be bound I'll lay down a problem that maybe some o' ye wouldn't find it easy to make out."

At this preamble, the curiosity of the company was raised to the highest degree, and the Knight of the Sheep resumed, after a brief pause:

"At a farm of mine, about a dozen miles from this, I have four fields of precisely the same soil; one square, another oblong, another partly round, and another triangular. Now, what is the reason that, while I have an excellent crop of white eyes this year out of the square, the oblong, and the round field, not a single stalk would grow in the triangular one?"

This problem produced a dead silence amongst the guests, and all exerted their understandings to discover the solution, but without avail, although many of their conjectures showed the deepest ingenuity. Some traced out a mysterious connection between the triangular boundary, and the lines of the celestial hemisphere; others said, probably from the shape of the field an equal portion of nutrition did not flow on all sides to the seed so as to favor its growth.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Taafe, "ye're all too clever—that's the only fault I have to find with ye'r answers. Shamus," he continued, addressing his eldest son, "can you tell the reason?"

"Why, then, father," said Shamus, "they didn't grow there, I suppose, because you didn't plant them there."

"You have it, Shamus," said the knight; "I declare you took the ball from all the philosophers. Well, gentlemen, can any o' ye tell me, now, if you wished to travel all over the world, from whom would you ask a passport?"

"From Civility, father," answered Guillaume; "for that's a gentleman that has acquaintances everywhere."

"You're right, Guillaume," replied the knight. "Well, I have one more question for the company. Can any one tell me in what country the women are the best housekeepers?"

Garret rubbed his forehead for a while, and smiled, and shook his head, but could get nothing out of it.

"I declare to my heart, father," said he, "I can't tell from Adam. Where the women are good housekeepers?—stay a minute. Maybe," said he, with a knowing look, "maybe 'tis in America."

"Shamus, do answer," said the knight, in a disappointed tone. "In the grave, father," answered Shamus, "for there they never gad abroad."

Mr. Taafe acknowledged that his eldest son had once more judged right; and the entertainments of the night proceeded without further interruption, until, wearied with feasting and music, such of the company as could not be accommodated with beds, took their departure, each in the direction of own home.

(To be continued.)

SOUPERISM TESTED BY ITS OWN STATISTICS.

(Concluded.)

But a still better criterion of the small success which has attended the operations of the Society will be found in the actual statistics of conversion, which we shall accordingly proceed to collect and set before the reader. Yet even this evidence must not be taken without a certain qualification. The question still remains unanswered by anything in this Report, What are the recognized tests of a "Conversion?" We have strong reason for thinking that in the Protestant estimate they are extremely inadequate to the subject on which they are employed; in short, that many a so-called "conversion," which goes to swell the statistics of these proselytising societies would be found, upon closer examination, to be some act or other, which involves indeed a very grievous sin against faith, but which amounts at the worst to something far below positive apostasy.

Some indeed of the criteria of missionary success given in the Report are insufficient to the extent of being simply ludicrous. We find the most confident hopes built upon such facts as that of a Catholic attending a controversial lecture or sermon, courteously receiving the visit of a missionary, accepting a bible, reading a handbill or placard, &c., &c. Sorry, indeed, are we to hear of Catholics giving any kind of countenance or quarter to persons who come to them as wolves in sheep's clothing, and against whom the apostle of charity himself, St. John the Evangelist, would have hidden them to close their doors, and withhold from them even the customary salutation of courtesy.

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number is extremely small of those who are not reconciled to the Church, even when they have formally apostatized from it, upon their death-beds.

Taking therefore into account, 1, that many a "conversion" is in truth no conversion at all, and 2, that even a true "conversion" is no pledge of a final separation from the Catholic Church; and making from the statistics of the Society the deductions necessarily involved in these qualifying considerations, we think that the facts which, in the Report under review, lie embedded deep in a mass of superincumbent self-gratulation, or self-depreciation, or self-placancy, or whatever other sentiment has "dear number one" for its ruling motive, or the object of its reflex operation, will not be felt very damaging to the cause of religion, at least as regards the diminution of its hold upon the great mass of the adult population of Ireland.

We have perused the Report with some care in order to get at the precise number of "converts" actually claimed as such. We may be quite certain that this number will not fall below the truth of the case. On the contrary, without imputing even exaggeration to the framers of the Report, (and we must in justice to them say that the Report gives no tokens of it), we may easily believe that, for the reasons just stated, some of these "converts" are but half converts, and a still larger proportion will not continue such. But let us come to the statistics of proselytism. The following is a tabular view of the conversions in the year ending May 1856.

Table with 2 columns: Location and Number of conversions. Includes Dublin, Monkstown, King's & Queen's Co., Kilkenny, Cork, Bandon, Fermoy, Anghrim, Galway, Tuam, Headford, Spidal & Inverin, Killeen, Lough Corrib, Castlerkerke, Conemara.

Here are twenty-nine missions, some of them populous and extensive, yielding a return of but twenty-one even nominal converts in the course of a year. On the other side we have several confessions of loss. For instance, in Conemara: "In estimating the effect of the works, we are forcibly reminded of the difficulty of judging by appearances. One, whom we for some time regarded as a convert, sent for a priest the day before he died; while another, a Roman Catholic tradesman, would have me attend him all through his illness, and though he never separated from Rome, and even allowed the priest to come to him, yet he declared that he had no confidence in any but Jesus alone."

