

BLACKFRIARS

ALSO A LEADER

Adolph Kolping, the German Bootmaker-Priest

A MONTH or two ago, happening to be in Cologne, I looked in at the Church of the Friars Minor to say a prayer at Adolph Kolping's grave. Not that I felt that he needed any memento of mine, but because of those words he wished to be inscribed on the plain stone that covers his tomb:

HERE RESTS

ADOLPH KOLPING

Born December 8th, 1813.

Died December 4th, 1865.

He asks for the charity of a prayer.

The little sanctuary was gay with the first spring blossoms, golden tulips and yellow daffodils ranged around the grave flanked by two great brown laurel wreaths with orange and black ribbons, the colours of the Catholic Journeymen's Association, of which he was the founder. And they drifted in, by twos and threes or in little groups, as they always do, sturdy fair-haired lads with heavy rucksacks and dusty boots and knelt down before their Father's grave to give him of their charity because he desired it so.

On this occasion, however, I noticed that they did not leave the church after they had said their prayer, but moved off to a little table near the altar rails on which lay an open book in which they all inscribed their names, I thought at first it was some sort of visitors' book, until a notice caught my eye requesting that no candles should be lighted before the grave nor any other rite performed that might in any way anticipate the decision of the religious authorities and prejudice Father Kolping's Cause.

No better moment than the present could have been chosen for the promotion of that Cause. Adolph Kolping's significance for our age lies in the fact that he was one of the great pioneers of Catholic Action, an apostle whose work

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is being carried on to this day, a *Fuhrer* in the finest sense of the word, long before that word had become identified with the idea of a political dictatorship. There was nothing flamboyant in his methods, and, in a sense, I suppose, his life was prosaic enough, yet now that we are able to view it as a completed whole and also in the right perspective, we see how much in that life was of Divine inspiration and full of poetic fitness.

Adolph Kolping was born at Kerpen near Cologne. On leaving school, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker, for though he had always shown an unusual aptitude for learning, his father was too poor to permit him to study. The boy not only resigned himself to the seeming inevitable, but, like his famous compatriot Hans Sachs, who described himself as a

‘ Shoe-
Maker and Poet too,’

he set to work with a right good will, determined to make himself at least a master of his craft. He served the full term of his apprenticeship, qualified as journeyman and followed his humble calling for a number of years with various masters. Thus, all unconsciously, he was serving yet another apprenticeship, living the life and enduring the drudgery and hardships of those who in the years to come were to look up to him, not only as their spiritual father but as the master who had been one of themselves.

During all those years, however, Kolping's intellectual hunger had remained unappeased. So when he heard that there were more chances in the city of a young man improving his mind as well as learning a bit more of his trade, he packed up his bag of tools and betook himself to Cologne. But the old city beneath the great twin spires that was to be the scene of his future labours and his future triumphs brought him for the first time face to face with the ugliest realities of life. In the workshops and sordid lodging-houses, in the wretched haunts where his companions sought their pleasures, wherever he gazed with the clear eyes of unspoilt youth he saw nothing but soulless

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drudgery, abject misery, human degradation. And whilst his dreams of intellectual advancement, of 'bettering himself' in the finest sense of the term, slowly faded away, he almost forgot his own bitter disillusionment in an all-absorbing compassion for the misery of others.

It was in those hours of spiritual desolation — wanting so much to help and feeling so utterly helpless — that he first thought of becoming a priest. He left Cologne, but, strengthened in his purpose by one who was to prove a fatherly and understanding friend, he even found the courage to return to that city of disenchantment in order to qualify himself to study for the priesthood. All day long he toiled at his craft and pored over a dog-eared Latin grammar when the day's work was done. Finally, at the age of twenty-four, he was able to take his place amongst the lads of fourteen at the Marcellus Grammar School. By dint of sheer hard work, he managed to get through a five years' course of study in three years and a half, earning his keep the while by coaching younger boys. A charitable friend provided the money for his University studies, and finally in 1845 he was ordained in the Church of the Friars Minor, which was to be so closely associated with his name and his work and in which he was to be laid to rest.

It was when Kolping was acting as assistant-priest in Elberfeld, then a rising industrial city, that the future *Gesellenverein* (Journeyman's Association) came into being. A proposal to form some sort of confraternity for Catholic working-men was submitted by a delegation of about thirty young journeymen to their parish-priest. At the meeting held for discussing ways and means and inviting suggestions, somebody opined that the scheme might be extended to encourage a little social intercourse amongst the various members, who, for the most part, were leading lonely, joyless lives in uncongenial surroundings. The idea found such prompt and enthusiastic support that it was immediately adopted. An informal sort of club was organized, and a carpenter's shop was placed at the disposal of members for Sunday and Monday evenings. The premises, however, soon became far too small, and a schoolroom had to

be commandeered instead. Father Kolping was one of the first to offer his services and considerably widened the scope of the new venture by organizing lectures and evening classes on subjects of practical interest to the various members.

