

TWO BISHOPS AND THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT

"By a decision taken on the proposition of the President of the Council, Minister of War, dated April 24, dated Friday, April 25, so as to give Parisians a comforting sense of being well ahead of the times.

There had been no announcement that either the Bishop of Strasbourg or the Bishop of Metz had resigned, and yet here was M. Clemenceau, in the midst of his preoccupations, appointing their successors. It turns out, however, that the Pope also counted for something in the matter, although no mention of that was made in the official announcement.

No sooner had it become clear that Alsace and Lorraine were to be restored to France than both ecclesiastical and administrative circles began to manifest concern about the future of the sees of Strasbourg and Metz. A very highly placed personage, not M. Clemenceau, intimated to a prelate in Paris that not only must the laws of France apply to Alsace and Lorraine, but that the two Bishops must go. If necessary they would be exiled. This appeared to be rather a brusque method of approach to the solution of what might be a difficult problem. Alsace and Lorraine were included in the concordat arranged between the Vatican and the French of Napoleon I. During the German occupation the concordat continued in operation, and the people of the restored provinces have not been parties to the anti-clerical legislation of the last fifteen years. Moreover, they have had definite assurances from President Poincare and from Marshal Joffre that their status would be respected. As to the proposal to displace the Bishops, there was an important adverse precedent. After 1870 the Bishop of Metz remained in office for many years, and Bishop Dupont des Loges continued to be so good a Frenchman that very recently M. Poincare, Marshal Foch and General Petain selected his tomb as a fit spot for reaffirming the unity of the provinces with France. It was not for this quality that he was retained in his office; it was a good bishop who was loved by his flock. But so is Bishop Benzelier. I have been assured on very high authority that it would be impossible for Rome to offer any satisfactory reason for requesting Bishop Benzelier to vacate his see.

Nevertheless, it was inevitable that there should be conversations between France and the Vatican in regard to the new situation in France, and it seemed probable that other issues than those arising in Alsace and Lorraine might be involved. There was a suggestion at one time that France might accredit an ambassador to the Vatican, but this idea was abandoned. Then it was suggested that as France had taken the hostile initiative against the Church, it was the part of France to make the first move towards a better understanding for the future. This suggestion was also rejected, out of deference to the assumed intractability of the Chamber of Deputies. In point of fact the ice was broken when, after the attempt upon the life of M. Clemenceau, Cardinal Gasparri sent, through Cardinal Amette, of Paris, a message of sympathy to the wounded Premier. Cardinal Amette was on the eve of a visit to Rome and it is assumed that he laid before the Vatican authorities his view of the situation in France. Meantime the Bishops of Metz and Strasbourg had informed the Holy Father of their willingness to be guided by His decisions, and had offered to resign from their sees if in his judgment the welfare of the Church would thereby be promoted. It would appear that in the judgment of the Pope the situation was not one in which a first friendly move from France should be insisted upon, but that, on the contrary, it was right and proper to continue, with the assent of the two Bishops most concerned, to the national desire of the people of Alsace and Lorraine to have the Church in the two provinces brought into the most direct relations with the Church in France. The resignations of the two Bishops were therefore accepted, their successors were designated, and in the due season the French Government acted in consonance with the terms of the concordat as administered prior to 1870. I gather that any alterations of method which may have been made since 1870 were ignored. The Pope has therefore made the first friendly gesture. It remains to be seen in what way it will be answered by France.

In the meantime, the Catholics of Alsace and Lorraine are organizing for the defence of their own religious interests. Accustomed under the German regime to support the German Catholic party, they are now meeting and making preparations to carry the same policy into the French elections, and there need be no doubt that when the time comes for the new Chamber to meet both the restored provinces will be represented

ment which moves succeeding generations of mortals. Then we may learn from the mistakes of these others how to avoid their blunders. But lastly we may be taught by their wise consideration of some pressing problems how to take advantage of methods which have availed them much.

Take as an illustration of the last point the wonderful response which has met the appeal of this church when the pension fund for aged and retired clergymen was addressed to the communicants. It is a marvelous tribute to the generosity of the laity and to the affection which holds them to their clergy when millions can be raised in little more than a year for the maintenance of those who may need support. Such kindness cannot be ridiculed and tribute to the donors of the fund cannot be interpreted as faithlessness to one's own persuasion.

Even when discussions, theological and other, may sometimes cause a smile to ripple across the lips of a Catholic, those meetings demonstrate that those engaging in them are at least alive and are attempting to get in touch with the necessities of their calling. Where we smile, they laugh aloud in return at what they call the unnatural suppression of all investigation and discussion in the Catholic Church. These good gentlemen never attended a conference of priests or they might change their opinion about that matter of suppressions. They hardly have arrived at the stage where they read the ablest Catholic publications, such as the American, for if they did it might be an exaggeration for them to charge that questions of present importance no where find intelligent discussion among members of the true fold. Beyond that, one does not need to question or debate that which he knows to be a certainty. We believe it was Kant who claimed that in some other planet two and two might not make four. We have not reached that planet, as yet, neither have we arrived at the condition where it is necessary to ask Christ to meet us in debate.—F. in the Guardian.

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Our clerical brethren in the Episcopal Church have been holding a religious congress in New York and seemingly historic things were evolved. The general tone of the meeting was a note of dissatisfaction with most of everything that constitutes their distinctive form of ecclesiastical organization. Starting with the ministry one speaker was candid almost to the point of offending his brother of the cloth. He admitted with emphasis that there were too many misfits in the sanctuary. Congregations asked for pastors and were given critical guides who were of ecclesiastical duty that to have ordained them was a crime. Then the whole system of clerical training was attacked. During this discussion it seems clear that modernism of a new brand has taken strong hold on this particular branch of the Christian Church. Old methods and venerable practices were derided. Much scorn was laid on the necessity of finding men for the ministry who know life as it is lived today. What sort of life was not defined, however, for at this juncture there was a trailing off into the vague regions where one hears nothing but indefinite phrases revolving around "humanity," "uplift," and "present day needs."

The feature of the debate at this congress, which has attracted most attention was the recommendation to eliminate the study of the Old Testament from the Sunday school. Not having seen the official report we are dependent upon the press for information. For ourselves we believe that there must have been some defective reporting. In fact there have been some denials that the suggestion to do away with the Old Testament was as sweeping as many were led to think by the newspapers. What may have been advised, possibly was the Catholic idea that it is wiser to select helpful passages from ancient revelation and teach these than trust to private interpretation the entire scriptures written before the coming of Christ.

We Catholics may be intensely interested in the doings of these sectarian conventions for several reasons. First they tell how happy we are in the possession of an unwavering oracle of doctrine which is not switched by every transient senti-

ment which moves succeeding generations of mortals. Then we may learn from the mistakes of these others how to avoid their blunders. But lastly we may be taught by their wise consideration of some pressing problems how to take advantage of methods which have availed them much.

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