

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL AND LIMERICK

A Tercentenary And a Centenary

CITY'S PART IN WORK OF GREAT SOCIETY

(BY ROBERT HERBERT)

"Alas," said he a hundred times, "had Mr. Vincent done for the glory of God only the good which he has done for these poor people, he ought to think himself happy." This commonplace statement gains in interest and spans three centuries with ease, when we realise the speaker was Limerick's soldier Bishop, Edmund O'Dwyer, and the humble "Mr. Vincent," was no less a personage than the great Saint Vincent de Paul, founder of the Congregation of the Mission, an Order which became world famous within a few years of its foundation.

A number of young Limerickmen, studying in Paris for the priesthood were attracted by the piety and zeal of this holy man, and immediately joined his Order. Among them was John MacEnery, who joined the Order in 1642, and became Professor of Theology at Genoa before his early death of the plague. Saint Vincent himself wrote the brilliant young Priest's epitaph: "A wise, pious and exemplary man." Other Limerick Priests among the first of Vincent's disciples were—Patrick Walsh, Francis White, Dermot O'Brien, George White and William Cart.

O'Dwyer had met Vincent on the Continent, and it is believed that the latter assisted at O'Dwyer's consecration in Paris in the year 1645. He was highly impressed by the work of the new missionary order, and appealed for assistance for Limerick. The appeal was sent to Vincent by Innocent X, and in return for the support he had received from the Irish Province, Saint Vincent sent eight young Priests to the Diocese of Cashel and Limerick, six Irishmen, one Frenchman, and an English brother. They arrived here about the year 1646, and worked ceaselessly, in daily peril of their lives, during the troublous years of the late 1640's.

MISSIONS IN THE CITY.
When, in 1650, the Parliamentarians were ravaging the countryside, and the City of Limerick was still a Catholic stronghold, the three Vincentians who had remained gave missions in the city. It was estimated that no fewer than 20,000 persons made general confessions during these missions, and "people who had grown old in sin gave marks of true conversion; and a numerous people was seen in a situation to serve as a model of the most exact penance." O'Dwyer wrote personally to Saint Vincent to tell him of the success of the missions, but the thanks of the Diocese was even more adequately expressed in the voice of the people themselves:—"Contagion soon reached Limerick," wrote Collet in his life of the Saint, "and in a little time it was so violent that it carried off nearly eight thousand persons. Of this number was the brother of the Bishop of Limerick, who had exposed himself with the missionaries, and like them in consoling the sick and supplying their necessities. It was admirable to behold their patience, or rather the peace with which this afflicted people received the scourge with which God visited them. They died contented because, said they: 'The Lord has sent us angels who have reconciled us to Him.'"
During the Cromwellian siege of 1651, one of the Vincentians died of the plague, while after the surrender of the city, the other two, Barry and O'Brien, escaped in the disguise of soldiers, and found their way to the port of Nantes. Thady Lee, the Brother, who was in Holy Orders, but was not a Priest, escaped to his mother's house at Tuogh, but was captured by Cromwellian soldiers, who dashed out his brains and cut off his legs in the presence of his mother. Thus ended the first great missionary effort of Saint Vincent de Paul in Limerick.

START OF SOCIETY.
In the year 1833, eight young men banded themselves together in Paris, to formulate plans for the organisation of a society whose object should be to minister to the wants of the Parisian poor. This was partly due to the talent of Saint Simon, Fourier, and other writers against nineteenth century French Christianity. "Show us your works," they sneered. "We admit the past grandeur of Christianity, but the tree is now dead and bears no fruit." The leading spirit of the movement was Frederick Ozanam, a brilliant young Frenchman, lawyer, author and Professor in the Sorbonne, and modelling his rule upon the same principles of the Order founded by Saint Vincent de Paul in the seventeenth century, he called his organisation "The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul." Within ten short years they had spread the branches of their humanitarian missionary society to almost every Christian country in the world.

The objects of the Society can best be explained in the words of one of its own manifestos:—"The great object of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the improvement, in a religious point of view, both of the members themselves, and of the poor visited by them. In Ireland, indeed, from the extremely wretched condition of the people, attention to their physical wants became of necessity a permanent feature of the working of the Society." This should always be remembered by those Sean O'Caseys who sneer at the length to which a Vincent de Paul brother will go to ensure that the funds of the Society are never misapplied. The primary object of the Society was a religious and not a charitable one.

