

A COMING OF AGE

(THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL GUILD).

IT is pathetic to see a young life coming of age merely to die. It is tragic if the death is due to the indifference and neglect of those who have brought the young life into being, and are responsible for its continuance. There is some danger that this year English Catholics may be, not merely witnesses of such a domestic tragedy, but actually the villains of the piece.

The Catholic Social Guild comes of age this year. At its annual meeting, just held in Oxford, it assembled its friends for the customary rejoicings. But the debutante was found to be seriously ill, sick almost to death. Instead of congratulations and good wishes for the future, there was to be heard a thin, tired voice uttering what sounds perilously like a valedictory death-bed speech.

'Last year,' it said, 'we made a loss of £86. This year it is £85. The surplus of £74 on the old balance sheet has disappeared and become a deficit of £11. Our expenditure cannot be reduced below its present amount if any sort of organisation and propaganda is to be maintained. Our income is below that—our regular income from subscriptions very much below that. Whether we meet again here will depend upon whether we survive the crisis by increasing our income. If the Guild goes, the *Democrat* goes, the *Year Book* goes, and eventually the Workers' College also goes.'

The Catholic Workers' College, be it observed, is the healthiest organ in the life of the Catholic Social Guild. It was not to the Guild, as one press notice implies, but to the College alone, that the Treasurer was referring when he said that 'the position is really

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better than it looks.' The College presents a separate balance sheet of its own, which this year shows a loss of £252. But as a small part of its expenditure has been virtual investment, the facts are slightly more cheerful than the figures. The main fact, however, is far from cheerful: the College depends on the parent Guild for its existence, and the Guild, after some years of gradual decline, is now at a serious crisis, hanging between life and death.

The tragedy that threatens is much graver than some may suppose. It must be averted if Catholicism is to make any real progress in England. It can be averted, and surely will be, unless, contrary to appearances, English Catholicism is very rotten at the core. There are many signs that the Church is rapidly gaining ground in England. Many of these, it must be admitted, are material signs and therefore superficial. The Social Guild during the coming year will provide a test case showing whether the material development has or has not been accompanied by a thinning out of spiritual quality. The Guild depends in a very special way upon the spiritual quality of Catholicism in this country. It is founded upon study circles and retreats. If such things fail, then 'with desolation is the land made desolate, for there is none that thinketh in the heart.'

The Restoration of the Hierarchy eighty years ago was interpreted by many Englishmen as a move on the part of Catholics to reclaim temporal power and wealth in England. The new Archbishop of Westminster was supposed to have designs upon Westminster Abbey. Wiseman reassured its Anglican Chapter that:

'This splendid monument, its treasures of art and its fitting endowments, form not the part of Westminster which will interest me Close under the Abbey of Westminster there lie concealed labyrinths of lanes and courts and alleys and slums—nests of ignorance, vice, depravity and

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crime, as well as squalor, wretchedness and disease
This is the part of Westminster which alone I could and
which I shall be glad to claim'

His successor, Manning, followed up this lead with enthusiasm and went far beyond it. He took all the slums of England for his parish, and extended his powerful patronage to the poor and oppressed of every creed. He scandalised his generation by defending the morality of strikes and associations, and the strict right of workers to a family wage. But he was more convincing in practice than in theory. 'I do not believe,' he declared, 'that the English people will be won through the intellect They may be won by human love, care and brotherhood drawing the human will to the Divine presence.'

Possibly Manning was here hitting quietly at Newman and his almost exclusive appeal to intellect. In any case he was preaching a dangerous doctrine especially for English Catholics. Since the Reformation deprived them of their cloisters and their libraries, their condition had disposed the majority of them to acquiesce all too readily in the easy doctrine that good will without much thinking suffices for everything, while overmuch thinking is the worst enemy of good will. Had Manning died in these sentiments, examples so powerful and so different as Newman's and his might have had disastrous consequences in Catholic England: the small number of Catholic intellectuals here might to-day have been much smaller and much more segregated from general Catholic life and interests than it is: and the great majority that reads and thinks but little for itself might have been less bookish, less contemplative, and more pragmatic than it is now content to be. There would then have been no such thing as English Catholicism, but, instead, two parties; the one simply living on the memory of Newman and Acton and wishing itself in France; the other

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simply organising and demonstrating and hob-nobbing, and thinking it un-Catholic to admit the existence of the Irish Sea or the Atlantic Ocean. We owe it to Leo XIII that the astounding success of Manning in social action and his curious confusion of social thinking and prejudice have not deprived us of the hope we still have of recovering the traditional culture of English Catholicism whose praise is in all the Churches and whose patrons are legion, from St. Bede the Venerable to Sir Thomas More the Blessed.

