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Rome and Democracy as Illustrated by the Story of the Sillon.

BY PASTEUR H. MERLE D'AUBIGNÉ.

THERE are few questions that are more vital to the welfare of nations in which there is a numerous Roman Catholic community as that of how far a Roman Catholic is free to follow the dictates of his conscience, especially in the social and political sphere. Most countries are in a process of social and political evolution. Will the Papacy keep hands off or is she likely to interfere and oppose the democratic and social current that is becoming more powerful every day? Judging from appearance in England, America, and Germany, one might think that the Papacy is on the side of democracy and social reform, but these are largely Protestant countries, in which the Roman Church is obliged to make many concessions. If you want to know what her true tendencies are, you must take a country in which almost the whole population belongs, at least nominally, to her. Such is the case with France. Besides this, France is certainly one of the nations that have given the lead in political and social reform. It is also the Roman Catholic nation in which laymen have always played the most important part in religious affairs. The Reformation of the sixteenth century, that took such a strong hold on the nobility and intelligent middle class of France, was largely a layman's reaction against clerical domination. When it had been nipped in the bud by fire and sword, the Jesuits, who had been the great organizers of the counter-reformation, met a stubborn opposition among the French Roman Catholics who followed the teachings of Jansenius. These also were put down and the noble company of Port Royal was scattered.

More than 200 years have elapsed since this last stand was made against the Jesuitical influence that has moulded modern Roman Catholicism.

In the meantime, the power of the Papacy has become supreme within the Roman Church. A Roman Catholic can no longer disagree with the Pope and still remain in the Church, as was so often the case in the days of Pascal and Bossuet. It is true that one may hold one's tongue and hide one's dissent, but this is difficult if you are actually engaged in religious, social, and political work. A man who works cannot help thinking, and, especially when he wishes to influence his fellow-men, he cannot help speaking and writing. Concerning religious doctrine he may, it is true, give his assent in bulk to the teaching of the Church, and, if he is requested to state more fully what his belief is, he may avoid giving a reply that might be either untrue or unsatisfactory by answering, like Brunetière, "You ask me what I believe ; ask Rome."

In the social and political sphere there are questions, however, to which a reformer must give an answer, and there are organizations which he will have to establish in order to reach positive results. How far is a Roman Catholic free to do that with the approval of his confessor, but without submitting every detail to the censure of the ecclesiastical authorities? That is the very important question on which the history of the Sillon has thrown light.

What is the Sillon? It is by far the most successful effort which French Roman Catholics have made during the last forty years to regain the influence which they have lost over the people of France. For years the French people have been accustomed to consider the priest as the valet of the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the plutocracy. Revolt against the one meant revolt against the other. Hence the opposition to the Roman Church that is steadily increasing as the people learn to read and write. The religious situation of the country is a painful one. Roman Catholics feel that the breach between the Church and the people is widening every day. The efforts that they have made to bridge it over have failed. Comte de Mun's working-men's clubs have never been a success. Their founder is a gallant, generous, and eloquent gentleman, but he is an

absolutist and a Romanist of the old school, and thoroughly out of sympathy with the critical, social, levelling spirit of young democratic France.

Having lost the greater number of their schools, the Roman clergy made an energetic effort to keep in touch with the boys by founding their numerous "patronages" or boys' Sunday and Thursday afternoon clubs and playgrounds. These have been an undoubted success, but when at thirteen the boys became apprentices and still more when at twenty they joined the army, the great bulk fell off from all allegiance to the Church and the Christian religion.

Such was the situation when eight or ten years ago one began to hear about the Sillon. What was this new organization, whose proud boast it was to heal the moral and social evils that the country is suffering from, to reconcile Roman Catholicism and democracy and to imbue the lives of the people, the social and political life of France, with the Christian spirit?

The Sillon began in 1894 as a schoolboys' debating society, that met during playtime once a week in the crypt of the Roman Catholic Collège Stanislas, in Paris. The soul of this little band was a pupil of the mathematical division, M. Marc Sangnier, the grandson of the famous barrister Lachaud. Sangnier is an earnest Roman Catholic Christian—a man who reads his New Testament and whose faith gives the impetus to his life. He is a broad-minded man,¹ with a warm sympathy for the social aspirations of the people, a clear insight into their spiritual and intellectual needs, and the deeply set conviction that a democratic and social republic is the only form of government that can suit modern France.