FIRST CONFERENCE IN LIMERICK.
The first Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul, that of Saint Michael's, was formed in this city on the 1st of November, 1846, two hundred years after the first Vincentians had arrived here, one hundred years ago this year; and, more important than any centenary, in the year when the first ravages of the greatest famine that ever visited Ireland were making themselves felt.

Presided over by the Bishop of Limerick, Most Reverend Doctor Ryan, and conducted by an energetic committee, composed of people like Michael Quin, an ex-Mayor of the city, William Monsell, M.P., Doctor Geary and Alderman Dawson, the Conference made rapid strides. In its first two years it had distributed upwards of 5,227 pounds of bread, 2,665 stones of meal, 241 quarts of milk, 842 ounces of tea, 420 pounds of sugar, 30 pounds of meat, 696 pounds of rice, 4 bags of coal, and £27 10s. in money. It will be seen from these figures that the charity was confined, as far as possible, to the absolute essentials for existence, meal, bread, and rice; and that money was seldom or never given. Their funds were obtained from grants from the Head Council in Paris, from donations, contributions from the "honorary" members (as opposed to the "active" or working members of the Society) a bazaar and an exhibition of pictures in the Town Hall. It is interesting to note that the last effort brought in £2 5s. 9d.

The Conference of Saint John was formed on the 20th of February, 1847, and was even more successful and more energetic than St. Michael's. In its first twenty-two months, it had given relief consisting of 5,900 pounds of bread, 3,523 pounds of meal, 613 ounces of tea, 211 ounces of coffee, 964 pounds of sugar, 105 quarts of milk, and £11 16s. 7d. in money. Some of the cases visited in those early years are recorded in the first annual report of the Society's activities in Limerick.

TERRIBLE STATE OF DESTITUTION.
One example is sufficient to show the terrible state of destitution of the poor of Limerick during those terrible early famine years:—"The members having been requested to visit another poor family, found them all in the most wretched circumstances. They were in a dark garret, more like a dungeon than a human dwelling—a poor girl in the last stages of consumption, bedridden for several months, was seen in one corner; in another the aged mother, paralyzed, was lying on a small bundle of half manure (for it could not be called straw) without any covering; in a third place was a wretched looking boy, quite deaf, and of no use or assistance to anybody. The only means of support of these poor creatures were the exertions of a poor girl, a sister, whose employment was the washing of a room, or some such work, for which she might receive occasionally two or three pence. They were, indeed, receiving 1s. 6d. a week from the Guardians of the poor, a large amount, to relieve so much distress, and misery."
The spiritual side of the brothers' work was, of course, by no means neglected. The persons visited by the members were required to attend their religious duties if they were physically capable of doing so, while the children had to be sent to school. For this purpose night school was opened for adult boys, where those who worked in the day time could receive religious and other instruction. Knitting schemes were also started for young women and girls who could not obtain any other kind of work.

APPEAL THAT IS TIMELY TO-DAY.
Doctor Ryan, the Chairman, closed the first annual report with an appeal for aid, and now, after one hundred years of pious, charitable and self-sacrificing service, the appeal is as necessary to-day as it was in that dark period of starvation and disease. Whether or not

FATAL SEIZURE

Nurse's Death In Derry

SAID TO BE NATIVE OF LIMERICK

Derry police are searching for the relatives of a 75-years-old woman, Miss Margaret Ryan, believed to be a native of Limerick, who had a fatal seizure on Tuesday, 5th inst., when descending the stairs in her lodgings at 83 Spencer Road, Waterside, Derry.

At an inquest held on the 7th inst. by the Derry City Coroner, Capt. J. T. E. Miller, it was stated that the deceased, who was of a retiring disposition and had not discussed her affairs with anybody, had left a considerable sum in cash and other monies. Police investigations had so far failed to trace any relatives.

Head-Constable Foley said the police knew nothing about her except that she had lived in the Waterside for a considerable time. They believed, although they had no definite information, that she originally came from Limerick. The St. Vincent de Paul Society had made arrangements for the funeral and were defraying the expenses, the Head-Constable added. Any friends she might have were probably in "Eire."

Sergt. J. McCambridge, Waterside, said deceased had been twenty years in Derry and had been nursing in Strabane and Belfast for many years in addition.

