

MORNING STAR AND CATHOLIC MESSENGER.

NEW ORLEANS, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1863.

WITH THE NUNS.

(CONCLUDED FROM OUR LAST.)

We had some discussion on the doctrinal points, unsharpened with that disputatious spirit so inevitable in doctrinal polemics between follow-Protestants. There was no desire manifested to argue me down. It may be that I did not need arguing down as much as I am sorry to say, many otherwise intelligent and fair-minded Protestants do; for I knew that Papiets did not worship images, or pray to saints as we pray to Christ; I had no urgent objection to celibacy on their part, was rather favorable than otherwise to a purgatory, on general principles, and did not try to answer the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. Once we touched on the Catholic claim of miracles. "I have been a nun," she said, "for more than twenty years, have been a great deal in different communities, some of them large ones, and I never saw or knew any one who had seen any thing of the kind. I have known, occasionally, those who supposed they had seen visions, and in these cases I have generally called in the physician, not the priest, and under proper treatment they have usually disappeared. We are taught not to anticipate such things—indeed, to suspect what appears at first to look like them. But that God does, in these, as in days gone by, in His own time and way, miraculously attest the authority of His church and the efficacy of prayer, I have no more question than I have in regard to the reality of that usual order of Providence which is the more common expression of His will. No new fact in science has to run such a gauntlet of criticism and tests as a new miracle in the Catholic Church; but when, after the most careful examination, it has been authenticated by the Holy Father, we credit it as unreservedly as we do those recorded in the New Testament. And in this, we, as believers in the Bible, are consistent—not you. Did not Christ say that, when the Paraclete was come, His disciples should do greater things than he had done? Were not the apostles, before commencing their ministry, to wait at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high? You know how that power was manifested on the day of Pentecost. And at our Saviour's last miraculous appearance, before His ascension into Heaven, did he not join with the very obligation to perpetuate his religion the promise of its perpetual attestation by a catalogue of miracles as wonderful as any you will find in Butler's 'Lives of the Saints'?" And then she quoted the Douay rendering of Mark xvi. 15, 20.

Among the nuns with whom I became more or less acquainted—and there were many of them—I did not see any one who appeared dissatisfied or unhappy. There was, of course, great diversity among them—five different nationalities at least to start with—all ages, and all grades of the intellectual scale. They did not all look like madonnas, or talk like our mother superior; but all did look as if they had found their vocation, and were satisfied with it. There certainly was no visible sign of regret for the world they had left behind. That the means they employ, and the ends they propose, would not suit you, Protestant reader, is very far from being proof that they may not be the best possible ones for them. All over the Christian world there are souls struggling for something above the vulgar joys and sorrows of commonplace existence, asking that their "Lamp of Sacrifice"—one of the deepest and divinest principles that God has planted in our clay, the one by which we are most nearly His spiritual offspring, and it may be added, the one most in need of the wisest human reason and the clearest heavenly guidance to trim and use aright—be lighted by a noble enthusiasm and fed by some transcendent mission. Such souls usually make terrible shipwreck; this world is no place for them; its chill is fatal to flame, and the Promethean fire, once out, is never lit again. There are those who have struggled to accomplish such a vocation to the bearing of bitterer woes than man will take for wealth, love, power or fame. No philosophy that ignores the spiritual elements of humanity will explain our many-sided nature. Man does not live by bread alone.

It is when he is clothed, and housed, and fed, that he begins to be in want. He is an animal, the king of animals, and some of his greatest mistakes arise from his ignoring this fundamental fact; but he is something more. Bound up in his unstable mechanism are two warring natures. The harmonious integration and development—the at-one-ment of these is the true and final office of science and religion.