¹ A few years ago M. Sangnier was talking with a Protestant acquaintance of mine, and asked him what he considered to be the dividing line between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. My friend answered: "A Protestant is a man who believes that he can be personally in contact with God, whereas a Roman Catholic believes that he must reach God through the mediation of the Virgin, the Saints, or the priest." "But," retorted M. Sangnier, "I believe that I am personally in contact with God." "Well," answered my friend, "in that case you are a Protestant." There came a twinkle in Sangnier's eye, and with a comical shrug of the shoulder he replied: "You are not the first man who has told me that."

Young Sangnier brought together a handful of like-minded men ; one day they went so far as to call a mechanic from Lille to speak to them about the social question. This naturally scandalized many of their comrades, and whereas some of them reproached them for the energy of their moral and religious propaganda, others reviled them as Socialists and "beastly" Republicans. When Sangnier entered the great polytechnic school in Paris, and later on when he was serving his time as a soldier at Toul, he remained faithful to his ideal of bringing together young men of different social situations to strengthen their moral and religious life, and influence others for good. *Mutatis mutandis* : there is some resemblance between the first days of the Sillon and early Methodism.

In 1899 M. Sangnier and his friends founded a number of "Cercles d'Études"—young men's clubs for religious and social study. The first members of these clubs were boys attending the Roman Catholic "patronages," but it was well understood that they were to be independent of priestly interference. The aim of the laymen who headed the movement was to train a picked body of men capable of having moral and social influence.

Next to the club stood the "popular institute," through which these men were to penetrate and influence the masses.

At the same time the little monthly Review, founded a few years before by one of Marc Sangnier's friends, and called *Le Sillon*, became the official paper of the new movement, and gave it its name. The beautiful picture of St. Francis of Assisi ploughing and praying at the same time was a fitting emblem of the association that endeavoured to dig the human furrow (Sillon), and throw the good seed into it.

The Sillonists proclaimed that they were democratic because democracy "is the social organization that tends to developing and bringing to its maximum the conscience and civic responsibility of each citizen." Consequently they took as their aim the establishment in France of a true democratic republic.

Their programme was the following :

1. *Legislative*.—The framing of laws to protect women and

children ; to prevent sweating ; to promote Sabbath-keeping ; old age pensions, etc.

2. *Economic*.—The promoting of trades-unionism ; co-operative production, etc.

3. *Moral*.—The promoting of Christian belief and Christian morals as the great source of spiritual energy. "We are revolutionary," said Marc Sangnier, "in this, that we are dissatisfied with the present state of society. Our aim is to transform society, but to transform ourselves first, to make a revolution within us so as to be able to make it all around us."¹ Those are words that every true disciple of Christ must approve. During the eight years that followed the Sillon grew steadily. The number of the "Cercles d'Études" went up to more than 400. These were linked together in provincial federations, and were in constant touch with the Paris Sillon, but there were no patrons, no elected presidents ; organization was reduced to a minimum. The Sillonists remained faithful to their motto : "The Sillon is a spirit, the Sillon is a friendship."

The yearly conferences of the Sillon became most important. In 1910, 4,000 people attended the public meetings, and more than 1,800 took part in the banquet. Fifty thousand copies of the popular Weekly, *L'Éveil démocratique*, were issued. These were largely sold by voluntary "newsboys," who shouted at every church door, "*L'Éveil démocratique*, Journal du Sillon, un sou." From time to time Sangnier and his friends organized great public meetings to protest against some social evil, or against atheistic propaganda. More than once they received blows, but at the same time they discovered that they were not the only soldiers fighting for righteousness. At Lille, our friend, Pasteur Nick, came in contact with them. In Bordeaux, Marc Sangnier spoke at the Protestant Y.M.C.A., and in Paris at the fine Institute belonging to the McAll Mission, and known as the "Maison Verte." Gradually the leader of the Sillon came to the conviction that to gain the victory over the powers

