

CHRIST UPON THE WATERS

WE keep finding that Catholic enterprises fail because there is no public opinion, and no business-sense, about them. There is a public opinion, for example, about Lourdes and the value of going there on pilgrimage. There is, to a considerable extent, a public opinion about Catholic schooling. There is to some extent a public opinion, now, about SS. John Fisher and Thomas More; but, if I may risk mentioning a personal impression, not all the heroic work of Mgr. Hallett and of others who so long toiled for their canonization, succeeded in creating it: perhaps it was largely due to the determination of the Holy Father that two men, who clearly deserved to be canonized, should be canonized. A kind of "public opinion" in the sense of a Catholic opinion, i.e., not confined to one nation nor universal in any one nation, to the effect that most religious Art is bad, and that the Liturgy is good, seems to be forming itself. An ecclesiastical "general" opinion certainly seems to be growing up, to the effect that Mass should be preached in a different way, that St. Paul should be studied increasingly, and that the doctrines of grace and incorporation with Christ (and all their consequences) should be made more of in and even out of retreats or convent-exhortations. Nuns keep telling one that "retreats are quite different from what they used to be." Maybe writers like Abbot Marmion, Abbot Vonier, Fr. Prat, Karl Adam, are outstanding figures among those who have helped towards this. Abbot Chapman, Fr. R. Steuart, and others, have alike witnessed to and assisted a somewhat new and "general" appetite in the matter of prayer; and it is quite obvious that BLACKFRIARS from its very beginning has similarly witnessed to and fostered a better conscience in what concerns social justice.

But there are many subjects about which there is no public opinion. For example, hundreds of our young men and women have to go to study or to work away from their homes in large cities. They can pay but little; they need to be sociable. But there is no public opinion about them,

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crystallizing itself in the determination that they shall have really pleasant and accessible and inexpensive Catholic hostels, like the HYELM ones for clients of other faiths or of none. We have a hostel here and there; but there is no public opinion about them. Nor is there about after-school Catholic education with a necessary creation of large Catholic Institutes catering for the whole of life, educational, that is, as well as recreational and "sacramental" and even philanthropic. Nor is there about the Catholic Duty to the Sea.

Reasons why such public opinions do not exist, are not too far to seek. One that is general and not discreditable is lack of imagination. As a race we are very susceptible to what stirs our emotions, activates our imagination, and makes us "feel." Thus I might plead in vain for years on behalf of "better housing": yet let me but mention *one person* over whom rats run at night, and who, though frightened by them, stays awake also because she hears her tuberculous grandson coughing—and then hears him no more—he has died, and she, paralyzed (and rat-terrified) can do nothing—cheques will come in from the soft-hearted. We don't see those hundreds of young Catholic men and women, planted out heaven (or hell) knows where, and so we don't "care" about them. We usually take good care *not* to see "those nasty places"—the wretched houses—and so we have no "views" about housing. Above all, we don't visualize the Sea.

There are other, more discreditable reasons, all-but accounting for our failure to form public opinion on large matters (I might particularly mention anything "foreign"); there is a form of parochialism which actively discourages people from attending to anything "over the frontier." May I say that I *try* to confine words in "—ism" to caricatures of good things. Thus the Church sanctions, very naturally, parishes, and has invented "parish priests" and given them prerogatives, though parishes are in no way of divine institution as bishops and priests are. Therefore parishes and their priests are good. But love for one's parish can, all too easily, express itself in terms of dislike, jealousy, suspicion and even antagonism, in regard of the next-door

one, especially if there is the slightest chance of money "going out of the parish." Money-need easily becomes money-worship; and loyalty to one's "home," active alienation from what is not home. If I had to mention one vice, as more destructive of Catholic good work than any other, I should, without hesitating for a moment, say—Jealousy, issuing into refusal to co-operate. Against this, practically all the Holy Father's *organization* of "Catholic Action" is directed.

