

THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

(Continued from last week.)

Name and Object.

The Religious State of life had its origin in that of the Redeemer Himself. "Who will deny," says St. Ambrose, "that this life flowed down from heaven which was not found upon earth till God had descended into the members of an earthly body." It was He who laid its foundations in the Counsels of Perfection, forming an integral part of the Gospel He delivered to all times and nations. It was He who first set the world its pattern by the example from the crib to the cross of the virtues by which the soul ascends to perfect union with God. The permanent practice of these virtues is secured in the Religious State by the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which remove obstacles and set the soul free to follow the divine exemplar. The vows themselves are protected and enforced through community life under a rule approved by the Holy See. Thus constituted, the Religious State is a school of perfection—not that all who have embraced it are perfect, no more than all who enter school are learned, but animated with the desire of perfection, they constantly tend towards it and find the means at hand to render the pursuit comparatively easy. It is not contended that the highest sanctity may not be reached outside religious orders, for the history of the Church, the calendar of the Saints and daily experience prove the contrary; but, examples are much rarer and this because of the fewer helps and the great difficulties to be encountered. In human pursuits, you may find here and there a great painter, engineer or physician who has reached eminence in his art by the inspiration of his native genius, but if you want them in any number to meet anything like a general demand, you must open a school in which every facility will be offered, capable and experienced teachers, well equipped libraries and laboratories, a proper distribution of time for precepts and practice, an authoritative direction. So the divine Founder of the Church has stamped her with the note of sanctity which must shine forth in the lives of a large number of her children, that she may be known to the world as the one Spouse of the promises. He has extended to all a general invitation to perfect sanctity: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all you have, give to the poor, and follow Me," and pledged to some, in abundance those inward graces necessary for every step in the way. But he has always provided the outward means—the school—in the Religious State by which the study of perfection, the ways of the spirit and correspondence to heavenly grace are taught as a science and reduced to practice as an art. "Born and cradled under the action of the Church, whose authority gives sanction to their government and administration, the religious Orders form a chosen portion of the flock of Jesus Christ." They are, according to St. Chrysostom, "the honor and ornament of spiritual grace, whilst at the same time they are witnesses to the sacred fecundity of the Church."—Leo XIII. letters.

Glory of the Church.

The love of God, in which perfection consists, is inseparable from the love of our neighbor. The latter is indeed the text and measure of the former. We should be overlooking an essential function of the Religious State if we passed in silence the outward works of charity and zeal that the religious congregations have at all times performed for the sanctification of souls and the alienation of the numberless miseries of humanity. It has been computed according to figures given by M. Taine, a non-Catholic, that in France alone to do the work the Religious have been doing gratuitously, the State would need to expend fully \$200,000,000 annually.

But dollars or figures cannot estimate the benefits which Religious confer on mankind. Again it is Leo XIII. who, in his letter to the French Superiors, says: "All those who have at heart the peace and prosperity of their country, are aware that there are no more hon-

orable citizens, no more useful men, no more devoted patriots than the members of Religious Congregations, and they tremble at the thought in losing in you so many precious advantages which depend upon your existence. There are the throngs of the poor, the abandoned and unfortunate for whose sake you have founded and sustained every variety of establishment with supreme intelligence and admirable charity. There are the fathers of families who have entrusted their sons to you, and who, until the present moment, relied upon you to impart that moral and religious education which is strong, vigorous and fruitful in solid virtue, and which was never more needed than in our time. There are the priests who find in you valuable auxiliaries in their important and laborious ministry. There are the men of all ranks, who in these times of apostasy, find useful direction and encouragement in your advice, backed as it is by the integrity of your lives. There are, above all, the bishops who honor you with their confidence and who consider you as tried teachers of their younger clergy, and who recognize in you the true friends of their brothers and their people, offering as you do for them to the divine mercy your incessant progress and expiatory sacrifices. But no one appreciates the exceptional merits of Religious Orders with greater justice than We Ourselves who, from this Apostolic See are watching over the needs of the universal Church.

"Already in other acts we have made particular mention of all this. Let it suffice now to call attention to that splendid ardor with which these religious bodies follow, not only the direction, but the least expression of wish of the Vicar of Jesus Christ; undertaking every work which may contribute to the advantage of the Church and society whenever He indicates it; hurrying to the most inhospitable shores; braving every suffering and accepting death itself, as many have done in the most glorious manner in the recent upheavals in the empire of China.

"If among the dearest remembrances of Our pontificate We count the fact that by Our authority We have raised a great number of the servants of God to the honors of the altar, these remembrances are all the more dear to Us because the majority of these saints belong to Religious Orders, either as founders or as simple religious."

Thus, as the Holy Father concludes, working under the direction of the Apostolic See for the realization of the idea of perfection traced by our Lord, and living under rules which have nothing in contradiction of any form of civil government, the Religious Congregations co-operate on a large scale in the mission of the Church, which consists essentially in the sanctification of souls and doing good to men. It is all very well for worldly people who have not the gift of faith to judge and esteem Religious Orders because of the temporal advantages they bestow upon society, but we with higher lights for our guidance, ought to esteem, love and defend them in view of the divine purpose for which they were created and the manner in which in all times and circumstances, according to the highest testimony on earth, they have fulfilled that purpose. This shall be the particular object of our prayers to the Divine Heart for the month of August.

REFINEMENT OF CHARACTER AND CHARACTER READING.

One may have been so happily born and reared that kindness, a delicate sense of honor and exquisite refinement of taste and feeling are as a second nature. Nay more, one may be so well grounded in religion and so devout in its practice that the Divine Ideal of life is never out of sight. She knows as certainly as she knows her own soul, that there can be no true character-beauty without faith and reverence—that true honor as between man and man, rests on the man's honor in his dealing with God.

It is impossible that such a one should be misled by false standards, but can we say with equal positiveness that her piety will save her from false principles, and from errors in the judgment of character.

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The most virtuous and high-minded are rarely good readers of character, that is, taking it in its ordinary acceptation. Many believe it to mean a certain instinct of self-protection by which we divine the evil in those about us and guard ourselves against it. The pure kindly and truthful nature attributes purity, kindness and truthfulness to every one else. It dowers anyone who wins its affection with good and gracious qualities exceeding in number and degree aught that it credits itself with. It speaks well for poor human nature that the trustful, the good and the truthful are less imposed upon than the shrewd and selfish, who are ever on the alert for imposition. Kind judgment, idealization even is good alike for giver and receiver.

"I will rise to his height" is the thought which has hastened to lovely development the best in many a woman's mind and character and brought her to a height perhaps unknown to herself, but where God's angels wait to touch her eyes to a clearer vision of the All-perfect.

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