¹ *Le Temps*, August 31, 1907 ; "L'Histoire et les Idées du Sillon," *La Démocratie*, 34, Bd. Raspail, Paris.

of infidelity and immorality, he must not refuse the help that Protestants and even earnest free-thinkers might give him. So he expanded the movement into what he called the "Greater Sillon," and summoned together in June, 1907, a joint conference between Sillonist and Unionist, that is to say—between Roman Catholics belonging to the Sillon and Protestants associated with the Y.M.C.A. The evening that I spent at the closing meeting of that conference will remain one of the most blessed memories of my life. The Salle d'Horticulture was packed to the door. The two speeches on "Christian Civilization in Danger" by Marc Sangnier and Edouard Soulier, Secretary of the Paris Y.M.C.A., were admirable. There was not a word in the speech of the Roman Catholic orator that an evangelical Protestant could not have said, and it made one's heart beat fast to hear the congregation, the great majority of which was Roman Catholic, cheer and cheer again the strong testimony which the Protestant speaker rendered to Christian truth.

Alas, this meeting was not to be renewed. It was too good a thing for Roman Catholics and Protestants to be able to unite and fight hand in hand the common foe of infidelity and immorality. Such a thing may be possible in England or America, but we are too near Rome; and besides that, English and American Roman Catholics are unanimous in their allegiance to the Government of their country. Such is not the case in France. With us the aristocratic and moneyed class is still bitterly opposed to the Republic. This same class has always considered that, just as it was the business of the police to protect their property, so it was the business of the clergy to keep the farmers submissive to their landlords, and the working men to their employers. They honour and support the Church, but they do so under the condition that it will serve their interests. So conservative Roman Catholics, who at first had considered the Sillonists as harmless, pious young men, began to get scared when they heard them putting forth their republican and democratic ideas, and refusing to join hands with the

conservative and anti-democratic associations, such as the "Association catholique de la Jeunesse française" and the yellow¹ Syndicates. The opposition of the Romanist press, especially *L'Univers* and *La Croix*, to the Sillon became furious. They were accused of being modernists, whereas they made it a point never to meddle with theology.

At the time of the inventory of the Churches, whereas the Jeunesse Française flung chairs at the heads of the officials, the Sillonists kept their peace, and were reviled for not joining hands with those who boasted of being the true defenders of the Catholic faith. The attitude of the Roman clergy towards the Sillon shows what a variety of opinions and sympathies lie hidden beneath the cloak of ecclesiastical uniformity.

From the beginning the Sillon had many friends among the cleverest students of Roman Catholic seminaries and among young priests; some of the prelates, such as Monsignor Mignot, the distinguished Archbishop of Albi, have supported it energetically, but since the separation of Church and State, the French Episcopate has become completely subjected to the Roman See. All the new Bishops are enthusiastic supporters of the true Roman doctrine, according to which the beginning and end of religion consists in implicit obedience of the layman to the priest, of the priest to the Bishop, and of the Bishop to the Pope, not only in things that concern doctrine or morals, but practically also in politics and social life.

It is not to be wondered at that the position of the Sillon became more and more difficult. The Bishops who disapproved of it, with the newly appointed Archbishop of Bordeaux, Monsignor Andrieux, at their head, began by fulminating against it in their Lent proclamations, and forbade their priests and theological students joining it. However, the subjection of the laity to the clergy in temporal as well as in spiritual matters has not yet been proclaimed as a doctrine.² So that it

¹ Yellow is the Pope's colour, just as red is the colour of the Socialists, white of the Monarchists, blue of the Republicans.

² In 1906 the Pope went as far as writing in a letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne that "submission to the Roman See leaves to everyone unlimited freedom in all that does not concern religion."

is most natural that, being supported by some prelates and being opposed by others, the Sillonists went their way, and, although remaining very courteous towards their opponents, protested against their libels, and appealed to the Pope as the Supreme Lord of the Church. It seemed at first that the Roman Curia, feeling how earnest, devoted, and submissive Sangnier and his friends were, would not knock down the only good bridge that spanned the gulf that is growing deeper and deeper between the Church and the French democracy.

