

LET'S SEE THE OTHER SIDE

By Daniel A. Lord S. J.

The party was relatively small; but no doubt about it, thought Mrs. Bradley, smiling inwardly, it was a success. She mentally patted herself on the back for having selected this evening, the evening of the golf tournament's semi-finals, for her party. It offered conversational possibilities—discussion of the day's play and apodictic prophecies about the result of the finals. Nothing helped conversation so much as the blending of history, current events, and prophecy. And the discussion of golf on the day before the finals encouraged just such a blend.

Out of the corner of her eye she noted the long buffet table on which the remains of the dinner were spread in pleasing and still tempting disarray. The waiters, hovering in the background, were smiling, perhaps because the guests had been so frank in their praise of the food, perhaps because of the pleasing quantity of food that still remained and of the meal to which they would soon sit down.

The guests sat at little tables on the wide verandah of the Bradley summer home. The lake breeze swept across the lawn and gently ruffled the tablecloths and stroked chiffons and cool linens and tossed about inconsequential but delightful scraps of conversation. Obviously the fourteen guests were having a good time. What more could a hostess ask as reward for the painstaking task of planning a summer dinner party?

Dinner's End.

Mr. Bradley arose with elaborate dignity. From a shelf under the buffet table he drew the longest and the darkest box of Corona Coronas and with it made the rounds of his male guests. That meant, thought Mrs. Bradley, that eating was officially at an end. She signaled to the waiters, and they began the expeditious process of removing the tables from the verandah and pointing at offending crumbs on the porch rug the long arm of a vacuum's streamlined attachment.

There was an easy shifting of positions. The business of eating had necessarily divided the sixteen into four small clusters, but now they naturally drifted into one rather irregular circle. Porch swings began to sway gently. The men disposed themselves in pardonably comfortable ease. Mrs. Bradley snapped off the overhead porch lights, so that the light from the two floor lamps seemed to weld the party and bring them into harmony with the charming twilight. And off on the lake the put-put of a motor-boat tried—and failed—to keep time with the song of some amateur quartet, which mingled very little harmony and much laughter and gay vituperation of a notably aggressive tenor.

In spite of the fact that the guests were, as summer-resort crowds usually are, mixed, they had blended beautifully. The whole evening, Mrs. Bradley thought, was simply made to order. And if the evening continued in this way.

Enter the Twins.

Up the steps bounded the twins, Dick and Sue. Mrs. Bradley glowed with maternal pride as every eye turned to her good-looking young son and daughter. Dick, she mused happily, had never looked more tanned and clean-cut and strapping than he did now in his summer flannels; Sue was something for other mothers to contemplate with frank envy.

"Hi!" cried Dick, with an inclusive wave of his big brown paw. He had two library books tucked under his arm, Mrs. Bradley noticed. How many lads of his age, she asked herself contentedly, would take time to read when all the summer world of open air and lake and sky was calling them to light gaiety and physical activity? He came over to her and kissed her affectionately.

"Good-evening," murmured Sue in her best party manner, and every one of the men, including her father, answered her in a hearty and altogether approving chorus that almost drowned the more dignified response of the women.

"Plenty of food left," said Mrs. Bradley, nodding toward the kitchen.

"We picked up some food in the village," answered Sue.

"Yee Oldee Shoppee for Modern Sandwiches," added Dick.

And then the twins spotted Father Hall, who was seated far over in the corner of the twilit porch.

“Hey!” they cried, in happy duet.

“Fancy meeting you here!” said Dick.

“Fancy the anguish and disappointment of not meeting you here!” added Sue.

Two Books.

They serpented their way toward their devoted priest friend. But as they did so, Dick spied an empty chair and relieved himself of his books. It happened that that chair was near Professor Clifford, and Professor Clifford was the only one of the guests (except for his wife, who believed a professor’s wife should show a professional interest in books) who would have thought of examining the books. He picked them up and noted the titles with surprise. Then, first turning his head slowly to follow the twins in their progress toward Father Hall, he opened the first volume to chapter one.

The twins reached Father Hall and again exchanged greetings with him. In a sort of shorthand conversational style all their own the three of them had begun to compare notes on the past few days when Professor Clifford’s voice cut the varied threads of the verandah conversation.

“Well,” he said, clearing his throat in true professorial fashion, “I thought you young people would be reading detective stories, or perhaps fast romances. I’d no idea that you read things like these.”

Dick turned as if he had been jerked back with a taut bit. Even the dim light cast by the floor lamps were sufficient to show a flush under his tan. Sue bit her lip in quick embarrassment. The twins did not have to look at each other to know just what each was thinking and feeling.

Turning the Pages.

