

Lacordaire.

OF Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire his biographer has said, and, we cannot but think, truly, that "God made him a priest in order that he might lead back by the road which he himself first followed, a multitude of souls wandering and wounded like his own." ¹ He had wandered, but his was not the wandering of self-will or of an unruly spirit. He had been wounded, and his wounds were great and deep, but they were the wounds of one who had fought a bitter conflict of the soul—the wounds of a stricken spirit from which, for some inscrutable reason, the light of faith had been withdrawn. He lost, for a time, his faith, but he did not renounce it. "He drank, like so many others of his generation, at the poisoned sources of the preceding age, but he was not intoxicated by them." Even during the time when his faith was dead within him, there was none of that bitter hostility to Christianity so characteristic of those who, at that period, had loosened the ties which bound them to the Church. He was unbelieving, but he loved what he for awhile had lost and could, even then, write: "I love the Gospel, for its morality is incomparable; I respect its ministers, because they exercise a salutary influence on society; but I have not received as my share the gift of faith." ²

Entering the Lyceum at Dijon in 1812, at the age of ten, he found there no one, nor anything, which would keep alive that religious sentiment which, as he tells us, had "passed from the bosom of a strong, courageous, and Christian mother, into his own, like a sweet and virgin milk." It is profoundly pathetic to think of the child in his loneliness, "pouring out religious tears before God, offering Him my childish troubles as a sacrifice, and striving to raise myself by tender sentiments of piety, to the Cross of His Divine Son." The one person who took pity on him was a young master of an elementary class, but the care which M. Delahaye lavished on his education, and the love of literature, and the love of honour which he instilled into the mind of the boy, were not alone sufficient to supply his needs. True, he made his first Com-

¹ "La Vie Intime et Religieuse de Lacordaire," par le Reverend Père Chocarne, O.P. (English ed.), p. 62.

² M. Lorain, *Correspondant*, tom. xvii. p. 823, quoted by Père Chocarne. Most of the letters from which extracts are taken may be found in this collection.

munion—" my last religious joy," he called it, " the last ray which my mother's soul shed on mine " ; but neither the Lyceum, at which he spent his boyhood's years, nor the School of Law, in which he afterwards studied, afforded opportunities of cultivating or developing the spiritual side of his nature, and it is with a real pang of sorrow, wrung from his sweet and upright heart, that he laments the sadness which often clouded his mother's spirit when she reflected that " among her (four) sons there was not one who was a Christian, not one who could accompany her to the holy mysteries of her religion." ¹

Even at this early day Lacordaire's literary and oratorical achievements were of a high order, and the part which he was wont to take in the discussions of the *Société des Etudes* of Dijon earned for him the foremost place among all his associates. Monsieur Lorain, his fellow-student and warmest friend, recalls " those brilliant bursts of eloquence, those arguments so full of skill, of rapidity, of ready and delicate wit, those precious and magnificent outpourings of genius which so well predicted the incomparable orator who was one day to be gained to the cause of God." ² But, for all that, Lacordaire himself tells us that while the sublime aspects of the old pagan world laid the foundations of a love of virtue and of the beautiful, the progress made by humanity under the influence of the Cross passed unnoticed—" we did not climb high enough to reach the summit of the edifice, which is Jesus Christ ; the friezes of the Parthenon concealed from us the dome of St. Peter's." ³

It is in Paris that the *Vie Intime* of Lacordaire begins to manifest itself. The capital with all its pleasures—even with its brilliancy of intellectual life, does not dazzle him. He lives in an attic-chamber in the Rue Mont-Thabor—the narrow street which runs behind, and parallel to, the Rue de Rivoli where the latter faces the Tuileries. He works, for the most part, in obscurity. At the age of twenty, or thereabouts, the call of the world has little to attract him. He forms no attachments in society. Even the theatre arouses in him no enthusiasm such as we should expect in one of his age, with his literary and artistic tastes. He confesses, it is true, to " a vague, tormenting desire for renown," which an

¹ "Memoires."

