

Catholic Lay Activities.

The Help Of The Laity Is Needed.

Written by the Rev. Albert Muntch, S. J., for the Press Bulletin
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(Continued.)

But we are not only members of the great human family, but also Christians and children of the Catholic Church. This is a second, and more forceful, reason for participating, each one according to his opportunity, in the "lay-apostolate." Ours is the Church of the Apostles, and we are called upon to be "apostles," messengers and doers of good in our own way. In the earliest period of her life, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. VI), there were appointed "seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," who were appointed to minister to the bodily wants of the needy brethren. The Church today relies much on laymen who are filled with the spirit of charity and with a genuine zeal for social justice, to help her in communicating the glad tidings to all nations.

A third reason for the active and joyful participation of our laity in social service is the spirit of the times. This has rightly been called "the age of the social consciousness." Men are awakening to a stronger sense of their obligations towards their less fortunate brethren. We realize that "social progress" depends on the united efforts of all classes of society, and on fidelity to the new concept of social responsibility that must be developed in leaders of public opinion, in officials, and among those to whom is entrusted the social and moral welfare of the community.

Moreover, we have a special duty in these days of materialism and "scientific philanthropy" to keep alive the spirit of genuine charity, the charity of Christ, which has worked wonders in the days gone by, and which will produce equally happy results in our own time. We certainly do not admit the statement made by Professor Devine in his book "Principles of Relief" (Pg. 12): "The idea of charity, attractive and inspiring at one stage of social development, becomes in time obnoxious, and as permanent element in the relation between classes, it becomes an anomaly."

No doubt, one cause of the widespread social discontent of our time is the decay of real charity in the hearts of our people. We rather hold to the opinion of Miss Katherine Conway, who referring to the practical social work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd says that "as long as we have the sad old story of sin and human frailty, so long will there be work for these good religious." We may add that as long as human nature remains what it is, with its downward tendencies, its selfishness and sad limitations, so long will there be large work for men and women who are inspired with the charity born of faith in Christ, and who are strengthened with the supernatural motives that have wrought marvels for the uplift and regeneration of man.

And finally social work, undertaken with the right motives, will help not only those to whom our good efforts are directed, but will benefit ourselves. We cannot do good to our neighbor, without reaping personal advantage. The extent of the reward will depend upon the excellence of the virtue of charity that inspires us. We love God when we love our neighbor. This virtue banishes from the heart selfishness and self-love, the great obstacles to spiritual growth and the source of many evils and imperfections. But when we are charitably interested in the ills of others, we are apt to forget our own troubles. Hence, St. Vincent de Paul instructed the men of his day not to flee from the misery and wretchedness that surrounded them, but to grapple boldly with these problems, and thus learn the heavenly art of making others and themselves happy by well-doing.

It will ill become us, who are daily reminded of the power of the Christian faith to be outstripped by others in the work of social welfare. Now is the day of social reconstruction. The call has gone out to do this work in the spirit of faith. For we are bid to help to "renew all things in Christ." When Arnold Toynbee founded "Toynbee Hall" in Whitechapel, London, in 1885, in order "to provide education and the means of recreation and enjoyment for the people of the poor districts of London" he experienced a new kind of happiness—that which flows from doing good to the poor who are God's children. He died of overstrain from the work, but his short life of 31 years was well spent. Think of all the good that other settlements have done since Toynbee Hall was established and of the hundreds of generous settlement workers in our country. Their joy and their happiness in this work will also be your portion.

Let us refer only to one kind of work which has been recommended to our laity by the National Catholic War Council, in its "Outline of a Social Service Program." It is a service of the greatest utility, and it is to be hoped that many of our Catholic young men and women will take part in it.

"Under the direction of the pastor, or assistant, the parish girls' club can do much to help the wayward boy or girl. An older companion can exercise a good influence over a boy or girl who is becoming neglectful about his religious duties, or has been brought before the juvenile court for petty offenses. In many cases it will be possible to get persons of leisure from the parish to visit the juvenile court and interest themselves in cases of wayward boys and girls. In every city a branch of the Big Brother and Big Sister movement should be organized."

Although the purpose of these articles on Catholic Lay Activities is to present as forcibly as possible the need for a practical lay apostolate in a general way, rather than to offer a specific program for action, the problem presented by the care of our youth, particularly of delinquent boys and girls, is so acute that a slight digression into this field will be pardoned, especially if, as we propose to do, the suggestions offered are given in the nature of examples for activity in other fields also.

In the last article reference was made to the efforts "Big Brothers" and "Big Sisters" might undertake in behalf of youthful delinquents. A still greater task is suggested by the question: What can we do by way of preventing and eliminating some of the causes that are responsible for our quota, as Catholics, of youthful delinquents. On the basis of an analysis of these causes prepared some months ago, and approved by experienced social workers as in agreement with their own ob-

servations in this field, we now venture a constructive program for further efforts.

