

Library Signpost

12 Million Underdogs

By Rev. Benedict Ekmann

It is too bad that Native Son runs berserk with a certain sensationalism which makes it unfit for decent people. Oh, not that decent people can afford to forget that such things exist. But when we come to cover the nakedness of our brother, it must be with eyes averted.

I say it is too bad about Native Son, because it plainly sides with the angels, and packs a mighty wallop (from all that the reviewers have been saying about it). And if we oppose it, as we must, on grounds of decency, it will look as if we are siding with the forces of oppression to keep the lid from blowing off of a mighty evil.

Catholics don't have to read the book or see the play to get an eye-full and a soulful of indignation over the injustices to our black and brown brothers. The same author, Richard Wright, has done a much better service in another book that can be recommended, despite a Marxian turn in the text here and there. It is called 12 Million Black Voices. It leaves one gasping. There's an old saying that one-half of the world does not know how the other half lives. I might have had some suspicions, but they were a thousand miles from the grim and awful thing that stares out of this book about the 12 million Negroes to whom America has been at best only a cold foster mother.

We must pay attention. We cannot say so what! The Baroness de Hueck told us in her lecture last Sunday evening that we don't say so what! when we have a "strep" infection in our finger, just because it's only our finger. Soon it's up to the elbow, then up to the shoulder, and then the whole body is infected. The body politic will soon be riddled with the cancer of racial hatred, if we don't take drastic steps now. The infection is already up to the shoulder. 12 Million Black Voices is an X-ray picture which we cannot deny. We are hypocrites if we protest against the cancer of race hatred among the Nazis while we tolerate the same cancer in ourselves.

Father Speer Strahan, one of the army chaplains in Hawaii, sends back a most encouraging spiritual report in this week's Commonwealth. If all the other news from that sector of the world is depressing, here is news which is exhilarating.

The day after Pearl Harbor, the boys of his sector came in scores to receive the Sacraments. "For who could tell when death might again appear in the sudden skies, or over the rim of this peaceful light-filled ocean?" These confessions might be their last, and so they must not be hurried, and the men in line have to wait patiently—Germans from Ohio, Poles from Weehawken and South Bend, a quiet, dark Frenchman from Louisiana, a Hungarian from the shadow of the George Washington Bridge, Ukrainians from the coal regions, a Catholic Chinese from San Francisco.

By mid-afternoon the last of the long line had been heard. Next, the Blessed Sacrament was brought from the chaplain's car, not in an ordinary pyx, but in a parish ciborium. The men formed naturally and knelt down. One of their number began, and all joined in the acts of faith, hope and love. Then, the Latin prayers said, the priest went down the line, placing the Living Bread upon the tongue of each, and as he did so, it seemed to him that until now he had never understood why the Church said "custodiat animum tuum in vitam aeternam." What better guard than Christ! Then Communion being done, the men recited the Our Father and the Hail Mary together, pausing slightly after every phrase, as if to make it a more intimate part of their consciousness.

Father Strahan reports some poignant little things which are lightning flashes on a dark landscape.

"Father, will you write my mother a line here is her address, and please tell her I made a confession, and went to Holy Communion?"

"Father, will you send a money order for me? They need it, and I've help them a long, I wouldn't want to disappoint them now."

"Father, when will you come and hear our confessions again?"

And best of all, the soldier (little more than a boy) who begged, "Father, let me go to Communion tomorrow, it's my birthday." Let Father Strahan tell the rest of it: "And next morning, fresh from Holy Communion, he was wheeled into the operating room for what seemed only a slight ordeal, yet he died upon the table, and the priest, hurriedly summoned, had just time to anoint him with the singleunction upon the forehead, as he breathed his last. And as he lay peaceful in death, 'breast to breast with God,' one noticed on his left shoulder there was tattooed the one word, 'ucky.'"

Father Strahan's whole article is a beam of good hope from the war zone. All may not be well on the military sector. But a better thing is happening than what we found during the false and foul peace before the war. Men are finding their way back to God on their knees. Suppose our hopes of victory fade to twilight and darkness. It is at night that we see the stars. In no matter what darkness of calamity or defeat, God's candles will burn, and the Host will be radiant on the altar, and the priest's voice will pronounce forgiveness—even though the candlesticks are bottles, and the Host is on a plain table, and the priest wears the garb of the concentration camp.

Read Father Strahan's article to find out how men are discovering for themselves the real meaning of God's good hope and mercy. It is entitled Holy Communions in Hawaii. It is a two-column article on pages 396-397-398 of The Commonwealth, issue of Feb. 4. You may find it on the Catholic Evidence Library reading table. Come in and read it soon before you forget. (Columbus Civic Centre, 50 Chestnut St.)

Quote--End Quote

Misfortunes come at night (when least expected).—Grimm's Fairy Tales.

