

A Way To End The Leakage

By Rev. J. Leycester King, S.J.

Catholic Truth Society No.c130a (1931)

[This pamphlet is of more than historical interest. Catholics today, especially those in English-speaking countries, can look back through the halls of time to the early 1930's and be reminded that it is still an urgent need for today's Catholics to end the 'leakage' of young Catholics from the active practice of their faith. May we be inspired by the active zeal shown by some, at least, of our forbears in the spread of Catholic Truth.]

(1) The Fact of the Leakage.

There can be few Catholics indeed who have not heard of the Leakage Problem; we have grown all too familiar with the fact that the Church in this country suffers a large annual loss of those who give up the practice of their religion. But it is not generally realized that this Leakage is perhaps the greatest problem which the Church has to face today, a problem on whose solution the whole well-being of Catholicism in this country depends. The plain truth is that so long as this Leakage exists, and because it exists, the Catholic body here will be in a grievously sickly condition, and to a great extent unfitted for the mighty task which lies before it. An unpleasant truth certainly, but a fact which must be faced just because it is true. It is perhaps because this truth is unpalatable that the whole subject is unpopular, and it is to this unpopularity that we must trace the general lack of interest in the matter and the fact that its importance is not recognised.

In past years, efforts have been made by various writers to break through this crust of apathy, but their efforts have had at the most only a partial success. As long ago as 1887, Mr. C. Giles wrote on the subject in *The Month*, and followed up his article by three others in 1895 and 1896. Mr. James Britten suggested many devices as a remedy in the same periodical, cf. "The Loss of our Boys" (1887), "Our Boys" (1899), etc. More recently Fr. John Wright, S.J. elaborated a scheme of "After-Care," which is, we believe, still in operation. The matter was thoroughly discussed in two thoughtful articles by the Rev. J. P. Murphy of Gosport in *The Month* in 1925, and in fact has never long been lost sight of by the Catholic Press. But apart from such organizations as Boy Scouts, Boys' Brigades, and the several Rescue Societies, which only touch a few, no national effort has yet been made to organize a national campaign against the evil. A certain amount of interest has been aroused, only to die down again after a month or two; plans have been made, never to be realized; letters have been written to the papers and ideas exchanged, but the spate of words has brought no effective action in its train; we have seemed to own ourselves baffled, as if a remedy were impossible.

Such activity as there was in this field has been greatly retarded by the Great War of 1914-1918, but there are signs now that this important matter will shortly be brought to the notice of the Catholic public with an insistence which will not be abated until definite and effective action has been initiated. In many places up and down the country, this problem is forcing itself on the attention of those who have the Church's well-being at heart, and the time seems to have arrived for us to look facts in the face and make up our minds to take concerted, determined and energetic measures with

God's help to bring an end to this steady, heart-breaking loss of souls. The topic of the Leakage was raised recently in one of our leading Catholic weeklies, and for several weeks afterwards its correspondence columns were crowded with letters from those who welcomed a thorough ventilation of the subject; it is clear that among those who are best able to judge in this matter, there is widespread interest and a general impatience to organize some definite course of action to eradicate or at least mitigate this evil.

The publication of this pamphlet may lead some to object that unwelcome truths of this nature should not be made common property, since they are likely to afford undue consolation to the Church's many enemies and to furnish them with material with which to taunt us; — we should not, in fact, "wash our dirty linen in public." To such an objection, it seems fair to reply that if the only way of getting our linen clean is to wash it in public, then washed in public it must be. But surely, we need not be dismayed at the thought that non-Catholics may make capital out of an open discussion of our difficulties; the truth cannot harm us, and an open disclosure of our trouble will even redound to our credit, when the occasion of that disclosure is a determined effort to mend matters. Moreover, since the root cause of the Leakage is to be found in the semi-pagan environment with which Catholics are surrounded, a plain statement of this sort will be not only a humble acknowledgement of our own shortcomings, but also a direct indictment of modern conditions of life which are in such open opposition to Christian ideals. The more violent and vociferous type of non-Catholic will be alarmed by the fact that the problem is being faced, rather than comforted by the thought that it exists; the more serious will recognize a special kind of virility in a Church which will tackle a matter of this sort in the full light of day; the best among them will welcome our efforts to check the modern lapse into paganism and worse.

Again it is to be noted that Catholics who give up the practice of their religion do not, except in rare cases, associate themselves with any of the non-Catholic sects, so that our losses are certainly no gain to any other religious body, though there is a marked tendency for the lapsed Catholic to be drawn into the ranks of Communism and Bolshevism, whose influence may be far more deleterious than that of a colourless non-Catholic sect. (The Communist and Bolshevik propaganda is as effective as it is persistent). Finally, while our problem is aptly referred to as a "Leakage," others have to face something very like a complete breakdown of the dam.

