

where for foolish superstition and mawkish sentimentality?"

One of the hitherto silent readers contributed his mite as he turned his page:

"In our discussion of educational problems at the congress, we might have taken up this unhealthy Virgin-worship among the factors which delude and weaken the masses."

The lawyer considered. Should he drop the subject, or should he speak out of his convictions?

"The assertion that reverencing the Blessed Virgin has no warrant from the Scriptures or the early Church, must be modified, Doctor. There may be different opinions as to the significance and importance of the often surprising prototypes of the Blessed Virgin in the Old Testament, which found a place even in the oldest form of liturgy. But whatever may be true of these, our warrant for reverencing the Mother of our Lord is richly present in the New Testament. I happen to have learned that the Catholic theologians find this warrant especially in the praises of Mary which were uttered by the Archangel, in the greeting which Elizabeth addressed to her, in the mercifully answered appeal of the Mother of Jesus to Her Son at the wedding in Cana, and in certain other approving mentions of her in the Gospels."

"Such subjective exegesis may meet subjective needs, but can prove nothing."

"I am glad, Doctor, that you at least admit a subjective need for reverencing the Mother of God. Until the beginning of the Reformation, as you know, no one had doubted that this subjective need had an objective foundation as well, that is, that it belonged with the essentials of the Christian religion. It is from the Reformation that you must date the individualistic or really subjective interpretation of the Scriptures, which, as you yourself remarked very justly, can prove nothing."

As his antagonist, a little taken aback by this turning of his own argument against him, did not answer at once, the lawyer went on:

"I am even convinced that a thinking man who lays aside prejudice and studies the history of the Blessed Virgin in connection with the Bible, will decide that devotion to her, so firmly entrenched among the common people, has come down through the centuries from generation to generation as an undying echo of that hymn which Luke puts into the mouth of the Mother of our Lord. At a world-famous place of pilgrimage, where I heard this wonderful Magnificat chanted by an assembly of thousands of people, the thought came to me convincingly that Mary's prophecy concerning herself in that hymn of gratitude was being literally fulfilled before me."

One after another the newspaper readers had begun to listen to the eloquent attorney.

But he of the gray head was not so easily convinced.

"You may have had that impression at that moment. But anyone who sees how contrary to all reason the manifestations of this cult are, can no longer be accessible to such arguments based, as they are, on feeling rather than on reason."

"You almost discourage me with your insistence on reason, Doctor. In religion, as elsewhere, there are axioms, which are too fundamental to be capable of proof, or to need proof."

"And it is one of these axioms which justifies in your mind the adoration of the Virgin?"

"Certainly not. But I believe that the nearer any person has stood to the person of Jesus Christ, the closer touch that person must have had with the work of Jesus, the work of Redemption. You will perhaps agree with this belief of mine when you think of the apostles."

"Granted, for the sake of argument. What is your conclusion?"

"That the Mother of Jesus, who bore and reared the Saviour, who freely consented to His redemptive labors, and His redemptive death, earned in a special degree the gratitude and love of all the redeemed."

"We instinctively reverence all mothers who have brought into the world, and reared to manhood great and good men," agreed the fat doctor.

The lawyer developed his argument.

"And this case is clearer than all others. Mary gave us Christ and with Him a new, spiritual life, and has won thereby a spiritual right over us, which we may properly term a mother-right."

The old man seemed bewildered. "Of course," he said, "it is natural that I have never thought over these matters of deep theology. But I have never been able to see why you Catholics attach so much importance to the idle repetition of the Ave Maria fifty times over."

"Idle repetition is useless. You are right, Doctor. But many people find in the repeated recitation of the same prayer a profound psychological aid—the simple child-likeness of the religious spirit. But Catholics find the most significant phase of devotion to the Mother of God, in something which we have not yet mentioned."

"I think I know what you are going to say. The Catholics—I was christened a Protestant, but I am not an active church worker—try to secure with the help of Mary all sorts of favors and miraculous aid

from God. Why do you not pray to God directly?"

"Nobody forbids us to do so. But nobody can forbid us either to resort to advocates to reach Him. And if you are still willing to admit what you agreed to a moment ago—that physical and moral proximity to Christ ensured a preeminently important part in the work of redemption—then Mary's mediatory activity for the Holy Church and her members is only the natural consequence of what she did as an earthly Mother for the person of the Saviour in His earthly life. But in what you said a little while ago you did not touch everything, or even the thing of most importance."

"What is this thing of most importance?"

"Are you a practicing physician, Doctor?"

"Director and professor in an institution for psychotherapy."

"Ah, I am glad to know that. You will be the first, then, to admit among the motives of moral conduct, along with sensory and nerve impressions, the psychic factors, moral imperatives, ideals, by whatever name you scientists may call them."

"Naturally."

