

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 3

OF THE

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, IND., Jan. 1, 1886.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

Never in my religious life did I feel more deeply impressed, while offering you my heartfelt thanks for your admirable filial expressions of good wishes for a happy New Year, than I do now, on the opening of 1886, which is to form such an important epoch in the annals of our dear Family of the Holy Cross.

Indeed, we probably never felt more sensibly the absolute need of God's special blessing than we now do on the dawning of a new year, pregnant as it is not only with such important issues for ourselves, but with so many grave social events as the world seems to expect from far and near, in all directions.

I make it almost a duty to keep my eyes open to what is daily going on at home and abroad; and, as a result of my observations and comparisons, it seems to me that mankind scarcely ever stood facing such a number of serious and vexing questions, *unsolved* and demanding a solution. Society at large is shaken all over the globe at this moment as it perhaps never was before. Evils are growing to such an alarming extent as to create dismay in the deepest and clearest-sighted minds. Infidelity is fast spreading all over the earth its most baneful and almost unchecked deadly poison, destroying all security, not alone among nations, but even in families and individuals alike; dangers of all sorts everywhere; peace and safety nowhere. No better fruits could be looked for from such a tree. Strikes and riots, rebellions and fights, scandals and horrible crimes stun our ears from morning to night. For mercy, let us pause and listen to the angelical hymn of yesterday: *Gloria in excelsis Deo!* and upon earth peace to men of good will!

That we are on the eve of no ordinary troubles, calamities, and disturbances, everyone may reasonably apprehend. Will it be for the better of society or the worse, is God's own secret. But, if we judge of the near future by the increasing and appalling insults of man to God, we have, indeed, reason to tremble. Still, if an all-merciful Creator was once willing to spare abominable cities in consideration of a few *just souls*, we may yet confidently hope that new miracles of grace will again save the world from the punishments it deserves. Let us rather hope even against hope.

But never before could we see, we Religious of the Holy Cross, born, as it were, yesterday, on the return of peace in order to assist in repairing the immense disasters of the French Revolution of '93; never could we meet a better opportunity to show the true spirit of devotedness and self-sacrifice, which first inspired and brought our Institute into existence. Setting aside all forebodings of the future, the actual necessities of the day forcibly remind us of the noble object for which we came to life as a Community, namely, the Christian training of young children, for years and years completely deprived of all religious teaching.

Our providential advent into this New World, as well as our almost miraculous retention of rights and property in France,—requiring in both hemispheres something like heroic efforts in order to succeed,—keep repeating to us every day that we were not born to grow in idleness, but constantly to increase in vigor and zeal, to carry out in full the merciful designs of Heaven.

There is no need of a new social crisis to stir up our energies; we should never forget the main object for which we were born in the Church *militant*: to fight is our end. Could we, then, stand anywhere, as true soldiers of the Cross, with open eyes and behold, unconcerned, the fall and the ruin of an immortal soul, and that of another, and of another again? Could we ever feel justified in looking indifferently on the eternal loss of souls we were sent in time to save?

When a fire-bell is heard in the dead of night, people rise and fly to the scene of danger, and often show real heroism to save property in which they have no personal interest. If a serious conflagration is threatening, urgent messages are sent to neighboring cities, and from all parts armies of heroes instantly arrive to fight

the destructive element, all this for ordinary property; but when human life is concerned, who looks to the pain and sacrifice it may cost to save a fellow-being? What should we think of a man looking indifferently from a bridge upon a poor woman or a child drowning in a river, a few yards or feet beneath, when he could save them if he had a spark of manhood?

But is not this our own case? That river which divides time and eternity, and which we must all cross some day, has for us Religious a safe bridge, resting on three solid pillars, a few feet above the current, and from which, as we pass, we may rescue from certain ruin a number of souls, who, ignoring the safe path, and suspecting neither depth nor holes, thoughtlessly venture to ford its deceitful course. From a fisherman St. Peter himself was made a fisher of men. As members of a teaching Order, we all share in the same beautiful mission of saving immortal souls whenever we come in contact with them in obedience to our holy calling. If our religious vocation ever was appreciated as it deserves, indeed it is now we should hold it as a priceless boon, when the Christian moulding of youthful minds and hearts has become the acknowledged vital question of the age. Happy those who spend themselves, not in acquiring perishable goods, or enjoying life, but in drawing stainless and angelic hearts nearer to God! May this new year, which for some of us may be the last, prove, more than any other, prolific in happy results! Let it be entered upon with a resolve to make it the richest in our life, in personal merits, in efficient and telling devotedness, in the faultless observance of our Rules, and in the visible successes which always reveal and reward the true Religious. The life of a teacher, truly deserving the name, is one of labor and fatigue; but what noble task was ever achieved without labor or fatigue? Here the end emphatically justifies the means; not alone because what is done for the love of God is no labor, etc., but because of the rich harvest rewarding generous efforts; above all, in cultivating such an admirable soil as that of the virginal and stainless hearts of little children. Whenever we kneel, in this precious season, before the Crib of the Divine Child, oh! let us thank our Blessed Lord for the beautiful vocation He has given us, to spend ourselves and be spent in the sweet service of His dear little brothers, in the least of whom He wants to be recognized Himself in person. No wonder if in this new sanctuary of Divine Love, the few among our Religious educators who had deemed the rod an indispensable necessity in the class-room, have since found out their error, and thanked us so sincerely for the absolute prohibition of corporal punishment in our schools—a prohibition born at the Manger of the Divine Child. There the question was answered as soon as asked: "Who could dare, under the eyes of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, strike a little brother of the Divine Infant?"

As Religious, our delight must be to live under the glorious banner of the Cross: *In hoc Signo vinces*, history says. Here, no effusion of blood is required, but a daily offering and immolation of our will. What a blessed and lovely standard we have chosen! "Far from us ever to glory in any other"; but to glory in it we must keep it raised, at any cost, with a valiant hand, until we breathe our last. What a noble career opens before us! Let us all remember that we came into existence, not to enjoy life, but to save immortal souls from eternal ruin, as the Apostle, with an ever-increasing courage; that each of us may say with him at the end: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the Faith; as to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day.* (2 Timothy, iv, 7.) In this spirit, with this blessed hope, I say, with my whole heart, to each and to all our dear Religious of the Holy Cross: A happy New Year! with an abundant harvest from the precious seed you are daily sowing in the richest soil on earth—the hearts of the young favorites of Jesus Christ. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,
Superior General.