

THE NEED FOR CATHOLIC ORGANISATION

SERMON BY DEAN REGNAULT

The following sermon was preached in St. Mary's, Church, Christchurch, on Sunday, May 25, by the Very Rev. Dean Regnault, S.M. (Provincial):—

Our people are to be congratulated on the opportunity given them last week of hearing such an able lecture as that which was delivered in the King's Theatre by the Bishop of Auckland. They ought to feel most grateful to his Lordship for his devotedness to the Catholic cause and the zeal with which he vindicates the rights of his co-religionists. But though most Catholics are eager to seize an opportunity like this, still there are some who are heard to express the opinion that priests would best serve the interests of the Catholic cause if they abstained from touching on such questions as the Bible-in-Schools, either on the public platform or in the pulpit, because such utterances are calculated to stir up trouble and dissension, and to arouse the anger and bigotry of the enemies of the Church. This is not a new cry. It was the cry taken up by Freemasonry 40 or 50 years ago in Portugal, France, and Italy. Bishops and priests were told that their place was in the sacristy; politicians alone had a right to the public platform, and the suggestion of Freemasonry was acted on to such an extent that a purely Catholic press scarcely existed in these countries where the population is overwhelmingly Catholic. They are now reaping the fruits of this policy dictated to them by the enemies of the Church.

In Portugal many of the bishops and priests are banished, others are in prison, and those who remain in the country are fettered by so much anti-Catholic legislation that they are even deprived of the freedom necessary to announce the Word of God. Catholic France has come under the absolute control of a mere handful of atheists who hate religion, and who are doing everything to eradicate it from the hearts of the people. Alas! whilst the priests prayed in the sanctuary or in the sacristy, whilst millions of French Catholics were asleep, or made feeble, spasmodic efforts to vindicate their rights, a nefarious Government drove forth into exile, bishops, and members of religious congregations, seized Catholic hospitals, colleges, convents, and churches; sold them to the highest bidder, or if no bidder were found, often used them for the vilest purposes. For example, the beautiful Church of the Redemptorist Fathers in Paris was put up for auction, and found one bidder—the munificent sum of one franc (about 9½d) was the sum bid, and it was knocked down for this amount. The purchaser, one M. Duez, by name, a robber of millions, it leaked out afterwards, was in league with Government officials to obtain 'legally' possession of the edifice, which he rented afterwards to a clothing establishment at a rental of £500 a year. There are Bills now before the French Legislature which, if passed, will have the effect of suppressing Catholic schools and compelling all parents to send their children to the godless State schools. Thus have the Catholics of France and Spain sacrificed their rights as citizens by the fatal policy of keeping silence.

Nor is the condition of the Catholics of Italy more hopeful. They are absolutely unprepared for either defence or attack—the Mayor of the Catholic population of Rome is a Jew, who neglects no opportunity of hurling insults at the Head of the Church. Our Holy Father the Pope is no longer allowed to appoint bishops of his own choice. The See of Genoa is still vacant because the bishop appointed is not acceptable to the civil authorities. There is no unity amongst Italian Catholics; they have no good newspapers to voice their views and to influence public opinion; yet no weapon is more powerful or more urgently needed in modern times than the press.

Other instances of the results of apathy on the part of Catholics might be quoted. Hardly a day passes but we witness evils which follow the policy of 'keeping quiet,' of want of organisation. But thanks be to God, as an offset to all this, there are countries where

Catholics are alive to their interests, where they organise and where they fight in order to vindicate their rights, and where success crowns their efforts. France has been awakened by the cruel lesson inflicted upon her; leagues have been formed everywhere; Catholic forces are being united, and the position continues to improve everywhere. There is the league of parents to watch over the education of their children and to prevent the teaching of irreligious ideas, which numbers 400,000 adherents. There is the league of Sunday observance, to stem immoral literature, there are Catholic clubs, Catholic labor unions, whose strength and importance are growing daily. So marked is the Catholic revival in France, and so great is the progress made by Catholic organisations of every description that the Government begins to respect the Church, and its friends advise the Ministry to drop the Bills which have been brought before Parliament for the purpose of doing away with the liberty of education. The Catholics of Holland have had to contend with the greatest difficulties, but owing to their marvellous pluck and organisation, they maintain their position, and their Catholic teachers in their Catholic schools are paid by the State. The same gratifying results are noticeable in Austria owing to Catholic newspapers and the organising capacity of a few good leaders; in Belgium, where the well-organised Catholic party has successfully resisted the combined efforts of Liberals and Socialists; in England, where a mere handful of Catholics in a large Protestant community has held its own on the school question against the strongest Government of modern times; and in the United States of America, where the Catholic Federation counts more than three million adherents. But the most perfect Catholic organisation known at the present day is the German Volksverein or Federation, which the Falk Laws rendered necessary. This organisation, due to the efforts of Bishop Von Ketteler and Windthorst, was launched in October, 1890: its practical results have been simply wonderful. As a description of this association may be of some utility to our young Federation, I shall quote its leading features from a lecture given by S. G. Magargee under the auspices of the Catholic Summer School of Philadelphia:—

'Its primary object was the defence of Catholic principles against the attacks of the social Democrats, but its original scope was gradually widened. It started a social propaganda of its own and set out to educate the people in true Catholic social principles. To do this successfully it was necessary that they should give the people, by an abundance of cheap literature on the subject, a thorough grounding in the deeper religious principles which underlie the social teaching of the Church. The Volksverein has a central board of thirty-three which appoints a director for each diocese. Under the director is a manager for each town or group of villages. Under the manager is a promoter for every twenty Catholic families, and so every Catholic household is linked with the central bureau established at Munchen-Gladbach. The central bureau employs a large staff of skilled, salaried officials, who devote all their time to the work of the Volksverein. The literary staff are men who have taken degrees in political economy and theology. There are about fifty clerks, accountants, and librarians. Another fifty are employed at the printing presses. The result is an efficiency of organisation which is incomparable. The central bureau is in constant and intimate communication with every director, manager, and promoter. Literature is distributed amongst the members on an enormous scale. Eight times a year a magazine called *Der Volksverein* is sent to every member. Social and apologetic articles are sent weekly to more than four hundred Catholic newspapers. Pamphlets on social questions of the day and questions of faith and morals, a monthly magazine for the study of social questions, various publications for the instruction of the laboring classes, treating of education, labor unions, accident and life insurance, tariff laws, and the like, are issued to the members. About fifteen million publications are issued yearly. What were the practical results of this splendid organisation of the German Catholics? The Catholics, inspired by Ketteler, led by Windthorst,

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