A College For Negro Catechists.

Progress and Needs of Catholic Missionary Efforts among Southern Negros.

St. Joseph's Society for Negro Missions now numbers twenty-one priests, who labor in seven States; Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Louisana, Maryland, Mississippi, and Virginia. They have a seminary, apostolic college, churches, schools, industrial institutes, and orphanages. At present St. Joseph's Seminary has thirty-one divinity students on its roll, and its feeder, the Epiphany Apostolic College, over sixty students. The former sent out seven priests during the scholastic year 1898-'99, and the latter in June, 1899, advanced fifteen graduates to the seminary. With the spread of missions a new departure has become necessary for the missioner, arising from the need of helpers who will live in the various missions and take, as far as possible, the place of the missionaries while absent. In a word, Catechists, officially and publicly appointed, are now in demand. To understand this let us recall the:

RELIGIOUS STATUS OF THE NEGRO.

Of this people 144,536 are given as Catholics in the official report for 1898 of the venerable Commission in charge of the Negro and Indian Fund. This is a very small percentage indeed of eight million American blacks. On the other hand, the various Protestant sects in their official reports claim less than four millions. "Of the eight millions in this country a very large proportion belong to Christian churches; one million six hundred thousand are reported to be members of Baptist churches, about the same number are enrolled in the Methodist churches, and besides these there are Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and others."—Negros in America, by Thomas J. Morgan, D.D.

Hence, four millions may be looked upon as beyond the pale of any religious denomination. Furthermore, in the South, negro Catholics, like white Catholics, are bunched, if we may use the term.

Maryland, Diocese of Baltimore, has 37,000 negro Catholics.

Louisiana, Diocese of New Orleans and Natchitoches, has 83,000 negro Catholics.

Kentucky, diocese of Louisville, has 6,000 Negro Catholics.

Alabama, diocese of Mobile, has 3,425 negro Catholics.

In these four States are 129,425 negro Catholics.

In other words, Louisiana has more than one-half the negro Catholics in the United States, and Maryland more than one-fourth, both together six-sevenths of them. That is to say, of every seven negro Catholics in this country four live in Louisiana and two in Maryland. Thus there are left a trifle over 12,000 Catholic negroes in the other Southern States, and 3,000 in the Bahama Islands, Diocese of New York, which belong to Great Britain.

Again, it is noteworthy that the States in which negroes are most numerous are the very ones having the fewest Catholics of that race; as, for example;—

Viginia, Diocese of Richmond, has 650,000 negroes, of whom 1,200 are Catholics.

South Carolina, Diocese of Charleston, has 650,000 negroes, of whom 800 are Catholics.

Georgia, Diocese of Savannah, has 900,000 negroes, of whom 1,300 are Catholics.

To reach these millions, as yet alien even to the sight or voice of a priest, is the work appointed to St. Joseph's Society for Colored Missions. It is of the true nature of the apostolic vocation to make use of the people themselves for whom the vocation is divinely granted. As the farmer needs the earth, the astronomer the heavens, the sailor the sea, so does the missionary demand the people, the Josephite the negro. But quite unlike the earth or sky or waves are the negroes. For men are they, able to co-operate, not alone by their presence and submissiveness, but also by their action in personally working with the missioners, as well as in their influence over their fellows.

NEED OF NEGRO WORKERS.

No wonder, then, that the common experience of the missionaries of St. Joseph's Society proves that to win and convert the negroes an indispensable means are the blacks themselves. Appeals, therefore, have come to St. Joseph's Seminary from different fields of labor, urging that negroes should be trained for the work both as priests and catechists. Now, from their foundation, St. Joseph's Seminary and its feeder, the Epiphany Apostolic College, have had as students negro boys as well as whites in preparation for the apostolic priesthood to labor among the blacks. At present there are three negroes in the seminary, and four more in the college. The colored boys, very few in number, are at once introduced among a disproportionate number of whites. Some of them rise to the occasion and equal and even outrank the whites; v.g., two of four negro seminarians won the A. M., at St. Mary's Seminary, of whom one carried off prizes in both years of philosophy, gaining eight out of ten all round in his studies.

The College for Catechists now under review will tend to increase the number of priestly vocations among negro youths, although primarily intended to establish a system of negro catechists. Moreover, by its means the bulk of the negro youths will be trained apart. In this matter we have before us the example of the Protestant sects, which, although throwing open their universities and colleges to the negro race, have however, almost all their negro students in separate institutes.

THE TRAINING OF NEGROES.

