

ART. V.—THE TWO SAINT PHILOMENAS.

I.

IN the year 1802 a stone was found in the catacombs of Rome, broken at both sides. On the centre part, that had been left, there remained the words *lumena pax tecum fi*. What was to be made of this inscription? A learned Jesuit, named Mariano Partenio, suggested that an explanation might be found by reading from right to left, "according to the ancient usage of the Chaldeans, Phœnicians, Arabs, and Hebrews, some traces of which," he declares, "are found even among the Greeks." But the inscription is neither Chaldaic, Phœnician, Arabic, Hebrew, nor even Greek, but Latin; and, further, when read backwards, the letters form *if mucet xap anemul*, which has no signification. Instead, therefore, the learned Jesuit suggested that the two last letters *fi* should be taken from the end and prefixed at the beginning. Then the inscription ran *Fi lumena pax tecum*.

This was the first step in the creation of Saint Philomena. The second was "miraculous phenomena which exhibited themselves in the catacombs" in the neighbourhood of the stone. The third step was formed by three visions which appeared to three different persons. These visions declared that the learned Jesuit was quite right in what he had suggested; that her name was originally Lumena, and that she took the name of Filumena at her baptism, *Lumena* meaning, in some unknown language, light, and *Filumena* meaning the Daughter of Light. No one acquainted with the Latin language can be unaware that *Filumena* could not by any law of language be identified with *Filia Luminis*, nor *Lumena* substituted for *Lumen*. The story of the saint was then made known by means of the visions, and the story was this: In the reign of Diocletian, Filumena was born in Athens, the only daughter of the King of Athens (we are not told who this King was in the reign of Diocletian), and heiress of the throne. Unfortunately her father took her to Rome, where she was seen by Diocletian, who immediately demanded her in marriage. Filumena refused because she had vowed herself to her Divine Spouse, whereupon Diocletian threatened to make war upon her father; but as she would not yield, she was carried, by Diocletian's order, to a loathsome dungeon, loaded with chains and fetters, refused any food, while "toads, lizards, and vipers were thrown upon her." These measures not being sufficient, Diocletian commanded her to be scourged and made the target for darts and arrows,

and finally he had her thrown into the Tiber with a weight around her neck. But she rose from the water, and came back safe to the land, on which her head was cut off by Diocletian's order. Two angels were seen to carry her soul to heaven in a cloud.

The worship of St. Filumena, or Philomena (a name evidently derived from *φιλουμένη*), spread, and it received the Papal approbation. Leo XII. pronounced her "a great saint." Gregory XVI. solemnly blessed her image at Rome, and she became "surnamed the Thaumaturge, or Wonderworker, of the Nineteenth Century."

Lives of St. Philomena were published with Episcopal approbation at Geneva, and in Italy and in Spain. Fifty years ago she appeared to be the most popular saint in Spain after St. Mary. It is possible that she will soon be superseded by her namesake the Venerable Philomena de Santa Colomba, whose canonization is at present proceeding at Rome.

II.

The surname of the second Philomena was Ferrer, and she was named Philomena by a mother who had a great devotion to the saint of whom we have already spoken. She was born in 1841, entered a convent in 1860, and died in 1868. Her life has been written in French by one of the Capuchin Fathers, and an account of her is given in English in the Rev. Wentworth Webster's deeply interesting work, "Gleanings from Church History" (S.P.C.K., 1903). From Mr. Webster's instructive pages we draw the following picture of a saint whose sanctity is modelled after the latest fashions of the nineteenth century. The secret of her eminent sanctity, says the *Civiltà Cattolica*, was "the double devotion, more especially peculiar to our nineteenth century, to Mary Immaculate, and to the Divine Heart of the Redeemer." To these Philomena added the Archangel Michael, and thus a second trinity was formed, consisting of the Heart of Jesus, of Mary, and of St. Michael, which appeared to Philomena under the form of a triangle. The Lord revealed to her that this new trinity must be "blest and glorified in earth, as in the Unity of the Three Divine Persons in Heaven." Writing to her confessor, and commanding him to propagate this new devotion, she instructed him that between Jesus, Mary, and the Archangel Michael there was but one will and one desire.

"Oh, a thousand times happy," she cries out, "are those devoted to them—devoted to the most holy heart of Jesus; or more, to that of His Immaculate Mother; or, still more, to the seraphic Archangel St. Michael; for, as I have said, the glory

that each one of them receives would be equally shared by the two others."

