

## CARDINAL GIBBONS'S "A RETROSPECT OF FIFTY YEARS"\*

Few men in America wield such unobtrusive yet real and powerful influence for good as the Cardinal Archbishop of Baltimore. His venerable age; his exalted office; his active, beneficent career; his varied interests, sound judgment, and unfailing tact; most important of all, the moral value of his blameless life, made but the more resplendent by "the fierce light that beats upon a throne," make Cardinal Gibbons merit and receive the respectful admiration and even the heartfelt affec-

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tion of all classes and creeds. For more than a quarter of a century the leading American official of the Catholic Church in America he has borne a responsibility such as few could carry so successfully. Dealing with problems the most momentous and the most delicate, he has never been rash, injudicious, or reactionary. He has had many opportunities to do unwise things; that he did not do them is more than a negative sign of wisdom. Repeatedly called upon to aid in the forming of public opinion, he has never hedged nor been silent; but more often than any other churchman in America he has lifted voice and wielded pen to further the interests of religion and humanity, to expound the teachings of the Catholic Church, to spread Christian morality, to promote social progress, to inculcate civic virtue. He has had the unusual good fortune to continue to say the right thing in the right way at the right time. By temperament prudent, by training conservative, he has retained the open mind of youth and a willingness to consider evidence against even long-settled views. Most loyal to Rome, he has been equally loyal to America. A prince of the Church, he is beloved for his unaffected democracy. An honoured citizen of Baltimore, devoted to its welfare, he received there in 1911 a civic testimonial to his patriotism of greater dignity, magnitude, and universal enthusiasm than is recorded of any other personage not holding an office of state.

Cardinal Gibbons's former books have been mainly concerned with religious subjects; of *The Faith of Our Fathers* over nine hundred thousand copies have been issued and the sale is still going on. The larger part also of these latest volumes is taken up with allied subjects, though exhibiting clearly his genuine devotion to his native land and his optimistic confidence in its future. Over half of the first volume is devoted to reminiscences of the Vatican Council, reprinted from *The Catholic World* and *The North American Review*. At that time he was the youngest

Bishop at the Council; to-day he is the sole survivor of over seven hundred members. The prelates came from every corner of the globe and to venerable years added profound learning, wide experience, and apostolic virtue. To some it will be a surprise to learn that "the most ample liberty of discussion prevailed in the Council." This freedom the Holy Father pledged at the opening of the synod, and the pledge was religiously kept. The members were extremely varied in type and interesting. Cardinals Manning, Deschamps, Bilio, Schwarzenberg and Simor; Archbishops Kenrick, Dupanloup and Darboy; Mgr. Hassoun, Bishop Pic and many others are portrayed in a few vivid sketches. One Chinese Bishop had travelled twenty-three thousand miles to attend the Council. Several had been exiled from their sees; "others were the successors of martyrs and were destined themselves to wear a martyr's crown." Cardinal Gibbons gives a picture of the daily life and private apartments of Pope Pius IX; describes in detail the discussions on the various questions, and devotes to the ceremonies of Holy Week, a chapter worthy to stand beside Cardinal Wiseman's famous essay.

The essay on the Knights of Labour is one of the most important, as the part played by Cardinal Gibbons in their behalf is one of his noblest achievements. "Numerous societies for the protection of the working man rose during the administration of President Cleveland—societies to which working people began to adhere more and more steadfastly as their only protection from economic slavery, but which were vehemently attacked upon the other side as destructive, revolutionary, and even anarchic." The Canadian Bishops were so alarmed that they obtained from the Holy See a condemnation of the society in Canada. But Archbishop Gibbons (as he then was) and all but two of the twelve American Archbishops "were equally alarmed at the prospect of the Church being presented before our age as the

friend of the powerful rich and the enemy of the helpless poor; for, not only would such an alliance, or even apparent alliance, have done the Church untold harm, but it would have been the *bouleversement* of our whole history. The one body in the world which had been the protector of the poor and the weak for nearly eighteen hundred years, could not possibly desert these same classes in their hour of need." When the Archbishop sailed for Europe in 1887 to receive the Cardinal's Hat, he accordingly presented the plea of organised labour in the form of a document to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda; the Knights of Labour were not condemned; and a few years later Pope Leo XIII "enun-  
ciated the principles which underlie the Church's moral teaching with regard to economics, in his famous encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*."

Perhaps none of the essays is more scholarly and thoughtful than the address delivered at the silver jubilee of the Catholic University of America in Washington held in 1916. For the University, of which he has always been the Chancellor, His Eminence has always had a special affection. Influential in founding it, he was the one whose courage and faith in God kept its doors opened when financial difficulties urged others to wish them closed. And so he not only had reason to rejoice at the successful outcome of his confidence in this institution's future but, as was appropriate, he here saw a vindication of the Catholic theory of education and the value of a Catholic University to our whole civic and social life.

It would be only partially to represent Cardinal Gibbons's interest not to make especial mention of the essays on "The Church and the Republic," "Patriotism and Politics," and "Will the American Republic Endure?" Here he gives free scope to his intense patriotism, for, as he says in his Introduction, "My countrymen and my fellow-Catholics will forgive me if I seem to yearn over this Church and this people, but I do so because I believe both the American

Church and the American people to be precious in the sight of God, and designed, each one in its proper sphere, for a glorious future."

Although these volumes make no claim to be an autobiography, many valuable details are given as to the Cardinal's own history and the progress of the Church in this country. In every essay, however, the character of the man is unconsciously made clear. And one rises from such reading with the conviction that this man is greater than any of his writings or deeds, and that such a man is one of the greatest assets of a nation or a church.

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