

THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA ON SECRET SOCIETIES.

We take the following from the Pastoral issued by the late Provincial Council of San Francisco:—

From the foregoing you will readily perceive, dearly beloved, the necessity incumbent upon you of providing for the Christian education of children, in order to secure to them the possession of that priceless jewel, divine faith, whereby they can attain to life everlasting. Of the necessity of your obligations in this respect we cannot speak too strongly. The church has ever regarded the Christian education of youth as among her most important duties. To this end she has spared no labor, refused no sacrifice. Her words, like those of her Divine Founder, have ever been: "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God." In their tender minds she sows with earnest solicitude the seeds of Christian faith and morality, knowing well that if duly nurtured, they will in good season return an abundant harvest, that shall yield to the owner a hundred fold. And if it be a duty in countries where all, or nearly all, profess the true faith, to attend sedulously to the early instruction of youth, it becomes doubly so here, where, in consequence of the educational system pursued by the Government, the faith and morality of our children are constantly exposed to the greatest peril.

We are aware that the best, and indeed the only efficacious remedy against such an evil is the establishment of Catholic Schools where nothing detrimental to faith or repugnant to Christian morality may enter, and where while, secular science is in no way neglected, everything may be found that will serve to impress on the minds of the young the saving principles of our holy religion. To this we are earnestly directing our attention at present, and we hope, with the blessing of God, to meet with success. But meantime it is the duty of parents and guardians who have not the advantage of such educational establishments to see that their children and wards are properly instructed at home, and that they attend regularly the Sunday Schools of their respective parishes.

Parents should be careful to prohibit from entering their families immoral, anti-Catholic publications, corrupting novels, and sensational writings of every kind. Nothing tends so much to destroy the purity of the young and to weaken their faith as productions of this nature. The term of youth is a time of trust; the mind is then more susceptible of impressions, and consequently the virtues of faith and morality are more readily imperilled. Independent entirely of the laws of the

Church on this head, which, as you know, are very restrictive, the Pagans themselves, from the light of reason alone, were fully alive to the evils arising from such a source. Hence the account given by Philostratus of the burning of the books of Protagoras in the public square of Athens, for having denied the existence of God. Hence, too, the destruction of the loose obscene poems of Archilochus by the Lacedæmonians, as recounted by Valerius Maximus, while at Rome. As we learn from one of the classic writers of the time, works hostile to the religion of the State were destroyed by the Pagan authorities. St. Gregory Nazianzen, speaking on this subject, says that heretical books should be destroyed like the eggs of serpents, because they bring forth vipers and basilisks. "Wherefore," says the assembled Fathers of the second Plenary Council of Baltimore, "we most earnestly exhort and beseech pastors to admonish often and earnestly the faithful committed to their care, and especially heads of families, to prohibit entering their dwellings, books by which religion or morality, and to carefully see that such do not fall into the hands of children or domestics."

The sinfulness and ruin of joining secret societies is another matter to which we feel ourselves necessitated to call your attention. You are aware, dearly beloved, that such assemblies are most strictly condemned by the Church. Several of the Roman Pontiffs—among others, Clement XII., Benedict XIV., Pius VII., Leo XII., Pius VIII., and our present illustrious Pontiff—have visited them with the heaviest censures and the severest penalties. We are aware that it is not always from an evil propensity or through an utter disregard for ecclesiastical authority, that persons are led to enter secret societies, but rather allured by the apparent temporal advantages and ostensibly justifiable nature of the organizations, sometimes it is from national motives—a desire of serving their native land; other times from a spirit of philanthropy, benevolence, and not unfrequently from a prurient desire of learning the hidden, or of attaining social connections, that men are thus led into opposition to the laws of the Church. And they are held, too, in their bondage by reason of the fact that the leaders are not made known to the many. To the plea put forward by the advocates of secrecy, the Church has only one answer to give, and she has ever returned the same. "Men loved darkness rather than light, for their works were evil." Beware, then, dearly beloved, of entering into any such organizations or of continuing members thereof; and if, at present, in any society which may hereafter fall under the condemnation of the Church, let it be your first duty to abandon the same in obedience to the voice of sovereign authority, bearing in mind the words of your Divine Redeemer: "He that heareth you, heareth Me;" and "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."

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