

THE CELIBACY OF THE CLERGY.

On Sunday evening last after vespers at St. Joseph's Church, Dunedin, his Lordship the Bishop of the Diocese commenced a course of instructions from ecclesiastical history. The subject chosen for the first lecture of the series was that of the celibacy of the clergy, and after a few introductory remarks the Bishop said he would divide his discourse into three parts. 1st. He would lay before the congregation the state of the question as his study of ecclesiastical history led him to apprehend it in his own mind. 2nd. He would give the authority on which he based his opinions, and thirdly he would state some objections that were urged against the matter.

All present understood what the celibacy of the clergy meant. According to the law of the Church those who were admitted to Holy Orders were forbidden to marry, or if already married were obliged to live as if they were not so, and in addition were compelled to lead chaste lives. Ecclesiastical history testified that from the days of the Apostles the higher orders of the clergy, i.e. bishops, priests and deacons, were accustomed to lead a life of celibacy. He was aware that this statement was contradicted by persons who were not Catholics, but it could be shown that their contradiction was groundless. The celibacy of the clergy had been the custom from apostolic times. A custom is not always a law, but this soon hardened into law. St. Peter himself had made a positive law, binding on the clergy belonging to the Church of Rome and all its dependencies in the west, to lead a life of celibacy. St. Mark, who was the disciple of St. Peter, had extended this law to the Church of Alexandria, of which he was bishop. This law was not enforced in the east, but clerical celibacy was there a custom; a statement which he made on the high authority of Origen, St. Jerome, Eusebius and St. Epiphanius. If some departures from this custom were to be met with, they were exceptional, and served to strengthen and confirm the rule.

For the first three hundred years of the Christian era it is clear that men who embraced the ecclesiastical state in its higher grades never married after they were ordained, and if they had been married before they were ordained, they were obliged, by the law of St. Peter in the west and by the universal custom in the east, to live separate from their wives. In the year 305, before the termination of the persecutions, in a Council held at Elvira it was canonically declared, that all in holy orders who married or lived with their wives after their ordination were deposed; this proves that a law on the subject must have previously existed, since a law made for the first time by the council would have had no retrospective effect.

During the first three hundred years Christians had been hunted as if they were wild beasts, it is not, therefore, surprising if they did not leave a superabundance of documents, and it is further known that many of those actually drawn up by them were burned by their enemies. Still there are sufficient writings remaining to teach us fully what the discipline of the Church was in this particular. The law made by St. Peter was testified to by Origen and Tertullian, and this latter had himself been a married man until he was ordained priest in Carthage, when he separated from his wife. Again, in two letters of Pope St. Siricius, one to the Bishop of Tarragona in 385, and the other to the Bishop of Toulouse, that Pontiff alludes to the institution referred to, and declares that all who violate it are to be punished. Innocent I., in the year 400, again testifies to the same, as do all the Councils of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.

At two Councils that were held in Asia Minor in the fourth century, and over which St. Vitalis, who died in the year 320, presided, namely that of Ancyra in 316, and that of Neo-Cæsarea in 317, celibacy was imposed upon the higher clergy. A strange provision was made by the fifth canon of the Council of Ancyra. If a deacon, when about to be ordained, declared to the bishop that it was his intention to marry when he was ordained, he might lawfully do so, but unless he thus protested he was obliged to observe the laws of celibacy.

The reason of that probably was, that in the first three centuries there existed great difficulty in obtaining men fit to exercise the office of the ministry, and it frequently happened that the people seized on some man of exemplary holiness, and insisted on his being ordained. It would no doubt have been considered a hardship had men, who were thus compelled to take holy orders against their will, been obliged in consequence of this to separate from their wives, supposing that they were married, and it may have been in consideration of their case that the provision alluded to was made by the Council of Ancyra.

Socrates and Sozomen declare that at the Council of Nice held in 325, when it was proposed to superadd to the custom already in existence in the east the sanction of positive precept with regard to the matter of clerical celibacy, St. Paphnutius protested against it, and it was not enforced. His lordship had no intention of denying that St. Paphnutius had been present at the Council, but it was nevertheless certain that his name did not appear subscribing any of the decrees. The historians alluded to did not live until more than 100 years after the Council of Nice, which had confirmed the customs previously prevailing. Moreover the eastern bishops who had been present at this Council, on their return thence to their dioceses, began to enforce strictly the obligation of celibacy on the clergy, and more particularly was it then extended throughout their patriarchates by the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch.

An argument brought from ecclesiastical history against the celibacy of the clergy is that the father of St. Gregory Nazianzen was a priest. There were, however, other priests besides those who were Christians, and this man may have been a pagan, or his case may have formed one of those exceptions found in the East of a departure from the universal custom observed there, and which have been already alluded to. Other objections from history are equally trivial, and admit of easy refutation. Certain arguments have also been urged from Holy Scripture, where we are told that St.

