

## LAY APOSTLES OF CHARITY.

Social life, affected as it is by the materialistic philosophy upon which our present industrial system is founded, has developed problems of a more and more complex nature, whose solution is awaited with grave concern on all sides. Organized efforts for the betterment of the condition of the masses, have elicited indeed, the earnest support of the public at large; but it is to be regretted that the influence of religion, as a factor in the solution of the problem, has not been more generally recognized.

Certainly the results of the numerous "social uplift" movements of the past have not justified the expectations of those who inaugurated them. The division, or rather the cleavage, which exists in society between the rich and the poor seems not to be less distinct than it was before. On the contrary, it is becoming more and more noticeable every day. And what is to be the remedy? It seems to us that since the reason for this change is proximately due to economic causes, but remotely and fundamentally to moral or better still, immoral causes; for example, cupidity, avarice and envy—so too the remedy is to be sought proximately in economic institutions such as trade-unions, brotherhoods, arbitration-boards, etc., but fundamentally in moral and religious organiza-

tions and institutions—institutions which regard not merely the material well-being of their members but also and principally their supernatural welfare.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is one of these organizations. It contains all the elements necessary for an effective system of social reform. It is not content with offering to the needy mere material assistance, but it goes further and gives moral assistance. Practical students of psychology, its members endeavor to effect by instruction and sound advice what they know no amount of food and clothing can do. They aim not so much at affording temporary relief as at securing permanent results.

A brief consideration of the history and growth of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, together with an examination of its principles and methods cannot fail to be of interest to all who have the betterment of society at heart.

In the month of May, 1833, eight young students of the Sarbonne, Paris, held a meeting in the office of "*La Tribune*," under the presidency of Frederick Ozanam a brilliant French Lawyer and professor. They were all animated with the desire of giving a practical demonstration of their fidelity to the Catholic Faith. Those were times of irreligion and immorality in Paris.

Numerous sects were attacking the fundamental Christian truths and were scoffing at the few Catholics who firmly adhered to the traditional belief. Among these, that of the Saint-Simonians was especially bitter. "Show us your works" was the taunt which aroused to action the latent zeal of Frederick Ozanam and his seven companions and which occasioned the meeting in question. At this conference they determined that the best way to safeguard their faith was to band together in an apostolate of charity under the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul. Such was the beginning of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. The keynote of the Vincentian propaganda was sounded at this first meeting by Père Bailley in these words: "If you intend the work to be really efficacious, if you are in earnest about serving the poor as well as yourselves you must not let it be a mere doling out of alms—bringing each your pittance of money or food—you must give them alms of good advice." The working of the Society was very simple. The members had each a poor family to look after; they met every week to report their experiences and to discuss the wants of their protégés and the means of relieving them; they began and ended their meeting with a prayer and made a collection to pay for the "bons," as the tickets for provisions, clothing etc., were called. The rules

were few but stringent. It was absolutely forbidden to discuss politics at the meetings. It was not allowed to distribute alms from one's own purse; the Society fund was to supply the needs brought to the attention of the members. The reformation and preservation of family life was the end to which all Vincentian efforts were to be directed.

Hence it is that Vincentian activity has ever been centered about the home. To personally visit poor families in their dwellings and minister to their needs is the principal duty of every member of the Society. The Vincentian must use a great deal of tact in this work, and his treatment of the poor will depend upon the peculiar conditions of each family visited. He goes about his task somewhat after this method: If the father is in need of work, a position is secured for him. This oftentimes goes a long way towards relieving conditions. Very frequently, however, the lamentable state of family affairs calls for patient, prolonged treatment, but this the true Vincentian, seeing in the poor the suffering members of Christ, willingly gives. For example, the intemperance of the head of the family may have destroyed all peace and happiness in the home, the children are unable to attend school for lack of clothing, while the broken hearted mother, in

trying to earn enough money to sustain life in her dear little-ones is separated from her children from morning until night. Manifestly such a case—and there are only too many of this kind—presents a very difficult problem.

When the Vincentian comes in contact with these conditions, he offers himself first of all, as the confidential friend of the family. It may be that he is a successful professional man. The poor parents will invariably look up to him. His sympathy may work a complete change in their views of life. The first thing he does in the matter at hand, is to remind the father of his duties towards wife and children. In this way, the lay-apostle often accomplishes more than a priest would be able to do in many sermons. If an appeal to honor and human respect is ineffective, a mention of civil penalties for non-support, may bring the negligent and improvident parent to his senses. Generally one or other of these arguments will have the desired results. In any case an effort is made to preserve the home life. If it can be conveniently done, employment is obtained for the mother which will allow her more time at home. The children are decently clothed and sent off to school. At the same time a little material aid from the Society encourages the

parents and gives a new impetus to their hopes.