Mrs. Elizabeth Devine, a factory worker residing at 83 Spencer Road, gave evidence that about eight weeks ago Miss Ryan, who formerly lived at 116, Spencer Road, came to live in a furnished room at her house. Deceased's room was situated at the street door on the ground floor and she often came down to the kitchen, which was in the basement, and spent an hour or so with witness. Witness saw her about 1.45 p.m. on Monday, 4th inst., when she appeared to be in good enough health. About 8.30 p.m. on Tuesday witness was in the kitchen and heard footsteps, which she recognised as those of Miss Ryan, coming down the stairs. When deceased appeared to be more than half-way down witness heard her stumble and heard the noise of a body falling on the stairs. She ran out and saw deceased falling down the stairs. She caught her when she had reached about the second step from the bottom and laid her flat on the floor. Deceased was then unconscious and witness shouted for Mrs. English, who occupied a room upstairs, and who ran out for the doctor and a priest. The only sign of life in Miss Ryan was the movement of her lips, which gradually stopped after about ten or fifteen minutes. She showed no sign of life after that. When deceased fell she had a small parcel of potato skins in her hand. She had been in the habit of burning these in the kitchen fire. There was an oil lamp which lighted up the stairs fairly well. In witness's opinion deceased did not fall more than four feet.

Witness added that deceased, who was a retired nurse, aged about 75, had told her that she had no relatives anywhere.

Mrs. Mary English also gave evidence.

Sergt. McCambridge said there were no superficial marks of injury on deceased's body. The kitchen, he added, was reached by a steep stairway on which there were two right-angled bends. It was difficult for a person going down the stairs to see the steps and one required much care to avoid missing a step.

Dr. R. Brown said he had conducted a post mortem, assisted by Dr. J. J. Cosgrove, and found that death was due to sclerosis of the coronary artery, a condition of old age where the artery became hardened and blocked, and the blood supply to the heart was stopped. He was not a bit surprised that deceased had fallen down the stairs. A verdict in accordance with the medical evidence was returned.

ACCIDENT TO CITY 'BUS

A double-decker bus met with an unusual accident in Limerick yesterday. After the vehicle had turned into Rose's Avenue from the "triangle," the driver, observing a motor car approach, pulled to the left side in order to give right-of-way. As he did so the roof of the bus came in contact with the roof of the Ardu Hotel Lodge. In the impact both roofs were damaged, and besides, two of the windows of the bus in the upper deck were smashed. Two or three people received slight injuries from glass splinters.

there is a moral in this fact we leave to the reader. In any case here was Dr. Ryan's appeal:—

"If you have much money and but little time at your disposal, give money; if, on the contrary, your means are small, and you have much leisure, give some of your time to the poor; and as to self-devotion, this may always be manifested in whatever position you may be placed; and, without it, everything else will be of little account; for this it is which gives to everything else its price and value; your mind, your heart, your judgment, your experience, your knowledge and advice, these are so many resources upon which you can at all times draw in favour of the poor."

Things That Matter

Even in normal times the housing problem in this country was exceedingly urgent. It is now far more so owing to the interruption in building caused by the war. The shortage of dwellings is particularly acute at the moment and insistently calls for the speedy implementation of steps to supply the widespread want. The whole question would seem to require some new approach if it is to be adequately dealt with in anything like a reasonable space of time.

New houses at reasonable rents are badly needed in every city and town in Ireland and in the rural areas as well. How to construct them in sufficient numbers and on terms that will be satisfactory both to the tenants and the community is an objective bristling with enormous difficulties. The combined intelligence of the Government, the local authorities and the engineering profession ought, however, be able to hit on some sound and feasible plan for dealing with the grave situation that exists.

Very creditable efforts were being made up to the outbreak of the war to cope with the demand for more and better houses. Practically all operations in that connection have been suspended for the past six years, and the result of this protracted hold-up is manifest in the present unexampled difficulty in procuring any sort of living accommodation. At the moment it is virtually impossible in either city or town to get any kind of dwelling or even a decent flat, and it is unnecessary to point out how serious this is from the point of view of young people who are otherwise young in a position to get married.

The wiping out of the slums is a necessary reform that must be kept constantly under active consideration until such time as all these "sunless lairs" have completely disappeared. In the meantime, however, other sections of the community have claims as well as the very poor. What might be called the middle classes—those who can afford to pay, say 15/- or £1 a week rent, or even more—are entitled to consideration also. Up to this they have been very much neglected so far as the provision of new buildings at moderate charges is concerned.

