

Surgeon Cords

# Robust Optimism

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

There are dozens of definitions, epigrams and "wisecracks" serious and jocund, about optimism and pessimism. Any one can reel them off. The poorest of them, in point of phrasing, and met by any means one of the best as far as substance is concerned, is that "an optimist is one who would rather believe that everything is all right than know the truth." It does often happen that an optimist retains his optimism by the simple expedient of closing his eyes. If he opened them wide, if he knew what is going on in the world perhaps he would abandon his optimism, or at least it would be shallow.

So it is a great satisfaction to come across a man who sees and knows and yet is hopeful for the race of man and for the future of civilization. I think I have not read in a dozen years one small book that is more realistic than the one entitled *Is Modern Culture Doomed?* by Andrew J. Krausz, Ph. D. S.T.D. Don't ask me to pronounce the name. We shall call him simply "Father Andrew."

Father Andrew wears no blinders. He has seen and read enough to make almost any man a misanthrope and even a dyed-in-the-wool cynic. Let me give you a few samples of his realistic apprehension of what's going on of what the "leaders of thought" are saying, of the trend of art, literature, science and social life. But as you read, remember that Father Andrew's conclusion is going to be very different from what you might imagine.

On the cult of money and the adulation of the rich:

"Having so nonchalantly sloughed off his belief in God, modern man turned to money as his chief object of worship. For him it is the means by which wealth, pleasures and comforts can be acquired. The thought of money animates and thrills him; it impels him to do everything in his power to get as much of it as he can . . .

This mad quest after riches does not always take the form of open lawlessness. Often it is disguised as a technically legalized procedure. Thus camouflaged, it evades reproach; for the springs of its motive, kept always in tension under the stimulation of avarice, act secretly from within. The results, nevertheless, are quite the same. The victims of this masked avarice feel it just as painfully as do those who experience injustice under bare-faced forms . . .

"The worth of men is estimated, not in terms of virtue, but in terms of money. If one has much money, he has both friends and followers. Everybody greets him cordially, flatters him, fawns upon him. Should he lose his riches, however, he is deserted, shunned, given no further thought."

Many a man has soured because of that despicable phase of human nature. I could cite a dozen instances myself in which a man who had money and friends, lost his friends when he lost his money.

On the cult of the body. (Father Andrew says "lie" when I fear, he means "she." He is gallant.):

"He is concerned about his body alone, which he fondles, admires, and develops with infinite care. As he surveys the world and life, he keeps his own

body prominently in the foreground, he never loses sight of it even for a moment. He looks at about everywhere like an idol. He suspects it frequently in mirrors large and small, set only in his own home but even in the streets and public places of entertainment. All his sins are removed, all his deficiencies remedied with great solicitude. Lips are rouged, cheeks powdered, nails manicured, hair dyed, eyebrows plucked, eyelashes curled. All this is done because nothing beyond the body is given the least thought or recognition."

On suicide of thought:

"According to the vitalistic pan-romanticists . . . reason itself is a harmful factor. They hold that reason depraves the very life of man, causing this to decay. Reason, they say, treats life logically and, like a veritable demon, is leading the entire human race to ruin."

On Hedonism:

"Modern materialists, everlastingly on the hunt for pleasure, pursue the will of the flesh through all the tortuous courses of their temptations lives . . . Hardly have they drained one draught of delight when a new craving arises . . . The result of each new attempt is always the same. After they have exhausted all sources of delight and are choked and gorged to the full, the spell breaks and they are disillusioned . . . At such moments the thought: 'Ead it all!' bores into their brains."

On dancing:

"Many exotic features are also found in the mimicry of modern dances, the same being reproductions of the dances of the jungle and of other primitive places . . . The modern dances have spread to the most obscure towns in rural districts, gaining there the same popularity they enjoy in metropolitan cities."

We could go on, but we need not. I fear that this process of lifting a few sentences here and there may give the reader of this piece, unless he also reads the book, an impression that Father Andrew is morbid. But those sentences are really conclusions of paragraphs in which he speaks with moderation and justice about what he sees. I quote them not only to show that his open-eyed and non-biased observer is no optimistic fool.

