

UNIVERSITY CATHOLIC SOCIETIES

THIRTY-FIVE years ago, the Holy See, in a letter to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, declared it would tolerate the presence of Catholic students at non-Catholic Universities in England. (April 2nd, 1895).

A few weeks later, the Holy See addressed a letter to Cardinal Vaughan (April 17th). That letter set out the conditions under which Catholic men might be allowed to attend the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The point which is pertinent here is that the letter is concerned with safeguards of the faith and morals of such Catholics as attend those Universities; that the safeguards are (1) regular courses of lectures in Philosophy, History and Religion should be given by Catholic professors to the Catholic students; (2) that the Catholic students who attend non-Catholic Universities are bound to attend the lectures which are specially given for their benefit, and that both parents and the Bishops should see that this is carried out.

Clearly these letters had in view attendance at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Most of the other Universities did not exist in the nineties. The situation is far different to-day. There is a University in almost every diocese in England. A clear majority of the total number of Catholics attending Universities attend the younger Universities. What of *them*? The writer is thinking only of them.

There was no need of a special permit from the Holy See, granting permission to Catholic men and women to attend these later centres of learning. The question whether Catholics could or could not attend non-Catholic Universities had been settled. It remained

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to act on the permission already granted. But, and equally, there was need of safeguards. Indeed, it would seem that there is more need of safeguards to the faith and morals of Catholics in the younger Universities than in the older ones, where students belong to colleges whose whole tradition and background date from and, to some degree, continue the Catholic days and spirit.

But, if some express word of the Holy See is required, here it is: 'We do decree and strictly command that in all dioceses throughout the world the following regulations be observed and enforced: Where there are public academies, colleges, and universities, let religious doctrine classes be established for the purpose of teaching the truths of our faith and the precepts of Christian morality to the youths who attend such public institutions where no mention whatsoever is made of religion.' (Pope Pius X's Encyclical on 'The Teaching of Christian Doctrine.')

It will be noted that both in the letter to Cardinal Vaughan regarding Oxford and Cambridge, and in the Encyclical of Pius X, regarding any non-Catholic centres of studies, the Holy See insists on 'lectures,' 'religious doctrine classes.' At Oxford and Cambridge a chaplain was appointed almost immediately; thus, it was argued, can the mind of the Church be best obeyed. At other Universities which have been formed since then, Bishops have appointed priests to do what they can in the matter of providing antidotes to non-Catholic influence. But how to get the Catholic students together? and, more difficult, how keep them together once they are found? Inevitably, at many modern Universities, Catholic groups have been formed. Their work has been a voluntary effort to obey, or, better, to fulfil the student part of the bargain. Those groups are known as 'University Catholic Societies.'

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In some modern University centres something of the work asked for by the Church is done by the training colleges which obtain in those centres. But not all of it. The students who are living in such training colleges and who are, at the same time, attending the University of their area, are like other Catholic students in this : they need *special* treatment ; and that by those who know, at first hand, just what are the dangers of attendance at non-Catholic Universities. Gladly will any Chaplain confess that the training colleges make his work easier, in that there the Catholic student has such easy access to the chapel and the Sacraments. But it is for him to provide, if possible, by means of conferences and lectures and discussion groups, just those things which meet their special need created by the special and peculiar place and atmosphere in which they spend most of their student time. Granted that, it follows that Catholic students who reside at Catholic training colleges and attend the Universities from there, are 'expected'—no—the Pope's word in his letter to Cardinal Vaughan is *bound* to attend the lectures which are especially given for their benefit. To continue the quotation, 'and both their parents and the Bishops should see that this is carried out.' Hence, it would seem, those who are, as we say, *in loco parentis* 'should see that this is carried out.' *In loco parentis* are, surely, those who are in charge of houses, religious or other, in which Catholic University students reside. They, too, must see that students *do* attend, and thereby support, whatever is done for their special benefit. And this by allowing them facility to attend conferences, where given, and lectures, etc., arranged by the chaplain through the local Catholic Society. I wish respectfully to make a suggestion in the last matter. Each college has its own social life ; arranges plays, parties, processions, etc. Naturally students of training colleges who attend the Universi-

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ties are expected to assist in their college social activities. But it must not be forgotten that such students, precisely because they are University students, are expected to help on the University social life. It is not always easy to decide from which college functions they should be excused. But the principle is the important matter. I would formulate the principle thus : for University students the University comes first.

And, once again, an appeal to Heads of Catholic colleges to sit up when they find that one of their students is going to one of the Universities after he leaves school. It is difficult at Oxford and Cambridge, it is far more difficult at the younger Universities, to know who are Catholics among the students. A previous word to the Chaplain would help so much. And, too, heaven knows how much could be done if the heads of colleges would speak to their students who are proceeding to a University of the *duty* to co-operate with the local Chaplain.

A caution. Some Catholic societies issue programmes of the year's activities. Those programmes are often misleading. Outsiders get the impression that the social side is *the* side. That is not the case. The purpose of the Catholic Societies is to foster the spiritual life of students, to provide for them adequate religious instructions, suitable to and keeping pace with their progress in secular knowledge, and to encourage Catholic social inter-activity, and *in that order of importance*. Or, in Fr. Martindale's scheme : ' Retreat, book, work.'

Perhaps a summary of my own experience of six years is material here. Once, and that not by the headmaster but by a personal friend of the boy, have I been informed of the 'coming up' of a Catholic student. Often have I failed to discover Catholic students until their last year, and perhaps not until they have gone down. Occasionally I have found that

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Catholic students have deliberately ignored the local University Catholic Society, and the reason given has been 'The Catholic students are out at elbows; no class.' I could name the schools from which they have come; but the reader would be surprised and the schools would be annoyed and no good would come of it all. So I shall merely say that the best Catholics at Universities are not necessarily from the 'best' schools.

The problem of the Catholic student from 'Latin' countries is very serious. Here little need be said except that, in my experience, hardly any of them care to have anything to do with the University Catholic Group, and more than half of them do not practise their Faith. But they are usually to be found at the local Y.M.C.A., a comfortable club with which we cannot compete. One suggestion to be made is this: some of these Latin students have been at Catholic colleges or schools in England before entering the University; is it too much to ask the Heads of such colleges and schools to keep in touch with these students whilst they are at the University; in touch by correspondence, by invitations to visit their old school, and by 'looking them up' whenever they are in the University town? Often the clergy at the preparatory school have gained an influence which the local University chaplain will never gain. Rarely, and certainly not here, can the chaplain succeed unaided.

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