At their second National Conference the Sillonists had received a letter from Cardinal Rampolla, Secretary of State of Pope Leo XIII., declaring that "the aim and tendencies of the Sillon have greatly pleased his Holiness." In 1904 Pope Pius X. declared himself "their Father and friend." "As to Marc Sangnier and his friends, whose aim is . . . to forward righteousness and respect for Christianity, their conduct is both right and loyal." In 1907, when the attacks of the Roman reactionary press were becoming more and more furious, and the number of their opponents increasing among the French prelates, Marc Sangnier returned to Rome, had long interviews both with Cardinal Merry del Val and with the Pope, and the question of the part which priests were to take in the work of the Sillon was arranged to the satisfaction both of the Curia and of the chief of the Sillon.

There can be no doubt that to the present day a great many of the more sober-minded priests and Bishops of France feel how very useful the disinterested, enthusiastic, and joyful work of these young men could be to the cause of Christianity. Last spring the Archbishops of Rouen and Albi and a number of Bishops, amongst others those of La Rochelle, Clermont, Nice, and Versailles, sent to the Pope an important statement in support of the Sillon. In answer to a letter from Cardinal Andrieux, refusing to sign this document, Archbishop Mignot wrote to him two letters in which he pleaded the cause of "his young friends" with admirable eloquence and tact.¹ "To destroy the prejudices

¹ "Le Sillon : lettres Épiscopales," *La Démocratie*, 34, Bd. Raspail, Paris.

that sever the Republican masses of the people from Catholicism," said the Archbishop, "to overcome that anti-clericalism that pretends to have the monopoly of devotion to democracy, to put an end to that unfortunate mode of thought that has seemingly linked together in our country the future of social progress with frantic opposition to religion, to devote to this great cause all the energies of their soul, to keep their heart pure from guile, and to fill it with the love of Jesus Christ in order to remain worthy of labouring for righteousness and truth, is not that the ideal of the Sillon? How could I not approve of it? We have not got in France too many people who are disinterested and devoted. The disavowal of the Sillonist movement, which the enemies of the Church intensely wish and have frequently foretold, would ground the people for many a day in the unfortunate belief that there is a fundamental disagreement between Catholicism and the present form of government."

No wonder that such words as these cheered the hearts of M. Sangnier and his gallant followers. However, the Catholic press, headed by *L'Univers* and *La Croix*, took care not to leave them any illusion as to the influence which the approval of such good men as Archbishop Mignot could have over their lay opponents of the reactionary and Monarchist party. The prelates, who were bold enough to stand up for them openly and defy the howlings of the pack of reactionary wolves, were a minority. One of the reproaches that was continually flung at the Sillon was that since 1907 it had admitted non-Catholics, especially Protestants, into the "Greater Sillon." This was all the more natural as the nationalist Monarchist party numbers among its leaders free-thinkers, such as Maurras and Lemaitre. As, however, the aim of the Sillon was not only social, but educational, moral and religious, its leaders came to the conclusion that it would be best to distinguish clearly between these two branches of their work, so they founded two distinct associations—one for religious and social work, in which Roman Catholics only were admitted, whereas the other one, the aim of which was political, was open to Protestants and free-thinkers.

The Sillonists had proved, not only by word but by deed, that they intended to be obedient to the leaders of their Church. They believed that the Pope, who had repeatedly expressed his approval of their work, would stand by them and put an end to the slander of the reactionary press. They were just on the point of taking a decisive step by issuing the daily newspaper that was to give them the means of spreading far and wide their social Christian principles. A fine building had been erected at No. 34 Boulevard Raspail in Paris; 250,000 francs had been collected through the untiring efforts of the comrades, many of them giving the widow's mite to uphold their beloved cause. A staff of fifty contributors and printers, all of them Sillonists, had been brought together, and many hundreds of voluntary newspaper boys were waiting to shout the daily *La Démocratie*, as they had done for the weekly *L'Éveil démocratique*. Unfortunately the floods swamped the basement of the printing house, and the publication of the paper had to be postponed till the fall. On August 17, 1910, the first number appeared, in which Marc Sangnier says: "France will not consent to choose between the Republic and Christianity; her soul is naturally idealistic and religious; her atheism is only superficial. It is a lesson that she has been taught to repeat. She does not only seek in democracy the betterment of material life, but more moral dignity and more brotherly feeling. . . . Our country must learn to respect the moral and religious sources from which many good citizens draw their energy for social work and their love and devotion to their brethren. It must not confound true and sincere faith with the hateful clericalism of politicians who use religion for their benefit, instead of using their influence in its interest."

