

Catholic Lay Activities.

The Help Of The Laity Is Needed.

Written by the Rev. Albert Muntch, S. J., for the Press Bulletin Service of the Central Bureau of the C.V.

(Continued.)

What Can And Should The Catholic Layman Do?

Let us begin our answer to this question with a duty which is of special significance in this "age of democracy": the faithful discharge of which is nowhere more highly extolled than in our country. We mean the duty of exercising citizenship. Have our men ever realized the power that is theirs in the wise use of citizenship? To refrain from use of this right through apathy, sloth or unconcern is unworthy of the true citizen. The baneful results to Catholics in countries like France and Italy for their remissness in this duty should teach us a lesson. The "children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Just now when there is a loud cry all over the country for wise and honest rulers, when the need of thoughtful, upright leaders in city and state and nation is so keenly felt, the Catholic citizen can do excellent service by using the franchise for promoting good government and by electing worthy and enlightened public officials. Father Norris in the pamphlet already mentioned, "The Help of the Laity" (Catholic Truth Society, London) does not hesitate to give to "the wise exercise of citizenship" a foremost place among the duties confronting the Catholic layman today. "And I would suggest as worthy of every man's consideration the duty of exercising his citizenship.—We want more civic virtue amongst us, a better realization of civic energy, and a greater appreciation of our duties as members of the civic body. We want to bring it home to ourselves, first that we have a duty to vote, and secondly, the duty of voting wisely and well."

The careful discharge of our duty in this regard is all the more urgent today when many of the leaders in American life are accustomed to gauge a man's worth and the value of his contribution to civic and municipal progress precisely by his faithful use of the franchise.

Such epithets as pot-house politician and heeler will not be applied to our men if they rightly esteem their privilege of free suffrage. Some of our best social reform measures, though perhaps only of local benefit, were brought about by judicious use of the ballot. Jacob Riis, whom Mr. Roosevelt called "the most useful citizen in America," secured results only after cleansing out some of the flagrant political evils of his community.

Again, it will be of little use to inveigh against such outcroppings of bigotry as have manifested themselves of late years in different sections of the country unless we are prepared to combat them with a most effective weapon—the ballot. Our men must also be ready to give cogent reasons for opposing certain pet schemes that are just now being forced upon the legislatures of different states.

Matthew Arnold has coined an expression which has become a prized literary expression. The cultured man is "sweetly reasonable." He realizes that he has a duty of self-respect, that he is bound to cultivate his moral and spiritual character, that he should always be guided by a moral sense and that he must acknowledge responsibility to God, his country, his family and to conscience. We want Catholic laymen of this type, men who can stand foursquare against all the forces of moral and political corruption.

The Catholic man will make due allowance for differences of taste, custom and national character. Inspired by "the charity of Christ" he ought to be distinguished for the spirit of true large-mindedness and of genuine sympathy which can recognize good even in an enemy and in a foreigner. Just now we are in a transition period. Hate and mutual distrust have not yet entirely vanished. How regrettable that even the Catholic press should still use opprobrious terms begotten in the heat of war! Verily, the Catholic layman has a larger share in the work of social reconstruction than he imagined. Let him begin the work at home. Let him offer the hand of fellowship to his neighbor. Let him co-operate in every good work, disregarding parish boundaries and national prejudices. Referring to the propaganda of hate which was assiduously promoted during the war, Archbishop Glennon said:

"We were trained for war by continuous—what you call, propaganda work. The propaganda consisted of a development of stories circulated with a great deal of ingenuity, appealing to our emotions, appealing to our love of down-trodden humanity, appealing to our love of liberty, our standard of right, and the justice-loving character of our people. That was done with a great deal of vigor and success. It was based to a great extent upon lies. It will take fifty years to untell all the lies that have been told in the last four or five years. The Holy Name members, being men of truth, can do well to disprove lies and begin a reign of truth."

But not only the "Holy Name members," but all our people, who are inspired by the ideals of Christian sympathy and justice, can do something to promote the spirit of Christian service and toleration.

Many movements are on foot in various cities to do away with some of the more glaring social evils and municipal wrongs by means of special committees selected from commercial organizations, clubs, chambers of commerce, etc. Catholics ought to be represented on such committees. There is reason to believe that the way to future civic and municipal progress will be controlled to a great extent by such committees.

With the growth of the community spirit and the larger interest of cities in the problem of juvenile welfare, etc., new fields of social service have been opened. There are such positions as playground assistants, attendance and truant officers, library workers, visiting nurses, helpers in civic, social and school surveys, "Americanization" workers, etc. There is no reason why they should all be taken by those not of our faith. An efficient and zealous official in any one of these branches of social service can do a great deal of really helpful work and be an apostle to those whom no church influence has as yet touched and who, for the present, seem beyond the reach of the pastor.

Anyone who has closely followed the work of the juvenile court in the larger cities, like Chicago, must have noticed how watchful non-Catholic workers are to "safeguard" the interest

of their church members, who happen to be in conflict with law. The negligence of Catholics in this respect has more than once been a matter of complaint. Our laymen must "get busy," more busy than they have been in the past, to save our children, especially those who have been brought to court. The confinement of these children in institutions, where they are deprived of the ministrations of their religion, may prove to them permanently disastrous.

