

NON-CATHOLIC'S OBSERVATIONS

Almost everywhere I have been in Europe the report has been made to me that the Protestant Churches are just managing to hold their own—in some cases are decidedly losing ground—while the Catholic Church almost everywhere seems to be growing relatively stronger (says a non-Catholic contributor in the American *Progressive Farmer*). That was the testimony I obtained in Great Britain, and it has been repeated in Germany.

Losing Their Hold.

The situation seems to me to form nothing less than a challenge to our Protestant Christianity. If the Catholics are doing their part to maintain the hold of a Christian organisation on the part of the world they influence, it is up to the Protestant denominations—if I may use the phrase—to maintain their hold upon the people they reach. Why is it that the Catholic Church is strengthening itself while the Protestant Church, in many cases, is losing ground? This is the question which every Southern church member, anxious to see his denomination do its part for the uplifting of mankind, ought to consider very seriously. To me the explanation seems to be found in the fact that the Catholic Church is everywhere interesting itself in movements and enterprises for improving the living conditions of its people, while the Protestant Church too often looks upon itself as an agency for getting people into a Kingdom of Heaven after death without doing its part towards making the Master's Kingdom come on earth.

Interest in Public Welfare.

I repeat that the Catholic Church seems to me to be getting stronger in Europe solely because it is interesting itself in the everyday life of the people

around it. When I was travelling in Ireland, I commented on the fact that Catholic priests were leaders in the co-operative societies I visited—the creameries, the egg-packing institutions, the co-operative credit societies or rural banks, the societies for co-operative purchase of fertilisers and feedstuffs, etc., etc. If any movement for progress—improving the roads or the schools or the farming methods or the health of the people—is started, which the priest approves of, he throws himself into the movement with his people and helps bring it about, not merely as an individual, but as an officer of the Church.

The same policy is pursued in other countries of Europe. Take the case of Belgium, where agricultural co-operation has developed almost as greatly as in Ireland. Here, too, the activity of the Catholic Church has been indispensable in bringing about this result, and the Church has immeasurably strengthened itself in consequence. In order to show that I am not exaggerating in this statement, I shall quote the following from Mr. B. Seebohm Rowntree in *Land and Labor in Belgium*. Says Mr. Rowntree:—

In Belgium

'The great development of agricultural societies is almost entirely the work of the Catholic or Conservative party; and it is doubtful whether it would have been half so important but for the whole-hearted devotion of hundreds of priests, who have made themselves responsible for managing and superintending the little village societies. The writer visited one of these priests, who showed him the elaborate system of book-keeping which he himself undertook in connection with all kinds of agricultural societies in the village. If a cow was to be insured, the priest must value it. If fresh ideas and fresh initiative were requested, he must supply them. It should also be remembered that the Catholic churches are multiplying their energies in

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