

GREAT QUESTIONS OF THE DAY

THE AUSTRALIAN PLENARY COUNCIL'S
PASTORAL LETTER*(Continued from Last Week.)*

Man has a right to his family; and God has protected his right by establishing the

Indissoluble Bond of Marriage,

and by forbidding in the Sixth Commandment the violation of that right. The bond of marriage when it has been completely established between two Christians can be broken only by death. This fundamental principle of the Christian family, and therefore of Christian society, which is made up of families, has been tampered with in many countries by modern civil legislation on divorce, and is flatly denied by those would-be social reformers whose paths would lie over the ruins of the present social order. It has always been the aim of the Catholic Church to maintain amongst Christians this divinely appointed prerogative of Christian marriage, which she knows well to be necessary for the very existence of Christian society, and, as history testifies, she has not faltered in her purpose, even when the tyrant's might threatened her destruction in his dominions. To the modern Socialist, just as to the royal libertine, the Church says with divine authority: 'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder,' and we warn you, dearly beloved brethren, to beware of any doctrine which tends to abolish the bond of Christian marriage or to weaken its efficacy in maintaining our social order.

Man's right to hold as his own the goods of this world is declared and protected by the Seventh Commandment. Even before the finger of God wrote on the tables of the law, 'Thou shalt not steal,' man's right to possess what the Creator made for his use and benefit was acknowledged and respected. Man's individual right, therefore, to possess property of his own, a right he has from Nature itself, must not be called in question. This truth, dearly beloved brethren, contains a principle by which Catholics must be guided in considering systems that are propounded for the amelioration of the condition of the laboring classes. We set it before you as a useful criterion on which you may form your judgment. It is not our intention to treat exhaustively of a subject which the world over is now occupying the minds of the thoughtful, and arousing in many places the desires of all true lovers of the welfare of Christian society. In that society

Labor Has Ever Had a Dignity

unknown to the world before God became Incarnate in the Sacred Person of Him Who was known as the Carpenter of Nazareth, and, as we are perfectly certain, impossible apart from the religion He has founded and maintained. His Church will never frown on labor or on poverty, but will ever enable both to sanctify by virtue these conditions which His Providence has in wisdom permanently maintained.

Nor will she discourage men from using every lawful means of bettering the condition of their earthly career, whether it be individually or collectively, provided that always they obey Our Lord's command, which was made with a promise, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.' We conclude this subject with the remark, that as to all such schemes as have for their object the settlement of the people on the land and the amelioration of the social condition of the laboring classes, and as to the State monopoly of such public conveniences, viewing them as far as they may be attained consistently with existing rights, whatever be their economic efficiency, we do not regard them as necessarily at variance with the principles of Christian morality.

The Church and Public Education

In a democratic community a minority is sometimes the victim of disabilities other than civil, or only directly civil, and of such injustice have we to complain in the matter of provision for public education. The Catholic Church is too old and too experienced an institution to insist everywhere and always on any measure involving sacrifice and trouble to her people, unless such measure is of vital importance for the welfare of souls and of society. Now the Church throughout the world insists on having in her own care the education of the children

of her flock, and this for the simple reason that she believes and knows that on such bringing up depends their eternal salvation. The Church in Australia has been no exception to this rule, and from the very beginning our Bishops have made primary education one of the most indispensable works of religious organization. In Australia, as in many other countries, owing to the State's unwillingness to assist denominational schools, the Church has had to carry out her education programme without her just share of the public moneys spent on the instruction of the people. She has thus been compelled to pay twice over for her children's schooling; and in keeping up a separate system in the face of an official and popular opposition almost amounting to hostility, Catholics have had to suffer what really amounts to

A Civil Disability.

But they have acted thus for conscience' sake, and the results have fully justified them. They can, in the words of St. Paul, say: 'We have fought the good fight, we have kept the faith'; and they may confidently look forward to the crown of justice, at least on the day of eternal retribution. The easy-going neglect of the spiritual interests of their children, which characterises so many non-Catholics amongst us, and their suspicion of the Church's intentions are likely for the present to preclude from the thoughts of Australian statesmen any change in the actual systems, but we are confident that one day the cause of justice shall triumph, and that the guardians of the public welfare will find it a good and a necessary policy to assist in her educational effort an institution which devotes itself, as the Catholic Church does, to the inculcation of the principles of Christian morality. In the interests of our country, we would wish that the neglect of Christian training for the children of a Christian people may not be carried so far as to exclude all hope of preserving their Christianity.

For the souls of our own children we hope, with God's blessing, to carry on the work of Catholic education even more energetically in the future; and on this occasion we remind the clergy of the grave duty of pastors to establish Catholic schools wherever they can be maintained, to foster them with diligence, and to do everything possible to promote their efficiency. The debt we owe to

The Religious Teaching Communities

on account of the achievements of Catholic education is a great one. Without their zealous assistance the success achieved would have been impossible, and while we are thankful to God's Providence for inspiring so many of Australia's sons and daughters to enter the ranks of the religious communities, we exhort them to keep always before them the highest standard of excellence, and not to be content with any lower. It should encourage our religious teachers to reflect that their labors are Apostolic in the strictest sense, because they share in one of the highest and in our day most necessary works of the Apostolic ministry—the teaching of religion.

While speaking of education we deem it our duty to impress on all who share with us in any way the pastoral burden the great importance of the study of Catholic history. In our primary schools we succeed admirably in teaching the little ones the rudiments of the Faith. The children who attend our schools learn their Catechism well, and, for the most part, they are fully trained in the difficult art of Christian living; but can we flatter ourselves that their subsequent careers always fulfil the promise of their prime? Is there not much room for improvement in the Catholic tone of many of our lads? Here it is that the importance of a knowledge of Catholic history makes itself felt. And are our schools, especially our higher schools, doing all they ought to do in this matter?

It is a question of the gravest import; and on the answer to it depends in a great measure the influence that religion will have in regulating the lives of many individuals, and especially the influence that the Catholic laity of the land is destined to exert, in promoting

The Christianity of its People.

Our youth show themselves most apt in conducting useful societies for literary purposes; but in these societies do they, by their choice of subjects and by their manner of treating ordinary topics, prove themselves to be educated Catholics? If they do not, it is not because their religion and history do not afford them the material, but because they have not been trained in that most useful and necessary part of a Catholic education. We therefore deem it a most pressing duty to urge on the clergy and on our Catholic teachers, espe-