Education has not escaped the all pervading influence of the war. Even while the struggle was still in progress our colleges had introduced the S. A. T. C. with a view of preparing men for more efficient service in the army. Now the cry is heard to put our schools more in touch with the demands of modern life and to train students more thoroughly in the vast world of trade and finance, and commerce and industry.

An educated Catholic laity is the need of the hour. For teachers and students these times are exceptionally rich in promise. The teaching profession needs apostles. It avails nothing to say that we cannot compete with others, that we cannot keep up the pace set by other institutions. We have hung back too long. Our schools are confronted with the duty of preparing men for leadership. We must make headway or our chances for doing fine work for God, for promoting the cause of Christ, of truth, of Christian culture and progress, will be taken away from us.

Sometimes our Catholic people, especially the directors of societies and those occupying a position of trust seek for the College man. For a particular vicious piece of anti-Catholic bigotry appears in the local press, or a wandering preacher or lecturer unfolds his ancient repertoire of lectures against the "Corruptions of Rome" or the "horrors of the Confessional." But no one, it seems, cares to answer the blatant orator of the coarse screed. And yet a timely refutation would do a world of good. It would calm troubled minds, bring the truth to those in darkness, and, perhaps, even teach the bigot or renegade a timely lesson. The Catholic townspeople look around in vain for a champion. It is to be hoped that the larger place given to apologetic questions in our course of Christian Doctrine as well as the publication of recent books, like Fr. M. P. Hill's "The Catholic's Ready Answer" will enable our college men and editors to answer these disturbers of social peace and to refute their onslaughts upon Catholic faith and practice. And cannot our Catholic people see that works like the one just mentioned, as well as representative Catholic papers, be placed in our libraries?

Sometimes our women are more energetic in such matters than the men. Have they a keener sense of justice or are they more alive to their opportunities for good? They have a new field of social activity open to them today. Our great spiritual leaders have been preaching this for many a day. Archbishop Faulhaber has spoken and written eloquently on the social apostolate of Catholic women in these times. He places before them models like Prisca and Tabitha, and Veronica and Lydia, who are mentioned in the New Testament. Prisca was a co-worker of St. Paul in his mission of making known the doctrine of Christ, and she is therefore a worthy patroness for those Catholic women who help in instructing children in the Christian Doctrine. Tabitha was "full of good works and almsdeeds." Veronica performed the kind service for the Master on His way to Golgotha. Lydia offered her house to the Apostle for the celebration of the Divine service. The "friendly visitor among the poor," the attendant upon the sick and the suffering, those who give time to the work of the altar-societies, find worthy models in these saintly women. And it is to such work that the "social apostolate" calls the Catholic woman of today. Margaret Fletcher and Virginia Crawford and Katherine Conway have given excellent advice to the Catholic woman and girl of our times and instructed them how to give service to the cause of Christ and of His Church by answering one of the manifold calls of the lay apostolate.

(To be concluded.)

The Saying Of The Oracle

Long ago, close by the Bay of Naples, lay the city of Pompeii, its beautiful homes embedded in bowers of roses, groves of orange and laurel, while picturesquely behind it in the distance rose the mountains.

On one day the people had gone to the Circus early, and although an intermission had been granted, most of them had preferred to remain in their places to be sure of seeing the Christian martyrs fight the wild beasts.

In a beautiful home in the heart of the town was a small group of people, grandfather, granddaughter and slave, that had not been attracted to this scene, and in the inner court where a fountain splashed, and flowers grew, protected from the sun by awnings, the three reposed in the refreshing shade.

"What of Vesuvius to-day, Syrus? Is the eruption over?" asked the old man of the slave in a high thin voice.

"No reliable news is to be had, master," responded the slave. "No one dares approach very near and from the town nothing can be seen but clouds of smoke and steam."

"Go pray to the gods, Syrus, for our safety," said the old man and to his grandchild Domitilla he added:

"Last night, child, when the earth shook, and Vesuvius sent

forth flames an occurrence of my youth came to mind."

"Oh, what was it, grandfather?" cried Domitilla.

"Domitilla, my parents, as you know, dwelt in the Alban Mountains and I was brought up there after a different fashion from the one of to-day. To-day it is the boast of Roman youths to know all pleasures and vices, and to despise the gods; in my day it was my pride to live spotlessly and honorably and to love and honor the gods, my parents and the truth. When I had grown to manhood I came to Naples but before starting on my journey I consulted an oracle regarding my future. The oracle was in a cave near the top of a high mountain and there, too, dwelt a soothsayer."

"O grandfather, don't talk so slowly, hurry! I want to hear about it," interrupted the girl.

"It was a dreadful place, wild and desolate; giant rocks lay on every side; in places the light of heaven was almost shut out by overhanging rocks, from others greenish yellow smoke issued. There were few plants and trees, and here and there crawled snakes which I dared not kill for fear of desecrating the place. Having come to the soothsayer's cave I trembled so that I dared not call her. Suddenly an ugly old woman stood before me, her gray hair blowing about her face, her eyes

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