It has seemed wise to say so much, since it is necessary at the outset to emphasize the fact that the Leakage is of very considerable dimensions. In insisting on this point, there is no intention of putting forward a disparaging or pessimistic view of the Church's position in this country. In recent years, the Church has gone from strength to strength, and her solid progress has surpassed the most sanguine expectations. Never since the "Reformation" have we been so favourably placed, or looked forward to such golden promise. We are entering upon an era fraught with tremendous possibilities, and we are on the whole admirably equipped for our vast campaign. But it is precisely because the hand of the Lord is so visibly with us, that we are bound seriously to consider the Leakage, and make sure that we are consolidating the gains which Almighty God gives us. We are moving onwards certainly, and we are moving fast, but the marvel is that we are not moving faster; and the explanation of that marvel is, simply — The Leakage. When one load is just a little heavier than the other, a balance moves but slowly; add a grain or two to the heavier side, and the scale-pan goes down with a rush. There are many who do not believe in the probability of a great rush of conversions under present conditions, but it may well be that when the Leakage has been stopped, our present steady progress will give way to wholesale gains on even a Pentecostal scale.

(2) The Volume of the Leakage.

Consequent on the recent publication of articles of his on the subject, the writer has received a large number of letters from interested persons all over the country. Here are some of the epithets they actually apply to the Leakage: — Serious, terrible, wholesale, appalling, 90%, awful, a nightmare, etc., etc. The most satisfactory way of driving home the fact that the volume of the Leakage is very serious would be, of course, to produce reliable statistics. Unfortunately, however, most of the statistics are unreliable and could be used to prove almost anything, though later on we shall show that they can at least be used to suggest to us the limits between which the Leakage may lie.

Commenting on the most recent figures available, Fr. H. Thurston, S.J.; in “Statistical Progress,” his contribution to the symposium on Catholic Emancipation published in 1929, writes “If we only include under the term Catholic those who fulfil their Easter duties and normally hear Mass on a Sunday, the estimate of 2,156,146 which stands in the Catholic Directory would probably be even excessive. But if, on the other hand, a Catholic be understood to be one who would not repudiate the description himself, who was willing to have his children baptized in the faith and would probably welcome the help of a priest on his death-bed, the evidence seems abundantly to warrant the conclusion that there are at present rather over than under three million souls who, subject to a less rigid interpretation of the term, could fairly be described as Catholics.”

If these figures are accepted, then the “standing Leakage” is in the neighbourhood of one million. We cannot discuss the figures here, but it is possible to marshal a few facts which lend great support to the view that our losses are at least very heavy.

(i).

While writers on this subject have often been accused of statistical exaggeration, their critics have scarcely ever suggested that the Leakage was of small or negligible proportions.

(ii).

In the opinion of some, present annual increments to the Catholic body are sub-normal, i.e., less than a normal Catholic birth-rate would lead us to expect. According to this view, our losses are greater than the gains we make by conversions and the excess of Catholic immigrants over emigrants. It is doubtful, however, whether the figures available warrant us in regarding this general conclusion as proven; but we have very reliable statistics regarding certain isolated towns and districts, and in some cases, these figures disclose a most alarming state of affairs. Thus, we hear of one large industrial town in the Midlands, whose Catholic population has remained practically stationary while the general population has nearly doubled. In this and similar instances we have definite figures to go on, and we may reasonably suspect an equally bad situation in many other places for which statistics are not available. Clearly, many partial causes may contribute to such a state of affairs, but there can be little doubt that Leakage in some form or other is the chief of these causes.

(iii).

Several of the Bishops have taken up a very uncompromising attitude towards mixed marriages. Their Lordships have been led to this largely by the overwhelming evidence of statistics in their possession, showing that such marriages are a most prolific source of Leakage. But the number of mixed marriages in this country is still very high; therefore the volume of the Leakage from this source alone is considerable.

(iv).

On all sides, personal experience bears out the fact that the Leakage is very large. One is constantly meeting, or hearing of, “ought-to-be” Catholics, and cases are frequently brought to one’s notice in which whole families have been lost to the Church because the parents became lax in the practice of their Faith. This impression is strikingly confirmed when, in any particular district, a systematic search is made for submerged or “ought-to-be” Catholics. In such cases one enquiry leads to another, clues and rumours are followed up, and it is not an uncommon thing even in rural districts to unearth 60 or 70 previously unknown Catholics within a radius of 10 miles or less. Such systematic enquiry is of course the first and most important step in Leakage recovery, with which Leakage prevention is so intimately connected.

(v).

Parish priests everywhere tell the same story. Here is a sample from a densely-populated London parish in a poor district: “How many Catholics have you in your parish, Father?” “There are 5,300 that I know of up to the present, but I think that you might well add a nought to this figure if you would include all the unknown Catholics. My curates and myself rarely go out visiting but what we discover three or four or five Catholics who have given up the practice of their religion.”

(vi).

Finally, the very nature of the case makes it evident that under present conditions our losses must be very considerable. Although we place such emphasis on the necessity of Catholic education in Catholic surroundings, and make such sacrifices to secure it, yet when once our children leave school there is an almost complete absence of organized and concerted effort on their behalf. We pitchfork them out into a pagan world to fend for themselves at a time when more than ever they need guidance, care, and support. A few moments consideration should suffice to convince us of the pitiful illogicality and futility of the whole proceeding. We are making a supreme effort to keep our schools; nay more, under the guidance of the Hierarchy’s inspiring lead we have registered a determination not to give them up, so far as it lies within our power to prevent it. And after all this heroic self-sacrifice, we are sitting by with arms folded while the very product we have fought and paid for drifts away from us as fast as the current can carry it! This is particularly true of working boys, with whose case this pamphlet is intended specially to deal.

