KATHLEEN O'MEARA.

I.

"Kathleen O'Meara has gone to her reward." In these words did a Parisian friend announce to us the death of this gifted writer. Great indeed must that reward be when measured by the blameless life and ardent devotion to religion and truth that endeared her to all who knew her. Though living in the world, Kathleen O'Meara was not of the world. The Comte de Richemont, an intimate friend of the family, who knew her well and admired her every quality of head and heart, writes us, and it is with his permission that we quote the words: "She was above all, unworldly.... She loved the visible light, but another light was present and mingled its rays therewith.... She gathered flowers as she passed along, and enjoyed them; but she was careful not to yield to the temptation of seating herself amongst them, as though they were the shade beneath which to find repose." She looked above and beyond things of earth for the guiding star of her actions. It was only in conversation with her that one soon learned how intensely religious was her nature. Still, her piety was without ostentation. Her ideals of living and doing were of the highest character, and could have been drawn only from

the inspirations that came of long and fervent prayer, frequent meditation upon the saints and heroes of the Church, and, above all, of intimate communion with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

On the occasion of her visit to Rome in 1887, an American prelate asked her what her pen was then engaged upon, and she playfully replied: "Writing novels for the good of my soul." So it was with everything she did; she always sought her own spiritual advancement. The great desire of her life seemed to be that in all things she should do God's behest. She envied religious persons the obedience that always made known to them the divine will. In striving to obey that will, she dreaded to put from her any work that came to her hand unsought. Hence the variety of subjects upon which her pen was employed. Whether that fertile pen evoked shadowy beings of fiction, or limned the features of a modern saint, or recorded the varying shades of Parisian society, her motives were always the best; she ever kept uppermost the glory of God and the honor of the Church.

One who knew her intimately writes: "She had a keen sense to resent any insult to God; it touched her like a personal wrong." The sympathy that went up to God, was also extended to her neighbor. The same loving pen writes: "She opened her heart wide to every form of pain and sorrow." No surprise is it that Cardinal Manning should write to her bereaved sister:

"I had hoped for many years of that bright and holy life, which has taught so many the true way of charity to God and His poor." We all had hoped as much. Better is it as it is. Kathleen O'Meara has gone to her reward!

II.

We will not here enter into a detailed account of her writings. They are known wherever the English language is read. She began writing about 1867 over the pen-name of Grace Ramsay. Her literary labors were not at first crowned with the success that followed her later efforts. The remembrance of her early struggles and failures made her ever ready to extend to beginners on the same course the sympathy and the helping-hand that are then so frequently needed and so rarely given. Throughout her novels—"Mabel Stanhope," "Iza's Story," "Diane Coryval," "The Old House in Picardy," "Narka,"—there dwells a wholesome spirit. There is always a truth to be illustrated or a lesson to be given, but it is done in the same unobtrusive manner that characterized her every act.

We take up "Narka," for instance. It is a story of Russian life. Of its origin she thus writes to a friend: "I once knew intimately in Paris two Polish refugees, and their wrongs kindled a flame in my heart which burned itself out in 'Narka.'" The Nihilist plottings on which the story turns remind us of William Black's "Sunrise." But whilst William Black, with the magic

wand of his descriptive power, throws a glamour over the doings of the Nihilists, and weaves a halo of goodness around the sweet, strong nature of his heroine, Kathleen O'Meara, in a terser and by far a more truthful manner makes the presence of Narka light up and reveal the unscrupulous character of other actors in that dread association. And after William Black has pictured scenes and incidents in the vividness of his own peculiar coloring, he leaves the problem of human suffering where it was—as great, as helpless, and as hopeless a mystery as ever. Not so Kathleen O'Meara. She grapples with the problem and attempts a solution. It is the solution of Christian charity. Narka's father and brother have been the victims of the petty tyrannies perpetrated throughout the provinces of Russia in the name of the Czar. She is in favor of revolution.