Men, even when alone, lighten their labor by song, however rude it may be.—Quintilian.

Nature loves leisure and peace, but grace cannot rest and eagerly embraces labor.—Imitation.

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some hope for the future in its discovery; perhaps one day the Church will see the light! Utterly incapable of discerning with the Church that some things are eternally wrong, can never become right, the Planned Parenthood Group goes merrily about its business of planning for fewer and farther-between parenthoods. Murder of the unborn is not the less murder because it is called abortion; and making it "therapeutic" lessens not its definite characterization as murder.

By all the rules of the Planned Parenthood Group, Abraham Lincoln's conception and birth would have been banned. Poverty and lowliness and lack of promise of two prospective parents would have led in all certainty to Banned Parenthood for them had the Planners' rules been followed. God has planned parenthood in the past, God plans it now; America and the world can be glad that God's plan was followed in the parenthood that made itself manifest in the birth in a log cabin on February 12 of Abraham Lincoln.

Names mean little. Justice and Godliness mean all! Evil is in the world and shall always have some way. Temporal evil will never be cured by resort to moral evil. Abuse of human nature and its powers can never become an acceptable or suitable or workable cure for human poverty and misfortune. Two wrongs can never make a right. Earnest striving along God's lines for betterment of human conditions can and will bring blessings to the world. Base surrender to practices that are unnatural can only add moral degradation to the material ailments that afflict mankind.

THE CRUSADE PROCEEDS

Crusaders originally were soldiers of the Church who fought to reclaim the Holy Land from the heathen. To the followers of Christ belonged by right the places that witnessed His birth, His preaching, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His ascension. The enemies of Christ had seized them, had forbidden Christians access to them, had persecuted and murdered those who attempted to visit them. Crusaders were, therefore, bearers of the cross who were dedicated to give back to Christian men what the heathen had taken from them.

To give back to men a right view of Christ's world, which is often taken from them by contact with a pagan world, is the work of our Crusaders. News that records world acts, that hides an reference of these acts to eternity, that speaks of the world in the language of the world with an underlying philosophy that is all of the world,—this is what men get from a secular press. The Christian view is denied to them, the Christian philosophy of life is hidden from them, the Holy Land of the Faith is kept beyond their reach.

Our Crusaders fight and strive to give back to them the Holy Land of the Faith, by placing our CATHOLIC COURIER in their homes. As Cross-bearers for Christ, bringing the message of His passion, His saving death, His abiding presence, His all-embracing mercy, into the homes of friends and neighbors, our Crusaders bring back into the possession of Catholic people something even better than the older Crusaders fought to retrieve for their contemporary Catholic brethren. The Holy Land of the Faith, the World for God, awaits those who by subscribing for and reading our COURIER obtain for themselves this priceless boon.

WARTIME PRAYER

Cities near and far have adopted the practice of Community Prayer for a duration. Methods differ, but the purpose of all is the same. One method may be that of a minute given by the individual at his own convenience each day; it may be the public method in vogue in Syracuse in which all traffic lights stand at red for one minute at a stated hour as a signal for all to turn to God in prayer. Our country needs the blessing of God in this, her hour of peril. Our soldiers and sailors, our President and his helpers, need the divine support our prayers can give them. All parts of our diocese would prosper through a program that would join us in prayer with our Jewish and Protestant neighbors for heaven's blessing on our country and on its arms.

THE CARES AND RICHES AND PLEASURES

They have heard the word, they have gone their way into their homes and into their places of business and into their farms. Some are old, some are young, some are in middle life. They have heard the word of God, the message of salvation. They have gone their way. They have retained for a time some memory of the word, perhaps have tried weakly to think about its meaning.

Then come the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life: and all thought of God's saving word fades from their minds. The cares of life: in the light of the struggle for sustenance, the attempts to increase income, to pay off the mortgage, to acquire a better job, to secure a competence,—how can a man find time for prayer, for attention to the call of salvation, for meditation on God's word. When riches come to make a man so content with the present, why shall he look to the future: forget God's word, it may interfere with the freest use and enjoyment of riches. And as for the pleasures of life, when they are at hand, why suffer them to be dissipated by gloomy thoughts of the future; why allow them to be interfered with by thoughts of duty, of right and wrong; why permit God's word to be dwelt on in such a way as to show the emptiness of these pleasures?

Those who give in to the call of cares, pleasures, riches, yield no fruit. No fruit! No merit, no reward, no acquisitions of spiritual worth! Too busy, too worried, too occupied, to find in God's word that support that alone can enable the soul to bring forth fruit unto life eternal! Please God that we be not numbered among those who yield no fruit.

My Ambition

I want to be a cowboy. With lasso, horse, and gun. To ride the rolling prairie From dawn till set of sun.

