

over the vacant tomb of Edward the Confessor within the hallowed walls of Westminster Abbey. It speaks in tower and pillared dome throughout the land, "of which every arch has its scroll teaching Catholic wisdom, and every window represents some canonized saint." * It breathes through the Catholic prayers still preserved in *The Book of Common Prayer*. It has become transfused into some of the noblest passages in *Paradise Lost*; the Arianism and the Protestantism are Milton's own; but his magnificent lines clothe many a sentiment of tenderness and sublimity culled from the pages of Cædmon, St. Avitus, Andreini, the Catholic mediæval miracle plays, and *Lucifer*, the Catholic drama of Vondel, the great Catholic and national poet of Holland. † It lurks in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, as much of it as John Bunyan chose to spell out of the prose translation of the original *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Le Pèlerinage de l'Homme* of the Cistercian monk Guillaume de Deguilleville. ‡ It is our Catholic heritage of thought and sentiment that has inspired the

* Kennelm Digby: *Mores Catholici*, vol. i., p. 22.

† Francis Junius introduced Milton to Cædmon; Roger Williams, of Rhode Island, taught him the language of Vondel. See Looten: *Étude littéraire sur le poète néerlandais Vondel*. Bruxelles, 1889.

‡ Not *The Wandering Knight* of Jean de Carthenay, as has been recently asserted; not even, perhaps, the complete copy of the *Pilgrimage of the Lys of the Manhode*, which I have before me; but an abridgment of it, which, Mr. Wright tells us, was copied and circulated in MS. in the seventeenth century (*Pilgrimage of the Lys of the Manhode*, preface, p. x.). John Lydgate made a poetical translation of the original poem in 1426. There are two copies of his translation in the British Museum, the best of which is in the Cottonian Collection (Vitellius, c. xiii., fol. 2-308).

sublimest passages in our Wordsworths and Tennysons, our Longfellows and Lowells. And whatever Shakspeare may have been in practice, the whole spirit of his immortal plays is Catholic. Even Carlyle regards him as the flowering of mediæval Catholicism. * "Indeed," says Digby, "a book might be composed on the latent Catholicism of many natives of this country, where everything solid and valuable is, after all, either a remnant or a revival of Catholic thinking or institution." †

VIII.

I. ALL honor, then, to those who at many and great sacrifices, and actuated by the pure love of God and their religion, have sought to wrest back for us a portion of our Catholic heritage in English literature. There are names connected with Catholic literature in America that we should ever hold in honor and benediction. Such is the name of Orestes A. Brownson. ‡ Do we realize all the greatness covered by that name? America has produced no more powerful intellect than Brownson's. There was no problem, social, political, religious, or philosophical, that he did not grapple with and find an answer for. After trying creed upon creed to find out

* *French Revolution*, b. i., ch. i.

† *Mores Catholici*, vol. i., p. 25. Mr. P. O'Shea has made American Catholics his debtors by the publication of this magnificent work, hitherto so long out of print, hard to procure, and expensive. It is a great Catholic classic. The more it is read, the better it will be appreciated.

‡ Died, April 17, 1876, æt. 73.

the hollowness of each, the aspirations of his strong and generous nature and the invincible logic of his acute intellect led him into the Church, in the strength and maturity of his manhood. Forthwith he consecrated his pen to the vindication of that Church and the defense of her doctrines against all comers. Mediæval knight never bore lance with greater singleness of purpose, or with more bravery and determination, in the cause of his lady-love, than did Brownson wield his pen in behalf of the Church. To his dying breath he was faithful to his vow. He viewed, and taught others to view, the doctrines of the Church from an elevated plane, from which they were apprehended as a whole and all their grandeur and beauty revealed to advantage. Men might differ with him in politics—his political opinions were odious to many among his readers, and yet his political principles, in the main, were sound and fully vindicated by subsequent events; men might differ with him in criticism—in spite of his elevated artistic ideal, some there were who regarded his literary canons as narrow and inadequate; men might differ with him in philosophy—his language smacked too much of Gioberti* to please the intellect trained on exclusively Cartesian or Scholastic lines; he may have been mistaken in matters of theology—in unguarded moments, in the heat of controversy, he may sometimes have expressed himself

* Brownson was a warm admirer but in no sense a disciple of Gioberti; he reached his philosophical conclusions independently of the Italian philosopher.