² Lorain, *op. cit.* p. 823.

³ "Memoires," p. 386.

occasional success at the bar helps to assuage ; but his is not a character to be deceived by such ephemeral achievements, and so we are not surprised to find him introspective—perhaps a trifle egotistical—and given to much self-analysis ; and, though we may smile when we read such words as these : “ the minds of other men are not made to understand mine ; I sow my seed on a slab of polished marble,”¹ we have to admit that they were, to a very great extent, true, for, as he writes to one of his acquaintances at this time, “ there are in me two contrary principles which are always at war, and which sometimes make me very unhappy—a cold, calm reason, opposed to a burning imagination, and the first disenchanting me of all the illusions which the second presents. . . . I have a most religious heart, and a very incredulous mind ; but as it is in the nature of things that the mind must at last allow itself to be subjugated by the affections, it is most likely that I shall one day become a Christian.” One wishes one might cite the whole letter, and others like it. Evidently he really felt, and that bitterly, that others did not understand him, and was eager to buy friendship at the cost of self-revelation : “ It is a strange thing, people believe me cold. . . . I cannot weep before spectators, I am ashamed of tears.” Was this morbid affectation ? we are tempted to ask. One little incident related of him may help us to decide. It is mentioned in a letter from one friend of his to another : “ Does Henri Lacordaire practise his religion ? you ask. Not yet ; but the other day I was reproaching myself for my own neglect of God, and as I passed Saint Germain des Prés, I entered, and who should I see kneeling behind a pillar, with his head half hidden in his hands, wrapt in meditation, and still as a statue, but Henri, my *bijou* of a Henri ! What could he be doing there ? . . . Either I am much deceived or he will not content himself with this, and when he betrays the secret which is fermenting in his brain, it will not be to me only, but to all the world.”² Events soon proved how correct was the surmise, for on May 11, 1824, he wrote : “ It needs few words to say what I have to say, and yet my heart would fain say many. I am giving up the bar ; we shall meet each other there no more.

¹ Lorain, p. 826.

² From the Recollections drawn up by the Abbé Reignier, a former student of the Lyceum at Dijon and a confrère of Lacordaire in the Séminaire de S. Sulpice. See an editorial note in the translation of Père Chocarne's book, p. 55.

Our dreams for the last five years will not be accomplished. Tomorrow morning I am about to enter the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice."

Of Lacordaire's life at St. Sulpice there is little to be told. The rigid discipline of such institutions is well known; and, while we may see in it certain defects, there is one point in which the advantages of the seminary system are fairly obvious, namely, in the cultivation of regular and methodical habits of life. To pass from devotional exercises to study, from study to recreation, and again from recreation to study at the sound of the bell is to develop the faculty of concentration in a marked degree, and the value of such a power of overcoming distractions can be well understood by those who have experience of the many calls of parochial life. One thing, however, in Lacordaire's seminary experience is instructive, and that is the criticism to which his preaching was subjected on the part of the superiors. It is customary for students to preach from time to time either in chapel or refectory, and it is significant that while Lacordaire's sermons appealed strongly to his fellow-students, the superiors felt themselves obliged to warn them against a style of oratory which might, perhaps, be admired, but not safely imitated. The uproarious levity with which he instituted a campaign against the old square cap of St. Sulpice, and in favour of the biretta, which was then a novelty, ill-accorded with the sedate and conservative views of "The Faculty," so that, on the whole, we are not surprised to learn that, for a time, his "vocation" was a subject of misgiving, and that it was beyond the usual time when he received Holy Orders. He himself confesses that, without intending it, he often "went contrary to the ordinary habits of Saint-Sulpice," and that "the sallies of an intellect too much given to dispute, added to a temper not quite under command" gave sufficient cause for the superiors to shake their heads over him, though they never had occasion to question his humility and obedience. His character was a singular one, but the patience and cheerfulness with which he endured the many tests to which he was subjected finally overcame the hesitation of those in authority and he was admitted to priest's orders on September 22, 1827.

