

CONDITIONS IN FRANCE

It may be said that from the time of the passing of the Separation Law, December, 1905, the Church in France has exhibited a most striking instance of the vitality that should be expected from whatever is permeated by the Divine Spirit (says a writer in *America*). In spite of the persecutions to which they are subjected the clergy have neither been dispersed nor discredited. When his Holiness Pope Pius X. ordered the repudiation of the Government scheme of the *Cultuelles*, the common impression was that under the stress of poverty the clergy would abandon their work. In fact the great majority were reduced to a state of positive destitution. Country curates up to that time had received the meagre allotment from the Government of 180 dollars a year; in towns it rose to 200 dollars or 300 dollars; the bishops and archbishops were granted between 2000 and 3000 dollars.

When this stopped the laity realised that something had to be done, and even before the official *Denier du culte* was organised, sufficient sums had been supplied by wealthy people. But that ceased after a short time, and even the collection of the cultural contribution, or the *denier*, was found to be a bother to many in the rank and file of the Catholic laity. They refused to support those whom they never saw, and whose services were of no profit to them personally. Many abstained from church services, and no longer sent their children to catechism. Even the priests themselves said: 'I will receive anything that is handed over to me, but will never go from house to house begging.' The result was that assignments to parishes had to be curtailed.

But as necessity is the mother of invention, some influential ladies and gentlemen were found to take up the work of collecting. Gradually the duty of supporting the clergy, which had been expounded in the pulpit and taught at catechism classes, found its way into the minds of the people to such an extent that, in the city of Laigle in Normandy, for example, the priest in charge of a parish almost exclusively composed of workmen has not met with one refusal in forty houses.

In old days parish priests were forbidden to move out of their parish without permission even for a few days a month, lest the tax-gatherer or *percepteur*, acting automatically under municipal information, would reduce by so much the monthly instalment. But since the Separation all are at liberty to move as they like without any interference of the civil power. In the same way bishops can assemble and issue synodal letters without having to ask leave to do so. Both the bishops and the lower clergy have

Recovered Their Liberty,

but it is an open secret that the Government will do its best to fetter them once more in some way or other. Separated from the State, the Church of France has become more united than ever to the Roman See. Thus no pronouncement has been made and no change inaugurated without the Pope's consent. In the same way a closer union binds the parish priests with their bishop. In virtue of the law, however, the parochial residences have become municipal properties. A rental was put on them by the municipal council, which often when it seemed to be a sort of help to the priest would be cancelled by the Prefect. In some hostile councils such a heavy rent was exacted that the priest was practically compelled to quit the old abode of his predecessors and to cast his lot in some uncomfortable, distant, and mean dwellings. In a few places matters were so bad that even such shelters could not be found.

Thus quite lately in the Borough of Orgeres, in the Chartres Diocese, the priest-tenant had to live in the city at a considerable distance from the church, as no house was available for him elsewhere, and then the municipal council raised the rent to such a price as to make it an impossibility for him to stay even there.

The recruiting of the seminaries was difficult for a few years after the Separation Law, for the reason that the obligation of spending two or three years with the colors kept some from resuming their clerical studies, and persistent efforts were made by petty officers to induce the young recruits to take up a military career, where enticing prospects, they were told, were in store for them. Lately, however, men of from twenty-five to thirty years of age, who had already started in life after their military service, have entered the seminaries and will become priests in due time. Thus in the Paris Central Seminary at Issy there is at present quite an unusual set of such distinguished vocations. There are seminarians who have been officers in the army and navy, lawyers, doctors, engineers, some of them having already achieved considerable success in the world. To such men, of course, no other motive can be attributed for their renunciation of the world except a genuine desire to serve God.

As regards secondary education, which was in serious danger for a time, some bishops have succeeded in establishing a number of high schools under clerical management. Thus Monsignor Gibier, the Bishop of Versailles, opened one in October, 1913, which he built at his own expense. It is at Juvisy, south of Paris, a place well known to aviators. He will have two more before long, one in Pontoise and another in Corbeil. Each of these secondary schools will in turn gradually send recruits to the Versailles great seminary. The old motto of Archbishop Duquesnay of Cambrai, in the late seventies, is being acted upon: 'In the meanest town of my diocese,' he said, 'I want a secondary school to impart to all the boys of well-to-do families a sound Catholic education. That much at least will have been gained by keeping them away from the atheistic and immoral schools which are under the Government's management.'

Father Vaughan on Miracles

Speaking in the East End of London on Sunday, January 23, Father Vaughan said that during the week he had received quite a number of letters from all sorts and conditions of men wanting to know what he thought of magic and miracles. Magic, he thought, except in connection with lantern slides, had best be given a wide berth. It was wicked, as well as stupid, to play with forces over which one had no more control than over the volcanic eruption of Sakurashima. With miracles it was different. They were wrought, when wrought, by the power of God. Man could not draw down a lever and work a miracle. He might be used as an instrument in God's hands for working a miracle, but a miracle always had God for its author, and he might define it as something done which was beyond the range of natural causes. The chief questions put him by his correspondents were two—

(1) Were Miracles Possible?

and (2) Were they actual? No sane man, believing in a personal God, could deny the possibility of miracles. God was no constitutional monarch, with limitations to His power. He was Master of His own house, creation, and He made laws of nature, but was no more subject to them Himself than the father of a family who made for his children rules of conduct was himself bound by them. It was argued by some of his inquirers that miracles were an interference with the regular working of the laws of nature. It was nothing of the kind. Miracles no more interrupted the laws of nature than did the footballer, the golfer, the Alpine climber, or the rower up stream. What man could do, that at least God might accomplish. Miracles did not interfere with the regular working of God's laws any more than sailing in an aeroplane interfered with the laws of gravitation. An asbestos curtain was let down in a Detroit theatre and stopped the onrushing fire; and a blanket which he had helped to hold in slumland broke the fall of a child from the window of a house on fire. Surely what man could do with an asbestos