

"IDEALS OF THE IRISH PEOPLE"

DISCOURSE AT ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, MELBOURNE.

The 22nd anniversary of the consecration of St. Patrick's Cathedral, which synchronised with the holding of the Irish Race Convention, was celebrated on Sunday, November 2. At 11 o'clock his Grace the Archbishop of Melbourne, accompanied by the visiting prelates, passed in procession from the Palace to the Cathedral.

In the course of an eloquent and powerful sermon, dealing with "Irish Ideals," the Very Rev. W. J. Lockington, S.J., from the text: "I shall write My law in their hearts; I shall be their God and they will be My people" (Jer. 31-33) delivered the following discourse:—

The highest ideal to which man may aspire is the perfect performance of duty. This includes his duty to God and his duty to humanity, and presupposes a thorough knowledge of his destiny.

But it is human to go astray, and the history of nations is largely a history of deserted and buried ideals. The pursuit of high ideals fructifies in noble thoughts and deeds; the abandonment of them means a falling to a lower plane.

The tale of the centuries proves this, and shows that a nation cannot rise to greatness from the grave of buried ideals. The march of man across Time is strewn with the bones of dead and forgotten nations which fell from grandeur to annihilation because, relinquishing ideals that would have led them to the Footstool of the Creator, they turned and followed those that did not rise above the earth. Their history shows that a nation that barter its soul for material ideals is a nation that is doomed.

The march of nations is not a slow struggle upwards from barbarism to high ideals, as some would have us believe, but, too often, is a blinded descent from honor and greatness to barbarism, because of lost ideals. It is not evolution from the mythical "heavens" upwards, but a succession of degrading fallings from the high estate in which man was placed by God. With feet clogged by the clay of earth and eyes blinded by the mists of earth, nations have blundered aimlessly down to nothingness.

As the student of the history of mankind stands amazed at the almost cyclic regularity of the recurrence of these falls, he cannot but be struck by one notable and almost unique exception to what seems a universal law. That exception is Ireland. As he unrolls the pages of the centuries—pages that tell of the passing of empires and the shattering of civilisations, of the discovery of new worlds, of new languages, of new beliefs, of dark epochs when the tide of Ignorance flowed full and fast and barbarism threatened to rule supreme—he sees that Ireland has ever held a level course, unmoved and confident in every crisis. While others fall in helpless ruin, he sees that nation for one thousand four hundred years steadily progressing and never declining.

Persecution struck long and hard at her in an endeavor to compel Ireland to surrender her ideals, but in vain. We have seen in her martyrdom how for ages wave after wave of oppression rolled across her path, but did not stay her. Poverty and pestilence dogged her steps, and almost annihilated her children, but she steadily pushed beyond them. The natural effect of grinding poverty is to degrade and brutalise, and of persistent pain is to weaken, and to this end they were ruthlessly used against her by her enemies. Grinding poverty and persistent pain were hers for centuries, and they but uplifted and strengthened her; for the spiritual strength that is hers because of her fidelity to her ideals lifts her above Time and its circumstances and anchors her to Eternity. Through all oppression the soul of Ireland looked upwards unmoved, her honor untarnished, and her heart ever faithful.

The preacher showed that Ireland succeeded because of her fidelity to the ideal set before her by St. Patrick—ideals given form by the Catholic faith. He paid a glowing tribute to the priests of Ireland. "Ireland," he said, "is securely anchored to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Mary, and he to whom, after God, she is indebted for this is the foremost of her heroes—he whom in loving reverence her children have named 'Sagart a Run.'"

Sagart! name of reverence, recognising and realising fully the majesty of the divine power that he holds.

A Run! name of love, telling of the outpouring of an affection without equal on earth.

Sagart a Run! He has ever been the faithful guardian of the people, the good shepherd ceaselessly watching in selfish devotion over the flock.

When Ireland had to choose between the torture and death of Calvary and the soft ease of earth, led by her priest sons, she fearlessly set her feet upon the Way of the Cross.

It was death for a priest to be found in Ireland, and death for a father to send his son out of Ireland to be trained as a priest. Yet no sooner did one fall than another sprang to take his place. For in an unending stream boys from Irish homes stole to the Continent, and, with hearts aflame with love, followed an ideal that touches the highest point of heroism that men may reach—close imitation of the Hero of Heroes, Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Scarce was the Oil of Anointing dry upon their hands than they hurried back to their stricken brethren, ready—aye, willing—to die for God and Ireland. Every glen and hill has its priest's cave, and too often, alas! its priest's tree, speaking eloquently of the long line of heroes who guarded Ireland's soul.

They lit the Lamp of Faith and kept it burning, and no matter what clouds rolled between Ireland and the Sun of Justice and Mercy, the Light of Faith ever shone through the darkness, and the nation stood steady against all assaults.

Though the Finn-foya, the sweet-toned Mass bell, lay silent and broken the voice of the Sagart rang like a clarion across the desolate land, and filled Irish hearts with faith and courage that rose triumphant over torture, starvation, and death. In a thousand disguises he faced death daily, as he succored his helpless flock. To harbor him was death, but the cabin of the poorest was ever a sanctuary for him and Christ, Whom he carried—a sanctuary that neither menaces nor gold could violate.

They had no bread and were starving; he fed them with Living Bread from Heaven.

They were friendless and outcast; he gave them Home and Christ.

Shelterless in the rain and storm they lay dying; he enwrapped them in his mighty love and comforted them.

Through the smoke of the burnings, past the hungry galleys, under the cloud of the pestilence, braving death at every move, the Sagart crept to them.

"Ah! thank God, Sagart, you have come," feebly whispered the piteously tremulous lips, with a sigh of content, and at his coming Death lost its terror; the trembling soul, steeled, leaped with confidence to the Sacred Heart of Christ, sure of a welcome. At the sound of his voice the grey mists of Death were banished and changed into the golden glory of the Home-going. As the outcast looked again upon his loved form, agony left the dying eyes, and they were filled with the radiance of victory.

Father Lockington then traced the effects of the following of their ideals by the Irish people upon the civilisation of nations. He said: "Her history is one of triumph and undying nationhood. She has never ceased to be a nation, and a nation that has come thundering down the centuries, ever faithful to the ideals set before her, and fearlessly following the footsteps of God. Irish faith is the salt that gives savor and health to the spiritual life of the English-speaking world, and there is no force on earth can stay the forward march of this nation, divinely strong in its constant fidelity to God."

In the course of a fine oration, the preacher apostrophised Ireland, congratulating her on the near approach of the dawn of freedom and liberty, after a long night of trials and persecutions.

MUSIC EXAMINATIONS.

The following numbers of candidates, presented by the Sisters of Mercy, Wellington, were successful in the recent examinations in connection with the Associated Boards of the Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music, London:—Licentiate examinations, L.A.B. diploma:—Singing, four; advanced grade, honors: singing, one; advanced grade, pass, two; singing, two; intermediate grade, singing, three; higher school, pass, four; singing, four; lower school, pass, nine; elementary, pass, five; primary, pass, eight; violin, one; theory (intermediate), harmony, four (lower) one; school examinations, division 1, eight; division 2, one. Trinity College, London, L.T.C.L. diploma, two; A.T.C.L. diploma, one; senior honors, four; intermediate, one; art of teaching, two.

The true grandeur of humanity is in the moral elevation, sustained, enlightened, and decorated by the intellect of man.—Charles Sumner.

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