

CHURCH AND STATE IN FRANCE

LECTURE BY THE COADJUTOR - BISHOP OF HOBART.

(Continued from last week.)

The Anti-clerical Outbreak.

The elections were coming on; the friends of Monarchy were numerous in the existing Parliament; in fact, the Republican Constitution of 1875 had been carried by only one vote. Had the Comte de Chambord accepted the Tricolor he might have had the crown of France without the asking. The Republic was only yet in the experimental stage. Monarchists and Bonapartists were jealous of each other. I hardly think that either regarded the Republic as a permanent rival. Nearly all families of position were adherents of either the Monarchical or the Imperial regime. They owed their standing to the Bourbons and the Bonapartes respectively. Out of power, both those parties were apt to be demonstratively Catholic. When you hear of French Clericalism, remember that in the political sense it has had very little foundation outside of those families. Churchmen in France have been compelled by the concordat to efface themselves overmuch in public life. But behind the scenes at the time of which I now treat, there was another power—the Grand Orient, occult, sagacious, and, as we shall see, already meditating a coup d'état of its own. The Grand Orient is no more Republican than it is Monarchical. It coquets as readily with crowned heads as with demagogues. Nothing comes amiss to it in its pursuit of sovereign sway and of triumph over the Church. The attempt of the Seize Mai was seized on by Gambetta, and he made France ring with his war-shout, 'Clericalism is the enemy.' The elections went strongly in favor of Republicanism, and in the circumstances most of those Republicans were naturally, or had to be, anti-clerical. Early next year (1879) MacMahon resigned, and retired for good into private life. His successor, M. Grevy, did not go to Mass; nor has any of his successors ever since. They have not even ventured to pronounce the name of God in any of their official utterances. Yet they have all been Catholics, but in office they had to obey the occult power that placed them there.

Jules Ferry's School Laws.

Gambetta, Ferry, Paul Bert, and others, then of lesser note, but well known to-day, voiced the new anti-Catholic policy. Ferry asked Parliament for power to close the establishments of secondary education conducted by the Jesuits and kindred Orders. The Senate threw his Bill out; but with his Clause Seven he broke up 300 houses, evicting their occupants. He inaugurated a scheme of universal secular instruction for the primary schools, turning the religious teachers out of the public schools as quickly as it was possible to replace them. The education vote ran up by leaps and bounds. Training colleges were multiplied and made centres of 'lay'—that is, anti-religious—formation. In Belgium at the same time a violently irreligious policy was carried out by M. Frere Orban, who banished God and the Church from the public schools. The Belgian Catholics deserted his schools, and ran up their own over against them. In a few years they hurled him from power. The French Catholics, no less than the Belgians, were alarmed at the character of the 'lay' schools, especially since 1882, when the clergy were forbidden to give religious instruction there, even to the children of parents who expressly called for it. Hence, like the Belgians, they, too, encouraged the Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods to open schools of their own, and sent their children to them in multitudes, notwithstanding the pecuniary sacrifices it entailed. In 1900 there were over one million children in those unsupported schools taught by the religious congregations. They had as yet 624,304 in State schools, from which they were being turned out as quickly as they could be replaced. In all they had 1,681,870 children under their charge. For the same time attendance of students at the secondary and higher schools was 88,202 at State colleges, 67,882 at the Catholic colleges.

Crushing Taxation.

It is plain enough, then, that both the religious Orders and the Catholic parents were making a stubborn stand in behalf of their schools. In 1882 Jules Ferry conceived the idea of crushing the religious orders by imposing special taxation on them over and above that paid by ordinary citizens. He remodelled his plan in 1886. It was finally perfected in 1895.

They had to pay a special income tax. The property was assessed, and 5 per cent. taken as the income on this capital assessment, and on this reputed income they had to pay 4 per cent. Then there was a second tax on another account. Their property was held in mortmain. It did not pay succession duty. Hence, the reputed 'increase' had to be secured. The English Passionists in Paris, not being French subjects, objected to this exceptional taxation. Of course, their house and church were on French soil, and the case went against them. But that had hardly happened when M. Combes turned them out of house and church, confiscating both. Quite lately, at the instance of the English Ambassadors, the French Government have compensated them for their house and church and ground to the amount of £2,400. The English Ambassador believes it is a generous sum. What, then, shall we think of the general scheme of taxation on the property of the religious Orders since 1882, seeing that in a few years the arrears demanded of the Passionists for one of those multiple taxes amounted to £800—that is, a third of the capital value?

The Reactionaries.

But if the French imitated the Belgians in supporting private schools, why have they not likewise borrowed their tactics at the polls, and sent their persecutors to the shades of private life? The Belgians had only one question—the religious question. In France, unhappily, the religious question has been, and still is, complicated with the question of the Pretenders. Each faction has had its mouthpieces in Press and in Parliament. They remind one of the saying that God deprives of reason those He resolves to destroy. While each successive appeal to the electors ought to have convinced the most obtuse that the constituencies were determined to have no restoration of bygone regimes, those dynastic organs went on declaring morning after morning that they were going to 'choke the beggar,' the beggar being in their vocabulary the Republic.

Leo XIII's Instructions.

Those were bad tactics for them; they were ruinous for unoffending priests and Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods, who had no concern whatever with plots, real or bogus, to 'choke' anything. After such a lapse of time as sufficed to show unequivocally that the French people wished to abide by the Republic, Leo XIII. felt it incumbent on him to lift his voice against the false assumption that a good Catholic may not be a convinced Republican. He felt his way, for it was a delicate subject. But in his letter to the French people in 1892 he emphasised the fundamental principle that Catholicity was not bound to any form of political regime, and enjoined on French Catholics a frank, unreserved acceptance of the Republican constitution. He was thanked by President Faure. Men who had been vehemently anti-clerical welcomed his intervention, and declared that it meant the opening of a new era. But the Catholics, to whom his words were chiefly addressed—the reactionaries—took them with a bad grace. Very few journals changed their policy. 'The Univers,' always true to the Pope, at once embraced the 'Pontifical Directions,' as they have been styled; but half its staff quitted the office, and started a 'Catholic' paper, 'La Verite,' in opposition, carrying a large contingent of the subscribers with them.

The Dreyfus Affair.

Nevertheless, the bishops and clergy, by their tact and moderation and their unfeigned acquiescence in the advice given by the Pope, supported by a small, but increasing, body of men representative of the best French traditions, men like Comte de Mun, would steadily have disabused the popular mind of the calumny that true Clericalism had any evil design on the Republic. This was of all things what was dreaded by the Grand Orient.

(To be continued).

It is pleasing to note the progress the smaller towns of New Zealand are making in their efforts to keep pace with the times. Picton, leading with its exceptionally well-lighted streets and wharves, has proved an immense success. Johnsonville, Kaiapoi, and Geraldine, are now also following rapidly with their splendid Acetyline systems, which will supply the ratepayers with light and heat for all domestic purposes. The N.Z. Acetyline Gas Coy. (Ltd.) have submitted tenders for lighting several towns in Otago, and are quite confident that it is only a matter of a short time, when quite a number of our towns and townships will be lighted by this wonderful light...

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