

We Careless Americans

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

After George Wickershaw, Chairman of the Commission on Law Enforcement in the Hoover Administration, had submitted his report on crime in the United States, President Hoover declared, with a forthrightness probably resented by a good many of us, that "We Americans are the most lawless people in the world." Naturally that sweeping utterance needed explanation, if not qualification. Into that we need not go just now, for my theme is something slightly different. But there is a word similar to lawlessness—"carelessness," especially criminal carelessness, and I think we must confess that we are perhaps the most criminally careless people in the world.

For example, the big hotels in New York City have found it necessary to paste a notice on every front window (some of them have a thousand or more of such windows) warning guests not to throw lighted matches or lit cigarette butts out the window. The clothing of people in the street has been set on fire, and awnings have been burned until the bad habit has become a serious nuisance. Does the warning produce the desired effect? Not altogether. In many cases the hotels had to remove the awnings. Smokers, it seems, don't give a hoot for persons or things below.

At the first tee of a golf course I have seen a sign, perhaps ten feet by twelve, beseeching players not to drop lighted matches or cigarettes or cigars upon the grass, which, it was explained, was highly inflammable. Did the warning work? Apparently not too well, for just in front of the tee was a burned space of about a hundred square yards. As I stood reading the sign, a player, with a long cigarette holder wagging precariously upon his lips, dropped the lighted cigarette from the holder, searched for it a moment, couldn't find it, exclaimed "Oh H—!" and went on after his ball.

More than once in driving in the woods of the State of Washington or in California I have been stopped by a forest fire and once indeed all but trapped between burning trees in front and behind. The rangers declared that almost all such fires are set either by campers or cigarette-stub throwers. Nothing can cure them. Newspapers in these sections carry warnings and threats of heavy fines; in the movies pictures are presented showing how much damage can be done, and even how many lives may be lost by the act of one careless person. But the forest and prairie fires continue. I remember particularly an area, several miles in extent in the Canadian Rockies, where one big fire had occurred, and as the new trees were starting to grow again—mere saplings—they too were burned out.

You have in a small way the same phenomenon of carelessness in the home and—the office. Smokers place their lighted cigars and cigarettes on desks, pianos and other furniture, or drop them on the floor where they burn holes in the rug. There seems to be no means whatever of correcting these criminally careless people. Are they morons? Not any more so than you or I, except along that one line. Are they malicious? Not at all. Just careless. They "don't give a hang." No psychiatrist has as yet discovered what kind of argument will appeal to them.

I once knew a man of considerable wealth who had a marble bar and floor installed in his beautiful home. He was a great entertainer, though as sometimes happens, a total abstainer. I have known nine governors of States to be in his home on one night, to partake of his liquid bounty, though, again, he was not a politician. He explained that his guests "traipse" all over the house and spill drink upon his rugs and even on the walls! Barbarians? Scarcely. They were of the social and intellectual elite.

I read in the papers some years ago of a man—this time a pipe-smoker—who narrowly escaped death some four or five times because he would persist in smoking in bed. Finally he burned down his house and with it his wife and four children. He nearly went mad with grief.

The reader of these lines may continue the catalogue ad lib. I could go on with it interminably.

Those recollections and dozens more came back to me as I read of the holocaust in that night-club in Boston. It is little satisfaction to see in the papers that "an investigation has been commenced." Why do not the investigations commence before the calamity, not after? But there ARE inspections. Yes? What kind of inspection is it that doesn't prevent catastrophe? Like the lighted-match and cigarette-stub throwers, like the campers and the drinkers and the rest, inspectors may be careless. Carelessness in such a matter is criminal. If someone like Mr. Wickershaw would make another report I fear we should have to admit, like President Hoover, that we are the most criminally careless people in the world.

(Copyright, 1943, N. C. W. C.)

