

THE DECAY OF MODERN SOCIETY

BY
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OUR great Pontiff Leo XIII., with his marvellous lucidity of mind, and his vast knowledge of men, lately in his Apostolic Letter of the 19th of March, 1902, enumerated most graphically the many and most frightful evils afflicting our times, pointing out the only true remedies. Modern society, whether we consider it in this land, or in any other civilized, or so-called, Christian country, has all the appearance of a "moribundus," or dying person, whose body, though partly alive, is already in a state of perulent decomposition and verging on the hour when, as the poet says:

Decay's effacing fingers
Shall sweep the lines where beauty
lingers,

leaving nothing but repulsiveness and utter deformity behind. On the one hand, we see civilized nations flourishing in the advantages of science, mechanics, speculation, and commerce. On the other hand, we cannot fail to notice their religious, social, and moral decadence—the new Paganism. All of us are familiar with the wonderful scientific discoveries of our day—the ingenious machines and appliances continually succeeding each other in variety and utility, and the perfection to which commerce has attained, forming a stupendous radius of communication, a very network around the Planet, surpassing in ingenuity the dreams we have cherished of fairyland and romance. Truly, Shakespeare's "girdle" is around the globe in a few seconds! Apparently all this ingenuity of device—all this luxury of adaptation—is designed, in a generous spirit, for the comfort and welfare of peoples and individuals, to make man's life a new Paradise. But is the ultimate result commensurate with the avowed aim?

FEVERED LIVES, PEACE DESTROYED, SUDDEN DEATHS.

—these are some of the modern issues. For the votaries of such progress there is little peace, although they have secured the utmost plenty. For has not the specious promise been marred and frustrated by other selfish and insidious agencies? Are not our boasted civilization and progress proving a failure in certain grave and serious directions? Are not the very causes secretly and openly at work which brought about the ruin of Tyre, of Sidon, of Babylon, of Rome, and Athens? For example, during the ascendancy of the powerful Roman Empire, that conquered the world by its arms and governed it by its inflexible laws, and, under its forerunner, the great Greek and more classical empire, what did we find? Was not the worm, the devourer of nations, already at the core, spite of specious appearances of refinement, and, beneath the gauds of fashion, proclaiming its devastating presence in the hectic cheek of beauty and the bloated face of sensuality? As it is to-day so it was then, weakness went to the wall; pride and power maintained a base supremacy, and great was its irretrievable fall. History attests this. Nations, the most arrogant and conceited, and seemingly the securest, are to-day becoming restless, suspicious, and discontented, dissatisfied with themselves and their jealous neighbors flying where none pursue, and vindictive where none offend. The ancient "comity of nations" exists no longer.

It is the age of unrest, of instability, of disintegration, of decomposition—fratricide. The Decalogue and the Beatitudes count for nothing in diplomacy. Degradation, soulless materialism, heathenism, epicureanism are on the increase and are so pervading and permeating more than ever—modern society.

Though their old statues are reaped and demolished, and their gorgeous rites interrupted, we still worship in effect the forbidden gods of a pagan day. For are we not idolaters, in essence, of Bacchus, of Plutus, of Pan, Mercury, and Venus?

