



Bogus Oath or \$25,000

The record of the Knights of Columbus has elicited the most favorable comment by persons high in civic and religious affairs. Because of it, the late Cardinal Gibbons said of its members:

*"They are our joy
and our crown
They are the glory of Jerusalem
They are the joy of Israel
They are the honor
of our people."*

But, as might be expected, the Order's noteworthy record has not protected it from vicious, mean and unjustifiable attacks. There are those who would destroy this great society and who would malign the men who compose it. The means adopted, for this purpose is the circulation of an ungodly and unchristian bogus "oath" that is alleged to be taken by the Knights of Columbus.

This has happened frequently in the United States. Recently here in Manila an attempt was made to do the same.

Wanton Slender

The purpose of this false oath is

to breed hatred and intolerance, regardless of truth. Many of those who circulate it claim to be actuated by religious motives, but this is a mere cloak for their wicked purpose to arouse hatred and ill will among their fellow men. Their protestations of religious fervor are the "sheep's clothing" to mask their vicious purpose to destroy the harmony that should exist among men and to deprive their fellow-citizens of their sacred heritage—the right to worship God in accordance with their own convictions.

No man is a true follower of the Saviour who ignores His injunction, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," and that is what every man who circulates the bogus "oath" is guilty of doing. Do those who are guilty of this terrible offense against their fellow men ever stop to consider the warning of Scripture: "The man that in private detracted his neighbor, him did I persecute?" (Ps. 100:5).

How It Started

No proof that the Knights of Co-

lumbus take this alleged "oath" has been offered and none can be produced. But to give the pretended "oath" the appearance of genuineness, many of the pamphlets containing it bear the notation "Copied from the Congressional Record, Feb. 15, 1913." However, they fail to state how this false "oath" came to be printed in the Congressional Record, nor the fact that the only purpose of printing it was to prove its falsity.

By referring to the Congressional Record it will be found that this so-called "oath" was printed therein merely as an exhibit in the contested Congressional election case of Bonniwell against Butler, in which Mr. Bonniwell, a Knight of Columbus, claimed that his defeat was brought about by the circulation of this false "oath". His opponent, Mr. Butler, repudiated the document and in presenting his defense said:

"I apprehended with alarm the use of such a document in a political campaign, or at any other time. I did not believe in its truthfulness and so stated my judgment concerning it on November 4, 1912, as soon as complaint was made to me of its general circulation." (See Congressional Record, Vol. 49, February 15, 1913, p. 3219.)

In its report, the Congressional Committee on Elections said:

"The Committee cannot condemn too strongly the publication of the false and libelous

article referred to in the paper to Mr. Bonniwell and which was the spurious Knights of Columbus Oath, a copy of which is appended to the paper." (See Congressional Record, Vol. 49, February 15, 1913, p. 3221.)

Masonic Committee's Report

A complete set of the work, ceremonials and pledges of the Knights of Columbus was submitted to a committee of prominent members of the Masonic Order. After carefully examining them, the committee made a report in which it was certified that the Knights of Columbus is not an oath-bound organization, that its ceremonials inculcate principles that lie at the foundation of every great religion and that—

"Neither the alleged oath nor any oath or pledge bearing the remotest resemblance thereto in matter, manner, spirit or purpose is used or forms a part of the ceremonies of any degree of the Knights of Columbus. The alleged oath is scurrilous, wicked and libelous and must be the invention of an impious and venomous mind. We find that the order of Knights of Columbus, as shown by its rituals, is dedicated to the Catholic religion, charity, and patriotism. There is no propaganda proposed or taught against Protestants and Masons or persons not of Catholic faith. Indeed, Protestants or Masons are not

referred to directly or indirectly in the ceremonials and pledges. The ceremonial of the Order teaches a high and noble patriotism, instills a love of country, inculcates a reverence for law and order, urges the conscientious and unselfish performance of civic duty, and holds up the Constitution of our country as the richest and most precious possession of a knight of the order. We can find nothing in the entire ceremonials of the order that our minds could be objected to by any person."

\$25,000 Reward

For twenty-five years the Knights of Columbus has maintained a standing offer of \$25,000 to any person or persons who will furnish proof:

1. That the alleged "oath" is taken or subscribed to, or ever was taken or subscribed to, by the Knights of Columbus, or

2. That Protestants or Masons are or ever were referred to directly or indirectly in the Ceremonials of the Knights of Columbus, or

3. That the following is not the true oath taken by the Fourth Degree members of the Knights of Columbus in the United States:

"I swear to support the Constitution of the United States. I pledge myself, as a Catholic citizen and a Knight of Columbus and, dully to enlighten myself upon my duties as a citizen and conscientiously per-

form them entirely in the interest of my country, regardless of personal consequences. I pledge myself to do all in my power to preserve the integrity and purity of the ballot and to promote respect for law and order. I promise to practice my religion consistently and faithfully, and to so conduct myself in public affairs and in exercise of public affair and reflected nothing but credit upon our Holy Church, to the end that she may flourish and our country prosper, to the greater honor and glory of God."

Decisions of the Courts

In *People v. Gordon*, 63 Cal. App. 627, in which the defendant was convicted of criminal libel for having circulated the bogus "oath" the California Court of Appeals, in affirming the conviction of the defendant, said:

"The evidence conclusively shows that defendant published the article knowing it to be untrue and without justifiable ends and for the sole purpose of injuring the members of the society by discrediting their honesty, integrity, and reputation, and with a desire to expose them to public hatred, contempt, or ridicule, and that so-called oath was false and that no member of the fourth degree of the order ever took such an oath."

In *Crane v. State*, 14 Okla. Cr. 30,

the Court affirming a conviction of criminal libel for circulating the bogus "oath" said:

It is to be regretted that the statute does not prescribe imprisonment in the penitentiary as the punishment for this class of crime in order that such characters as this record discloses plaintiff in error to be should receive the judgment which the author in this book says would be proper if his statements are untrue and false in toto the proof offered in this case overwhelmingly establishes . . . It is remarkable that in this country where freedom of conscience in religious matters was one of the chief basic doctrines upon which the government was founded, people who hold themselves forth as possessing even ordinary intelligence would indulge in this character of criminal conduct... The Charge that members of an honorable organization, secret, religious, or otherwise, subscribe to such an oath as that complained of or the doctrines alleged is not tolerable and is not permitted by law... The plaintiff in error was properly convicted by the jury.

In sentencing Rev. E. L. Bateman, whom a jury at Newark, New Jersey, found guilty of circulating the bogus "oath" the Court said:

"You have been convicted of a libel. You have borne false

witness against your neighbor. You have told an untruth."

The New Orleans Daily States said:

"If the Jersey Judge before whom the Reverend Mr. Bateman was tried should take it into his mind to put him in stripes it would go a long way toward stopping the circulation of an outrageous forgery."

Press Cites Lie

The bogus "oath" was denounced from the press and pulpit. Great newspapers, such as the Saint Paul Pioneer-Press, the Montgomery Advertiser, the Saint John's, Newfoundland, Evening Telegram and Daily News, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the New York World, the New Orleans Daily States, the Cleveland News and many others assailed it. A Committee of prominent Masons described it as "scurrilous, wicked and libelous" and "the invention of an impious and venomous mind."

Many persons who circulated the "Oath" were prosecuted and convicted of criminal libel and some were sent to jail.

And still the bogus "oath" is circulated from time to time—usually in connection with a political campaign. The Knights of Columbus has published a booklet setting forth the facts regarding the so-called oath and if any of our readers are interested, they may obtain a copy of it by writing to Supreme Secretary, Knights of Columbus, New Haven, Connecticut.