"'If you ever make a revolution in Russia,' said Marguerite, 'let it be a revolution of love, not of hate.'

"Narka laughed. 'And burst our chains by kissing them!'

"'There is nothing that love might not do if people would only believe in it,' said Marguerite; 'if only they would let it rule the world instead of hatred. If they would let it have its way, like the blessed sunshine, it would turn this world into a paradise.'" *

It is the soul of Kathleen O'Meara that speaks in these

* "Narka," Vol I., p. 50. The story first appeared in a serial in Harper's Magazine.

words of Marguerite. She afterwards shapes the life of this same Marguerite upon the conviction uttered, and pictures her wielding untold influence in the lowest quarters of Paris as a Sister of Charity, even as did her prototype, Sister Rosalie. And when Sister Marguerite takes the larger views of life and poverty and suffering, it is the soul of the author that is going out to God's poor.

"'I wish I could think the poor were grateful to you!' said Narka.

"'Who says they are not grateful?' demanded Marguerite, quickly.

"'It seems to me everybody says it; it is the constant complaint of all the good people who work for the poor that they get no return.'

"'What nonsense! I wonder what sort of return they expect? If they gave love, the poor would give them love back; but they only give alms, and I don't suppose they expect the poor to give them back alms.'" *

Again it is the soul of Kathleen O'Meara that pleads through Sister Marguerite for the poor dinnerless laborer that is driven to revolt by the pangs of hunger. "It is hunger that sends the *ouvrier* down into the street. He is not wicked; he is a good fellow if you give him bread enough; but he goes mad on an empty stomach, and that hunger-madness is the worst of all." †

* Ibid., Vol. II., p. 42.

† Ibid., Vol. II., p. 245. Cf. "Life of Frederic Ozanam," pp. 321-336.

So we might run through all her novels, and disentangle the large-hearted sympathy with poverty and suffering that is woven into them out of the writer's soul; but we must not tarry. She has achieved even greater success in other fields.

Her "Madame Mohl" [1] is a remarkable book, crisp and bright as the subject. There is not a dull page in the volume. It introduces us into that unique institution that has never been able to flourish elsewhere, the Parisian *salon*, and brings us in contact with men and women who are still in the flesh, and leaders of the social, literary, or political world. It paints for us in clearest colors a worldly woman, odd to the straining point of oddity, living for the world, her pulse throbbing to no higher motive than that of pleasing the world, yet deserted in her old age by the world; withal a good-hearted and true woman, exemplary as daughter, as wife, and as hostess. It unravels with skill the oddities, the likes and dislikes, the whole puzzle of this "short-skirted, witch-like woman," with her round blue eyes "wide open in a perpetual sparkle of curiosity," her whole bearing expressing "energy, vivacity, and happiness. And," adds the author, "what a charm there is in the mere sight of a happy human face amidst the suffering, discontented ones that meet us on all sides!" [2]

Here again it is the soul of Kathleen O'Meara that

[1] First published in the Atlantic Monthly.

[2] Madame Mohl: "Her Salon and her Friends," p. 182.

speaks. Her large-hearted charity loves to bask in the sunny side of all things.

A more delicate task still was her "Life of Thomas Grant," first Bishop of Southwark. It tells succinctly and well the story of the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England. In preparing it she had the advice of Cardinal Manning and the guidance of the venerable Archbishop Ullathorne. Those conversant with the stormy period through which Dr. Grant lived, the delicate nature of issues then raised, the unique character of that saintly but much ill-understood man, can best appreciate the prudence and tact with which Kathleen O'Meara handled the whole subject, and produced a biography that has won the admiration of competent judges.