In many cases, perhaps in the majority of cases, when a boy of 14 or 15 starts work, nothing is done to help him. All the care and solicitude lavished on him at school ceases abruptly; instead of being in the midst of Catholic companions, he is often associated with youths and young men whose speech and way of life are a constant challenge to all that he has been taught to respect as just and holy and of good report. The physiological and psychic changes of adolescence demand an adaptation, new experiences crowd on him apace, life puts its myriad questions — and the answers are supplied ready-made, from tainted sources. Amid all this confusion of impressions, in an environment which solicits every sense and faculty with pagan interests and Godless values, at the time above all when the formation of character is trembling in the balance, too often there is not a word of help or a sign of interest from outside. Small wonder if disaster follows!

Humanly speaking, we can devise no educational system which will make a boy proof against such an onslaught, and to allow such conditions to exist must almost inevitably involve the ruin of vast numbers of the Catholic boys who are subjected to them. Add to this the fact that family life and parental control, where indeed they exist at all, become relaxed much earlier than was formerly the

case, and it will be seen that we are sending our boys out from school into a fight in which they are foredoomed to failure because we do not back them up. The very way of the world shames us beyond measure in this matter. Night-schools, continuation classes, polytechnic institutes and the like, are found in abundance in all our larger centres of population; business men and industrialists require their employees to have a more complete formation than the elementary school can give them, while we are acting as if the formation of the Christian were substantially completed at the age of 14.

Working boys of 14-17 are too old to care to associate with those still at school, and they are still too young to be taken fully into the society of men; they are therefore in a small class of their own, a class that is largely isolated from outside contact. In this class, Catholic working boys are necessarily in the minority, and from the very start the individual Catholic is swamped by the non-Catholic majority. Such a state of things was bad enough in all conscience before the Great War, but since the Great War, and even during the last five or six years, the influence of the non-Catholic environment has become immensely more demoralising. The former general, though vague, reverence for Christian ideals and standards has given way to defiant indifferentism, which has formed almost an ideal atmosphere for the growth of Communism and Bolshevism, Materialism and Hedonism; if the problem was urgent in the last century, it is a thousand times more urgent today.

Reverting again to statistics, we find that even by making the most conservative use of the figures available, it is not possible to find reasonable grounds for convincing ourselves that the "Standing Leakage" can be less than about 300,000. (By the term "Standing Leakage" is meant the total of surviving Catholics who have given up the practice of their religion). We have seen already that Fr. Thurston's estimates favour the conclusion that the "Standing Leakage" is about one million. The Catholic Directory figures for 1930 show 374,169 pupils in elementary schools and 53,897 in secondary schools. We may conclude therefore that about 47,000 Catholic children leave school every year. To account for a "Standing Leakage" of about half-a-million, we have only to suppose that of every 10 children leaving school, 2 cease the practice of their religion very soon after. Now many Catholic elementary school-teachers, who follow up their boys' subsequent careers, assert that considerably more than 2 out of 10 neglect their religion soon after leaving school. These are certainly only very rough statistics, but it may fairly be claimed that they are at any rate in the right order of magnitude. Let us not quarrel as to whether we lose 5,000 or 10,000 or 15,000 a year by Leakage, and agree instead that at the lowest probable figure this steady drain year after year results in a "Standing Leakage" of appalling dimensions.

One last consideration in this connection, at the risk of seeming to labour the point — does not our very familiarity with the Leakage, and the widespread indifference with regard to it, prove our contention conclusively? The lapse of a single Catholic is a most frightful calamity, a thing at which the very angels might weep, a cause of unutterable sorrow to the Church. If such a lapse were a rare occurrence, we should be shocked beyond measure when it happened, it would fill our hearts with deep sorrow, we should storm Heaven with our prayers and never cease our efforts for the wanderer as long as life still gave hope of his return. But as things are at present, we have become accustomed to regard this steady drain of thousands of souls as a normal occurrence, something to be expected and indeed almost inevitable. Surely, we must rouse ourselves to the conviction that The Leakage, far from being normal, is a ghastly and calamitous abnormality, a constant loss of carefully trained troops who lay down their arms without striking a single blow in the Church's

battle. If our consciences cannot be stirred, then at least our instinct for self-preservation must be aroused.

(3) Causes of the Leakage.

Among the manifold causes of Leakage, four are of outstanding importance: —

- (i) Lack of due religious training and formation in the home;
- (ii) Defective and unsuitable training in the school;
- (iii) Failure to follow up home and school training with effective after-care work;
- (iv) The isolation and virtual abandonment of many rural Catholics.

Regarding the first two causes, keen and fruitful discussion is now going on in the Catholic Press; suggestions towards a solution of some of the difficulties in rural districts have already been embodied in a C.T.S. (Catholic Truth Society) pamphlet “Our Lady’s Catechists” (R 92), and it is hoped that something further regarding this matter will be published; the present pamphlet aims at proposing a way of remedying the third cause of Leakage, i.e., lack of organized after-care for Catholic children when they leave school. Although great emphasis will be laid on the importance of this after-care, yet this is in no way intended to detract from the necessity of adequate home and school training, for without these, after-care would be merely rescue work.