Let us examine a little more closely the nature of some of the evils that beset us to test the full truth of this severe pronouncement. Vice is so common that it passes as lawful for its being so common. Scandalous luxury prevails amongst the members of the upper and educated classes. Vast wealth is thereby wasted to the detriment of charitable causes and deserving institutions. Self and selfishness are the modern deities of the "noble" and ignoble alike. Valuable land is persistently kept out of cultivation by the owners for the purposes of sport and pleasure; for fox and deer hunting, rabbits, grouse, pheasants, etc. Thousands of acres are thus rendered barren and unproductive, and, if foreign ports are closed to us, famine may follow. Have we not to thank this abnormal state of things for the worst features, and the rapid spread of Socialism and Anarchy? Again, we have to witness numerous and scandalous cases of divorce, of separation, of desertion; as well as inhuman treatment of defenceless women and children, on the part of unfeeling men—savages, rather. The very lowest class of animals are a veritable reproach to such monsters. Dishonored women and illegitimate children are absolutely legion, beyond estimation. To this must be added the vast number of infanticides, including the many suffocated in bed by drunken parents, and many other crimes best unnamed, making devils ashamed. The terrific number of suicides of persons of both sexes, and of all classes, sometimes for the most frivolous reasons, is truly startling. In this odious list are to be found children confessing themselves to be tired of life, too miserable to live longer. Last year Germany alone furnished the aggregate of over 6,000 to the awful list of homicides. In some English towns the average is from 6 to 10 cases weekly, sometimes through poverty, sometimes through drink, sometimes through both. Intemperance, often caused by misery and miserable surroundings, whilst it increases misery, with all its evil consequences and tendency to lunacy is everywhere on the increase, necessitating an enlargement of asylums, workhouses, hospitals, and penitentiaries. Again, how many deaths take place annually from starvation, and are attributed to "failure of the heart's action," or other plausible causes? The thousands domiciled in the workhouses have their own sad tale to tell, besides the misery of the still greater number relieved in their own wretched dwellings, often unfit for the habitation of swine and dogs, and how little is done to secure them better conditions? England is fast becoming the premier land of tramps, who constitute a danger and a disgrace to the community, and form a difficult problem for the statesman and the philanthropist, being often as vicious as importunate and destitute. What a humiliation is found in the innumerable acts of dishonesty and breaches of trust committed by educated people, especially in the colossal crimes causing the ruin of thousands, in the loss of their savings for years! And how lightly the law deals with them! Then we have the enforced emigration of hundreds of thousands of every nation and of all ages in search of employment, often causing the loss of their faith and morality; the sweating system so mercilessly carried on by human wolves representing wealthy companies or individuals; also the enormous number of the unemployed, whose claims to existence are disputed, and who often find no refuge but in the tender mercies of that anti-Catholic institution—the Union workhouse, Queen Elizabeth's grand solatium to avert pestilence, famine and revolution from the land, and to protect the rich from pillage and slaughter in the hour of retaliation. The old friendly relations between master and man being abolished, continual and frequently destructive strikes and lock-outs are the order of the day. Perhaps more misery and injustice is the outcome of lock-outs than of strikes. At all events the women and children in the homes are in the main, the chief sufferers when the bread-winner is thus stricken. Here it may be observed that Catholic employers often fail to employ Catholic workmen in due proportion, causing endless wretchedness when the exercise of a little charity would obviate much misery, and advantage an employer in both worlds were he wise.

The ever-increasing war facilities of destruction; armaments being carried to the greatest pitch of perfec-

tion, precludes hope of an early millennium. The existence and rapid development of so many secret societies, as well as of Socialism, Nihilism, and Hooliganism—a new and infernal addition to the innumerable evils of our modern Babylon, with its wild savagery seem to indicate to the most careless that the fearful handwriting on the wall, or, that the pillars of the State, pulled down in fury by a new Sampson, cannot be long delayed. The existing churches are few in number in proportion to the Christian population, and even these are almost empty during the performance of Divine service. The fierce war against the very existence of voluntary schools is inspired by the same spirit of irreligion.

There is little respect for age, less for poverty; but when the two are combined in one person, alas! for the contempt exhibited. Looking at the Catholic Church, we see persecution of the secular clergy; banishment of the Religious Orders, secularization of ecclesiastical institutions; and the great "crux" of the Roman question more severely accentuated in the Cabinets of the world. Altogether, the twentieth century outlook is not encouraging, if the above alone are considered.

To this may be added, not only the depressing attitude of Apostates, but of Mormons, Spiritualists, and even of converted Mohammedans—all tending to lower the moral power of the world. Again, we are distracted and saddened by the incessant cry attending the birth of new, man-made religions, declaring "Lo here is Christ," and are pained to witness the simple led astray, if only for a time. All these and other contingent evils constitute the real troubles and afflictions of modern society, they are "spots in our banquets, clouds without water, for which the storm of darkness (we may fear) is reserved for ever. The daily press is repeatedly publishing new and startling revelations of the cupidity and turpitude of mankind, respecting the growth of the evils just mentioned.