His rare faculty of self-analysis stood him in good stead, for, when shortly after his ordination, he was offered the post of Auditor of the Rota,¹ a position which carries with it the certainty of eleva-

¹ The Rota is an ecclesiastical tribunal attached to the Papal Court.

tion to the Episcopate—if not even to the Cardinate, he refused it. “ I have no ambition,” he afterwards wrote to Montalembert, “ and can have none, for all the higher dignities of the clergy are either pastoral or administrative, and both kinds are totally incompatible with my tastes. I shall never hold any office, nor do I desire it. Yet one must do something with oneself, for this is an obligation of conscience.” So he was content to remain as chaplain to the Convent de la Visitation—the catechist of little schoolgirls—though with but indifferent success. His retired life at the Visitation, however, afforded him opportunities of pursuing his theological studies and of fitting himself, in this way, for the great work which he was destined to fulfil as one of the foremost of the many apologists of the Christian Faith his country has given to the world.

It was inevitable that during this time of comparative inaction, the idea of an apostolic life in foreign lands should have laid hold on a nature that was—in spite of all he said and, no doubt, really believed—not made for seclusion; and so we find him looking across the Atlantic with longing eyes to a sphere which seemed to hold out to him the promise of an outlet for missionary zeal and activity. Whilst at Saint-Sulpice, he had said that “ the more good we desire to do in religion, the larger must be the pledges of our conviction we give to the world by the holiness and self-denial of our lives,” and to him, ardent patriot as he was, to bid farewell to France seemed the greatest proof he could give of devotion to the cause of his Church. There was another reason, too, which contributed to such a resolve. He tells us how he had come forth from the temple of God vested with a mighty office—the ministry of preaching; and how he had been met on the threshold with laws that made him a slave and forbade him to teach the youth of France under a most Christian King. So, weary with the spectacle which he beheld in France, he turned his gaze towards the republic of Washington and thither resolved to go to ask a hospitality she has never refused to a traveller or a priest.¹ This project, however, was destined never to be realized, for almost on the eve of his departure “ the same enthusiastic love of liberty which was carrying

It consists of twelve prelates who are called Auditors. Formerly, it was the supreme court of justice in the Church and the universal court of appeal. The marble floor of the chamber in which the Rota used to sit was designed in the form of a wheel—hence, probably, the name.

¹ Procès de l'Avenir.

this ardent and generous soul to a country blessed with a larger freedom than his own, stopped him and fixed him for ever to take part in the destinies and struggles of his native land.”¹

Of Lacordaire's relations with the Abbé de la Mennais, and of the part he took in the publication of the ill-fated journal *l'Avenir*, much might be written. The subject is too large for treatment in the brief space of a magazine article, for it involves a consideration of the peculiar difficulties with which the Church in France was called upon to deal—difficulties which even to-day continue to exercise a powerful influence upon her fortunes. The unsettled condition of religion, the difficult relations between Church and State had driven de la Mennais, as they have driven many others, at home as well as abroad, to adopt principles which carried him far beyond the bounds of sound philosophy and sober politics. It is no matter for surprise that Lacordaire's enthusiastic nature should have been attracted by the forcefulness of M. de la Mennais, or that he should have thrown himself into a struggle the methods of which, though not always commending themselves to his judgment, at least seemed to be the only means at hand of combating the evils of the time. Two years after the condemnation of *l'Avenir* and his rupture with its founder he wrote: “After my conversion I read the works of M. de la Mennais, that celebrated man, the defender of my resuscitated faith, and I admired them on many accounts; but two things deserve notice: I thought I understood his philosophy, although in point of fact I did not (as I discovered later on); and when in course of time I came to understand it better, it threw me into endless perplexities. I studied it for six consecutive years, from 1824 to 1830, without ever being able to settle my doubts, though I was much urged by my friends, many of whom were disciples of M. de la Mennais. It was only on the eve of the year 1830 that I at last gave in my adhesion, rather out of weariness than entire conviction; for even in the thick of my labours in *l'Avenir*, I was from time to time conscious of growing ideas which were opposed to his philosophy; and now I clearly see the falseness of those opinions which I embraced with so much hesitation.”²

“You want another baptism, and I am going to give you one,”

¹ Père Chocarne, “La Vie Intime,” p. 93.

