

His Name's O'Connell

(By KIM for the N.Z. Tablet.)

You remember me. I had a little chat with you last year. I wrote impulsively. An enthusiastic Catholic layman had thrilled me. I was under a spell—retailed his conversation as reliably as a phonograph. I said very little myself, but I did admit that he forced me to what I owned was a good resolution. I told you what it was. I broke it! I've met him again and had to own up. Yes, I broke my resolution. It shames me to say it, but I must unburden myself. He called it "antecedent wind-up." You recollect he's an American—my friend. What I want he says is a *firm* purpose of amendment. That's not American. It's in every language. It's in the penny catechism. It's in everybody's life. It's got to be. It's meant to be something very warm and hard—like desert sand. More often it's like thin ice—looks all right, but breaks when the weight is on it.

I am no coward, when blows have made me stay I've fled from words. I call that modesty. It's temperament. He says it's cowardice cowardice—when a man won't listen to his conscience—when in consequence he does not the good that he would and should. He talked New York last time, when he got me to make that resolution that got broken. He's changed the venue now, it's Boston. I associate it with cream, so does he, the cream of Catholic manhood.

Well, he talked Boston as he knew it ten years back, a great city with great Catholics under great leadership. There was a quiver in his voice. It was the thought of the leader brought it there, I felt that.

The New England tradition he said was not an altogether glorious one. The Boston Town Records of 1772 excluded Catholics from toleration, they declared their beliefs were subversive of society. The 5th November provided a popular diversion, the Pope and the Devil the principal participants. Washington changed that. Said he was astounded that there were men in his army so void of common sense. He knew Carroll of Carrollton, one of the immortal "signers"—a Catholic leader. He valued the true leaders of the Catholic Church—denied that "unprized were her sons till they learnt to betray." Great leaders—leaders who led, pilots who piloted—made Boston. In my friend's day the Mayoral robes were more often worn by leading Catholics than by any other folk. He has seen public monuments to Colonel Cass, Boyle O'Reilly, and Patrick Collins.

For the last 18 years, he went on, a man and a maker of men has worn Boston's pallium. It's his Boston my friend wished to tell me about—rather perhaps to tell me how he made it his. He hated palterers. He said that. He was no palterer. He showed that. His wartime speeches stand as his panegyric. "The great body of Catholics," he told the Knights of Columbus, "know God's will and are willing to obey it, but history and experience prove to us that many who would pose as leaders lead them astray." Two courses were open to him—popularity, a something he never cared to obtain, never

entered into his conception of anything he did. But he got it. Said he would be ashamed to talk pleasing platitudes. The second course—the only one he could take in conscience and honor—two fine Catholic words—was to tell the truth. He noted the rise of plausible talkers, self-seekers, ambitious members, demagogues who were choking the life out of Catholic societies. You know your constitution, he said, your regulations, your obligations, live up to them. At Camp Devens he cried out to the Catholic soldiers: "Ask General Pershing what he wants and needs most and he will answer, 'Send me munitions, yes, but above all send me *men*, men of discipline, men of courage.'" What is the secret of valor? Above the din of battle you will hear this answer: "God and America. Faith and Fatherland." One thing history made clear, whenever a real Catholic learnt his duty he was firm as steel, as immovable as a mountain. Character counted. Witness Napoleon at the height of his glory. How he stormed and fumed before the weak aged Pontiff, whom he dragged from the Vatican! But the unconquerable Pius VII gazed at the strutting tyrant, calmly folded his thin wasted arms, looked him coolly in the face and quietly replied: "*Non possumus.*" There was Catholic character! He who fights the hardest is not the emotional militarist but the peace-loving Catholic acting from the divine sense of duty. He denounced bewildering orations with their endless insincerities, the waving of flags and the blustering about patriotism. He withered the growing false aristocracy which sundered Catholics. Plain common people from Europe worked out their salvation and the salvation of the country: Unity was lacking in the past. He wished to sound the death-knell of division. Catholics had often succumbed to the cheap and sorry attempt to win them away, as "men of progress." So-called "leaders" were wooed in the hope that they might betray the rest. The little men who tried to buy them and then sell them again would pass. The judgment of God would not pass. The agents of evil were trying to blindfold good Catholic men. But would they sell all their spiritual graces and liberty, or let others filch them away and barter their higher interests? They had nothing to apologise for, no need to wave the flag or make the eagle scream. The world needed but one thing. That one thing was Faith in Christ. Who was to carry the Faith of Christ among the seething mass? You (he said) among the rest. It was now above all other epochs the layman's day. Laymen imbued with the high and dynamic principles of Christianity must go forth and deal with the actual questions of the day. We must consolidate our laymen in the Faith and make them active apostles of the Faith. This was his message.

I listened patiently—never said a word. There was no call to speak. I had to listen. It was very one-sided, but he was not aggressive. I wasn't bored. I smoked my pipe. Plans of a great life for me seemed to be

fashioning themselves from the curling smoke. I was thinking hard—"Laymen imbued with the high and dynamic principles of Christianity must go forth"—from where I asked? Where did I think? Where dynamos were reconditioned—fitted with new brushes. We must consolidate—who must consolidate? Men with the character and men of the mettle of the man I have quoted, he answered. He seemed to visualise him. Who was he again? I said *again*, I wanted him to tell me more plainly. He didn't. He only repeated, he who wears the Pallium of Boston. I was beaten, what's the Pallium of Boston? He was dumbfounded, but he bore with me. It's the insignia of the great Archbishop of this great New England see, His name's O'Connell.

Well it seems this is what William Cardinal O'Connell did, did for the high and dynamic principles, did for consolidating the laymen. He beckoned to the Passionist Fathers. When a great Archbishop beckons, my friend assures me something can be looked for. The answer resembles an Australian's response to the "Coo-ee" he hears in London. The Passionists came: came to St. Gabriel's at Brighton to do for New England what St. John and Paul's does for Rome and its Provinces. In addressing the Laymen's Retreat Guild, I saw at last the drift of all my friend's talk, he was back on last year's theme, he was at my broken resolution all the time. I had failed to make last year's Retreat. Well the Cardinal said the project with which the Passionists were charged was the sanctification of the dear men of his diocese. This was to be accomplished by having them come to this holy place—St. Gabriel's—far away from the world, and here weigh the value of their immortal souls. The Passion of Christ was the very key to all the values of life. He urged the men to acquire the Retreat habit to mould their personalities and render them proof against the maelstrom that sweeps the thoughtless off their feet. The Cardinal talked false standards and fictitious values—the need of atmosphere, solitude, to render the world remote. "*My men*"—the Cardinal it appears never said just "*men*"—are in the midst of dangers that would corrupt a saint, in false ideals and false values. The dangers come in forms so specious. I want *my men* to be safe against them.

His name's O'Connell! Cardinal Gibbons called him "the great, fearless, noble Archbishop of Boston." The Laymen's Retreat Guild is his creation. It has an active staff of officers, councillors, and promoters. In ten years 300 Retreats were conducted and 7000 men responded to the invitations of the league. It has 4000 active members. They are leaders in their parishes, the Retreats make leaders. Men in every walk of life are in it—Senator Walsh, Mayor Curley, eminent judges, lawyers, doctors, military men, business men, respectable men in simpler stations. My friend was at a reunion of retreatants in '15. He met Senator Walsh there. Reminded him of his illustrious namesake, the triple doctor. You remember they met at Mount Manresa in New York. Both Walshes are Catholic men with "the something about them." They can get on without