Messenger of the Sacred Heart.

LEAGUE OF THE SACRED HEART.

General Intention For January.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

(Continued from last week.

Elsewhere, the irreligious state expels the members of the order, with little or no formality, confiscates their houses and lands, or decrees that to devote one's self to the service of God is a violation of the Constitution. We have not yet come to that; but what we have just said is actually happening in other countries, some of which are nominally Catholic, but groan under the iron rod of Masonry.

Pretexts to suit the occasion, and without stint, are alleged to give a certain color of respectability to intolerant enactments. We are told that in all times the monks and religious were the drones in the hive. The recent work on "Europe in the Middle Age," by Professors Thatcher and Schwill of the Chicago University, though often offensive in its generalities, when it comes to deal with particular facts, is found to admit most of what Catholics contend for, that is, the great services rendered by the monks to the cause of civilization:

"Monasticism furnished the missionaries who christianized western and northern Europe. The monks were also the civilizers. Every monastery founded by them became a centre of life and learning, and hence a light to the surrounding country. They cleared the lands and brought them under cultivation. They were the farmers and taught by their example the dignity of labour in an age when the soldier was the world's hero. They preserved and transmitted much of the civilization of Rome to the barbarians. They were the teachers of the West. Literature and learning found a refuge with them in times of violence. Their monasteries were the hotels of the Middle Age, and they cared for the poor and sick. They were the great builders of the Middle Age, and many of the great churches of Europe were built by them. We owe them an immense debt of gratitude. Monasticism was an excellent thing for the world in those days."

This merely confirms what has long since been acknowledged by other Protestant authors, by Maitland, Lecky and Stuppe.

The world is mistaken if it believes that members of contemplative orders while away life in a kind of slothful piety. The bee in its hive is not more active than the daughter of St. Theresa in her convent. It is even more at sea when it considers the life of contemplatives useless. Accustomed to look upon God as a quantity which may be neglected, the world forgets that His service is the first duty of man, and that the religious, consecrated to this service, fills a place in society without which society would be doomed.

The Carmelite, in the moral world, performs the same office as does, in the physical, the metal rod which, from the depths of the soil, rears its copper point skyward: it is so slender and requires so little room, and yet it disengages a fluid and renders harmless the threatening thunderbolt above. The humble daughter of St. Theresa is as a lightning rod against God's avenging wrath, and we may repeat, with more confidence, Abraham's prayer for the doomed city, "Wilt Thou destroy the just with the wicked?"

"Had these asylums of prayer," said the great Bishop of Angers, "no other use than to drown the blasphemous cry in a chorus of praisegiving to God; were there naught else in religious life, in its monastic form, than that living lesson of self-denial, so forcibly brought home to all by the sight of a perpetual sacrifice: that moral power of example peculiar to sanctity reaching to so high a degree: that sweet odour of piety rising from the solitudes of the cloister and filling every aisle of God's Church: that abiding protestation in behalf of the evangelical counsels against the numberless disorders and scandals which beset mankind; the spiritual gain accruing to the whole body from the superbundance of divine life deriving from some few of its members; those signal triumphs of mind over matter, which do so much credit to human nature; those treasures of grace accumulated in favor of those living in the midst of the world by the merits of continual mortification: that counterpoise to the crimes of the earth and that compensation for evil-doing pushed to its extreme limits; those hands raised night and day to appease Eternal Justice, irritated at so many outrages, and to call down upon the earth the blessings of Heaven: were there no other effects to be counted on than these, both reason and faith, relying on the two great laws of community of interests and reversion of merits, would still compel us to see, nowadays as in the sixth century, in the monasteries devoted to prayer and penance, a public service and an immense social advantage.

It is hard to gain a hearing from governments bent on shutting out religious from the simplest privileges of citizenship. The collective pastoral of the Bishops of Brazil made a forcible enough appeal to the spirit of justice and fair play; but none is so deaf as the one who does not wish to hear. What could be more to the point than the following passage:

"If the voice of conscience and that of God should whisper to a Christian that, in the conditions in which his life is cast, he can work out his soul's salvation only by consecrating himself to God by the practice of the evangelical counsels, as set forth in some one of those monastic professions emanating from the heart of a saint and approved of by Holy Church: and if his aspirations to a religious vocation are now thwarted, is it not putting that poor soul to the torture and doing violence to his liberty of conscience?

"If some unfortunate wishes to plunge headlong into the depths of vice, the police of the Republic respectfully open their ranks and make way for her, with this for sole comment. 'She is within her rights: she is free to fashion her way of living as she thinks fit.' But should a Christian maiden bend her steps towards some pious asylum, in view of leading a life of chastity with other pious companions, devoting themselves together to works of religion and charity, and recognizing no other family than the great family of the afflicted, 'Stand back,' cry the police, 'you have no leave for this, it is forbidden by the Constitution of the Republic!'