² “Considerations on the Philosophic System of M. de la Mennais,” chap. ix. p. 123.

said the Archbishop to Lacordaire on his return to Paris in 1832, so Monseigneur de Quélen restored him to his chaplaincy at La Visitation, where he once more took up the work of catechizing little girls. It was a refuge after the storm. While here, his mother once again entered into his life amid the quiet, calm days passed in study and retirement. It was during this period, too, that M. de Montalembert introduced him to Madame Swetchine, and there began a friendship which lasted until her death. This highly cultured and devout woman possessed a knowledge of the world that enabled her to become a guide, philosopher and friend to Lacordaire in dark and cloudy days. After her death, he wrote : " I touched on the shore of her soul like a wreck broken by the waves, and I remember now, after the lapse of five-and-twenty, the light and strength which she placed at the disposal of a young man, till then altogether unknown to her. . . . Her counsels supported me at once against discouragement and elation, and with no one did I ever feel more thoroughly lifted out of the atmosphere of the world." The editors of *l'Avenir* had been smitten. Rome had spoken, and, we cannot but think, rightly. As was inevitable, even those who had submitted were suspected. More than that, behind the natural feeling of distrust, " lurked other passions such as every defeat awakens ; the rancour which had been held in check so long as the pen remained in the grasp of the combatants, but which now felt relieved from all fear of their lash ; the easy triumphs of mediocrity, the jealousies which superior talent too often arouses in commonplace minds . . . a short-sighted orthodoxy which was about to spy out heresy in the orator of Stanislaus and Notre Dame, and to weary the ears of the bishops with its tiresome denunciations ; all these were to a nature like that of the Abbé Lacordaire dangers which I venture to call more formidable than those which he had just escaped in his campaign with M. de la Mennais." Throughout this season of trial when the temptation to retaliate was strong upon him, he acknowledges that it was owing to the advice and far-seeing counsel of Madame Swetchine that he was enabled to ascend to those " calmer heights, where the soul, drawn up to God, breathes an atmosphere of peace and charity, and is no longer irritated by the murmurs of ill-will, to which it soon ceases to listen." ¹

¹ Père Chocarne, *op. cit.* pp. 140 f.

But the ecclesiastical mind is naturally—inevitably—hard and uncompromising, and the very success which attended the Conferences in the Chapel of the Collège Stanislaus, commenced by Lacordaire in the January of 1834, was turned against him, and he was denounced as a dangerous innovator, as a preacher of novel theories of liberty which tended to unsettle the minds of the youth of France. The Conferences were suspended, but they had served to reveal to Paris the greatness of Lacordaire's oratorical gifts. The Archbishop was alarmed, and, on Lacordaire's refusal to submit for his approval the written subject-matter of future Conferences, even deemed it necessary to withdraw his preaching "faculties." Such a course was fully justifiable. The times were critical. Much was at stake, and, even on the most charitable estimate, Lacordaire was not beyond suspicion of philosophical heresy. But he showed admirable patience. "Obedience costs something," he wrote, "but I have learned from experience that, sooner or later, it is always rewarded, and that God alone knows what is good for us. . . . Light comes to him who submits, as to a man who opens his eyes." So the event proved. In the meantime Monsieur Affre,¹ then Canon of the Cathedral, took up his cause, and the advocacy of that great and heroic soul—so grandly sincere in life and in death—resulted in Lacordaire's complete vindication, so that in the Lent of 1835 we find him in possession of the pulpit of Notre Dame, Monseigneur de Quélen himself attending the Conferences. Nine years later, the same M. Affre, then Archbishop, invited him to resume the Conferences which had been interrupted for seven years. But by that time Lacordaire had become a Dominican, and was seeking to re-establish the Order in France, and it was a serious matter indeed to offer the Cathedral to a cowed and hooded friar. This time it was the Government that was in alarm; the King summoned the Archbishop to the Tuileries and for more than an hour begged him to recall the promise he had given—he even resorted to threats: "If any mischief comes of it, Monseigneur, understand that you will not have a single soldier or gendarme to help you";