Are civilized nations therefore doomed, and will they shortly crumble away like "the grass on the house-tops," or like those mighty kingdoms of antiquity, on whose vast possessions the sun never sets, leaving but inglorious ruins to mark their ancient magnitude and magnificence? Are future generations of other climes to wrest from us the fruits of our centuries of labor and civilization, and sweep away our claims to an Imperial sway on sea and land, the supremacy of ages, the product of millions of minds, and of tens of millions of workers, simply because we would not listen to another Moses, warning us to be wise and understand in time the dangers that threaten us? Shall our greatness "be dissolved, and like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind" to proclaim to the future inquirer how potent once was Britain? Even so, it is not our bounden duty to do what little we can to arrest the coming of the catastrophe by minimizing our present day evils, and showing ourselves on the Lord's side and that of angels and good and wise men? This will be to us a virtue and a merit, however we may labor in vain. It will count in the unseen statistics for "an eternal weight of glory" and recompense. Will the day come when strangers will visit the few ruins left of London, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, St. Petersburg, and the third Rome, as travellers now visit the Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, and Roman ruins? This will depend upon men's attitude towards the Catholic Church. Our Divine Lord came into this world for a twofold object—that of Redemption and that of healing the human race of its moral diseases. After His ascent into heaven and the descent of the Holy Ghost, the Church, instituted by Him, went forth to continue His divine mission, and has continued it without cessation to this present day, despite all opposition.

The annals of the Church and of her saints tell us of the multitude of social works accomplished all over the world, and in different ages, by her and her children—works of charity, of refinement, of progress. From the first dawn of her existence, faithful to her incomparable mission, and assisted by her Divine Founder, in accordance with His divine promise, the Church has fought successfully against the Neros and Caesars of

Rome; then against the Byzantine Emperors and the Emperors of the West; against the invasion of the Mohammedans, Moors, Goths, and Visi-Goths, and, at the present day, against our modern tyrants, and what for? For liberty for all the human race? In reference to the claims of science, the arts, and agriculture, the Church has done, and is still doing her work, by her universities, colleges, monasteries, and schools. Regarding charitable works see the thousands of institutions to meet the different needs of the sick and the poor. Her beneficent action among the nations would have been a hundred times more fruitful had it not been impeded by the jealousy and ambition of her enemies. In fact, where, on the contrary her action has been supported by the Governments—as during the middle ages—great deeds were wrought for the well-being of all; see, for example, the magnificent cathedrals built in those ages of faith; the innumerable guilds established for the protection of the workers everywhere, the universities for scholars, and the hospitals for the poor.

Modern nations can only be healed, therefore, as already asserted, by the Catholic Church, the embodiment and focus of Christianity; and they decline and perish in proportion to their apostasy and defection from her. They will rise and be exalted, should they return to the bosom of the Church of Christ, because she possesses His prerogatives to bless and to perfect. "They shall go from virtue to virtue; the God of gods shall be seen in Zion," and in the world. Without the help and guidance of the Church, all human laws and efforts are powerless to heal and reform society. For the Church was instituted by our Divine Redeemer for that object. Do we not see this with our own eyes? Have these human laws checked, or, at any rate suppressed, the progress of the evils we have spoken of? A priest of the Church, supported by the reigning government, would succeed better in representing vice than a whole division of police; so that the Holy Father, with his cardinals, bishops, and priests, would completely heal society of its moral wounds, if duly supported by the temporal authorities. Then would mankind find peace, prisons, asylums, and workhouses would no longer be overcrowded; progress in the different branches of art, of science, labor, commerce, etc., would experience no manner of hindrance. The Church, whilst unchangeable in her internal principles, because these are divine, has always accommodated herself to the needs, necessities, customs, and character of races, and to the spirit of the time and place, as far as possible, wherever her ministry has extended. The present century announced itself as the era of democracy and combination among the masses. The Church in her wisdom, and by Divine inspiration and guidance (for our Lord clearly promised to be with her till the end of time), is already following and co-operating with this modern movement. Hence our pre-eminent Superior, the Vicar of Christ, has marked out our path of conduct in his Encyclicals, comprising all the disputed points and completely covering the ground under consideration. In other words, he has directed us—the children of the Church to combine among ourselves. Have we obeyed His injunctions? Sections—the nuclei, it is hoped, of great societies—have been formed here and there, but the Pope's council remains, in the main, a dead letter in many places, and this for no good and valid reason, but through indolence, apathy, routine, groundless fear, inertia, and even through culpable ignorance of the importance of founding such clubs, sodalities, and associations, and to the detriment of the Church and her character and reputation for pressing the claims of the poor and struggling workers in all ages and countries. Sadder still, some of these inchoate and nascent sections have ceased to exist, or are on the point of disappearing, for want of suitable persons to manage them, or through the need of centres to infuse into them fresh life and vigor, and to give moral support to their infantine exertions, especially in difficult moments of dismay and depression. From all this it is evident that we Catholics in this land are behind several other portions of the Church in the matter of social combination. I will not say that we are less intelligent than others, but it seems all our talents are exclusively absorbed by religious controversies, with little result, or by uncharitable gossip, which sows the seed of disunion, discouragement, etc. It is time to awake—"Tempus est a somno surgere" (says St. Paul)—and to listen to the "mot d'ordre" of His Holiness. Let us therefore combine

all over the land to form a well-arranged army for our defence, and for common action in all good works affecting the Church and the community at large.

