St Antony's College concentrates on research in modern history and social studies, with centres or groups specialising in Europe, Russia, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East and Latin America. This new series is an expansion of *St Antony's Papers*, twenty-two volumes of which have appeared since 1956. It is designed to present a selection of the work produced under the auspices of the College, and it will include full-length books and monographs as well as collections of shorter pieces.

**CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY**

**ANTICLERICALISM, EDUCATION AND MORALS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**ESSAYS EDITED**

**BY**

**THEODORE ZELDIN**

**LONDON**

**GEORGE ALLEN AND UNWIN LTD**

**RUSKIN HOUSE MUSEUM STREET**
the attempted restoration in 1873, as leader of the movement for the *Vœu national* and the most formidable opponent of the Catholic liberals, he was to be constantly on the public stage until his death in 1880 at the comparatively early age of sixty-five, and for many years afterwards his teaching on Church-state relations had a profound influence with the traditionalist right in France. His obituarists, however, might have come closer to the true lesson of his career if they had looked beyond the national champion of ultramontanism, and paid more attention to the bishop of Poitiers. In the more significant conflicts of local politics Damay and the prefecture had won; twenty years of Bonapartism had left their mark, and Pie was never able to recover any serious degree of social or political influence in the Poitiers region. The cardinal’s hat, for which he was nominated in the last year of his life, and which now hangs above his tomb in the darkest of the great Romanesque churches of Poitou, was an ironic prize for his resolute but ultimately fruitless struggle against the current of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

POPULAR ANTICLERICALISM IN THE ISÈRE (1852-70)

ROGER MAGRAW

1. Introduction
The nineteenth-century French clergy were never able to shed their dreams of a return to an idealized ancien régime in which, in the words of one bishop of the 1830s, ‘all Frenchmen were brothers because all were Christians’. The myth of a Christian rural France was the basis of much ultraroyalist political thought during the Restoration, when some went to the point of advocating universal suffrage as a tactical device to drown Paris, the ‘modern Babylon’, in a damp wave of loyal Catholic peasant votes. The illusion never died completely. But it was an illusion—and one whose persistence gave a perpetual ring of unreality to legitimist politics throughout the nineteenth century. In brief,

3 In the early days of the religious sociology of Le Bras and others in France in the 1930s the discipline, which aimed at presenting a detailed empirical survey of religious practice in France as an aid to pastoral work, was bitterly attacked by the Catholic right which denied the existence of a ‘mission problem’ and insisted that France was still the eldest daughter of the Church with her faithful masses intact and merely led astray by freemasons, Jews, socialists. G. Siefer, *Church and Industrial Society* (1964), 47.
the French peasantry was no longer—if it had ever been—the devout loyalist mass of *ultra* dreams.¹

The process by which large sections of the rural population were alienated from the Church is still obscure and not yet fully understood—and obviously varied from region to region. A number of local studies provide at least a framework for the religious history of the department of Isère. The department seems to have resented—and in some cases resisted—the militant dechristianization campaigns attempted by popular societies during the 1790s.² Mute hostility and sporadic violence greeted attempts made from Grenoble to suppress Sunday observance or to enforce ‘décadre’.³ Refractory priests were supported in several mountain cantons. On the other hand fears of a religious counter-revolution—a *Vendée dauphinoise*—failed to materialize outside one or two of the mountain areas. By 1802 over one-quarter of the churches in the department were closed or unusable and clerical recruitment was in serious decline. Prefectoral reports spoke of the ‘surly’ attitude of many of the younger generation toward the clergy.

The reaction of the department toward the Restoration provided clear evidence that any sympathy shown to the clergy during the ‘persecution’ of the 1790s would not be forthcoming in a situation where the clergy themselves threatened to be the persecutors.⁴ In Grenoble churches priests insisted that the Bourbons would restore all *biens nationaux*. The peasantry were alarmed by the return to the nobility of unsold émigré lands. An anonymous writer in late 1814 prophesied a new peasant revolu-

¹ For a brief survey of the available evidence for religious observance in the period before 1789 see F. Boulard, *An Introduction to Religious Sociology* (1960), 28-44.
² Pierrette Paravy, *La Faillite de l'église constitutionnelle et de la déchristianisation dans le département de l'Isère*, Diplôme d'études supérieures, typescript, Archives départementales de l'Isère, 2 J 16 (henceforth ADI).

The conflict in the villages

tion against the nobility and the clergy. A society for the defence of holders of *biens nationaux* was set up.¹ In rural areas rumours of the restoration of the tithe were rife.² Many clergy were physically threatened. In Bourg d'Oisans peasants cut down the clergy’s woodlands. A police report noted that ‘through fear of seeing themselves stripped of their property [the peasantry] regret that they did not kill the nobles and the priests and dream of revenge at the earliest possible opportunity’.³

The experiences of the Restoration left an indelible stamp on the peasantry’s relations with the clergy for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

As Mareilhy’s study of the diocese of Orléans shows, the anticlericalism of the 1830 Revolution, a revolution very largely provoked by the throne-altar alliance, could be as violent in a rural department as in Paris.⁴ But in her estimation it was the events of the Second Republic which applied the coup de grâce to what remained of the religious practice of the ancien régime and which ‘consummated the divorce between clergy and people everywhere that the notables did not throw their weight in favour of the former’.⁵ As a number of recent studies have shown the Second Republic—in sharp contrast to the traditional picture of urban radicalism stifled by the apathy of a property-owning anti-socialist trogolodyte peasantry—saw the last great rural jacobie of French history in many areas of central, south-eastern and south-western France.⁶ And as studies elsewhere have shown, the mass peasant vote for Louis Napoleon in 1849 was not for

¹ Rolland, *op. cit.*, p. 92. This was particularly strong in Vienne, which until 1790 had been a diocesan centre. Its fifteen religious houses had been confiscated, sold to the local bourgeoisie and used as workshops so that ‘there were very few families who did not possess some portion of church property’.
² ADI 52 M 5, *Rapport sur la situation du département de l'Isère*.
³ ADI 52 M 5, *Police politique*, 1 November 1815.
⁴ C. Mareilhy, *op. cit.*, 453.
a ‘saviour of society’ against urban ‘reds’ but for a guarantee of the ‘revolution’ against legitimism and the local notables. Peasant Bonapartism was the guarantee of equality, the revolt of rural democracy against its traditional ties. As Vigier has stressed the February revolution in Isère and elsewhere in the Alps was decorous, merely substituting one group of notables for another. The true revolution came with universal suffrage which offered the chance of making the Republic rurale et paysanne. This left-wing Bonapartism of the peasantry was to be a constant factor in the politics of the Second Empire.

The aim of this study is to attempt to illustrate the type of conflict which arose between this nascent rural democracy and the society of notables which it confronted. The notables were the pillars of French Catholicism. They deformed religion by tying it to the narrow conception of the throne-altar alliance and to the conservation of a social order. Inevitably therefore for anyone opposed to legitimism or to the existing social order, anti-Catholicism became a foundation stone of class-consciousness. Since religion, in the eyes of its friends as well as those of its enemies, was secularized, ‘it became a party and, at a time when parties had little substance, the most organized party. It was treated as such by those outside it.’ The process by which the French Church, by espousing political reaction and social conservatism after the June Days, uprooted the fragile plant of social Catholicism and created the final chasm between itself on the one hand and the urban artisan and working classes and republican intellectuals on the other, is fairly well known. But


2 Vigier, *op. cit.*, passim.


4 C. Marcilhac, *op. cit.*, 492.


---

France’s retarded industrialization meant that she was and remained predominantly rural, not urban, and the plebiscites showed that she was Bonapartist not republican. The incessant anticlericalism of the governments of the Third Republic, installed by universal suffrage in a predominantly rural country, cannot be attributed solely to the tastes of urban workers or positivist politicians. This study is an attempt to show how and why anticlericalism found a rural audience.

The department of Isère falls naturally into two distinct sections. The north and west—the Bas Dauphiné—is a region of low hills and plains orientated towards the Rhône. Its population was relatively dense in the mid-nineteenth century. The proximity of the urban market at Lyon and the extensive road building of the July monarchy stimulated the growth of commercial agriculture. Although the department was still approximately seventy per cent rural, the Bas Dauphiné contained a large number of industrialized communes, some close to the Lyon agglomeration. The largest of these was Vienne with a population of some 17,000 and with silk weaving, textile and metal industries. Tullins, Voiron, Rives, Bourgoin and Jallieu were other communes with similar industries. This was the area of the department most susceptible to the influence of the radical ideas of Lyon.

The southern and eastern sections of Isère make up the alpine Haute Dauphiné—its population less dense, its communications much more primitive, its agriculture almost entirely of a subsistence nature in mid-nineteenth century. It was an area where national politics meant little. Its orientation was towards Grenoble, a city of as yet only 25,000, without the heavy industry of the Lyon plain.

We do not possess any full statistics on church attendance comparable to those given by Dupanloup’s thorough survey of his Orléans diocese in 1852. Impressionistic reports from prefects

1 Marcilhac, *op. cit.*, 488-91. These figures, which apply to the rural sections of the diocese, are very striking confirmation of the extreme inroads made into rural religious observance by the mid-nineteenth century. In all 11 per cent of the population attended church on Easter Sunday—67 per cent of the girls in the 13-20 age-group, 20 per cent of the women over
and bishops in 1877 have enabled Gadille in a recent study to compile a national map of religious practice in that decade. In general, the Bas Dauphinois stands out as an area of barely average religious practice—though it was higher than in Orléans or any of the ten dioceses around Paris. The alpine regions show a much higher level of religious observance—yet even so reports from eighty-nine mountain parishes for 1855 indicate that the large majority of men were absent from Easter services. The seventeen parishes for which we possess reports both from 1855 and from the only other such enquiry in 1827-29 show a substantial drop in attendance in the interim. A prefectoral report of 1883 notes that the observance of much of the rural population of Isère was limited to rites of passage—baptism, first communion, marriage and funeral. The procureur général summarized the attitude toward the clergy as 'a mistrust which was not sceptical but completely reserved—so adopting a form of self-defence for fear of being less free arbiters of their consciences, their families and their municipal interests'.