The value of thoroughly Catholic home life can scarcely be over-estimated; the Catholic family is quite definitely the seed-plot in which the soul of the child should receive its early nurture and first formation. To be born and bred in a really Catholic home, to be loved and cared for by thoroughly Catholic parents, to live one’s early years with the example of Catholic virtue and piety constantly before one’s eyes, these are advantages of the very highest order. To be deprived of such advantages is to miss one of God’s choicest blessings; but to be brought up amid laxity and bad example is to be terribly handicapped from the very start. To realize the guilt of causing such a handicap, we have only to recall Our Lord’s words: “He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matt. 18:6). Throughout the whole Church of God, no apostolic work is more solid or lasting than the work of the Catholic parent in the home, which is indeed of such value that nothing else can take its place.

Home formation is seconded and supplemented by the Catholic school. It must be noted that the school never entirely takes the place of the parents, but rather acts in partnership with them and on their behalf. It is impossible for parents to hand over the whole responsibility of religious training to the school, since their own contribution is quite essential and cannot be supplied by the school. A notable part of that contribution is, of course, good example. It is often heart-breaking to see the best efforts of zealous teachers made of no effect by home conditions which are in direct opposition to all that the child is being taught to value. Just now, the nature of the religious instruction given in our schools is a matter of hot discussion, and it is not suitable to take sides in the contest here. But all will agree that school-training should aim at providing something more than glib answers to Catechism questions. Religious training in our schools should kindle enthusiasm for the Faith and a permanent interest in everything connected with the Church. The growing lad is above all a creature of enthusiasm, and we have the greatest Story of all with which to fire his enthusiasm and inspire his generosity

(4) The Leakage among Working-boys.

There are good reasons for concentrating here on working-boys; theirs is a more difficult case; little is done for them, and they constitute by far the greater part of the male population between 14 and 18 years of age. Moreover, these are the future fathers of families, with a great potential influence for good or evil. Mention has already been made above (in Section 2 point vi), of the circumstances under which these lads only too often start their after-school life. Enough has been said to make it evident that special measures are required to stem the wholesale drifting away of these boys, and to tide them over that important period which elapses between school-days and responsible manhood.

What kind of measures are likely to succeed among boys of this age and class? This is a question which experience can answer for us. In general, it may be said that boys of this age react very strongly to real interest taken in them by adults. But in taking an active interest in working-lads, the adult must introduce a certain subtle difference in his manner towards them. They are no longer school-children, and will resent any attitude which seems to place them in that category. Apart from this, they are ready in their friendship, grateful for the interest shown in them, and eager to take a lead when it is given them. This then is the keynote of work for boys, interest; and without personal interest good results cannot be hoped for. Secondly, it must be remembered that these lads are at an age of enthusiasm, ambition, and widening horizons. They demand a fuller and a firmer hold on Life, and they will not be denied it. If the Church offers nothing to satisfy their cravings, then they will seek satisfaction elsewhere.

At this age a great capacity for love is developing apace, generosity and devotion are seeking an outlet. If this capacity for good is left unfilled, then the World, the Flesh and the Devil are waiting on the threshold of the empty heart to rush in and take possession. The boy's character will develop somehow, and if we do not form it then somebody else will, and probably with disastrous results. The careless Catholic, if he is well-to-do, contented and selfish, will relapse into indifferentism or into a frankly naturalistic paganism; but the working-class Catholic, ill-content with his conditions of life and surrounded by poverty and squalor, will tend to lapse into something worse. Let us make no mistake about this, among the working-classes today the drift of the unstable is more and more into active Communism and Bolshevism, and these agencies it is which will only too readily undertake the formation of our neglected lads. When the deluge comes, we shall need a staunch Catholic body among the workingmen, who will resist on the ground of clearly defined and long-practised Catholic principles. As it is, we are simply raising up out of our own body a set of young men who may be powerful factors in our own undoing.

(5) Various Methods.

We start off, for the most part, with magnificent material; how are we going to use it? Schemes of work among boys are legion — social clubs, billiard tables, Scouts, boxing, swimming classes, bands, orchestras, etc. All these have great value in so far as they provide opportunities for personal contact with the boys, and interest in their affairs. But it seems certain that all such activities should be definitely subordinated to some main activity which has for its object the spiritual welfare and growth of the individual. No matter how poor he is, or how ill-instructed, a boy has capacities and longings that no billiard-clubs, rifle-ranges or gymnasiums can fill. The boy's spiritual life and growth must be attended to specially and, as it were, separately. His soul is living the life of supernatural grace, grace must more and more abound within him. His supernatural life must not be allowed to stand still, grace must perfect his intellect and quicken his will. It is in the very nature of

the soul in grace to grow and expand, to reach out and possess ever more and more of the better gifts which are the heritage of those whom God has called to be His sons. The boy himself is conscious of vague longings for great things, he catches glimpses of the Promised Land afar off, and is eager to set forth on the journey. If these yearnings are left unsatisfied, if this growth is frustrated, if the eager stretching out to better things is thwarted and neglected, then it is a calamity indeed, for the vision will never again be so bright. All this suggests that directly spiritual work for boys must on no account be neglected, and that all other activities should flow from this main spiritual activity.

The advisability of making spiritual growth and well-being the first and central aim of work for boys, is amply borne out by experience. When all the material activities and amenities of a parish, such as boys' and men's clubs, football teams, etc., are made to centre round a common purpose of spiritual endeavour, then the various organizations work together harmoniously, and the parish is "alive" with the very life-blood of the Church. But where social organizations in the parish exist for a merely material purpose without any real relation to spiritual life as such, then they easily get "out of hand", breed dissension, and are anything but an ornament to the parish.