So, let's come to his conclusion -- the surprising conclusion. He says:

"Whenever any influence detrimental to the development of a nation begins to diffuse itself, a reaction sets in, either immediately or a short time after, and certain tendencies . . . the injurious effects and to restore equilibrium come to the fore. Political and social upheavals are soon succeeded by a return to normal conditions. A period of corrupt morals is followed by a period of greater regard for morality; a decline in religion, by a revival of religious zeal. The operation of this law is confirmed by the history of every nation, ancient or modern. In the course of their existence, nations have undergone many acute and distressing crises which they have somehow managed to survive."

If I cared at this time and in this place to go into the theology upon which an optimistic view of man and affairs must be based, I should launch into a little sermon on the text of St. Paul, "they are without hope because they are without God in the world," and its correlative text, "We are not of those who have no hope."

The only basis for optimism; the only reason to believe that the world will be set right again when it goes too far wrong is--God!

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# STRANGE BUT TRUE

## Little-Known Facts for Catholics

By M. J. MURRAY



# EDITORIALS

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He was a member of the Ordination Class of 1928, had served as Librarian, Mt. Morris, the Immaculate Conception Church of Rochester, and as Chaplain of St. Mary's Boys' Home. His death occurred at the Home early on Monday morning.

Father Smith was a priest whose outlook on life was always a happy one. People instinctively accepted him as their friend, their spiritual guide. Old and young rejoiced to share in the fruits of his ministry. Joy in the faith of Christ marked his every action. Fourteen years of priesthood were all too short to express the consuming zeal that dwelt within him, when we speak from a human standpoint fourteen years of priesthood were ample, indeed, for such expression, when we see things as God sees them.

His many friends in the priesthood will miss him, his fraternal spirit, his helpful optimism. Thousands of the faithful to whom he ministered will see in his death the loss of one who meant much to them. The Bishop and the diocese will mourn his passing as a useful servant of the Church, a worthy priest of God.

To his brother and sister the COURIER extends its sympathy, extending the hope that solace shall be theirs in hallowed memory of a life dedicated to God and to the salvation of souls. May his soul rest in peace!

# BAPTIZING THEM

Entrance into Christ's Church was to be by Baptism. Not by Baptism in the name of any creature however holy, however great. But by Baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. We were to belong body and soul to the entire Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the three Persons, we were to find our supernatural life as in its source. In them we were to have the daily help needed for its continuance.

The power of the Trinity was first exercised within us supernaturally in our Baptism. That power suffused our being with vivifying grace, which came to us not as a robe or covering, but as a penetrating force entering into every fiber of the soul. That power brought about wonderful changes in our soul: it blotted out all stain of original sin, took away the curse of the primal sin, raised the soul from a creature of God to the adopted son of God, made it an heir of God's Kingdom above. In us from the moment when the waters of Baptism flowed over our heads, the Father began to dwell as the Author of our being; the Son began to dwell as our Redeemer; the Holy Ghost began to dwell as our Sanctifier.

The Trinity remains within us throughout our life on earth and for all eternity in Heaven. It is a presence always effective in results. The divine love that brought about our creation, reveals in each new moment to renew in us our created gifts of body and mind; to add each day new increments of soul-life and body-life; maintaining our souls constantly with its own divine life, blessing our bodies with sturdy health, active senses, the joy of living. Added to these natural gifts, are the riches of all the spiritual gifts and graces proper to one baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

# 'Quiz' Corner

Why does not the Catholic Church have Sunday schools for the grown people like the other churches do?  
 Since Catholics receive a thorough training in their religion during their school days they are not so well equipped in the knowledge of their religion. They are constantly reminded of their duty in sermons or Sunday evening lectures and on the various festivals. Instructions are given in the many Catholic societies, as of which eliminates the necessity of a Catholic Sunday school.

Library Signpost

# The Song of Bernadette

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

The Song of Bernadette. By Franz Werfel. (Viking) Franz Werfel, like certain other great writers of our times, is a fugitive from the Nazis. His first book since his escape is not a philippic nor a jeremiad against his enemies, but a testimony of love for God and man. It is the history of St. Bernadette, told in the form of a novel.