II. 'Anticlericalisme de clocher'—administrative conflicts in local politics

This essay attempts to investigate the factors and issues at the local level which can explain the depth of hostility to the Church which underlay the Ferry legislation. At the national level the main causes were briefly the clergy's nostalgia for legitimism, its political and social conservatism, its highly unpopular ultramontanism during the Italian question and its pretensions to dominate primary education. But at the communal level it is perhaps unrealistic to imagine that rural populations with a very limited range of political interests shared the opposition to the

20, 23 per cent of youths 13-20 but only 3% per cent of the men above twenty years of age. Two-thirds of the girls who practised ceased to do so after marriage. See also Barral, Le Département de l’Isère, 255-7 and Archives épiscopales de Grenoble B 15 and D 50.

1 Jacques Gadille, La Pensée et l’action politique des évêques français 1870-1883 (1967), 152-3.
2 Archives nationales F.19 5812 30 May 1883. (henceforth AN.)

'The conflict in the villages'

'intellectual obscurantism' of congregational education, or the sympathy with Italian unification or republican intellectuals. The roots of anticlericalism are to be found, not invariably but extremely often, in rural areas, in squabbles which in themselves are of a nature so parochial as to appear unimportant. Yet if one traces the courses of these innumerable petty disputes it becomes obvious that by a logical sequence they progress towards the sort of issues which comprised the national politics of the Third Republic.

A municipal council, at odds with the curé over the expenses for the re-roofing of a church, instinctively protests when the curé starts a campaign of propaganda for a congregational school. A mayor whose protests about the interference of a curé in local administration have produced no remedies from prefect or bishop sees in a rash sermon defending the Pope's temporal power an opportunity to discredit the priest in the eyes of the government. The opportunities for friction within the village were infinite. The state officials complained: 'the clergy involve themselves too much in temporal matters and create discord in the villages'; clergy of the department were seeking 'to control the mayors'. Such observations provide a constant threat in the reports of sub-prefects to the prefect. The sub-prefect of St Marcellin said that in his arrondissement the influence in politics was slight, but 'in administrative questions, on the other hand, it is sufficiently strong to contribute to divisions in many communes. All too often, where there is a party in conflict with the local administration, the curé can be counted among its main members.'

In the villages no question aroused so much friction as the expenses involved in the rebuilding of churches, provision of new bells, the siting of new cemeteries. Year after year the sub-prefect of St Marcellin was forced to reiterate his protests in his terminal reports. The clergy are generally too much inclined to consider religious buildings, churches and priests' houses as belonging to them personally—a tendency which leads them to undertake all sorts of work without the agreement and sometimes even against

1 ADI 52 M 44
2 ADI 52 M 38, 1859.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

the wishes of municipal administrations. It is not possible to refrain from protesting against their tendency to consider the cemeteries as belonging to the church. Citing disputes in Réamont and St Romans, he stressed this as a constant source of friction 'above all in small villages'. Frequently the root of such clashes lay in the curé's domination of the parish council. Legal forms would be ignored. The parish council would be controlled permanently by the curé's sympathizers, election deferred indefinitely. Very frequently one encounters protests that the parish council has not been re-elected for six years or more.¹ Having escaped from communal control, the parish council, then 'considering communal funds to be at their disposal', undertook rebuilding schemes which created financial deficits for the commune which they were often unwilling to meet. The irregularities of the running of parish councils, whose recruitment is often done not by way of election at all but simply by choice of the bishop, and which often buy, borrow and carry out all their financial transactions without either authorization or control, often rebounds on to the heads of the communes. These latter, who have not been consulted at all, refuse to bear the consequences of actions to which they have not agreed and such circumstances have been the cause of skirmishings in a great number of communes. All too often the ecclesiastical authorities claim the benefits of the rights allowed them by law but refuse to accept the obligations these entail. The parish councils regard the communal budget as being at their disposal—from this spring perpetual difficulties between mayors and curés.²

In La Frette, the polarization of the commune into warring factions seems to have occurred early in the 1850s. However, it was the Italian war which provided the municipal council with the opportunity to denigrate the curé in the eyes of the government. In 1859 we find the bishop writing to the minister of cultes concerning the curé's alleged outrages against the government—refusal to sing the Te Deum and 'equivocal comments on the

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

Italian war'.¹ The bishop, while insisting with apparent certainty that 'no one is more distressed than myself to see the pulpit become a platform and the most important political questions broached and dealt with before a village audience', said that he thought the charges exaggerated and the request of the population for the curé to be moved unacceptable.

The procureur général's report, while emphasizing the instituteur's evidence that the curé had indeed called for prayers for the Austrians, 'since they are Catholics like ourselves', tended to place the cause of the incident 'on the divisions for which the commune of La Frette has been the stage for several years'. He said that soon after the arrival of Abbé Drevet, a friend of his, M. Romanuet, treasurer of the parish council, had gone bankrupt, owing ninety-six francs. In order to prevent the parish council from acting against M. Romanuet the curé adopted the simple device of refusing to call it together. From that incident one can date the struggles which, since then, have become progressively embittered' with Abbé Drevet refusing to keep parish council accounts and insulting the municipal administration periodically from the pulpit.

The canton of Grande-Lempes in the Bievre has been seen as a traditionally conservative area with a high vocational ratio and an obstinate tendency under the Third Republic to vote for 'Order'.² The commune of Longchanel was one of the few in the Isère to put up any resistance to the making of inventories after the Separation. Yet it was this area of the arrondissement that the sub-prefect of La Tour du Pin noted for conflict with its curés, perhaps for the very reason of the local pretensions of the clergy.³

¹ AN F 19 5813, Letters of Bishop and Procureur général, July 1859.
³ A. Siegfried, Tableau politique de la France de L'Ouest (1964 edition), 390-400, notes the existence of areas of high religious practice which nevertheless succeeded in remaining independent of the political and administrative control of their priests. This paradox rested on their ability to maintain a logical distinction between their Catholic religion and its local representative. All too often, in Isère at least, a single long-serving unpopular priest was sufficient to destroy local church-going habits which then never afterwards revived. For example, at St André le Guz where there was 'open war' for

¹ See, for example, ADI IV v 33, Parish Records of Fontaine, 1869.
² ADI 52 M 44, December 1862, monthly report.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

In his report of 5 October 18571 he lamented that ‘this part of the arrondissement—“la terre froide”—has always had the sad privilege of providing a public spectacle of its invertebrate hatreds. I would add that unfortunately one does not find at all in this canton people of a sufficiently exalted social position or with a sufficiently firm and independent character to raise himself above these petty local rivalries and whom the administration can consult when necessary.’

In Longchampe, for example, ‘it would appear that reconciliation is impossible’. The contestants were the curé ‘a man of spirit, too much perhaps’, and the mayor, ‘a violent man, very jealous of his authority’. The curé had used all his possible means to get money for a new church bell: his success ‘exasperated the mayor’. The curé pressed for the reconstruction of the church and from the pulpit criticized the municipal council for their opposition. He then interfered in the local elections in an effort to overthrow the mayor. His failure left him open to further administrative pressure so that ‘he would have done much better to have kept out of it.’ The prefect’s report to the minister blamed the curé for the coming ‘all-out war’. ‘His haughty and pretentious character ... has created numerous enemies in the parish.’

In October 1858 the sub-prefect of La Tour du Pin wrote to the commissaire de police at Grande-Lempe urging him to protect Abbé Chalons against a threat from twenty-five pères de famille who had ‘made it known that they had made up their minds to go to the priest’s house to evict Abbé Chalons, without doing him any harm, on the pretext that he was disliked by all his parishioners’. A month later the sub-prefect protested at the violence twenty years between a priest of violent character who charged excessive burial fees, etc., the sub-prefect reported: ‘At St André they no longer believe in religion. Religion is very largely the example set by the priest.’

1 AN F.19 5812.
2 Cf. Barral, 92. Well under twenty per cent of the Bilhre was held in estates of more than twenty hectares. This contrasts with nearly fifty per cent in the neighbouring canton of Valloire, to the west.
3 AN F.19 5812, 7 October 1857.
4 ADI 52 M 35, October and November 1859.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

which had been permitted to occur by the police and the garde champêtre and at the fact that the ‘guilty have not been found’.

Just to the south of Grande-Lempe at Marnans, in the canton of Roybon, the curé was driven to pulpit polemics against the municipal council for their failure to undertake satisfactory church repairs.1 In St Gervais the curé made use of the mayor’s temporary lack of attention to build a fresh cemetery, demolishing the walls of the old one in the process. Challenged by the municipal council to explain this and similar actions, he told them not to interfere in parish council affairs. Though the sub-prefect assured the mayor that the curé’s action was indeed highly irregular, the curé refused to give way. Despite strong protests from the local authorities the priest ‘claiming that the cemeteries belonged to the parish council, would not agree to the commune having anything to do with them.’

Grande-Lempe itself was the scene of protracted conflict in the early 1860’s. Here Abbé Ballet was accused of misappropriating funds collected by the charity society for victims of a fire.2 The curé became the target of a flood of caricatures, abusive verses, cartoons, distributed and sung year after year in the cafés and cabarets of the town, or sent through the post from Grenoble. Typical was the verse which appeared in March 1860 which began

‘Tu avais donc, adroit, gredin,
Sans tambours, ni trompettes,
Porté ton impudente main
Sur le don céleste.’

(So, cunning villain, without drums or trumpet accompaniment, you laid your shameless hands on the holy gift.)

The sub-prefect in 1860 lamented that the affair had already ‘produced the very worst results in this district’. In an act of considerable tactlessness the local clergy openly supported a ‘legitimist’ in the local elections of 1861. In 1862 a ministerial enquiry on

1 ADI 52 M 43, Sub-prefect of St Marcellin, 12 March 1861.
2 ADI 52 M 44, Sub-prefect of St Marcellin, November 1862.
3 ADI 52 M 35; 52 M 42; 52 M 445 IV v 57, Parish Records of Grande-Lempe.
try to make her take time off from school to sing in the choir and numerous other *tracasseries*. By January 1868 the sub-prefect was reporting an accusation that the curé had refused to celebrate the *fête de l’Empereur* and that he was rigging parish council elections.

