

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, January 5, 1875.

REV. FATHERS AND DEAR BROTHERS IN JESUS CHRIST:

I wish, indeed, I could answer one by one all the letters lately received on the occasion of the New Year. But when I see four hundred and more accumulating on my table since a week, I must resort to a general means, to convey you, one and all, my unfeigned and cordial thanks for your kind expressions of regard and pious wishes of the season.

I have read attentively and joyfully every line of the pile, and now beg leave of my dearly beloved correspondents, to assure them all how much I feel obliged to them, and how sincerely I reciprocate in their behalf, all the blessings they have solicited for me from above.

Such letters do their writers no ordinary credit: they reflect honor on their respective authors; I will preserve them all for future reference, and also to show to our successors, that the best sentiments of a Christian heart were common among their predecessors in the Congregation. To excel them, they shall have to rise far above the level of the age in which they may happen to live.

I have not waited until now to make a return for your pious and exquisite sentiments. Every morning, at the Holy Sacrifice, I have endeavored to pay my debt of gratitude to every member of our dear little Family, far and near. There it is, I trust, that we all tried on the opening of the New Year, to wish each other a happy one.

Never perhaps, since the origin of the Congregation, did we need more the blessings of Heaven. Not one of our Houses in Europe could be declared to-day safe and secure. They are threatened, like all other Religious Establishments, now left in jeopardy to the first revolutionary movement, in the Old World.

Nor is the aspect of the immediate future on this new continent absolutely free from apprehensions and disquieting signs. Times are hard beyond anything in man's memory; and the opposition to our Holy Faith is rapidly spreading over the land, to a frightful degree of blind excitement.

Hence our duty to leave nothing untried, in order to avert pending calamities, by the only means in our power, viz.: incessant supplications to Heaven, and a most faithful discharge of our obligations, as Religious of the Holy Cross. On these two points rests our very existence, as on the two wings upon which alone we may fly from danger and rise heavenwards to breathe a pure air, instead of the poisonous atmosphere which covers lower regions everywhere. Prayer and devotedness to duty are universally accepted as essential to a Community life: how is it then, that some Religious, whose vows were unconditional, and whose obligations are evident and binding, in honor as well as in conscience, dispense themselves with the same, upon the most trifling pretexts? Now is the time to see to the observance of our Rules in full, whether they apply to the day, or to the week, or the month, or the year. Let us all say, with a will: They must and shall be observed. We know from experience,

that without regularity to the Rules, there can be no happiness, nor edification, nor order in a Congregation; neither can we expect any serious efficiency from irregular Religious; as well might we look for real and great achievements from half measures. No Superior or Director is allowed to require from his Associates more than the Constitutions and Rules prescribe; but it is the first duty of all heads of houses, to see that the Rules are observed, not only by a few but by all. Otherwise, it must be admitted, that such officers are betraying the best interests of the Congregation, and alike of those they thus allow to perish in their hands. Under a zealous and energetic direction, those nominal Religious might have been brought to and confirmed in healthy habits.

Let us make no more of such victims, from a mistaken and cruel notion of kindness. If a physician must needs be severe at times, to save a patient, a Superior must also be ready to use severe measures to prevent a disorder from becoming worse, and contagious. When, after all, a person is required simply to accomplish what he has spontaneously and solemnly promised under oath, he cannot complain of injustice or unwarranted rigor.

Need I, in these days of general retrenchment, advert again to the propriety of economy? or shall we insist on ease and comfort which even rich people deny themselves around us? can we not practice any mortification? For instance, should not a Religious be satisfied, while travelling, with a seat in the common cars, instead of paying two dollars extra per day, to sit in a palace couch?

The year just closed brought on us trials and afflictions of unusual severity; but however painful such visits of Providence may be, whenever they do not appear as punishments of sin, they are always accompanied with consolations that counterbalance the grief. Such were the losses lately sustained by deaths in our Congregation; the pain and sorrows they inflicted have gradually lost their sting under the soothing effect of the edification they left in every mind. A Christian heart may feel and smart under the pressure of God's hand, but it will find no fault with Divine dispensations and decrees, and will soon enjoy more fully a complete submission to His Holy Will than any possession of the goods of this world. What we call a loss, is often, in Heaven's design, a gain even to those who cannot see it immediately.

None of us know what Divine Providence has in store for us through this present year, in shape of blessings or trials. Whilst we may indulge the hope of unprecedented successes, we must also be prepared for the worst. Were I now certain that all of us would prove real and true Religious, I would unhesitatingly predict the former; but if it should come to pass that we would relax, and abandon our pristine fervor, what else could we expect but reverses and failures every way? Un-

like individuals in this respect, Communities generally receive here upon earth their just dues. The God of Justice and Mercy may, and often does, afflict His faithful servants here below, in order to reward them hereafter with an eternal happiness.

To a great extent, if not strictly at all times, Divine Providence adopts a different economy with regard to Religious Orders and Congregations: as a rule, they obtain, this side of eternity, full justice for their deeds; they succeed or they fail, as they deserve before the eyes of God. "He alone searches the heart," and from His scrutiny nothing is hidden. What a source of consolation and encouragement for the good and exemplary Religious! and what a just cause of fear and trembling for the lukewarm and "wicked servant," as the Evangelist terms him?

Well may we start on this New Year with a firm conviction that having entered our names and pledged our existence under the glorious Standard of the Holy Cross, we must, to the last of our life further or check its progress, according as we fight vigorously or cowardly the battle in which we are engaged; for, in a certain measure, each one of us may apply to himself the words said of the Divine Infant by Simeon: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel." (St. Luke, ii, 34). None can prove totally indifferent; all must have either the merit of raising high the flag under which he is enrolled, or seeing it dragged to the dust, precisely as one shows himself zealous for the observance of his Rules, which he continually strives to maintain in due respect; or as he lays them aside, and lets them fall into contempt, as a matter of no importance.

When we die, one of the two following inscriptions shall be written either on our tomb or in the minds of our survivors: *Here lies a brave soldier of the Cross. Honor to his memory. Though dead, he still speaks for the encouragement of the living;* or this other: *"Ilic jacet" a poor nominal Religious, whose rule was his own will. Let his memory be forgotten and his example remain without followers.* Which of the two will best apply to us? "Whilst we have time let us do good." (Gal. vi, 2). "Now is the seasonable time." (Cor. vi, 2). Probably very soon it will be too late. "*Tempus enim propè est.*"—For the time is at hand. (Apoc. i, 3).

May the Grace of God be with us and enable us to persevere to the end, faithfully and devotedly, that we may all receive the immortal crown.

P. S.—With the present Circular we send to every member of our Congregation a ticket of admission into the new Association of Prayer for the Clergy, with the request to recite daily in common, at the end of the evening exercise, the prayer attached to it. Let us all endeavor to propagate this beautiful devotion.

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,

Superior General: