

Catholic Lay Activities.

The Help Of The Laity Is Needed.

Concluded.

A timely article appeared in "The National Weekly" for May 10th, 1919, on the troubles of "The Little White (Protestant) Church" and its struggle for existence in the present changed economic conditions of many of its adherents. The article intends to show that membership in these churches goes hand in hand with material prosperity. For we read (l. c. page 27): "Church membership in the country . . . is a badge of respectability, a distinction that goes with Sunday clothes and the ability to own a horse and drive it. It is not an honor designed for tenant farmers or hired men; at least the tenant farmers and hired men do not so consider it. In nineteen Ohio counties about 40 per cent. of the farmers are tenants, but only about twenty per cent. of the church membership is made up of them. The remainder consists of the settled, substantial members of the community who have earned the right to the good things of life, church membership included." Again, it was "discovered, that the more prosperous portion of the population is much more likely to be in church. Arrange the families of a community in the order in which an income-tax collector arranges them, draw a line somewhere just above the middle of the list, and you'll have most of the church attendants above the line and a majority of the non-attendants below."

Now what is here stated to be true of the rural district and of non-Catholic churches, may to some extent be true also of our own people. We have, no doubt, all heard the excuse given by poor people, that they could not go to Mass on Sunday, "because they had no good clothes." What a fine incentive to help to elevate the economic standard of these people! Willing workers could, for instance, especially if these poor Catholics be immigrants and not yet fully adjusted to American conditions, try to obtain better employment for the father, or the older sons and daughters. Perhaps the mother is willing to do extra work if it be of a suitable kind. The children could be looked after and attempts made to find adequate housing facilities for the family. If better and more permanent results can be secured in such cases by co-operating with non-Catholic agencies, it would not always be unwise to do so. For as Virginia Crawford says in "Ideals of Charity": "More training for social work and a less parochial view of our obligations are what we need if we are to labour on terms of equality with our non-Catholic fellow-workers in these new fields of social endeavour." Much less would it be right to say that "these people don't concern us; they're not of our parish." No wonder cases of this kind are referred to the Provident Association or to a "non-secretarian" body, when Catholic laymen thus shirk their plain duty.

When we draw up programs of social work for our Catholic women, we are sometimes reminded that "there are two distinct kinds of Feminism, the one based upon Christianity, the other upon revolt against revealed religion." So too are there two schools of social service, the one opposed to the other. The one has inscribed "philanthropy" on its banner and abhors the word "charity." It ignores supernatural motives and knows nothing about the charity taught by Christ. In the last installment we quoted the words of Professor Devine who says that "the idea of charity becomes in time obnoxious and an anomaly." This school wants to be strictly "scientific" and undenominational. But as Miss Fletcher rightly says: "The mental attitude defined upon paper as "undenominational" has no existence in the human mind; the nearest approach to it is indifference. Below all sustained enthusiasms lie strong convictions."

Now our attitude in this matter is based upon the fact that the "social question" is not only economic, but also moral and religious. We can define our position in no better way than by quoting from "The Pope and the People, Select Letters and Addresses on Social Questions by Pope Leo XIII." (Catholic Truth Society, London, 1915.):

"It is the opinion of some . . . that 'the social question,' as they call it, is merely 'economic.' The precise opposite is the truth, that it is first of all moral and religious, and for that reason its solution is to be expected mainly from the moral law and the pronouncements of religion. For suppose the productiveness of capital doubled, the hours of labour shortened, food cheap; yet if the wage-earner listens to teaching—as he commonly does, and acts upon it—which tends to destroy reverence for the Deity and to corrupt morals, his labour, too, necessarily deteriorates and his earnings fail. . . . That is the reason why we have never encouraged Catholics to form associations for the assistance of the poor, or introduce other schemes of the kind, without at the same time warning them that such things must not be attempted without the sanction of religion, without its inclusion and aid. . . . By the law of mutual charity, which, as it were, completes the law of justice, we are bidden not only to give to all their due and interfere with the rights of none, but also to do kindnesses one to another not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth, remembering what Christ most lovingly said to His disciples: A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."

It stands to reason, moreover, that many questions pertaining to social legislation and to the carrying out in detail of plans of practical social amelioration border on religion. We can not remain "neutral" when religious questions are dragged into politics and into the discussions in our legislatures. We must always contend, for instance, for the right of the parent to educate the child, we will always look upon marriage as a Sacrament, and resolutely oppose divorce, with its horrid implication of "free love," we will always reject "economic materialism," which is, unfortunately, the basis of much social legislation and of many social reforms today.

Such then is the Lay Apostolate to which our Catholic men are earnestly called today. As the opportunities for service are so many let us hope that they will listen to the call. We may repeat the statement made at the beginning of this series: New times, new duties. The way of the Catholic layman to well-being, to promoting charity and harmony in his community, to doing, to promoting charity and harmony in his community, spreading the Kingdom of God among the nations, aye, perhaps, the way to his own peace and welfare, lies along the path pointed out by our three great Pontiffs of these changing times—the Catholic Lay Apostolate.

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Der Landonkel.

Onkel Hiram von Dayton besucht seinen verheirateten Neffen in New York. Nach Tisch gibt es Kaffee, und Onkel Hiram langt mit den Fingern in die Zuckerdose. Der Neffe reicht ihm die Zuckerdose und sagt: „Hier, Onkel, nimm den Zucker mit der Zange heraus.“

„Aber wozu denn,“ meinte der naive Onkel, „er ist doch gar nicht heiß.“

Geistesgegenwart.

Bei Geheimrats ist Diner. Der Diener hat das Malheur, den Truthahn fallen zu lassen. „Bitte, Madam!“ sagt er zur Gastgeberin, indem er den Truthahn aufhebt und sich damit entfernt, „werde gleich den anderen hereinbringen!“

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