Such examples could be repeated in an endless list of local variations on a very similar theme. The point which emerges is that though anticlericalism in France has generally been thought of in terms of the working classes of the urban areas and the artisans, lawyers, doctors, café owners, etc., of small *bourgs*—the type of conflict described here was more intense in smaller rural communes. Although it is undeniable that, in the Isère, the workers of Voiron or Vienne tended to have a greater ideological hostility to organized religion, their near-atheism in the context of a large commune meant that they could spend much of their lives without needing to come into any direct contact with the Church. In smaller communes, where the curé was one of the notables, the consequences of any divergence of opinion had greater impact on a larger proportion of the community. Hence the frequency of conflicts in rural Bièvre, despite its reputation as a ‘Catholic’ area. However, it would be misleading to suggest the paradox that ‘anticlerical’ areas produced fewer anticlerical demonstrations than ‘Catholic’ areas. One of the most virulent conflicts over church construction comes appropriately from Corbas, on the plain of Lyon, midway between Lyon and St Symphorien, a ‘rural’ area, but one highly influenced by the advanced left-wing tendencies of the city which found an audience among local shoemakers. The area had been subject to a fit of violent anticlericalism in 1848, when many priests were driven from parishes—for example at Chaponney and at Villeurbanne—and St Symphorien elected a fervent republican, Etienne Buyat, as conseiller général in 1864.

1 See, for example, Marcilly, *Le Diocèse d’Orléans sous l’épiscopat de Mgr Dupanloup 1848-1878* (1962), 340-472.

---

*CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY*

the question of the funds cleared the curé from the charges, but his guilt had already entered too deeply into popular mythology for the court decision to have any effect. In October 1862 the sub-prefect noted that ‘this priest, who is so disliked by the population, continues to be caricatured and lampooned in a truly scandalous fashion’. The latest caricature placarded round the commune showed him wearing devil’s horns, trampling on books marked ‘Law Book’ and ‘Scriptures’ and waving a banner inscribed ‘First prize for telling lies’. It is superfluous to add that religion and public morality suffer from this deplorable state of affairs.’ The sub-prefect complained of the bishop’s reluctance to change the curé when it was so obvious that ‘Abbé Ballet can no longer carry out his evangelical mission’. Not, indeed, until 1866 did the bishop sanction a change.

The Bièvre had no monopoly of such conflicts. One finds the same pattern repeated in disputes in, for example, St Martin d’Hères, now a suburb of Grenoble, or in La Ferrière, south of Allevard in the mountainous east of the department, where municipal politics were wrecked in the 1860s by the interference of Abbé Ballet, described by the local *justice de paix* as ‘an uneducated man, full of prejudices, immensely full of himself, who assigns himself the right to dominate everything in the village, public and private business as well as consciences. The municipal authorities have wanted to retain their independence.’ On September 19th the mayor asked the prefect that the curé be moved. The parish council, he said, ‘cannot remain with the members of the curé wishes, for he makes his choices out of pure spite against the commune’. Though not treasurer of the parish council, the curé was constantly buying objects for the church without permission. He was trying to dominate public life, insulted the municipal council, and even slandered women who wore crinolines. Simultaneously the *inspecteur d’académie* protested to the prefect that the curé was trying to get the *insitutrice* removed although she was popular with the villagers, and was

1 ADI IV v 94.
2 ADI IV v 52, Parish Records of La Ferrière, J.P., to Prefect 12 November 1867.

---

180
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

The conflict at Villeurbanne which culminated in the expulsion of the curé in 1848 is of interest as an example of the greater polemical sophistication of anticlericalism near Lyon. In 1845 the municipal council went to the trouble of having printed a long Reply to Abbé Delion’s latest libell. Its aim was ‘to reject the lying accusations with which you are trying to brand our commune’. The issues are familiar—municipal council’s refusal to build a church, cureau’s misuse of funds of the parish council and so on. The cureau claimed that he was generous to the local poor. The municipal council retorted: ‘As for your generosity, if we admitted it as genuine it would be only a farthing set aside from the gold which you amass from our village—because for many years it has passed into proverb that your living is profitable. The lease is good we say, in our vulgar language, all the farmers going into it poor come out rich. Thus you can easily give to the poor the thousandth part of what you levy from all the inhabitants. They denied the cureau’s accusations that he had been physically threatened. ‘The era of martyrs has gone. But Tartuffes still exist. Permit us to correct your pious mistakes.’ After refuting all the cureau’s claims, the pamphlet contained in its final paragraph a withering criticism of the ‘style’ in which priests all too often waged these local conflicts.

‘We have finished, M. le cureau, but, poor sinners that we are, we are unable when concluding to drape ourselves in the oh-so-noble, oh-so-Christian sentiments which you express at the end of your writing. The beginning of it was a slander, an outrage against the entire commune. The end, on the contrary, is full of evangelical ascension. With hands crossed on your breast, eyes piously lowered to the ground, you take God as your witness that you are committing an act of violence by writing at all, that you feel loath to use phrases that may wound. We were profoundly moved, M. le cureau, our eyes are filled with tears; we wanted to re-read your communication. We compared the beginning with the end—then all of a sudden, enlightened by sudden inspiration, we cried out, full of enthusiastic admiration: Oh Molière, you are the greatest of writers and Tartuffe is immortal.’

Many of the communes in the area were given to bouts of anti-

183
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

to life in mountain parishes. M. Berlioux in Clunis was stiff, unbending and had accumulated many enemies. M. Giraud at Livet had let relations get so strained that it 'prevented him from doing all the good he wanted to do among the population'. In all he advised the bishop that it would be expedient to move seven priests to prevent a deterioration in the situation.1 This was the type of information on administrative questions which the diocesan authority needed more often—and which, if acted on, could have deprived militant anticlericals of a large section of their audience. Such advice was received on occasions from other deans. For example, the dean of Bourgoin wrote to the bishop to urge him to move the curé of Chateauvillain, saying that although the specific charges against him—raising pew rents, slandering families from the pulpit—were not true, nevertheless the curé had made it obvious that he wanted a change of mayor and in consequence the clash could only get more violent unless the bishop intervened. But examples of such advice are very rare.2

The habitual response of the episcopal authorities was the very reverse of this. In part this firmness stemmed from the bishop's suspicion that all too many of the charges made against his priests were false. At Ornacieux the sub-prefect was finally forced to agree with the bishop that 'contrary to information received' the curé had not been guilty of the various irregularities alleged.3 Again it would appear that the bishop was well aware that the easiest administrative course open to the departmental authorities faced with such disputes was to sacrifice the priest for the sake of peace and quiet in the locality. In Masson the mayor and municipal council exceeded their powers in control of the parish council. The bishop urged a prompt redress of grievances and then demanded the mayor's resignation because of his 'threats and violation of all rights'.4 The sub-prefect recognized fully where the legal rights of the case lay but insisted that the mayor's dismissal would be 'very badly interpreted in the neighbouring country'. and would be sufficient to arouse further conflicts between the curé and his parishioners—which would do little to facilitate his ministry'.5 The mayor acted illegally but 'under the pressure of popular opinion'. In these circumstances was it opportune to instigate legislative measures against the offenders? In face of an attitude which suggested that the anticlerical faction in the village had only to be the larger, the more vocal or the more influential in order to persuade the departmental authorities to turn a blind eye, then perhaps episcopal stubbornness in such a dispute can be understood. A further example may illustrate how complex such a decision could be for the episcopal authorities. In Oytes, where the curé was forcibly expelled in July 1866, there seems sufficient evidence from a variety of sources to suggest that his own character was very largely at fault.6 A similar but less decisive riot had occurred four years previously in protest against the priest's interference in local elections. By 1865 the curé was claiming that his house was uninhabitable and that the municipal council ought to supply funds for its repair. The sub-prefect visited the parish to investigate the long-standing dispute and reported that the house was the 'finest and best maintained in the arrondissement' and complained to the prefect that the curé had ranted at him that no one was going to tell him how to behave, 'neither the mayor, the sub-prefect, the prefect nor Mgr the bishop himself'. On 2 July 1866 the village gave the curé a two-week ultimatum. He was forcibly prevented from conducting several masses and drunks burst into the church to disrupt those services he did hold. The sub-prefect blamed the bishop.7 During the period before the expiry of the ultimatum he remarked: 'Let's hope that Monseigneur will finish by waking up; once this respite is over we must expect the consequences of the inactivity in which the episcopal administration has seen fit to take refuge'. The moral responsibility therefore for any violence lay with the bishop. After the expulsion the local gendarmerie noted that the inhabitants

---

1 Parish Records of Bourg d'Oisans in AEG, 9 July 1869.
2 Parish Records of Chateauvillain in AEG, May 1869.
3 ADI IV 4 77, December 1870 AEG Parish Records of Ornacieux.
4 ADI IV 69, 2 June and 10 July 1870.

---

1 Ibid., 19 August 1870.
2 IV v 77 1287 720 AEG, Parish records of Oytes.
3 Letter of 17 May 1866.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

had at last made sure that justice was done. All would be well provided the curé stayed away.3

The reasoning behind the bishop's refusal to change the curé thus appears at first sight to contain little more than stubbornness. However, if one traces the dispute further back the motives of the departmental administration itself become rather dubious. In 1864 the sub-prefect had agreed in a letter to the prefect that the curé's demands were not altogether ill-founded, that the whole dispute rested on a clash of temperament between curé and mayor.4

But the main consideration of the sub-prefect was not really with the rights of the particular case at issue but with questions of administrative convenience. 'M. Emard, the mayor of Oytes, is a conseiller d'arrondissement, an influential man throughout the canton of Heyrieux. I am afraid that if we act too strictly with him he will resign as mayor—which would be highly regrettable since it would be extremely difficult to find anyone to succeed him. I really do not know which side to take to conciliate all interested parties... In the period between this letter and the expulsion of the curé the sub-prefect obviously decided that it was easier to snub the episcopal authorities than to risk offending a local notable and denied his original admission that the curé had a legitimate case. In these circumstances the curé's letter to the bishop complaining of illegible letters from the prefect, and banalities from the sub-prefect is not surprising. 'I now understand that those people (ces gens-là) have a very strange view of justice and common politeness.' The bishop himself as early as 1857 had described the 'deplorable and degrading condition of the curé's house. I have seen it myself and can assure you that there are no exaggerations.'5 The original request for repairs had been made in 1847.