"Such is the law, such the justice, such the liberty, such the respect of conscience which the enemies of religious orders boast of and hold up to our admiration—they the very men who would banish from the world the practice of Christian perfection! It is a mutilation of the Gospel! Voluntary poverty, perpetual chastity, entire obedience, which this sacred code commends to chosen souls, are, as it were, a triple and powerful lever, in the moral order, to raise man above his level into a region all serene and beyond the influence of the passions. The suppression of the religious orders, by placing an obstacle to the rapid flight of souls to the summit of Christian perfection, lowers the general level of morality in society, for it finds its principal incentive in this Lerotism. The religious orders, in fact, have always been the most efficacious means for keeping alive among the people sentiments of faith and piety, and for providing the Church with a devoted army, which, free from worldly cares, bends all its energies to the conquest of souls by home and foreign missions and to all the other functions of apostolic life."

And we might add, that the history of missionary enterprise is, to a great extent, the history of the Church. In modern times, India, Japan, China, Canada, Paraguay, the colonies of Africa and every recently discovered country under the sun bear witness to the devotedness of the missionaries of religious orders and their services to the Church, in propagating the Gospel; while at home, the teaching orders and congregations are toiling to maintain the faith among the older and more settled communities of Christendom. Nor is this apostolate the less ardnous or deserving, because it furnishes a less brilliant career in the estimation of men.

"The Brother," says Mgr. Merrillod, "just at the age of sweet illusions, leaves his little cottage; bids goodby to the flowers of his meadow, to his parents who doted on him, and to his friends. He will now go and breathe in the dusty atmosphere of a class room in the great cities where his worth will remain unknown and where he will never meet with the disinterested friendships of his youth. Devoted to his task, he will continue the hum-drum monotony of his life for twenty, thirty and perhaps fifty years. This is the society of the immolated after the example of the Crucified on Calvary. What a contrast between the scoffer of the eighteenth century dogmatizing thus: "The people deserve no instruction" and Blessed de La Salle pledging himself by vow to instruct the poor! This is why his feast is called the feast of the people."

M. Pradié, a French Republican, published in the early years of the Second Empire a work entitled "La Démocratie Française." It was, no doubt, suggested by De Tequeville's famous work of kindred title on American Institutions, and made no little stir at the time. Coming from one of his political school, the following appreciation of religious orders is somewhat remarkable:

"Religious orders offer another advantage, that of placing within the reach of the more humble classes those lofty and refined enjoyments of the soul which otherwise would be the exclusive heritage of the lettered and aristocratic. The brilliant walks in life, with their honors and dignities, are for the most part closed to the plebeian, while convents, monasteries and the preferments of the sacred hierarchy are open to him. The priesthood and the religious profession form the aristocracy of the people. In these he may display his ability and give free rein to his mental faculties and to his tastes.

"Should he feel burning within him the fire of eloquence, that *cry of passion*, as one, a master in the art, Father Lacordaire, has defined it, he becomes a Dominican, he preaches and expounds. If he be drawn to the contemplative life, he will listen to God's whisperings to his soul from the depth of some wild mountain gorge, on the brink of a torrent or amid the silence of some impenetrable solitude with the disciples of St. Bruno. If study and research be his delight, with the Benedictine, he ferrets out the musty manuscripts and documents of past ages. If he be a lover of nature with a yearning for the open fields he becomes a Trappist. If his heart throb within him with all a mother's fondness for childhood, he enters the Institute of Christian Schools. If he possess a universal adaptability, limitless self-denial, an insatiable zeal for the spiritual welfare of the simple people, of the untutoured savage, and especially of intelligent youth and the refined classes of society—with mind made up to encounter opposition, adverse argument and persecution — he becomes a Jesuit, consummate master in things divine, and adept in the "discernment of the spirit," living synthesis, ever varying in its unity, of religious life in its every phase."

The author is evidently partial to the Society of Jesus, for what reason, we are left to conjecture. But the members of the society need take no vain glory from the foregoing words of praise. They should rather accept them as a lesson in view of the high standard which a man of the world has conceived of St. Ignatius' ideal of a religious. In theory, they may well strain every nerve to attain to such rare excellence: in practice, how far they fall short of it, each one of them, with true humility, must needs be only too conscious. The excuse we offer for this quotation is that it makes for our contention that, in a purely social view, religious orders, in opening up so many and such varied careers to its citizens, is an unmingled blessing to the State, even were that state a French republic.

