

ARE RELIGIOUS ORDERS Rebellious and Aggressive?

Continuing my gleanings from Rev. Father Belanger's series in the "Messenger of the Sacred Heart," I find that, under the subheading of the "Scandalous Riches of Religious Congregations," he takes up and practically exhausts the question of the attitude of these congregations towards the State. They are accused of being both rebellious and aggressive; of course, mere excuses put forth to justify, if possible, the persecution to which they are subjected. I will not attempt any comment or enlargement, for Father Belanger's statement of the case is too complete to permit of any such. But I will select from his work such passages as may have a general application, for we are not concerned, as fully as the Catholics of France, in all the details of the situation in that country. I will try to connect the following extracts that no important break will exist in the learned Jesuit's chain of argument and of facts; but I must of necessity skip the countless references, notes, authorities quoted, and statistics presented. However, the reader may glean from the extracts that I select, an idea of the force and completeness of the work itself. It is thus the author approaches the subject.

He asks: "Are Congregations Rebellious?" and replies: "That they are is the grave complaint certain people have lodged against them, and this merely because they have refused to pay an arbitrary tax imposed upon them. Now, this complaint is a gross exaggeration, for even were we to consider this resistance wrong, it is simply passive, partaking in no way of violence. There has been no throwing of missiles, no breaking of bricks, no slamming of monastery doors in the face of embassies from the public treasury. This institution has merely been thus informed: 'In our heart and conscience we are convinced by evidence that this exceptional tax is unjust. We will not pay it. Therefore, you may take the patrimony of the poor and the bread of their servants if you have the heart to do it.' 'Now, it must be admitted that this revolt of the lamb against the wolf is indeed a mild rebellion. Deprive me, if you insist,' says the innocent victim, 'but do not willfully putting my head between your jaws, I shall never do it!' 'Here, then, is the extent of the revolt. It is certainly very unobtrusive when we consider that we live beneath a regime where the fundamental charter of which counts among the 'natural and imprescriptible rights of man—rebellion against oppression.'—Declaration des droits de l'homme, Art. II.

It is exactly this long and complete vindication of the congregations, supported by a formidable array of data, that we must pass over, as being beyond the limits of the space allotted to these contributions, and as not absolutely necessary to convince the readers of this organ that the misrepresentation of the religious orders by their enemies in France, is not glaring and malicious. The first injustice done the congregations is in regard to taxation. In this connection there is not one fiscal exception, not one favor. A common law for all, and an equal inheritance tax. This may seem like justice, but, in our opinion it is, to say the least, a flagrant lack of equity. What is destined for the betterment of the poor, the education of orphans, the care of the sick, is handicapped by society which, while professing supreme interest in these good works, helps itself to their resources. Equally shameful imposes on them a burden which is this equality? No, but its caricature. Equality would not demand that a shelter for the poor and unfortunates be treated as if it were a profitable business concern. Equality would not demand that an orphanage in which the poor are educated pay as would a college in which the rich are instructed. To act otherwise is to establish real injustice upon apparent equality. But let us proceed. The Church and the congregations have not opposed this unreasonable common law which puts an unjust limitation upon charity. The only result is that fewer poor are helped, fewer orphans educated. Catholics sigh over this condition of affairs, but what does the State care? What difference does it make to the fair friends of the people to whom their interests give no concern?

Second Injustice.—Contrary to all common sense, a congregation must pay taxes on rented property identically as it would if, being the owner of it, it were receiving its rental. Suppose, for instance, that an apartment be not large enough to accommodate all whom the religious in charge would care for. To harbor twenty more old people, a house valued for 5,000 francs. Now an alms-house would be liable for this transaction in 100 francs. But, when

dealing with religious, the public treasury is no alms-house, without hesitancy or apology it deliberately changes the minus into plus, and virtually says: "You occupy property which you rent at 5,000 francs and we will conduct matters precisely as if that property belonged to you and yielded you 5,000 francs. Pay us thereon a tax of 200 francs." Understand it who can. For congregations, equality consists not in paying on what they gain (as is the case with stockholders and bondholders in financial companies) (13) but on what they spend. Mr. X, a stockholder in P. L. M., is taxed 200 francs because he receives 5,000 francs dividend; but a Little Sister of the Poor is charged out of 200 francs because she gives 5,000 francs to the poor. O blessed equality!

Third Injustice.—Revenue is reckoned at an exorbitant, improbable, contradictory rate. If a religious community hold a titre de rente of three per cent. from the State, how much does this yield? Why three per cent. of course; how otherwise? Now this is almost the rate of a debtor, says, but it is thus that it speaks through the public treasury: "This title yields you five per cent., and upon this basis we establish your tax. Impossible!" You yourself gave us three per cent., how can you suppose that it would yield five per cent? "Silence!" rebellious congregation. In your case three per cent. means five per cent., and you can thank us for not looking for six per cent. when we give three." Indeed, to do so would hardly be more absurd than to introduce or approve such courses pursued.