They left Father Hall, bent on retrieving the books as soon as possible. *But* the professor, famous for thoroughness, had lowered the book a little to bring it closer to the light from the lamp and was paging through the volume with genuine interest.

“Well, well!” he repeated, his mind pulling up whole paragraphs in single swift glances. “It’s nice to know that young people read serious books these days.”

Then he looked up at the twins, who were standing in front of him, their hands partly raised in a gesture that expressed their hopeful desire to reclaim their books.

“And I confess,” he added, taking in the whole group with a sweep of his eyes and then bringing his glance back to the twins, “that I’m surprised to find you reading precisely these books. I didn’t know that Catholics—and of course we couldn’t miss the fact that the Bradleys are excellent and devout Catholics—read books like these.”

Which Other Side?

Dick’s flush deepened. The attention of the entire group was centered on the twins, and Dick would gladly have wrung the professor’s not-too-muscular neck.

“Nothing unusual about it,” he muttered. Then in a quick defensive burst he added. “We Catholics like to read the other side.”

“That’s it,” said Sue, beaming with relief, “we like to read the other side. One has to see the other side these days, you know.”

The professor’s face reflected her beam with appreciation.

“Excellent!” he said, “excellent! You know you Catholics are often accused of being narrow-minded, lacking—if I may say so at the risk of seeming a bit rude—in breadth of viewpoint. I’m delighted to know that you two young Catholics believe in seeing and reading the other side.”

“Which other side?”

Duel.

Everyone turned, Father Hall was deftly tamping tobacco into his favourite pipe. Clearly it was he that had spoken, but his voice was so cool and quiet that no one could be quite sure whether it was at that instant tinged with naivete or irony.

“Eh?” demanded the professor. He didn’t particularly like the parish priest of Lakeside. He had met him only twice before this evening, and there were a number of things about the priest that he resented. This Father Hall, the professor thought, was much too modern in his outlook and his interests —too modern for one connected with so distinctly mediaeval an institution as the Roman Catholic Church. The priest’s lack of mental dustiness seemed slightly blasphemous to him. And Father Hall had had the bad taste to disagree with him on points of history that he, the professor, had always taken for granted—and the priest had been correct. What right had priests to know about anything outside of theology and that persistent little black book they always toted around with them wherever they went?

“Eh?” demanded the professor again. “I don’t quite understand.”

“I just wanted to know,” said Father Hall, still mingling naivete, with irony, “since you think we Catholics ought to see the other side, just which other side you mean.”

The professor flung his hands in a wide arc as he did when an obnoxious pupil in one of his classes asked him what was clearly a catch question.

Catholic and Now—...

“The non-Catholic side, obviously,” he said, heatedly. “I take it for granted, my dear father, that even you know that there is another side. If I am not mistaken, there is a side that is clearly Catholic; then there a side that is very decidedly not Catholic.

You Catholics, if I may say so, generally know your own side extremely well. But, I regret to add, I find that you Catholics are extremely poorly posted on the other side. And, to repeat what I said to the young man here, I am delighted to find that there evidently are young Catholics who are making an effort to read about the other side. *I* like that breadth of mind.”

Father Hall sighed a little and lighted his pipe. The flare of the match illumined his face, which seemed innocent of all guile.

“But you still haven’t answered my question, professor. You still haven’t explained which other side you want Dick to know.”

The professor held up the book, as if he were holding up some object to a not-too. bright pupil.

“The other side as contained, for instance, in books like this one, which clearly disagrees with the Catholic Church and says so in no unmistakable terms.”

Out of a Field.

Father Hall drew on his pipe until the tobacco glowed, and then he flicked out the match.

“May I ask professor, whether you have read that book?”

“As a matter of fact—” (The professor coughed in embarrassment.) “*I* haven’t read it. You see that’s outside my field.”

“In that case,” said the priest, “that book constitutes one side that you haven’t investigated. There’s one side you don’t know. That’s why I emphasised the word ‘which’ when I asked you which side you meant.”

The group on the verandah were following this duel of words in interested silence. After all, they had pretty well exhausted the subject of the golf tournament, and when two antagonists like Father Hall and Professor Clifford seemed about to lock horns, there was reason for delightful anticipation. Mrs. Bradley, however, looked about her a little uneasily. The group was, save for Father Hall, her husband and the twins, and the Careys from down the lake, entirely non-Catholic. How would they take this little scuffle?

Her look satisfied her that they were taking it with keen relish, and she settled back, content.

The Flattering Division.

The professor replaced the books on the chair. And Dick and Sue, grateful that the conversation had switched from them to a more general theme, sat down at the base of the porch column, prepared to enjoy the battle.

