

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

(From our Wellington correspondent.)

At the quarterly meeting of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Wellington, on Sunday, July 24, the Rev. Father C. J. Venning, S.M., in the course of his address, made several suggestions as to the scope of the work of the members. He said:—The idea of having papers read at the quarterly general meetings of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was some time ago suggested to the Particular Council as a valuable means for increasing the interest in the society and arousing greater enthusiasm at the meetings. It was thought that the zeal of the brothers might flag unless some fresh stimulating matter was brought forward at each general meeting. If a paper were written on each rule of the Manual for discussion at each of the four general meetings, we should find ample occupation for the next fifteen years. Bro. L. Reichel has set the ball rolling by his bracing article on Rule 54. He could not have chosen a more important subject than the 'corresponding member.' The object of his paper is to show that once a man is a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society he is a member for ever, or at least he should never sever the ties of friendship nor break the bond of union with this vast organisation of charity. Even death itself does not break the 'silken cords of charity.' 'The sweet voice of charity and the incense of prayer ascend for the deceased brother.' The desire of every zealous layman is not only to live as a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, but also to die a true lay apostle, thus to bring a noble life to a fitting end.

In the past the difficulty of obtaining birth or baptismal certificates from Home has been considerable, especially if the required age went back some 60 or 70 years. I am given to understand that the quickest way to obtain all such 'ancient documents' is to write to London, to the High Commissioner for New Zealand. He can obtain information (if it is a question of Ireland) from the census returns of 1841 or 1851. The cost for the search should be very small. Such certificate is proof enough in applying for the old-age pension.

At present there is a decided tendency on the part of our Government—the same tendency is noticeable in other countries—to board-out children in private families, rather than commit them to institutions. The State thinks more home life is secured the child in the private family circle than in a public institution or shelter. There is much to be said in favor of this view, provided the family be well chosen, and in every way 'a home, sweet Catholic home.' A recent writer thus sums up the position, with its advantages and drawbacks, merits and difficulties: 'The boarding-out of children has peculiar difficulties in that it could not be carried out by the St. Vincent de Paul brothers alone. To be satisfactory it must be universal; it must embrace the supervision of all the boarded-out children, and the inspection and approval of all the Catholic homes applying for children. The ideal would be, first, a really capable secretary, who would make this work his hobby and keep records and all reports, all children and all homes. Then he should obtain the sympathy of the officials at the head of the department, and be supplied with the names of all children at present boarded-out, and of all others as they come along. Then, in addition to the list of Catholic homes now containing boarded-out children, he should be supplied with a list of the applicants unsupplied. He should then be able to have all the homes reported on, especially the unsupplied ones, so that he could have not only the knowledge that they are Catholics in name, but that they are places to which children will be lucky to be sent. In time he should have all Catholic boarded-out children in pious homes, and he should have them supervised by the local priests and nuns, and by the brothers of the local conference of St. Vincent de Paul. It might be necessary to get parish priests to urge the best homes to apply for children as a good work, because people to whom the four shillings a week is an object may not be all they ought to be. Then in time, to work perfectly, it might be well to have an office, where poor Catholic parents could see him, and he might give them a choice of homes for the children they were obliged to give up, whether in the same city, only in a distant parish, so as to remove a wayward boy from had companions and yet permit of their visiting him, or in the same parish with some friendly neighbor (where poverty alone caused them to give up their children), so as to be able to see them constantly; or in some country district, with older boys, in the home of a good Catholic farmer, near a church. The work is a wide one; it requires a tactful, zealous, and methodical secretary, the assistance of the Government officials, and the co-operation of the clergy.'

I think the one difficulty—the great difficulty with us in New Zealand—is this: will a sufficient number of foster homes of the right stamp offer to take these boarded-out children? It is not easy to persuade town people to take up this work, nor would it be fair in many cases (to them and to the boarded-out child) to overtax their already crowded houses. Our chief hope must be the country. We must appeal to the charity, good-will, devotedness of our rural conferences of St. Vincent de Paul to help in this difficult work. Then there is the question of a Catholic school for a Catholic child. Many country districts have nought but the State school. The problem is certainly a big one.

