

WHAT IS CHARITY?

How is it exemplified in the Church—Bishop Ireland's Address at the Conference of Charities in St. Paul, Minn.

Continued from Last Week.
ALWAYS READY FOR WORK.

Through history, in the world to day, whenever a work of charity it to be performed as evil, moral or physical, to be encountered, a battalion of devoted persons, men or women as the case may warrant, springs up: if one already suited to meet the emergency is not in existence, but pledged in the name of charity, strength and life—thoroughly disciplined, inspired by the highest motives with an eye single to the purpose in view. I speak for the religious order in the Church. You have read of them at home in story and legend; you have espied their members moving through the streets of our cities with odd dress and manner demure. I will tell you the secret springs that control and maintain their organization. Their members have spoken before the altar three vows, binding for life, of virginity, poverty and obedience. The vows fit them and the confine them to their vocation. They are freed from all family ties and obligations; they are freed from all care of worldly things from all desire of worldly advancement, from all prompting of selfish interest. Their time, their love is undivided—all going into service of God and the neighbor. Poor themselves by choice they love those who are poor from necessity, and the latter love them, knowing well what sacrifices have been made by them. Belonging by birth and association to all classes in society, often to the highest, they are the intermediaries between rich and poor, drawing from one to relieve the other, and bringing all into mutual contact and love, fusing all hearts by the warmth of their own into one brotherhood. Obedience, which is, however, limited by the terms of the rule of each community, and which never, as the world sometimes supposes, the surrender of conscience—gives unity of direction to the energies of all, putting each one in the right place, obtaining movement at the right time, with the order, precision and certainty of the best drilled armies. Each religious order is an entity of itself, having its own rule and government. all are subjected beyond their own immediate superiors, to the chief governor of the Church; and under him with certain well defined limitations to the heads of the dioceses. The three vows are common to all orders. Special details in the rules, special training of the members secures adaptability for the special work assigned to each one, whereas the holy and daring courage of those soldiers of charity. For courage is needed to leave homes and land, to close the soul to visions of earthly happiness which come unbidden before the fancy of youth, courage is needed to bind ourselves to the perpetual disinterested service of beings whom the world deems repulsive, and rejects from its presence. The courage comes from faith. Gold could not purchase it; glory could not inspire it.

I know our religious orders; their cloisters are familiar to me; I see their work daily; I receive often in the name of the Church the vows of strong men, of timid maidens, and you may believe me, but one motive holds them to their work—the love of their Savior. I do not ignore or despise social, economical or humanitarian grounds upon which charity may be made to rest; but when I desire in its name great sacrifices, I place the human heart upon the wings of faith, sending it upward even to the throne of the Immaculate Lamb, and it returns to me burning with His love, strong with His strength, and then all things are possible to it. May we never permit the divorce of charity from Christian faith. Man is by himself a sorry object, and if we behold in the poor and the rich and the prisoner but man alone, we will not love him. We will not serve him. Charity is to day widespread because Christian faith permeates our civilization, forms our thoughts and directs our feelings. There are those who profess to set aside religion. They cannot divest themselves of its power, and they breathe, despite themselves, its invigorating atmosphere. There was a time when there was no charity. There was a time when whatever Roman soldiers might do toward subjugating nations whatever the power of Caesars to build palaces the surprise in their magnificence of succeeding generations, however eloquently Roman orators and philosophers spoke, a conference of charities would have been an impossibility. It was a time when fashionable philosophy declared pity for the unfortunate a weakness, a vice, and the maimed and the aged were by imperial edict consigned alive to the watery graves. It was the time of paganism, before the love of Christ and come to save the children of men. The religious sentiment, intensified by the breathings of the Church, produces our Catholic religious orders. I do not know the names of all. It would require a long time to repeat them if I did know them. Suffice it to say, there does not exist an ill for the relief of which an order has not been created. Some time ago, when African corsairs led many Christians into slavery, the Order of Trinitarians arose, whose work was the redemption of captives, the monk being obliged by his vow, if no other means of liberation were at hand, to take upon himself the chains of the captive and emancipate his fellow man through his own slavery.

