

'THE SINS OF A SAINT'

AN ENVENOMED ROMANCE

The opening of a new church at Clyde (Central Otago) on last Sunday, dedicated to St. Dunstan, gives a splendid timeliness to the following vigorous dissection of an envenomed romance entitled 'The Sins of a Saint,' which has found its way to New Zealand. The exposure of this evil book is from the gifted pen of Father Lucian Johnston, and was forwarded to us by the International Catholic Truth Society, Brooklyn, U.S.A. It runs as follows:

Baltimore, Md., August 10, 1903.

President of the I.C.T. Society,—

Dear Sir,—At your request I have carefully examined the 'Sins of a Saint,' by J. R. Aitken. (D. Appleton & Co., N.Y., 1903.) The following is the conclusion I arrived at regarding it—

It strikes me as amateurish as a novel or romance, and it is beyond all doubt a slander both upon a great man and upon the Catholic Church, of which he is an honored saint. This is strong language, but I use it deliberately and for these reasons.

The book deals with the character of

St. Dunstan,

Archbishop of Canterbury. According to our author he is worse than a criminal. He is a liar, a sly diplomat, who would not scruple to employ any means, however base, which would further his ends (pp. 45, 46, 57, 60, 70, 102, 288, 302); a tyrant when in power (55, 97), revengeful (60, 72), 'Satanic,' demoniacal in disposition (38, 39, 203), capable even of counselling a young monk to break his vow of chastity in order to further his own political purposes (45 to 50, 71); a disturber of the realm, treacherous to his king, persecutor and murderer of an innocent maiden—in a word, an incarnation of political ambition unchecked by any consideration of honor, virtue, or even humanity. So much for Dunstan.

The Papacy is also the target for the most savage abuse of the tone to which we are accustomed in the reading of such books as the alleged Confessions of Maria Monk et al. (pp. 44, 56, 74, 75, 97, 102, 162, 195). The monks are painted in colors which would make even 'Friar Tuck' ashamed. They are drunken, revengeful, cruel, murderous, etc., and so on. Every person and everything dear to Catholic memory is held up to scorn and abused in language which at times is so foul, so intemperate as to excite our pity for the writer.

Now what justification in history is there for such awful charges against English Catholicism of the tenth century? None.

Before the time of Lingard, Dunstan's character had, it is true, been a favorite theme for the attacks of anti-Catholic writers like Hallam, Hume, Turner, Southey, Tenny, Rapin, Carte. The charges of these men were fearlessly and successfully met by Lingard, chiefly in Chapter XIII of his 'History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church' (2 vols., 1845). Since that time the tide has almost completely turned.

In Favor of Dunstan;

Anyhow, the old virulence of style has entirely given place to moderate criticism even in quarters most anti-Catholic. Since Mr. Aitken makes a great show of historical learning I will mention some leading writers in proof of my statement.

To begin with the authorities cited by our author. He refers us chiefly to Greene, Kemble, and Milner. Milner is not an authority. He is not mentioned in the latest and best 'Bibliography of English History,' by Charles Gross. But Greene and Kemble are authorities. Now, if you pick up Kemble's 'Saxons in England,' at pp. 458, 461 (edition of 1876), of Chap. IX, Volume II, you will find an estimate of Dunstan completely adverse to that given by our author. The same with Greene, who pays a flattering tribute to Dunstan both in his 'History of the English People' (Chap. IV, Vol. I.), and in his 'Short History of the English People' (Chap. I, pp. 57 et seq., edition of 1889). Mr. Aitken even quotes Stubbs, a great authority on this matter. Here again the same story. Stubbs in his 'Memorials of St. Dunstan' (R. S. London, 1871), gives a glowing picture of the saint, as glowing as the most sensitive Catholic could desire, fully as flattering as that given by Lingard (see pp. 103 to 109, and 117 to 120 Introduction). Finally our author has the effrontery, on page 321, to quote even Lingard for the substantiation of 'the main facts of the conduct imputed to him, i.e., Dunstan, the conduct referred to consisting in the bloody mutilation of a woman. On the contrary, Lingard distinctly states the opposite. Mr. Aitken's re-

ference is nothing less than an outrage upon all historical decency.