It is, in part, to keep alive the faith among our Catholic negroes, scattered up and down, here and there, like the few grapes left on the vines after the vintage. It is, however, chiefly to meet and offset the influence among negroes generally of the Protestant negro clergy over their church members and people generally should not be pooh-poohed or set down as trivial. The priests in the negro missions have too often felt its strength. And we were not surprised to receive urgent appeals from our missionaries in five different dioceses urging that this long thought-of college for negro catechists be started. True, in nearly every mission and station the missionary finds some one—an old "uncle," or "mammy"— who acts as catechist, baptizes the dying children, visits the sick, argues for his or her religion, announces the visit of the priest, and gets things to rights for his coming. But such help is precarious, without the proper fibre and, especially without official standing. Catholic catechists should be put in a position which would make them in the eyes of their black countrymen as important officially as the Protestant negro ministers.

In the efforts about to be made for training catechists, the following tentative plan will be followed till experience and time enable us to develop and improve it;—

1.—Negro candidates for the catechetical school will live under the watchful eye and care of the various missioners, who after trying them for some time will send the selected ones to the school itself.

2—At this college for catechists the course of studies will include;—

a—Course in English, mathematics, kindred branches, Christian doctrine, and Latin, about three years.

b—Course of philosophy in last year of preceding course.

c—Three years' course of theology and Sacred Scripture. In the former the Catechism of the Council of Trent, and in the latter the Douai and Rheims Testaments, especially the four Gospels, will be used as text-books, the professors by their explanations making them text-books for the catechist's use in his future career among the negroes.

3.—Throughout the whole course manual labor for about two hours daily will be a feature. All work about the house and premises shall be done by the students.

4.—When graduating those fitted will be received as catechists by an appropriate ceremony, and then sent to the various missions for work, getting in return a fair salary.

5.—Those of the catechists on the mission who persevere will be advanced step by step to the priesthood, while they who marry may remain as catechists. Mission schools will also be taught by these catechists.

St. Joseph's College for Negro Catechists will require a farm of a few hundred acres of land, from which should be raised most of the support needed. The buildings, large enough for a hundred inmates, should be simple and plain, so that the catechists on returning to their homes would not fancy it a disgrace to associate with their old companions. Again, the college must not create wants in the catechists ill-suited to the tobacco, rice, and sugar plantations upon which their fellows live. When visiting Booker Washington's institute at Tuskegee, Ala., we were struck with the plainness of the buildings, the meagreness of the food, and the simple appearance of the scholars. No doubt poverty plays some part in this, but at bottom the real reason seems to be not to wean the scholars from their native surroundings, for we must remember that Booker Washington receives from his white Protestant countrymen about one hundred thousand dollars yearly.

Unless fortified by negro catechists and negro priests, we shall always be at a disadvantage in dealing with the negro millions beyond the pale of the Holy Church. The negro looks with suspicion upon white men. The impression left from slavery; the many dishonest tricks upon them; unpaid wages; "store pay;" bad titles to

COL. TWENTY.

land; unjust mortgages upon their crops; prisoners' stockades—these and countless other wrongs make the negroes suspicious of the whites. During two-and-twenty years we have been in the closest relations with the black race, have had their confidence in countless ways, are now steadily consulted by them in their little troubles, financial and otherwise; yet we are not afraid to say that there is no white man living who has a negro's full confidence. We are told by those who know nothing of this poor people that they do not trust their own, that they prefer white priests. How that can be said in the face of the millions belonging to Protestant churches, every mother's son of whom, from the bishop to the latest baptized infant, is black, goes beyond our comprehension. Chiefly is this true of negro priests. How can anyone say the negroes do not want their own priests, since the experiment has never been tried, for we have had but two, one of whom is dead? And to our knowledge, at every big marriage or funeral among the Catholic colored people of Baltimore, they want the colored priest. From all parts of the country they are ever inviting him. Human nature is human nature in a black man as well as it is in a white man.

In conclusion, the Third Council of Baltimore speaks with no uncertain sound of negro catechists; "Finally, we must not pass over in silence that the establishment of catechists of both sexes would not be more difficult among us than in heathen countries, if missionaries would diligently attend to it. The aid of such co-workers should be made much of. For they will prepare the way for the scared ministers by gathering together the negroes in the neighborhoods of churches and by teaching them catechism and religious hymns, so that the hard labor of the priest will produce richer results."—Tit. viii. 240.

The twentieth century looms up before us. Leo. XIII., our illustrious Pontiff, has blessed the opening age in proclaiming a universal jubilee, and called upon the whole world to consecrate itself anew to God and Him whom he sent, Jesus Christ.

The various sects, too, look forward to the era before us; the Methodists of the British Isles are reported as about to raise a million pounds sterling for their Foreign Missions.

Let St. Joseph's College for Negro Catechists be the offering of our white Catholics to the cause of Christ and His Church in this land of ours.

Surely the negro race may hail the twentieth century in a happier, better state than the progeny of Ham have ever known in the annals of mankind. What they lack is the true Faith of Mary's Divine Son.

The nineteenth century brought them emancipation, right of ownership, education, citizenship. Let the twentieth century crown all by imparting to them the truths of our Holy Religion, in which glorious task, with God's blessed held, no small part shall be played by St. Joseph's College for Negro Catechists.