In such a case the curé himself was obviously far from blameless. Although five men were fined at the trial in Grenoble for the riot, the fines were very light because of the extreme violence of

1 Letter to Prefect, 24 July 1866.
2 Letter of Sub-prefect to Prefect, 4 October 1864, and AEG, 11 July 1866.
3 Bishop to Prefect, 9 August 1857.
4 Abbé Meunier's behaviour in court. The procureur général washed his hands publicly of any future disorder should the curé return to the village. Nevertheless, it seems undeniable that the departmental authorities were willing in such cases to connive at behaviour that was, strictly, illegal on the part of municipal administrators and local populations. The resistance by the episcopal authorities becomes more comprehensible. The wisdom of it is much more doubtful. A month before the final expulsion the dean of Heyrieux had begged the bishop to remove Meunier from Oytes where 'his excessive zeal strives up almost continuous opposition'. The bishop's laconic footnote on the letter is revealing: 'We cannot give way to riot'. This insistence on the necessity of firmness lies at the heart of episcopal response to all local disputes. As the dean of Heyrieux himself had advised the bishop when consulted about the Oytes situation four years earlier, 'In all cases of this sort, when these types have boasted that they will get rid of their curé, I think it is best to leave him at his post. Failing that we would all be exposed day in and day out to denunciations each more stupid than the last.'

This policy of 'no surrender in the face of violence' and of 'wise firmness' was the standard response of the episcopal authorities to local disputes. Applied without flexibility, it could lead to the sort of long-standing conflict which bedevilled the local politics of Corbas, a small commune near Lyon which assumed proportions sufficient to attract L'Univers and other national clerical journals. Here there was a smouldering feud between the village and its curé, who started repair work on the old church, ignoring the municipal council's decision that what was needed was a church situated rather nearer the centre of the commune. The mayor was determined and well supported. 'Except for a feeble minority... the mayor has won the support of almost all the local inhabitants. He is a sensible man, loyal to the government, and one who is in
no way prepared to submit to the tyranny of the curé," reported the sub-prefect. Already in 1864 a petition from some seventy pères de familles had been sent to the prefect expressing resentment at the possible cost to the village of the curé's schemes. The mayor simultaneously sent a letter of protest to the emperor himself which began by insisting on specific issues—that he, as mayor, had the right to approve all building schemes—but which broadened into something which can stand as a virtual manifesto of the viewpoint of local administrations vis-à-vis the clergy in these decades. Why, he asked, was the departmental authority so slow in seeing that justice was done? Perhaps no one attributed any importance to a dispute which was boiling up unnoticed in a tiny commune? Or was it not rather that, since it was a curé who was at the root of all the trouble, no one wished to come into conflict with the bishop? I cannot positively affirm anything, but I attribute the hesitation which has been shown in this case to this second factor. I am not quite certain why it should be so—perhaps they are afraid of the influence of the clergy in the event of some political upheaval or other. Your Majesty, this is not the first time that I have noticed such hesitation in legal cases in which a priest is involved. Everyone seems scared to cross the diocesan authority even in the person of one of its lowest members. I am not afraid of bringing this matter to your Majesty's attention: this way of going about things loses you many supporters. Much too much tolerance is shown to the parti clérical which would like to dominate and rule everything. The people fear this domination, which is the most humiliating of all, and one against which no resistance can ever be too strong. It is a domination to which I intend to submit neither as individual nor as mayor. From this latter viewpoint no administration would any longer be possible. I would prefer to resign rather than be incapable of making the authority which has been given me respected. Furthermore this antagonism exists in many communes in Isère. There is a perpetual war between mayor and curé and it is almost always the latter who is "right" because the bishop does not care to admit that any of his priests can be in the wrong. The case was taken to court in Vienne, where it was judged that the curé had exceeded his powers and that the work ought to be demolished. The court decision was the signal for the release of pent-up hostility. While the curé barricaded himself in the church with a handful of pious women and threw stones at the demolition workers; these, supported by a large crowd of villagers proceeded to smash the windows with ladders and to knock the roof off.

Predictably relations became even more strained. The curé refused to baptize children of the mayor's supporters. The attitude of the episcopal authorities was at once transformed. Two years before the 'riot', the sub-prefect had implored the bishop to tell the curé to be more restrained. The bishop had been prepared to be conciliatory to the extent of urging the curé to drop a just but inexpedient claim for a lodging allowance, warning him against regarding the church and the cemetery as his personal possessions and reprimanding him for writing direct to the minister of Cultes. But the bishop stressed that, despite the curé's flouting of a valid court decision, the 'riot' was a crime, a revolutionary act which cancelled out any errors the curé might have made. He shrugged off the prefect's suggestion that the 'riot' was 'in some small way linked with the illegal rebuilding'. Although claiming that 'I have made myself a rule never to demand the dismissal of a mayor, whatever type of man he may be', he did try to secure the mayor's resignation. He withdrew the curé but refused to send another

1 AN F.19 5812.
2 ADI 700444, Petition to Prefect, 26 July 1864.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

until such time as the mayor and commune apologized collectively for the 'crime'. He hoped to make use of this device to turn the village against a mayor responsible for creating a pays sans prêtre, thus following the advice of a local clerical. He insisted that he was being lenient in not using his legal right of excommunication. When worship was finally restored in 1869 he insisted that the same curé should return there and that the commune should restore the old church to its pristine condition for occasional use for burials, despite the fact that the new church had been completed. Not surprisingly the village protested at the expense involved in this, insisting that no other commune of that size had to keep up two churches. The curé aggravated the situation further by starting to construct a belltower (despite further court injunctions) and by saying that the bishop was using the chapel to 'punish' them for 'having committed an outrage against public worship'.

Consequently by July 1871 the sub-prefect was reporting that, despite a new mayor, feelings in the commune were again running high. He had consulted with a local mayor, 'a conservative...

irregular behaviour by the curé. Indeed the press is proving wide-awake these days in picking up the slightest event of this type. The Sifals and the Opinion Nationale make themselves the daily mouthpieces of complaints against the clergy and these two newspapers would eagerly seized the opportunity to attempt to win over to their side all the mayors and all the municipal councils of all the communes in the Empire by pointing out that the central government was abandoning its officials in cases where they had right on their side. Our electoral position could suffer seriously from a discussion carried out on these terms.' Nevertheless, the minister's earlier spontaneous reaction to the dispute tends to confirm some of the fears expressed by the mayor of Corbas in his petition to the emperor. The riot, said the minister, 'will have caused displeasure among the clergy in the diocese of such a nature as to deprive you of its support in the next legislative election. Faced with numerous difficulties which you can foresee, and also by the increasing efforts made by the democratic party it is necessary to humour the susceptibilities of the section of the conservative party which obeys the lead given by the clergy.' Minister of Interior to Prefect, 22 March 1869.

3 ADI IV v 44, Bishop to Prefect, 19 October 1871.

4 ADI IV v 44, Prefect to Minister, 20 February 1869.

1 ADI IV v 44, 25 December 1871.

2 ADI IV v 44, Sub-prefect to Prefect, 7 September 1871.

3 ADI IV v 44, Sub-prefect to Prefect, 30 September 1871.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

very little given to supporting the views of the mayor of Corbas, who admitted that the curé used the old chapel more than the new. This mayor had consulted with 'several very moderate local men' who were fully determined that if the old church were to be used it should be as a communal school. From personal visits the sub-prefect insisted that 'two-thirds of the inhabitants are supporters of the mayor, and most want to demolish the old chapel'. Reports from the gendarmerie insisted that the curé was widening the gulf by slandering the morals of some of the girls in the commune, insulting the lay institute, and claiming that 'blood ought to be split to wash away the curse which has been hurled at the parish'. In conclusion the sub-prefect stressed that there was an obvious need for a new curé 'less compromised, less violent'. Only then might the commune be willing to accept the bishop's decision to continue to make use of the old church. 'If you bring these facts to the attention of Monsieur explain to him fully that I have no intention of harming a churchman. You know that I am not anti-Christian. My brother is a bishop and I cannot be accused of hostility to the clergy. I am merely doing my job. I am convinced that the present curé of Corbas cannot be useful to the cause of religion.'

The episcopal authorities remained adamant. In 1873 the dispute was still smouldering. Why did successive bishops—Ginouillac was replaced by Paulinier in 1870—risk provoking further anticlerical outbursts by this type of uncompromising stand? One might suggest that they were convinced that an innocent priest was being victimized were it not for several clear indications to the contrary. The curé of St Jean de Bormay described the curé of Corbas as a 'quarrelsome meddler', and another curé said in 1868 that the bishop was making a mistake by not being conciliatory—the new church was sufficient reparation for the damage to the old. It was unreasonable to expect an apology: 'Such an act of humility is inconceivable on their part. In all that happened at Corbas none of the protagonists ever had the intention of insulting religion or the religious authorities. They were merely
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

annoyed at the behaviour of one priest. 1 On the bottom of a letter received by the bishop in 1871 he scrawled that the curé was ‘very cunning but neither prudent, frank or honest’. 2 Yet this was never admitted in public correspondence—indeed here he was allowed to have ‘an impressionable and sensitive mind’. 3 The starting-point of the episcopal attitude to the case lay very close to that of the proclerical minority on the Corbas parish council and to that of the dean of St Symphorien—that the mayor’s rule was a ‘horrible tyranny’, aiming at ‘blatant hostility’ to the Catholic religion, that the commune was divided into ‘agitators’ and ‘honest Christian families’. 4 The commune was a ‘miniature 1793 and getting worse’. Thus the riot of 1866 was an ‘illegal and revolutionary act’, a ‘crime’ which nullified all irregularities of the curé, past, present or future. Though one must admit that the mayor, by his own admission, was ‘professionally anticlerical’ and that there was a degree of both administrative and political expediency in the attitude of the departmental authorities and of the ministry, it appears undeniable that in such cases episcopal overreaction in defence of ‘religion and public morality’ was self-defeating.

