

From the Tablet.

FREEMASONRY.

DECREES OF THE POPES.

Sir,—The letter of the Archbishop of Tuam, and strictures from your pen, which have appeared in the last number of the Tablet, must have created some misgivings in the minds of those members of the Catholic Church who have associated themselves with Masonic institutions. Not a few have been induced to take that unguarded step, as much by a spirit of idle curiosity as by the specious arguments and importunings of the abettors of those pernicious societies. Amongst them are to be found many well-disposed men, who would have shrunk from such associations had they plainly before them the opinions of the Church, or the decrees of her venerable Pontiffs.

Only a few years have elapsed since that highly-gifted man and exemplary Catholic, Mr. O'Connell, having learned how much the Church reprobated such conventicles, publicly disclaimed any connexion with Masonic societies.

I have strong motives for thinking that, like O'Connell, many young men in England and Ireland have been unconsciously seduced, if not into a formal, at least a material violation of the law of the Church, and numbers of highly respectable Catholic families, under erroneous impressions, have indirectly contributed to cherish the Masonic institutions.

I shall not here stop to discuss the prudence and wisdom which induced our Holy Pontiffs—the ever-wakeful sentinels and guardians of the purity of our morals—to pronounce the awful sentence of excommunication against all who aid, cherish, support, or become members of Masonic lodges. The arguments adduced in your last print have, Mr. Editor, abundantly justified the severity of this censure. Whoever will take the trouble of looking narrowly into the history of Freemasonry for the last century in America and the various kingdoms of Europe, will unhesitatingly subscribe to the wisdom, which guided the successors of St. Peter in their condemnation of such institutions. Inspired with a humble hope that many well-disposed men will, like O'Connell, be induced to retrace their steps, and many others may be preserved from such contamination, I beg, Mr. Editor, you will give room in your journal—at once the champion and defender of Catholic morality—to the following decree of Pope Benedict XIV. The original will be found in the edition of that Pope's "Select Constitutions," published at Venice 1784.

"B-NEDICTUS ERIS COPUS SERVUS SERVORUM DEI,

AD PERPETUAM REI MEMORIAM.

"Just and grave motives inducing us thereto, we have deemed it fitting to strengthen, and by the additional weight of our authority, confirm, not only such provident laws and constitutions of our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, which have been unimpaired, by lapse of time or desuetude, but even those which are now in force and have been recently in vigour. Our predecessor, of happy memory, Cle-

ment XII., by apostolical letters, dated A. D. 1738, in the eighth year of his Pontificate, addressed to all the Faithful, and commencing 'In Eminent' has, for ever, condemned and prohibited certain societies, conventicles, assemblies, &c., commonly called *De Liberi Muratori, des Francs Macons*, at that time widely diffused through some countries and daily increasing; commanding all the Faithful,—under pain of excommunication *ipso facto*, and to be incurred without any further promulgation, from which none can be absolved, save *in articulo mortis*, by any other than the Roman Pontiff for the time being;—that no person dare, or presume to enter such societies, or propagate, cherish, receive, conceal, be enrolled in them, or to join, or be present, or otherwise, as is more fully and clearly contained in the aforesaid letters, the tenor of which is as follows."

Here Benedict XIV. inserts, at full length, the decree of Clement XII., a document which will repay an attentive perusal; and thus continues—

"But lest it may be said that we omitted anything which could extinguish calumny, or silence the tongues of those who gainsay the truth, we determined, having first consulted some of our venerable brothers, Cardinals of the Sacred College, to confirm, by these presents, the constitution of our predecessor, as we now confirm, strengthen, renew, will, and decree that it shall have perpetual force and efficacy.

"We have been induced to this amongst the many other serious reasons recited in the constitution containing the aforesaid censure. *Firstly*, because men of every sect and persuasion find easy admission into these societies, from which it is manifest how much danger must result to the purity of the faith of Catholics. *Secondly*, because of the close and impenetrable bond of secrecy, by which whatever occurs in such meetings is concealed, making thereby the words which Cæcilius Natalis addressed, on a very different subject, to Minutius Faxius, very applicable to them, '*Honestæ semper publico gaudent, scelera secreta sunt.*'—'*Honestæ avocations court the light, deeds of darkness hate it.*' *Thirdly*, because of an oath by which they bind themselves to inviolable silence: as if they could, when interrogated by the lawful authorities, be exempted, by the plea of any such promise or oath, from making such disclosures as would lead to the discovery of conduct in these assemblies, that may be inimical to the interests of religion, the constitution, or the laws of the realm! *Fourthly*, because it is well known that such societies are as much opposed to the spirit of the civil as the ecclesiastical law, as, by the civil law, all societies which have not the sanction of Government, are strictly prohibited. *Vide lib. 17. Pandectæ, Tit. 22 de Collegiis et Corporibus illicitis*: also the Epistle of C. Plinius Cæcilius, who says, 'By my edict, in conformity with the commands of the Emperor, all societies, which have not the sanction of the Prince, are unlawful.' *Fifthly*, because, at this day, such societies are proscribed by the ordinances

of secular princes. And lastly, because all good and wise men hear of the existence of such societies with pain, and regard members of them as depraved and immoral characters.