“You see, professor,” Father Hall continued, “you lined up mankind on two sides: the Catholic side and the non-Catholic side. That is a quite common and, I do believe, a quite flattering division.”

“It wasn’t meant to be flattering,” said the professor, letting his temper slip.

“Perhaps not. But the fact remains that you echoed the educated world’s commonest classification of the sides men take. Now I grant you one side—the Catholic side. But the other side? That’s split up into several thousand other sides. That was what I meant when *I* asked you which other side you want us Catholics to study. Which of the thousand other sides, all disagreeing more or less with our side, do you think we ought to investigate? Don’t you agree that even if we did try to investigate all the other sides, let’s say spent the rest of our lives doing nothing else but that, death would find us with our job hardly begun?”

Division on the Porch.

Everyone on the porch laughed, not so much at the priest’s words as at the amusing affectation of despair that accompanied those words. But the professor glared. And the twins, exchanged complacent glances.

Suddenly Father Hall leaned forward. “Let’s take a census of the sides that are represented right here on the porch,” he suggested. “If you don’t mind, that is, making professions of faith. . .

“Or lack of faith,” supplemented tall Mr. Rodney, who hadn’t been near a church since he stopped going to Sunday school back at the turn of the century.

“All of you, except my good friends the Bradleys and the Careys, are non-Catholic. You are all, in the words of the professor, on the other side. May I ask you then: Which other side?” The priest’s manner was completely disarming.

It was an amusing revelation that they laughingly made. And in a few moments the whole procedure had become hilarious

Catalogue.

One of the guests was a Christian Scientist; another was an atheist. One man professed to be an agnostic, but a few questions revealed that he was not sure what an agnostic was. One was a staunch Methodist; another was a Unitarian. The Brownes went to the High Episcopalian Church once a year, though they confessed that they found the service a little mystifying.

Young Hilda Lane loftily declared that she thought there was a great deal to be said for Communism, and she twirled her massive four-carat diamond ring as she made this declaration. One of the men said that psychology had knocked into a cocked hat whatever faith he had had.

One of the women announced that she was reading Hindu literature and was finding it very fascinating. “There was the most charming swami . . .” she began. But the contributions of the other members drowned her out.

One of the guests thought that all religions were pretty good but that none of them was very important.

One woman wished that she had time to go a little more thoroughly into spiritualism. “Oh, there’s a great deal of it that’s fake,” she murmured, “but just the same, I feel that there must be something . .

And one man, a biochemist, frankly declared himself to be a materialist.

And then, when each had made his “confession,” as if by a spontaneous impulse everyone started to talk at once. Each one wanted to give an explanation for what he was or wasn’t. And then as if by the same impulse everyone suddenly stopped talking and burst into laughter.

Where to Start.

But Father Hall only smiled.

“I apologise;” he said, “for starting what sounded a little like a board of trade on a busy afternoon. But you do see now, don’t you, professor, what I mean by which other side? Here are the Bradleys, the Careys, and myself, united in our representation of the Catholic side; but the other side, as you call it, is represented by twelve charming people each of whom stands in a position that is totally different from that of the others—eleven positions, I should say, since the Brownes are agreed on the High Episcopalian Church.

“Now just suppose that I were to take the time and the thought necessary to devote myself to the study of these eleven positions. Think what a life’s career that would be! No, professor; you really haven’t made yourself clear about what you mean by the other side. As I see it, you’ve assigned Dick here a pretty tremendous job.”

They all laughed as if they found it very amusing—all, that is, except the professor, who snorted and waved a professorial finger in a gesture of one admonishing a prank-some scholar.

The New Thought.

“Very amusing,” he said, caustically, “very amusing indeed. You may be interested to know that when I spoke about the other side I was not thinking in terms of organised religions.”

“Organised religions?” queried Father Hall, mildly, “like Communism and psychology and biochemistry and agnosticism?”

“Please,” begged the professor, “don’t be Jesuitical.”

“Ah!” sighed the priest, “I’m a member of the diocesan clergy. There’s nothing Jesuitical about me. I even wear a Roman cassock.”

That last point was lost on the group. *And* evidently all points were lost on the professor, for he pursued his way.

“Not organised religions,” he persisted. “As everyone knows, the last few generations have made wonderful progress in and for the process of thought. Our universities have not been idle. Science has achieved what in mediaeval days would undoubtedly have been called the incredible and the miraculous. We have built up a great body of facts, on which we are constructing a new heaven and a new earth. I think I am safe in saying that all of that constitutes what we are now calling the other side. And a very powerful and—from the viewpoint of organised religion—a very crushing side it is indeed.”

Father Hall waved his pipe.

