

FEBRUARY 12, 1910

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN

LACORDAIRE TO YOUNG MEN

Lent is now at hand, and I owe it to my affection for you to give you some words of explanation about the season set aside for penance. You yourself asked me to do so, so that I am only obeying you.

Penance, as you are aware, is one of the chief virtues of the Christian. It consists of meekness of heart, which sees the enormity of our faults and our natural corruption, and of bodily mortification, which both humbles the mind and curbs the bad passions which spring from the flesh.

If the Christian always practised penance really and bravely, he would be a saint. But the Christian is weak; he lives in the midst of the world, he leads like others a soft and easy life, if not a full life. This is why the Church in Lent, or rather received from apostolic tradition, a special time for penance. It is the period which precedes the time when we hope to see our Saviour again, and resurrection of our Saviour.

It consists of forty days, whence the name "Quadragesima." On Ash Wednesday the faithful repair to the church and kneel before the priest, who makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads with ashes, saying: "Remember man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return." Fasting is a penance laid upon the faithful for the whole of Lent with the exception of Sunday. Fasting, in the strictest sense of the term, means taking but one meal a day, after midday, and that of nothing very substantial—only of vegetables and fish. This penance, which is nothing out of the way, which the philosophers of old used to recommend to their disciples, is very useful, because it weakens the body, curbs our intemperate nature, and makes us much fitter for prayer and meditation. By food man partakes of the lowest creature—the flesh and blood of beasts; by fasting he rises above bodily wants, and yields to them only in what is absolutely necessary.

Go to confession at the beginning of Lent as a preparation for it, and again shortly before Easter, in order to fit you for Communion the following day. At confession do not consider the man, but consider the God who is before you. He is the God who saved you from sin, and who will save you from sin again. Do not be afraid to confess your sins, for God is merciful and forgiving. He will forgive you all your sins, if only you are truly sorry for them, and if you have a firm purpose of amendment. Do not be afraid to confess your sins, for God is merciful and forgiving. He will forgive you all your sins, if only you are truly sorry for them, and if you have a firm purpose of amendment.

Just think how incapable you are of great things, and don't despise little things. SELF-RELIANCE CALLS OUT INITIATIVE Many of our great business men never got a glimpse of their real power until some great panic or misfortune swept their property away and knocked the crutches out from under them. They then discovered their ability until everything they thought would help them to succeed had been taken away from them; until they had been stripped of everything without their being able to do anything. Our greatest power, our highest possibility lies so deep in our natures, that it often takes a tremendous emergency, a powerful stimulus, to develop them. It is only when we feel that all bridges behind us are burned, all retreat cut off, and that we have no other side aid to lean upon, that we are able to do our best. As long as we get outside help we never know our own resources. How many young men owe their success to some great misfortune, which cut off a complete dependence on a relative, the loss of business or home, or some other great calamity, which threw them on their own resources and compelled them to fight for themselves!

Responsibility is a great power developer. Where there is responsibility there is growth. People who are never thrust into responsible positions never develop their real strength. This is one reason why it is so rare to find very strong men among those who have spent their lives in subordinate positions. In the service of others, they go through life comparative weakness because their powers have never been tested or developed by having great responsibility thrust upon them. This thinking has been done for them. They have simply carried out somebody else's programme. They have never learned to stand alone, to think for themselves, to act independently, to plan for themselves, they have never developed the best thing in themselves, their power of originality, inventiveness, initiative, independence, self-reliance, their possible grit and stamina. The power to create, to make combinations, to meet emergencies, the power which comes from continuous marshaling of one's forces to meet difficult situations, to adjust means to ends, that stamina or power which makes one equal to the great crises in the life of a nation, is only developed by years of practical training under great responsibility.

PUT RESPONSIBILITY ON YOUR EMPLOYEES There is nothing more misleading than the philosophy that if there is anything in a youth it will come out. It may come out, and it may not. It depends largely upon circumstances, upon the presence or absence of an ambition-arousing, a grit-awakening environment. The greatest ability is not always accompanied by the greatest confidence or the greatest ambition.

There is, at this moment, enough power latent in the clerks or ordinary employees in almost any of our business houses to manage them as well or better than they are managed to-day, if the opportunity and necessary emergency came to call out this dynamo force. But how can our clerks who remain behind counters, measuring cloth, selling shoes or hosiery, year in and year out, ever know what latent power for organization or executive ability, what in-

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initiative they possess? It is true that some of the more ambitious and courageous get out and start for themselves, but it does not follow that they are always better than those who remain behind. Sometimes the greatest ability is accompanied by great modesty and even timidity. Then, again, employees contented with their position are often deterred from taking the risk of launching out for themselves because of possible disaster to those depending upon them for daily bread. But trust great responsibility upon a man, drive him to cooperation, and the demand will bring out what there is in him. It will call out his initiative, his ingenuity, his resources, his self-reliance, his power to adjust means to ends. If there are any elements of leadership in him, responsibility will call them out. It will test his power to do things.