in language that a better trained theologian would not employ, or would modify considerably; but he was still great; there remained in his politics, in his philosophy, in his theological discussions, in his literary and art criticism, enough to instruct, elevate, inspire, and compel admiration.* The very ring of his sentences was a trumpet-blast to us of the rising generation. He taught us how to take our stand upon his own high plane of thought, and thence survey the beautiful harmony of our creed with all that is good and noble in the natural world. He brought home, not to us alone, but to the cultured

* Brownson himself, in his old age, with all the candor and humility of a great and noble soul, recognized his own shortcomings in the following generous sentences: "I have always regretted that circumstances not under my control seemed to compel me to appear as a Catholic reviewer on the morrow of my reception into the Church, while almost totally ignorant of Catholic theology, and still more ignorant of Catholic life and usages; and I have often admired in later years the wondrous charity of the Catholic bishops and clergy in overlooking the crudeness and inexperience, if not the overweening confidence, of the neophyte, and in giving a generous support to his *Review*, notwithstanding the manifest inaptness of its editor. It is true, I studied hard day and night for several years, under an able master, to supply my deficiency; and, also, that I published very little which was not previously examined and revised by one of the ablest and soundest theologians I have ever personally known; but it was a great drawback upon the usefulness of the *Review*, that its editor and principal writer had not had leisure previously to make his course of theology and to place himself *en rapport* with the Catholic community, and that he had in every successive number to write up to the very limits of his knowledge, if not sometimes beyond them. I had always to write as an apprentice, never as a master. I have not made much progress in the knowledge of theology, and still less of spiritual life; I have also forgot much of what I had acquired; but I have learned this much—not to venture beyond my depth, and not to broach questions which I have not mastered, or, at least, think I have mastered. If I could have done so in the beginning, I should have spared myself and my friends many mortifications."—*Brownson's Works*, vol. xix., p. 587.

intellect throughout the Christian world—for he had admirers in all parts and among all creeds—the great truths of natural and revealed religion with a grasp, a force, and an energy of expression worthy of an Aquinas. We were led to hold up our heads and to be proud of the faith that could inspire such sublime thoughts and control such a noble nature. His great intellect was only equalled by his profound humility. Once his bishop told him that in consequence of some objectionable tenets in his *Review* he would be obliged to censure him publicly. The old man's reply was: "Bishop, you may condemn and burn my books if you will, but by the grace of God I shall die a Catholic." * And a docile, pious, believing child of the Church he died. We of America owe Brownson a debt of gratitude that our children's children can but ill requite.

2. When Brownson was already a leader among men there was wont to sit at his feet a youth whom he looked kindly upon, and who afterwards, growing into manhood, threw aside the shackles of prejudice and error, and entering the Church, became a freeman with the freedom that truth alone gives. † To speak of books or of reading and not to mention the name of Father Hecker ‡ were an

* I received this incident from the lips of the Most Rev., the late Archbishop Bayley.

† He says of his conversion: "It was one of the happiest moments of our life when we discovered for the first time that it was not required of us either to abandon our reason or drown it in a false excitement of feeling to be a religious man. That to become Catholic, so far from being contrary to reason, was a supreme act of reason."—*Aspirations of the Soul*, p. 286.

‡ Died, Dec. 22, 1888, æt. 69.

unpardonable oversight. He was a man of generous impulse and noble aspirations, who thought better of the world than the world has deserved. His thirst for souls was insatiable. Having learned how good it was to live within the pale of the Church, he would bring all men to share his peace and his joy. He loved American youths with the eager, hungering love of a father who saw his children in danger of drowning and would save them at any cost. He felt the pulse of the American youth, divined his yearnings, laid bare to him his better aspirations, and showed him where every beat of his heart and every question of his soul would find satisfactory response. You could not be in his presence for five minutes without feeling your soul set aflame with the same pure and noble fervor that was ever urging him on to make for the best. He was in an especial manner the apostle of Christian culture. He loved good books; he encouraged others to read good books; he inspired many to write good books; he freely disseminated good books. The Catholic Publication Society is a standing testimony to his zeal and energy in the cause of good Catholic reading. It was under his fostering hand that *The Catholic World* grew up and flourished. His own writings abound in that strong common sense so dear to the American mind. Who can number the souls that, weary and parched in traversing the arid sands of philosophic speculation, have stopped and drunk of the pure crystal waters of clear, good sense flowing from his

refreshing volumes, and, strengthened, have resumed their journey with a new-founded hope that has cheered them on to a home and a resting-place in the Church of God? He has passed from amongst us, but his spirit still lives in devoted disciples of his, who are carrying on his work as he would have it carried on, in the spirit of charity for man, zeal for souls, and an abiding trust in the practical good sense of the American people.