Judging from the zeal of the Church in making proselytes, one might infer that it was equally anxious to increase the number of those who take upon them its final vows. This, however, is not the case, except under important limitations. If, after having been a lay member for a proper time, one wishes to become a nun, she must satisfy her spiritual director, and the superior of the convent to which she desires to attach herself, that she has a true "vocation," as it is called, to such a life. No mere desire on her part to be a nun, no consideration of the mere pecuniary gain that may accrue to the order from her incorporation in it, will determine even the first step in the process. The life is one of complete self-abnegation and most arduous labor. The postulant must be in sound health, body and mind, thoroughly devoted and steadfast of purpose. These points affirmatively settled, she enters a convent on a six months' probation. If this is satisfactorily completed, she begins a two years' novitiate. During all this time she assumes no vows. At the end of the two years and a half she is as free to change her mind and return to the world as she was before her probation. But when, after this extended test, she takes the veil—that, in symbol, shuts out all purely secular interests and pursuits—there must be no looking back. She lays aside every weight, to run the race set before her. For evermore the world is crucified to her, and she to the world.

Were there not some who, without knowing more, should know better, I would not refer to the vulgar insinuation sometimes heard, of conventional unfaithfulness to celibate vows. The time, I trust, has come when truth can afford to be honest; and just men, however strong their antipathies, should be ashamed to charge guilt which is not only unproven, but negated by all the evidence upon the subject. Sensuality, especially when detached from the order of nature—family and domestic ties—makes marks in both the physiognomy and physiology of its devotees, which no one can hide. You know the woman of the *demi-monde* when you see her on the pavement or in the street car. You may find the traces of most human impressions on the faces of the nuns—but not that. Every physician with a conventional practice knows that their diseases (and those of the genital plexus are not infrequent) are of the celestiate type. If of that class, they are most probably those for which the medical attendant of your family is treating your unmarried sister and your maiden aunt. There are no reservations in the professional pathology. Nature, at least, is true. Get rid of that vulgar notion, my friend; leave it to ignorant and brutal people; you will be very much ashamed of it when you are qualified to have an opinion on the subject.

Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of our Roman Catholic friends is the entireness of their faith in the Church as the "pillar and ground" of religious truth. Those who believe at all, believe unreservedly. All the matters of faith and practice debated by Protestant controversialists and agitated in thinking minds among the Protestant laity, are *res judicata* to them. The way to go to Heaven is as simple as the way to go to school. They carry no intellectual impedimenta into the lying of their creed. Doubting Castle and Giant Despair do not lie in their pathway. Doubt of the compassion of the All-Merciful is a temptation which must be resisted without parley, and despair, a mortal sin, which confession and abandonment alone can purge away.

While there may be ignorant priests, there are among them, particularly in the higher ranks of the clergy, very many men of eminent scholarship and learning. And, strange to say, they are on better terms with the more advanced school of physical research than Protestant divines. They do not quarrel with Bichat or Lyell. It is not the literal accuracy of the Book, but the spiritual infallibility of the Church, that they have in charge to promulgate and defend. The tendency among them is to a wider and more catholic scholarship than is common among Protestant theologians. They do not get nervous when some one unearths a new monster from the oolite, or picks up a piece of pottery from the pliocene tertiary. They have given up the miserable, hopeless fight with demonstrable science, and are the stronger for it.

This Catholic question, so important in its bearings upon the future of America, this Church so overshadowing among the ecclesiastical activities of our time, require to be treated fairly. Those of us who believe that the Reformation marked an onward step of Providence in the secular and spiritual education of the race—that the fruits of civil and religious freedom, baptized with the blood of the Thirty Years' War, and a thousand battle-fields since, toiled and suffered for by the choicest spirits that have lived on earth during the last three hundred years, and now delivered to the keeping of the most advanced and powerful races of civilized men, are worth preserving and handing down—cannot afford to misunderstand the position of our opponents. Ignorant aspersions of their tenets or practices will help them, not us. When some well-intentioned "no-popery" man relates a string of stupid falsehoods about their history and doctrines, tell him to read up the other side of the subject, just for the sake—since he will talk—of knowing something about it. The truth is bad enough, and a better ally than its opposite. The man has not made much progress in inculturating Protestant views, no matter how tremendous his objections, who succeeds in satisfying his hearer that he is either ignorant or insincere. And if, for the time being, he convinces, the reaction will be still greater if the hearer finds out, two or ten years afterwards, that his confidence has been abused. If there be any permanent result in such cases, it is more likely to be favorable to Romanism than adverse to it. And there are no zealots like proselytes. A larger per centage of originally Protestant than Catholic pupils in conventual schools become nuns.