I have in mind a young man who devoted such amazing ability within six months from the date of a very important promotion, that he surprised everybody who knew him. Even his best friends did not believe it was in him. But the great responsibilities, the desperate situation thrust upon him brought out his reserve power, and he very quickly showed of what stuff he was made. This promotion, and a little stock in the concern, which was given him, aroused his ambition and called out a mighty power which before he did not dream that he possessed.

Tens of thousands of young men today are just waiting for a chance to show themselves, waiting for an opportunity to try their wings, and when the opportunity comes, the responsibility comes, they will be equal to anything that confronts them.—O. S. M., in Success.

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

A FAITHFUL VALENTINE

Little maiden, dost thou pine For a faithful Valentine? Go and ask, my little child, Ask the Mother undelivered; Ask, for she will draw thee near, And will whisper in thine ear: "Valentine! I know the name, Many martyrs bear the same; And they stand in glittering ring 'Round their warrior God and King, And beneath the eternal sky, And the Beatific Sun, In Jerusalem above, Valentine is every one; Choose from out that company Whom to serve and whom to love."

ST. VALENTINE, FEBRUARY 14 An old time custom in yogue among friends and acquaintances of sending kindly greetings to one another on the 14th of February, owes its origin to several zealous priests in the early centuries of the Church. It was introduced to supplant a heathenish and superstitious practice of drawing names in a hat. On the 14th of February, one of several names was drawn, and the person named was to be the recipient of a letter of love. The feast of St. Valentine, a priest and martyr, which falls on the 14th of February, was celebrated on the 14th of February, about the year 270. A church near Ponte Mole is said to have been erected in his honor by Pope Gelasius II. The name of the saint, St. Valentine, was derived from the name of the Roman Emperor, Valentinian, who was a persecutor of Christians. The feast of St. Valentine is celebrated in many parts of the world, and is a time when young men and women exchange letters of love and affection.

For a long time the good priest sat thinking. Then he raised his head and murmured, "It is true we are growing hard and selfish. It is time, high time, indeed, something be done to raise the hearts of our young men, the empty ideas which the world affords." The following Sunday Father Valentine, inspired by the little voice, spoke to his people with force and earnestness, and brought many to a sense of shame and duty. All loved and revered the good saint, and when he spoke to them of the beauty of friendship of love and good-will, many hearts were touched and grew less hard and cold. Nor did Father Valentine's work end there. Until the day of his death he continued to labor for the establishment of a "Peace on earth, good-will to men," and in his memory Christian friends send to each other messages of love and affection on his birthday.

From the moment when Father Valentine began his sermon, the crystal pendants in the Stalactite Cave grew dimmer, but many of the hardening roses began to relax and to grow sweeter. And after all it was but an inspiration of that Unseen Power which worketh all good, sent by a messenger under the veil of a fairy, M. Zuleime Garrett in The Parish Monthly.

CONSCIENCE

Some time ago Francis B. Levesey of Clarkson, Maryland, sent us an article in which he had labored to find ground in which all Christians might unite. His purpose was most praiseworthy, for such a ground there must be, though we do not think he has found it. He says: "Any thing that has the approval of the world's leading thinkers, in the present, and from St. Paul to Socrates in the past, should be unhesitatingly accepted as the basis of a tolerant and all-sufficient religion for the present century." The first thought that arises against this theory is that we must admit that there is a vast number of good, honest people who follow their consciences, even among pagans, and are yet in error as to the truths of religion. From this it follows that conscience is not a guide to the discovery of the truths of religion.

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And such a guide is necessary to man, and even to his conscience itself, for conscience cannot act, cannot determine the right or wrong of anything without reference to truths or principles which religion supplies. It therefore depends on religion for its ability to exercise its function. It cannot act without data on which to base its judgments, and it cannot supply these data to the faculties of man, unless he is therefore logically prior to conscience, as the teacher is prior to the pupil.

Another and very serious objection to Mr. Levesey's theory is the fact that the great and little men whom he quotes do not agree in what his functions consist. He quotes Cardinal Gibbons as saying: "What is the greatest need of our times? Is it churches? They are necessary and most useful in the alleviation of the sick. But none of these is the most important necessity of the age. It is the need of a religion which will carry out the dictates of conscience in social, political and religious life. The times need men who will follow their consciences rather than expediency, principles rather than popularity." The man who follows his conscience has but one master—God—and he will enjoy the liberty and glory of the kingdom of God.

