

CATHOLIC SOCIAL LIFE.

Some Pertinent Remarks About the True Vocation.

(From the Catholic Mirror.)

Ruskin and Emerson and Carlyle and all those modern philosophers who spent their lives in demanding more of mankind than they would give themselves, and other transcendentalists asked for it, insist that vocation is a real thing. They all preach it. They all insist that the spirit of good work is vocation. "Teach a young man to do what he can do best, teach him to follow his bent intelligently, and you will have done your best for him," they say, in substance; "each human creature has his vocation."

At the same time, none of these men recognized the meaning of the word "vocation" as the Catholic, as St. Ignatius Loyola, as Father Faber recognized it. With the Catholic, vocation is not merely a natural gift, it is supernatural. Carlyle would have men work for the sake of work, no matter what it is. Ruskin approves of work so far as it helps to produce the beautiful, and Emerson, because it keeps a man from idleness. With all of them work has not the sanctity which it derives when it is directed to the greater glory of the God of the Christians, and, consequently, Carlyle's shrieks, and Ruskin's appeals, and Emerson's self-conscious rhapsodies have only a temporary effect of stimulus.

Now, we Catholics of the laity, while we understand the inadequacy of the merely natural point of view, do not give enough practical importance to the practical application of vocation in its true sense. There would be more happiness in life, fewer instances of hopelessly ruined careers and greater peace for our children if we did not neglect to give vocation its true place. Spiritually speaking, the loss of a vocation is a curse. In French the words "*cure manque*" mean a great deal, and in English "spoiled priest" has an ominous signification. Most of us would say that we believe that the most exalted position one of our sons could attain would be that of a good priest. But how few of us take the trouble to find out whether a young man has an such vocation or to help him to find out.

Similarly, there are many girls who miss fulfilling their religious vocations because fond parents (I use fond in its good, old Shakespearean meaning of foolish) throw all sorts of obstacles in the way. Why does the fond parent think it a shocking thing for a young girl to enter a convent, while in spite of the light sprinkle of tears from parental eyes on the wedding day, a marriage, which separates her more effectually from her father and mother than cloistered walls, is looked on with satisfaction? Why? The old proverb about a married daughter being a daughter all her life is nonsense. She, if she is loyal to her husband, must give him the most of her interest; her life is his. She must take many risks. Often the parents know very little of the man she has married. "She has been brought up so carefully; it is too horrible to think of her accepting poverty in a convent." Is there no poverty in married life? Are fortunes and human lives so stable? And, besides, voluntary poverty is a light yoke compared with involuntary poverty. A girl wants to enter a convent! how sad, how awful! What have these amiable and self-sacrificing parents done to deserve a girl so heartless? "She might wait till her parents are dead, at any rate." But if it were a question of marriage, even to a man that drinks too much and who needs reforming, what would you say? Wait until her parents are dead? Not at all. It would be cruel to suggest such a thing.

The truth is, we have become materialized—"bestialized," Dante calls

it—by the influences about. We are hypocritical, too. In our hearts we recognize only one aim for our sons—to make money, and for our daughters—to marry. We pretend to be more spiritual than the non-Catholics about us, but we are not until we find ourselves facing death. There we have the advantage of being able to grasp the real spiritualities, even, as it were, with our human souls. But, as a rule, we are not more spiritual than other people. We have more faith, it is true, but it only becomes practical in the most supreme crises. The making of money and the making of marriages are the only vocations we acknowledge. We give much attention to the making of money; the marriages make themselves.

For instance, we shudder at the idea of a young woman's entering the Order of the Carmelites. It is medieval, darksome, narrow, Spanish, out of date, useless, not *fin de siècle*, un-American; therefore it has no reason to exist. We forget that St. Teresa, its founder, was the broadest-minded woman of her time. She was of the same nationality of that Queen Isabella, whom all America is claiming now, and a much cleverer woman. St. Teresa, who has, like St. Francis de Assisi, come into a favor with us since cultivated Protestants, like George Eliot, professed a cult for her, believed in prayer, honestly and with her whole heart. We, in comparison with her fervor and that of St. Francis and Columbus and Isabella, vaguely believe in it. If prayer is *real*, the Carmelites are the first of all orders, as the spirit is above the letter and faith above works without faith. As the Church is a real community of people and not an abstraction to be recalled languidly every Sunday to our minds, so the vocation of the priest, of the nun, of the Sister, of the Brother is the highest of all vocations, and we ought to act in our families and to our relatives as if we considered it so.

There are "mute, inglorious Milton's" who are eating their hearts out, but far more wretched than the artist or the poet who has found no power of expression are those women and men who have lost their way, who have hesitated through undue regard for opposition, or who have accepted the verdict of the world that vocations to the religious life are delusions.

Every man and woman has a vocation of some sort. It is well that Carlyle and Emerson and Ruskin have taught that; it has made life easier for the artist and the poet, whom British Protestantism was driving, with the Carmelites, into the Middle Ages. It is one of the first duties of every man to find it; and the first duty of every parent, after he has begun to give his child a Christian education, is to treat a marked vocation as a sacred thing.

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The Roman Anti slavery Committee has had a solemn service celebrated for the repose of the soul of Cardinal Lavigne. Mgr. Volpin, of the White Fathers, chanted the Mass, and Cardinal Parocchi gave the absolution, assisted by the pupils of the French Seminary. There was naturally an immense concourse of French notabilities, ecclesiastical and lay. Cardinal Vaughan was conspicuous among those present.

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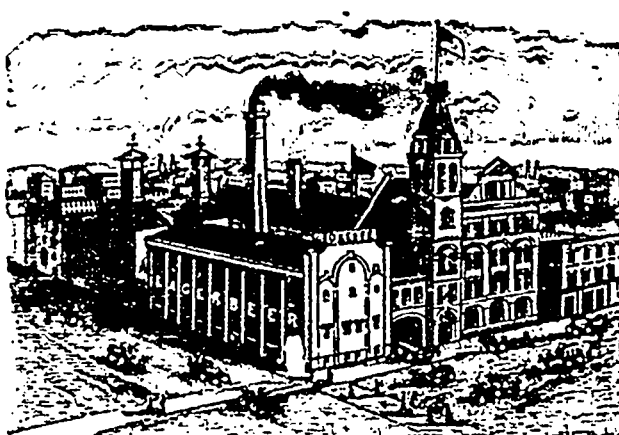
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