The Holy Father has distinctly declared that the priests at the present day and hour must come out of their sacristies for social work or the masses will perish. In a double sense they are to be their "brother's keepers." And, I may add, that the laity, too, must come out of their arm-chairs and join their priests in the noble work of the salvation of the masses and of society. To remain indifferent in presence of the many evils afflicting the human race is, assuredly, outrageous, inhuman, un-Christian—the reverse of charitable. And, remember, our greatest commandment in the quality of Christians, is, after the love of God, that of our neighbor. Our Divine Master, with His own sacred lips, has told us this truth, and we cannot gainsay it except at our peril. What a terrible account have those selfish individuals to render to Him; the Christians who hide their selfishness and apathy under the pretext of having other duties to perform, and thus refrain from giving their assistance to their priests and brethren. I wish such delinquents would affix a printed copy in a prominent position on the walls of their houses or offices of our Lord's discourse on the Mount and make it the subject of their daily meditation and examination of conscience.

How many young ladies and gentlemen, after leaving their schools and colleges, live selfish and aimless lives in our midst? A good many of them attend the religious services regularly, and subscribe occasionally some pecuniary assistance to the Church, and towards the cause of various good works, but they will not personally lift a finger, or stir a foot, to assist the priests of their respective missions, either through indolence, pride, or some gross misconception of the ideal of true Catholicity.

What an amount of good those useless persons deprive the Church and their brethren of? It is time that, in our colleges and schools a special course of sociology were taught as a preparatory training for our children in the duties of our modern social life, instead of squandering the time in teaching useless accomplishments, adapted but for "shining" in society. We do not object to "polish" in itself, so that we secure "with the flash of the gem its solidity, too," and a zeal that will induce them to unite with veterans and elders in good works, when they begin their career in the world. They should be taught the nature of the principal social questions, and how to deal with them as they arise. They should be impressed, especially, with the importance of taking due part in these same social questions, and of devoting their talents, energies, and a portion of their wealth to these purposes. The work of the conversion of England will be carried out not so much by controversy as by taking part in social questions—the problems of the age. Our Catholic young ladies at school must understand that, once in the world, they will encounter thousands of their sex awaiting their religious, moral, and social assistance, and that, should they neglect their mission in this respect, they are undoubtedly disgracing the Catholic Church, so glorious for her eminent good works, and that their education will prove a melancholy failure in these our critical times.

Summing up all that has been said, I do not hesitate to affirm that, if we wish to save society from total ruin, if we wish to contribute our share of social work to the missionary programme of the Church in this country—following her initiative in other lands—and would close the mouths of the Church's enemies, denouncing her as a degrading, enslaving, and priestly institution; if we desire to check, at least to some extent, the progress of the numerous evils which are the scourge of modern society—e.g., the need of protection for numberless persons oppressed by the petty tyrants of the day. If we recognize the necessity of waging war upon the abuses and vices so prevalent around; if we desire to keep the glorious traditions of the Church displayed in her good works, and hand down the same to posterity for edification and imitation; if we really mean to see, as an accomplished fact, the greatly-desired con-

version of England, and to stop the justly-lamented "leakage," we must boldly come out into the grand arena of the world and stand about our priests, bishops, and the Holy Father—the ministry of our Lord—and work zealously, fight courageously, suffer patiently with them and beside them.

A TYRONE

CENTENARIAN

DEAD.