3. And there has recently fallen another whose life was an apostolate sacrificed for the Catholic press. He fell in the breach; fell fighting till summoned by the death-knell; fell with aspirations unrealized, plans and projects unachieved; fell in the noon-day of his life, feeling that while he had done something he had left much more undone. Only the friends that knew him intimately and were favored with an insight into his noble aspirations and the high ideal he always placed before himself, are in position to weigh and measure the solid worth of Commendatore Patrick Valentine Hickey.* He also was one of the chosen few who labored in the interest of Catholic literature and Catholic journalism with a singleness of purpose and in a spirit of self-denial and self-devotedness truly heroic. Moderate in his views, unbending in his principles, charitable in his judgments, he was a ripe scholar, versed in theology, a clever writer, a fair-minded and honorable opponent in controversy. He might have been imposed on at times; at times he might

* Died, Feb. 27, 1888, æt. 43.

have seriously blundered; he was not more than man; but he never knowingly did injustice to his fellow-man. Rarely was his paper sullied with personal abuse. He always bore the respect and esteem of the non-Catholic press. Be his memory cherished amongst us as the Bayard of Catholic journalism.

Let us not forget or ignore such merit and such devotedness. Let us love the literature for which such noble souls sacrificed themselves. Let us cultivate it, each according to his capacity; let us patronize it, each according to his means.

IX.

ON the eve of sending out this lecture in its permanent form another great luminary in the world of Catholic letters passed from earth. The Right Reverend Monsignor James A. Corcoran died.* His loss is irreparable. Among the American priesthood he towered peerless. His learning was prodigious. He was a lifelong student, ever absorbing knowledge. He was deeply read in oriental literature; he was equally at home in the sacred and profane literatures of nearly every nation in mediæval and modern Europe; he was unrivaled as a Latinist and wrote the Latin language with classic grace and purity of expression; his knowledge of books and authors extended to the smallest details and the most obscure writers; he was possessed of rare critical acumen; his erudition was profound, but he

* Died, July 16, 1889, æt. 69.

never permitted it to conceal from him the real worth of an opinion. Authorities had in his judgment the weight of their intrinsic merit, and neither more nor less. He had rare tact in brushing aside as so many cobwebs traditional opinions and traditional quotations, and going straight to the heart of his subject, weighing and measuring it in the light of his trained intellect. In all matters of human knowledge he considered facts and principles above mere assertions, how respectable soever might be the authority from whom they proceeded. He was intolerant of all dogmatism, be it the dogmatism of the theologian who would have men more orthodox than the Church, or be it the dogmatism of the scientist who would obtrude his crude fancies as proven propositions.

My acquaintance with Mgr. Corcoran began at the time that he assumed the editorship of *The American Catholic Quarterly Review*. The acquaintance soon ripened into friendship, and to the hour of his death that friendship grew more cordial and more steadfast. He honored me with an amount of confidence, and treated with a degree of deference the judgments and opinions that I had formed in my own line of study and thought, which I can account for only by his great humility, but which have been to me, and which shall continue to be an incentive so to labor as to render myself less unworthy of the abiding trust of such an eminent scholar. Indeed, when one has learned to distinguish the would-be friend

from the real friend, one may well rank the friendship of James A. Corcoran among the blessings for which one should daily thank God. He has passed away, but like a sweet perfume his memory remains to cheer and to refresh.

