

The Value of a Catholic Press

There are not wanting at the present moment in France, Catholic experts who attribute (says the New York 'Freeman's Journal') many of the troubles which have overtaken the Catholic Church in the republic to a lamentable lack of organisation among the faithful themselves, a lack of organisation of which no one dreamed and which did not appear to be even necessary till the Catholic community awakened to the fact that for a quarter of a century a powerful and fully organised enemy had been dealing it stealthy blows which gradually weakened the activity and vitality of its influence social as well as political. The fault has been attributed in turn to each section of the community; to-day the clergy are accused, to-morrow, the laity. To seek the real truth about the matter, writes Father Berchois, in *Etudes* (Paris), we must consider both the clergy and the laity. Even the most prejudiced must admit that for sense of dignity and devotion to duty, the clergy of France during the nineteenth century, was fully equal to its high calling. Assuredly the present troubles of the Church in France cannot be attributed to any lack of faithfulness or devotion in its priests. While we may boldly conclude that Catholicity in France has lost nothing from the point of morality, it is proposed to show that there may be sins of omission as well as commission; that faults negative are often more destructive in their results than faults positive. Germany and Belgium have within the past half century taught the Catholic world the supreme value of secular organisation as the only true safeguard of the interests of the Church. In these two countries, it was the action of the clergy in

A Well-organised Catholic Press,

exercising through that channel, its influence upon the elections, that saved the Faith. What was possible in two countries monarchically governed, should also have been possible in a republic. It is no valid objection to assert that the priest has no business in politics; that he has no concern outside his Church. It would be an equally valid argument to hold that an apothecary has no business in politics and no interest outside his pharmacy. As long as the priest is endowed with the political rights of citizenship, he is entitled like any other citizen, to take an intelligent and an active interest in the political life of his time. If the farmer has a right to interest himself in that life, in order to protect his material interests, there can be little question that a priest has a similar right in respect, not only of his religious interests, but also in respect of those of his flock, since even governments admit that his main function is the care of souls. As feudal kings had their conscience-keepers, so the priest may be said to be, in a large measure, the keeper of his flock's conscience, in as far as it is his duty to enlighten it upon points impinging on

Catholic Dogma and Doctrine.

As an objection it may be said that in exercising their influence upon Catholic citizens, the clergy as, in a measure, politicians, would be likely to make mistakes in respect of political issues. It has also happened that doctors have killed patients who would certainly have regained their health, had they not called in the medical man, and it is fair to say that all the blunders that the clergy might commit in politics would in their results, not equal the amount of harm they do by abstention or recusancy in political or electoral matters. Nor has the history of the Church ever been wanting in the names of prelates who have fought for

their political rights and those of their faithful. When Saint Athanasius, Saint Basil and the other Fathers of the Church combated the great heresy of the fourth century, protected though it was by the emperors, they were meddling in politics, as were Leo IX., Gregory VII., Alexander III., Thomas a Becket and Thomas Aquinas, in the episodes in which they defied temporal sovereigns in the attempts of the latter to restrict the liberty of conscience.

Germany and Belgium

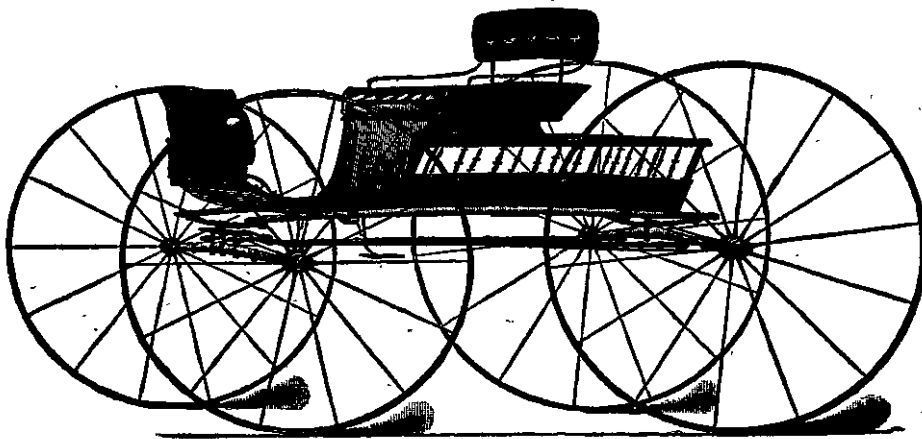
owe their present freedom to the fact that they adopted, as of the utmost importance in the fight for their freedom, the principle of publicity as the most effective method of reaching the public and of silencing the enemy, or at least confuting him. In no country in the world is the Catholic press better organised than in these countries. It is an ascertained statistical fact that one Belgian Catholic in seven, subscribes to a Catholic paper. It is also a well-known fact that there is no Catholic country in the world in which the voice of the bishops and the clergy makes itself so powerfully felt at election-time as in Belgium. Despite their magnificent organisation, their perfectly equipped press and their cohesion on all questions affecting their belief, the Catholics of Belgium would still be under the iron heel of masonic liberalism, if their clergy had been content to remain in their sacrifices. Germany's Catholic press it was, that enabled

The Church to Issue Triumphant

from the Kulturkampf as Bismarck admitted. Subsidies are in that country diverted from the building of churches and schools, except in cases of dire need, to be turned to the building up of a great Catholic press which voices the Church, which in many cases is gratuitously distributed at electoral periods to the electors, which is so compiled as to attract and engage the attention of the lowest as well as the highest and the journalistic ability of which is, in every phase, equal to that which characterises the press in the opposition camp. In Germany every priest knows the value of the press. In France its value has been underestimated till within a comparatively short period, when 'La Croix' came into being. On the contrary, freemasonry and impiety were long acquainted with its tremendous force and from the very first day, they turned their weapons against the Church, an attack being made daily. Such attacks, which should also have been met daily, were left to be answered at rare occasions by lay editors who had sufficient Catholic loyalty to do so. The result was, however, almost futile, and when the Catholics made a timid attempt to found an organ of their own, the clergy, not knowing the value of a press, were even wanting in according it their adhesion. They had ample means to build schools, churches, hospitals, but nothing to give to their most necessary and most important arm of defence—the Catholic press.

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