There is a danger of St. Vincent de Paul brothers looking too much to the visible results, or, to put it more correctly, looking for the invisible results of their zeal. A few are inclined to grow faint-hearted because they do not succeed at once, because the poor man does not immediately respond to their noble endeavors, because they do not notice any tangible, visible results, or again because the results seem small when compared with the time spent, labor expended, and sacrifices made on behalf of the neighbor. It is not the 'visible' or even the 'immediate' success that counts so much as the invisible motive or good intention one has in doing the work. Remember the example of the 'cup of cold water.' Remember, too, that you have at least planted, even if others have to reap. Even if your good services do not earn your neighbor's warmest gratitude, yet you are always sure of God's reward if your intention be right. Be not discouraged, therefore, at little setbacks and rebuffs.

In nearly every parish there are a number of Catholics that cannot be found—Catholics who are such on the census paper, but nowhere else. In one sense they are leading the 'hidden life.' How are they to be known? I shall give one simple method: An almost infallible method is to search the electoral roll, take little notice of surnames, however suspicious, unless they are preceded by respectable Christian names. If you find a woman with a double-barrelled saint's name, you may rest assured that she was at least baptised a Catholic, whatever may have been her later training. On making inquiries it is found, perhaps, that she has married a Protestant, and the children are being brought up rather mixed in faith. Of course men who are fortunate in possessing good solid Christian names may also be found to be Catholic—at least by baptism. The Christian name will betray them quicker than the surname. I realise the difficulty of this method will be very great in a few years' time; there is a tendency to supplant good old Christian names—saints' names—by the mothers' maiden surnames. The others prefer to afflict their children with names taken from story-books, cookery-books, flower-gardens, medicine-bottles, etc. The electoral roll will not be much of a guide in another generation. Still, make use of it while you can.

Country conferences can prove of great value to city conferences by notifying the latter of any work in the country. Lists of people's names could be drawn up of those wanting men, and another list of men who want work. Then again many of our town boys would be a thousand times better off in the country. Could not something be done in this matter?

Nothing will be found so efficacious as frequent correspondence and communication by word or letter with neighbouring conferences to quickly unite a new conference to this vast organisation of charity. It is thus, by a mutual communication of thoughts and deeds, and by the interchange of visits that the first fervor of zeal is kept up, whilst progress is being made in experience and wisdom' (Manual, p. 148, 1909 edition). I am convinced that our conferences everywhere would be on a better footing if they received regular visits from some member of the Particular Council Board. When a visit cannot be made in person there is always a good friend known as a 'letter.' In fact, if that real union that makes for progress and vitality is to be fostered, very frequent correspondence must take place between conferences and the Particular Council and vice versa.

It would be an excellent thing if the presidents of all isolated and country conferences could have an annual conference at which various problems affecting rural districts could be discussed. It would likewise help them to know one another and stimulate fresh interest in their works.

Great progress has been made with Catholic literature in all the conferences. Our people will read if they get the encouragement. This work of distributing C.T.S. pamphlets is growing in importance each day. We must work it for all it is worth.

Gisborne

The annual social in aid of St. Dominic's school funds was held in His Majesty's Theatre, Gisborne, on August 4, and like its predecessors (says a local paper) proved a very great success. Among those present at the function were Fathers Lane and Dignan. Much regret was expressed at the non-attendance, through indisposition, of Mrs. E. Williams, hon. secretary, who had worked so hard in the arranging of all the necessary preliminaries. The members of the committee, who deserve every praise for the success of the social, were Misses Neill, Haughey, and Duggan, and Mesdames Hennessy, Williams, Rossbotham, Hackett, Elwood, Doolan, J. H. Martin, Blair, Webb, Finn, and Doyle. A most acceptable supper was provided by the ladies. It is understood that the function financially was an even greater success than most people predicted, and the school fund will benefit considerably as a result thereof.

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