Some scheme ought be possible, and would certainly be very desirable, whereby suitable dwellings could be made available on terms that would enable a tenant to become the owner of the house after paying a reasonable sum annually for a certain number of years. The importance of a sense of ownership cannot be exaggerated from the point of view of inculcating a spirit of independence and an attitude of good citizenship and responsibility. On the other hand, it is a galling handicap to have to keep on paying a heavy rent year after year without any hope of ever owning the premises. Extensive building programmes are almost certain to be put on hands in the near future and in carrying them through due regard should be paid to the principle of fixing the annual rent charges on a house-purchase basis, which would be advantageous not only to the particular tenants but to the entire community.

DEATH.
FOLEY (nee O'Mahony)—On February 18th, 1946, at her residence, 10 O'Curry St., Limerick, Breeda, beloved wife of Cornelius Foley, Macroom, Co. Cork. Deeply regretted by her sorrowing husband, mother, brothers and sister. Funeral from St. Michael's Catholic Church to-morrow (Tuesday), at 3 p.m., to Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery.

THE A.R.P. SERVICE

WHAT THE DUTIES WERE LIKE

(To the Editor, "Limerick Leader.")

Dear Sir—I would like to comment further on a recent letter in your widely read journal relative to giving employment to ex-A.R.P. wardens and to point out to employers and prospective employers the moral obligation they owe to the above-mentioned force.

Away back in the dark days of 1940-41, when our worthy An Taoiseach announced over the radio the grave danger of invasion that was facing this country and called for volunteers to man all the Defence Forces, despite the ominous warning of an Taoiseach the wardens service of Limerick, men and women alike, stuck to their post and went on cheerfully with their work, with only one object in view, to safeguard the lives of the people entrusted to their care, never thinking of their own personal safety, and not knowing the hour from the minute when they would be blasted out of existence. As an officer of the A.R.P. during that period, I had under my control about 25 wardens, some trained, others attending lectures and undergoing training so as to be qualified to look after and be responsible for approximately 6,000 people in my area should the terrible spectre of war be visited on us, which, thank God, was happily averted.

I will now give a brief resume of some of the duties which a warden had to carry out during his term of office. Irrespective of the lectures he had to attend at the Town Hall, and not to mention his usual weekly meeting, the first job that was assigned to us was to assemble thousands of gas masks, which involved weeks and weeks of hard work, and which were later tested in a specially constructed gas chamber at the City Home, the warden having to enter the gas chamber wearing the mask to be tested. When all this was completed the next item on the programme was to take a census. This was long, tedious work done during the winter months, the wardens often having to call back to the same house several times until they got the required particulars. After all this our next duty was to notify all the people in our area by letter that the masks would be issued on a certain date, having a different date for different districts. Incidentally, the letters had to be written by the warden and delivered by hand.

On the nights the masks were issued the public will remember the most courteous manner in which they were received by the wardens, the meticulous care in which their mask was fitted, as an ill-fitting mask during a gas raid meant death in a terrible form to the wearer. All this does not include the large list of names by now compiled of sick and bed-ridden people who could not attend the various centres, which necessitated the wardens going to their homes and fitting them there. This work was all done at night time and it can be left to the reader's imagination the time left for recreation. In return for all this work, done free, gratis and for nothing, all the warden asks in return is that the Limerick employer treat him as a former member of the Defence Forces as regards securing employment.

On several occasions the Minister for Defence publicly stated that the A.R.P. were part and parcel of the Defence Force of this country. Then, if such is the case, we are all ex-service men and women in every sense of the word and should be treated as such.

I may also state that the above mentioned wardens' duties do not include parades, exercises and lectures on first aid, of which we were compelled to have an elementary knowledge.

Trusting you will find space for publication of this letter in your widely read paper.

Faithfully yours,
"HOMO SUI JURIS."

EMILY FAMILY BEREAVED

The death occurred at his residence, Tankardstown, Bansha, of Mr. Timothy O'Dwyer, deceased, who had reached an advanced age, was an extensive farmer and landowner, and a highly respected member of the farming community. He was brother of Mrs. M. O'Callaghan and Mrs. K. O'Callaghan, Ballyhona, Emily, and of Mother Teresa Joseph, Cross and Passion Convent, Whitehall, Dublin.

The remains were removed to Bansha Church, and the funeral took place to Solohead, where the interment took place in the presence of a large gathering of mourners, friends and sympathisers.

The chief mourners were—Mrs. M. O'Dwyer (widow), Edmond, William and Michael O'Dwyer (sons); Mother Teresa Joseph, Mrs. M. O'Callaghan and Mrs. K. O'Callaghan (sisters); Edmond, Nicholas, Michael O'Dwyer, Jerome and Edmond O'Callaghan (nephews); Mrs. K. Quish and Miss P. O'Dwyer (nieces).