As might be expected, the Catholic press did not give *La Démocratie* a warm greeting. *L'Univers* said: "Their democracy has broken loose from all rules which Leo XIII. and Pius X. have laid down for that sort of propaganda. The work which they are doing is political and social, distinct from that of the Church, suspected and condemned by it." To this attack

the newly born paper retorted: "When has the work of the Sillon been condemned by the Church? *L'Univers*, who knows perfectly well that the Pope has never judged the Sillon in this way, and who cannot ignore the facts that the Catholics of the Sillon are capable of any sacrifice in order to be true to the faith and discipline of the Church, has not got the right to speak in that way."

Alas! the generous and liberal-minded leaders of the Sillon were mistaken. They had believed that the Pope would uphold the interests of religion and the Church of which he is the chief against the jealousy of those who link its interests with those of their political rancours or belated prejudices. Many a time at the close of a stormy public meeting, where they had proclaimed their faith amidst the jeers of infidels and anarchists, they had sung—

"L'amour est plus fort que la haine,
Et le Sillon vaincre."¹

This prophecy was not to come true, and the man who was to become the tool of those who hated the Sillon was the very one whom they called the Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Exactly a fortnight after the first number of *La Démocratie* had appeared, on August 30, 1910, Marc Sangnier received a 'phone call from *Le Temps*, asking what he was going to do in consequence of the Pope's letter to the French Bishops concerning the Sillon. Marc Sangnier had not heard of any such letter, but the same day he could read it *in extenso* in *La Croix*, the organ of the most reactionary and superstitious French Romanists.

It would be too long to analyse in detail this document that occupies seven columns of a newspaper. After saying a few polite words concerning the leaders of the Sillon, the Pope accuses them of having been "infected" in their doctrine by Protestant and Liberal infiltrations, and of "having thought that they might escape from the leadership of ecclesiastical

¹ "Love is stronger than hatred,
And the Sillon will gain the victory."

authorities." The Pope goes on to attack the democratic principles of the Sillon. Speaking of Leo XIII. he says: "that he condemned a certain democracy which goes down to such a degree of perversity as to confer sovereign rights to the people and to endeavour to level down the classes of society and blot them out." He blames the Sillonists for being dissatisfied with the "present Christian social status," and for endeavouring to emancipate the people politically and socially, and still more for their belief "that man will not be truly worthy of the name till he has acquired an enlightened, strong, independent, and self-governing conscience that can do without a master, only obey its own dictates, and be capable of bearing the most important responsibilities without being unfaithful to right and truth."

The Pope complains also about the methods of the Sillon, about the brotherly equality that reigns among its members. "Even the priest," he exclaims, "lowers the exalted dignity of his priesthood, and, inverting in the most extraordinary way the places which cleric and layman ought to keep, he becomes a pupil, puts himself on a level with his young friends, and is nothing more to them than a comrade." The Pope does not even mention the arrangement concerning the Sillonist priests which he had previously approved, and to which M. Sangnier had gladly agreed. He also denounces the "Greater Sillon," without taking into account the fact that, to satisfy the scruples of some of his opponents, M. Sangnier had recently excluded non-Catholics from his educational and social work. M. Sangnier's crime is that he believes that men can find good nourishment for their spiritual life elsewhere than in the teaching and discipline of the Roman Church. Speaking about the new organization, M. Sangnier had said: "The Catholic comrades will work together in an organization of their own, to teach and educate themselves. Protestants and free-thinking democrats will do the same in their own organization; all of them, whether they be Catholics, Protestants or free-thinkers, will take it to heart to gird the young people, not in order that they should wage war against their brethren, but that they

should generously compete with them in the field of social and civic virtue." To this the Pope objects in his letter on the Sillon. "How are we to judge," he questions, "that appeal to all dissenters and unbelievers to make the proof of the value of their convictions in the field of social work? . . ."