“I quite agree with you that science has made marvellous contributions to knowledge. Its fact-finding activities have been splendid. The microscope and the telescope, to mention but two of the crudest of its instruments, have opened a new world inside and outside of the world that we once knew.”

We Keep Up.

“Precisely,” cried the professor, infinitely pleased. “And *it* is highly commendable that we know that there is such a side and that we give that knowledge a chance to broaden our mind and strengthen our grasp on truth.”

“But,” countered the priest, “you seem to have the impression that we Catholics don’t know that that side exists. We are aware of it, I assure you. I myself do all I can to keep pace with scientific progress. Drop in and see my library before the end of the summer.”

“We can’t make head or tail of loads of his books,” volunteered Sue. “Looks like pretty heavy going to us.”

“And,” added Father Hall, “these young people are studying in their Catholic colleges biology and history and chemistry and astronomy courses that couldn’t be shamed by courses that are offered in non-Catholic schools.”

“Oh,” inserted young Miss Lane, acidly, “I thought that Catholic colleges went in for religion and how many angels can dance on the point of a pin.”

“I never could understand,” murmured the priest, “why non-Catholics think that our angels are so insistent about dancing on pins. Disagreeable place for a dance, I’d say. No, Miss Lane; we keep right up to the minute on the facts, the

scientific facts, the data that are being constantly piled up through research. But . . .

“Ah!” said the professor, sensing a triumph, “I knew there was a but.”

Father Hall arose, walked across the verandah, and sat down on the porch rail. He was finding this argument great fun. Swinging one leg loosely, he faced the group and tried not to feel like a District Attorney about to make a point.

“Yes; I quite agree with you, professor; scientific facts are splendid, and have been marvellously useful. But let me ask you a question. How far do you think we would get if we called together the leading scientists in all the fields in your university and asked them to sit down and explain the facts, put them into a philosophy?”

“My dear fellow!” It was the professor’s turn to laugh. “Why, that would be an absurd request, one that would do no more than create bedlam. We don’t ask scientists to agree on theories. We don’t ask them to formulate philosophies.”

“But each of those scientists holds and teaches his theory or theories, doesn’t he?” insisted Father Hall. “There are some men at your university who maintain, let’s say, that the scientific data in the universe prove that there is no God, and others who hold that scientific data point to a creative intelligence, and others, pantheists, who believe that everything is God, and still others who are materialistic monists . . .”

Dissension in the University.

“What in the world are those?” demanded little Mrs. Stevens, the Christian Scientist.

“People who maintain that the whole world can be explained in terms of matter and force,” pontificated the professor.

“...and others,” continued Father Hall, “who are spiritualistic monists. . .”

“Dear, dear! What words!” exclaimed the little lady again.

“Your Mrs. Eddy,” said the priest, smiling, was one of those. She believed that the world contained only spirit, that the only manifestations in the world were spiritual manifestations”

“Of course,” she hastily agreed. “And a charming doctrine it is.”

“And don’t some of your professors say that man has no free will?” queried Father Hall, turning again to the professor. “And don’t others insist that he has free will? And others that he is bound by heredity? And still others that he is bound only by environment? And haven’t you men on your faculty who maintain that human conduct must be governed by the Ten Commandments? And others who deny for human conduct the validity of any law other than that which the individual makes for himself? And others still who say that all law comes from the State, or from custom, or from experience, or from a conviction of the usefulness or the futility of this act or that?”

Whom to Hear.

“Most certainly,” agreed the professor who had been listening with some impatience. “We encourage the widest possible range of opinion.”

“But,” protested Father Hall, “if in one university each of a dozen different men holds a different theory on the same set of facts, it’s rather difficult to learn what you mean by the other side. Here are two scientists who agree in declaring that the Church is wrong when she says that man is a creature composed of body and soul. But the one scientist believes that the world is all spirit, and the other believes that the world is all matter. Now which of these two sides would you have us investigate?”

“Again, one scientist points to the marvels of the world to prove that material things are superior to the things of God, and another points to those same marvels to prove that we don’t need a God, and another declares that those marvels are themselves God. All of these scientists agree in declaring that the Church is wrong, yet each of these scientists disagrees with the others...”

“Really,” concluded Father Hall, throwing his hands into the air, “it quite takes my breath away.”

They all laughed a little sheepishly, and the professor attempted to look amusedly tolerant.

Freedom, Not Unity.

“Perhaps you have noted,” Father Hall continued, “that Professor Hutchins of Chicago University has lately been lamenting the fact that universities are so torn, so divided against themselves. The secular university, he has declared, suffers because it has no philosophy to unite it into a single whole. It has, in other words, too many other sides. What is taught in the philosophy department contradicts what is taught in the medical school; the law school lays down rules of conduct for men who are assured by the psychology department that men can keep rules not at all because men have no free will; Buchinanites and Communists, Unitarians and materialists, devout Methodists and frank atheists, men hopeful of humanity, and men despairful of humanity— each expounds his own pet theory in perhaps the very same lecture hall”

“And all,” said the professor, triumphantly, “in the interests of freedom of thought.”