But the work in which her genius for biography shows to best advantage is "Frederic Ozanam: His Life and Works." The second London edition, now before us, has been found worthy of a long and valuable introduction from the pen of Cardinal Manning, to what His Eminence calls "this deeply interesting narrative." With great firmness of grasp, the author handles the salient events of the day, and groups around Ozanam all the leading characters of that most interesting period of French history—interesting above all to the Catholic student,—and follows her hero through the whirl and turmoil of Paris, and notes amid the seething of thought that was then going on in all active brains the self-possessed student through "eighteen years of great in-

tellectual and spiritual intensity,"[1] strong, energetic, earnest, carving his way to eminence, and inspiring youthful souls with his own chivalric impulses. Faithfully she traces his footsteps as, weak in body, he wanders through many lands in search of the health that was ebbing fast away from him; but, well or ill, always returning weighted down with erudition gathered from musty tomes hidden away in the recesses of dust-laden libraries,—now picking up legends in Catholic Brittany; now culling flowers of sweetest poesy and song in the garden of St. Francis of Assisi; now imbibing inspiration in the land of the Cid; now following the slow and solemn tread of the great Dante, delving into that inexhaustible mine of high thought, the *Divina Commedia*, —glad always and above all things when he could establish a branch of his dear Confraternity of St. Vincent de Paul. It is all told with an indescribable charm.

It is noteworthy how well Miss O'Meara had mastered Ozanam's most philosophical writings and condensed them in a few pages. M. le Comte de Richemont throws a side-light upon the working of her mind in this regard. He writes: "Her mind was admirably endowed. We frequently discussed questions the most philosophical and abstract in connection with the work she would have on hand; she took them in at a glance and assimilated them with a rare facility." He further on notices the humility with which she would receive

[1] Cardinal Manning, Preface, p. 96.

information or the correction of any misconceptions.

Had Kathleen O'Meara left no other work from her pen than this biography she would well deserve the gratitude of Catholics. If we were asked what book we would recommend to be placed in the hands of young men in order to quicken their sympathies in behalf of misery and suffering, and aid the good that is in them to bloom out and bear fruit, we should name, without fear of demur or contradiction, Kathleen O'Meara's "Frederic Ozanam." It is a story of great talent utilized and bearing compound interest; an illustration of great opportunities created and seized upon and used to advantage; a revelation of sweet and charming domestic virtues. In Ozanam we behold the man of the world whose pulse beats in sympathy with all the literary, political, and social movements of the day; the ripe scholar, the unwearied student, and the beautiful, saintly soul. The book is strong enough to mark an epoch in the life of any thoughtful Catholic young man.[1]

We leave untouched many other works from the pen of Kathleen O'Meara, such as her charming sketches of Père Lacordaire, Sister Rosalie, and Madame Swetchine.[2] Last summer, while resting in Switzerland, she finished another of this series—a sketch of the Curé of Ars—which appeared in the "*Ave Maria.*" Other

[1] There is an American edition of this work published by the Catholic Publication Society Co.

[2] The first two of these, also sketches of Père Beson and Mgr. de Ségur, were written for the "Ave Maria."

literary plans and projects she had. Last year, while translating Armand Ravelet's beautiful "Life of Blessed de la Salle," she conceived so much love and admiration for a soul that achieved such great things amid sufferings and persecutions which ceased only with his last breath, that she proposed writing a popular life of the saint, and upon this she was working when she dropped her pen in death. The present writer looked forward to seeing a master-piece from her pen, and into this slight tribute to her worth he would weave the regret that her noble intention remained unachieved before she had gone to her reward.

III.

Born in 1839, Kathleen O'Meara was in her forty-ninth year when she died of pneumonia, November 10, 1888. Her passing away has left a void in the social world as well as in the world of letters. She was well known and highly esteemed by some of the most distinguished men and women in France and England. We have before us beautiful letters from a few of those friends; they are all couched in the same terms. They might all be summed up in the words of one who knew her well and intimately: "To the many who admired her she will ever be a gracious memory; but to those who knew her and loved her, a life-long regret."[1]

To the venerable Archbishop Ullathorne she looked

[1] L. M. W.—Mrs. Wheelwright, in the Boston Post, Nov. 27.

up with all the affection and esteem of a daughter for a father. To him she appealed in every sorrow and anxiety that might be hers. The writer remembers the glow of enthusiasm with which she spoke of this learned prelate when showing his picture, which held a place of honor in her room, as he himself did in her heart. In return the venerable Archbishop entertained for her the tenderest regard. Her letters were to him a source of delight. "There were no letters I received with more delight than your sister's. She was to me like one of my own dear spiritual children. All around me in this house there is but one feeling of regret for her." So writes this prelate to the bereaved sister of Kathleen O'Meara.

