

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 111

OF THE

VERY REV. SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

July 10
NOTRE DAME, 5th Sunday After Pentecost, 1881.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

The monstrous act which a few days ago startled the whole world with horror and amazement, shocked us all, even more than the rest of our fellow-beings; and no wonder; for if to the people of the world, rightly disposed, an attempt, as unexpected as unjustifiable, on the life of the lawfully-elected chief of a great nation, in perfect peace and unprecedented prosperity, sends a shot to 50,000,000 hearts, it seems that we Religious, so little prepared for such dreams of horrible blood-sheddings, naturally find in our respect for lawful authority—which we know comes from God, and which we make an elementary and loving duty to venerate and obey—a convulsive horror and shudder we cannot express.

During the forty years I have lived joyfully on the American soil, no deed has horrified and prostrated me as the cold-blooded shooting of our worthy President on the 2d of July, Feast of the Visitation. And when I say this, I feel confident I express what was experienced by every member of our Congregation in the world.

What a sad and mysteriouselectric change! Only a few brief hours before, we were all spellbound listening again to the most admirable canticle ever issued from human lips—the wonderful *Magnificat* of our Blessed Mother, after saluting her venerated cousin St. Elizabeth; witnessing again that ineffable embrace of two hearts such as the world had never seen, bearing actually—the one, the Author Himself of peace, and the other the forerunner of Him who came to take away the sins of the world. What an unspeakable scene of heavenly peace! An unearthly, delightful, and enrapturing calm had permeated and filled our souls. The mystery of the reconciliation between God and man was now proclaimed. Happy, blessed prelude of the solemn declaration soon to be heard from the skies above: “*Glory be to God in the highest, and peace on earth unto men of good will.*” When all at once a cry flashes over the land: The President of the United States assassinated!!!

Oh! what a horrible contrast! What a painful, heart-breaking evidence, that, even at the hour when God should receive the warmest thanks from all men for His infinite mercies, *there are men*, who, Satan-like, will unexpectedly rise to disturb the designs of Divine Providence, and, by a monstrous perfidy, cast a gloom again on mankind!

On any day in the year, such an execrable deed would have plunged us all into a wild stupor! But on such a feast—so lovely, so replete with charming and heavenly teachings—the cruel, the barbarous, the devilish attempt on the life of the incontestable and universally admired chief of our great Union, whose administration thus far has given unprecedented guarantees of unflinching justice,—such an act, I say, cannot be qualified by any pen.

God has permitted it. God's designs are inscrutable. Far from me to attempt an unwarranted explanation of a monstrosity which even our shrewdest diplomats have not hitherto offered to explain. I may say, however, that we must pray that such a visitation on the gallant chief of our nation, or rather on the fifty millions of its citizens, may not be one of anger, but, like all divine visitations, one of warning and merey. May God Himself show us all clearly that He intended it as a visitation of salvation for our noble and dear country. We have already prayed much for the restoration of our worthy President to life; let us continue to the last in the same laudable effort.

Should there be any need of arguments to prove how well-grounded is our execration of the deed that has shocked the whole world, I would refer to the striking Lesson given by the Church in the Office of this very Sunday. Where could our feelings meet a better justification? [Read the sixteen first verses of the II Book of Kings, Chapter i.]

When I speak of visitations from Divine Providence, whether they apply to individuals, or families, or nations, we Religious readily understand they are always merciful means which our Heavenly Father uses for the salva-

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tion of His children. However severe they may appear, if properly received, and acted upon, they never fail to create amendment, and reach their intended ultimate result. Each of us can gratefully point out to such loving marks in life to which is due more than can be expressed.

Such a visitation as the one engrossing the attention of a whole nation for over a week, should not be lost on any; but should open the eyes of our people, and raise serious inquiries on the due acknowledgments we show to Heaven for the extraordinary blessings of almost every kind bestowed upon us, of late years especially, to such a degree as to make us a subject of wonder to the rest of the world. Ingratitude, says a great saint, dries up even the source of divine favors. Common sense tells us the same, and daily experience proves it. Can we say that religion has increased among us, in the same *pro rata*, as the ever-increasing flow of heavenly blessings? Let every honest heart answer.

We all know that a great injustice is done day after day, year after year, in the School Question, not only to our church, but even more to the entire nation; and that, as long as the present system will be insisted upon, the morality of our people must unavoidably grow worse and worse: a frightful prospect indeed, which men of sense cannot fail to see, unless completely blinded by abject prejudices. The outcrop of our public schools is confessedly (and can be nothing else) a new generation of infidels. Our feeble exertions will not, we feel, counteract, but in a comparatively puny way, the alarming results of a national treasure extensively poured out on the children of an entire nation, with the undeniable consequence: atheism; which means no restraint even on the worse passions of nature. Feeble as our resources are in this unequal contest, our consolation is to know that we fight on the right side, and therefore that God is with us, and that ultimately we must win.

Shall we close the subject as one from which we Religious have absolutely nothing to learn for ourselves? If it be true to say that "all may turn unto good," we may draw from it useful warnings, even in a community. Alas! in our own days, three Archbishops of Paris fell victims as Archbishops, and one of them from the hand of one of his own priests. The great founder of monastic life, St. Benedict himself, would have died from a poisoned cup presented him by one of his monks, had not a miraculous sign of the Cross over it saved him. Horrible crimes are recorded of all ages and of all nations, but none of them can ever compare with that of Judas betraying his Divine Master with a kiss.

My relations of late with the deepest minds in the Hierarchy fill me with sad forebodings of troubles in the American Church and in American communities. Whence such apprehensions? From insubordination: not from want of knowledge, but from practical contempt of the Rule. One such pretentious, unscrupulous subject in a diocese or community, they say, is enough to disturb all peace. Now, such troubles can only be avoided, as far as we are concerned, by a closer adhesion to the elementary principle of obedience and submission to authority. The *Non serviam*—"I will not obey," uttered by the arch-rebel in Heaven, in the beginning, never was, since six thousand years, so universally the motto of the world as it is to-day. No wonder if it has passed from the world to those even who should be the salt of the world. Instead of drawing the world to ourselves, we are drawn insensibly to the spirit of the world, because we lose our only safe ground—the spirit of obedience, to which faith led us at first, and upon which faith founded us as the only basis, or rock, against which the gates of hell can never prevail.

My beloved friends, be not carried away by the illusions of a deceitful and crafty spirit, but listen to the warnings of one who, for forty years, has spent himself—God alone knows at what cost—to the establishment of a Community, now resting, with God's grace, on a safe basis, and never encouraged by brighter prospects. My love for our dear Congregation increases, as age daily tells me, more clearly, that I must soon part with it. You know my preferences: they were always for the obedient, the devoted, the model Religious. The irreligious, the haughty, the proud; the sneerer, the gossip, the opponent of authority, the debt-maker, I could never support. But now such spirits appear to me so dangerous, not only to the peace, but even to the very life of the Community, that I deem it my duty to warn the Councils which are to be held throughout vacations and retreats, to *examine well* into the conduct of each member to whom they have to assign a new obedience. I recommend an impartial justice to all. Much as I pray for an increase of subjects, when so many demands have to be declined, I feel even more anxious to protect our good and worthy members from any contact with irreligious spirits. Oh, the baneful influence they exercise! May God preserve us from their pestiferous communications!

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