ON the 7th inst. the remains of Mary Martin, a native of Sultin, County Tyrone, were laid to rest in the graveyard at Carrickmore. Father Donnelly, who officiated at her funeral, in the course of his remarks, said:—"Mrs. Mary Martin was by far the oldest woman in this parish. She was born in 1787, putting up the grand total of 115 years. 'Tis given to few, even in Carrickmore, where the people are so long-lived, to live so long a life; to fewer is given the full and perfect use of all their senses as the deceased possessed down till her last breath. 'Twere incorrect, in a sense, to call you who have borne her corpse here to-day strangers, but most of you are so many generations after her that you and she may be truly said to have lived in ages far between. All her early companions are long since dead, most of them about 40 years ago, when the oldest of you here present were being only born. Mrs. Martin's ancestors, like all our ancestors, were robbed of richer lands long ago and banished to the bare mountains of Tyrone, but God, who blessed the mountains as well as the plains, makes all things even in this life or in the next, so that even here we need not wonder if good health, long life, and a strong faith be the privileged heritage of the descendants of a wronged ancestry. 'The deceased was not only the oldest, but also one of the most pious women of the parish. That portion of her life which we know and her death were delightful to tell of. Nothing but God in her heart and God on her lips, she died in peace, as she lived in peace, after a life which we may well envy." Mrs. Martin was purely Irish-Irish in blood, without mixture of Dane or Briton. Although living long enough to learn and know "Feurla," she never tried to master it, but spoke always her own tongue, in which she was an adept. Let us to-day lay this remarkable woman alongside the other quiet people who have gone before her. They and she will be facing toward the east, where the sun rises, where the Son of Justice shone for the Redemption of mankind, where all who will then be living as well as all who will be dead will see Him come; but He will be seen everywhere, "For as lightning cometh out of the east and appeareth even into the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

FOUR

HUNDRED

PRIESTS

AT

A

FUNERAL.

AN unusual tribute of respect was paid to the memory of Rev. Martin Carroll, the Brooklyn priest who died from the effects of an injury received in a railroad accident, at his funeral on Monday. More than four hundred priests were present, and no less than fifteen thousand people crowded about the church. He was one of the best beloved of Brooklyn pastors. Bishop McDonnell officiated at the Requiem and Rev. E. W. McCarty, classmate of the deceased at Niagara University, delivered the eulogy. Father Carroll had been ordained thirty-seven years.

From

It was that portion where the long blue-green broken by rich, gentle before they join the and dreary mountains was early June. Nature right royally reign;—thick clover in lush grass on the slo leadiness in the woods. Through this world turnpike threads its way; in the opposite of a wide stream. Near and river meet, stands its walls grey and w its roof moss-covered. On this June mornin sitting on the granary feet was a pile of yellow sunlight, which fell small window, lay up and, as she looked on half-closed eyelids, it a little the gold of w thinking.

Down the road move covered wagon, drawn horse. Some tin pans gilled in the front of caught the piteous s threw back a flood of f. On one of the hills w sheep. Along the summ rail fence, was a path, row of young walnut their grateful shadows. a boy, playing a flute. on the back of his he face thus left exposed, in outline, coloring and The eyes, a shade betw brown, were set in wh its clearness; but far b physical beauty was the looked out from the people feared that Mar would never amount to world,—for as far back inhabitants of Glen Mar member the Andrews we less race—yet they love in their hearts lived the he would make something opportunities. These were He had fortunately (so it, while the young h the love it had missed) ther, be sure that paren time to mismanage a want of the family estat ther had followed the h in a year, and boy and placed under the care of ried maternal aunt, who ability was acknowledged now be well-off when manhood. His wealth h crease by a wise marria dustrious application of That those talents would into politics they secretly war always the ambition ple of the Glen to have ably represented in pub The boy's musical inclin concerted and displeased his aunt, acting on the would have deprived him he quietly but firmly res with it. Being a wise w did not attempt to enfor thority, for that first res ter a deeper insight into ter. Though its wool m ant, she saw the warp w would do what he wished life, and the good wom that he might choose right. When within sou ears, Mark played human off in the fields, with on: beasts for his audie strains, which had first selves in his soul would the reed-like instrument. played now while the ped on crept over the white r the mill where the girl a kind fairy godmother w the corn into gold. As moved across his line of music lost its meditati unrest that lives in all a to breathe itself upon the in this expressed longin other, wider sphere of ex something high, heroic. he took the flute from h lips, and, as his eyes lo wagon, he said, half-alou "Some day I will go a here to do good in the y.

The girl, sitting on the floor, had little in commo boy playing his flute on. While not lacking beauty, no lofty, spiritualizing fo to refine her face; instead unmistakable indications heart, restless, discontented, dominated. Like him an orphan and the descen family long associated w rural district; but there th chance ceased. The Lan