From a practical point of view, boys' clubs, Scouts, football teams and the like, all need money to start them, and in many parishes it is impossible to raise money for such purposes; often, even when money has been raised to start a club, funds are not forthcoming to keep it going. Now a spiritual society needs no money either to start or to run, but it will easily bring into being such a spirit of zealous co-operation, that funds will be forthcoming without difficulty for various social amenities organized in subordination to it. It might be objected by some, that a purely spiritual society, offering no material or social advantages, will fail to secure the interest of the boys. Experience has shown however that this is not the case, provided that the spiritual society is organized on suitable lines, and directed with energy and enterprise.

(6) The Sodality of Our Lady.

Growth in the spiritual life, so far as our human efforts are concerned, is effected by the removal of impediments to the reign of grace in the soul. Members of this Sodality have placed before them as their model, Mary, in whom grace always reigned supreme. The Sodality is in fact a religious society of layfolk, whose common effort it is to make progress in the spiritual life by means of devotion to Our Lady. Catholics know well that true devotion to Mary, of its very nature, calls forth a strong personal love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Love of Mary presupposes love of Our Lord, indeed, we love Mary because we love Our Lord. Our Lord's life and actions, His infinite love for us, and the Sacrifice by which He won the life of Heaven for our souls, all furnish abundant motives for a perfect love on our part. But by an intimate knowledge of the Mother we are drawn yet more closely to the Son, for in Mary we see perfect love and perfect imitation of Christ in a simple creature like ourselves. True devotion to Mary then, leads directly to the very highest Christian perfection, and in their devotion to Our Lady, members of the Sodality have in view nothing less than progress towards the perfection of each according to his state of life.

This being so, it will be evident that the Sodality will concern itself with the full Christian life in all its bearings; frequentation of the Sacraments, the intimate study of our holy religion, apostolic zeal for the perfection of others, all these will come a long way first. There will naturally follow concord and charity, which will find expression in the organization of the various social amenities which provide opportunities for Catholics to meet and know each other and to co-operate with one another

in the various contacts of which life is made up. Moreover, apostolic zeal will show itself in active participation in the work of the Catholic Evidence Guild, Catholic Social Guild, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Legion of Mary, etc.

So much having been said about the Sodality in general, we may now consider .it in its special relation to the Leakage among boys. Bearing in mind the peculiar requirements of boys who have just left school, we have to find out how the Sodality should be managed so as to ensure that its members frequent the Sacraments; grow in the knowledge of the Faith, of themselves, and of the world; and deepen their spiritual life generally. The exact methods to be adopted in each case will, of course, vary according to the particular local conditions; the main purpose of the Sodality is clear, but there is plenty of room for elasticity of method in achieving that purpose. No attempt will be made here to discuss methods of managing a Sodality so as to meet the widely diverse requirements of the different classes of parishes which exist in this country, but instead we shall content ourselves with giving a description of a highly successful Sodality which is in actual operation in a parish typical of hundreds of other parishes in industrial areas. In many cases, it will be possible to apply this scheme quite unchanged, in other cases suitable modifications or additions may be introduced with advantage.

(Although the organization which we are about to describe is, as a matter of fact, a Sodality, yet it seems important to point out that this work can be successfully undertaken by any other similar organization. It is altogether foreign to the writer's intention to suggest that the Sodality contains the only solution to the problem of Leakage among boys; Third Orders, Guilds and Confraternities of all kinds are in active operation in our parishes, and in many cases, they are accomplishing magnificent results in their work for boys. In common with the Sodality of Our Lady, these various spiritual organizations aim at the spiritual progress and perfection of their members, each according to its own method and tradition. Our intention here is to suggest that a practical adaptation of some of the methods outlined in this pamphlet, would result in a very desirable co-ordination of the anti-Leakage aspect of work for boys throughout the country).

The writer recently had the privilege of spending a few days in a North-country industrial town. In one of the parishes of this town, a parish of some 5,000 Catholics, the problem of Leakage among working boys existed in an acute form; it was attacked by energetic and systematic work, and these efforts have been rewarded by complete success. In twelve years not a single boy has been lost! The methods which have been productive of so astounding a result must be of such interest to all who realize the urgency of the problem that no apology is needed for setting them down here in detail.

It is obvious that other, and perhaps equally effective, methods might be devised; it is not suggested that the scheme to be described is the only possible one. But it is a scheme that has been in actual practice for 12 years, a period long enough to put theory to a searching test. The scheme has succeeded beyond all expectations; indeed, were it not for the personal assurance of the parish priest, one could scarcely believe that so complete a measure of success had been obtained. After several long and intimate conversations, the parish priest was kind enough to place at the writer's disposal some exhaustive notes which he had written about his work for boys. I shall not hesitate to quote at length from these notes, since their direct and forceful language can scarcely be improved upon.

(7) The Sodality in action.

In this parish, the foundation-stone of the work for boys is the Boys' Sodality of Our Lady; a Sodality can be erected in any parish, however poor. This Sodality has two parts — boys at school and working boys up to 16 years of age. Boys at school can always be got at, so attention is focussed on the working boys.

