

BISHOPS AND BRAINS

By MICHAEL WILLIAMS

ONE of the two literary pathologists who month by month record their "Clinical Notes" in the pages of *The American Mercury*—in this case I more than suspect the diagnostician to be Mr. H. L. Mencken—has written some pungent pages in the December issue concerning the deathbed symptoms of the Ku Klux Klan. I am not keenly interested in what Mr. Mencken has to say on this rather threadbare subject, although I hope his prediction of the early demise of the subject of observation speedily comes true; but I find what he has to say concerning the effect of the passing of the Klan on the Catholic Church in the United States to be of more than usual importance. Mr. Mencken pays his compliments to the dignity and discretion with which he thinks that Catholics, in the main, have borne the assault of the bigots. "The net result of the Ku Klux buffoonery," says Mr. Mencken, "once it runs its course, will be, I believe, vast profit to the Church of Rome in the republic. . . the danger is, indeed, that Holy Church will come out of the combat, now beginning to languish, with such flying colors that its General Staff will grow somewhat cocky, and so overlook some weak spots in its defences. One of those weak spots, in America, lies in the inferiority of its higher clergy, compared to their predecessors of the last generation. To say that the Church has failed to produce another Cardinal Gibbons is to say only what is both melancholy and obvious. . . The present hierarchy, it seems to me, shows no sign whatever of producing a leader of equal or comparable skill."

Mr. Mencken continues with some more or less appropriate animadversions on what he deems to be the impolitic conduct of some members of the hierarchy on various occasions. He then throws out suggestions that the Church, in the days of prosperity which he says are coming for it, may run into squally weather. The absence, which he seems to take for granted, of high mental ability on the part of the higher command on board the bark of Peter may be responsible, he thinks, for troubles that might be avoided were the leadership more comparable with that supplied by Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland.

Mr. Mencken's remarks remind me of a passage in Chesterton's story of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, wherein the anarchist relates his many misadventures in trying to disguise himself by assuming not only the garb but the mental habits of respectable members of society in order that in this way he may penetrate the inner courts of civilization, for the ulterior purpose of blowing the whole business sky-high. One of the parts he selected for this purpose was that of a bishop. He read the literature concerning bishops, at least the literature supplied by anti-clerical and secularist

sources. He then proceeded to carry out his conception of a bishop, with the sad result that he was nabbed by the police as a patent imposter in the first public place where he ventured to try out the part.

It seems to me that Mr. Mencken's notion of the part played by bishops in the affairs of the Catholic Church is rather amateurish, and smacks of the methods of the inexperienced anarchist in Chesterton's story—I hasten to add, however, that it is a conception shared by a great many others than Mr. Mencken, particularly by those whose single standard of civilization is what is termed "the intellect," or, in general, intellectual attainments and ability. Mr. Mencken is the champion press-agent, in this country, of the Superman superstition (*Supermania*, it might be called). His advocacy of the aristocracy of brains throws him into strange company at times. For example, it places him in the company of such advocates of purely governmental supervision of human affairs as Professor Albert Edward Wiggam, who worships brains with such gusto that he has written a big book, indeed several of them, urging us all to set at the head of the state a bureau of eugenisists who will so regulate marriages and births that in the end we shall be a nation of intellectual supermen, bossed by the most superior one of the lot, who, obviously, will be a scientist like Mr. Wiggam. When that happy day arrives, no doubt, a man of letters of Mr. Mencken's type will become the official propagandist of the new régime.

Whether there are or are not men among the American hierarchy of today who have the mental ability of that very great man, the late Cardinal Gibbons, or of that perhaps even greater man, Archbishop Ireland, may or may not be so. That it is at all times eminently desirable to have among the hierarchy of the Catholic Church great intellectual leaders should go without question. All Catholics would feel sad if they really shared the view held by Mr. Mencken of the striking inferiority of the present intellectual equipment of the American bishops. They at least equal him in his admiration and respect for the great qualities of the two leaders whom he singles out for his special praises. So far, we are all at one with Mr. Mencken. But where it seems to me he fails to grasp a true conception of the real work of an American bishop, and of the true part played by purely mental ability in the economy of religion, or the technical work of religion, is precisely the undue emphasis placed by him upon purely intellectual ability, and his neglect to recognize the part played by other qualities that are perhaps even more important. I am sure that Mr. Mencken would hate to think that his own mentality was even a wee bit of the Protestant variety. Yet, with all due respect

to him, and also with all proper regard to Protestants, it may be said, quite without offense, that the Protestant churches have done a good deal to instil into minds not swayed by the Catholic view of religion, an exaggerated opinion of the place of the more showy and public manifestations of intellectual ability, in the field of religion, than these really deserve. The great emphasis placed upon the preaching of sensational sermons that may be tremendously eloquent but which often have little or nothing to do with religion is one striking sign of this tendency. The part played by so many non-Catholic clergymen in non-religious public affairs, and in the purely secular interests of the community, is still another symptom of the same tendency.