One other aspect of the reaction of the clergy and of the episcopal administration to criticism needs to be stressed. In a report on the dispute at Corbas, in July 1871, the sub-prefect of Vienne reported that similar conflicts existed in neighbouring communes such as St Sorlin, St Alban les Roches, Les Roches. 5 Much of the trouble came from curés who poured oil on the flames by violent language. ‘They treat peaceable republicans as though they were communards.’ During the Second Empire the episcopal administration used ‘men of 1848’ as their bogey. At Brezins, where the curé wanted to build a new church and raised pew rents to help pay for it, the bishop was prepared to conciliate the anti-curé faction by limiting the new building to being an auxiliary chapel until it was reported to him that the villagers had marched on the new building hurling insults and singing the Marseillaise and other revolutionary songs and that the centre of opposition was a café which served as a republican nucleus in 1848. 6 At Veyrin, the minister and the prefect agreed that the bishop ought to move the curé who constantly attacked the new municipal council against whose election he had campaigned from the pulpit. 7 The bishop refused to comply with this request for the curé had informed him that the municipal council was made up of ‘revolutionary rabble, affiliated to secret societies’ and had warned him that if the commune succeeded in having him disciplined ‘What a triumph for the enemies of the clergy, since all that needs to be done is to accuse them and brand them as guilty’. 8 ‘It would be easier for me to deal with Russians or Turks than with my beloved parishioners... I have against me only those who are hostile to religion. Persecution by types such as these is glorious rather than humiliating.’ Eventually in 1867 the bishop was prevailed upon to end the conflict by moving the priest. The municipal council had insisted that they were the representatives of universal suffrage and that the curé was a legitimist who had maintained that he would ‘never bow down his head to the tricolour’. In this case the bishop finally admitted that ‘now more than ever priests ought to be reserved in their comments on universal suffrage’. 9 This was a rule which the episcopal authority would have done well to have urged much more forcibly on its clergy.

A final source of irritation between local populations and their clergy was the puritanical condemnation of dances, wine shops, festivals, amusements of all kinds—perhaps an expression of the last vestiges of Jansenism? For many clergy the local cabaret was

1 AEG Curé of Marennes 1859 (undated).
2 AEG October 1871.
3 AEG Bishop to Procureur-général, 23 November 1866.
4 AEG Bishop to Procureur-général, 25 November 1866; Dean of St Symphorien to Bishop, November 1867. ADI 700428 Parish council to Bishop, 18 August 1866 and 31 July 1868.
5 AEG Sub-prefect of Vienne to Prefect, 8 July 1871.

192

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

pay for it, the bishop was prepared to conciliate the anti-curé faction by limiting the new building to being an auxiliary chapel until it was reported to him that the villagers had marched on the new building hurling insults and singing the Marseillaise and other revolutionary songs and that the centre of opposition was a café which served as a republican nucleus in 1848. At Veyrin, the minister and the prefect agreed that the bishop ought to move the curé who constantly attacked the new municipal council against whose election he had campaigned from the pulpit. The bishop refused to comply with this request for the curé had informed him that the municipal council was made up of 'revolutionary rabble, affiliated to secret societies' and had warned him that if the commune succeeded in having him disciplined 'What a triumph for the enemies of the clergy, since all that needs to be done is to accuse them and brand them as guilty.' It would be easier for me to deal with Russians or Turks than with my beloved parishioners... I have against me only those who are hostile to religion. Persecution by types such as these is glorious rather than humiliating.' Eventually in 1867 the bishop was prevailed upon to end the conflict by moving the priest. The municipal council had insisted that they were the representatives of universal suffrage and that the curé was a legitimist who had maintained that he would 'never bow down his head to the tricolour'. In this case the bishop finally admitted that 'now more than ever priests ought to be reserved in their comments on universal suffrage.' This was a rule which the episcopal authority would have done well to have urged much more forcibly on its clergy.

A final source of irritation between local populations and their clergy was the puritanical condemnation of dances, wine shops, festivals, amusements of all kinds—perhaps an expression of the last vestiges of Jansenism? For many clergy the local cabaret was

1 ADI IV v 33, Prefect to Minister of Culture, 3 May 1866.
2 ADI IV v 19, Minister to Prefect, 26 April 1867. Municipal Council to Minister of Justice, reported by Sub-prefect to Prefect, 8 February 1866. Minister of Justice to Bishop, 28 October 1865.
3 AEG Curé to Bishop, 26 November 1865.
4 AEG Bishop to Prefect, December 1866.

193
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

at one and the same time a 'talking shop' and a platform for agitators, and a rival centre of attraction on Sundays when the population should have been at mass. From Moitieu the cure triumphantly sent to the vicar-general the 'confessions' of a 'wretched old reprobate of ninety-two' who stated that the cure was right to preach against dancing and against wine shops, for these latter were centres of 'conspiracy against public order and against religion' where many in the village, including the mayor, spent their Sundays. From Cordian, near Lyon, the priest protested to the prefect against a population that spent 'the larger part of its days and nights in wine shops and cafés. You were asking, M. le Préfet, what do the representatives of the civil authority do? Alas, M. le Préfet, I must complain that they behave like the others.' At Goncelin in July 1837 the cure tried to get the local 'fête baladine' prohibited. At Gries (see above, p. 185) one of the reasons for the cure's unpopularity was his attitude to such matters. The local cure of Heyrieux backed him up. There would always be excessive dancing: 'We cannot abolish totally the in-veterate scandals of our countryside but we ought to be allowed to fight against them, and above all not to approve them'. At La Ferrière the cure slandered the character of women who wore crinolines. At Villenomieu the cure wrote urging the bishop to give financial support to the school run by the nuns, the only civilizing force among a 'wild, coarse' population. Should the school disappear, 'this hamlet will become worse than ever: the great majority no longer go to mass. They work all day Sunday. They spend their evenings in cabarets feeding themselves on the devilish doctrines of evil newspapers and listening to scurrilous attacks on religion and its priests.'

Such trivial, yet passionate and commonplace conflicts were the daily background from which militant anticlericalism on issues such as the schools question was to emerge.

1 AEG 29 September 1834.
2 ADI M 55, 2 January 1837.
3 ADI M 55, July 1837.
4 AEG Curé of Heyrieux to Bishop, 1862.
5 ADI IV v 52, J. P., to Prefect, 12 November 1869.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

III. Anticlericalism and the School Question in Isère 1852-70.

On 30 March 1848, forty-five instituteurs from Isère met in some school premises in Vienne. They declared the 'phalange' of schoolteachers to be the avant-garde of civilization and called for one of their number to stand in the next legislative elections, not merely to advocate the cause of education but:

1. to bear witness to the contempt and indignation they felt for the scandalous and tyrannical obstacles which the 'coterie jésuite' had raised against them;
2. to demand prompt and genuine suppression of all the religious teaching orders, both of men and of women;
3. to call for the complete independence of the teaching body from all religious authority and to insist that education administration and inspection be placed entirely in the hands of teachers.

Here was a lay programme thirty years before Ferry; a striking testimony to the resentment felt by the teachers of the Isère at the spread of congregational education and at the supervisory powers allowed to the clergy by the law of 1833. But for 'laïcité' it proved a false dawn. Carnot's projects for the suppression of the 'letter of obedience', which allowed those in religious orders to teach merely by virtue of presentation of a letter from their superiors, for free compulsory education, for public libraries, higher teaching salaries—all fiercely denounced by the clerical press in the Isère—were the victims of the Second Republic's rightward swing after the June Days.

Instituteurs had been not infrequent participants in the outbursts of anticlericalism in the Isère in the early months of the republic. With political reaction came systematic reprisals by local notables and clergy against instituteurs who had shown too overt a taste for suspect newspapers, expressed too vocal a disdain for the Church. In Moret, for example, the instituteur had taken his chance in

1 ADI M 55.
2 L'Unio Dauphinoise, 4 July 1848 and 6 July 1848. For Carnot's educational reforms see P. Carnot, Hippolyte Carnot et le ministère de l'instruction publique de la deuxième république (1948).
February to settle old grievances by inciting the commune against the curé. By late 1848, labelled a 'red' he had been ousted by cure and municipal council. The March 30th meeting, a gesture of collective professional solidarity by the lay teachers of the department was nullified by the events which followed. Isolated in his village, subject to the pressure of local notables, cut off by salary from the middle class and by education from the peasantry, the instituteur was a prey to retaliatory persecution, encouraged by successive government measures—the petite loi of January 1850, the loi Falloux, the imperial decree of 1851 giving prefects wider powers. The republican Patriote des Alpes, soon to be suppressed, tried to oppose the petite loi by setting up an 'Association pour la conservation des écoles laïques' and by drawing attention to the plight of the instituteurs subject to clerical pressure.

The example of Morette was typical of many communes in the Isère. The price paid for the momentary gestures of radicalism or anticlericalism was the systematic administrative 'purification' of 1850-53 carried out with such efficiency that, for the remainder of the Empire, reports on the political conduct of the purged teaching corps were to indicate an almost unanimous loyalty to the government. In 1848 only three instituteurs were dismissed or suspended, in 1849, six—only two described as 'political'. In 1850 the figure rose to forty-five, of which thirty-five were specifically 'political' or for reasons of 'irreligion' or conflict with the curé. In 1851, thirteen were disciplined, one explicitly for hostility to the curé at Roche Tuir but several for 'inconduite', 'mauvais principes', irreligion, and similar vague charges. In 1852 nineteen were disciplined, in 1853 eleven. By 1852 they had been cowed. None was reported as voting against the plebiscite. Thereafter only the occasional instituteur had to be weeded out for social, political, or religious subversion. This forcible weaning from militant republican anticlericalism did not imply any improvement of relations with the clergy in the Isère. Rather, hostility to clerical influences in education had to be muted for fear of government reprisal. It was deprived of outlet other than in factional struggles at communal level. Only when the Italian question forced the imperial government to give its attention to the clerical viper which the loi Falloux had nurtured in its breast did the laic sympathies of Rouland and Duruy allow an explicit anticlerical attitude.

The persecutions of radical instituteurs did not pass without indications of popular unrest. The Inspector Mathieu noted on 19 January 1850, 'To strike them down might perhaps be an unwise action which would sow unrest in the communes where they work and there the majority of them are protected by the sympathy of the population'.