The latter anecdote reminds us forcibly of the triumph exhibited at the Evangelical Tea-party in "Loss and Gain," on the fact of Pope Gregory XVI. having died "a true believer," because he was known to have expressed confidence in the merits of his Redeemer.

Again:—"Seven have returned to Popery, of whom three were young women who married Popish husbands, who most probably influenced them. Two others were the son and daughter of Romish parents who had not the moral courage to resist the priest's repeated denunciations, and another was a man who was never regarded as a decided convert."

Now see the "gains" by which these losses are counterbalanced. "Eighteen adult Romanists have attended from time to time our mission service who never attended before. Many others have promised to come, but have not as yet; while a very large number are under instruction and read the Bible and tracts given them, and acknowledge openly they believe everything in the Bible, and nothing else."

Ballinakill.—"I need scarcely say that the great mass of the people are fearfully ignorant and superstitious."

Killery.—"I feel I should not be discharging my duty should I merely show the cheering side of the picture, whilst I pass over in silence that which is not so. I must therefore mention two cases of relapse into Romanism."

Achill.—"The congregation has somewhat diminished. . . . Our schools have not been so well attended towards the close of the year as they were at the beginning. Every exertion has been made to induce the parents to take their children away from the schools. Dr. M'Hale visited the island some months ago, and urged the people to withdraw their children from the schools, to which, he said, they are sent as little angels, and returned little devils!"

Truly, these are the most candid of witnesses. The following little histories give more than an inkling of the way in which these "conversions" are brought about: "A —, of Lisnaskea, is, we hope, a truly pious convert from Popery; she attends church regularly, and is deeply acquainted with her

Bible, which is quite a curiosity to look at, from the way it is thumbed, and scored, and underlined. She is indeed a very interesting young woman! and a faithful witness for the truth.—She is a servant now in the house of a pious Protestant lady, and is a regular communicant."

—p. 16. "C —, an intelligent, frank, fearless girl, gradually and completely gave way to the arguments of the readers, and what she heard at the inquiring class. . . . She came to me several times, and seemed to be earnestly seeking truth, and searching the Scriptures, at the same time quite resolved to leave home. I then took her in as a housemaid; and soon after her mother came and told her that the money was all ready for her emigration. She went home, but found that it was all false, and only a ruse to get her out of my house. I recommended her then to the Rev. —, who reports of her most satisfactorily, that she is an excellent trustworthy servant."—pp. 16, 17. There is a strong smell of "soup" here.

On the whole, we cannot be far wrong in concluding that, as regards adult conversions, the operations of this Society are little less than a total failure. Allowing, indeed, for the admitted "relapses" or restorations to Catholic communion, and for the probable return to the Church of many who are described as having emigrated, enlisted, or otherwise removed themselves from the influences of Protestant bribery, there is good reason to hope that even the recorded gains of heresy during the year to which this Report applies, have been completely neutralized, and that the enormous expenditure of £36,444 15s 4d (a sum which in Catholic hands would have sufficed for missionary operations all over the world,) has not produced the accession of a single adult Catholic throughout the length and breadth of Ireland to the ranks of apostasy.

With the children, we fear, the case is otherwise. The statistics of this Society undoubtedly exhibit an amount of success in the educational department of its operations, which gives us very considerable pain. We much fear that in Ireland, as in England, many poor Catholics, who would rather suffer martyrdom than themselves be guilty of any final act against the Faith, are seduced, partly bribes, partly by false professions, and partly by the most mistaken notion that the minds of children under eight or ten years of age are incapable of receiving any indelible impressions of false doctrine and false morality, into committing these little ones to the care of heretical teachers, who do their best to corrupt them. For the faith of the adult Irish (at least in their own country) we have no fears. But the prospect is, we confess, anxious if not alarming, as regards the rising generation. The utmost vigilance on the part of the priests, joined with an essentially Catholic system of education, can alone, under God, prevent the otherwise almost certain inroads, both of actual heresy, and what is even a more fatal, because less assailable foe, that carelessness and indifference about the grand distinguishing features of the Catholic religion, which must result from a counteracting power applied with the most indefatigable pertinacity, the most dexterous ingenuity, and the most unscrupulous disregard of principle in the means by which it effects its objects. Sincerity of purpose, however grievously misdirected, shall always meet with forbearance at our hands; and we desire that what we are about to say may be understood with an allowance for all which, in the sight of God, is truly the effect of invincible ignorance in this movement. But, speaking of it materially, and in the abstract, we must say unhesitatingly, that a more exact counterpart of the Tempter's work in the first Paradise we can hardly picture to ourselves, even in imagination, than is to be found in the systematic endeavor to rob a religious and united people of that Faith which is no less the cementing bond of the nation, than the foundation of the hope and the pledge of the peace of the individuals composing it.

To prevent mistakes, we close with two observations. While we have felt it our duty, at all hazards, to set before our readers the true state of the case with regard to the actual success of one Protestant engine for the destruction of the Faith in Ireland, neither they, nor we must forget, that this engine is but one of many, and may not, for what we know, be a fair specimen of its class.—Let nothing, therefore, which we have said, be taken as an encouragement to over-confidence and false security. "Legion" is the name of the evil spirit who stalks abroad in the specious form of a friend of liberty and a messenger of peace to Ireland; and the revelations of failure to which this particular Report bears witness, must not be allowed to throw us off our guard in a contest where, although vigilance be not victory, indifference would be certain ruin.

Again, the confidence we have expressed in the "tenacity of Irish faith," must not be understood to extend in all its fulness to the case of