

ligion, a growing tendency towards materialism, and even, as we have lately seen, open blasphemy is tolerated. It was to combat these evils that the first conference was formed in Paris in the year 1833. When Ozanam advocated a return to the practice of Christianity as a means of remedying the social evils, he was laughed at. 'Christianity,' his opponents said, 'was a grand thing in the past, but to-day it is a dead tree, which bears no fruit.' 'Show us your works; what are you doing for your fellow-men?' It was to meet this line of argument that our society was established. When the first conference, consisting of but eight members, was formed, it was ridiculed. 'What can you poor fellows hope to accomplish?' said the St. Simonians. 'If you were rich you could do very little in a city like Paris. We, on the contrary, are elaborating ideas and a new system which will reform the world and banish misery from it altogether.' Twenty years later the St. Simonians and their grand schemes were dead, while the eight members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society had increased to 2000 in Paris alone, whilst many conferences were flourishing all over France and in several other countries.

One of the great works undertaken by the St. Vincent de Paul Society is the establishment of parish libraries and the dissemination of Catholic literature, particularly the publication of Catholic Truth Societies. Our clergy are continually deploring the fact that Catholics do not read the proper kind of books. Our conferences in the cities are remedying this evil. In most of the churches book-cases are erected, where the best of controversial and devotional works can be obtained practically free. It would be a great advantage if the country churches were similarly equipped. Our young men, then, instead of being attracted by every plausible theory put forth, would know what to accept and what to reject, and would at the same time be able to instruct others.

And surely every parish priest in the Dominion would rejoice to have in his district a body of men ever ready and willing to help him in his projects. It is sometimes suggested that a conference may not work in harmony with the clergy, but this is quite a mistake. The basis of the society is humility. No preferment is given to any member; all are equal. There are no heated discussions. The conferences begin and end with prayer, and members realise from the beginning that they must sink all personal aims and feelings. Nothing whatever justifies a conference of St. Vincent de Paul in having differences with the clergy.

It is a common mistake to judge of the success of the society by the strength of its finances and the amount of relief granted. These, however, as stated above, are quite secondary considerations. The true indication of the success of a conference is the increase in zeal and personal sanctity of its members. As to the good done to others, there are thousands in need of help which involves no expenditure whatsoever. Thus the unemployed can be helped to obtain work, a cordial welcome can be given to the stranger. In seaport towns like Wellington, where there is a Catholic Seamen's Conference, the ships can be visited and the Catholic seaman made aware that there are friends interested in his welfare. The spiritual work of mercy can hardly be shown by statistics. The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul exercise a kind of lay apostolate, and we have known of several cases where they have been the means, through God, of reclaiming sinners and making careless Catholics more fervent.

The question is sometimes asked, Why cannot charitably inclined men work by themselves privately without joining a society, where their good works must necessarily be known to others? The answer is that by working together as a society the work is more fruitful, and better results are obtained. Each member has the benefit of others' experience, and there is less danger of acting imprudently. The society has been approved of by the Church, and numerous spiritual advantages are gained by the members. The Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul have a kind of authority to visit the poor in their homes. The members, too, edify and encourage each other by their example. Neither is there any publicity outside the meetings. Our society works in silence; no self-advertisement is permitted; and if, occasionally, it is necessary to mention our work or to give a report, the object is not to obtain praise, but to extend the society.

The advantages of the society to the Church, to the clergy, and to humanity have been mentioned above, but the advantages derived by the members themselves are more numerous and of a far higher order than those received by others through their instrumentality. It is remarkable how the members, who attend a sufficient number of meetings to understand the work, become fascinated with it, and afterwards find their greatest pleasure in furthering the interests of the society. In visiting the sick and those in distress they learn, perhaps for the first time, how much better off they are than those around them, and the

realising of this fact causes a cheerfulness of spirit and contentment of mind hitherto unknown. It is certain that no active member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society can be unhappy.

Such, then, are the objects and advantages of our society. What a grand thing it would be if there were a conference in active operation in every parish in the Dominion! There is really no reason why this should not be, as only five or six earnest men are needed to start one. In the cities where they are already established the holding of a retreat on the lines of the one just concluded in Wellington would be the means of reviving interest and zeal in this the most useful and practical of all societies.

## IRISH LOYALTY

The following leading article under the above heading appeared in the Dunedin *Evening Star* of March 19. Our evening contemporary, we may remark, is one of the best informed secular papers of the Dominion on the Irish question. It thoroughly understands whereof it writes, and is never led astray by the partisan cable news on Irish affairs which finds its way to the Antipodes:—

'It is somewhat refreshing to find a cable message concerning Ireland and the Irish people that is free from accusations of outrage and crime, and bears testimony to their claims to humanity and loyalty. The world is told so much and so persistently of the first that it comes as a surprise when we hear of the existence of the second. Ireland, we are afraid, is to many a country wholly given over to treason, broken heads, plundered habitations, and harried cattle. The Governor-General of Australia, however, does not accept this picture as historically accurate, and the Earl of Dudley, a member of Mr. Balfour's Unionist Administration, knows whereof he speaks. He was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for some years, and one of the most popular in recent times. He toured the country in a motor car with his Majesty the King; he saw and spoke and associated with the people; and though an aristocrat of the aristocrats, he gave himself no "airs." On retiring from office he stood up in his place in the House of Lords and told his brother Peers that if they wanted a peaceful Ireland they must govern her according to Irish ideas. No surprise, therefore, need be expressed that on Ireland's great anniversary Lord Dudley should not only preside at a St. Patrick's Day banquet, but tell his audience, and through them the world at large, that "he was convinced that the great majority of the people of Ireland were at heart as loyal as any other people in the King's Dominions." A statement of this nature requires some courage, especially to a man of Lord Dudley's official rank, social status, and political affiliations. In saying what he did he possibly knew that he would cause offence to a considerable minority of his friends at Home and in Australia. But truth will out occasionally, and after all is said and done the Governor-General of Australia was only repeating what he had said before, and what nearly every great English official in Ireland after a few years' practical experience has also said. Until Gladstone's day the Governments of Great Britain had done worse than nothing to make the Irish people loyal. From the fearful days of the Wexford rebellion, when a J.P. who had treacherously gained admission to a sick rebel's room shot him dead in cold blood, and turned to the weeping wife to say, "You will now be saved the trouble of nursing your damned popish rebel husband," until the day before yesterday Ireland has had small cause to be loyal. And yet there is and was no rational reason why she should not be as loyal as Scotland has been since her union with England. "Had England maintained an alien garrison in Scotland, had she refused for half a century political rights to the mass of the Scottish nation, had she imposed a land system that was a relic of confiscation and conquest," there would have been not one, but two Irelands to-day. The fault of Englishmen in the past has been their attempt to govern Ireland against the wishes and without the consent of the majority of the governed. Nor can England ever hope for a prosperous and contented Ireland until she whole-heartedly reverses this policy, accepts the situation as it is and will be, and honestly legislates accordingly.'

The proprietors of Kozie Tea offer a prize of two guineas to the writer of the best verse of eight lines dealing with the excellence of that favorite brand of tea. Further particulars will be found elsewhere in this issue....

Messrs. Brown, Ewing, and Co., Ltd., Dunedin, are now showing a splendid and varied stock of autumn and winter goods just received from the leading fashion centres of the United Kingdom and Europe. Patterns, etc., will be sent on application....

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