“But all,” retorted the priest, “making it very difficult to follow your advice about seeing the other side. So I come back to my original question: Which other side?”

Professor Gifford shrugged his shoulders. The argument had grown quite annoying, almost unnecessary, he thought. But with his usual lack of tact, Father Hall pushed firmly, if gently, along his way.

Dissension in the Press Room.

“Recently a group of young and some not-so-young liberals in New England got together to establish a newspaper. It was to be a modern liberal’s idea of heaven in a newspaper office. This group calmly announced that the newspaper would have no policy. A staff of important writers would write what they felt like writing when they felt it. Included on that staff was Broun, Reynolds, Ursula Parrott and a half-dozen others. The editor-in-chief, speaking in a newsreel that presented the beginnings of this enterprise, said in substance: We’ll all write what we want to write and say what we think. We are all editors. Nobody is boss. I hope that once in a while we’ll agree on something.

“There you have it—a famous other side; a group of liberals, some of them non-Catholic from birth and at least one of them non-Catholic by defection from the Church, who can tell everyone else what’s wrong with everything else but who hold out very little hope about ever agreeing among themselves, That one enterprise has, not one other side, but as many other sides as there are editors.

“I’ll admit that those editors may manage to publish a very amusing paper. After all, it is fun to watch a good fight . . . provided one is personally safe and well out of range of the brickbats that usually strike the innocent bystander. But my first objection still stands: While I admit that the Catholic Church is one side, I cannot grant that this unjelled group of conflicting minds constitutes the other side.

Which Side First?

“And this picture that I have attempted to sketch is representative of the actual situation. So when people tell me to read the other side, I become a little discouraged. Which other side? Shall I study Hinduism, or High-Church or Low-Church or Broad-Church Episcopalianism? Shall I run with the fundamental Methodists? or with the Unitarians, who have scrapped the divinity and the miracles of Christ? Shall I be a Seventh Day Adventist or a Holy Roller? Or should I perhaps follow the new revelation of Judge Rutherford, Jehovah’s Witness? Shall I be a psychologist who accepts free will, or one who rejects it? Shall I be a pantheist, a deist, a monist, or an atheist? And if I am to follow Socialism, which one of the half-dozen different brands shall it be? And if I decide to read up on Communism, whom shall I read, Stalin or Trotsky? And evolution? Well there are so many theories of evolution. . . . If I follow the survival-of-the-fittest theory, I’ll have most of the modern scientists on my neck. . . .and if I move along with adapted Mendelianism, I’ll be accused of being false to Darwin.”

“I’m terribly confused. The picture is, not the Catholic Church and the other side, but the Catholic Church and too many other sides. And the mere business of finding out just where to begin reading and studying and investigating these multitudinous sides is in itself a task of staggering proportions.

“And really, professor, when you add to all this the admission that there are different theories and differences of

opinion among your own university confreres, you make my situation even more hopeless.”

Narrow-minded.

The professor saw an opening and, using good military tactics, rushed to the attack.

“So,” said the professor, coldly emphatic, “since it is a little confusing—and I should be the first to admit that it is—the Catholic, even the intelligent Catholic, is content to study his own side and to let the rest of us poor, ignorant, misguided non-Catholics, go our own stupid way.”

He was really quite angry, and he made his point almost fiercely. Father Hall smiled at him with genuine friendliness.

“Before I answer that argument, professor, I’d like to make this much clear: While the principles and philosophy of the Catholic Church may seem absurd to you, you will have to admit that the Church is unified, logical according to her lights, and quite accessible to the human mind. You could get a fair idea of what the Catholic Church—and that means all practising Catholics the world over and history through—holds if you spent one afternoon in studying three or four books that I could suggest.”

“Now, from your viewpoint we Catholics represent the other side.

Unfair Question.

“But let me ask you a question, if you will: When did you last read a book that upholds the Catholic side of any question?”

The professor blinked. The entire group looked a little startled, as if the idea were altogether absurd. Imagine asking the professor, a busy man, with classes to teach and his own personal research to conduct and graduate work to supervise, when he had last read a Catholic book? Not when had he read such a book, but when had he last read...

“I beg your pardon,” cried the professor, seeming not to have heard the question.