FIVE and TEN Years Ago--

From Jan. 12, 1938, Edition

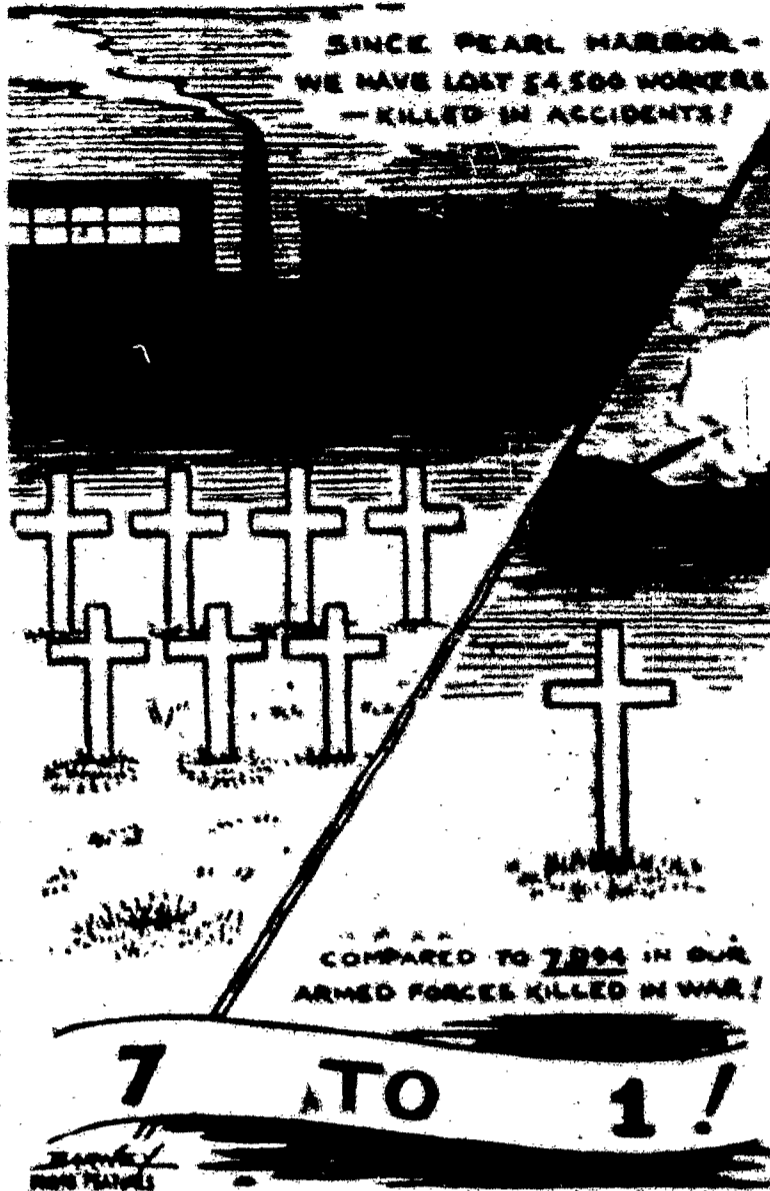
An outpouring of 10,000 men, marking the 30th Anniversary of the Holy Name Society in services at 19 rally churches, brought high commendation from His Excellency, Bishop O'Hara to the Rochester Diocesan Holy Name Union, sponsors of the rallies.

From Jan. 12, 1938, Edition

On a hurried visit to Ithaca where he visited the Immaculate Conception Church rectory, the Most Rev. Paul Yu-Pin, native Catholic Bishop of Nanking, China, described war conditions in his native land to Chinese students of Cornell University at the Cosmopolitan Club.

A movement to promote Inter-Racial justice and charity was launched by the Rev. John La Farge, S.J., associate editor of America, at a dinner meeting of Nazareth College Alumnae Association in Hotel Sagamore.

Home Front vs. War Front



EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 18)

of the parishes still further extended that association. Mr. Wynn was an example of a Catholic layman eager and ready to bring into a busy civic life the advantages of devotional practices; and willing to spend his time and efforts in inviting his fellow man to join with him.

His influence and his zeal should be an example for good unto our Catholic men. So many are apt to look upon attendance at the Laymen's Retreats and membership in Nocturnal Adoration Societies as extraordinary activities proper only to a few chosen souls. Mr. Wynn showed these movements are for all men, not for just a few. They are fitted to bring many blessings to the ordinary factory worker, office worker, business man, professional man.

Our sympathy to his bereaved mother, wife and family; our prayers for the repose of his soul. May he rest in peace!

TAKE TO THE CHIEF STEWARD

The order was given by Jesus. It was given to the waiters at a marriage feast. The waiters had filled the vessels with water at His command; now obeyed His further order to take them to the chief steward. The divine power of Jesus wrought a change from water into wine in all six of the vessels, while the waiters were carrying them across the dining hall to the chief steward. Jesus found nothing evil in wine, nothing wrong in serving it at the wedding feast. He worked His first miracle for a twofold purpose: to let His friends and neighbors know of His divine power at the beginning of His public life; to do a kindness for an embarrassed bridegroom and for His guests. He assumed His companions knew how to take their wine, and He left it to their own consciences to use it in proper moderation.

The Catholic Church carries the spirit of Jesus Christ into our own times and conditions. No fanatical urge impels her to deny to men what God made for them. No twisted judgment leads her to impose a prohibition law where Christ did not impose it. Good things for the good. Good wine for those who use it wisely; retribution for those who abuse it. The wickedness of the bibulous does not change the wine into an evil thing. It remains as God made it, good. The Church would appeal to the conscience of man to deal temperately with God's gifts, finding in the lawful use of them the happiness that God intended when He created them.

The fanatic would say: "Take it away from the chief steward—take it away so that he can not serve wine to the guests." Christ said, and the Church repeats His command: "Take to the chief steward." Kindness, temperance, hospitality, all meet congenially when the spirit of Christ is present.

BUY WAR STAMPS, WAR BONDS

Your brethren, your sons, fight every day for you and for America. They need your support, your cooperation, if they are to win. Their struggle is constant, your purchasing of War Bonds should be constant. Do not let them down! Give them the weapons, the bullets they need: You keep them supplied when you buy more and more War Bonds.