All this is very true but it does not tell us what conscience is. It assumes that the reader knows what it is. But before Mr. Levesey can make a religion of it he and the new religionists must know what it is. He next quotes Count Leo Tolstoy: "Let each one fulfill, without ostentation or adulterated argument, that which each day his conscience commands him and he will recognize the truth of the gospel." The demand of conscience is what, in the language of Christianity, are called the will of God.

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Robert G. Ingersoll says that "more conscience" is one of the six great needs of the times. Ingersoll taught that men's ideas and thoughts are the result of the food they eat, and digestion. He did not tell us what kind of food we should eat to produce "more conscience," nor does he enable us to know a conscience when we see it. So we are still in the dark.

The late Theodore Parker of Boston said: "A man's power of conscience is the measure of his moral communion with the infinite." Why did he not say something tangible, something that would afford us some information about conscience? George Washington said: "Labor to keep alive in your hearts that little spark of celestial fire called conscience."

The General knew more about ammunition and military tactics than about theology, but he was a conscientious man, an all-round man, an honest man; but he used the poetical privilege when he spoke of conscience. If it were a question of how to take a battery we would have a high regard for his opinion. But he was not defining conscience. In referring to it he assumed that it was known. "Alexander Pope says: 'What conscience dictates to be done, Or warns us not to do.'"

THE WHITE PLAGUE

Other Poems. Thaddeus A. Brown. William Briggs & Co. TORONTO. PRICE \$1.00

That, teach me more than how to shun This, more than heaven-born. Pope—by the way he was a Catholic—is right in what he says, he put sound theology into good poetry, but he leaves us in the dark as to what conscience is. In fact they all seem to know what it does, but none what it is. Mr. Levesey quotes Socrates and St. Paul, but neither tells us what conscience is. He also quotes Shakespeare, but he was writing poetry.

Conscience is an act of the individual mind, a practical judgment by which reason, basing its judgment on known principles, approves or condemns the act of the individual as to do, as right or wrong for him to do. Now religion cannot be based solely on any one or on all the faculties of man. It is a relation between the Creator and his creature man, a relation determined and promulgated by the Creator, and which man should know, and regulate his actions here in harmony with it. He should accept it gladly as given, and not spend his time foolishly in attempting to improve on it.

True, man is an inventive genius and he may invent an aeroplane, an automobile, a type writer, a sewing machine, a patent razor or a galliotine, but he cannot invent or construct a religion that will improve on the Divine Economy set things at rights, and naturally the burden of his complaint was laid at the door of the priest. He was telling what Father Gabriel ought to do, and man changes his mind as to what he would like the priest's shortcomings with the departed air of a man who was disappointed, and he bewailed his faults bitterly. While he bewailed them, Father Gabriel took too long to say Mass, his friend Mr. Grouch contended that he was rather too hurried to be dignified. Then the sermon was too long; and he could not see why the priest could not confine himself to the Gospel without darning his ears with that song of money. Mr. Grouch, on the contrary bewailed the priest's conduct, and he was actually allowing the parish to go to the dogs for a carpenter, a painter, or a plasterer.

The Chicago Post says: "It is through the conscience, which is friendly as well as hostile, that the only happy life is that of the man who is in the dark as to what conscience is." Rev. Ezra K. Bell, Lutheran of Baltimore, says: "The first promptings of conscience are nearly always the best, and it is only after getting into false practices of sophistry that they are otherwise." Still in the dark as to what conscience is.

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THE CRITIC AT CHURCH

We met him in the vestibule; he was not rather than that, even though his presence there was hardly ornamental, and contributed much to the sense of overcrowding and discomfort. He was holding forth with his friend, Mr. Grouch, a "liberal" Catholic, who had come to church to hear the music. He was evidently a born critic who felt it incumbent upon him to set things at rights, and naturally the burden of his complaint was laid at the door of the priest. He was telling what Father Gabriel ought to do, and man changes his mind as to what he would like the priest's shortcomings with the departed air of a man who was disappointed, and he bewailed his faults bitterly. While he bewailed them, Father Gabriel took too long to say Mass, his friend Mr. Grouch contended that he was rather too hurried to be dignified. Then the sermon was too long; and he could not see why the priest could not confine himself to the Gospel without darning his ears with that song of money. Mr. Grouch, on the contrary bewailed the priest's conduct, and he was actually allowing the parish to go to the dogs for a carpenter, a painter, or a plasterer.

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