On the summit of the Alps, where the air is so rarified that a few years exhaust a life, the monk of St Bernard has pitched his tent to save the unfortunate wayfarer from the death dealing avalanches. The Brother of St. John of God, the Brother of St. Alexius tend in the hospital the sick of their own sex. The Sister of Charity, the Sister of St. Joseph take under their charge hospitals and

orphanages, The Sister of the Good Shepherd consecrates her own pure heart in love for the unfortunate outcast of society. The Little Sister of the Poor gathers around her the aged and poor and feeds them tenderly with the fruits of her begging, her rule not permitting her to eat until the children, as the old people are lovingly called, have had their fill, and then if nothing remains she fasts until Providence comes to the rescue. The Sister of Bonsecours nurse the sick poor in their own cottages; the Little Sister of the working people looks after children and women employed in factories and encourages them to habits of piety and thrift. But enough for mere names. We claim peculiar advantages for the system of Catholic charities. It secures in the service of charity what is most valuable and most difficult to be obtained—the sweetness and tenderness of love. It is not bread and medicine that is most prized by the indigent and the sick. It is the smile, the soft caress, the kind hopeful word. The heart rather than the mouth must be warmed. All this is done without effort, and done with exquisite delicacy when the heart of the laborer is in the work. The Catholic Brother and Sister are inspired by love; they could not endure the religious life unless the heart were all on fire with love; love steams from the heart all ignites all hearts coming with, in the circle of its influence. We have read in military annals how the dying soldier fancied a mother or a sister to be standing over him as the daughter of St. Vincent bade him to confide in the Saviour of Calvary, and poured refreshing drops upon his parched lips. The Little Sister of the Poor lifts her finger, and a hundred querulous and quarrelsome old men a hundred old women will be silent and respectful, while they would be untamed before a regiment of policemen. The mere rustling of the gown of a Good Shepherd nun distills fragrance of heavenly purity amid a crowd of poor creatures from whose souls the chilling blasts of horrid sin had seemed to drive all vestige of the divine image. And why should not these things be so? Love is ever the conqueror. I read a few days ago that at the late annual exhibition of pictures in the Palais de l'Industrie at Paris, one picture by M. Cabanel attracted universal attention, and crowds of spectators remained still as fixed to the ground before it. It was the portrait of the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor. The costume was austere, unbecoming, but the face—it was, said the critic, "an inspired work of art, one might say of faith, for seldom has the beauty of divine love and humility and self-sacrifice been more vividly and delicately expressed than in this portrait of the humble woman who from heroic charity conceived the idea of helping the poorest of the poor by begging for them day by day the crumbs from the rich man's table." The picture but faintly represents the living beauty of love and faith which daily walks and works amidst our hospitals, asylums and refuges. There is economy, too, in our system. The Sister receives for herself food and clothing; her vow refuses her all other temporal advantage. She feels for the poor, and for their sake she has learned to misuse nothing, to waste nothing. The rich give to her willingly; they recognize that she has no profit of her own in the gifts, and that the needy will be the sole beneficiaries. Special training and long experience brings skill. Nor is the lesson of experience confined to the lifetime of the individual; the whole order is as one being receiving knowledge from many countries, and storing up for the benefit of each member the treasures of experience accumulated through generations. And finally permanency is given to works. However active and intelligent the zeal of an individual drops out of the ranks, his place is quickly filled, there is no interruption in the task of mercy. I should add that beside the vow-bound orders of charity in the Catholic Church—these are her regular army—there are her volunteer associations of charity, composed of men or women, the married or the unmarried, who, without leaving the ordinary walks of life, band themselves into associations of various natures and give to them what time their occupations may allow. Chief among these is the that admirable Society of St. Vincent de Paul, branches of which exist wherever the Church herself is found, and whose mission it is to visit and relieve the poor in their homes. The Society of St. Vincent has received high ecclesiastical approval. I make mention of it in order to call attention to two very prominent features in its rules, which are main characteristics of all Catholic charities, although, perhaps, not so explicitly expressed in some. The one is that the end of all charities is to elevate the recipient and ultimately if at all possible, to save him from his helplessness. The accusation has been made that Catholic charity is reckless in its arbor and perpetuates poverty, by encouraging idleness and improvidence. No accusation could be more false, more groundless. The other feature is that charity demands from us personal service. We do not do our duty by paying a tax to the State or sending to a committee an annual subscription, leaving to the State or the committee to stand proxy for us and omitting to come ourselves in contact with the poor. Charity is a love for the victim of sorrow, and love demands personal attention. It is the mission of Christian charity to benefit both the giver and the receiver, and indeed the one that is the more benefited is the giver, whose nature is softened, refined by the exercise of the virtue in whose heart pride and egotism are cut short by the sight of suffering and misery among his fellowmen. It is the personal charity, let it be said, that will prevent the estrangement of classes in society, and will save us from the total social disruption with which we are threatened in