Quite in keeping with the systematic opposition of certain governments, there are other causes at work which tend to diminish the number of religious vocations, and consequently prove detrimental to religious orders. The daily press, the sensational novel, the very conversations of the home circle wage a covert though a not less telling warfare against vocation to the perfect life. Parents, in whose souls the Christian spirit is growing weak, can no longer be made to understand what an honor it is for them to yield their child to Our Lord's keeping. They run counter to the call of the Master. The family that gives a son to the priesthood, be it in the ranks either of the secular or regular clergy, may count on a daily intercessor at God's altar to offset their past delinquencies, to draw down numberless blessings upon their home, and, after they are dead and gone, to blend their names in the solemn memento of every day, while the Divine Victim's blood is being poured out for their deliverance.

The family that has a religious in the cloister or a daughter consecrated to God, wearing away her life in works of education or charity, has a constant peace-offering burning before the Almighty. The sweet incense of the sacrifice rises before His sight and shuts out from the vision a thousand short comings of daily occurrence in the home she has abandoned for His sake. She is the sanctury lamp—generous oblation of a father's or a mother's love—whose tiny flame never goes out, but night and day sheds its sweet rays in the August Presence, while her parents, harassed by worldly cares and distractions, have perhaps little time to give to the all-important affair of eternity.

On, let all our Associates, during this opening month of the New Year, beneath the Sacred Heart to preserve the religious orders and congregations of God's Church amid all the dangers that beset them. It was God, and God only, whom these chosen souls had in view when they bade farewell to the world. Let the Good Master look upon them with eyes of mercy; let Him come to their help and disconcert the plans of their enemies, and vouchsafe that without let or hinderance they may devote themselves to His service and to the salvation of souls.

PRAYER.

O Jesus! through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer Thee all the prayers, work and sufferings of this day, for all the intentions of Thy Divine Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in reparation of all sins, and for all requests presented through the Apostleship of Prayer: in particular that religious communities, triumphing over the attacks of their enemies, may in full freedom give themselves over to God's service and the service of souls. Amen.

If you don't know what you have to be thankful for, any of your neighbors can tell you.

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Episcopalian Ministers.

In Philadelphia there has been established a new order of ministers of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the name, rules and objects of which resemble an order of the Catholic Church. This new order is known as the Congregation of the Companions of the Holy Saviour. Interesting particulars regarding it have been obtained by the *Catholic Standard and Times*. Our contemporary tells us that the order has been established with the full knowledge and consent of Bishop Whitaker, and has at present eight novices, who have taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for the period of two years. At the end of their novitiate they will take the same vows for life. They will receive no salary for their services and can accept nothing for themselves individually — everything they receive becoming the property of the order. The objects in view include the teaching of theology, preaching and the direction of souls. They will devote themselves wholly to the ministry, and all candidates for membership must be able to read Latin and Greek. Most of the novices understand French also. According to their talents they will be assigned to teaching schools of divinity, to preaching, conducting retreats and to the "direction of souls." This latter phrase was found on inquiring to mean "hearing confessions," which the superior of the new order says is practised more or less in at least three-fourths of the Episcopal parishes of Philadelphia, though confession is not made obligatory. The daily exercises of the members of the order include prayer, recital of offices, intercessory prayer, meditation, self-examination and spiritual reading. They wear no distinctive garb, but, like other ritualistic Episcopal clergymen, dress in cassock when about the house or church. Their superior says they pray regularly for Christian unity. The rooms on the first floor of the congregation's home are filled with books, among which are the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and the decrees of the Councils. Over the doorways of the rooms are large crucifixes, such as may be seen in the houses of our religious orders, and the absence of luxury in the furnishings constitutes another point of resemblance. The founding of such an order in the Episcopal Church is one more proof that a considerable number of the members of that denomination are hungering for what they can find only in the Catholic Church. — Catholic News.

The Angelus in Spain.

The Angelus in Spain has thus been beautifully described by a Protestant traveller:

"At sunrise, a large, soft toned bell is thrice tolled from the tower of the cathedral, summoning all the inhabitants wherever they are, or however occupied, to devote a few moments to the performance of a short prayer in honor of the Blessed Virgin, called the 'Angelus Domini.' At mid day, and again at the close of the evening, the bell tolls thrice again. To a foreigner it is curious and not uninteresting to observe the sudden and fervent attention which is paid in the streets within and without doors, in the Alameda, on the river, by everybody, high and low, the idler and the laborer, infancy and old age, to this solemn sound. The loiterers in the promenade are suddenly stopped, and each group repeats within its own circle the consoling prayer. The politician breaks off his argument, the young men are abashed in their gay discourses, and take of their hats; the carriages are drawn up: all the worldly business and amusements are forgotten for three minutes, till the cheerful tinkling of lighter bells announces that the orison is over."

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3. The competitors will close the last day of each month during 1897. Coupons received too late for one month's competition will be put into the next.

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5. A printed list of winners in competitors' districts will be forwarded to competitors in regular each competition month.

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