

CHARLES DE MONTALEMBERT.*

The service which this distinguished man rendered to the United States during our civil war, and his able and generous plea for us at a time when half the European world were against us, should give him a claim upon our attention, and lead us to make acquaintance with his character and life.

We confess that we know very little of the works of Mrs Oliphant, but we feel after closing the pages of this book, that a mind which could draw such a graceful and delightful picture of its hero, and at the same time make so fair, so broad, and philosophical an estimate of his character, must possess no common culture and ability. There is not, in our opinion, one dull page in this Memoir. It is contrary, at the same time, to all the received laws of good biography, which generally require that the author should keep himself and his views out of sight as much as possible. If the writer therefore had made an uninteresting book, we should have the right to complain; but he who succeeds, makes laws for himself. We have something here far more comprehensive than a series of facts, however valuable. We have a grand colossal figure, standing out amid the pigmies of the past half century in France, painted by the hand of affection, and in the glowing yet chaste colors of an artist, who saw the original in no false light, but noble and beautiful as he really was.

It is not our purpose to make a complete review of this book, but there are some elements in the character of Montalembert which are peculiarly fitting for us to contemplate in this age of the world:

So-called Liberal Christians are too apt to believe that liberality of thought must inevitably belong to a mind that accepts radical opinions in religion. Hence our unseemly haste to force a man, by the charge of cowardice, out of the communion where he was born,

* Memoir of Count de Montalembert, Peer of France, Deputy for the Department of Drubs. A Chapter of recent French History. By Mrs. Oliphant.

and which he loves. We forget that human nature is not a mathematical machine, which must continually repeat that two and two make four, or else be charged with failure. We forget how many different elements it takes to make up a man, and so, because he has got hold of some one great truth, we are impatient with him, that he cannot see others close under his vision. It is a trite saying, but we cannot hear it too often, that liberality is a quality that lies more in a man's character and heart, than in his way of thinking. We have in Montalembert a good illustration of this truth. There never was perhaps a more ardent, unswerving, and some would say fanatical Roman Catholic than he. In the glow of youth, with life all before him, eager to rouse his beloved church to a sense of its privileges and responsibilities, he calmly puts aside his weapons of warfare, and like a docile Son of the Faith, renounces his cherished hopes, because an old man, the Pope, whom he believes the Father of Christendom, bids him lay his hand on his mouth and be still. Who would dare charge him with moral cowardice? Courage has nothing to do with these inexplicable emotions, proceeding from the religious imagination, born with our being, growing with our growth, heightened by the associations of youth, and sanctified by the sorrows of after years. The logical critic, the religious economist, have nothing to do with such a character. They read him exactly as they read the Bible; ready to square everything with their line and plummet, impatient at inequalities, and disposed to reject the whole if they cannot accomplish their object.

We cannot discover that this sacrifice of his will to that of another equally fallible injured the mettle of Montalembert's character, or dimmed his vision of abstract truth. We all have our ideals. This was his ideal: Whatever the Pope's private failings, he as the great Bishop of the church below, wore the mantle of Christ, and commanded the entire devotion of the faithful. As to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, he never accepted it, and he little valued his temporal power. Montalembert's love of civil liberty was in no way impaired by his obedience to the church, although he seemed to hold the opinion of Plato, that "the acceptance of established opinions must precede and aid the private judgment, because the mind which submits to lawful authority is most

likely to possess real independence, in distinction from that counterfeit which is only a slavish fear of a creed."

His efforts in the cause of free education were unceasing. He accepted the powers that were, — that is, the existing government in France, — but reserved to himself the right to oppose them constitutionally when their measures went against his sense of right. It was a hard lesson which he endeavored in vain to teach France after her terrible memories. He tried to show her how to curb legitimately her tyrants and demagogues, without the awful necessity of revolution. He felt the truth of the saying of a distinguished Frenchman, that "France had wit, industry and even genius, but not character." He had such a horror of anarchy and bloodshed, that he was ready to accept Louis Napoleon as the only salvation of the country. His loyal soul never suspected treachery, and the President of the Republic became the Emperor before his eyes were opened. Between him and Louis Napoleon unmasked there could be no real sympathy. The Emperor cast him off as soon as he no longer needed his services. His political life suddenly ceased.