A site of 200 acres of land at Montgomery, Alabama, has been chosen for the new training school. The price asked is $8,000, which will be raised by subscription. All communications should be addressed to Rev. Thos. B. Donovan, St. Joseph's Catechetical College, Montgomery, Ala.

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CONVERTS' LEAGUE.

First Meeting of the New American Organization

At the Catholic Club last week a new church organization, the Catholic Converts' League, held its first public meeting in New York, with Dr. Benjamin F. De Costa, formerly a minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church presiding, and Archbishop Corrigan at his right hand. Prior to the formal meeting, those in attendance had an opportunity to meet the Archbishop in the club parlors. The organization, as is indicated in its name, is one of converts to the Church, and is designed to be of national extent, including all converts as active members if they will join it and born Catholics as associates in the membership.

According to the design, local chapters will be organized in various places. The object of the league is the propagation of the faith. As explained by the speakers last evening, it is to do work for which converts are especially adapted in the way of taking by the hand persons who in great numbers, it is said, are waiting to come into the Church, but who hesitate for the lask of just such counsel and sympathetic help as those who, having been through the fire themselves, are able to give them. It is also to aid in a pecuniary way converts who, in consequence of losses incident to their change of faith, are in straits; and by reason of its ability to do this the league, it is held, will be in a better position to prosecute its work of bringing into the fold those whom prudential reasons compel to hesitate. Some such organization exists in Great Britain, and the Archbishop told of such a fund over there, of the usefulness of which Cardinal Vaughan had spoken to him.

Besides the Archbishop and Dr. De Costa there were on the platform the Rev. Father Deshon, rector of the Church of St. Paul the Apostle; Rev. Talbot Smith and G. Stanton Floyd-Jones. Father Deshon is the spiritual director of the league, organization of which had been perfected privately before the last meeting. The constitution, which had been gone over and approved privately, was read and adopted by vote.

INTERESTING ADDRESS.

Dr. De Costa in opening the meeting said;—"Any new movement is liable to be misunderstood by some. I will tell you a few things that the league does not propose to do or be. It does not propose to rival any existing societies in the Catholic Church. We do not not propose to form a sect or a party. Every person in the Catholic Church is invited to become a member.

"We must love all our old friends more than we did before, for we have learned the infinite value of a human soul; we have learned the value of humanity; we have no doubt about the Atonement."

Archbishop Corrigan said in substance;—

"I am glad that Dr. De Costa has made these remarks, because it tends to disarm opposition, for we can't close our eyes to the fact that there are differences of opinion. Some think that converts would better just keep on as quiet workers in the Church. But the Lord seems to require some of this sacrifice in return for the gift of eternal life. This, I think, is one of the chief objects of your league, to extend sympathy to those who want to enter the Church.

The Archbishop spoke of the fund for use in extending aid to converts in England, and said that Cardinal Vaughan had told him of instances of suffering and heroism on the part of those who had come over to the Church—largely from the Church of England. The funds over there, the Archbishop said, was not so much to give to converts requiring help as to make loans to them temporarily. As the money was in this way used over and over, no very large amount was necessary.

"We ought to do as much as possible to disarm prejudice," said the Archbishop, referring again to the difficulties of those who severed associations to join the Church; "it isn't well to reopen wounds. And we ought to avoid giving offence to those who are not with us. The Catholic Church is not a fashionable Church; that is one of the difficulties in the way of some who would like to come over. It is proper not to increase the difficulties; it is better to diminish them if we can."

The Archbishop extended his felicitations to the league, remarking that, although it was known that the Church was always receiving converts, it was gratifying to find the evidence of it.

Fathers Deshon, Smith and Hughes also spoke, as did President Sullivan, of the Catholic Club. The motto of the Converts' League is "Lead, Kindly Light."

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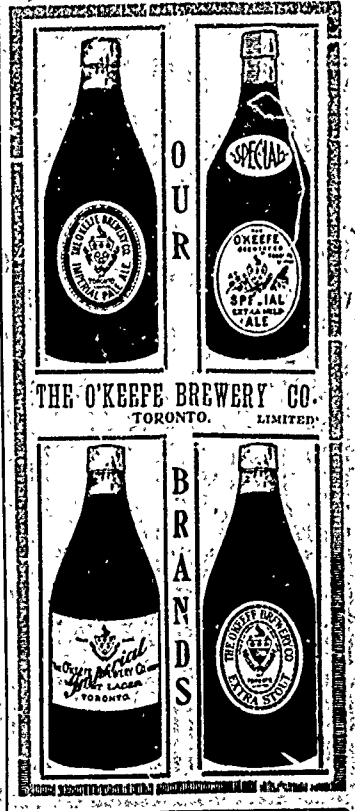

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