

CORRESPONDENCE

[We do not hold ourselves responsible for opinions expressed by our correspondents.]

THE STRAY SHEEP.

TO THE EDITOR

Sir,—The condition of the stray sheep has been haunting me for some time. With some reluctance I tackle it now, and not without consulting a wise head. For some 6½ years I have been chaplain to St. Joseph's Home for the Aged Poor, Ponsonby. During this time I have had to deal with many a stray sheep. This means that I have come into close contact with some austere realities. My experience, therefore, does not rest on hearsay, but is of first-class and constraining power.

The stray sheep arrive from city and town and country. Some hail from very remote localities, and not from one diocese alone, but from many, though mostly from the province of Auckland. The ages range from over 60 to 86 years. The health shows a marked variety also, as do the mental conditions. From a religious point of view there are marked differences. A few had received only Baptism, while others rested at First Communion and Confirmation.

Some came out of the conflict with fair intelligence, while others are very dull, and there are the blind and the deaf. Some take well to their new mode of life and make themselves happy, while others are ill at ease and will not bear restraint. Religious exercises and private instruction they will not relish or appreciate. The pension and Johnnie Walker lure them away to the police cells, and they are on the shaughran once more—stray sheep!

Classes of private catechetical instruction have been almost continuous for over six years, in many instances with consoling results. To secure a fair working knowledge the catechism has to be explained more than once from end to end, special parts frequently. Sometimes a demented person cries out: "What is it all about?" On such minds instruction is lost. How very sad! Forty years without the practice of religion and the children all lost to the Church! Such people and others come too late and are incapables. Let this preamble suffice.

That the majority of men and women coming to the Home have been hitherto devoted Catholics we are happy to testify. That these never become malcontents or troublesome is also most true. They make themselves helpful according to their capacity, and are most grateful to God and the good Sisters for the manifold blessings they enjoy. How happy their exit at the close of their earthly pilgrimage! How profound their peace after the battle has been bravely fought and won! "*Nihil suavius pace post bella*," as wrote the illustrious St. Columbanus.

But let us come into close grips with the stray sheep out in the tempting world. When such arrive at the Home, the Sisters are keen in discovering their spiritual condition; and they take care to inform the chaplain, who also takes an opportunity of interrogating them. Comprehensive inquiry brings forth the certain conclusion that the stray sheep and the pastors had no close contact with each other. Usually they had known a priest at a safe distance, and the "ambassador of Christ" left them in this condition. Apparently he did not seek and bring back to the living fold the erring wayfarer. Assuredly this would be work within his furrow. Of all pastoral duties there is none finer or more meritorious. It renders the ambassador another Christ, who painfully searched out and restored the lost sheep. Will it suffice to wait until they are broken in mind and body and then dump them into the Home of the Poor? *In hoc non laudo*. A man of 86 years was under instruction for a few days, and he seemed well disposed and grateful. The passion for freedom and the craving for Johnnie Walker drove him mad away. The police brought him back, but next morning he cleared away forever. A type of some others.

Some of the class under review are quite demented and are proper subjects for the mental asylum. They watch every opportunity to steal away into the streets. They wander through the whole house like troubled spirits, causing much pain and anxiety to the Sisters and all the inmates of the Home. They are quite unfit for the place. The pastors or the relatives who fling them away to the Sisters may think they have done a wonderful work.

Non laudo. Far more hopeful and efficacious for their salvation would have been the pastoral work of looking them up while their faculties were unimpaired. Many sins would have been prevented and solid hope of salvation would have been secured. Timely warnings and instructions would have brought them the healing effects of the Sacraments and of Holy Mass. Now, they are incapable of prayer and the rest. Let this suffice. It is the impelling force of conscience that has produced this letter, whose appeal, I hope, will produce good and wholesome results for erring souls.—I am, etc.,

August 10.

J. GOLDEN.

M.B.O.B ASSOCIATION INVERCARGILL

A meeting of the committee of the Marist Brothers' Old Boys' Association was held last week to consider ways and means of fittingly celebrating the silver jubilee of the Marist Brothers in Invercargill (writes our own correspondent, under date August 8). Members were very enthusiastic, and after a good deal of discussion the meeting decided to circularise all old boys and notify them that they will be asked to assist in pushing the project to a successful issue. The intention of the association is to erect and equip an up-to-date gymnasium when the Brothers' new school is being built. To raise funds for this worthy object, a subscription list will be drawn up and a campaign of collection among old boys carried on for a period of 12 months, commencing on September 1. The committee are anxious that all old boys and sympathisers should, if not already known to them, at once communicate with the secretary, Mr. B. Mahoney.

TRUMPETS.

I heard the trumpets of the morning blowing
A clarion call behind the purple hills.
I saw the banners of the morning glowing,
And as the sound of rain with whispers fills
A quiet house, the tramp of marching feet
Filled the calm air. The hosts of day draw near;
I saw the gleam and glint of many a spear.

Those legions in their shining panoply
Marched o'er the mountains; martial music sang,
Insistent, ringing. There was naught to see
But blaze of dazzling colors. Echoes rang,
As they passed proudly to the beat of drums,
And joy ecstatic, full of sound and light,
Thrilled to the glory of the blue noon's height.

So with a shout they marched until the wide
Red sunset held nor peace nor weariness.
Untiring and resistless as the tide,
The host passed on to music clear, no less
Prepared for song and triumph than at dawn.
Splendid and clamorous, in bright array,
They reached the verge and took the shining way
That leads to lands beyond the Western skies.

Mine ears were ringing with the wealth of sound
From golden trumpets blowing, and mine eyes
Were blind with glory. To the utmost bound
Of the horizon splendor throbbed and thrilled
And glowed; and, while the fiery clamor shrilled,
They passed beyond the Western slope. Then came
To ears bewildered, from the stilly night,
A peace as sweet as a beloved name;
After the kingly splendor, pale moonlight
Soft soothed my dazzled eyes. The trumpets died
In the great distance, and I heard the far
Faint silver singing of a tranquil star.

—GRACE ETHEL MARTYR, in the Sydney Bulletin.

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