Now the Sea suffers in both ways. Only a very few of our towns are on the sea-board, and so their citizens do not observe, nor reflect upon, nor feel any duty towards, the Sea. Indeed, even a town like Cardiff exists in two halves, one of which is quite able to be unaware that a Sea exists. Again, an inland parish or even diocese may say: "Let the Coast look after the Sea" (forgetful, perhaps, that no end of seafarers come from inland; indeed, may do so especially, because seaboard people start more than half-disillusioned—and forgetful of course that our seaboard cities and parishes in no case can do a hundredth part of the work necessary if Catholic seamen are to be properly shepherded). We shall say below that Catholic Sea-work must be (i) local, (ii) national, (iii) international, if it is not to be (as in this country it very nearly is) nugatory.

The reason that this work *has* to be done is that there are eight hundred thousand seamen in the world, and that two-thirds of them are Catholic. Now for the major part of their lives (perhaps all save six weeks a year; and perhaps, if they belong to small ships, whole years at a time) they are at sea, or, for brief spaces, on shore but in foreign ports where they cannot talk the language. While they are at sea, they *cannot* perform any Catholic duty (save saying their prayers and trying to live morally without any help): they are not like men who *could* go to Mass, listen to sermons, etc., but with difficulty. The thing is impossible. If by exception there is a priest on board, it may well not occur to him that he can look up the men, or to choose to. But they cannot go to him if they are to meet; he *must* get leave to go to them. And how rare it is for a priest to be on

board—he never is on board the smaller ships, cargo-boats or tramps. In ports, there is sometimes (by no means always) an English-speaking priest: but how find him? Even if a man can get to confession, it is usually at an hour that precludes Communion. And take the man's psychology into account! Suppose (as is probably nearly always the case) he has not been to the Sacraments for years, or since youth. It is hard to begin again even though everything be facilitated for him, confidence won, fright exorcised, and the whole tradition of port-life surmounted. In a line—*every kind of vice is organized, active, and forthcoming, in ports, on behalf of sailors. Is Catholic succour similarly organized and as it were thrust upon him?* By no manner of means. Is not this a ghastly anomaly? One cynical retort is: "Organized Vice pays. If Catholic succour for Catholic seamen *paid*, you people would soon organize it." That was said to me: I do not discuss it. But the contrast remains and is shocking.

What we can safely say is, that no Public Opinion exists about the matter, but that it is forming itself in important places. Thus on my way recently to Buenos Aires, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon spoke to me of his intense desire that the work should be established in Portugal: at Rio (Brazil), Cardinal Leme talked of the same subject; he knows that recently (and still, for all I know) thousands of his people were being sent to Barrow-in-Furness to build ships for Brazil. In Monte Video (Uruguay), only yesterday have I heard that an admirable beginning has been made thanks to a few zealous and keen-sighted ladies, one of whom has a hereditary connection with the sea. (It seems incredible that despite the great quantity of English or English-speaking Catholics in that little republic and its capital especially, there has so far been little if any attention paid to them—none, so far as I know, by *us*—so little do we visualize our own people once they are actually out of sight. No *public opinion*. At Buenos Aires, as at Sydney, the work is excellently done: in Wellington and Melbourne there has been remarkable development within the last five years. I cannot remember what happens at Auckland, Perth or

Colombo; there was a Catholic seamen's club at Adelaide that I had no time to see. I could see nothing at Valparaiso, but I was there for little more than a day, and at Panama, for a day only. I must not allow myself to be diverted into anecdotes: enough to mention that on the *Rangitane* I met several men who remembered with gratitude (not all were Catholics) what little we had been able to do on the *Rotorua* six years before; and on the *Cathay*, the Goans had heard from their fellow-countrymen of some similar small work done on the *Mongolia* also six years ago. We received a deputation asking for Mass, on the strength of it. The Seaman never forgets, and constantly "talks across and across."