The Council, or Governing Body, of the Boys' Sodality, with the parish priest as Director, is composed, not of boys, but of members of the Men's Sodality. The parish is divided up into districts, and to each of twenty young men one of these districts is assigned. In this manner, a complete network is spread over the whole parish, and this is a sensitive network, so that a "bulge" in the net is immediately felt. Let us see how the parish priest describes the working of this net.

"On the Boys' Sodality monthly Communion Sunday, each of my twenty young men places in my hands, by three o'clock on the same Sunday afternoon, the names of all working boys who have been absent from Sodality Mass and Communion. I call my Council together, discuss this list, and assign to each those boys who are in his district. That same week a visit is made to each house to find out the reason why the boy has been absent. The reasons given are written down and sent to me, with a note sometimes to the effect that the only hope is a visit from me. This visit is made by me at once. All this implies, of course, solid hard work, work too that is depressing often-times on account of the atmosphere of the homes."

With this spadework going on continuously and systematically, the details of the scheme are filled in thus:-

"Every week I give a special talk to boys in the top classes of our two Elementary Schools, throughout the year previous to their leaving school for work. This aims at preparing them for certain temptations, and the type of men they are bound to meet.

"By consulting parents and boy, I find out what the boy wants to work at, and then go round to various employers, promise them a good type of boy, and get them to take an interest in the boy's career. By this means, I am able to get boys straight to work when they leave school, and know exactly what their surroundings are. When it is a big works they enter, I put each boy under the care of a good Catholic working man there, so as to make the boy feel that he has a friend.

"The special talks begun during the year previous to leaving school are continued after the boys go out to work. On Sodality Sunday, the working boys are separated from the schoolboys, and have a special talk all to themselves. These talks I give myself, but I sometimes get one or two men of the Sodality to give them. This makes a great impression, because they hear a young man telling them what 'going straight' means.

"All this work goes on till the boys are 16 years of age. At that age, they are transferred to the Men's Sodality. In the Men's Sodality the same 'network' is continued, with visits and reports to me. Also at 16, the boys become eligible for the Men's Club, which they are keen to join. Membership means keeping up Sunday Mass and Sodality Communion, the men of the Club report to me any slackening off in this matter. The parish Football Club, run by the men, is another link. The club exists simply and solely as a means of catching the boys and keeping them straight.

"Lastly, every year I have a working boys' Retreat. It is essential for the success of this, that the expense should be kept at the barest minimum, and so the fee is 2/6 per day, for which they get breakfast, dinner and tea. Here again, the recruiting for the Boys' Retreat is in the hands of the men. It is amazing how boys like to feel that men are interested in them; they like to be thought men."

And now what about the success of the scheme? The words which follow leave little doubt on that score.

“The scheme starts with success. No boy can escape the net. If he is slackening, he comes up against the net, and there is a “bulge”. That bulge is investigated at once — a very important factor.

“In a London parish, when I was in charge of the boys, only 12 were attending Mass on Sunday and going to Holy Communion. I put my scheme into operation, spread my net, and at the end of one year had caught 120 boys. At the end of that year, I was transferred to another sphere of action, and so had not the opportunity of seeing my scheme reach maturity. One thing I do know is that within two months of my departure, my 120 boys were lost again, because nobody took up the work.

“In this parish, I started the scheme under similar circumstances, and have had the good fortune to see the work come to fruition during several years. On an average there are about 30-40 working boys coming direct from school each year. Throughout a period of twelve years working of the scheme, there is not a single case of any of my boys giving up Mass, or giving up the practice of his religion, except when and only when they have left me and gone elsewhere.”

What a truly magnificent result! If the same work were going forward in every parish throughout the length and breadth of the land, the whole face of things would be changed in a generation. This is, in fact, the only defect of the scheme — that it is not yet a national organization.

“Let me make this clear by an example. One of my boys, 15 years of age, was showing the results of the scheme — keen on Mass and Sodality Communion. Everything seemed set fair for his future. Suddenly his parents removed to another place. I met him 6 months later, and had only to look at his eyes. He was all wrong, and I knew it. Why? Because nobody was bothering about him. This is the kind of thing that breaks one’s heart. Why wasn’t the net ready to catch him in the place he went to?

“I urge therefore that the solution of the Leakage question is national, not parochial. Had the same net been spread throughout the land, all I had to do in this boy’s case was to write a post-card informing the parish priest of his arrival; but unless the work is being done everywhere, the postcard is useless and the boy is lost. The heart-breaking thing to me is that the only boys of this parish who are lost to the Faith, are the boys who leave it.

“What we have to realize is that isolated effort will not stop this terrible Leakage among boys — that mere talking will not stop it. No! We must take off our coats and work like blacks, each in his own parish, and so make the Leakage Question national and even international, so that wherever a boy goes he is caught.”

(8) The Layman’s Part.

We have been studying at close quarters a scheme which has been in operation for 12 years, and which has been and still is an unqualified success.