In the prime of life, in the very heat of the contest, flushed with the consciousness of his own powers, and wakened to the delightful fact that he had the ears of his fellow-men, he was compelled by the insolent power of one man to lay off his armor, and retire from the field. He had reached the most brilliant period in his career. Nothing could equal the effect of his speeches before the assembly. When in early life he had the whole house in opposition to him, even then he chained their attention. It was such a novel spectacle to see in that blasé circle of men, a young nobleman so high toned, so impassioned, so bold, and so religious. But often in later years — as, for instance, when he made an appeal against the intolerance of the Swiss Protestants towards the Catholics — he brought down the house with wild plaudits. The Jesuit party in Germany to-day might well invoke his memory, for though he was no Jesuit, he always took the side of the oppressed.

In regard to his speeches it is difficult to describe them. We have very superficial ideas of French eloquence. We form our opinions from the melo-dramatic sayings which come to us in the time of revolution. The public words of Lamartine, of Victor

Hugo, and other distinguished men, have a sentimental air that does not suit our Anglo Saxon tastes. We defy any one to make this criticism of the speeches of Montalembert. They read admirably, which is a great deal to say of such fragments as appear in this life, — a public speech being supposed to depend so much upon the voice and manner. There is very little of historic allusion, as in our great speeches, there are few illustrations, or figures, no arts to attract the attention, but simply the overwhelming appeal of a nature that cannot rest until it has convinced you. Sometimes it is the cutting, calm, repressed satire of the avenger of meanness and injustice; sometimes the lofty conviction of the religious man who loved his church like a lover; sometimes the generous plea for the rights of humanity, denied to his bitter opponents; and sometimes, as when he took his seat in the French Academy, the grand survey of intellectual truth and liberty.

Two other men figured largely in France during the life of Montalembert. They also had their mouths sealed and their young aspirations quenched. One of them, Lacordaire, was of an elastic temperament like Montalembert, and when repressed in one field of action he broke out in another. The other, Lammenais, was of a different nature; he could not struggle with destiny. His whole life was embittered by his cold reception at Rome, and the impossibility of carrying out his cherished plans for the enfranchisement of the church. A country which can produce three such men in one generation, need not be despaired of, much less a church. Whatever may be its local and political prejudices against the Reformed Catholic party in Germany and Switzerland, the Romish Church in France must see, that if it is to live, it must widen with the march of civilization. It may do it in its own way, the way best suited to the genius of its people. Happy would it be for France, if the church would inscribe on her banners the names of these three great men.

Montalembert published several volumes during his life. One was a memoir of St. Elizabeth, another a sort of romance founded on the lives of two friends. His article on the Triumph of the North, and the Question of Slavery in America, is full of clear

good sense, and delicate appreciation of the condition of things in this country.

His greatest work, "The Monks of the West," he left unfinished. In the preparation of this book he called to his aid all the richest treasures of sacred art and history, amid the retirement of his literary life. The thoroughness of his research was only equalled by his enthusiasm, which threw a halo of subdued and beautiful light around the lives of those early fathers of the church and floods the whole book with a warm religious glow. One day his beautiful and beloved daughter came to him with a sweet smile upon her face, and announced to him her desire to enter a convent; and when he remonstrated with her, she turned towards his table, and laid her hand upon the manuscripts of this book, and said, "Here, my Father, is where I have learned to prefer the monastic life to all others." He was struck dumb. He had not thought of the practical effect of the book upon the life of to-day, but only of the beauty and sanctity of the past. He struggled with the feeling of the fond parent and let her go, but he never recovered from what he called his "grande desolation."

The latter part of his life he spent in his country house, an old Chateau, which he remodelled with much taste. He loved his trees and lands like an Englishman, and respected his humble neighbors, who, strange to say, with the fickleness of French peasants, ripped up the bark of his saplings, and injured his dwelling, whenever any out-break at the capital encouraged them to make raids upon those who were noble or rich. He bore it patiently, for he had long been used to ingratitude from his country and church.

So passed away a noble life. When will France have another son like him?

MARTHA PERRY LOWE.