Who's Against Revolution? (III)

By Rev. Benedict Shannon

Certainly not the Pope. Certainly not Archbishop Spellman. Certainly not Bishop Sheil. What have the Pope and many other Bishops been calling for during the last 75 years, if not a revolution? What else was Leo XIII's labor encyclical, or Pope Pius XI's, but a radical charter to turn the industrial world inside out, if not upside down? What else was Pius XI's call to restore corporate worship and frequent Communion, but a rallying of Christian souls around the only genuine source of divine courage and energy. What else has his great prelate, the Most Rev. Cardinal Spellman, and his fellow prelates, the Most Rev. Cardinals Spellman, Sheil, and Sheil, been ordaining for the future, if not a grand Christian revolution, taking the world by storm and giving it a new era of Faith and Hope and Charity? And what else have such great movements as the Jewish, the Greek, the Catholic, the Worker, been, but revolutions, and such triumphs of these far-seeing Popes and Bishops as the great revolution, setting the world afire with Christ's life, and laying the dynamite of Christ's truth in the very midst of the world's stronghold.

Who wants to be a back number in this breath-taking movement? If Catholics don't move ahead with the stride of their Popes and their own wills, they certainly will not find that the world has stood behind to keep their slow pace. For the world is rushing ahead, not in its own revolution. With uncanny speed, it is shaping up into what Aldous Huxley foretold years ago in his "Brave New World," and Monaghan Brown also, in his "Lord of the World." The danger for Catholics is not that they will stay behind, for nobody likes to be outdone or look as if he just got out of the Ark; but rather that they will, more or less unconsciously, be on the side of the world's revolution, and will accelerate the coming of that day of which Christ said, "The Son of man, when He cometh, shall find His faith on the earth?"

Pope Pius XI declared that he thanked God it was given him to live in these times so tremendous with possibilities for the future. He said, when "no Catholic can afford to be justifiers."

Our great war-Pope, Pius XII, uttered in his recent Christmas message:

"Tranquillity has nothing in common with the spirit of holding steadily and obstinately... and with childish stubbornness, to things as they are, nor yet with the reluctance—child of evil envy and selfishness—to put one's mind to the solution of problems and questions which the passage of time and the succession of generations, with their different needs and progress, make actual, and being up as burning questions of the day. But, for a Christian who is conscious of his responsibility even towards the least of his brethren, there is no such thing as a doubtful tranquillity; nor is there a question of right, but of struggle, of action against every inaction and desertion in the great spiritual hour, when the stakes are the construction, may the very soul, of the society of tomorrow."

Further on, speaking of the "dreadful gravity of this hour," he says:

"The call of the moment is not lamentation, but action; not lamentation over what has been, but reconstruction of what is to arise and must arise for the good of society. It is for the best and most distinguished members of the Christian family, filled with the enthusiasm of Crusaders, to unite in the spirit of truth, justice and love to the call: God wills it—ready to serve and sacrifice themselves, like the Crusaders of old."

"We drive home these thoughts, which are meant as an appeal to the conscience of the world, and a rallying-cry to all those who are ready to ponder and weigh the grandeur of their mission and responsibility by the vastness of this universal disaster."

(By the way, how many of you readers at least looked over the text of the Pope's Christmas message, printed on pages 2 and 3 of the Dec. 24th issue of the CATHOLIC COURIER? It is a wonderful message—over which all men of good will should brood and meditate, so that it may come to pass in the world.)

In his book "The Road to Victory," Archbishop Spellman of New York makes his own the words of a letter which an RAF pilot wrote to his mother:

"Today we are faced with the greatest organized challenge to Christianity and civilization that the world has ever seen, and I count myself honored to be the right age and fully trained to throw my full weight into the scale."

Bishop Sheil, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, said recently in an address:

"The liberal of yesterday must become the Christian revolutionary of today. The conservative of today is already buried in the debris of yesterday's collapse... We are free to face with realism against which wishful thinking is powerless... There is no longer place for the faint-hearted, for the so-called conservative Catholics in this world-wide battle for justice, for the cause of the oppressed, and of the common people everywhere. Catholic education must do its part in this work... It must comprehend and teach: a realistic view of the present world crisis; an understanding of the forces that are at work; a thorough, a radical Christian philosophy of life, without shadow of weakness, of compromise with any group within or outside the Church that may stand in the way of attaining our common objective; finally, an active participation in the revolution of today that will shape and dominate the world of tomorrow."

Who's afraid of the revolution, with such intrepid leaders, in the front lines?

Last week there was an unfortunate omission of acknowledgment to Dodd, Mead & Co., for the quotation from Chesterton's "The Outline of Sanity."

A benefactor to humanity would be the scientist who discovers how to revitalize milk, juice by the injection of vitamins.—"Waterloo Courier."

But if millions of women can take up war work without disrupting home life, what have they been doing all the time?—"Lancaster New Era."