To what particular elements is this success due? First and foremost, success has been won by hard work and system. An important factor in this system is the prompt and unfailing following up of any slackness. Our enemy “goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour”, and is prompt in following up his advantages; we must forestall him with even greater promptness. The work has been backed up by the energetic and loyal co-operation of laymen, without whose help the scheme must have failed. That the Council of the Boys’ Sodality is made up of members of the Men’s Sodality, is a feature of the highest importance. The boys very greatly appreciate the interest

which the men take in them, and in this way, something is done towards bridging the gap which exists between the small community of working boys and the men. Clearly, the men themselves benefit enormously by their participation in this apostolic work, and the whole parish is welded and knit together into one great living organism.

Surely, this is the truly Christian way of setting to work, mutual help and interest, loyal service for Christ's sake, the strong helping and protecting the weak until they too become strong, all centering round Sodality devotion to Our Lady. "We that are stronger ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1).

But it is clear that in so far as it exists only in isolated parishes, this scheme is, at the best, only a partial solution of the Leakage. To be really effective the organization must be, not parochial merely, but national and even international. The net must be spread everywhere, so that none can escape its meshes. We need a national organization of Catholic laymen who will offer themselves to the parish clergy to work for the boys of the parish, in systematic co-operation with similar work in all other parishes. It is hoped that the question of the constitution of such an organization will soon come up for discussion among those who are able to take active steps in such a matter. It is clear that work of this nature is in harmony with the general aims of several of the existing Catholic Societies, but none of these Societies has up to the present engaged on this work on a really national scale. However the work is tackled, and tackled it must be, it seems certain that centralized control will be required, or at least the very closest liaison must be maintained between the various fields of action. This pamphlet will not wholly fail to produce its desired effect if it stimulates an interest in this aspect of the question, and calls forth suggestions as to the nature of the far-flung organization which must sooner or later come into being.

(9) Catholic Action.

It is not too much to say that without a very great increase in lay co-operation, this problem is quite insoluble. For many years past, appeal after appeal has been made for the layman's help. When that help has been forthcoming, the layman's work has been magnificent, and God has blessed it with wonderful success. To take but two instances, the Catholic Evidence Guild and the Catholic Social Guild have accomplished wonders, especially when it is remembered that the proportion of the Catholic population which has supported these organizations is really quite disgracefully small. Let us look the facts in the face — the very great majority of those on whom the Church has a right to call in her need are doing nothing in the way of personal service. Why is it so hard to rouse the British layman? Is it because he is only a slack, lukewarm, 50% Catholic? Emphatically no; experience proves the contrary to be the case. On all sides, we find indications of zeal, energy, loyalty, and ready willingness on the part of the layman. The trouble is that all this goodwill and readiness has not yet learnt to find an outlet for itself. Laziness and indifference are not the Catholic layman's besetting faults, but excessive diffidence. We have not yet become accustomed to the Lay Apostolate as a normal and a necessary thing. We must get habituated to the idea, not that it is exceptional for a layman to take part in apostolic work, but that it is a reproach to him if he does not do so. The Catholic must come to regard himself as by that very fact an apostle; of the Apostles we read that they were "laborantes in remigando", ('labouring in rowing', Mark 6:48,) we must realize that in Peter's Barque all are rowers; there is no room for mere passengers!

The layman has no reason to be diffident in this matter, for the very highest Authority urges him to come forward and take his share in the Church's work. In his first great Encyclical (*Ubi Arcano Dei*

Consilio in 1922) on The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ, His Holiness Pope Pius XI made a special commendation of Catholic Action, under which heading he included apostolic work of the laity for young people, and the promotion of Sodalties of Our Lady. Since then, His Holiness has insisted again and again on the necessity for well-regulated Catholic Action on the part of the laity. In an address to university students in 1929, the Pope defined Catholic Action as “the participation of the laity in the Apostolic Hierarchy of the Church.” His Holiness drew attention to the fact that Catholic Action is as old as the Church Herself, and pointed out that the Apostle St. Paul in the commendations and salutations at the end of his Epistles, was addressing, not bishops and priests, but layfolk “who have laboured with me in the Gospel.” Two further extracts from the Holy Father’s Encyclicals will drive the point home.

“With no less care, Venerable Brethren, would we have the manifold cohorts of the Catholic Action polished or cultivated fitly by the Spiritual Exercises. With all our power, we desire to promote this Action; and we cease not, and never will cease to commend it; because the co-operation of the laity with the Apostolic Hierarchy is exceedingly useful, not to say necessary.”

(Encyclical: The More Extended Use of the Spiritual Exercises.)

Mens Nostra, 1929.

“This state of things may perhaps be attributed to a certain slowness and timidity in good people, who are reluctant to engage in contest, or oppose but a weak resistance; thus the enemies of the Church become bolder in their attacks.”

(Encyclical instituting the Feast of Christ the King.)

Quas Primas, 1925.

We have been slow and backward in this matter, we have not come up to the hopes which our fathers had of us.

In his great Stockport address of 1899, Cardinal Vaughan spoke as follows: --

“For my part, I consider that as it was the bounden duty of the Church sixty years ago to organize lay forces into an army of teachers for children of tender age, so it has now become her duty, in the present state of English society, to recruit another army of unpaid workers, not only to take charge of the children when they leave school, but to live and work among the poor as lay missionaries — pledged to better their social and religious condition. It has been whispered that the laity are not sufficiently employed in the work of the Church. Would to God that more among them stepped forward to throw themselves into the great Christian work of regenerating the masses in overcrowded centres of population! This work of fraternal charity is to their hand. The Church invites, nay, presses them into her service. Let them gird themselves, and put their backs into the work. The chivalry of personal service to Christ in His poor is open to them. A heavenly hand holds out the guerdon of their reward.