(1) Priests, especially those in charge of parochial schools, as well as assistants in Sunday Schools, the directors of boys' clubs, etc., should study the children and carefully note any sign of unusual viciousness on their part. Retardation in school, especially if this be due to other causes than sickness or legitimate absence from class, should be inquired into. Any unusual physical defect which might prove a handicap to the child later on, should be taken note of. This may be done without hurting the sensibility of the child or interfering with the rights of the parents. Sometimes the curing of such a defect in early years spells great success for the future of the child. We know how often the removal of tonsils and adenoids has at least cleared away obstacles to the mental growth of the child. Defective vision is sometimes responsible for poor work at school, and this, in turn may lead to discouragement, frequent absence, and occasion for getting into mischief.

*Excessive shyness, stammering and stuttering, a tendency to solitude rather than sharing in the usual diversions of childhood ought also to be taken note of, their causes ought to be ascertained and the parents duly informed. The latter, if sensible, will hardly take this interest in their children amiss, and the treatment at school should be continued by the parents at home.

(2) Parents themselves will therefore have a large share in determining the happy future of their children. There ought to be a willing response on their part to the suggestions and instructions of the teacher, priest or sister. Unfortunately we have not the aid of school-nurses and special attendants who are such a fine help to the teaching force of other schools. Until we too have auxiliaries we must make extra efforts to shield our children from untoward influences.

(3) Physicians, especially dentists and oculists ought to be found who would take an interest in the welfare of the school and the health of the children. Of course, the question of compensation will have to be considered, but the suggestion is offered that at least in the large cities, volunteer workers be sought to look to the physical well-being of children who are apparently neglected.

(4) Our Catholic societies will find a field of fruitful activity in supplementing the work of our parochial schools in the line of social uplift work. A movement has been going on for many years to "socialize" the schools and to widen the use of the buildings. Could they perhaps be made the center of social and recreational activities under the leadership of the members of our Holy Name societies?

(5) Our settlements, which are now fortunately increasing in number, must extend the scope of their work. If the schools have not secured the co-operation of Catholic societies, the settlements could provide for "after-school" hours of a number of children. Those connected with the settlements may be even better prepared for such "extension" work than our teachers. When many amusements are "commercialized" and morally dangerous, as is the case in large cities, the settlement workers have a fine opportunity to help the children to find ways and means for much-needed physical exercise and social enjoyment. And don't say that all this smacks of "paternalism." It does not. And don't assert that "we got along without all this in our past." We answer: "New times, new duties," and that anything done for the child is like bread cast upon the waters.

(6) We have already referred to the help the "visiting nurse" can give to the schools. Our Catholic hospitals ought to graduate an increasing number of nurses, who would find an attractive field for professional work in our schools.

(7) The hospitals themselves should come in closer touch with our schools. Perhaps those taking the courses in nursing could occasionally visit the schools and, if possible, advise mothers on methods of improving the physical well-being of their children.

(8) The Big Brother and Sister movement ought to be more developed among our people. In the Moral Court, the Court of Domestic Relations, and the Boys' Court of Chicago, there are non-Catholic representatives who are keenly interested in every case that is concerned with a member of their church. Here we reach perhaps the very fundamentals of success in our work with the younger generation. We must show a live, genuine and sympathetic interest in child life, in everything that concerns the child, his moral and physical well-being, we must be quick to sense any danger that may interfere with his normal development, and be ready to sacrifice even personal comfort to bring him that help and guidance to which, by virtue of his tender years and immaturity, he is entitled. Now the efficient and large-minded big brother and sister, particularly the one inspired by "the charity of Christ," will be able to do all this for the child, especially for the one that is handicapped in the race of life, and is retarded from the standpoint of normal mental and physical development.

Again, cannot all of us—priests, teachers, parents and social workers, strive more consistently to develop the will of our children and their resisting power to first evil influences? It is unwise and unjust to allow our boys and girls to plunge suddenly and unprepared from the anxiously guarded life of the parochial school, with its numerous incentives to virtue, into the world where an entirely different standard of moral value prevails, and where evil influences turn up at every bend of the road. We do not mean that the teacher should draw lurid pictures of a wicked world which is only set on ensnaring the innocent, nor do we hint at the necessity of "sex-instruction." But we refer to the need of constantly presenting to the young not only the best models of a holy life, as exemplified in our saints, but also those motives and means of keeping their Christian character unshaken, which have helped many a youth to pass successfully through the stress of adolescence and to keep his faith in the ideals of younger and more innocent days. Will-training of this kind is highly recommended by our best teachers of youth, men like Father Barrett, Msgr. Guibert and Prof. Foerster. With regard to girls, the sound Catholic advice of women like Mrs. Catherine Conway, Virginia Crawford, and Margaret Fletcher, will, if wisely pondered, save many a life from disillusion and a bitter awakening.

There are, finally, besides the causes of delinquency mentioned in the analysis referred to above, certain dangers which we can minimize by steady co-operation. That the movies are

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