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— A serious problem
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A SERIOUS PROBLEM

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A SERIOUS PROBLEM



O the Catholic, education is a subject of vital importance. Since the earliest times the Catholic Church has realized the dynamic influence exerted by education for good or evil, and has insisted that the fullest consideration be given all educational questions. Not merely has the Church counseled in this matter. With age-long iteration she has taught the absolute necessity of true education. She herself has taken a most active part in determining intellectual training, and has been the greatest educational force the world has every known. There has been no greater factor in the intellectual development of the human race than that mighty power which built the famous universities of the Middle Ages, established popular schools, and produced by its training such scholars as St. Thomas and St. Augustine in philosophy, Copernicus, Verrier, and Lecchi in astronomy, Lavoisier, Pasteur, and Chevreul in chemistry, and Raphael, da Vinci, and Michelangelo in art.

From these teachings of his Church, the Catholic realizes the need of education. But he has received a greater heritage than this. He has received the knowl-

edge that education, to be true and worthy, must be based upon the acknowledgment of the existence of God, and have for its end the closer union of man with his Creator. He has grasped also the immediate corollary of this truism, and comprehends that if ever religion, which is the only real support of law and order, is to be destroyed, the work will be done, not by physical controversy or loud, sword-thwacking dissension, but by the quiet and all-permeating influence of perverted education.

This danger arising from false education has threatened and is threatening to-day. Under the influence of the pagan pedagogy of Rousseau, Locke, and Spencer modern educators have fashioned their courses on principles and methods which exclude from the child's education all knowledge of a higher life or of a Supreme Being. The need of teaching the relationship of man towards his Creator has been deemed of no moment. The aim of education has become merely the training of the child to use material means for the attainment of material adjustment and material advancement. The idea of God or of a higher moral code does not enter the conception of so-called modern education.

The seriousness of this danger has not passed unnoticed. When the Catholic people recognized the utter failure of the public school system, and realized that the methods of these educators were turning out into the

world a new generation of unreligious and unmoral children, they courageously faced the issue and endeavored to work a solution. Having no endowments, and receiving no financial assistance, they began the building of their own schools, where their offspring might be trained not only in intellect but, what was more important, also in soul. The cost of this work has been enormous, yet the Catholic people, although for the most part possessed of no great wealth, cheerfully assumed this burden, and, while still contributing their equal share in taxes toward the support of the public schools, have provided for their offspring an education that is comprehensive, progressive, and efficient. To-day there are in the United States five thousand four hundred and eighty-eight parochial schools, providing education for one million four hundred and fifty-six thousand two hundred and six children. This is a wonderful monument to the self-sacrifice, the perseverance and the heroic ideals of our Catholic people.

But outside of this problem of elementary education, the handling of which has brought so much credit upon the Catholic, there has arisen a state of affairs that is so serious and yet so little comprehended that our attention should be drawn to it at once. While we have focused our eyes upon one problem, another has escaped our vision, and has grown to great proportions. The facts are startlingly clear and must be stated. There can be

no solution of the problem until they are known, and the causes and extent of the evil realized.

We are in an age of concentration and specialization. Because of our complex existence and its manifold demands for efficiency, greater equipment and finer training are needed for success. As a consequence, it is an almost absolute necessity that education be carried beyond the elementary stage. This fact seems self-evident. Yet when we look into our secondary education, we find a condition that gives rise to many disturbing questions. The most important of these is the attitude of our Catholic people. What are they doing for their children in regard to secondary education? Are they failing to look beyond the elementary stage of training? Do they rest satisfied when they see their children graduated from the parochial school? These are thought-provoking questions; their answers can be found only through a candid examination of our secondary education.

The City of New York spends over forty million dollars annually for educational purposes. Of this enormous sum, towards the payment of which every Catholic contributes a share, almost fifteen million dollars is spent yearly for secondary education. It would be logical to suppose that we derive a proportionate return from this vast expenditure; that our children are profiting by opportunities thus provided. But such is far from being the case. Our city is the most cosmopolitan city in

the world, with inhabitants of every race and creed. Of the five million people, about seventy-five per cent are Christians, of whom Catholics constitute seventy-six and five-tenths per cent. The Jewish race constitutes a little over one million, or about twenty-five per cent. This is a ratio of three Christians to one Jew. Yet when we examine the enrollment of our city high schools, we find that less than twenty-five per cent are Christians—that more than seventy-five per cent are of Jewish stock. Although the Jewish people are in such a minority, their children possess an overwhelming majority in our high schools. This means that where we might expect to find the ratio of the population sustained in the schools, we actually find that for every Christian child who is accepting the advantages of our secondary education, there are three non-Christian children. In other words, the non-Catholic pupils aggregate nine times the number their place in the city's population would lead us to expect.

