

offer for my ignorance, and it is this: I never in my life went to the trouble of taking a course in Catholic doctrine."

'Your excuse is as poor as your recitation. Your wilful neglect in this matter is without doubt blameworthy.'

'Blameworthy!' shouted the doctor. 'For me, a Protestant, not to study your religion, blameworthy! What do you mean?'

'With your permission, doctor, I could show my meaning better by a similitude.'

'Father Casey, you're the very deuce for similitudes! Well, fire away!'

'Let us try to imagine a man—well educated on most points, possessed of means, fairly influential—let us imagine such a man having at the same time none but the most hazy, distorted ideas on civil government. Let us suppose that he knows very little about civil government in general and still less about his own, the American Government, in particular. He does not know what bodies make the laws of the country, nor by what power they make them, and he knows very few of the laws that they have made. He has on all sides ample opportunities for learning, but he refuses to make use of them. What would you think of such a man?'

'Such a man, if it were possible for him to exist, would be both a knave and a fool.'

'Why?'

'He would be a knave because by his wilful ignorance of the ordinary laws of the land he would put himself in constant danger of violating the strict rights of others, assured to them by law, and furthermore, being a man of influence, he would by his conduct lead many to practise a like disregard for the law. He would be a fool, for, knowing nothing of the laws of the land, he would undoubtedly transgress many of them, and thus bring upon himself heavy loss and punishments in the form of fines and imprisonment.'

'But, doctor, how can you hold him responsible, since he does not even know enough about civil government to realise what risks he is taking by his ignorance of the laws?'

'If he does not realise it, it is his own fault. Wherever he goes he sees that the influence of the government is there in some form or other: everyone he meets is affected by it; if he does not realise his obligation of investigating what bearing this ever-present power should have upon his own conduct, it is because he deliberately shuts his eyes to the fact.'

'Doctor, you are strong and pointed in your condemnation of the man who wilfully neglects to learn the principles of civil government, but I tell you honestly that I cannot see how you, yourself, escape the same condemnation for neglecting to study the fundamental principles of the Catholic religion.'

'Why, the comparison is preposterous!—'

'Listen, doctor, you have had wide experience with men; among those whom you have met are hundreds, whose intelligence and honesty you cannot doubt, who, being well-instructed Catholics, know exactly what the Catholic Church is, and who are firmly convinced that it is the highest duty of every human being to belong to that Church and regulate his conduct by her teaching. Secondly, you have travelled extensively, and in every country on the face of the earth which you have visited, you have found there the Catholic Church; you have found there men and women devoted heart and soul to her; you have found there her places of worship from the peerless Cathedral that cost the fortune of a kingdom and centuries of time in building to the bamboo chapel that cost the life blood of a devoted missionary. Thirdly, you have read history, and there you have seen that the Catholic Church stands unrivalled—alone—in her immense influence in moulding the destinies of men and of nations.'

'She stood out as the power most loved or most hated in the world during the first 300 years after Christ, when the world empire of Rome strove to crush

her by bloody persecutions; she stood out as the power most loved or most hated in the world during the transition of the tribes of northern Europe from barbarism to Christianity—during the life of Arianism and the other heresies of early times—during the mighty struggle between Popes and the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany—during the crusades when a whole continent united for the recovery of the Holy Land—during the Protestant Reformation (or better, Protestant Revolt) of the sixteenth century—during the social revolution that began in France and overran Europe a century ago—during the recent upbuilding of the nations of modern Europe—in fact, even during the year of 1914 that has just closed. Fourthly, you are acquainted with statistics; you know that this Church which should, after the manner of other institutions, be now decrepit and dying of old age, this Church oft doomed to death, yet fated not to die, has at present over 301,000,000 members, that 16,000,000 of them are your own fellow countrymen here in free America, and that every day men of intelligence and learning are renouncing their former beliefs in order to enter the Catholic Church.'

'These facts prove to any thinking mind that either the Catholic Church is the true Church, upheld and guided by the power of God, or she is the most gigantic fraud ever devised by the mind of man.'

'Which of these two views is the correct one you do not know, because you have never investigated the doctrines and claims of the Catholic Church. You know that the Catholic Church teaches that every human being is bound by the divine law to believe in her and follow her teaching in all his relations with God, with his neighbor, and with himself. If she is the true Church then you are sinning against God, your neighbor, and yourself by not obeying her. Hence it is your bounden duty to convince yourself whether she is the true Church or not. But this you can not honestly do without a careful investigation from reliable sources of her doctrines and the grounds upon which she bases them. Neither have you any lawful excuse for neglecting this investigation. There are numberless books, for instance, the well-known Catholic Encyclopedia wherein these things are clearly set forth by men who knew whereof they wrote. Then there is the living voice—every priest in the land is ready for the asking to give you a detailed course of instruction.'

At that moment the toast-master rapped for silence, and the Mayor rose to address the President. The next morning when Father Casey was sorting his mail, the desk telephone rang.

'This is Doctor Bustanoby,' said a voice; 'I thought of calling on you this evening to arrange for a course in Christian doctrine.'

'Come right along, doctor, you're as welcome as the flowers of May,' said Father Casey.—C. D. McENIRY, C.S.S.R., in the *Liquorian*.

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