We are told that Philomena's first utterance was, "Mary, my mother," to whom she had been dedicated before her birth. When she was thirteen years old she received her First Communion, which was followed first by a fainting fit and then by "a clear vision" (to a child of thirteen) "of the Immaculate Conception of the Very Holy Virgin Mary," on which "she consecrated to her all the affections of her heart, choosing Mary for her sweetest mother and offering herself to her for ever as her humble child." From this time she began a life of asceticism which brought her to an early grave. She slept in winter on the bare floor, in spite of her mother's orders; she wore a hair-cloth shirt; she gave up first all meat, then all fish, then all pottage, and finally confined herself to bread and water, which she took once a day towards evening. She and one of her friends agreed to spend the whole week between them fasting, one of them fasting three days, and the other four days, each week. After she had entered a nunnery she described her day, which began at 2 a.m., as follows:

"Before beginning it I shall give myself a severe scourging with an iron chain; then I shall put a crown of thorns upon my head, a cord round my neck, and a heavy weight upon my shoulders; then, after the example of my Divine Saviour, I shall follow His steps on the road to Calvary, visiting the way of the cross. At three o'clock I shall begin my prayers, and continue till six, imitating Jesus in His three hours' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, persevering in it in spite of all pains and sadness. After that I join the Sisters in reciting the Divine Office, preparing my soul to receive the living Bread from heaven. After the sacrifice of the Mass and thanksgivings for it, I shall occupy myself with the ordinary occupations of the community. . . . My daily penance shall be constantly wearing a hair-cloth shirt, daily disciplines (*i.e.*, whippings), fasting on bread and water three times a week, and adding to this a Lent from St. Matthew's Day to All Saints' Day, and from the first of May to Ascension Day. During these Lents I shall eat once only in forty-eight hours, and what is served in the refectory, taking only the worst food. For other meals I shall be contented with bread and water. I shall abstain from sweets, fruits, and from all such things" (p. 190).

The results of such a life as is here indicated were such as might have been expected both in body and soul. She pathetically complains that "The devil pictures vividly to my imagination the most exquisite meats, the most delicate savours, and that everywhere—in the choir, in my cell, in the

places furthest removed from the kitchen—on the days when I eat I feel all the same an insatiable hunger, and often after my meal I have a greater appetite than on days when I do not touch a morsel.” And, again, sometimes she had “a disgust and want of appetite so great that I suffered atrociously at meal-times; sometimes it was an insatiable appetite, but all that I ate did not do me the least good, and I was almost falling from weakness. . . . I had no strength at all, and suffered unspeakable pains, which I strove to hide as much as possible as far as the body was concerned.” At other times she had “the terrible temptations of despair, wrestling against the diabolical insinuation that Mary herself—Mary, the refuge of sinners—had also abandoned her for ever on account of her wretchedness.” She could not read at all. “If I have sometimes a little time for study it is impossible for me to apply my mind to it, or to remember what I have read, however much I may wish to do so.”

On the other hand, the supposed merit which Philomena derived from her austerities led her, in the midst of her humiliations, to a spiritual pride, which made her sermonize everyone about her—parents, brothers, sisters, friends, relatives, fellow-nuns, and even her superior and her confessor. Nor was this all, for she instructed St. Michael what he was to do, and not only that, but “she argued with the Divine Master, arriving at such boldness as to make a compact with the Lord and debate conditions with Him.” Still further, addressing God, she says that it seems to her that “the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity in some way strive in rivalry to beautify my soul with gifts and celestial graces.” And again, she exclaims, “O my God, you were very right to cry out that you did not know what more to do!”

Of course, too, she had visions. On one occasion, while “the devil was hovering about me,” she says, “I felt myself touched very gently on my right shoulder, and turning round, I saw a most beautiful angel, who invited me to follow him into the smaller choir. On entering the place I saw Jesus and Mary; they spoke to me tenderly, and invited me to rest in their sweet company after the fatigue that I had experienced from the assaults and attacks of the devil. I remained still with astonishment, not knowing what I ought to do, when it seemed to me that the Mother and the Son made me taste some exquisite food and drink a celestial and wholly divine liquid. The taste of this food made me take a disgust to all earthly nourishment, at the same time that it left in my soul an ineffaceable sweetness.”

As the canonization of Philomena is at present proceeding at Rome, it is necessary that she should have worked miracles,

not only during her lifetime, but also after death. One of those on which her advocates rely is as follows: "One of the Sisters sent to a nun belonging to another convent, who was said to be dying of consumption, a chip of the rush shirt which Philomena wore, with nine little notes, each containing an invocation of her. One of these notes was to be burnt each day, and the ashes swallowed in water. On taking the ashes of the first note burnt, the girl was completely cured. But another nun, ill of cancer, who did the same thing, died soon after. In the latter case it is said that God granted the prayer of the Sister—she wished to die"!

What are we to think of the two Philomenas, and of the Church which holds them up as objects of adoration or devout admiration? Of the first we may say that it is demonstrable that she never existed at all, any more than St. Viar existed, who, like her, was formed out of a broken stone, and when the other parts of the stone were discovered, was resolved into Præfectus Viarum, the road surveyor. Yet St. Philomena was counted "the Thaumaturge of the nineteenth century," no infallible Church stepping in to enlighten her numerous votaries, but encouraging them with her blessing.

