

ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH.

**The Difficulty in the Greenpoint Parish.
Bishop Loughlin Declares that if the
Law Committee Persists in Their
Work He will Excommunicate Them,
and Close the Church.**

The financial difficulties in the Parish of St. Anthony's R. C. Church have assumed a new aspect brought about yesterday by the action of Bishop Loughlin. This was an announcement made from the altar during morning service, that if the Law Committee of the parish appointed by the members persisted in their attempt to bring the financial affairs of the church into court, he would excommunicate the members of the committee, withdraw the priest from the parish and close the church. This announcement was made by Rev. Father Murphy, pastor of the church, and naturally created a considerable degree of excitement in the congregation, and it remains to be seen what will be the outcome of this new phase of the difficulty.

The question at issue in St. Anthony's is one which has agitated the church in the several localities in the State, and which is being forced to the front by the laity. The question, briefly, is this: "Who owns the temporalities, that is to say, the real estate of the church, the congregation or the bishop?" The statutes and common law of the State both answer: "The congregation." The bishop and other trustees only hold it as a trust, to be used for the benefit of the congregation and for no other purpose, and in no sense can the trustees, or any one of them, acquire in any way the right of ownership in the real estate of any religious society. The law does not recognize any religious society as a civil member until it is incorporated, and after its incorporation any religious society has a standing in law and owns its property, which it cannot sell or mortgage without the consent of the Supreme Court.

THE DIFFICULTY IN THE PARISH.

The Religious Society of St. Anthony, after its incorporation, built the church edifice over which the question is raised, and though incorporated under the general law of 1813, by a special law of 1863 the bishop, vicar general, pastor and two laymen, appointed by the first named three, became trustees. The people of the parish contributed largely, not only in pew rents and collections on Sundays, but also by a separate contribution for the express purpose of paying for the new edifice. This latter contribution was called "The house to house collection." The moneys thus contributed have aggregated nearly twice the value of the building and the running expenses to date. A short time ago the bishop applied to have a new mortgage put on the church, and this gave rise to the existing difficulty. The parishioners held

meetings and united almost to a man in opposing a new mortgage, and applied to the bishop for an accounting, which he declined to make. The people at the same time declared their fealty to the church on all matters of faith, and their determination to bring no scandal on the church, and so thoroughly were they in accord that the bishop is said to have expressed his surprise and admiration at the creditable manner in which they conducted themselves and expedited the business.

THE CARDINAL DECLINES TO INTERFERE.

Not getting an accounting from the bishop, the parishioners next appealed to the Cardinal; but he declined to interfere, saying that it was clearly a question for the court to decide under the laws of the land, and that he could take part in only questions of ecclesiastical comity. The parishioners thereupon engaged lawyers and have instituted legal proceedings to compel the trustees to make an accounting and to rehabilitate their *cestui que trust*. They also unanimously resolved to stop the "house to house collection," and though they attended church regularly and contributed liberally toward the running expenses and support of the pastor, the revenue was so appreciably decreased as to give hopes of thus forcing a compromise.

A pastoral letter on the subject was expected by the congregation for several Sundays, but none came, and then it was hoped that the bishop would recede from the position he had taken and allow them to know how the moneys had been applied and also restore to them the title to the property, especially as they had always declared that if the accounts showed no misapplication of the moneys they would withdraw all opposition and accept the position of affairs as they stood.

THE BISHOP'S ULTIMATUM.

Yesterday morning, after the reading of the Gospel, the Rev. Father Murphy said from the altar that he had been requested by the bishop to deny that he authorized the published avowment that he countenanced or was in sympathy with the movement in the parish. The pastor was also instructed to say that the bishop was not interested in anything that breeds dissension in the parish. Further, the Rev. Father had been instructed to say that if the Law Committee appointed by the parishioners of the church held meetings to bring the bishop into civil courts the bishop would excommunicate the members of the committee, withdraw the priests and close the church.

This announcement astonished all the congregation, and after the service it was decided that a general meeting shall be held at an early day to consider the subject. One of the committee said last evening that the bishop had made a great mistake, and that not only are the parishioners more closely united than ever to continue the struggle, but the general sympathy of the Catholic people at large is with them.

WHAT ONE OF THE LAW COMMITTEE SAYS.

A member of the Law Committee who does not care to have his name made public, had this to say: "I do

not believe the threat of the bishop to excommunicate us will prevent the contemplated appeal to the courts. It may induce two or three of our number to drop the business, but in case of the withdrawal of any of the committee the vacancies will unquestionably be promptly filled. As for that it would be proper for a majority of the original committee to act and proceed with the preparations for a legal combat."

ANOTHER PARISHIONER,

a member of the Executive Committee, was also seen and talked with on the subject which now forms a crisis in the affairs of the church. He expressed himself freely and to the following effect. Said he: "I was present yesterday, when Father Murphy announced his instructions from the Rev. Bishop Loughlin. I believe our pastor felt demeaned by the position into which he had been forced; yet he realized it to be unavoidable. We have carefully avoided having Father Murphy entangled in any manner with the movement instituted by the parishioners to obtain their rights. In that and in securing an unexampled unanimity of sentiment and action we have been singularly successful. Strange as it may appear, the ladies of the parish are foremost in the movement, and in many instances that have come to my knowledge have been instrumental in getting their husbands and other male relatives to take a deeper and more active interest in church affairs. On that fact the bishop has complimented us in saying he has been surprised to find a people so united and intent upon the attainment of an object. When I heard the announcement regarding the threatened excommunication," continued the speaker, "I thought to myself it cannot be possible the bishop really means to do as he says he will. It must be, thinks, to deter us from further action by holding us in terror of the bugbear of which he will not in the end avail himself, even if the legal proceedings shall be instituted. Then, again, the bishop authorized our pastor to state that he would withdraw the priests from and close the church. I cannot believe the bishop would deprive several thousand communicants of their Christian and church privileges. If it should really be true that such a thing may be done in this enlightened age, then all I have to say is, I do not care to

BELONG TO A COMMUNION,

the head of which, while acting in defiance of our State laws, would debar me of my religious rights in a church."

In conclusion, the speaker remarked, "If the bishop carries out the intimation above given, then we should probably have the sensation of the day in a couple of weeks or so, as the lawyers will have our case prepared by that time. I do not shrink from the contest, as I believe it involves a most important principle in church polity, and the sooner all question in such matters is set right the better for all concerned. We expect a favorable decision in the court in which the case shall be first brought, and on an appeal, if there should be one, we are not afraid as to the ultimate result."