The advantages given to the Church at the departmental level by the loi Falloux are too familiar to require more than a brief outline here. They included most notably, the place given to the bishop on the departmental council, the retention of curé-mayor supervision in the commune, the recognition of the 'lettre d'obéissance', the choice between academic and congregational lists allowed to communes, the exemption of congregational schools from pedagogic inspection by laymen. The insistence that all communes of 800 people (Art. 41) should have a communal school for girls was to be a further provision which accelerated the expansion of congregational education in the Isère. This said, however, one must beware of emphasizing too strongly the subservience of imperial education policy to the Church, however strongly Thiers may have insisted that the purpose of the 1850 act was the subordination to the clergy of the '36,000 anti-cures, frightful little village orators'.

In the first place, the decree of 9 March 1852 and the law of June 1854 redrafted the balance of 1850. In the conseil supérieur the elective aspects of the 1850 law were suppressed and two inspecteurs généraux created to make the minister's weight felt in primary education. Surveillance of primary education was transferred to the prefects who, through inspecteurs d'académie, could nominate and change instituteurs and so on—hence the complaints by militant ecclesiastics such as the bishop of Montereuil that the prefects...
not the Church were confiscating powers once held by the université.

The avowed aim of Falloux was to moralise ‘education too cut off from religion’. Hence the supervision by the curé, the emphasis on scripture and catechism at the expense of history, the insistence that the instituteur should be and be seen to be a Christian and should take his pupils to church. The ideal teacher in Fortoul’s 1852 circular did not wear a beard, ‘symbol of anarchy’, avoided ‘political clubs and cafés’ and was full of respect for authority. The ideal école normale produced not intellectually advanced, but ‘sages institutrices’ who could teach the catechism as well as arithmetic. Such an ideal seems to have been scarce in the Isère. In 1845 Inspector Richard lamented that ‘the great art of moulding the heart at the same time as the mind is understood and practised to its full extent only by a very small number of lay schoolmasters and mistresses’. In a report of the same year the inspecteur d’académie wrote, ‘good social relations existing between priests and schoolteachers can do nothing but consolidate the calming down of men’s minds and the moral future of the country. Alas among the majority of them there is insufficient feeling of Christian resignation towards the difficulties of their position.’ Inspector Châteauneuf lamented that ‘the religious devotions of the majority of schoolteachers are limited to an occasional prudent appearance at church’. As will be seen below it was the contrasting emphasis stressed by lay and congregational education that caused many of the local disputes in the department.

If the majority of the institutrices were to prove unwilling to play the role of passive moralizers to the rural masses, the higher echelons of the educational establishment in the Isère were themselves never as devoted as a Montalembert might have wished to the cause of clerical control of education. From 1859 onwards the Isère had in Massy a prefect little disposed to aid ‘the congregations’ invasion’ of primary education, who had lost his previous post in Lourdes for determined opposition to the Lourdes

′miracles. The departmental council played its part in the disciplining of radical institutrices in 1850-53, but during the Empire came under the control of the inspecteur d’académie and of his inspecteurs primaires—often extremely critical of the intellectual level of congregational education. Both Cresp, the inspecteur primaire of St Marcellin for thirteen years, and Habans of la Tour du Pin won a reputation with the local sub-prefect for indulgence to lay institutrices and bitter hostility to congregational education. ‘I have had the chance to see yet again on my recent tour of the communes that the primary school inspector’s attitude scarcely improves. He shows himself much too openly hostile to the clergy, preaches to the institutrices that they ought to be independent and gets them to mistrust the administration,’ reported the sub-prefect of la Tour du Pin about Habans in October 1862.

Although the inspecteur primaire of the Isère had complained in 1847 of the ‘invasion of public education by the religious teaching orders’, neither the régime nor the department was too favourable to their expansion in the 1840s. The freedom allowed by Article 31 of the loi Falloux to communes to choose congregational education, and the recognition of sixteen teaching orders as ‘établissements d’utilité publique’ cleared the way for their rapid growth in the Isère. In 1848 there were thirty boys’ public schools in congregational hands. By 1860 the figure was seventy-one. In 1861 the sub-prefect of St Marcellin insisted with some plausibility that ‘the clergy is moving towards the complete absorption of all primary education on behalf of the teaching orders. In the communes where the schools are still in the hands of lay schoolteachers the clergy busy themselves obtaining favourable circumstances for the setting up of church schools. If we are not very careful this movement will continue imperceptibly everywhere and lay education will, in practice, be annihilated.

The expansion was most striking in girls’ education. In 1852

1 ADI T.17.
2 ADI T.14.
3 ADI 11 N 32.
4 ADI 53 M 44.
5 ADI T.165, 168.
6 ADI 53 M 43, 14 November 1861.
there were 160 lay écoles publiques de filles and 116 congregational. By 1860 there were 226 lay écoles publiques and 179 congregational. In addition there were 110 lay private schools and sixty-four congregational. 356 lay schools taught 14,000 girls; 243 congregational schools taught 17,000. 1

It must not be assumed that every establishment of a congregational school provoked the resentment of local populations, lay instituteurs or departmental authorities. The more militant anti-clericals among the instituteurs had been purged. The imperial authorities in the early 1850s were anxious to keep on friendly terms with the Church. The congregations themselves may well have lacked the personnel to make a frontal attack on all communities and tended to withdraw in cases where their projected arrival was arousing hostility. Financially harassed municipal authorities welcomed the arrival of congregations supporting themselves from pious legacies of legitimist or bourgeois notables anxious to see mass education in safe hands. On occasions, as in Port de Beauvoisin, the curé was also able and willing to pay the sœurs’ modest salaries from his own pocket. 2

The substitution of nuns for lay instituteurs rarely produced local resentment. Intelligent, unmarried, independent lay instituteurs scarcely harmonized with rural conceptions of woman’s role in society. The nuns, coming in groups of three, made themselves part of village life, looking after the curé’s washing (as at Montfalcon) 3 or tending the sick (as at La Combe des Eparres), 4 or keeping kindergartens for younger children. The Isère lacked an efficient école normale for instituteurs whilst a leading family of the department, Murinais, had founded an école stugère for nuns of Notre Dame de la Croix. However by the late 1850s the communities were beginning to resent the hold of the congregations on girls’ education. Habans’ reports frequently expressed dissatisfaction that the 1850 law allowed no powers of pedagogic inspection, resentment at the fact that barely one-fifth of the directrices

1 ADI T.8, 14, 315.
2 ADI IV v 84.
3 ADI T.447.
4 ADI T.447.

had diplomas, distraste for excessive concentration on the catechism and religious studies. 1 The Italian question brought Rouland to a similar way of thinking. His circular of 11 May 1860, founded on the suspicion that the congregational schools might be teaching legitimist or ultramontane ideas, gave the inspecteur primaire a measure of control over congregational schools and examinations. The staunch Bonapartist of the majority of the lay teachers in the 1860s, contrasting strongly with the ultramontane leanings of the clergy, helped redress the balance of 1850.

The lay instituteur merged more easily into village life than his female counterpart. Frequently he supplemented his income by acting as secretary to the mayor, helping peasants with their accounts, or measuring fields. On many occasions when the curé’s conduct had divided the commune into rival factions the instituteurs sided almost without exception against the curé. The inspecteur d’académie commented in 1856: ‘The relations of instituteurs with mayors are better than their relations with curés. They know by bitter experience that in conflicts that arise between communal and religious authorities it is the former which usually come out on top. The instituteur thus chooses the stronger side.’ He added, ‘The instituteurs do not always have the necessary deference and respect for the curés. In some rural communes they align themselves alongside the large number which shows neither veneration for the priest’s office nor sympathy for his person. It is not rare in this department to see the curés target the siane de siane as soon as someone gets it in mind to attack them. Petitions containing odious accusations are hawked around covered in signatures—and the instituteurs do not remain aloof from these goings-on. 1

But it was not simply in order to side with the dominant factions in local politics that so many instituteurs in the Isère became involved in bitter struggles with the curés towards the end of the 1850s. Perhaps for many mayors the roots of opposition to the

1 ADI T.14.
2 AN F.17, 10, 779.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

congregational school may have been an antieclericalisme de clocher, a still bitter memory of recent conflicts over church repairs or the site of a graveyard. But for many lay instituteurs the struggle appeared to be one for the very survival of lay education. The congregations in many cases appeared to have raised their target to complete annihilation of lay education even in communes where the lay school was popular, efficient, and sufficient for local needs. From the resistance of local populations to calculated clerical attempts to undermine lay instituteurs’ positions sprang a wave of local antieclericalism in the Isère in the 1860s. As will be seen later, the hostility to congregational education was to find its most lucid ideological expression in the larger industrial bourgs such as Tullins, Vostre and Vienne, among militant republicans influenced by the wave of laicisation in Lyon in 1870–73, in the foundation in the Isère of branches of Macé’s Ligue de l’enseignement or in the pages of the radical Rêveil du Dauphiné in 1870.1

What is perhaps more important is the way rural populations in the Isère, not basically hostile to clerical education, were antagonized by the congregations’ attempts to destroy existing lay schools. Later in the decade, they also came to resent clerical resistance to widely approved reforms suggested by Duruy. This reaction was not limited to traditionally republican areas—resentment at clerical pretensions in the educational field was marked also in rural ‘Catholic’ areas.

The degree to which the struggle between lay school and congregational ‘invasion’ could dominate local politics is well illustrated by the case of La Buissé. In December 1865, the mayor wrote to the inspecteur primaire complaining of the curé’s refusal to participate in drawing up a list of ‘free pupils’ for the communal school and of the ‘continuous agitation of the curé who has never stopped attacking my administration’.

By 1865 the curé had made a more determined assault on the lay school by soliciting the donation of property and 1600 francs per year from a local legitimist lady, the comtesse de Michalon, in order to set up a congregational school to ‘save the area from the devil’, and then by denouncing in the pulpit the municipal council’s refusal of the offer. The municipal council wrote to the prefect that this had been ‘announced very pompously to overthrow the municipal council’. The prefect was also informed that ‘Disorder continues... could it be otherwise when it is widely known that the curé only induced Madame de Michalon to make this donation to get rid of the instituteur. But he is so well liked by his pupils and so sympathetic to their families that despite the fact that the congregational school is free he has kept many more pupils than his competitors. Providence, M. Le Préfet, never blesses works born amid passion and lies.’