My horse, the mighty Pinto, Will gallop far away; And I, the jolly cowboy, Astride him all the day.

I'll shoot, and hunt, and whistle, Cheer all the folk with song; I want to be a cowboy— Just happy all day long.

Written in school in less than twenty minutes by David De Maize, age 12 years, a pupil of the Seventh Grade of St. John's School, 2375 Ridge Road West.

The Effect of War Upon Morals

By Rev. James M. Gillin, C.S.P.

The principal horror of war is not in bloody conflict, not even in the devastation of cities and provinces. I would go so far as to say that the principal horror of war is not even the possibility of the defeat of the right and the triumph of tyranny. To the saints, and to those who look at all things in the light of eternal consequences, the principal evil of war is the death on battlefields of soldiers who go before God in the state of mortal sin.

Some tremendous things have been said by great theologians about the evil of sin. Perhaps the strongest is a sentence from Cardinal Newman in the Lecture in Dialectics of Angelina entitled "Social State of Catholic Countries No Prejudice to the Sanctity of the Church." He says: "The Church holds that it were better for sin and men to drop from heaven, for the earth to fall, and for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extreme agony, so far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin."

Obviously if that sweeping statement be true—and no Catholic theologian will declare it untrue—the Church would not consider it a gain if in any war for the freedom of a continent or of a world the necessary price of victory would be the death in mortal sin of one soldier. I beg the reader to note carefully the wording of that sentence, and especially to concentrate upon the phrase "necessary price."

There are, of course, soldiers who would sin anywhere and in any circumstances. Some also who may sin less or not at all in barracks who would sin at home. Some who resist the temptations both of barracks and of cities to which the boys from the barracks go for recreation. But ever since the Spanish-American War (in which, by the way, we had too few chaplains) I have been impressed—perhaps it will not sound philosophical to say, horrified—at the report of recklessness and demoralization in the armies at the front of young fellows who had been decent and religious at home.

I cannot but be aware that certain people, even some Catholics, will call this feeling morbid. They seem to think, with a certain class of theological theorists in France during the last war, that if a man dies bravely in battle for the right or even for what he thinks to be the right, his sins are automatically cancelled. In effect, those theorists seemed to say that to die in battle for a good cause is to be a martyr. That theory will not stand. If a soldier carouses the night before a battle, breaks the Commandments of God and dies in battle without sacramental absolution or without perfect contrition, we dare not say that by the very act of dying he is forgiven.

The horror of war—principal horror for those who look at war, as they look at all things else, with the eyes of faith—is the thought that so many who have lived a clean pure godly life at home, go wild in the army and in no condition to meet their Judge go suddenly out of this world.

There is another phase of the question of morality and war, rather different from the phase I have mentioned but nevertheless an allied subject. I find it quoted in my favorite foreign monthly, Blackfriars, of London (December, 1941). It is from Christopher Hollis:

"There are some who talk to us of the horrors of war and bid us tolerate them because of the new world of peace that we are to enjoy when it is all over. The immediate horrors of war are commonly exaggerated. . . . But the real horror of war is the terrible moral reaction which universal experience shows always to come with this conclusion of peace."

Blackfriars adds this comment:

"War itself is necessarily brutalizing. Death and human butchery become so common as to be callously passed over with a shrug of the shoulders. . . . At the beginning of the war Christianity experienced a brief revival as people sought support at the first shock. But churches are emptying again; the first religious reactions have worn off and callousness is hardening the arteries of society and increasing crime and selfishness. However many opportunities it affords us the present disorder is a very evil thing, a cancer that grows malignantly."

The passages from Newman and Hollis may well be the subject of meditation. And of action, it will be well to keep them in mind when you hear the cry for more priests and more churches for religion in the army. And it will also be well to have these thoughts in mind when you make your daily prayers for the men on the field of battle and just behind the battle field.

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Five Years Ago--

In the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

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Heeding the call to aid victims of Ohio River valley floods, Catholics of the Rochester diocese poured thousands of dollars into the American Red Cross fund.

Amid scenes unprecedented in the Philippine Islands, only Christian country in the Orient, scenes made indelibly impressive by the deep devotion of the throngs attending, His Eminence Cardinal Dougherty, Papal Legate, opened the Thirty-third International Eucharistic Congress in Manila.

"Much will be accomplished in the problem of crime, when religion and morality become a living and vitalizing force in the lives of people of this nation," declared the Rev. William F. Bergin, Chancellor of the diocese and former chaplain at Auburn prison, in a radio address over WHEC.

For the part he played in the return of the body of Father Damian, from the leper colony at Mankai, to his native Belgium, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was presented with a medal struck to commemorate the occasion. The presentation was made by the Fathers of the Sacred Heart in Belgium.