these times. The Catholic Church has not yet had the time nor the opportunity to build up as fully as she would have desired her charities in America. Still she has not been idle. There is no city without her institutions, no village without an efficient representative of her charity. She will do more in the future. For freedom of expansion is allowed her by our generous laws and the noble spirit of our people. She will watch carefully over her own works at the same time she will bless all other agencies of true charity. The field is broad. There is room for many workers. The consideration of the labors of others will fire our emulato to do as well as they, and the spirit of love for a neighbor which inspires us all will lead us to one another most sincerely and to rejoice in all the good that is done, as our Heavenly Father above rejoices in it.

AN ASTONISHED IRISHMAN.

Hon. Bernard C. Molloy, from Kink's county, an Irish member of the House of Commons, was introduced to President Cleveland at the White House in Washington one day last week. He approached the mansion very timidly, seeming to think there was something wanting at the outer gate, hesitated before passing the front door of the mansion, had to be urged before passing any further, and finally when his escort, who is more familiar with American manners, led him up the carpeted stairway to [the President's] own apartments on the second floor, without asking questions or being asked any. Mr. Molloy started in astonishment and asked in an undertone. "Are there no guards on duty?"

That the President's residence should be open to all comers without hindrance was something of which he had never dreamed. He was more astonished still when the President stood up against the desk and talked without any ceremony whatever. He watched the afternoon reception in the east room, when the President, at 1.30, met all who desired to meet him, and shook hands with the white and colored without distinction, and came away from the White House, as he himself declared, "with an entirely new sense of the reality of American freedom."

IT DOES MATTER.

We overheard a conversation the other day in which the old delusion came out as fresh as ever: "After all, it does not matter what a man believes if he only does right." We passed on our way wondering if the speaker would be willing to apply his principles to anything except religion. Does it make no difference in a man's business operations whether he believes in honesty or dishonesty? Does a man worthy of suffrage believe one way and vote another? And shall it be said that it makes no difference in a man's character and destiny whether he believes in virtue, goodness and righteousness? Does it have no bearing on a man's daily life to believe he shall reap what he sows? Is there no inspiration to do right in a firm belief in a holy, just and merciful God? It is time that the old fallacy which denies this should be rooted out. Thinking, feeling and acting are connected in our being. "As a man thinks in his heart; so is he."

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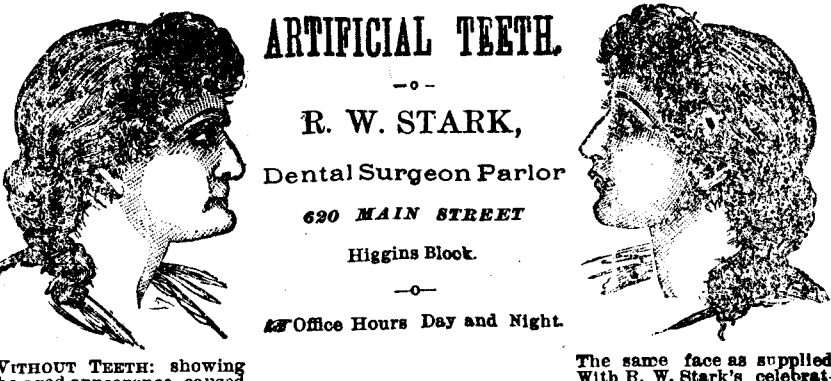
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