When the Nazi war machine crashed through France in that fateful June of 1940, Werfel and his wife were driven ahead of it in the exodus of refugees. He knew he was a marked man, for he had written against the Nazis in the earlier years; one night, in fact, he heard in London a British broadcast announcing his execution by the Nazis. There seemed no place in all the south of France where he could find lodgings and secure refuge except Lourdes, and to Lourdes he came with his wife, with only a superficial knowledge of the destiny and importance of the little town.

Under cover, until he could get passports to America, he learnt about Bernadette and the meaning of Lourdes; and during one particularly dark hour of anguish and mortal fear of the Nazi dragnet, he made a vow to sing the song of Bernadette if ever he should find safe harbor on the shores of America.

That was in 1940, in the late spring. And now, in the spring of 1942, appears this book. The Song of Bernadette, as the fulfillment of that vow. It is a generous, whole-hearted, amazing fulfillment: for it must surely be reckoned as one of the noblest novels ever written. Greater even than the miracle of his escape from the Nazis is the miracle of this book. Uprooted, driven forth, exasperated by terror, Werfel who is a Hungarian Jew, has been so blessed through Bernadette with healing of mind and heart that no trace of bitterness or hatred flaws the utter graciousness of his story. It stands, apart and sublime an overwhelming avocation of Bernadette and her lovely lady and the healing love that flows out of Lourdes.

Werfel begins his story with that marvellous February day in 1858 when Bernadette Soubirous, fourteen years old suffering from chronic asthma, child of Lourdes poorest family was given by Heaven to see the beautiful Lady in a vision of such ecstasy as to possess the girl until her death. In fifty chapters arranged in tens like the decades of the Rosary, the author tells the chain of events which led from the first Ave Maria of that February apparition until the last unearthly cry *J'aimé, I love, before her death at 35.*

Werfel follows the facts of the case with scrupulous fidelity, yet so great is his dramatic power that they are alchemized into a drama of remarkable

realism. The living Bernadette walks through these pages, every nuance and tone of her life faithfully reproduced. Even more remarkable is the mastery of Werfel's description of the apparitions. Such a delicacy of perception and such a penetrating intuition into the rarest of spiritual experiences would have been impossible without the aid of grace. No reviewer's description could reflect the utter spiritual loveliness which radiates from the very essence of Mary's love in the pages which describe the eighteen apparitions. They are the perfect mirror of that heaven of delight and communion into which the little girl was rapt as she beheld the Lady.

Nor does Werfel relax his reverent attention to the verity of Bernadette's nature in those final years, hidden in the convent so far from her beloved world. He finds the true key to her great sufferings and vexations in the Lady's call to penance; and the agony of the tumor on her leg is the culmination of that vexation of long before when the Lady made her eat of the grass and drink of the muddy ooze in the grotto. "I cannot promise to make you happy in this world, only in the next . . ." the Lady said to Bernadette during the second apparition. Werfel, more powerfully than any writer I know, conveys the full pathos of this sword of separation throughout Bernadette's life.

The Song of Bernadette is richly and warmly human. Each one of its host of characters comes forth true to life: Bernadette's hard-hit father and mother, something like Dickens' Micawbers; her teacher, rigidly set on holiness and impatient of visions to a backward child; the dean of Lourdes, Peyramale, furious lion tamed at last into a docile lamb by his singular little parishioner; the government officials from the police commissioner Jacomet up to the Emperor Louis Napoleon; the café cronies slyly voicing the stale left-overs of the age of reason and science. All these have their innings, but among them moves Bernadette, a sign to be accepted or contradicted. Werfel draws the full measure of the world's "comedy of errors" out of the dramatic personae around Bernadette; but never with venom or acid, for Werfel loves all these people and views their errors with humor and pity.

Not only is The Song of Bernadette the fulfillment of a noble vow, but also a testament of faith and love. Werfel believes and loves what his book so eloquently describes. He has the conviction that Lourdes is Heaven's gift to the world of our times--its peace, for the world's strife; its healing, for the world's inhumanity; its faith, for the world's negation and despair. For it was at Lourdes that he himself found peace and healing and faith during his flight from persecution.

(Three copies of The Song of Bernadette are being placed in the Catholic Evidence Library for what is hoped will be a long line of readers.)

The American home is a little democracy. Maybe so, but Mother wishes someone else occasionally would be elected to do the dishes. Waterloo (La.) Courier.