

While other Masonic governments brutally suppressed at one stroke or expelled religious orders, the Italian tyrants proceeded with a more devilish astuteness. Their plan was to starve the nunneries to death and seized upon their property on the hypocritical pretext of benefiting the commonwealth. In exchange for the large booty they had thus secured, they granted to such nuns only as were professed in or before 1870 a miserable annual allowance. Those who had not yet taken their vows received no pension. All contemplative sisterhoods were strictly forbidden to admit any more novices. Still more strictly was the acceptance of any dowries forbidden. In this way, in proportion as the older members of a community died off, the aggregate of the pensions dwindled away, and no novices could be received without bringing the whole religious community within measurable distance of starvation.

Before seeing with what heroism this diabolical persecution was faced, let us pause for a moment to consider the injustice and iniquity of the spoliation itself, so that we may the better understand the virtues of its victims.

The Italian Government, which is always diplomatic and urbane, even when it assassinates, could not perpetrate such wholesale robbery without giving forth to the world some plausible excuse. This time it manufactured several or rather refurbished them out of the old armory of Voltairian and Mazzinian sophisms.

The first and best known objection to religious orders, especially the contemplative ones, was that they were utterly useless. We grant, of course, that they are not money-making concerns. Were the driving of shrewd commercial bargains the be-all and end-all of human existence, a life of meditation and self-denial might well be deemed wasted. But the most elementary Christian principles point to a higher destiny for mankind, one which is wrought out chiefly by keeping God's holy will ever in view, and this is precisely the main object of religious orders, more particu-