

THE GERMAN VOLKSVEREIN .

The German Volksverein celebrates next year the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation. This great Catholic association, which now extends through the whole of Germany, was started in 1890 by a number of prominent Catholics, ecclesiastics and laymen, at the suggestion, and under the guidance, of their distinguished leader, Windthorst. In the view of its founders the Volksverein was to be an organisation whose primary object should be to conduct the spread of irreligion and to oppose the revolutionary tendencies of the growing Socialism. The fundamental truths of Christianity were to be defended by an unceasing and intense propaganda in support of Catholicism, while the menace to social order was to be met by the wise dissemination of sound economic principles based on the teachings of the Gospel. Since its origin the Volksverein has steadily adhered to these two cardinal points of its programme. By means of the numerous tracts, brochures, and other publications it issues it ably champions the cause of Catholic truth, keeps its members and Catholic workers generally acquainted with the various phases of the social movement; at the same time it furnishes them with sane views on social economics, indispensable for the proper understanding of legislation bearing on the social question, and necessary also for turning such legislation to profitable account.

The General Direction of the Volksverein is in the hands of a committee of at least 24 members, half of whom retire each year, but are eligible for reelection. This body chooses from among its own members a sub-committee of nine, on whom the practical management of the association devolves. Among its other functions the sub-committee nominates representatives of the central organisation for the different States of the Empire, for the dioceses or great towns where the membership is particularly numerous. These representatives direct the various district groups, from whose members energetic and experienced men are appointed who have in their sphere of action from 20 to 40 Catholic families. It is through these specially chosen agents that detached Catholic families are kept in touch with both the central and local organisation of the Verein. It will then be seen that centralisation is a marked feature in the policy of the association, but it is found necessary in order to economise time and effort. Each member of the Volksverein pays an annual subscription of one mark (a shilling), three-fourths of which are allocated to the central fund; the remainder goes to cover the expenses of local meetings, correspondence, etc. The members of the association receive every two months a copy of the *Verein Review*, which contains the special notices, apologetic articles, essays on economic or social subjects, and other matter relating to the programme of the organisation.

From Munchen-Gladbach, in Rhenish Prussia, radiates the activity of the Volksverein. Here is situated the Centralstelle, or head office of the organisation. Its management is conducted by a director-general, with two assistant directors. In addition to these officials there were in 1912 18 collaborators, lay and clerical, charged with editing the various publications of the association. The work of the several writers is carefully arranged,

So that Each Treats of the Subject

which he has, so to say, made his own. One or two of them deal with matters of interest to the agricultural classes, another with questions important to the workers, skilled and unskilled, such as trades unions, co-operative societies, benefit societies, and the like: two write on apologetic questions, and so of others. The writers at the Centralstelle have at their service a library of 38,000 volumes, covering every variety of subject: each has, besides, a special library comprising journals, reviews, and books referring to his particular branch of library work. There is a numerous staff of clerks for the accounts, and typists to facilitate the task of the

group of writers. Since 1907 the office possesses a printing establishment of its own in which are produced the various publications of the Verein, turning out thousands of leaflets, pamphlets, etc., all admirably adapted for popular circulation, treating of their several subjects in a simple and familiar style easily within the comprehension of the clan to whom they are specially addressed. From time to time works are issued of real scientific value, intended, of course, for a more educated circle of readers.

The Centralstelle of the Volksverein

does not, however, confine its activity exclusively to library production. It labors unceasingly for the furtherance of the Catholic social movement throughout the Empire by the creation of branch organisations, by the grant of financial assistance to societies already existing, by the work of its authorised lecturers and propagandists who carry its message to its members and to those of the toilers not yet enrolled in its ranks. Without the aid, primarily and other, it has been able to afford to the Catholic labor syndicates in the difficulties these bodies had to contend with during their initial stages, many of them would not be in existence to-day. Recognising the utility of popular libraries and reading rooms, the management actively promotes their foundation, as also the widespread distribution of healthy literature. Special courses of lectures are organised for working men, colliers, and skilled artisans on subjects connected with their calling or on questions of general interest. To meet the needs of Catholic students it has established guilds for social studies. It may, in fact, be said that in every line of Catholic social activity the Verein is well to the fore, indefatigably providing Catholic workers with weapons for the defence and strengthening of their faith, and for the maintenance of those Christian principles that constitute the only basis on which the social fabric may securely rest.

It is evident that work so various and on such an extensive scale cannot be carried on without a considerable money expenditure. And yet the management of the Volksverein relies almost exclusively on its quota of the subscriptions of its members; this subscription, as has been already stated, is only a shilling annually,—of this sum three-fourths go to the central fund of the association. But, then, the number of members is very considerable—at least some 800,000. Large as its number is, it forms but 20 per cent. of the adult Catholic male population of the Empire. As this leaves a wide field for recruiting new members, the leaders of the Volksverein are unremitting in their efforts to win adherents to its ranks. Such is, in brief,

The Magnificent Organisation

which the genius of Windthorst created—an organisation which has rendered, and continues to render splendid services to the cause of religion and social order in the German Fatherland. To place at the disposal of the Catholic leaders an army of the workers well instructed and well disciplined was the task which the founders of the Volksverein set before them: beyond question their aim has been admirably realised. And if the great mass of the Catholic working men of Germany have given their unwavering support to the Centre Party at every successive election for the Reichstag, though at times their fidelity was put to a severe test when their representatives felt it necessary to consent to heavy financial charges, this constancy is largely due to the influence the Volksverein has been able to exercise on and through its members.

Wanted generally known that we supply and send to any address all ladies' requirements in underclothing, dressmaking, trousseaux, etc. Also men's shirts, etc., artistically made by ourselves from the best materials. Our chief aim is to satisfy our customers. There is no demand you can make upon us in the sewing line we cannot execute.—Mrs. J. WACKER & Co., 224 Barbadoes street, Christchurch....

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