

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 85 .

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, November 5th, 1877.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

The snow already covering the ground tells us the winter is at hand: and with it what a chapter of miseries is opening to our eyes! If we judge from present and unmistakable signs, unprecedented sufferings will soon encompass in our immediate vicinity a countless multitude of human beings. When such facts stare us in the face, it would ill behoove us—Religious—to dream of comfort and gratifications in our manner of living.

This, however, is not all. In vain should we try to persuade ourselves that such hardships will not affect us. Such an idea would be folly; experience shows that none feels more keenly than ourselves the immediate results of the general distress of the country. Hence a strict economy is not alone a virtue, but a matter of necessity, for each and for all of us. You may find it strange to receive such a Circular, at a time you looked for none. But I purposely write it for the sole object of directing your attention to this point, exclusive of all others.

The repeated calls made upon the Administration here, from our own Establishments, prove a sad drain instead of a resource; and this, at a time our own receipts are materially reduced. I waive all explanations, as a waste of paper and ink; common sense will supply what I pass over, with its natural consequences. Our best Religious will take it for granted that my appeal to the Congregation must be well grounded, and responded to with a will.

Therefore I direct that every member, who has the interests of the Community at heart, consider it a duty to economize and to save in every way and everything possible. Personal expenses must be reduced to the strictest necessity: thousands of dollars will be readily saved as a result, and we need all we can save. Some of our best members are surprised we have not commenced sooner curtailing unnecessary expenditures. The retrenchments we deem perfectly feasible, not only will not injure us, but draw us near to the rules and habits of true Religious.

Our tables must be more frugal (in this I do not insinuate any reduction in the fare of our boarders):

- 1st. One meat dish at a meal; less sugar in coffee and tea; one half of what is now used will answer as well.
- 2d. No new article for personal vestiary to be asked except in case of necessity and with the approval of the committee appointed to examine the same.
- 3d. No money expended for travelling, except on journeys duly recognized as unavoidable.
- 4th. No improvements, repairs, purchases, and laying out of funds, without the authorization of the Council of Administration.
- 5th. Let all take the best care of what is given them, and thus save renewals, always expensive and painful to Religious.
- 6th. In connection with the question of economy, I cannot help remarking here that if our own *personnel* were doing their duty, we might well dispense with a number of hired hands whose weekly wages amount to more than our own profits, at this season of the year particularly, when a day's work is scarcely any more than a fraction of a day. All such men should be let go. If the Heads of our Houses examine seriously the work done by each member of their Family, they will find that some, everywhere, do *scarcely* anything. With a spirit of general devotedness, we should hardly need, any longer, foreign help. The system of hired hands is doubly ruinous among us.

From the above every one should draw the conclusion that in a Community no worldly habits should ever be countenanced; and that frugality, simplicity and cleanliness are virtues to be honored by all and neglected by none.

An especial meeting should be held every first Sunday of the month to examine the expenses of food and clothing.

Now, please, each and all, to follow me honestly in a colloquy by no means a draft of imagination, but a real and serious inquiry of a Christian conscience. Each time I listen to it I feel disturbed, frightened. Perhaps you can find consolation in what leaves me so sad. Here it is: Am I earning the bread I eat? Am I not, in simple truth, a burden to my Community? and, yet, among the first to complain, I am last at work. At work? Where is my work? What salary should they give me, in justice, at the end of each week, over and above my board and clothing? Ah! shame, shame upon me: in truth I make neither the one nor the other. When I hear a Father de Ravignan—the most celebrated and saintly Jesuit of our age—reproaching himself with being a burden to his Community, and that, when he was on the point of entering into Heaven, I declare a feeling of intolerable oppression overwhelms me. What can I do for my dear Community before I am laid up an invalid, a burden? I seek, I need a relief. Ah! from this moment no one, I trust, will ever again be scandalized at my idleness or indolence; devotedness will be my motto to the end. Devotedness and saving, or economy, are sisters, and ever go hand in hand.

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