

A FASCINATING BOOK

The Path that Led from Socialism to the Priesthood

Illemo Camelli, Once a Socialistic Agitator, Now a Seminary Professor

One of the most interesting of latter-day autobiographies is the apologia of the Italian Illemo Camelli, entitled: "From Socialism to Priesthood." The author, now professor at the Seminary in Cremona, narrates how he drifted into Socialist circles as a youth and, being deceived by the high-sounding phrases of the leaders and agitators, tore out of his heart the faith of his childhood, that his mother had planted there, and threw himself headlong into the maelstrom of socialistic propaganda and political combat. Imbued with "that grand optimism regarding men and things human which has ever been and still is the backbone of revolutionary ideas, he did not realize that no "purely human idea can elevate man over the deep impulsive forces of his nature." But an inkling he had, even then, that by practice of the evangelic principles alone could the world be overcome; hence the Gospels were his chosen reading matter in hours of weariness and despondency. He did not see in Christ the divinity, although he acknowledges to have had a presentiment of it in the human greatness of the Saviour. Other comrades were of the same mind; the fact is that the history of the beginnings of Christianity exerted a very charming influence over the first labor movement in Italy. Because Christianity had succeeded, Socialism was looked upon as possible, nay even as the realization of that common Communism which seemed the dream of early Christians.

Disillusionment

On the other hand, progress of the industrial movements meant increased malignity towards the Church because of the somewhat antagonistic attitude of the clergy until the latter began to support labor organizations and their activity according to the spirit of the Gospels. "But in many places it was too late"—the priests had been branded as the enemies of the poor working people.

Socialistic ideas were spreading rapidly throughout Italy, but the fruits their practice bore did not correspond to the expectations and the ideals of Camelli. He was horror struck to see the evils of drunkenness, immorality and indolence become more prevalent in the ranks of his comrades, effective working in the party got to be more difficult, even painful for him; he lost faith in Socialism, discerned the lie in the words of the leaders and was struck by the inconsistency between their preaching and their practice. "I saw no one," he writes, "give up claim to home, to his coat, his purse or his name for the sake of the idea; but I did see many a one, having no other way to enter the ranks of the middle class, give chase to a dowry."

Back to the Truth

Disgusted with these doings, Camelli longed more and more for independence, for a quiet home, for surcease from haranguing labor meetings and boisterous tavern gatherings. But even betrothed to a young lady distant from socialist circles did not fill the emptiness of his soul in its quest for happiness; the engagement was dissolved, homage was paid to beauty in art wherein he now sought the gratification he had denied it in the days of his youth. He sketched, he painted with success, received orders—but the void within remained. A nervous affection rendered him unfit for work, gave him much time for reflections and broodings. Often he would find himself speculating on things religious, which thought he strove to banish, saying: "I do not want to be like so many that despise religion while they enjoy health, but reconcile themselves with it when they see death approaching."

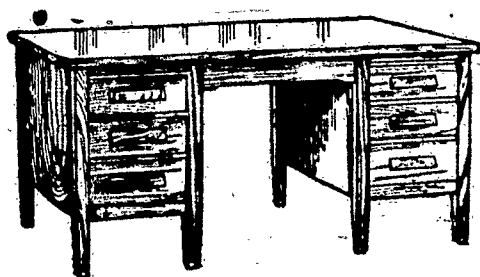
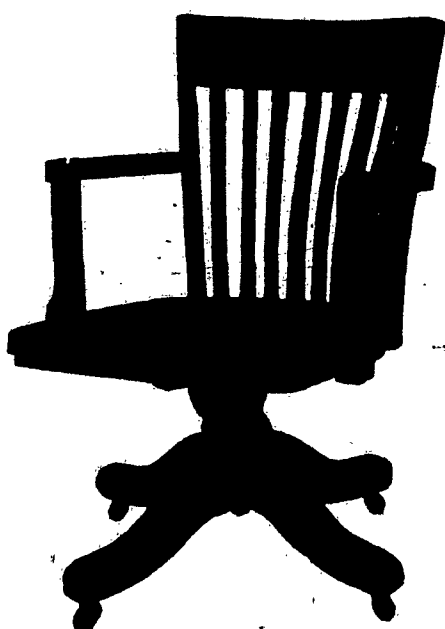
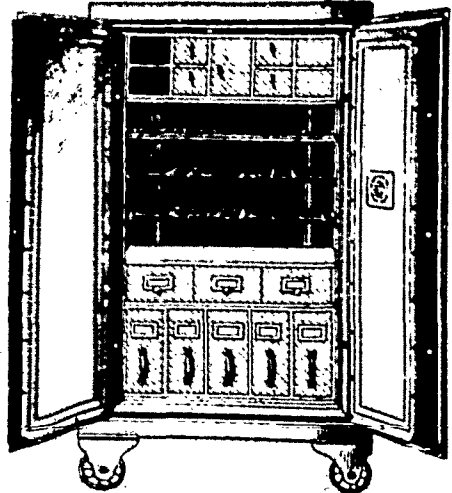
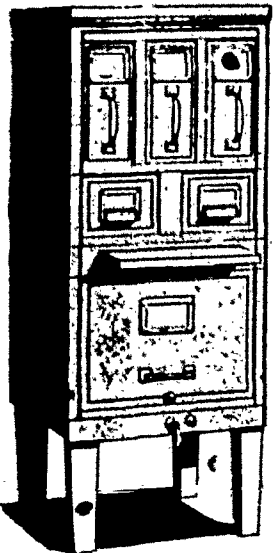
It is a beautiful story, the bringing home of the wayward, in spite of all obstinate resistance and perverseness, on the way that led "from light to light" and brought him by kindly leading to a new life and to new activity. Upon complete reconciliation with his God and the Church there followed the conviction that true happiness and contentment of soul meant for him service of the Lord. On Christmas morning, 1905, in his twenty-ninth year, he sang for the first time the anthem of Glory and Peace at the altar of the Most High—Would that an English translation of the book were soon to be granted us. C. B. of C. N.

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