In January, 1891, Leo XIII wrote Manning personally the first news of his great philosophical treatise 'On the Condition of the Working Classes.' The Cardinal, with Archbishop Walsh, of Dublin, was later appointed by the Pope to superintend the English translation. Manning made himself its commentator also, praising its 'profound and loving sympathy for those that toil and suffer.' But, consciously or unconsciously, he was impressed, as English Catholics after him have been impressed, by the great Pope's example of a close intellectual study of social problems. At the end of his commentary, striking a personal note, and reflecting on the experience of a long and active life now ending, Manning acknowledges one obstacle to his splendid social ideals which goodwill alone has not been able to overcome: 'So obscure from want of thought . . . are the minds of men.'

Want of thought was the evil against which Leo XIII fought throughout his pontificate. He was eminently successful in exemplifying and encouraging profound and exact thought within the Church. His most conspicuous success in the Church as a whole was the restoration of St. Thomas Aquinas as the teacher and model for all Catholics, simple and subtle, clergy and laity. In an age of universal education, of books, of science, of philosophy, Catholics, who were richer than any others in these good things, must make the

most of them for the sake both of religion and humanity. Even in England, where the native Catholic tradition of these things had been interrupted, his influence had a remarkable effect. The standard of ecclesiastical studies advanced by leaps and bounds. And more remarkable still—considering our history, our poverty, our pre-occupation with material cares, our conservatism, and our ancient inexperience and distrust of a learned laity—even the laity began to read and study and write. The influence of Newman, great as it was, though it moved the heart of the people by its spectacular appeal to popular feeling and popular fancy, never produced the popular intellectual awakening at which he aimed. His talents were academic and his audience was academic. The Brothers of the Little Oratory sat at his feet with reverence and love, but not with understanding. On the other hand, the intellectual influence of Pope Leo was miraculously popular here. It immediately produced the Catholic Truth Society; then through that, as offspring, the Catholic Social Guild and the Catholic Evidence Guild—all three being popular, lay, intellectual movements whose aim is not merely to spread the Faith, but to educate even Catholics in the Faith.

In the order of their development these three bodies form an organic growth. All intellectual progress proceeds from an aristocratic to a democratic state. Intellect never ripens unless it is first set in movement by a superior intellect already ripe in some degree, which is therefore, in that degree, a *magisterium* teaching with authority. When the young mind is fully ripe it has passed from dependence on the *magisterium* which set it going, to equality with it. The Truth Society was, and is, a teaching body, in which the more learned Catholics educate the less. The Guilds, as their name implies, are student bodies, composed of the less learned who were first stimulated into intel-

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lectual activity by the teaching society, and are now intelligently asking their own questions and seeking the answers intelligently. The first questions asked by the awakening mind are provoked by the human body and the whole material world. The answers lead to the discovery of the human soul and the spiritual world. The Social Guild arose when the disciples of the Truth Society—which had published Pope Leo's *Rerum Novarum* magisterially—began to ask the questions about food, housing, health and so forth immediately suggested to them by their own surroundings. The comfortable folk whose own or whose neighbours' surroundings provoked no questions went on piously reading C.T.S. pamphlets until they grew tired, and all hope of their intellectual awakening died down. The answers to the questions that created the Social Guild came quickly to two types of mind—the very pious and the very intelligent. These answers appeared in such terms as 'human soul,' 'free will,' 'supreme good,' 'everlasting happiness.' To the more intelligent of the pious minds and the more pious of the intelligent these spiritual notions opened up a further field for endless questions. The intellectual movement to ask and answer them took the form of the Evidence Guild—the finest monument to the memory of Leo XIII that has appeared anywhere in the Church.

All three organisations, the Truth Society and the two Guilds, are, of course, subject to the *magisterium* of ecclesiastical authority, but they stand in different relations to it. The Truth Society volunteers to teach what ecclesiastical authority requires to have taught; both Guilds, on the contrary, come on their own initiative to ecclesiastical authority to ask it questions, then take the answers home to think about them before they can be satisfied. Because they are Catholics, their faith was satisfied before they came; in fact, it brought

them. Because they are intellectual Catholics they have, over and above their faith, though docile to it, an intellect that values an answer not for its authority but for its intrinsic truth.