Where are the Christian boys? Where are the Catholic boys? Does not secondary education mean as much to them as it seems to mean to the non-Christian boy? Why should our public high schools fail to attract the boy of Catholic parents?

The answer is given that Catholic parents send their boys to Catholic schools. But such a reply cannot be borne out by facts. Fordham University opened in

September with a high school enrollment of only four hundred and twenty-nine, and with a college consisting of only one hundred and seventy-four students. St. Francis' High School has three hundred and eighty-five students, St. Peter's, three hundred and seventy-six, and Brooklyn College, two hundred and eighty-six. When we consider these schools we must keep in mind the fact that they are fee-charging institutions, and are, therefore, not open to the poor Catholic boy except under special conditions. Besides, they have on their lists the names of many who live outside of our city. St. Regis' High School, which has no tuition charge, opened with two hundred and fifty boys on record. These are representative schools, and their smallness is emphasized when we realize that there are in New York State two million eight hundred and eighty-five thousand eight hundred and twenty-four Catholics. The more we examine the present conditions, the more do we realize the small percentage of Catholic boys who are receiving the benefits of a Catholic education.

We cannot get away from the seriousness of the problem. The character of our public high schools has become so marked as to excite wonder and surprise even in the casual observer. A visit to any of the schools brings out many startling facts. Here is a school containing about five thousand boys. It has one hundred and seventy-nine instructors receiving two hundred and

fifty thousand dollars annually in salaries. It contains everything that is requisite for the physical and intellectual development of the boys, and is ideal in construction and equipment. Yet of these five thousand boys hardly ten per cent are Christians, and it is a rare thing even to hear an Irish Catholic name! Surely such a condition warrants immediate attention. These boys, so few of whom belong to us, will be the lawyers, the doctors, the educators, the professional men of the coming generation. This follows as a logical consequence. Besides, it cannot be denied them, for they know no denial. These boys will be the shapers of thought, the instigators of public feeling. From them will come strong, prevailing influences for good or evil. We cannot minimize the power which education gives a person, and when we sit back and refuse to accept for ourselves and our children the training and education these boys do accept, we must be prepared for the consequences.

The result of an education is either positive for good or positive for evil; education cannot be negative; for a man after receiving an education has greater capacities for good or greater capacities for evil. Now, can we expect much from these boys who are so eager to receive knowledge? After the election last November a composition, entitled "Why I Like the Election," was given to five classes totaling about one hundred and fifty boys. On examining the papers, the writer found that over

ninety per cent of these students rejoiced particularly in one thing—the election to Congress of the Socialist, Meyer London. These were pupils drawn from many classes of the school, and were representative of the whole student body. The fact stated is merely an indication of their attitude on one of the vital economic questions of the day. In overwhelming numbers these students are Socialists, or Socialists in the making, whose gospel is contained in the *New York Call*, and whose ambition is the furtherance of Socialistic dogma.

Whatever hold the teachings of Zionism had upon these people is lost when the children learn English. The obligations of the orthodox Judaism of their fathers and mothers, prove irksome in the competition for material advancement, and are soon laid aside. The influence of religion, consequently, is a negligible factor in shaping their thoughts and actions. In oral discussions on such topics as “Is Lying Justifiable?” or “Is It Wrong to Cheat?” their words constantly show that they recognize no code of morals, and are governed by no motives higher than those originating from fear of detection and consequent loss in money. Surely we cannot look for ideal results from such material.

It is to such as these, that our children, who are without the benefits of education, must bow in later years. It would be denying that result follows cause to gainsay this, for training and education do give to the possessor

advantages over his more poorly-equipped fellow. We are giving them the sharper tools, the better instruments, and then are expecting our children to cope successfully with them. It must follow that in the years to come our handicapped boys will be forced to give way in competition for better positions and higher advancement in law, medicine, education, and business. It was only recently that a prominent authority on education remarked that "within twenty years these people will be in control of our public education."