“Well,” said Father Hall, shrugging his shoulders, “you’ve charged me with failure in broad-mindedness because I haven’t read about all the various sides that are not Catholic—and there really aren’t days and years and centuries sufficient for that task. But it shouldn’t take a trained reader like you very long to read up on the Catholic Church. When did you last read a book that upholds the Catholic side of any question?”

“Why . . . why . . .” The professor was coming close to spluttering. The priest lighted his pipe again and out of consideration for the professor’s indignant confusion turned his face away from the verandah and looked out toward the lake.

They Don’t Read Us.

“Unfair question,” admitted the priest. “Unfair because you’ve probably never read a Catholic book . . . probably not even the ‘Imitation of Christ;’ which even a man who does not accept Catholic principles would find a really beautiful thing. Please don’t think me too rude, professor, if I presume to read your mind. You’re thinking: ‘Why, what a ridiculous question! Why should I waste my precious time reading Catholic nonsense?’”

This time the professor did splutter. And he spluttered because he had been thinking precisely that, had been thinking it with annoyed resentment.

But Father Hall waved his hand in a gesture that dismissed the question and the ensuing embarrassment.

“Forgive me,” he said. “It was a rotten trick. But I did want to point out one rather outstanding fact. The other sides, about which you are constantly concerned, accuse us of crass bias and bigotry because we don’t read all their books and follow all their circuitous and criss-crossing paths. And yet it is an undisguised fact that those on the other sides really never, or so seldom that it can hardly be reckoned, read anything about the Catholic side. Let us come back to your professor friends for a minute. Do you know of any of them who have tried or are trying to find out what the Church really teaches and why? I’ve talked in a fair number of universities to a fair number of learned societies, and I find that any statement that I make about the Catholic Church—her practices, her theories of life, her attitude on current topics, her

historic traditions, her basic doctrines—comes as startling news.

A Bet; No Takers.

“I’ll make a bet with you, professor. I’ll match you book for book. I’ll mention a book that I’ve read about another side, and you mention a book you’ve read about my side, the Catholic side. We’ll play and pay as we would in a golf game. For each book you mention that I can’t match, I’ll pay you a dollar; for each book I mention that you can’t match, you pay me a dollar.”

“Oh, gambling!” cried Mrs. Morton, who was a devout and almost defiant Methodist.

Father Hall shook his head.

“My dear lady, betting on a sure thing is not gambling, you know. Anyhow, I doubt that the professor is going to take my bet.”

He didn’t, and the conversation turned into other channels. And everyone seemed glad enough to get back to ground that was free from high explosives.

For a Walk.

The party was over. Mrs. Bradley was saying good-bye to her guests, who assured her they had had a delightful evening. Father Hall and the twins stood near the steps, talking about the tennis tournament that was scheduled for the coming week; Dick and Sue planned to enter both singles and doubles.

Suddenly Dick said, “May we walk you home, Father?”

“I’m taking Father home in the car,” said their sire, hospitably.

“Thanks,” smiled the priest, “but the twins seem bent on walking the legs off me, and I think I’ll let them have their way.”

And he shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Bradley and, flanked by his beloved twins, walked off into the velvet evening.

Dick broke the friendly yet expectant silence. He knew that all three of them were thinking about the discussion and the books that had given rise to it.

“I’m afraid you gave the good professor a bad drubbing,” he said at last, with a slight effort at ingratiation.

The priest was quick in his protest: “It wasn’t, believe me, for the drubbing’s sake.”

The Real Audience.

“We knew that,” said Sue. “Fact of the matter was you were talking to Dick and to me, and we both knew it.”

The priest nodded but said nothing, and they continued to walk along briskly. The mystic, intangible silver of the moon seemed to flood the little road—which ran along the lake—and the cottages, which appeared at closer intervals as the trio approached closer to the village.

“Yes,” Father Hall said, at last, “I was talking to you. I don’t suppose that anything will ever convince the professor that I’m not a bigot. If I told him how much time we spent in our philosophy and theology courses on what he vaguely calls the other side, he’d be openly sceptical. If I told him that in our science courses at the university the priest professors gave the other sides the fairest possible show, he wouldn’t believe me. And if I told him how many books about the other side I have read and continue to read, I think he’d be shocked.”

We Do Read.

The priest seemed to withdraw his enthusiasm a little.

“Sounds almost as if I were beating the drum for myself, but I really have tried to learn about the other sides. I think I know as much about most of the other religions and cults as do the people who sincerely practise them. I’ve studied Communism to try to find out what makes it tick, and I have read Mrs. Eddy in order to see what it was in her that fascinated people. My course in evolution was very comprehensive, and I’ve faced all the historical difficulties that are

brought against the Church. I've read the modems, from Renan to Shaw, from O'Neill to what little I can stand of that pompous old pontiff H.G. Wells. I subscribe to a good many current magazines, even to the supposedly liberal and radical ones. I'd be ashamed not to give the other sides a fair show."