"In the person of the Virgin Mary the Catholic Church places before her children a loving, gentle, peerlessly attractive ideal, an ideal of faithful fulfillment of duty in the family circle, an ideal of perfect purity and of unequalled, holy mother-love. Trusting dependence on the Virgin Mother is not weakening, but through the centuries has encouraged, strengthened, comforted, lifted and inspired countless weak souls, has worked moral miracles, which I am impelled to rank higher than miracles of physical healing."

The fat man could no longer conceal his satisfaction.

"You are right, perfectly right, my dear sir. Our women, especially our mothers, can have no better model held up before them than the noble image of the Virgin Mary. The moral laxity which is spreading so terribly in our civilization is doing immeasurable harm among the women, as it is among the men too, for that matter."

The director of the therapeutic institute, too, seemed pleased.

"Your theological training, dear sir—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the conductor. Hefer intentionally or by accident—drew his pilgrim's badge out of his pocket along with his ticket, and said carelessly to the conductor:

"I missed the pilgrim extra, but I shall board it again at the frontier."

"You would like to know what my business is, Doctor? I am an attorney, and my name is Hefer. I live in Vienna, but I have just made the pilgrimage to Lourdes."

"Ah!" An exclamation went round the circle. "Then you no doubt saw many miracles done at Lourdes?"

"I am sorry to say I didn't, gentlemen. But I experienced a sort of miracle in my own person."

"Tell us about it."

"Not so long ago I had much the same idea about the cult of the Virgin which you gentlemen seem to have. But while I was in Lourdes I heard a very searching sermon on the subject—which explains my knowledge of theology, Professor—and I came to think differently. Then, after a gap of twenty-five years, I went to confession again."

"My wife says the Mother of God at Lourdes worked two wonderful miracles on me."

THE ASCENSION

The Feast of the Ascension brings to a close the glorious cycle of festivals that cluster around the life of Our Divine Lord upon earth. His birth, life, death and glorious resurrection have all been fittingly commemorated in the feasts of the Church. And now on next Thursday we are called upon to celebrate the final triumph, the glorious ending of the earthly sojourn of the Word Made Flesh. He tore open the solid rock. He rose from the tomb, and now He ascends on high.

The wonders that fill the last forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension have been vividly and touchingly described in the closing chapter of The Passion of Our Lord, translated by His Eminence Cardinal O'Connell. These glowing words that close this remarkable volume make an inspiring meditation for the Feast of the Ascension.

For forty days He lived with His dear Apostles, walking with them through the fields of Galilee, confirming their faith and giving them explicit directions concerning the constitution and foundation of that great Church, which should be His Kingdom on earth until the end of time. Once more He sat with them at table and spoke to them the words of life. He took their hands in His, and allowed them to touch His Sacred Wounds so that never again should doubt enter their souls. Again and again in the Cenacle He sat among them and unfolded the wonderful revelations which would constitute forever the glory of all those who had believed in Him. Oh, what a wonderful forty days spent at the feet of Christ learning the lessons, which poured from the lips of the Son of God.

"Finally the end of those wonderful forty days had come. Once again He goes out of the Cenacle,

following the same route which He had taken on the night of His Passion; down into the valley by the brook Cedron, stopping for a moment to look across at Gethsemane, not now in the sorrow of the evening of His Passion, but in the glorious retrospect of all that the Passion had accomplished. He crosses the brook, enters through the gate and climbs the side of the hill of Olivet. Joyfully they mount the sacred hill and soon reach its summit, whence once again they look out upon the panorama which surrounds them, recalling for a moment all the scenes of the labors and the sufferings of their Master. They kneel down upon the ground, from eyes lifted to the face of Christ. They hear for the last time the sacred lessons which He had reserved for them until that moment, and then stretching out His hands above their bowed heads, He blessed them all. One final word of leave taking, and while they look, behold His glorified form is lifted into the air; it rises above them, shining with the glory of the sun; it rises and still rises until finally, enfolded in a brilliant cloud, He is lost to their view. And there they still kneel, their heads lifted towards Heaven, their eyes straining towards the great cloud into which He had disappeared. Then lifting up their voices, they chanted the hymn of "Glory to God in the Highest." Immoveable they remained, looking still up into the great empyrean in the midst of which He had disappeared.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, their Lord and Master, had ascended into Heaven. But now the Apostles realized that His Kingdom would have no end, that His Church, the Kingdom of Truth which He had founded upon Peter and the other Apostles, would endure forever; that they would carry His Gospel to the ends of the earth, from sea to sea, over mountains and rivers and plains; that His Church would suffer even as He had suffered, but that it would ever be refreshed for new combats and fortified by prayer for new triumphs; that it would ever and ever be assaulted but never overcome and when time should be no more, that His Church, like its Divine Founder, would be crowned with His victory and partake of His eternal triumph in the Kingdom of God in Heaven."—The Pilot.

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FACTS VS. FALLACIES

Some there are who never seem to take any interest in things good and holy which do not directly concern them, and as a natural consequence, when, by chance or otherwise, circumstances arise which bring them face-to-face with such things, a lack of appreciation, and often a want of clear understanding of the matter in question is conspicuous. An example of this is, undoubtedly, the attitude of secular people, especially parents, toward the subject of Religious Vocations.