With regard to the second Philomena, can her faith be called the Christian faith at all? She professedly introduces a new religion, a new trinity, consisting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Mary the Immaculate, and the Archangel St. Michael. The poor child did not know that it is not only inconsistent with, but contradictory to, the once delivered Christian faith to form any such imagination, or strive for its propagation; she did not know, for none had taught her, that worship must be confined to the one Triune God. She did not know that the Sacred Heart, one of the most popular devotions of the modern Roman Church, had been virtually condemned at the Œcumenical Council of Ephesus as heretical, at the time that it rejected Nestorianism. She did not know that the worship of St. Mary was a Gnostic and Collyridian heresy, unknown to the Church, and condemned by her as "a device of the devil" for the first six centuries: nor that the idea that she was immaculate—that is, not subject to original sin—was not only unknown during those same centuries, but she was believed to have fallen into sins of infirmity, like other good men and women. She did not know that the worship of St. Michael and the other angels was condemned by S. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians. Probably she was not allowed the use of any Bible at all; if she had been, she tells us that her mind, weakened by her fasting, was incapable of understanding or retaining anything that she read; and all

this time she was under the direction of a confessor, and went on her way to introduce her new religion unreproved by him.

Then look at the life that the poor girl led. From thirteen years onward she never ate food enough to keep her in moderate health. Every morning at 2 a.m. she beat herself with a scourge, made by herself, of iron chain-links. She "wore round her neck two heavy chains, which crossed on her chest and were wound round her waist. She girded herself with a brass cincture bristling with sharp points. She had a kind of shirt, sharper than a hair-cloth shirt, made of stiff rushes with hard points. Under her head-dress she put on a crown of thorns, which she had taken from a crucifix, and as there were not thorns enough, or sharp enough, she added needles. She slept but three hours each night, often on the bare ground, with a log for her pillow. So that in the year before she died she declared to her confessor that "from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head she had no sound part." All this would be quite reasonable in a Hindu devotee, who believed that her god was gratified by the pains which his worshippers underwent. But is it Christianity? Compare this poor girl and her self-inflicted tortures, resulting in enthusiastic joys on occasion, depression and misery at other times, and spiritual pride at all times, with the simple, natural life of a young girl brought up in a different system of belief. Look at a young English girl, such as we see about us day by day, conscious (though with a consciousness only half realized, perhaps) that she is living in the warmth of God's love and under the protection of her heavenly Father's care. She does not enter on sickening attempts to earn God's favour by giving pain to herself and to those about her. She lives, and she finds an exquisite happiness in living, as God intended that she should do. And there emanates from her, as naturally as an odour from a sweet-smelling flower, an atmosphere of purity, love, and self-forgetfulness, which spreads itself around her, and is the salvation of many more than herself. Kind acts to others come naturally to her ("for am not I also forgiven?"), and that by doing them she is laying up merit for herself or earning a higher place in heaven, or that self has anything to do with them, does not come within the range of her imagination to conceive. Such lives as these are the salt of the earth. Would we exchange them for St. Philomena's?

What did that poor girl do with all her self-torments, hair-shirts, scourgings, iron chains, crowns of thorns and needles, and nights spent on the bare ground with a log of wood for her pillow? In her own person she did not escape tempta-

tions of the flesh or temptations of the spirit, and what did she do for others? The only results that she effected were that the poor Sisters of the Order should henceforth go bare-footed instead of wearing sandals, and that they should get up at twelve o'clock at night for a midnight service. In other words, Philomena lived her unnatural life without doing any good to others—unless it was a good to be “the first to propagate through the world the worship of the new Trinity, the very Sweet Heart of Jesus, His Mother, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and the Archangel St. Michael”; that is, to introduce a new fashion of religion only slightly based upon Christianity. In the case of Philomena I., the Church of Rome shows that she is entirely careless as to the truth of the existence or non-existence of the saints whom she canonizes and makes objects of worship. In the canonization of Philomena II., she shows us what is her ideal of the spiritual and religious life. Not such is the ideal of the Church of England, and may it never be!

F. MEYRICK.



ART. VI.—BISHOP CREIGHTON'S SERMONS.¹

FOR the intrinsic value of its contents this is a volume of sermons which should be studied. And if only the clergy will profit by the opportunity of studying it, its publication may, I believe, be an event of very great usefulness. Such a recommendation does not, of course, bind us to agreement with every statement or argument it contains; nor do we say that the various sermons are equally valuable. But were we asked what kind of preaching we believe would most probably prove to be really helpful at the present time, we should answer, “Preaching similar to that which is here offered to us.”

However painful the recognition of the experience may be, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that in various quarters very severe criticism is at the present time being passed upon what is termed the “average preaching” in the English Church. At the last London Diocesan Conference the Bishop of Stepney said: “Surely it would be a libel on the Church of England to say that the average sermon represented the average capacity of the English clergyman—he was sure it did not.” If a Bishop can speak like this, can we be sur-

¹ “University and other Sermons,” by Mandell Creighton, sometime Bishop of London. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903.