

MEMORIES OF THE IRISH FRANCISCANS

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Memories of the Irish Franciscans by J. F. O'Donnell

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J. F. O'DONNELL

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FRANCISCANS**

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OF
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BY
J. F. O'DONNELL.

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THE IRISH FRANCISCANS.

THE FRANCISCANS.

[Saint Francis, son of a wool merchant, was born in Assisi, A.D. 1181.
He founded the order which is called after him; and died 1228.]

"The man, whose admirable life
Better in glory of the heavens were sung"—DANTE.

I.

OF the great Orders, clad in poverty,
Whose labors and whose sufferings help man
Unto the chaste and clear serenity,
Which is not compassed by this earthly span,
I most love that which unto me has been
Familiar as some fixed, true-charted star,
Which one glance at the sky brings to my ken.
I loved it tenderly when life was green,—
Loved it when sorrows grew familiar,
And still would love could life renew again.

II.

It had a radiant origin—it leaped
Fire-winged from St. Francis' heart and brain;
In tears and blood its victories were reaped—
From persecution's red but fruitful rain.

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Vast were its early triumphs, when the world,
Shaken from phantasms of unholy sleep,
Awoke to hear that God existed still !
Nor meaner, when Success's flag was furled,
When darkness fell once more upon the deep,
And hell, a season, seemed invincible.

III.

Again were fields to fight, and souls to save,
And principalities to overcome ;
Again St. Francis' children, sternly brave,
Rushed to the rescue, and to martyrdom.
Roused by an inner voice, their hosts advanced ;
Again in deathful conflict closed with Sin,
And overthrew it—would it were for good !
The Church reaped laurels where their keen blades
glanced,
The earth heard music where their swords made
din,
And found salvation where they spilled their
blood.

IV.

Another crimson pageant fades, and, lo !
The world relapses to its ancient way ;
The prophets of humanity cry Woo,
Seeing hell's shadow sphered in the broad day.
Again the rallying cry on sea and shore !—
This was the demon in his subtlest mood,

With all his enginery close-masked from
sight !
St. Francis' sons against the torrent bore,
Their naked hands its violence withstood,
Till peace shone crescent-wise upon the night.

V.

In those stern ages, barred with gloom and glare,
They held the strong, aggressive world at bay ;
Met it in its own lists when it would dare,
And plucked the greenest garlands from the fray.
Their books were catapults which battered down
The proud, embattled cities of untruth ;
Their confessors were torches fed with faith.
Whether the conqueror's or the martyr's crown,
Repose, or swift, unseasonable ruth,
Their heroism found no rest, save death.

VL

And if for earth, at large, they labored thus,
What men bore love for Ireland like to them ?
Served her in days when skies were mutinous,
And every wind-gust was a requiem ?
They were with us, of us, in blissful days,
Ere yet across the smiling land there came
Calamity in its extremest form,—
Ere yet invading hands had learned to raze
The altar, giving shrine and roof to flame,
And slaying madly in the fiery storm.

VII.

Their gray and ruined monasteries stand
 By storied lake and river, through the isle ;
 Their square bell-towers, erect, austere grand,
 Woo from the flying gleams of heaven a smile.
 Chancel and nave with weed and grass o'ergrown,
 Pillars of their sculptured beauty rent,
 Windows through which no fractured sunsets
 pour,
 Plead for a Faith dismantled, not o'erthrown,
 Plead for a race not broken, if 'tis bent,
 Plead for a cause not lost for evermore.

VIII.

Within those wasted sanctuaries the bones
 Of Ireland's bravest, noblest sons find rest.
 Their names are graven on the shattered stones—
 Epitaph, and shield, and broken crest.
 Franciscans closed their eyes, and dug their graves,
 And laid them with their feet against the east,
 And sang their dirges—such a psalm of love ;
 Calmly they sleep, whilst o'er their ashes waves
 The melancholy tree that blossoms least,
 Whose roots in the wet clay are deepest wove.

IX.

Beautiful tradition ! deathless bond !
 That binds St. Francis to our Irish land.
 Immutable, imperishable beyond
 Time, and the despoilers' wrecking hand.

Ages shall wane, yet see its strength increase,
And men shall waste, yet feel its strength renewed,
As is the eagle's bowed with centuries' weight ;
Growing with the growth of fruitful peace,
The patient death and burial of feud,
Assured to all whose faith can hope and wait.

X.

'Tis writ : the Saint shall repossess his own,
'Tis writ : Christ's poor shall have their heritage,
Violence and wrong be overthrown,
And heaven smile down upon a fairer age.
Could Wadding hunger for a dearer time,
Whilst watching Ireland o'er the tortuous foam
Cast on his sandals by a southern sea ?
Could his desires, matured by grief and clime,
Rise to a nobler pitch in friendly Rome ?
Can Rome ask larger blessing ? or can we ?

XI.

Then to St. Francis and his brown-robed sons
I dedicate, with love and reverence,
This little book ; and crave their benisons,
Wishing it bore a higher, deeper sense
Of what my heart would utter. May they spread
And fill the land with their sweet influence ;
With loving labors vivify the past ;
Proclaim that ignorance is crushed and dead,
Scatter those vapors ominous and dense,
Till enmity shall kiss their feet at last.

FATHERS PURCELL AND MOONEY.

[TIME—September, 1617. SCENE—The Guardian's Cell in the Irish Franciscan Convent, Louvain.]

"I was a man of arms, then cordeller;
Believing thus begirt to make amends."—DANTE.

I.

A SOUL sedate and clear ; not tempered, tried
In the world's battlefields, its councils, schemes ;
Still from the page of Mooney's book it beams
Supremely tranquil, cold, and purified,
It had not striven in mischance of war—
Gathered victorious laurels from no fray ;
But shone in its own compass as a star
Awaiting dissolution with the day.
Thus self-contained, beyond the fiery round
Of force, enthusiasm, hate, and love,
It found content in rich, if narrow, ground ;
And satisfied that here, below, above,
Extends a Providence apast our ken,
He died, the most resigned of thoughtful men.

II.

If on the orbit of this life direct
Some stranger impulse crossed, when least fore-
seen ;
If watching, in its tenor, could detect
A cloud that left it scarcely less serene,