— The English people are more readily convinced by deeds than by words. When they shall see educated men and women of the upper classes, perhaps delicately nurtured, devote a substantial part of their life and of their fortune to bettering the lives of the poor, when they shall see them working earnestly and humbly in subordination to their clergy, then will the English people turn to them instinctively with respect, and bow down in admiration before the religion which has presented Christ to them in so admirable a social form.

— The need of this (work for children) is becoming recognized, and I believe that the first quarter of the coming century will see among us the organization, upon a wide scale, of this necessary work of co-operation for the benefit of young people between the ages of 13 (the then school-leaving age) and 20. It will be, indeed, a grand Catholic Brotherhood when one-third of the population is cherished and taught by elder brothers and sisters, regardless of social rank, of rich or poor.”

(10) The Public-School Man — An Appeal.

It is from public-school men that we might reasonably expect the most ready response to the Church’s appeal; especially might they be expected to take a leading part in tackling the problem of the Leakage among boys. Their education has fitted them for leadership, their knowledge of their religion should be considerable, and their whole training should have impressed them with a high sense of the value of the Faith, and inspired them with apostolic zeal - in spreading and defending it. But it is a regrettable fact that after he leaves school the public-school man for the most part seems to disappear into thin air — nothing is ever heard of him again! The great puzzle is to find out where he has got to. Certain it is that public-school men do not associate themselves in large numbers with active Catholic lay enterprises.

[It will be recalled that a British ‘Public School’ is in fact a private school open to those who can afford its fees and scholastic standards. Generally speaking, their graduates are regarded as the elite of society, and thus the disappointment of the writer in the failure of the Catholic intellectual elite to be actively involved in the works of the Lay Apostolate.]

There are, however, more hopeful signs for the future. Several of our largest schools have enthusiastically taken up work and study in preparation for outdoor speaking as members of the Catholic Evidence Guild, and in not a few cases, boys have spoken with good effect at C.E.G. pitches in London and elsewhere. Moreover, some schools have for some time past had organized Study-Circles working in co-operation with the Catholic Social Guild, so as to fit the boys to take an active part in Catholic social work when they leave school. These and similar activities cannot fail to have the happiest effects, but it must be confessed that so far they are only a beginning.

This work for boys is absolutely crying out for public-school men. It will involve hard work, a certain sacrifice of spare time, occasional disappointments and failures — but an immense reward. In these days, the public-school man who keeps aloof is guilty of something very like treason, at least he merits St. Ignatius’s reproach of “*eques ignavus*” — ‘slothful knight’. The Catholic public-school man has received so much, that he is in duty bound to pass on some of his advantages to his less fortunate fellows. He need have no fear that his efforts will not be appreciated, or that such work is unsuitable for him. Fortunately there are plenty of instances of public-school men who have done, and are doing, magnificent work for the Church. They organize Boys’ and Men’s Retreats and encourage the Retreatants by their own attendance, seek out submerged Catholics in rural areas and catechize their children, arrange bus services to convey scattered rural Catholics to Mass, start Mass-centres and run them until a parish can be erected, give up spare time to Boys’ Clubs, teach boxing and swimming to working boys, and are at the right hand of the parish priest in all his necessities. But one of the reasons why one can so easily call such instances to mind, is that it is still something of a phenomenon to find a public-school man engaged in active work for the Church, it is nearly always a case of isolated and individual effort. Surely, in all our large cities there are enough young Catholic public-school men to form the back-bone of the Men’s Sodality of Our Lady, and to take their part in the running of the Boys’ Sodality!

A Catholic public-school education is not only an advantage, it is a responsibility as well, a precious talent to be traded with for the benefit of the Church, not to be wrapped up in a napkin and buried for safety. By way of inculcating this sense of responsibility, would it not be possible for some of our larger schools officially to adopt some town or district, for the purpose of assisting the local clergy to develop welfare work for working lads? Similar action has already been taken by many great non-Catholic schools, often merely with the motive of diffusing a general spirit of philanthropy and social service. We, with motives infinitely higher, might well consider to what extent such an early participation in works of apostolic charity might be mixed with our existing school activities.

(11) Conclusion.

The Church then appeals to all Her children for help, but more especially to those on whom She has already lavished her choicest gifts, and to whose gratitude She has a special title. The problem has long been familiar, and calls ever more insistently for a solution. Whatever the solution be, it must be provided by lay co-operation. The method of solution which has been outlined in this pamphlet has had such striking results in practice, that a very clear indication seems to be given of the lines to be worked on in the future. The facts given show a promise fulfilled in one parish, and a promise eminently well worth working for in every parish in the land. Here is the layman's work par excellence; who will take it up?

When I asked my parish priest if he really meant that none of his boys had been lost, he said: "Humanly speaking, I know that all of the 200-300 working boys in this parish are in the grace of God." What this really means only the tongues of Angels could describe, the shining splendour of that company of Christian Knights in a North-country industrial town is beyond all worldly ken; but one is wistful for the splendour and the glory of this living faith to spread through all the land, so that in every parish in the country it may be said: They are all in the grace of God; "and where sin abounded, grace did more abound" (Rom. 5:20).