No man could have been better qualified to talk to the men and to win their confidence by meeting them, as it were, on common ground. He had led their life, knew its hardships, trials and temptations; small wonder that their hearts went out to him who was striving to make up to them for father, mother, kindred, and all the kindly familiar things of home.

'The Catholic Church is a family in the finest sense of the word,' Kolping writes in his book on the Association and its work. 'A *Catholic* association is recognizable as such because it is a family, and it is most truly Catholic the more closely it approximates to the family ideal or most nearly attains it.'

But the new Association was not merely to be a family in itself, self-contained and self-sufficient. It had another and far greater objective in the family life of the future, for it aimed at making 'good workmen for the present and good masters and heads of families for the time to come.' The family life of the Association was to be a preparation for the family life of each member individually. 'That,' says Kolping, 'was the fundamental idea of the whole institution, and, please God, will remain so to the end.'

As its name implies, 'The Catholic Young Men's Association of Elberfeld,' started as a local fellowship, but so swift was its growth and so eager the response it found, that Kolping soon began to consider the possibility of launching a similar enterprise in other cities. In 1849, two and a half years after the Elberfeld foundation had come into being, he was moved to Cologne at his own request, and soon after his arrival was able to enrol the first seven members of a branch association that was eventually to become the headquarters of a universal brotherhood. In the short space of a year, the roll of membership had increased to 300. Temporary premises were acquired, but were soon

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found too mall; after a long series of similar and irksome removals, Kolping had finally begged enough together to enable him to acquire a large house and garden for his lads in the very heart of the city. At last his dream was realized. The great Kolping Family now had a home of their own.

Not only had the good seed fallen from the hand of the sower to strike deep and lasting roots in fertile soil; the birds of passage carried it in their turn and dispersed it far and wide. Kolping's own 'travelling journeymen' helped to propagate his work wherever they went, and new foundations sprang up, first in the Rhine country, then in South Germany and Austria, after that spreading northwards as far as Berlin. At the second General Congress held in 1851, it was decided to do away with local designations and to bring all the foundations under one heading as the Association of Catholic Journeymen, the name by which Kolping's work is known to this day.

It is no exaggeration to say that Adolph Kolping lived and died for the cause he had so much at heart. He covered thousands of miles in order to gain new recruits, to prepare the ground for some new foundation or to speak at mass meetings, gladly begging his way wherever he went for the lads he loved. The great work of organization rested mainly on his shoulders; he edited a number of newspapers and periodicals, contributing largely to each, whilst as an unrivalled speaker, he was continually in demand at Catholic Congresses and similar functions.

Such superhuman demands on human strength and energy would have undermined the finest constitution, and all his life long Kolping had been a sick man. His last years, however, were to be full of happiness and rich in reward and honour. His great work received its crowning blessing when Pope Pius IX in a personal letter thanked 'his beloved son Adolph Kolping' for all he had accomplished in the service of youth and conferred on him and all members of his Association the Apostolic Blessing. In 1862 the 'Journeymen's Father,' as he had come to be known, visited Rome and was twice received by the Pope in private audience. The words he then heard from the Holy Father's

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own lips must have been a rich recompense indeed for all his devoted labours. As a further token of his favour, the Pontiff presented him with a handsome chasuble from his own private chapel.

The day of the consecration of the new wing of the Associations' headquarters in Cologne was the last Kolping was to spend with his sons. For the last time they saw him 'go unto the altar of the Lord,' for the last time he blessed them, and they were afterwards to recall that there was something unusually solemn and impressive in the words he addressed to them, almost as though he knew that in a little while he would be leaving them for ever.

After much suffering heroically endured, Adolph Kolping passed away on December 9th, 1865, and was laid to rest before the St. Joseph's altar in the church that for thousands of young men from every part of the world has been a place of pilgrimage for many years past. In the simplicity of his last resting-place, his wishes have been respected, but a fine statue in the grounds before the church testifies to the gratitude and affection of the lads to whom he devoted his life's work.

And now the Process for beatification of Father Kolping has been opened by Cardinal Schulte, Archbishop of Cologne. No more auspicious moment could have been chosen for focussing public attention on the man and his work. Men and women need an occasional reminder that there is nothing new under the sun, and that it is not always the thing that matters so much as the spirit in which it is done. In the Germany of our own day, everything conceivable is being done for the rising generation, everything save the one thing that really matters. To his massed brown legions of high-mettled youth Adolf Hitler is what Adolph Kolping was and still is to his own **young** men—a *Fuhrer*. Viewed superficially, the two great movements have some striking points of resemblance; in fact, the main principles on which Kolping's work was based stand for all that is best and finest in the programme of National-Socialism. The cult of the family, the team spirit and the training of good citizens—all these ideals were Kolping's long before

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they were Hitler's. 'If you want a better future, you must rear it.' That maxim of Kolping's would also appear to be the motive force inspiring the work of reconstruction in the Third Reich.