So much for the authorities cited by the author. I have gone further and examined others of even a more recent date. In them I can find nothing whatever to justify such an attack upon Dunstan and early English Catholicity. And these

Authorities are all Protestant.

Foremost is one of the latest and in most respects the ablest one—volume 'History of the Church of England,' by H. O. Wakeman (1897). His estimate of Dunstan and of Dunstan's works both as archbishop and as statesman is, highly flattering (pp. 67 to 72). A similarly favorable judgment is found in 'The English Church in the Middle Ages' (pp. 45 to 52) by Rev. William Hunt (1895). Also the 'Student's History of England' by no less a competent and fair writer than Mr. Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1900) says enough in its brief way (pp. 65 to 79) to entirely discredit Mr. Aitken's romance. Also a very recent and able 'History of England' by E. F. Powell and T. F. Tout (pp. 39 to 43) gives a favorable estimate of Dunstan and his work. Lastly even an habitually anti-Catholic historian like W. F. Hook says of Dunstan ('Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury,' vol. i., p. 403, 1882), whom he freely criticises that despite his 'many and great faults,' he was nevertheless a good and virtuous man, deserving though often of censure, yet always our respect.

From the preceding you can therefore see very plainly that Mr. Aitken's book is a

Romance Pure and Simple.

He is utterly ignorant or ignores all the history written in the last fifty years or more. The latest English historians give the lie direct to the story, and even the bigoted and uninformed writers anterior to Lingard would blush at the foulness of Mr. Aitken's language and thought; moreover, it must be plain that he either did not read the authors cited by him or else maliciously misquoted them. In the case of Lingard he utters a plain falsehood. He terms his story an 'Historical Romance.' It may be romance, though a poor thing even at that; but it surely is not 'historical.'

I am sorry to have spent so much time over such a worthless and really venomous book. But I have done so for good reasons. In the first place the author has made such a show of historical knowledge that the incautious are likely to bow down before his superior wisdom. A prominent morning newspaper here in Baltimore spoke of the book in very flattering terms. The reviewer was evidently scared by the pretentious array of English authorities quoted in the footnotes.

Then, too, the book at bottom and in intention is not so much a romance as an attack on the Catholic Church in the form of a novel. As such it is sure to have a large circulation, particularly among Anglicans. Lastly, it is issued by a well-known firm—Appleton and Co., whose prestige alone can win a large audience for almost any book. Why this firm should lend its name to such an infamous attack upon its Catholic patrons is rather hard to see. Had the book any real literary merit one could understand. But it is decidedly amateurish even as a novel. In the absence of any proof of intentional anti-Catholic bias on the part of this firm I suppose the most charitable conclusion to come to is that the scholarship of its literary critics is of a very low order, while that of its historical critic is simply beneath contempt.

LUCIAN JOHNSTON.

The 'New Freeman' of St. John, New Brunswick, notes the fact that two recently-appointed American bishops were journalists. Bishop Hendricks, who was appointed to the Philippines the other day, began his career as a newspaper man many years ago. While engaged in this avocation, it is said that frequently it came in his line of duty to write of turf happenings. Wearying at last of the business, he resigned, studied for the priesthood, and was ordained. As a priest, says the 'New Freeman,' he did his duty so well that Leo XIII made him a Bishop. Another American journalist the same journal points out, is soon to be consecrated Bishop—Father Charles J. O'Reilly. Father O'Reilly until recently was editor of the 'Catholic Sentinel' of Portland, Oregon. And (says the writer) he made a good editor. Under his charge the 'Sentinel' was a first-class paper—a far better paper than one would expect to find in Oregon. It was bright, it was newsy, it was full of purpose, it was quoted East, West, North, and South. It had opinions and was not afraid to speak them. For this reason we predict that Father O'Reilly will make a splendid Bishop of the new diocese of Baker City.

A single trial of MOUNTAIN KING ASTHMA POWDER will convince the most sceptical of its efficacy.---