Apropos of this matter, I remember an incident that occurred in California, in which a bishop played a part. A certain non-Catholic historian of the West was so impressed in the course of his researches by the heroic character and the great achievements of the founder of civilization in California, the Franciscan friar, Junípero Serra, that he very properly thought that something should be done about it, in the way of public appreciation of Serra. He thought people should erect a great monument to him. He was also indignant because it seemed to him that the Catholic Church had failed to recognize the value of her devoted son.

"Why," he indignantly said to the Bishop, "has not the Catholic Church promoted Father Serra to be a Saint? Surely, if any man deserved to be honored by his own organization, he was the man. Look what he has done for California and America. He it was who introduced the arts of civilization, who began agriculture, who laid down the very foundations of civilized life in the West."

In what fashion the bishop modified the indignation of his friend the historian, I am not in a position to say; but I do feel that he must have been a little bit amused by the scale of values adopted by the historian, who in this was typical of so many other modern minds in judging the work of religion. It is quite true that Serra was a man of great intellectual gifts. He was famous as a lecturer on philosophy in the universities of Spain when he was still a very young man. The highest paths of preferment were open to him in the world of letters of the Europe of his time, yet he threw all this over and plunged into the wilderness among a savage people. He gave his life, all his powers of body, mind and soul, to his great task. That great task was to save human souls, to lead them to eternal life. Incidentally, but also as a matter of real importance, he taught them the arts and crafts of civilization; he taught them to build houses, to till the earth, to weave, to carve, to sing, to paint; he let light in upon their minds through education. Meanwhile, to him personally all that he did was also done for the purpose of developing the power of goodness in himself. He was a seeker after sanctity. Yet, it is not the bril-

liant and masterful and wonderful Father Serra who among the pioneer priests of California seems most likely to be honored by the Church with the title of Saint. It is an obscure parish priest who all his life stayed in one spot, obeying the orders of others rather than commanding their obedience, a man whose intellectual gifts were probably not more than sufficient to enable him to master the things necessary to become a priest, the holy man of Santa Clara, Father Magin Catala, who seems likely to win that highest of honors within the power of the Church to bestow. This is because in Father Catala there was visible, in a degree superior even to what was evident in Father Serra's case, the glowing light of sanctity.

This obscure California case is typical of the history of the Church in the world for 2,000 years. There are great and marvelous intellectual luminaries in the calendar of saints—names like St. Paul, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Thomas of Aquin, and scores of others are typical examples. But they were not named saints simply because of their intellect. Thousands of other names are on that glorious list, of persons who were totally undistinguished for intellectual gifts. But the obscure beggars, and tramps, ex-thieves, humble parish priests, cloistered nuns, former sailors and soldiers, even a lawyer or two, whose names appear side by side with those of the great lamps of the illuminated intellect, shared in common the one thing needful—heroic goodness.

The bishops of the Catholic Church are not always either saints or marvelous lights of intellectual eminence, sometimes perhaps they would with difficulty qualify for even the lower degrees of goodness. But human goodness is always what they seek; it is goodness more than intellect which they know to be the one thing above all others desirable. As bishops, each and every one of them today, as through all the centuries since the beginning of the Church, and as it will be until the end of the world, are first of all the shepherds of souls. They are likewise administrators who care for complicated organizations called dioceses—each one with its scores or even thousands of priests, and hundreds of churches, schools, seminaries, hospitals, asylums for the old, the orphans, the sick, the insane, the lepers; together with many subsidiary organized groups carrying on educational, charitable and spiritual labors. When a great bishop, or a prelate, like a Newman or a Serra, a von Ketteler, or a Manning, or a Gibbons, or an Ireland, appears—men who in addition to the usual and accustomed work of their high offices are also great intellectuals, or literary artists, or orators—men whose mental gifts are so conspicuous that even those not of their own faith respect and admire them—the whole Catholic Church applauds also, and is glad. But Catholics likewise know that great bishops are great not because of these added gifts, but because they are leaders in a spiritual sense, because they are the men whose dioceses are first:

of all administered in the interests of the one thing above all things necessary, the serving and saving of human souls. Finally, it is my own opinion, and the opinion of well-informed lay persons who are, in all likelihood, better acquainted with Catholic Church conditions and bishops than Mr. Mencken, that he has made a decided blunder in asserting the inferiority, mentally, morally and practically of the present-day incumbents of our Catholic Sees. In spite of the con-

spicuous eminence gained by the late Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland, the general body of the hierarchy appointed during the last twenty-five years is so superior to the general body of their predecessors that Mr. Mencken's impression can only be accepted as an opinion formed merely on his properly high opinion of the two great men he singles out for mention and by his unacquaintance with Catholic bishops in general.

ON THE SICK LIST

By HELEN WALKER

IT was Christmas night, and the table—perhaps anticipating those who sat about it—groaned. When the mince pie had made its début and just before I had lapsed into a comatose condition, two remarks came to me hazily.

"What a marvelous thing the cross-word puzzle craze is for augmenting a limited vocabulary," said someone. "Think how it increases one's command of verbs, nouns, adjectives—"

On my other hand, someone was saying—

"Yes, I am on the executive board of Rainbow Hospital. We need one hundred more beds and are planning a drive—"

Later that night, I seemed to enter a modern hospital, and going to the information clerk, said—

"I have brought some books, and should like to visit one of your charity patients—the one who is suffering most."

The clerk turned to the switchboard and asked—

"Has Adjective had his supper yet?" Then to me—

"Second floor, ward 3, second bed on the right, elevator to the left."

A few minutes later I entered the ward and stood beside the most forlorn prone figure I have ever seen. The head and shoulders were swathed in bandages—beneath the covers I could discern lumps that looked like splints—and more bandages. I laid the package of books on the table at the head of the bed and then addressing myself to what little was discernible of an old, shrivelled-up face, said—

"I'm sure I didn't understand your name correctly downstairs. May I know—"

The tortured lips interrupted me—

"Adjective," they muttered.

"Oh—I am delighted to meet you—though distressed to see you in such a pitiable condition. How have you come to this?"

The suffering figure made a wry face and wriggled itself a little higher on the pillow.

"Perhaps you can help me. I've been here so long now that I wonder if I'll ever be well again. You see, they won't stop abusing me."

"What?" I cried. "Aren't the nurses and attendants here good to you?"

"Oh, they're not so bad. It's the public."

"How do you mean?" said I, puzzled.

"They're responsible for my condition," said the patient, a dangerous light growing in his eyes. "They, the ungrateful heirs of a priceless beautiful tongue—" and he began to toss feverishly and grow very excited.

"There, there," I said. "I'm sure they haven't meant to injure you."

"Haven't meant to injure me!" he screamed. "What difference does that make? They've nearly killed me, just the same."

"How?"

"Misuse—abuse—neglect—everything terrible they could do to me."

"But in concrete instances?"

Adjective slowly lifted a mangled, maimed hand out from the covers and held it before my revolted eyes.

"See that? That's my word 'little.' How many times, my dear Sir, in the course of the day, do you hear people misusing poor 'little'?"

"I don't understand," I mumbled—ashamed, I knew not why.

"Oh, you don't? Well, you're one of the worst offenders yourself in that line. Just two hours ago, weren't you repeating over and over again to Smith, apropos of the Jones divorce—'Too bad. I hear he has such a nice little wife.' My dear Sir—do you realize that Mrs. Jones weighs 185 pounds and is six feet tall? Little, indeed!"

"No, I didn't know. I'm sorry for the mistake."

"Oh, that isn't the first time, by any manner of means," cried Adjective, wrathfully. "You're always saying that people have nice 'little' wives—regardless of whether the lady in question has to go to the stylish stout department for her gowns, or not. And what about your own wife?"

"Well, if she is tall, she's not fat," I said proudly.

"Maybe not," grumbled Adjective. "But how does she treat me? Isn't she always telephoning her friends to tell them that she's just bought the loveliest