Now whoever is going to inspect the intrinsic truth of anything with his naked intellect requires very special moral safeguards. Hence, being healthy growths, the two Guilds have from the beginning depended as for their very life upon spiritual exercises more moral than intellectual in their nature—that is to say, upon regular retreats. The Social Guild being the earlier in the field was the first movement to popularise lay retreats in England. Now that the Social Guild is languishing lay retreats are languishing everywhere—except in the Evidence Guild, which is vigorous because of them.

If the Evidence Guild were to fail, the reason could only be a shortage of lay folk intelligently interested in spiritual problems. There will never be any shortage of spiritual problems to excite their questions. But even in the most highly intellectual Catholic community an organisation like the Social Guild might conceivably fail through a shortage of material economic and social problems. Can that be the cause that threatens the Social Guild at present? We are obviously not short of material economic and social problems with two million citizens unemployed, a great part of them Catholics. Can it then be that Catholics are not intelligent enough to find such a problem intellectually exciting? Obviously not, since Catholics as a body are intelligent enough to find excitement in the profounder problems that engage the Evidence Guild. The only solution remaining is that somehow English Catholics, though intelligent, are failing in a moral duty.

This, unfortunately, seems to be the true solution. In his presidential address at the recent annual meet-

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ing of the Guild the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle excluded every other solution. 'Every Catholic ought to be a member of the Guild as a duty,' said his Lordship, after it had just been made plain that very few Catholics are members. Neglect of duty is further hinted at by the declining enthusiasm for lay retreats.

The truth is that from the beginning very few Catholics have been stimulated to questions by social conditions unless they have personally found them intolerable to themselves. The moment the conditions have been made tolerable, even those who have suffered have ceased to think about them. From the beginning there have been some magnificent Catholics, like Archbishop Keating, Monsignor Parkinson, Fr. Plater, Dr. Mooney, Mr. Leslie Toke, Professor Urquhart, Mr. Edward Eyre, Mr. Charles Diamond, Miss Margaret Fletcher, Lady Gibbs and a few others who have been stimulated by the sight of the sufferings of others as though they were their own. There have been others also worthy of praise for almost, but not quite, equal sympathy and intelligence: not understanding that the Guild is a student movement they have deserted it either because it would not crudely issue into social action, or because they wanted to teach it instead of encouraging it to think out its own way to conclusions possibly more enlightened than theirs. For membership and for work the Guild has had to depend in very great part on the socially oppressed.

Now the precise social evil of this present time is that the socially oppressed are being doped, by doles and cheap amusements—the expedient by which pagan Rome prolonged its miserable existence—into a sense of present comfort and an intellectual apathy that is worse than brutal. The oppressed Catholics are swallowing the dope with the rest, and while thus making their own condition more miserable than ever it was before, are depriving the Guild, their

best friend, of the brains and the little economies by which it has principally lived these twenty-one years. Meanwhile the great body of well-to-do Catholics who are paying intolerable taxes to keep them in this wretched condition, are either too unsympathetic to be moved by the sight of it, or too stupid to see that the remedy for it, as well as for their own little economic ills, lies in their own hands—or rather in their own heads and hearts, if they will but open them as the moral law of Christ demands they should.

This is no new complaint. 'The Jews,' said Cardinal Manning in his day, 'are taking better care of their working girls in the East End than we are. What are our people doing? Oh, I forgot; they have no time. They are examining their consciences or praying (with dear Mrs. Craven) for success in finding a really satisfactory maid.' Since 1894 the devoted Dr. Mooney has been deploring the inactivity of educated and prosperous Catholics in the cause of social reform. Throughout his heroic campaign Fr. Plater, the martyr to the cause, was constantly sighing the same sad plaint.

Have English Catholics allowed the influence of Pope Leo to come to such promising life in their midst only to kill it by neglect the moment it comes of age, and is face to face with the real social crisis that the great Pope foresaw? Surely not. Then I venture a suggestion. Let every English Catholic using a motor vehicle reduce by one-tenth the amount of petrol he is accustomed to burn for pleasure, and pay in the sum thus saved as a Christmas-box each year to the Catholic Social Guild. And if this means a dull hour a week at home instead of on the road, let him brighten it by trying to understand what the Guild is doing for himself and for his fellows with his money.

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