

THE WAR ON RELIGION IN FRANCE

The well-known author of 'Slav and Moslem,' writing from Nice, under date May 2, to the 'New York Sun,' says:—

A few years ago the May Laws of the Russian Government against the Jews elicited the fiercest protestations in all free countries, notably in England and the United States. To-day crimes against liberty, justice, and humanity of far greater magnitude are being committed in France, and the indignation aroused is of the most courteous kind. Two years ago the Association Bill was represented as a very inoffensive measure of domestic economy. To-day

The Tyrannical, Intolerant Character

of the Trouillot Bill can no longer be dissimulated. It should have been labelled 'An act for the suppression of religious Congregations engaged in teaching or preaching, preparatory to the suppression of the Catholic religion in France.' To-day it is self-evident that the Associations Bill was merely a trap set by the Government to obtain the detailed and minute information regarding the pecuniary resources, members, etc., of each Congregation, in order to confiscate their property (liquidation is only a euphemism) and to see to it that the members are forever debarred from teaching or preaching. To use the language of M. Decrais, an ex-Minister of the Rousseau Cabinet, 'the manner in which the law of 1901 has been applied is a violation of the spirit and of the letter of that law.'

When the Bill was before the Chambers, M. Waldeck Rousseau obtained many votes by solemnly declaring on the part of the Government that the free primary schools supported by Catholics and taught by Congregationalists were in no wise affected by this law of 1901. Yet two months later his successor, M. Combes, closed some 3000 of these schools by administrative process, as in Russia. As in Russia, the Sisters were all peremptorily ordered out of the villages and towns where they had been teaching from 30 to 40 years, and commanded to concentrate at their mother houses.

I was at Juan les Pius, near Cannes, when some Sisters who had an orphanage for small boys were ordered at three in the morning to go immediately to their mother house in Brittany, at the other extremity of France, a journey of three or four days. Now no free Government may legally enforce a residence on any except an accused or condemned criminal. The 'Journal of Geneva,' an able Protestant paper, was the first to raise an indignant cry at this violation of public right. Thus in this episode alone we have

Guilt, Brutality, and Illegality

on the part of this Government of Jacobins. My blood boils to think that such crimes can be done by liberty-loving people unmoved merely because the victims happen to be Catholics. A conspiracy of silence conceals from the people of the United States the shameful violation of liberty, humanity, and justice which is being perpetuated in France in the name of a barbarous law of religious persecution.

The latest act in this disgraceful episode of French history has just been perpetuated in the Chambers in violation of the spirit and the letter of the law of 1901, to use the words of M. Decrais. This law required that the demand for authorisation of each religious Order be submitted to the Chambers. M. Combes just bunched them all into three categories—teaching, preaching, and contemplation—and at the request of the Government they were sent to execution by cartloads like the victims of the First Republic in 1793. The last session at which the Grande Chartreuse had the honor of a special hearing was most disgraceful. The Government majority, the Left, banged their desks, stamped their feet, and howled to cover the voice of a speaker on the Right:

'What do we Care for Legality?'

We have the majority,' were some of the utterances which were passed unrebuked. Worst of all, M. Combes produced and used with much effect a false document purporting to be signed by the Superior of the Chartreuse urging all to sell out their Government bonds. In vain the Right demanded that the authenticity of this document be established before taking the vote. M. Combes refused. In private life we would know what epithet would be applied to his conduct.

If the Chinese and Turkish Governments were to close all Christian schools and declare that a whole category of preachers were to be gagged, a naval demonstration would soon be made by the Powers, as was done by France not long since to compel the Porte to recognise certain of her Congregational schools in the Turkish Empire.

The Godless System of Primary Education established by the Third Republic caused Catholics to

establish their own free primary schools at the cost of great sacrifices, while establishments for secondary education, colleges, etc., were multiplied by religious Congregations of men and women to meet the ever-increasing demand. The Government schools could not stand the competition or pay their way. Hence the Associations Bill, which, as I have said, should have been labelled 'An act for the suppression of Congregation schools, the successful rivals of the Government.' Parents are brutally deprived of the right to give their children teachers of their own choice, and tens of thousands of teachers are deprived of the right of exercising their profession—this in a land which writes, 'Liberty, equality,' on all its monuments; this in spite of the fact that out of the 1600 Municipal Councils of France 1000 voted for the Congregations, about 400 against, and the rest abstaining; this in spite of a petition signed by 72 bishops and innumerable petitions and other manifestations of public opinion. Moreover, the Concordat, a solemn treaty made by France with the Holy See, stipulates for the 'free exercise of the Catholic religion.'

Not satisfied with sweeping away the teachers and the schools of the Catholics and compelling the latter to send their children to Government institutions, M. Combes has sent a circular to all the bishops requiring that every place of worship not a parish church be closed, and threatening to close these latter if any priest belonging to the suppressed Congregation be allowed to preach in them. Practically every bishop has declined to execute this ukase.

In 1789 the convention had seized and thrown on the market all the property of the Church, pious donations which had accumulated during many centuries. From prudence and common honesty, if not from fear of excommunication, few purchasers could be found for this kind of property. Two classes of proprietors were formed: those who give a clear title and those who could not. Civil and religious discord was perpetuated in this material form. Napoleon was most anxious to restore normal conditions, and there was but one person who could give a clear title to the confiscated lands in the eyes of Catholics. To him Napoleon appealed. But Pius VII would not forego all claims on these lands without adequate compensation. The French Government then undertook to pay in perpetuity the stipends of an adequate number of bishops and clergy, and to guarantee

The Free Exercise of the Catholic Religion.

This was the consideration for which the Pope, as Supreme Head of the Church gave a clear title to these lands by condoning the spoliation.

The payment of these subsidies to the Church is not a 'tribute,' or a gratuity, such as the State allows to Jews and Protestant ministers, nor is it a salary, as is falsely represented. It is strictly the payment of a national debt in the same way as the interest is paid to holders of three per cent bonds.

The spoliation of the Catholic clergy, the suppression of Catholic schools were the chief means adopted by Julian the Apostate when he undertook to restore paganism. This pagan Third Republic is resorting to the same means.

Civil Religious War

is raging all over the country. The regular army has been called into requisition to aid the mounted police in sweeping back the multitudes who manifest everywhere against the expulsion of the Congregationists. Several officers have refused to take part in these operations. Many arrests have taken place. A Mademoiselle de Morene was condemned to eight days' imprisonment for having cried 'Vive la liberte' and said to a magistrate that he was a coward. Here in Nice, on my boulevard, three companies of cavalry and some infantry were at work recently clearing the streets at 3 a.m. Hitherto the weapons used have been sticks and fists. There have been many broken limbs and broken heads. At Marseilles more than 20 were perhaps mortally wounded. The French Catholics do not carry revolvers or knives as a rule, or blood would certainly have flowed long ere this. The indignation of visitors to the Riviera is great at the closing of so many churches. The American and English Consuls headed a protest to M. Combes, and the American squadron invited the brave Bishop of Nice to say Mass on board the next day. At Cannes the same indignation prevails in the foreign colony as well as among the natives.

The Third Republic is following closely the First, which began with the Jesuits, then proceeded to all the Congregations. The turn of the secular clergy came next, that of the nobles and the bourgeois followed in quick succession. To use the expression of Taine, 'instead of a temple of liberty, the people found they were in a slaughter pen.' As in 1793, France will again become the firebrand of Europe. Her emissaries are at work to-day as in the past. To-day, as in the past, it is a peculiarity of the French free thinkers that they can tolerate no free thinking but their own.

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