"To no person shall it be lawful to infringe or daringly oppose this our constitution. If any dare so to do, he will have thereby incurred the indignation of the Almighty God, and of his blessed Apostles SS. Peter and Paul.

"Datum Romæ apud Sanctam Mariam Majorem, A. D. 1751, Pontificatus nostri anno undecimo."

[In addition to the above document, for which we have to thank an unknown correspondent, a distinguished ecclesiastic has enabled us to present our readers with a correct copy of the Decrees of His present Holiness touching Freemasonry; which the Vicars Apostolic of England are understood to have recently communicated to their clergy, for the purpose of being enforced here. The Italics occur in the original printed copy now before us.]

Decrees of the Holy See Apostolic touching the Society of Freemasons.

MOST BLESSED FATHER,

Ecclesiastical penalties have been by many Roman Pontiffs, imposed on such persons as may have joined the so-called Society of *Freemasons*, and taken an oath of secrecy as to what passes at their meetings.

A doubt has arisen, whether those who, although repenting of their oaths, yet persist in holding themselves out as true members of the same Society, whether by communicating with other adherents of the sect, or by attending their meetings, or by any other means *soever*,—can lawfully be admitted by a confessor to the Sacraments of Penance, or of the Most Holy Eucharist? Some priests there are who do so admit them. Wherefore,—that a sure guide may be afforded unto Confessors,—it is now asked, whether, in any part *soever* of the world, while the custom of exacting oaths continues to prevail among that sect, a Confessor may lawfully or validly grant *Sacramental Absolution*, to men belonging to the Society of *Freemasons*, (incorporated under and mutually bound by the obligations of an oath of secrecy), before they *absolutely and positively* abandon for ever, the aforesaid condemned Society?

It is asked, what ought the Confessor to do?

To this petition the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, on the 5th July, 1837, made answer, "That, in the case as put, it is not lawful to grant it."

But since a doubt hath arisen, whether those words, "not lawful to grant it," include also in the case supposed the *invalidity of absolution*, the Sacred Congregation is requested, that it deign to declare the matter. Which, &c.

Wednesday, 27 June, 1838.

At a General Congregation of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, held in the Convent of S. Maria super Minervam, before the Most Eminent and Reverend Doctors, Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and general Inquisitors against heretical perverseness, the same Most

Eminent and Reverend Doctors have declared that, in accordance with the Constitutions Apostolic, the question must be answered in the affirmative.

The same date and day.

Our Most Holy Lord Gregory XVI, by Divine Providence Sovereign Pontiff—at the usual audience granted to the Most Reverend Father Commissary General of the Holy Office,—hath ratified the decisions of the Most Eminent persons abovementioned.

(The Seal)

ANGELO ARGENTI,

Notary to the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition.

From the N. Y. Freemans Journal.

FREEMASONRY.

On the first and second pages of this day's paper are given some documents touching this institution, for which we ask the attention of every reader. We have judged it right to give them the publicity which the wide circulation of the JOURNAL will afford them, not only on account of their intrinsic interest as referring to a sect which at one time possessed an influence and an extent almost unbounded, and which is still far from being wholly extinct,—but because they have an important bearing upon kindred institutions,—confraternities and fellowships,—of more recent origin, and more vigorous existence. It is well that Catholics should know that their church has uniformly reprobated & anathematized Secret Societies, and pronounced all those who knowingly become members of them, or wilfully remain so, *ipso facto*, by that very act, shut out of her pale, that is to say, excommunicated; and that all, whether Catholics or Sectarians, should be aware that the Civil Power, fully recognizing, and imitating, (as it often does,) the wisdom of the Church's discipline, has not only discountenanced, but frequently suppressed by the most summary measures, all associations of a secret nature.

The statements in the article, on our first page, quoted from the Tablet of January 7th, however startling they may appear, and however new they may be, to most readers, are nevertheless quite true, and we are glad to be able to adduce in confirmation of them, the testimony of no less a man the Frederick Schlegel. This writer, whose mental powers, and profound insight into the science of human government, have rarely been equalled, and hardly if ever, surpassed, alludes to the subject in his great work, "The Philosophy of History." After speaking of the surprising rapidity with which the most brilliant victories were achieved by the armies of Infidel France, in her wars during and after the revolution—under the Directory & the Consulate—he attributes them mainly to the prevalence of Freemasonry throughout Europe at the time. The institution attained its full development in France, amid the horrors of the day, and under the shadow of the bloody guillotine; and the French armies were, in fact, immense Masonic Lodges. The ties of Masonry were too strong for the loyalty and patriotism of the Masons among the opposing forces. Treachery followed, and an easy triumph too often crowned the Freemason