In the following year the municipal council renewed their correspondence with the prefect to defend the lay instituteur from slanders which the curé sent to the school inspectors. Already, they insisted, enquiries by the justice of the peace and by the prefect himself ‘have clearly shown the innocence of the instituteur despite the defamation of his character by the curé from the pulpit and elsewhere. In short, the Brothers were invented to get rid of the instituteur and of the mayor with him.’ In La Buissé, as in so many communes, the instituteur acted as the mayor’s secretary. The municipal council went on to describe the curé’s attitude as one of trying to ‘rule us like a new court of the Inquisition. Already the majority of people in villages no longer go to church on account of the sermons they hear there.’

According to the municipal council the Brothers were not themselves disliked by the populations of the communes, ‘but they have become unpopular because they were imposed on us after denunciations and defamations, all the proof of which you have in your hands’.

However, a petition signed by over two hundred péres de famille in 1866 struck a more positively antieclerical note.1 After saying that in their opinion the ‘free school’ had been founded specifically ‘to endanger the communal school from which our children draw a firmly based education’ and describing the zeal, devotion and popularity of the lay instituteur, M. Baudet, and the

---

1 See, for example, Gontard, ‘Une basile scolaire au XIXe siècle’, in Cahiers d’histoire (1958), Vol. 3.

2 ADI 702244, 1866 (undated).
success of his adult evening classes which attracted audiences of upward of sixty in a population of 1,200, the signatories concluded that all this 'bears loud witness to the fact that our district will only live with lay education, and that all pressure which might end in turning it away from this would only produce bad effects'. They feared that the fact that the new school was free would cause the authorities to withdraw the lay instituteur but insisted that nothing could induce them to send their children to a religious school: 'in the event of lay education being withdrawn from our commune...we will see ourselves forced to send our children to be taught outside the commune, which would involve us in heavy cost'. They ended by pleading to the minister 'to maintain lay education in our commune, as the only type which is suited to the needs of our younger generation'.

The struggle, however, had scarcely started. The procureur général reported that the curé was refusing first communion to pupils from the lay school. The 'incessant conflict' between the two groups of partisans, each seeking to 'destroy the other's establishment', made local administration difficult. The mayor protested that the pupils of the lay school were being discriminated against by being placed in the side aisles of the church. The curé protested that the instituteur allowed his pupils to shout offensive remarks outside the congregational school—and a retaliatory petition of 135 signatures informed the authorities that the curé was hostile to the Republic. Madame de Michalon stepped up her campaign by a further sizeable donation to the congregational school.

The question arises as to the extent to which this type of campaign received the backing of the episcopal authorities. Mlle Mareilhas has shown that the 'liberal' Dupanloup undertook a positive campaign to oust lay education in his Orléans diocese. There is no evidence at hand for Isère to suggest that Ginoultiac went to these lengths. However, in La Buisse he gave tacit support to the assault on the lay school by a blunt refusal of the justice de paix's request to change the curé and replace him by a

\[1\] C. Mareilhas, Le Diocèse d'Orléans sous l'épiscopat de Mgr Dupanloup (1964), Ch. VII.

man of 'less violent character'. Any accusations such as the twenty-four page dossier which the municipal council sent to the prefect against the curé were 'manifestly false', and the mayor put himself beyond the pale, said the bishop, when he said there was a 'powerful influence' stopping the course of justice and that before 'this type of criminal (that is, a priest) justice was disarmed'.

Of greater interest is a letter addressed to the bishop's vicar-general from a M. Morel in Vizille, which described a meeting of more than one hundred legitimists in his brother's house and continued: 'If we can keep together in the next local election we hope to get the municipal council kicked out by a handful of votes...It is said that the lay instituteur works very hard and that his pupils make much better progress than those of the Brothers...I have spoken to Brother Philomène, their superior in Grenoble, about this but he tends to treat all criticism as slander. At the same time the headmaster of the congregational school is in Madame de Michalon's pocket so the evil is difficult to remedy. Nevertheless the great aim of the parti noir, its principal basis for hope of a future triumph, lies in demonstrating to the country the undeniable advantage of having a free congregational school founded in the communes. Therefore the tactics in La Buisse should be to demonstrate to the population that the behaviour of the mayor and the local faction might deprive them of Madame de Michalon's donation in the hope that this financial blackmail might lose the mayor votes in the election. At present it is the intellectual weakness of the Brothers which gives the mayor an excuse for resisting the establishment of the congregational school as the communal school.'\[2] The suspicions of the supporters of lay education about a 'clerical plot' were obviously not totally unfounded.

The lay instituteur of La Buisse was fortunate to find a large enough body of militant lay support to offset the financial advantages of the clericals and the pulpits violence of the curé. In Péage-de-Roussillon the young instituteur was less fortunate in

\[1\] ADI 700444 (1) 18 November 1868, Prefect to Minister of Interior; (2) Bishop to Prefect, 24 October 1868. 
\[2\] AEG 28 November 1867.
his struggle against curé, congregation, and local notables. After some four years of conflict he was forced to leave in 1863. The tactics employed by the clerical party were even more ruthless. In July 1860 a letter to the Inspecteur Primaire de St Jean de Bournay reported that the curé’s methods which included household visits to mothers of pupils at the lay school, threats that such pupils would not be given first communion, insistence that pupils should go to the Brothers for confession, pulpit defamations of the instituteur. The curé and the Brothers were free to ‘go into the houses and exercise their “divine” influence on the mothers’. By contrast, the influence of the instituteur was ‘very limited. . . . Nowhere is one as isolated as I am here. These poor inhabitants of Péage, who nevertheless flatter themselves that they are in tune with modern ideas, are so much dominated by the threat “if your child goes to the communal school he won’t get his first communion” that it is truly preaching in the desert to assure them the contrary’. The inspecteur primaire confirmed in his April 1862 report that, ‘the communal authorities and above all the curé are using all possible means to destroy the school’. The instituteur stressed that the opposition was backed by the substantial landowners of the area. ‘The ten or twelve large landowners or merchants keep the bakers, wheelwrights, etc., under with a rod of iron and if these latter do not comply with the slightest whims of these gentlemen then it is goodbye to their business. We would have the larger proportion of the people on our side but they are tied to these gentlemen by links which are too delicate for them to attempt to break them so soon.’

The instituteur—described by the inspecteur primaire of Vienne as ‘both able and full of enthusiasm’—insisted throughout that he had no personal animosity towards the curé ‘but merely the enthusiasm I feel to make lay education triumph’. By 1863 the pressure of landowners and clergy, despite the wishes of most of the local population, forced the lay school to shut.

In St Jean de Bournay similar pressures were exerted but came up against more determined resistance. The mayor backed the opponents of the local congregations and the conflict, spread over more than a decade, polarized communal politics into two factions over these issues. In May 1856 the curé wrote to complain to the inspecteur d’académie about the relegation of the hitherto communal school run by Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne to the status of mere école libre while the new communal school was lay. ‘Since the partisan mentality which splits this commune has filtered down into the two schools, and since it is that which has inspired this change, I have become a mere spectator of the state of conflict which has just been set up around the boys’ school. The essentially religious nature of our population will disappear under the influence of these various lay schools.’

The atmosphere in the commune was not improved in 1858 when, as the prefect protested to the bishop, ‘the curés of Clarantonnay, Calis, St Agnin, Chatonnay, together with the curé of St Jean . . . contested not only in public but from the pulpit the official candidate’ in the elections for the conseil général. The bishop replied that these priests had merely voted for a man who was devoted to the government but also ‘a friend of religion and of the clergy, whereas they considered the official candidate to be hostile to themselves’. The priests had been booted and called as they made their way to vote and greeted by cries of ‘à bas la calotte!’ and ‘à bas la soutane!’ from cafés as they left. The bishop quoted a letter from a handful of local Catholics who blamed the disturbance and the protest to the prefect on ‘a number of men who for many years have taken themselves the task of disrupting the peace of the districts’—even threatening to bring in a Protestant preacher! In July 1856 the instituteur asked for permission to start the next scholastic year earlier to try to prevent the attempt of the congregational school to attract away all his remaining pupils. In 1859 the curé was protesting to the bishop about numerous street fights in the commune between pupils of the two schools which, he claimed, the instituteur encouraged.

In 1860 the chaplain of the local Ursuline convent addressed a letter to the empress claiming that in 1854 the mayor had asked

1 Report of 14 April 1860.
2 ADI T.411: AEG Parish records of St Jean de Bournay.
them to build a sort of kindergarten for the very young children and that now he refused to pay the agreed sum for this. Simultaneously the pro-clerical diligént cantonal wrote to the departmental authorities, 'the Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne, after all sorts of local disputes, have seen themselves forced to purchase at their own expense an establishment where they give a religious education to almost 200'—whereas the lay school had barely thirty.

When on February 10 the inspecteur primaire of Vienne wrote to the inspecteur d'académie, his version of the affair stressed the other side of the question. He saw the lay school and the lay nursery school as living under a state of siege, targets of the same sort of clerical pressure which we have observed in La Buisse and in Péage-de-Roussillon. 'The communal boys' school is besieged and under attack by all imaginable ways and means. St Jean de Bournay is at this moment divided into two distinct parties, the party of the Church and that of the communal authority. But the division concerns more than the schools; it is like a political party, evidence of which was noted in the last elections for the conseil général and which will be seen even more keenly in the elections for the municipal council which are about to take place. The ecclesiastical authorities in St Jean and all their supporters are ruthlessly opposed to the communal school. They even go into homes to recruit pupils for the Brothers' school; all methods are employed to remove children from the communal school—promises, threats, secret influences, anonymous letters and defamation of the character of the instituteur and his assistant, the mayor and his deputy—no efforts are spared.' With regard to the nursery school, the primary inspector denied the story of the Ursulines and insisted that they were trying to undermine the position of the young lay directrice of the communal nursery school. 'These women, one might say, spend a lot of their time on the things of this world. They are furious at the setting up of a kindergarten outside their control.' By 1862 the nuns had succeeded in making life so difficult for the lay directrice that she was considering leaving, but the inspecteur primaire notes that the mayor remained as reluctant as ever to hand the kindergarten over to the nuns. 'If control is handed over to them it will become a nursery where the Brothers' school will come to recruit its pupils to the detriment of the communal school, all the more easily since the children will hardly be trained to fit into the latter'.