December 14, 1887, came to her the great sorrow of her life. Her mother died. How intensely devoted she was to that mother it were difficult to describe. "All her labors," writes an intimate friend already quoted, "all her successes, she referred after God, to her mother. How often, in the bosom of the family, when she returned from a walk, would she kneel by her mother and kiss her hand, as she used to do when a child." The depth of her affection may be measured by the following glimpse from her journal, with which, through the kindness of her sister, we have been favored:

"Many and many a time I reminded myself that the day would come when she would not be there to bless me, and I tried to picture my living on without her, but

it seemed impossible. She was so completely the life of my life that it seemed as if mine must come to an end with hers—as if my heart could never keep on beating when hers had stopped. She lay within my life as the heart lies within the body, and in going away she seems to have lacerated me as when the flesh or a limb is torn or cut out from the body. And yet I know that it is well with her, and I bid my heart rejoice for her and with her all the day long. We can praise God on broken hearts. The agony of our poor broken hearts makes no discord in His."

The silent, pent-up grief kept gnawing at her heart, and undermined her constitution. The writer remembers a conversation in which, speaking of the ease with which some persons forget the death of relatives, she expressed herself with great feeling upon her own cherished sorrow for her departed mother. "For my part," she said, "as time goes on I only feel more keenly the death of my dear mother, and I cannot imagine the time when I could look back upon it with cold indifference." Tears stood in her eyes, and her voice failed when she spoke these words. This is the love that is stronger than death. We are not surprised that her bereaved sister should write: "The last year of her life was a struggle to live after the loss of our mother; and at last her frame, weakened by grief, sank in a few days from pneumonia."

Her death was worthy of her life. The same sorrow-

ing pen has thus described it: "Her death was most beautiful. No agony, no sign to say all was over. She received Holy Communion and Extreme Unction. She was conscious almost to the last. She said to me two days before her death: 'God's will be done. He knows what is best, and if I am to be taken from you--' when she stopped, and I said as firmly as I could: 'Yes, darling, this will be best; you accept it, and I accept it."' It was in this resigned spirit that she passed out of the smoke and fumes of earthly fame into the white light of God's holiness. One can linger over such a death-bed, and feel one's faith grow all the stronger for it. Kathleen O'Meara has passed away, but the world is all the better for her having lived and labored. Kathleen O'Meara has gone to her reward!

MR. AUGUSTINE BIRRELL AND CRITICISM.

I.

Mr. Augustine Birrell is always lively, chatty, interesting, when he writes about books and authors. His two volumes of *Obiter Dicta* have had quite a run, and have delighted their readers. His latest work, *Res Judicatæ*, bids fair to be no less popular. His is a healthy mind with excellent digestive power, and a keen relish for wholesome literature. It is a scholarly and a trained mind. It is a broad mind. Mr. Birrell revels in the untrammelled, outspoken, bigoted and hard-hitting pages of eccentric George Borrow, and at the same time appreciates to the full the classic flow of Newman's graceful prose, the color and glow of it, the humor of it, the pathos of it, and the fascination that hovers over all the writings of the great Cardinal. Borrow, Mr. Birrell understands —he is a born Borrovian; he tells us 'men are born Borrovians, not made'—his falsehoods, inconsistencies, his brag, his naturalness; but while his sympathy with Newman is deep and reverent, he has missed the meaning of Newman's writings. They form part of Newman's life and are one and inseparable with it. It is asking much of the ordinary critic that he should grasp