Nobody who has studied this New Germany, so full of hope and fervour, can fail to be impressed by the great and insistent work of propaganda that is being so efficiently carried on in this particular direction. On my last visit to the Rhine, I found the main thoroughfares of Bonn and Cologne hung with banners and streamers reminding all and sundry that 'Without The Family There Is No Happiness. Safeguard The Family.' 'Healthy Offspring The Nation's Future. Germany Shall Have A Future.' 'Help Build Up The Third Reich. Your Nation Shall Yet Be Happy.'

No German who can read block capitals has any excuse nowadays for failing to realize the importance of the well-being of the family in its bearing on the State. And in these days of the transvaluation of all moral values, the loosening of all domestic ties, it is something to find a State so whole-heartedly upholding the family ideal.

But 'Patriotism is not enough,' and the interested outsider is rather apt to carry away the impression that this intensive cult of the family is but part of that other and more fervid cult of *Volk und Rasse*, the Nation and its Racial Integrity, with all the Chauvinism and intellectual inbreeding such fetishes imply.

Therein lies the essential difference between the two leaders. To Hitler, the State is an end in itself; to Kolping but a means to an end, and that end the peopling of the Kingdom of God.

Like Hitler, Kolping in his day foresaw the perils of a Socialist mass movement, for, in the Communistic Manifesto of Marx and Engels, the voices of the first revolutionaries had already made themselves heard, and their battle-cry was growing more and more insistent: 'Proletarians of all nations, unite!'

But Communism and, paradoxically enough, many of those now pledged to its extermination, can see a better

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world **only** in terms of drastic change and upheaval. The existing order has first to be swept away to give place to **the** new. Having gone about its work of destruction with characteristic German thoroughness, the Third Reich is **now** striving to prove its ability **to** reconstruct, and much **that** has been achieved in this respect is deserving of warm recognition.

But in the handling of human material Kolping showed himself by far the better psychologist. In any system that excludes all hope of advancement for those who are not 'Yes-Men,' there must always be some who sacrifice, or more often pretend to sacrifice, principles to expediency. Tyranny, however benevolent in its ultimate aims, is apt to breed hypocrites, and that even more formidable army of martyrs.

Kolping's policy was essentially constructive. His was Nature's way, that of slow growth and steady development. How different was his conception of leadership may be gauged by the circumstance that throughout the first two years **of** its existence his great Association had no formulated rules. Later on, before adopting for a new centre the regulations that had been drawn up for another, he would often make certain modifications to suit local conditions, 'for,' as he says, 'the same kind of life is not everywhere the same.' Then again: 'We also learnt not to make more rules than were absolutely necessary to attain some definite end. Too much laying down the law is bad for authority and makes obedience a difficult matter.' Authority, he concedes, is indispensable in every form of community life, but he who sets out to win men's hearts must give his own in pledge. It is this disinterested self-sacrificing love that is the mainspring of authority. Authority must be deserving of love, earning it by the sweat of its brow, or it will **be** but a phantom thing, raised by exigency, sustained **by** force and doomed sooner or later to break down.

'Freedom and honour are your most precious possessions.' All who joined the Association were made welcome but no pressure was brought to bear upon a lad if he did not care to remain. Nor was there any constraint in reli

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gious matters. A good word in due season was usually found to be more efficacious than rules and regulations. For those who desired to participate in the religious life of the community, every facility was provided, but such participation was a matter of free choice. The one rule of the Association that allowed of no exception required of every member that his mode of life should be that of a self-respecting human being, morally above reproach. In short, by helping to form a good Christian working-class, Kolping's ultimate aim was to form good citizens for the State and for the City of God. And the words he writes in this connection are not without their significance now that the Christian Associations of Germany appear to be threatened in their very existence, whilst Wotan and the old Germanic gods make their entry into a very earthly Walhalla.

'Politics are not our concern. The menace of War may thin the ranks of our associates, but the purpose of the Association and the needs of the young will always fill them again. Life has ever its definite claims and Christianity has ever its obligations for those who profess it. If we love our people in truth and in deed, despite our adversaries, the heart of the people will give us love for love.'

E. CODD.

Owing to limitation of space, the second part of Fr. Aidan Elrington's article on *A Hundred Years of Psychology* is unavoidably held over until next month.