¹ Mgr. Affre succeeded Mgr. de Quélen in the See of Paris. He was shot dead at the barricades in 1848. "He offered himself as a holocaust," said Lacordaire in his first oration in Notre Dame, before the new Archbishop, Mgr. Sibour; "he fell disarming civil war, and the people, moved by that victim who had become their peacemaker, brought him back to this temple and made here for him a sepulchre greater than his throne, and a resurrection as glorious as his death."

but the Archbishop was firm, "Père Lacordaire is a good priest," he replied, "he belongs to my diocese, and he has preached in it with honour. It is I who have voluntarily recalled him and publicly passed my word to him; I could not withdraw it from him without dishonouring myself in the eyes of my diocese, and of the whole of France."

Of these great Conferences of Notre Dame little can be said here. It is probably no exaggeration to say that they formed one of the most important religious works of the century. Whenever Lacordaire ascended the pulpit, the great nave was packed with men of every form of religious belief—and of no religious belief at all, eagerly listening to a preacher of that Faith which their fathers had driven from the very Temple wherein they now assembled to hear the ancient dogmas and Christian verities propounded by a priest of the proscribed Order of St. Dominic. It was amazing! For seven years he continued to challenge, to reason, to dispute. He never claimed to do more than "to *prepare* souls for faith," but it was truly said, over his grave, by a Prelate who had been his constant auditor, that "the Conferences of Notre Dame form an epoch in the history of Christian eloquence, and one from which dates the commencement of an immense religious movement among the youth of the time. The vaulted roofs of the Cathedral of Paris now yearly behold the spectacle of thousands of men kneeling at the Holy Table to fulfil their Easter duties. Ask them who made them Christians, and many will reply that the first spark of returning faith was kindled by the lightning-flash of this man's eloquence."¹ It will be as the orator of Notre Dame that Lacordaire will be best known and remembered, and it is as such that we now take leave of him; for whether we think of him as the restless and indefatigable champion of civil and religious liberty, or as the politician who by sheer forcefulness of character carried the habit of the Black Friars into the Constituent Assembly of 1848, it was his marvellous gift of eloquence that had an effect on the men of his day that was well-nigh irresistible: "You sought to have cast God down from off His throne," he said to an unbelieving generation, "and in spite of the mad attempt of your fathers, God is pursuing you without intermission. He is everywhere crossing your path, and presenting

¹ Monseigneur de la Bouillerie: Funeral Oration on the Rev. Père Lacordaire, pronounced at Sorèze, November 22, 1861.

Himself in all shapes before your mind. In your philosophical deductions, in your studies of natural science, in your historical researches, in your attempts at social reform, the question of God is always the first to present itself, because it is, in fact, the first everywhere, and it is as impossible to do without God as it is to change Him. He is to-day what He was yesterday, and what He will be to-morrow. He presses you on all sides, and you do not see Him. Like the old pagans, you raise your altars to the *Unknown God*. Now the God Whom you seek without knowing it, Whom you invoke in secret, the God of Light, of Science and of the Future, is He Whom I preach unto you, the God of the Gospel, Jesus Christ our Lord, in Whom alone is life and salvation."

It was Lacordaire who said: "To live is only the first act of life, the second act of life is that of outliving ourselves." It is a profound saying, but surely his own life demonstrates its truth, for few besides himself have left an equal impress on their age, and of few are the words more true

"Defunctus adhuc loquitur."

ALEXANDER HENDERSON.

