

In order to compel children to receive it, the authorities made use of the clergy in order to get things arranged so that the First Communion should coincide with the completion of the school course. In Alsace, under French rule, the schools used to be open during the winter months only. The priests deferred First Communion till the age of fourteen in order to have the children under instruction for a longer period. It was not the Church that introduced the innovation. The clergy were really acting as government Police. Our fathers had but one year in which to prepare for First Communion ; and yet they were much more religious than the present generation with its five or six years of schooling and catechism.

This last piece of testimony is not at all surprising. When the practice prevailed of beginning to communicate at about ten years of age, people were virtuous, and had a good prospect of remaining so through the efficacy of the Sacrament. Whereas now that they only start Communion at fifteen, virtue has in many cases already made shipwreck, and in spite of the instructions they receive, people are forced to own : "The good which I will, I do not, but the evil which I will not, that I do . . . But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin."

The confessor should guard against certain wholly mistaken theories about the admission of children to Communion. He will hold fast to the common and true opinion, according to which children ought to be admitted between nine and ten years of age, and he will in no case wait beyond the age of twelve, because at that period a child is capable of approaching the Holy Table with the needful reverence and thoughtfulness, and, on the other hand, by that time the child is bound by the precept, and ought no longer to be deprived of the grace of so great a Sacrament. When with a little zeal one can prepare him for so great a blessing, why should the poor child be deprived through the neglect, or the false views of parish priest or confessor, who, moreover, are under an obligation to see to the business ?