What are we to think of that way of respecting all errors and of that strange invitation which a Catholic extends to all dissenters, urging them "to strengthen their conviction by study and to find in these convictions sources ever more plenteous of spiritual power."

The Papal prosecutor concludes his letter thus :

"And now, venerable brethren, we ask ourselves with intense sorrow what the Catholicism of the 'Sillon' has become. Alas! this association that was so promising, this clear and gushing stream has been drawn out of its bed by the modern foes of the Church, and can only be considered henceforth as a miserable tributary of the great movement of apostasy that is organized in all countries in order to establish a universal Church that will have neither doctrines, nor hierarchy, nor any rules for the mind, nor any check on human passions, and which, under the pretence of furthering freedom and human dignity, would bring back, if it were to get the upper hand, the legal sway of deceit and violence, and the oppression of the weak, of those who suffer and labour."

After such a hit at the Sillon, the Pope reminds the French Bishops of the fact that Jesus made it a condition for reaching temporal and eternal bliss "that one should let oneself be taught and guided by Peter and his successors," and he demands of the leaders of the Sillon that they should resign their leadership and pass it over to the French prelates.

The different associations at the Sillon will have no central organization in future ; they will become parochial young men's clubs, and take the name of "Sillons catholiques."

This command of the Roman Curia meant, of course, the breaking up of the whole organization. If M. Sangnier and his friends submitted, their leadership was at an end. In some

places where the parish priest was liberal, the local Sillon might survive, but with a new name and a new spirit, but wherever he was not in thorough sympathy the organization was doomed.

“Chercher le vrai de toute son âme,”¹ such had been the watchword of the Sillon.

What was its leader to do, obey or revolt? In similar circumstances Luther and Wesley revolted, and a Protestant will say: “Stand fast by your principles and only bow your knee before God”; but Marc Sangnier is not a Protestant, and nearly 400 years have elapsed since Luther declared “Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders, Gott helfe mir, Amen,”² and during that time Jesuitical influence has identified Roman Catholicism with the Pope much more than in the days of Luther, Bossuet, or even Montalembert. M. Sangnier and his friends are modern Catholics, and every time they have been attacked by their Catholic reactionary foes they protested that they were as good Catholics as any, and that they intended to submit, “not only to the supreme guidance and control of the Church, but to its immediate direction in cases where the Church takes upon itself to give such a direction.”

After having declared this repeatedly, M. Sangnier could not back out when the time came for him to be true to his principles. Besides this, if he had protested, it is probable that few of his friends would have followed him, and, as Protestants are only a handful in France, he could not expect to find among them a sufficiently wide basis for the social and political work which he wishes to accomplish. M. Sangnier has been very friendly to Protestants and he has had to suffer for it, but let us not forget that he is not a Protestant.

So what might be expected has happened, and, after publishing in *La Democratie* the letter in which the Pope condemned the Sillon, M. Sangnier, in a leader of the same paper, declared that however hard it might be to him, he was determined “to give up the leadership of their popular educational associations

¹ “To seek truth with whole-heartedness.”

² “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise, God help me, Amen.”

to which, for so many years, he had given the best of his life and of his heart, and which had appeared to him as the instruments that God had used to bring back to virtue and religion so many young men who before that had wandered away from the truth."

A few days afterwards I was travelling between Lausanne and Paris. In the same compartment were two young men whom I immediately guessed to be Sillonists. So they were—two of the leaders of the movement going to Paris to give the death-stroke to their beloved association. We talked of the Sillon for many hours, and a piteous sight it was to see these two clever, earnest men obliged by their conscience to submit to a decree that their conscience told them was wrong.

