

## BLACKFRIARS

material aid. The rent, the finding of meals, clothing, etc., for so many of Christ's poor, taxes the resources of the house to the utmost. Gifts, not only of money, but of groceries, old clothes, bedding, etc., will be most gratefully received. Please address to: The Secretary, St. Joseph's House, 129 Malden Road, London, N.W.5.

PETER WHITESTONE, O.P.

## PROGRESS OF THE Y.C.W.

Accounts of the Young Christian Workers' Second Annual Congress have appeared in the Catholic Weekly Press. But a general reflection on their position in this country and their prospects in it might yet be useful.

At the first Annual Congress, December 4th, 1937, at Wigan, six groups were represented, numbers in all about 100. At the 1938 Congress, September 4th, at St. Dominic's, London, N.W.5, 11 groups were represented and numbers approximately 200. There were boys also from places which have not yet a group but are preparing to start. The number of Priests present at the meeting of Priests connected with the movement was also roughly double that of last year. And this year the Congress was honoured by the presence of the Cardinal.

As at the last Congress the impression given by the members was that of real confidence in the enormous work the movement undertakes: to make itself responsible for every interest, spiritual, moral, intellectual, social, of the Young Worker. Indeed the responsibility is the inspiration, a point of strategy in Catholic Action. The London boys, to begin with, made all arrangements for the Congress—for feeding, for meetings, for transport in London; meeting trains and seeing off at all hours of the night and day. The Societies' magazine was brought out (again exclusively by the efforts of the 14-25 years-old members), with a printed

cover for the occasion. At the Congress meeting local section leaders from the North and South stood up and spoke practically of the leakage, social problems of working youth in their districts, and remedies, which the inquiries of the leaders are discovering.

Incidents in the history of the various groups show their spirit. The delegates leaving the North at 11-30 on the night previous to the Congress mostly went to Communion at a 7-30 Mass on arrival—a long fast for a hungry boy. The Y.C.W. sections of London had had forty voluntary sellers of the *Catholic Worker* along the route of the Communist march on May Day and sold several thousand copies (with a purity campaign on the back, a new thing for May Day!) Another section did all the preliminary work of the foundation of a House of Hospitality. All sections are beginning to list their elementary school leavers and keep in contact with them, to preserve them in the Faith, to help them with social services. One Y.C.W. was in hospital and 15 Y.C.W.s visited him during the hour on Sunday afternoon in which he was allowed three visitors. I forget whether they sang their stirring song "Rouse Up" there. But they certainly sang it at the gates of Hyde Park on May Day. Another Y.C.W. died and without pre-arrangement all his group were at Mass next morning.

It is a new militant Christianity. Dr. Furfey from America, addressing a Y.C.W. group, said he had come to Europe to study the new Catholic Social Movement and saw in it this new thing. It is not now simply a study of social reconstruction. It does not simply demand rights. It changes individuals. It is apostolate of the worker—formation as well as defence of him. The *Worker* is the apostle of the Worker, in a man-to-man or boy-to-boy language he can understand.

The programme of the Y.C.W. is this: that the boy formed in the Y.C.W. school shall contact the working boy just before he leaves school and lapses. (One priest at the Congress confessed that all endeavours up the entry of the Y.C.W. had only succeeded in preventing the lapsing of 20% of his parish's working boys.) It will take him over

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whole—see that he gets a job with reasonable prospects and suited to him; defend his interests in it, (partly through Unions which all members are encouraged to join and Christianise); it will give him social services outside, saving schemes and sickness service and the like (these are being slowly formed in England already); it will bring him into a form of instruction where his life is shown in its entirety worked out in terms of his faith, and its problems as so solved; it will give him an ideal of himself as an apostle and minister of direct social service to his friends. It will give him a pride in the status of worker for the sake of Christ. All will be centred round the Mass—in dialogue where possible so that he may remember his place in the Mass. And above all, as this early morning of the Y.C.W. shows, it is going to bring him the strengthening of companionship and joy, a social unity in the Church corresponding to the spiritual unity professed. Someone watching the Congress on September 4th remarked it was a triumph if only in the way it mixed the North and South.

The Y.C.W. for boys is not yet authorised as a National Catholic Action movement. But already it has the individual approbation of the Cardinal and the two Archbishops and other Bishops. One great problem stands before it: will this country have a movement invoking a class-consciousness in religion? The Church has agreed to it in general. Cardinal Mercier objected, "It seems to split the Mystical Body of Christ." Another Cardinal has answered, "It creates an antecedent unity." Let each group find unity and solving its problems in the light of the faith and a deeper unity will come. Again, will this country tolerate the determined though tactful interference of one in another's life for that other's well being? The Y.C.W. is setting out to "conquer" and do it practically, house to house. It sounds a dangerous programme in England. But the Pope has expressed a wish that it should exist internationally. And all evidence so far goes to show that the Belgian-French methods require a little adaptation, but a very little, and they are working as well here as abroad. Which is a very great promise indeed.

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