It is a fallacy to harbour the idea that such a subject has nothing whatever to do with ninety-per-cent of Catholics. The fact on the contrary, is that very few Catholics are not called upon, directly or indirectly, at some time or another, to have a practical concern in the matter. Youths setting out on a career in life . . . parents considering the future of their children . . . do not these form a class which is as comprehensive as to be the sum-total of the children of our Holy Church?

Firstly, we shall treat of vocations to the Priesthood. The poet Wordsworth wrote the words:

"A mother is a mother still
The holiest thing on earth."

Doubtless, the words are true, as far as human vocations are concerned, for of all human offices in this world none can compare with that of motherhood. There is, nevertheless, something greater, something which is, like Jesus Christ Himself, both divine and human, namely, the Catholic Priesthood. There is no dignity on earth like that of a Catholic Priest. "Higher task than that of priest-hood," wrote Carlyle "was allotted to no man." And the great Napoleon once exclaimed "I can rule the bodies of men, but the kingship of a

priest is over souls; what dignity can equal this?"

What is it that makes a man, raised up and chosen by God to be His Ambassador, the guardian and protector of His Flock, receiving a dignity and a power which even he himself cannot fully realize? It is the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Have you ever seen an Ordination ceremony? If not you have missed one of the most wonderful events on earth. For there one sees a young man kneeling before the successor of the Apostles, having his hands anointed with the words: "Vouchsafe O Lord, to consecrate and sanctify these hands, that whatsoever they bless may be blessed and whatsoever they consecrate may be consecrated." Then, while that young man touches the chalice, the bishop says to him "Receive the power of offering sacrifice to God, and of celebrating Mass, both for the living and the dead."

There is still something more. As the ceremony draws to a close the Bishop has one more power to confer, which he does saying: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins thou shalt forgive they are forgiven and whose sins thou shalt retain they are retained."

The ceremony is over and the youth is "a priest forever"—Christ's ambassador amongst men. Morning after morning he will bring his Saviour down upon the altar. He will hold the Sacred Host in his hands and break the Bread of Life to hungering souls. He will pour the waters of Baptism on the head of the little babe. He will spend many hours in the Tribunal of Penance, raising his hand to bless the innocent and absolve the penitent. He will join many a young couple in the bonds of Matrimony. He will anoint and comfort many a dying Catholic, and prepare them for the last great journey to Eternity.

Is there any dignity, is there any power, is there any ministry like that of our Priesthood?

It is but natural that many a father and mother will have many an anxious hour thinking of their children's future. "Many a time and oft" they will ponder over the secrets which the coming years hold for their little ones. Perhaps they will cherish day-dreams of their filling honorable positions in the world. But when the thought comes "what if God should call my son to be a priest, or my daughter to be a nun," what is the feeling aroused in the parental breast? If such a query arouses a dread, it is either because such a thing is deemed almost impossible, or because it is considered a kind of calamity. If the latter be the cause, then, beware! Parents! do you intend to prevent your little ones from being the means of salvation to many an erring soul for whom Jesus died? Prevent the response to God's call, and yours is the unenviable lot of wrecking the life of the child whom you are bound to train in the loving service of God!

But perhaps the cause of the parents' dread is that they think that a vocation is a privilege almost impossible. A vocation does not mean an apparition of God or His Angels. No, a Decree of the Holy See has declared that:

(a) A vocation to the priesthood does not necessarily include any interior inclination of the person, or prompting of the Holy Spirit.

(b) All that is required is "a right intention and such firmness of nature and grace, as evidenced in integrity of life, sufficiency of learning, and well-founded hope of stability."

Given these conditions, a true vocation is unquestionably conferred by the Bishop at the moment of Ordination.

What has been said with regard to Vocation to the Priesthood is equally true regarding that to the Religious Life, the third condition being, of course, changed from "Ordination" to "Profession."

As regards Vocation to the Religious Life, of course the world looks at the question cynically and laughs. It is the solid rock. He rose from the tomb, and now He ascends on high. "An easy career." But Catholicism knows otherwise. A religious whether monk or nun, is in the very forefront of life's battle. The history of the Catholic Church abounds with heroic examples of lives spent in the service of the poor, the education of the young, the consoling of the penitent and the orphan—and these are the works of Religions.

A word of warning. Canon Sheehan has entitled one of his illustrious novels "The Spoiled Priest." There is an old fallacy—unfortunately still evident—that one who has tried to become a priest, religious, or nun, and failed is to be regarded as a failure. Away with such a calumny! Is it not better and more heroic to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all?

May the foregoing remarks help, in some small way at least, towards a greater appreciation and understanding on the subject of vocations. And who knows but that the reading of them may be the means, under Heaven, of calling someone to work for God, either in the Sacred Ministry of the Priesthood, the peaceful, active army of some Religious Order, or the work of mercy, sacrifice and love—the work of the consecrated virgins of Jesus Christ?—The Cross.

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