And, as regards bonds of industrial companies, matters are even worse. Congregations pay twice. First, through the medium of the company which advances taxation the four per cent. and retains it on a coupon; again, in the character of religious. Let us suppose a title of 3,000 francs yielding 100 francs, and belonging to a community. Four per cent. is withheld from it and it receives but ninety-six francs as against any other owner. But, moreover, these 3,000 francs being part of the gross assets of the congregation, are supposed to yield 150 francs. And upon this ground is an additional four per cent. collected—that is, six francs. Hence, where ordinary citizens pay four francs religious pay 4x6=10 francs. So much for equality!

Finally, the strongest reason, although perhaps the most difficult to expose, is this: Because the rate at which the congregations are taxed is apparently equal to that at which financial companies are taxed, whereas in reality it is ten times higher. All the mechanism of this transaction is hidden in the words: "Revenue is determined at the rate of five per cent. of the gross value of property." Now no company, however prosperous, yields 4, 3, 2, or even 1 per cent. of its gross assets. The latter comprise reserve and sinking funds, real estate, etc., all things indispensable to operating the enterprise, accumulated little by little by deductions made from profits prior to distribution and of which the total value is often a hundred times greater than the original capital or the sum of shares. Moreover, "the shareholders can receive annually twelve per cent. of the capital which they or their representatives have invested in the company, and not have altogether the one per cent. of the funds constituting the gross assets." (15) Practically the largest financial companies do not yield their stockholders more than one-half of one per cent. of their gross assets. Associations founded with a view to exploiting property actually in the hands of religious would not succeed in getting beyond this limit, or indeed, even attaining it, considering the decay of their buildings, their location and their mortgages. For all the greater reason the congregations would not reach it, as far from exploiting such property, they make it serve charitable ends.

Well, this gross value, which in the maximum would yield one-half of one per cent., is reputed to bring five per cent. Therefore, the tax is established for congregations on a basis ten times larger than for lay societies and companies. Hence, congregations pay ten times a heavier tax than they should.

I will not ask space for any further extracts this week; but I will have to occupy a couple of columns in the next issue, with an account of the most flagrant of all the injustices practised on the congregations, and the most powerful of all the arguments set forth by Father Belanger.

CATHOLIC AUTHORS ON MANY SUBJECTS.

ON BOOKS.—Books, especially those connected with history, instruct the great, but do not instruct the great. Books do not instruct and would not. Therefore, Don Alphonse, King of Arragon, being once asked who were the best counsellors, replied: "The dead (meaning books), because we learn easily from what we wish to know." Richest and happiest, therefore, is the man who loves and possesses good books.—Rev. John O'Neill, O.P.

ABOUT VOCATIONS.—When parents are true, fervent Christians themselves, and Catholics to their very heart's core, they will certainly shield an honor and blessing in their children's vocation. But, when

children at least one or two consecrated and dedicated to God and the service of the altar. Such parents I should like to see, for they would only for a day. Strange to say, the moment I made up my mind to do so, something arose to prevent me. For fully two years I had been promising myself, each month, that I would take a run over, and each month I was fated to be disappointed—some unforeseen obstacle arose. The result was that I did not go.

One day I was taking a walk around the mountain when I was suddenly seized with fit of homesickness. It may be that I had met with some object that recalled familiar scenes of other days, some tree that resembled a tree I had known, some form that brought back a form long vanished; or it may simply have been that sense of sweet loneliness that pervades the soul when in solitary communion with nature. But be the cause what it may, the feeling was irresistible, it was all absorbing, it was overwhelming. For fully an hour I walked along in a veritable day dream; the trivial incidents of my younger days that I sprang into prominence before my mental vision, assumed an importance out of all proportion. I grew more and more familiar with the scenes that had been buried in the oblivion of twenty years. I peopled the scene with the forms and features that I once knew so well. I revived, for my own enjoyment, the very sounds and tones of voices that had not greeted my ears in many long years. I hated to come back towards the city, for I knew that the moment my feet walked the planks or asphalt of our sidewalk, the whole vision would for ever vanish. But, pleasant as the half-painful dream might be, it had eventually to come to an end.

OUR CURBSTONE OBSERVER

On Home-Sickness.

It is generally conceded that the Irish people have a more marked and undying love for what is called the "Old Land" than the children of any other race. We of Irish parentage in this country—and I mean thereby both Canada and the United States—know how wonderfully deep has been the reverence of our fathers and mothers for the land of their birth. Even the Irish-Canadian, who has observed his parents bidding adieu to this world, McGehee's "Homeward Bound" might apply to almost every Irishman—and Irishwoman—on this continent. This great yearning for the land of his birth, for the sights and sounds of his native soil, for all times, how the Irish exile (for all native Irishmen consider themselves exiles) lives constantly in the hope of some day or other revisiting the scenes of his youth and the graves of his parents before bidding adieu to this world. McGehee's "Homeward Bound" might apply to almost every Irishman—and Irishwoman—on this continent. 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