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EDITORIAL

WELL FOR THE MEN OF NEFFS!

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SIXTY-FIVE men is not a large number. Sixty-five men is a small number. But sixty-five MEN, especially when operating at the right season, are a legion. They are like the inconsequential-looking acorn which encloses the broad-breasted, wide-branched oak of the morrow. Of this caliber are the sixty-five Polish Roman Catholics of the mining town of Neffs, O., who—discovering that what they had fondly believed to be a purely devotional organization, the Roman Catholic Church, was essentially a political machine, that shields their exploiting capitalists and, accordingly, bitterly opposes their own Socialist political convictions—pulled out of that Church, organized a new Polish-Slavonic Catholic Church, and affiliated themselves with a kindred national body, the National Catholic Diocese of America, incorporated under Ohio laws.

The Constitutional guarantee of Freedom of Conscience is one of the great conquests of civilization. It safeguards the devotional preferences of the individual. These none shall touch, or molest: they are matters of private concern. So priceless is this private and individual freedom that Manhood is enlisted in seeing that it shall not be made a cloak for ulterior purposes. On the same principle that Freedom of the Press is guarded by provisions that protect the Freedom from becoming a weapon for recklessness and blackguardism; on the same principle that Freedom of Speech is guarded by provisions that protect the Freedom from becoming a sport for rowdyism;—on the identical principle the Freedom of Conscience may not be allowed to be queered by any who would turn the Freedom into an ambush for politics.

The Roman Catholic Church the world over—markedly so, of recent years, in the United States—is essentially a political organization, with all that that implies. Like all other political bodies, it seeks material and political power to enforce its

views. As such, as a political movement, it is entitled to all the rights of other political bodies. The same as other political bodies have their convictions, and must be free to propagate them, and are justified to seek to convert others to their views, so likewise must the political Roman Catholic Church be credited with convictions, be safeguarded in the freedom of propaganda, and be held guiltless in the endeavor to win others over to itself. Just the same—no less—and no more. The election laws of the land condense these principles in the clause that forbids any religious device upon the ballot.

The political Roman Catholic Church proceeds upon a different set of principles. It demands all the rights of a political body towards others, but denies all others the same rights towards itself. The latter it attempts under the plea of “religion.” When its Washington, D.C., organ publishes statistical tables of the Congress Districts in which the “Catholic Vote” holds the balance of power, and the figures are used to bring pressure upon the Government for appropriations and political appointments—that it pronounces a “legitimate exercise of political rights”; when such a manoeuvre is counter-manoevred by other seekers after appropriations and appointments—that it condemns as “bigotry.” When one of its high officials quotes at the Washington Catholic University Hanna’s and Depew’s praises of the Roman Catholic Church as “the best police” and as “the most effective guarantee against Socialism”—that it applauds uproariously as “political wisdom”; when the Socialist movement turns to the pages of history and proves from them that the political regimen of the Roman Catholic Church has, everywhere it has had the power, made against political Freedom, Science and Progress,—that it howls at as “sacrilege.”

Of course, such bizarre political pretenses on the part of a devotional body, simultaneous with such devotional arrogation of immunity, on the part of a political body, can not long last. The monstrous combination has not lasted in other countries: it can not last in this: in fact it is ripping up at all corners. The path struck by the sixty-five men of Neffs is one upon which hundreds of thousands are certain to follow—and that sooner than later, the Star of Socialism lighting the way.

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