

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 124

OF THE

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, IND., Dec. 12, 1883.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

For the first time in my religious life I come to propose to you a half-way measure. But, when fully explained, this word half-way measure may turn out *full* of the happiest results.

As a religious Congregation we devote ourselves to the education of youth. Our daily experience shows us the increasing difficulties and also the growing importance of our noble task. We all understand that "unless God bless our labors, we work in vain." But how shall we secure this indispensable help from above?

My long captivity here in my room would have been very tedious had I not enjoyed, from my sitting-chair, the continual view of our Blessed Mother's splendid statue on the new Dome. This sacred image has reminded me of many a blessing: of an astonishing series of blessings since the 5th of Aug., 1841! At times, it seems, I shall never be able to thank her enough even for a portion of what I owe her motherly love and protection. No one will ever know, this side of heaven, how much I am indebted to our Glorious Queen. It is true it was for her I came 42 years ago. If I have a wish, a burning aspiration in my soul, it is to pay to her my debt of gratitude. Here is what she seems to claim from me as a proof of my honesty, viz.: to see her, not alone here, but in every establishment of the Congregation, *more honored, better loved*, and, therefore, *much better known*. But are we not all striving alike to consecrate our efforts to the Blessed Mother of God? You may judge, yourselves, by the results, how the Blessed Virgin is pleased with each one of our Houses. Where she actually presides, and governs, and reigns, as a mother and a queen, there is success. Here is now my means to serve her cause and draw her blessing upon our Houses more abundantly than ever before. When I look up and rest my eyes with delight on our monumental statue, how I wish that every child of our schools might enjoy such a sight! and each time our Blessed Mother seems to say that something even far better can be done: that she has given me a *means* to reach the eyes and the mind and the heart of each one of these dear little ones she loves so tenderly; and that, far and near, every Saturday, by placing her Journal into their innocent little hands; that this early seed would soon grow in those spotless souls, and that their hearts, once occupied by the love of the Mother of Jesus, would have no room left for any debasing desire; that possession was to be secured to the first occupant,—and all this would be obtained by the spreading of her Journal, her own beloved *Ave Maria*.

The messenger of the Holy Mother of God, our *Ave Maria*, so highly recommended by the Holy See, the Sacred Hierarchy, and a vast multitude of fervent souls, has been undoubtedly a blessing, since 18 years, upon many Christian households in the land; while taking the place of loose and dangerous novels and papers, it has made known the virtues, the merits and grandeurs of Mary. Hence the increase of pure devotion and blessings.

It is not enough that our Blessed Mother's Journal shall be read by our teachers: it should pass into the hands of their pupils as well. When, on Friday evenings, every Christian child taught in our schools will go home rejoicing, carrying the last number of the *Ave Maria*, I say, that child will bring home a blessing, and the centre from which so many *radii* of light will issue will soon be a centre of blessings, a consolation, a success. Explained and referred to once in a while by the teacher, the *Ave Maria* will soon appear, as it is, a pearl to the eyes of young readers. They will love it, and draw to its beauties the attention of all at home. How touching the anecdote of that little girl who rushed to her father's arms after tea, with an enthusiastic accent: "O father! what a beautiful story I have read to-day in the *Ave Maria*! will you hear it?" And she commenced; and when she was through, the loving parent in tears pressed her to his heart, saying: "You are a darling child, indeed; how well you read! You, too, will be a noble girl!" One or two pieces read out from the magazine every week, would soon fill a whole class with admiration of its merits. Of course, a little zeal is required; but what can we accomplish without zeal? The lack of it is first cousin to indolence and sloth.

But, you will say, \$2.50 is more than most of our children can pay. Let us, then, reduce it by half: \$1.25, not 3 cents per week. This is what I meant by a *half-way* measure. It will scarcely pay for the paper. But, no matter; some real, serious good will be accomplished in our schools. Let it be well understood, however, that my present offer is made exclusively for school-children, and holds good only to the 20th of this month, as we must know in time how many extra copies shall be printed at the opening of 1884. Let us see who loves our Blessed Mother and values her protection upon the little ones entrusted to our care.

Let me close by reminding you all of the solemn declaration that was the text of my first sermon in 1837: "*Qui elucidant me vitam eternam habebunt.*"—They that explain me shall have life everlasting."

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