This is an auspicious beginning; but it is only a beginning. The true Vincentian will follow up his case. He makes regular visits to the family. He inquires about this or that matter. If one plan fails, he tries another. During all this time, he is gradually restoring the family to a more healthy frame of mind; by his words of encouragement and counsel, he dispels the darkness of gloom and despair, and brings a little sunshine into their lives. If the family is Catholic, he urges the members to attend to their religious duties and instructs the children in the Catechism. When he has thus satisfied the needs of the family and provided as well as possible for the future, the Apostle of Charity seeks out some other unfortunate household and begins his work anew. This is simply one phase of the Apostolate of Charity of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul.

It must be borne in mind that the work of the Society is not confined to the relief of the poor in their homes. In outlining the activities of the organization, the founder had an eye to the future needs of mankind, and dictated that no work of Charity should be regarded as foreign to the Society although its special object is to visit poor families.

Consequently, the charitable works of the Society have become quite varied. It conducts fresh-air camps for children; cares for paroled prisoners; finds suitable shelter for homeless boys. Employment bureaus have been established under its direction and control. The Society is engaged in the custody of boys who are brought before juvenile courts, and in placing orphans in homes where they will be properly cared for. All these charities are conducted with characteristic modesty, so that few are aware of the great force for good at work in our very midst.

It is not strange that so unselfish a work should receive the hearty support of the public. As has been said, the Society began with eight members in 1833. The unpretentious methods of the pioneer Vincentians gained favor immediately with all who were charitably inclined, so that it was soon found necessary to abandon the private character of the work, and to admit into the Society as many persons as showed themselves qualified by moral character to join in the noble cause. Within two years, the Society was known throughout Paris. In less than twenty five years, it numbered 2000 in Paris alone; it had given birth to five hundred conferences in France: it had spread into England, Belgium, Spain and America. At the present time it

numbers about 100,000 members actively engaged in the work; and nearly as many honorary members who cannot devote themselves to the actual works in which the Society is engaged, but who assist the other members by their influence, their offerings and their prayers.

The first Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul in the United States was formed at Saint Louis in 1845, twelve years after the inauguration of the Society. The honor of having the second, falls to New York, where a branch was found in 1846. Other Conferences followed in rapid succession, so that soon the Vincentians were to be found in most of the dioceses of the United States. The present status of the Society in this country is given in the report of the Superior Council of the United States for the year 1914, as follows:

Conferences .....	961
Conferences reporting.....	796
Active members.....	14215
Families assisted.....	33071
Persons in families.....	180305
Visits to homes of the poor..	287829
Situations procured.....	4766
Receipts.....	\$537,042.28
Expenditures.....	\$543,653.65

The above statistics deal only with conference work, and do not include the records of 165 conferences which failed to report. A conservative estimate of the monetary value of additional items, of which no record is made, would increase the total amount expended for the year



to upwards of \$800,000.

Though we are pleased with the rapid growth of the Society in the United States as indicated by the above figures, we are of the opinion that it has even a more glorious future. This lay apostolate is one of the best means our Catholic men have of showing to the world that our religion is not one of fair words and futile promises, but rather of noble deeds and unselfish efforts. The Saint Vincent de Paul Society is an institution which will justify to a more or less incredulous public, the claim that the Church is in very truth the representative of Him Who was the friend of the Poor. Moreover, it seems destined by the power of its example to be a potent factor in the solution of the great social problem. Within its own sphere of activity it has given unmistakable evidence of its power to allay social unrest, to bridge the chasm be-

tween the supposedly hostile members of society. And in consequence, the sooner its principles are adopted by those outside the Church, the sooner may we expect a complete solution of the problem.

It seems then, to be incumbent upon our Catholic laymen to give such an organization their sincere support, not only because it affords them an opportunity of giving proof of the faith that is in them, and of convincing an unenlightened public that the Catholic Church is the friend of the poor, but also because it is to be of incalculable assistance to those who are seeking a remedy for the so-called social problem. The lay Apostles of charity have done much in the past. They are doing more at the present time than at any other period of their history. And if we mistake not, they are to reap an even more abundant harvest in the future.—*Xavier Dolan, O. P.*

### THE KING'S CUP-BEARER

Behold the ministry given you!  
Serve well and God will pay the due  
With life eternal.

Grapes from the vines of Engedi,  
Wheat from the plains of Galilee,  
Bring for the Sacrament.

Then in the chalice the blood-wine stood,  
On paten the wafer marked with the rood,  
Waiting for sacrifice.

*Hyacinth Chandler, O. P.*

### THOUGHTS AND DEEDS.

Sublimest thoughts oft come from pens  
Of men who are unknown,  
And pass from tongue to tongue  
Until the gems of thought are sown  
Within the hearts of men.

Our noblest deeds oft come from souls  
The humblest of the earth  
And pass from age to age  
Until their priceless worth  
Records itself in Heav'n.

*Damian Kennedy, O. P.*