Now not only must public opinion be formed, but formed along a few definite lines. First, such a work, in England or anywhere else that has a sea-board, must be "national." Even though so many of our dioceses are "sea-side" ones, yet, as we suggested, all dioceses are involved because seamen come from everywhere. Further, no society not having the sea for its exclusive preoccupation can do the work properly anywhere, though practically all Catholic societies can co-operate in one way or another. Thus the C.Y.M.S. officially opened up for the general sea-work in Glasgow, Leith and Liverpool, and are (I understand) to do so at Fleetwood. The K.S.C. did the same at Middlesborough and Plymouth. The S.V.P., in England, have institutes at London, Cardiff and Salford, of which I fear the last is languishing, while London ought to have quite three or four such institutes and Cardiff one quite ten times its present size with all sorts of non-existent facilities. Moreover the S.V.P. has primarily the visiting of the poor in their houses for its work, even though "no charitable work be alien to it." What is necessary is a national work dealing with the sea and nothing else, able gratefully to accept the fine work done by the above-mentioned and other societies, correlate and direct it, pool all information and disseminate what reaches it from abroad, provide one address and one badge, and in short play a gallant and unselfish part within the English sphere of the Sea-Apostolate. As a matter of fact,

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there has been recently created a National Board for Catholic British Sea-work, and we view that with the greatest satisfaction.

Yet even so, under-financed, under-staffed, ill-housed as everything Catholic is, in this country, that concerns the Sea, it will hardly be able to do a fraction of the necessary work within this island or in British ports. But the British sailor is constantly in non-British ports; and British ports are packed with non-British sailors. For this definitely international work—a uniquely “Catholic” work since the Sea starts by being international, and the Church is super-national—a co-ordinating H.Q. is absolutely essential, able to keep in touch with every Sea-enterprise in every land; to provide the one name, the one everywhere recognizable badge, the one address memorizable by all. Also, to publish the polyglot literature so absolutely necessary both for travelling priests and port-chaplains; both for sailors and for ship-visitors.¹

I have not sufficient space for showing why I think that it must be *at present* (i) in England and (ii) in London; or why, again, I hold that the H.Q. of the National Board should be under the same roof—I just mention that half the dossiers, all the maps, would be identical for each; half the work would go to and fro between them. Expense in personnel and money and time would be tithed. This international work has recently been most emphatically blessed by the Holy Father, and in short one has but to travel a little to see how absolutely essential it is. By a paradox, the international work for once all but takes precedence of the national. The sea just *is* international, and so are seamen.

On July 8th last a combined meeting representing local interests, the national board, and A.M.I.C., was held at Norfolk House under the chairmanship of His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster. The question of finance was uppermost. For my part, I would suggest that appeals for local institutes should be made through the societies respon-

¹ This is provided by the A.M.I.C. (*Apostolatus Maris Internationale Concilium*), 38 Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1.

sible for each; and that the National Board should come to be in a position to give them subsidies if need were (and need will always be). The representatives of the National Board proposed to appeal—not to individuals, but to Shipping Companies which certainly have large funds collected in various ways, of which but little comes to Catholics and, when it does, goes to what is not directly connected with the Sea, so far anyway as I have noticed. Cardinal Bourne was, I am told, about to sanction a national appeal for the Sea, owing to the representations made to him by A.M.I.C. His death interfered with this; and, so we were told, the Hierarchy asked that no public appeal of a national sort should be made until all those working for the Sea should be organically correlated and presentable as a tripartite Sea Apostolate within which funds could be apportioned in a proper way. It will in fact be perfect if this Apostolate is thus seen as a trinity that cannot be split, and if public opinion be so formed in regard of it. It is essential that a *clear* view of the *whole* be presentable; that an articulated statement of the whole problem be givable and given; that perfect co-operation be brought about among all the “parts” of this really most simple organization; but also, that our Faithful be aroused to a “conscience” (better than mere opinion!) about the Sea and the souls of Sea-farers.

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