Peter himself was married, and whence some suppose that all the Apostles were married. This, however, was not the opinion of Tertullian, who had been born in the second century, and died in the year 216. In his opinion St. Peter only was married, all the others were celibate, and St. Peter separated from his wife when called to the apostolate. Such was also the opinion of St. Jerome, who, in his controversy with Jovinian and Vigilantius, treats on this subject. Another objection is found in the words written by St. Paul in 1st Cor., ix. 5v.; but this depends altogether on a mistranslation. The word rendered "wife" in the authorised version is properly woman, and the term "a woman, a sister" means a Christian woman. It was the custom of certain of the apostles, as of Christ himself, to be followed by holy women, who ministered to their wants, but St. Paul rejected such assistance, he being of an independent spirit. It is of these holy women St. Paul speaks in the passage alluded to, and it has no bearing on the subject. Another passage adduced in opposition to the celibacy of the clergy occurs in the epistle to the Philippians iv., 3v., but this also hangs upon a mistranslation, and cannot be urged with any force.

In conclusion his lordship stated that much more might be said on the subject which would be of deep interest to critics and scholars, but he considered that what he had now said was sufficient for the purpose he intended to serve, that of making it plain to an ordinary congregation that clerical celibacy had been the rule from the days of the Apostles to the present. The next evening that he should address them he would also choose ecclesiastical history for his subject, but he was as yet undecided as to what particular point he should select to speak upon.

THE POLICY OF OBSTRUCTION

[From the 'Wexford People']

It is full time for Irishmen to consider the various suggestions which have been submitted by the National press as the alternative means to be adopted in the present crisis. One journal—the 'Irishman'—always more or less hostile to the Home Rule parliamentary policy—counsels abstention from Parliament and a protest in the name of the nation against the farce of Ireland being legislated for through a representation which is a mockery, while England crushes their power by numerical force. The 'Nation' that has hitherto counselled parliamentary action in the usual form, now declares for a policy of obstruction, so that if Ireland is not to receive justice at the hands of imperialists the English people must be made to feel that the Irish members have the power to nullify the action of the imperial parliament. The 'Freeman,' on the contrary, declares for pursuing the old policy, and on the lines laid down at the general conference, as being the course then recommended to and endorsed by the nation, and not since revoked—and for thus stating its views is roundly assailed by the 'Ulster Examiner,' a journal of much patriotic feeling and power, largely circulating not alone in the North of Ireland, but also through the West of Scotland. Logically the 'Freeman' is safe, but patriotically, we think, an advance might be made in the programme, and the policy of obstruction adopted, when it has been proved, as it has been notoriously, not alone on the Home Rule debate, but on almost every other occasion when English interest, ignorance, and prejudice stood opposed to Irish rights, that brute force tramples on reason and justice is stifled by its breath. Obstruction is the natural weapon to wield when such a policy is pursued by British statesmen. If Ireland is not to have justice, England shall not have legislation—and so the game can be played out. Mere argument, complaisance to parties, a desire to be fair, honorable, and above board in all things, have been tried without avail. To pursue the present course would be merely going over the old ground again without advancing a step. Brute force must be met by aggression and obstruction on all and every occasion that supplies the means. Even, as the 'Freeman' suggests, did the House alter its forms to meet the difficulty, other means could be devised to obstruct business—or England would be placed before the world in the position of a State boasting of free institutions but only enabled to carry out legislative deliberations by gagging the representatives of Ireland. This is an alternative which we fancy she would not like to force, and hence the feasibility of the leading policy of obstruction. Anyhow it is worth the trial. Should it fail there is the policy of abstention from Parliament to fall back on—a policy of formidable significance should it be adopted during the crisis of a foreign war. At present such a policy would be injudicious, because its adoption would destroy its force should it have to be adopted in the future. But the policy of obstruction is open to no such objection, and a great duty devolves on the Irish people during the recess—that of demanding that the Irish representatives shall meet at a convenient time, determine the course to be pursued next session, and resolve on the policy of obstruction in the event of Irish demands being met only to be crushed, as they have been in the present and past sessions of Parliament.

The idea has been transmitted from generation to generation, that happiness is one large and beautiful precious stone, a single gem so rare that all search after it is in vain, all efforts for it hopeless. It is not so. Happiness is a mosaic, composed of many smaller stones. Each taken apart and viewed singly may be of little value, but when all are grouped together and judiciously combined and set, they form a pleasing and graceful whole—a costly jewel. Trample not under foot, the little pleasures which a gracious Providence scatters in the daily path, and which, in eager search after some great and exciting joy, we are too apt to overlook. Why should we always keep our eye fixed on the bright, distant horizon, while there are so many lovely roses in the garden in which we are permitted to walk? The very ardor of our chase after happiness may be the reason why she so often eludes our grasp. We pantingly strain after her when she has been graciously brought nigh unto us.