"What can you do with those two toreadors governing the Church?" one of them exclaimed, alluding to the two Spanish Cardinals (Merry del Val and Vives y Tuto), whose influence is supreme over the Pope. Their only hope was that Popes are not immortal and that better days would come when Pius X. has gone to his rest. In the meanwhile the Sillon has been killed. Its fall has been hailed with joy by the two extreme parties against which it had battled so vigorously.

On September 2 Archbishop Andrieux of Bordeaux and his clergy telegraphed to the Pope to express their "thankful admiration" for his letter concerning the Sillon, and their "heartfelt worship of the Immaculate Virgin."

On the same day Mr. Lafferre, who soon after became Minister in the Briand Cabinet, published a leader in the extreme free-thinking paper, *L'Action*, in which, like Cardinal Andrieux, he congratulated the Pope on having given the death-blow to the Sillon. "There can be nothing in common," he says, "between the Republic of the Sillon, which is subject to the dictator of Rome, and our Republic, that is free from any Catholic dogmatism. Let us hope that it is for ever that Pius X. has formulated the doctrine and policy of Rome as being permanently opposed to the rising tide of Democracy." Many good Protestants will approve of these words. Unfortunately

for Mr. Lafferre and his friends, "Roman dogmatism" includes belief in God, in Christ as Saviour, in the judgment to come, and everlasting life. His Republic is one in which "the heavenly lights have been put out," as his friend Mr. Viviani said in our Parliament. We Christian Protestants do not believe in that sort of a Republic. That is why we had hailed the Sillon with joy, hoping that the day might come when, next to the more and more infidel Radical Socialist party that governs France, a new party might some day emerge that would be thoroughly republican, democratic, and social, but respectful of God and of the human conscience.

We had hoped that the Sillon might help on the growth of this new party, but the Pope has decided otherwise. It is true that the men of the Sillon are still living and that the Pope has allowed them to go on publishing their daily paper, *La Démocratie*, but he has done it under the express condition that "it will abstain from all propaganda in favour of the theories, principles, and organization that have been censured or mentioned by his Holiness in his letter to the French Bishops." He tolerates a newspaper because M. Sangnier has given him a proof of his obedience "as if he were a corpse," as the Jesuits say, and because it is easy to censure a newspaper.

But *La Démocratie* is certainly very different from what it would have been if M. Sangnier's hands were free. From time to time it publishes articles in favour of some of the baser superstitions of Romanism, such as Lourdes and the Liquefaction of the Holy Blood of St. Januarius in Naples. One feels that the Sword of Damocles hangs over its head.

The former Sillonists are discouraged and dissatisfied. Very few of them have consented to submit to the supremacy of the Roman hierarchy, even in Rouen, where Archbishop Fuzet was one of their best friends and told them that they might go on with their work just as they had done before. The "Catholic Sillons" have been a failure.

So the Roman Catholic Church has not gained anything by the Pope's victory. After one of the battles in the French

religious wars, in which the Royal Catholic army had beaten the Huguenot forces, a Catholic gentleman, being asked who had won the battle, answered: "It is the King of Spain." Much the same can be said of the defeat of the Sillon. The true victor is not Christianity, not even the Roman Church—it is infidelity.

What France needs is a layman's religion. It will never go back to sacerdotalism. The Sillonists tried to present Roman Catholicism to the people as a progressive, social layman's religion. Their effort has been broken, and I fear that we must consider their influence as at an end.

It is a pity for France. Just as in the days of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, of the Jansenists' revival of the seventeenth century, and of the Liberal Catholic movement of the nineteenth centuries, Rome had dried up the well of spiritual life and social progress that had begun to spring up. The story of the Sillon is also a lesson to those who, judging from the policy of the Roman Church in countries where it is in a minority, believe that she may become an important factor in social and moral progress.

M. Sangnier and his friends, most orthodox Roman Catholics, believed that they had the right to think for themselves about social and political questions, and to teach their followers what they considered as true. They believed that they had the right to stretch out a hand of fellowship to men who did not belong to their Church, but had the same social and political aspirations as themselves. For these two reasons their work has been ruined by him in the interest of whom they believed to be working, and whom they call the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Is that not a lesson for us who, thank God, do not bow down before any other Master than the Divine Christ Himself?