Looking into the clear crystalline depths of his beautiful soul, methinks I behold it in all its greatness. Methinks I can still see the honest indignation with which that soul would be stirred by the very shadow of sham or pretence. He had an abiding hatred for dishonesty, be its form what it may. He could but ill disguise his loathing of him with the two faces, or of him of the fawning ways, or of the cowardly character devoid of the courage of his convictions. I read therein the perfect manhood scorning all pettiness and subterfuge and strong and fearless in right-doing. I read the charming simplicity of the character without wrinkle and without guile,—just, upright, straightforward, charitable. I read the profound humility that led him all through life to shun honors, seek retirement, and find happiness in doing God's will in the most lowly occupations. I read that wisdom from above which made clear to him that in the service of God even the least position is ennobling. I read the simple faith that accepted every jot and tittle of the teachings of the Church with all the docility of the artless child. And the love the child bears the mother only partially measures the love he bore the Church and all things pertaining to the Church—the language of her ritual, her ceremonies, her devotions, her practices, her

doctrines. He loved them all with a tenderness and a reverence that were touching. This love led him to resent any insult offered to her teachings and her practices with all the energy of his great soul. It wounded his sensitive nature far more than could any personal grievance. In controversy he was a hard hitter, but he never forgot the courtesy due to an opponent; he could not be provoked by personalities the most bitter and malicious into an uncharitable expression. I have named but a tithe of the many virtues that I read in that beautiful soul.

Years were pressing upon him, and ill-health was compassing him round, but the joyousness of his spirits rose above his sufferings and infirmities, and his heart grew young with advancing age. He was the most genial of companions even as he was the staunchest of friends; he had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and I now see the quiet humor dimple his amiable face as he told a good story, or listened to a clever joke, even when made at his own expense. There was no moroseness in his nature; there was no gall in his disposition. Broad in his views, large-hearted in his charity, modest as he was learned, he was among the brightest ornaments of the American priesthood, always a pillar and mainstay of the American hierarchy.

As editor of a quarterly which directed and influenced the readings of many, Monsignor Corcoran is entitled to a distinguished place in any discourse treating of books.

He was a firm believer in the apostolate of the press. He loved the good book and recommended it to those under his personal guidance and influence. But the modern books that met with his commendation were few and far between. He preferred to go back to the old masters in literature, the tried ones who had been weighed and had not been found wanting. These were the favorites with whom he loved to commune. His acquaintance with Italian literature was especially intimate. Even in Rome he was regarded as one of the greatest Dante scholars living. He saw in the avocation of the bookseller great opportunities for doing good, and he once remarked to him who pens these lines, that if he were not a priest he would follow that calling, and would devote all his energy to the propagation of good reading. Though an elegant and forcible writer, he has left little from his pen that will live in literature; his name will pass down the corridors of time, a wholesome tradition of great learning and solid piety. When shall we look upon his like again?—

X.

IN conclusion, let me add that a great responsibility rests on us in regard to our reading, and we cannot shirk that responsibility. Ours is the duty to develop and make perfect our whole nature; therefore must we look to our intellectual growth and progress. Books are the great means by which we are expected to achieve

this. They are the reflectors by which the light of God's truth is flashed into the mind. That light runs through all books; but self, and passion, and prejudice are so many absorbents, leaving but a few rays to glimmer through the darkness. Let us select those giving out the truth most clearly and convincingly; they will supply us with the needed light and warmth—so far as human agencies can supply us—to walk in the path of right and duty.

Let your readings be such as shall imbue you with exalted ideals of manhood and of womanhood. Eschew those authors who would destroy the roseate hues of the morning of life, and leave the soul to be consumed in the contemplation of a parched and arid waste of human nature, from which all good has been extracted and upon which the dews of heaven no longer fall to freshen the flowers of virtue; for according to these men, there is neither virtue, nor a heaven, nor a God. It brings no good, and may work great injury to young people, to wade through the miry pages of a Zola, to learn from an Ibsen the disenchantments of life's most sacred relations, or to sicken over the stench proceeding from the ulcerous sores a Tolstoi has been probing and laying open to the public gaze. These men call themselves social physicians. But the respectable physician confines his lectures and experiments to the dissecting room, where they are understood and appreciated. It is only your quack who goes into the public shambles, and

under pretence of enlightening men, spreads the germs of disease among those who are attracted around the putrid corpse he would openly dissect. What else are those men?—They tell us with Ibsen that “all the spiritual well-springs of our life are poisoned, and our whole civic society rests upon a soil infected with the pestilence of lies.” Not so, my friends. Faith, and Hope, and, greater than all, the Love of God and of our neighbor, are life-giving fountains of spiritual life still flowing in abundance. Christian manhood and Christian womanhood the world over draw healing waters from these Divine sources. The literature that brings therefrom strength and firm resolve to the soul to rise higher and higher into the more perfect life, is the wholesome literature which our young people should cultivate.