"I know it," blurted Dick. "Don't be angry, Father, but I think I picked up those books chiefly because I admire you for being broad-minded enough to try to see what the other chap holds."

The priest stopped stock still in mock horror.

"To think," he cried, "that I have become an occasion of sin and a bad example to my twins!"

Expert v. Amateur.

"Hey, wait a minute!" cried Dick. "Don't get me wrong—"

The priest pointed a finger at him and fixed him with an unblinking but humorous eye.

"And don't get me wrong, young man. As far as theology and philosophy go, I am—in a small way—something of an expert. Are you?"

"Well, hardly," volunteered Sue. "He rated a C in apologetics. And what was that marvellous grade you pulled down in rational psychology?"

"Dry up!" was the brotherly injunction, uttered under his breath.

"I'm an expert on certain subjects," repeated the priest, "and the plain fact of the matter is that you are very, very far from having mastered even the beginnings of those subjects. Contact with the other sides would serve only to confuse your mind, as it has madly jumbled the minds of the thousands of young people that are completing university and college courses and that are doing a deal of undirected reading to-day.

Total Confusion.

"What is that other side that our good professor was upholding? Masonry or Mohammedanism? The stupid literal Bible worship of the Rutherford people or Harry Emerson Fosdick's preaching of graceful modernism? George Bernard Shaw's new and skyrocketing amorality or Ghandi's new asceticism? Some professor's theory that human conduct is all a matter of glands or a sociologist's hypothesis that humanity will be saved by bigger and better tenements? Are we to follow the man who, because he wants to get rid of excess people, advocates mercy killing? Or shall we turn to the birth controllers, who want to keep people out of the world? Shall we turn Nazi with Hitler, who preaches the supremacy of Germany, or Communist with Marx, who preaches the supremacy of the suppressed classes? Shall we cast in our lot with the professor of philosophy who has read so many theories that he doesn't believe any of them, or with the scientist who has read so little about religion that he thinks all religion is a joke?

"Now, an expert can read the sort of stuff that the other sides turn out, and if he has a firm and proved position of his own, he discovers to his pleasure that there is some truth in each of those sides. But he takes the truth and then stops. He doesn't allow himself to be knocked around by the frightful disagreements in these sides. He doesn't permit himself to be sunk by some theory which seems plausible only until a chap on another side knocks that theory into the famous cocked hat.

Strong Proof.

"Please remember that one of the soundest proofs for the truth of the Catholic position is precisely that generation after generation the theories of the Church's enemies cancel one another. But during the time that those theories are in vogue, it takes an expert to see their weaknesses. And until experience or time or the coming of a new prophet has chucked these theories into the scrap heap of human follies, the amateur is likely to be rather badly disturbed by them.

"I want you to get this clear: On the one side there is the Catholic Church, reasonable, logical, its first and its last conclusions marching together in perfect step; on the other side there is . . . well Babel is the best word for it. Our position, the Catholic position, is so remarkably sound and sane and common-sense that your reading and advanced study

serve only to make you more calm, assured, and absolutely convinced of your position. But on the other sides you have every conceivable conflict of mind and practice and theory and conduct; you have every possible outpouring from new prophet and new novelist, and new thinker and new psychologist, all of whom, by the way, have the most surprising habit of burrowing in the rags and scraps of the past.

“An expert knows what is old and what is new; he knows exactly where he stands, and that makes it possible for him to evaluate the other chaps properly.

“Are you in the position of expert?”

“Obviously not,” said Sue.

“Most decidedly not,” added Dick.

Not for Beginners.

“Well, if you were interested in the higher studies of astronomy, you’d certainly make it a point to become an expert in correct and accepted astronomy before you undertook side excursions into astrology, ancient or modern, or into the theory that the sun moves around the earth, or into the field of the Sunday-supplement astronomical nonsense. Your chemistry professor would be amazed and annoyed if he found that you were playing around with alchemy or the chemistry that is popularised by the *Weird Story* magazine. And if you should decide to go to medical school, believe me you’ll find that you’ll have to master orthodox medicine before you can start experimenting with all the mad medicines and quack theories that the cranks of the ages have used and that modern cranks still use to obscure correct medical thinking and practice.

“Some day, I hope, you’ll be expert in your religion, expert enough to recognise almost instinctively truth from error. I’m perfectly willing to read about the other sides with you. I think that your Catholic religion professors and philosophy teachers give the adversaries, as we inclusively call them, a fair deal. But if you start scurrying around now, trying to read about even a minor portion of the other sides, you’ll be doing nothing more profitable than filling your mind with a kind of dead weight, stuff that is obsolete even before it is digested.”