And their energy and perseverance must be commended. In their endeavors to better their condition, they know no sacrifice too great, and recognize no obstacle too difficult to surmount. A large majority work after school hours, and the writer knows of one who runs an elevator from twelve midnight until eight in the morning in order to provide means for support, and thus remain at school. Despite many serious disadvantages of foreign birth and foreign language, they quickly overcome these difficulties and soon progress. Although their lives are worked out in poverty and in environment that is most unpropitious, they are excellent students and often profound scholars.

The facts and circumstances of the present situation are not difficult of comprehension. They lie patently before us. Far more difficult is the problem of discovering the causes which have led to this condition in our city

high schools. It would be untruthful and unjust to say that Catholic boys are less capable than their fellows. We have too many examples of Catholic men in public life to allow the utterance of such an assertion. The defect lies not in the fact that the Catholic boys cannot accomplish great things, but that they do not seem, in proportion to their numbers, to be grasping the opportunities for advancement which are offered them.

This may be due to many reasons: First, to circumstances at home which do not permit the boy to continue his studies; second, to the short-sighted vision of parents who prefer their boy to begin work immediately after completing his elementary studies; third, to the boys themselves, who falter and fall by the wayside because of misconceived vocations, or through lack of proper guidance, help, and encouragement.

As to the first, the boy who is called upon to be the bread winner of the family deserves our sympathy and admiration. There is no higher nobility than this—to sacrifice one's ambition for love and duty. But even in the most extreme case, the boy who is truly ambitious will find a way to study and advance. There are many opportunities in our city for such a boy; all he needs is encouragement and words of cheer. Are we taking the means to encourage our boys who labor under such circumstances?

The second cause, however, is more reprehensible, be-

cause it rises from selfishness and mistaken ideas. Many parents discourage their sons in their desire to attend high school. They see only the wage which is forthcoming, and lose sight of the fact that, in most cases, they are handicapping their children and closing to them many avenues that lead to future advancement. According to the report of the United States Labor Bureau, the average wage of the elementary school graduate is ten dollars a week. At the age of forty it is ten dollars and twenty cents. Surely parents, for the sake of an immediate return, should not thus condemn their sons to lives of circumscribed drudgery.

The third reason, given above, is one which offers the greatest opportunity for splendid work. Our Catholic American boy is ideal; he is ambitious, intelligent, and well-mannered. His only need for a future of great good and wide influence is proper guidance. In each parochial school there should be established the special office of vocation-director. This work of directing boys to their proper life-work has been taken up long before this. But even greater efforts should be made along these lines. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of this. The boys should be studied as individuals with different powers and different possibilities. They should be encouraged early in life to shape their thoughts and energies along particular lines for the furtherance of their vocations.

Then should follow the selective work. The boy should be told of the advantages of one high school over another, and helped in his selection there of proper courses of study. Records of his work in high school might be kept, and help and encouragement given him at times when needed. We cannot carry this directive work too far; it should be continued even while the boy is at college. By this means, too, we will be guarding our boys from many of the pitfalls which beset them during the most susceptible periods of their lives.

If this work should be emphasized in the parochial school (and who will deny the urgency?), how much more is it needed by those boys who attend public elementary schools? Here it becomes the work of the local parish priest to organize his boys, to give monthly talks on vocations, and to follow up the boys in their studies. The work is arduous, but surely the return is great. If our public schools are not what they should be, we, to whom education is so dear, should assume the responsibility and courageously endeavor to change the prevailing conditions. The evil cannot be cured by aloofness.

These changes can be accomplished in two ways. First, let us urge the graduates of our Catholic colleges to take up in greater numbers the work of teaching in our public schools. True teaching—the moulding of boys' characters—is a noble mission. There is a sad lack of true Catholic lay teachers. Is it not foolish to try to

combat Socialism and other attendant evils, when we sit back and allow the positions which carry the greatest influence for good or evil to be filled by men who do not scruple at the dissemination of false doctrines? Why allow the flames to be kindled for the sake of extinguishing them?

We should, therefore, make greater efforts to send our boys to Catholic high schools whenever possible, or at least to the public secondary schools. The Catholic teachers already in the field would be only too glad to instruct boys after school hours in the principles of their religion, and by lectures and talks to counteract the flamboyant attractions of pernicious modern philosophy. The presence alone of Catholic boys would be a deterrent to many dangerous forces now at work.

“The child is father of the man.” Are we giving him his proper heritage? The problem is apparent and serious; the solution urgent and necessary.