Twenty years ago, the growth of the Catholic Church was almost exclusively the result of accretion by immigration and the increase of Catholic families. This is no longer the case. In this age of printing presses and free schools, she has organized an aggressive campaign, and entered upon the work of propagandism with an energy and sagacity which have not unduly excited the interest and apprehensions of such Protestants as take note of what is going on around them. And it is not only the number, but in many cases the quality of their converts that surprises the looker-on. Such proselytes as Newman and Miller in England, and Ives and Brownson in America, project an influence into the higher circles of culture and power, which no mere number of obscure Smiths and Joneses could wield. They go to work with a vim—with treatises and essays, which the alumni of Oxford and Harvard read with relish, if not with conviction, and aim at nothing less than the capture of minds of equal endowments and influence with themselves. Already Protestantism, so long assailed, is put upon the defensive. Conversions from Romanism have ceased, or nearly so, and the contrary process has begun. Within a single year Archbishop Manning has made one thousand converts in a single fashionable district of London, and during the same period has admitted fifteen Protestant clergymen into the communion of the Church of Rome. I know a mother superior who, ten years ago, was a first Presbyterian. Instances of this character are far less frequent than unobservant Protestants imagine. And as for the matter of nu-

merical increase of membership, it is gaining on that of the total population of the country at the rate of about twelve per cent. per annum, compounded at that. Consider what such facts mean and point to, you who thought that Garibaldi was going to finish the papacy a few months ago—you who believe that it is dying of a complication of printing presses, steam engines, and submarine cables!

What is to be the result? Is Protestantism to be reabsorbed, before the close of the twentieth century, into the larger and more ancient mass—to make full and complete surrender, as did the Arian and Gnostic revolts of earlier time? We waive the consideration of the grand element in the problem, the question on which side the Divine Power is to work—on which side is the Rock, and the inexhaustible Truth—and content ourselves with calculating the resolution of the human forces, visible and invisible, that are co-working and counter-working in society towards the settlement of this question. If we depended on the counter-ecclesiastical activities of Protestantism, we might well doubt its ability for successful resistance.

The present reaction is a protest against the religious hollowness of the age. It is the prophecy of a new, wiser, and more reverent epoch in the religious progress of mankind.

Finally, the lesson we get from our sojourns with the nuns and colloquies with the priests is the same that comes from all our better knowledge of each other—charity. There is a wonderful family-likeness between good people everywhere. If we know saints who never saw a convent, let us believe that there are saints in convents we have never seen—just men in Samaria as well as in Judea. Wide apart as they now appear, a few years will bring these good people together. "The time cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, they shall worship the Father."

IRISH CHURCH APPENDAGE.—According to the recently published report of the Government Commissioners, the doomed Irish Law Church Establishment is possessed of no less than 30 cathedral corporations for its 693,000 men, women, and children, the nominal Protestant population of the country. Four cathedrals are dedicated to St. Patrick—Armagh, Dublin, Cashel and Killala. Tuam and Limerick have St. Mary for patron; Clogher has St. Macartin; Achonry, St. Crumath; Kildare, St. Brigid; Kilkenny, St. Canice; Ferns, St. Edan; Leighlin, St. Lazarus; Emly, St. Alibeu; "alias Elibeu;" Lismore, St. Carthage; Cork, St. Finbar; Cloyne, St. Colman; Kilmacduagh, St. Coleman; Ross, St. Faughan; Kallaloe, St. Flannan; Kiltenera, St. Fachuan; Clonfert, St. Brandon; Ardfer, St. Brendan. Dublin has also Christchurch Cathedral. The cathedrals of Waterford and Down take the name of Trinity; Drogheda, the Redeemer; Connor, St. Saviour. We do not observe that the Royal Commissioners mention a patron saint in the instance of Derry, Raphoe, or Elphin. The list will in many instances introduce a name and nothing more. Many of the cathedrals are now used as parish churches. In only a few is cathedral service celebrated.

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31 to 35, 30
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51 to 55, 50
56 to 60, 55
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