One-sided.

He paused.

“What I’m going to say now isn’t true of you, of course.”

“It probably is, if you’re going to say something devastating,” suggested Sue, who was feeling a little cheap about the whole business.

“Shoot ahead,” Dick said. “Whatever it is, I’ve got it coming to me.”

“Well,” said the priest, “whenever I hear a Catholic say, ‘I want to read the other side,’ I am almost always absolutely sure of this one thing: That Catholic doesn’t read his own side.”

“Oh, come now!” protested the twins.

“It’s true. I know all sorts of Catholics who do just that. They give the other side every possible show. They read the secular newspaper reports on Catholic countries. They read H.G. Wells. But do they read the Catholic commentary on those countries? Do they read Belloc’s reply to Wells? They become breathless trying to keep pace with the other sides, not because the other sides are convincing, but because the other sides are fashionable, the craze of the minute, the best seller of the hour, the conversational topic of the cocktail bars and bridge tables.

“As a matter of fact these Catholics would be much more outstanding if they roan up on the Catholic side. Then, when another side was being discussed, they wouldn’t have to follow along, parrot-like, with the crowd. They would have something different to offer. They would be contributing to the conversation a slant on a side about which no one else in the group knew anything. They would be the instigators of delightful controversies. And they would be young apostles of truth.”

So Much to Learn.

The trio came in sight of the rectory. The spreading trees on the lawn looked dark and mysterious as the moon touched their upper leaves as if with quicksilver and plunged the boles and the entire grounds into gloom.

“Come in and have lemonade and cookies?” invited the priest, questioningly.

“Better be getting back,” said Dick; and Sue agreed.

The priest nodded, and the three slackened their pace.

“There’s so much a Catholic ought to know about his own side before he should so much as give a thought to another side. There are so many fundamental things that he ought to be sure about first.

Do You Know?

“Can he for example prove conclusively that there is a personal God?

“Is he convinced from reason that he has a soul?

“What reason has he for being certain that there is a fundamental difference between right and wrong? And what makes right right and wrong wrong?

“Precisely why has he given his allegiance to Jesus Christ?

“Could he demonstrate historically that the Catholic Church is the Church of Christ?

“Is he intellectually persuaded that Christianity has been and still is a good thing for humanity?

“What evidence can he offer to prove that the Church has benefited the human race? And in what way has the Church wrought these benefits?

“Can he prove that Christian moral practice has bettered the individual and the race?

Firm Stand First.

“Those are just a few of the fundamental questions that he should be able to answer. But if the young man or the young woman isn’t equipped to answer those questions clearly, then when his or her faith is confronted with the brilliant writing of an heretical author who may not even believe what he preaches, that faith is in grave peril. That shaky faith will take a bad beating from the smart arguments of almost any clever leader of another side. And the man or woman whose Faith has been reduced to such slipperiness and uncertainty needs only a good hard shove to send him or her dizzily reeling to any side.

“Chesterton has somewhat said this in effect: There is only one side on which you can stand firmly; there are a thousand sides from which or into which you can slip and fall.”

What of the Books?

Dick looked up and held out his hand.

“I’ll take the books back to the library in the morning,” he said.

“Nonsense,” laughed Father Hall. “The two of you bring ‘em down here, and we’ll sit on the back lawn and find out what the chap has to say for his side.”

“Mean it?” demanded Sue, breathlessly.

“Why, of course.”

Dick and Sue laughed delightedly.

“Sure,” questioned Dick, in hushed tones, “that you yourself aren’t afraid to read that other side?”

Here We Stand.

“Dick,” said the priest, “if the Catholic Church were here, where I am standing, and if across the road there were a united army, bound together by one magnificent philosophy and one great set of principles, ready to battle shoulder to shoulder for what they were convinced was the truth, perhaps I might have my moments of worry. But here we are, we

Catholics, united in all the essentials, unswerving in our devotion to an historic truth, aware of the time-old heresies that lie buried so far in the past that even their tombs are misty. And there are the armies of our enemies, our adversaries, who agree in nothing, are united on nothing, call one another the most violent names, hold every conceivable shade of dissenting opinion, sing their doctrines in every note in the long gamut of a grand piano, and get together in name only, a name that is the most ridiculous of negatives—Non-Catholics.”

“Do you think I could be intimidated by a situation like that?”

“There is only one side, the Catholic side.”

“And opposed to that side are a million other sides, angles of every shape and size and degree. But you can’t take a million mad angles and make them into any one side.”

With that Father Hall started to enter the rectory. Then he turned and waved at the twins as they walked off under the moonlight.

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