The factor determining the failure or success of the clerical campaign in such a dispute was whether or not it could attract the active support of influential local notables who could not merely supply funds but continue to pressure their dependants—tenants, customers and so forth—into supporting the Catholic school. At both St Jean and La Buisse the combination of a strong municipal authority, an influential mayor and popular resentment at clerical tactics saved the lay school. The Isère was, broadly speaking, a department of small property and as such was obviously less susceptible to pressure from legitimist notables than were areas with greater concentration of landed property.¹ The map of congregational education in France was very nearly the map of legitimism.²

It was not that there were no legitimist notables to supply funds. La Buisse was one example. Another was the village of Moidieu, where a certain Madame de Montauban donated in 1859 money and buildings for a congregational school at the instigation of the cure.³ But the response of the commune to the attempt was violent. Already in 1854 the commune had tried to get the cure dismissed, accusing him of being more of a businessman than a priest. The Vienne police chief after fresh complaints in 1860 commented in amazement: 'I thought that since 1789 the title, like all other feudal rights, had been abolished. It seems that it still exists in the rural communes of my district under the name of cauillette.' The cure of Moidieu 'either after the cereal crop or the wine harvest goes from house to house where the inhabitants each

¹ Barral (Le Département de l'Isère, 90) estimates that it would come sixteenth among the departments in a nineteenth-century league table of small landowners. The area held in estates of over 20 hectares was 35 per cent of the total in 1840, 26½ per cent in 1869.
³ ADI 53 M 15, Police report from Vienne 17 March 1860; IV v 69, ADI parish archives of Moidieu.
give him a proportion of the crop. Curé Bonneton also gathers quite a few insults. The curé was unpopular already on further grounds in that he met with some twenty-two other priests at a local village and 'it is believed that this meeting had its purpose more in politics than in religion'. Six years earlier the mayor had already sent in a petition for a change of curé with 120 signatures, demanding a priest who taught Christianity, not one who got mixed up with local legitimist high society and 'wetted his lips amid the cups of sumptuous hospitality with the fortunate ones of the century'. Once there was a choir; now only two people in the village cared to sing in the church. He charged exorbitant burial fees and pew rents.

When such a priest tried to use his influence to get the existing lay schools removed the commune's resistance was predictable. They objected furthermore to the tactics he used to try to get the institutrice dismissed, which consisted of writing letters to the bishop claiming that she was having an affair with a young man with whom she had been seen in a café and to whom she wrote letters whilst she was away in Lyon. The municipal council denied these slanders and retorted that she enjoyed much more public esteem than he did. In March 1860 the curé was denounced for visiting parents to tell them not to send their children to school and for attacking the mayor in his sermons. The dispute dragged on for a further five years, by which time the local police appealed to the prefect to intervene with the bishop to take the necessary measures to prevent violence. The episcopal authorities for once

---

1 The continued efforts of the rural clergy to collect tithe in some communes ties in with the fears expressed by the peasantry in 1815, and with rumours of its possible return in the 1869 election campaign. It is interesting that in his appeal to the French nation in 1874 the legitimist pretender Chambord included a specific denial that a Bourbon restoration would involve such a return—which seems to indicate a very widespread peasant suspicion of it in late nineteenth-century France (quoted in Fauilloux Mémoires d'un royaliste (1925-36), 3, 337). See also C. Marcillan, La Diocèse d'Orléans au milieu du dix-neuvième siècle (1964), 127-8, for this type of feudal survival. This seems to throw doubt on Maurain's assertion (op. cit., 57, n.3) that only in strongly clerical regions was such tithe collection attempted.

---

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES
took the easy way out, feigning surprise at the state of unrest, claiming that it was a case of personal enmity towards the curé by the mayor, but securing his dismissal nonetheless.

Similarly at St Pierre de Chardieu, the efforts of the curé to set up a congregational school with the aid of a large donation from a Madame Gavinet were resisted by the local population. As the bishop was informed, 'The municipal council . . . has refused this gift and is trying to persuade the academy to give them a lay institutrice. Since the communal school is their own work they are proud of it and prop it up.' As at Moidieu the curé slandered the character of the institutrice—the third consecutive teacher he has tried to 'annihilate', insisted the mayor in a long complaint to the bishop about refusal of first communion to pupils from the lay schools. Six years earlier the curé had tried to get the instituteur dismissed on similar grounds—that he was a pillar of the wine shop, taught his pupils dubious songs whilst ignoring their catechism and that he had actually been seen danc- ing and had never expressed any shame at the fact! Throughout the 1850s the curé had failed to get the municipal authorities to make adequate provision for the upkeep of the church. They showed 'a hostility to anything to do with religion. There is a type in the village for whom the altar is always too rich, religious services too well attended, who would like to banish from our solemnities all luxury, all comfort, in short anything that might make an impression on the popular imagination.' The instituteur and the mayor had great influence on the rest of the village, 'uneducated people, always mistrustful of the well-off . . . but on the other hand of a more than sheeplike docility towards those who flatter them in their evil prejudices'. Only two of the twelve municipal councillors had ever been to mass in eighteen years.

The ideas of the curé on how this hostile population was to be
won back to the Church shed an interesting light on the mentality of the nineteenth-century French clergy. No attempt was made to understand the roots of the 'revolutionary' mentality which he attacked. The remedies were firstly to set up a congregational school, secondly to raise money to 'reconstruct a beautiful church in the interests of worship, religion and beauty of ceremony which makes such a big impression on the mentality of our rural populations'. Not surprisingly this attitude, reminiscent perhaps of England's slum ritualists, was worse than useless in winning back an alienated population who merely resented church rebuilding as an additional expense.

At Villemoirieu one finds yet again a pious legitimist benefactress, Mademoiselle Comte, donating 6,000 francs to set up a congregational school in 1869. By the early 1870s the curé protested to Grenoble that the municipal authorities were doing all they could to replace the nuns with a lay *insituteur*—a virtual persecution, he called it. For decades this had been a 'wild, coarse' population. The only hope in the 'fight against evil' was to maintain the religious school. Otherwise 'this hamlet will become worse than before; the great majority will no longer go to mass'.Already 'they work all day Sunday, spend evenings in wine shops feeding themselves on devilish doxies of the evil newspapers and listening to dreadful accusations against religion and priests'. Here was a commune unmoved by many of the tactics which the clergy used in such conflicts. When he refused communion to pupils of the lay school, one replied, 'Very well, keep your precious God'. The situation worsened when the curé made an unsuccessful attempt to oust the mayor. In consequence the mayor demanded a change of curé. The reaction of the local dean whom the bishop consulted for advice is again an interesting example of the higher clergy's attitude towards such disputes. He said the curé had tried to overthrow the mayor, that he was driven on by 'an often excessive zeal' and that a change would have been for the best were it not for the fact that the mayor might regard this as a victory. Consequently any change at that time was 'inopportune'.

These examples should not be seen as isolated phenomena, but rather as among the more striking illustrations of a process which repeated itself regularly in many communes of the department when the congregations attempted to establish themselves under the Second Empire. The conflicts arose not because of the arrival of the congregations themselves, but because so frequently the congregations gave the impression not of fighting to set up *écoles libres* but rather of attempting to annihilate well-established *lay *écoles communales*. In 1860, fifty-seven of the seventy-one congregational boys' schools and 168 of the 229 girls' schools were communal. By 1875, 390 of the 400 congregational schools were communal. The reports of *inspecteurs primaires* in 1867 mentioned conflicts similar to those described above, in Savas Mépin, Villeneuve de Marc, Seyssuel, Chonas, Beauvoir de Marc, and St Prim—where the lay *insituteur*, 'well thought of both in the district and by the authorities, sees his school almost empty'. In December 1864 the sub-prefect of St Marcellin in the course of a long complaint to the prefect about the growing pretensions of the clergy in all aspects of departmental life, insisted that 'the clergy direct their efforts in particular against primary schoolteachers. Under the clergy's inspiration, often with the decisive benefit of donations made specifically for that purpose, the majority of the important communes have called in religious Brothers to control their schools'. Where there were popular objections to this direct process, the *école libre* was set up as a basis for destruction of the lay school. 'This process has already been followed many times. It is what is happening this moment at Renage, a populous industrial commune where the priest, assisted by aid from several factory owners, has just called in the Brothers and set up a school without fees—and already that of the communal schoolteacher is deserted. In January 1866 he insisted that

---

1. ADI 3 J 74.
2. ADI T 167.
3. ADI 52 M 44.
4. ADI 52 M 45.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

there were conflicts over congregational infiltration 'in all the large communes'. The archives contain numerous examples. Even in areas traditionally conservative and deferential to notables and clergy, the tactics employed by the clergy and the Frères produced bitter local resentment. This was most apparent in the canton of Crémieu. Here the clerical-legitimist party had always been dominant. The chef-lieu contained many religious houses and had the largest percentage of religious vocations of any urban centre in the Isère. Nearly fifty per cent of the canton was held in estates of over twenty hectares—nearly twice the departmental average. It was in this unpromising milieu that lay anticlericalism made one of its more surprising appearances in the 1860s—a profound reaction which culminated in the victory of the freemason, Marion, in the 1869 elections over the clerical, de Vaulserre. Here, as in many other areas of the department, the rise of vocal resentment of clerical pretensions seems to have been incited by the clergy's attitude to the Italian question. In 1859 the Abbé Bouchard of Crémieu made a series of violent pulpit attacks on Piedmont which caused sufficient local hostility for the sub-prefect to remark that as a consequence, 'the clergy has no political influence in this district, which is nevertheless religious'. In 1866 the opposition succeeded in electing four members of the municipal council of Cremieux. The commissaire de police attributed this change to the influence of M. Fabre, head of the local lay college, founder of an eighty-member musical society and société de bienfaisance in the town. One of the issues in the elections was the stagnation in the town's economy 'which arises from the fact that the aristocracy puts obstacles in the way of all industrial enterprises'. But the question which aroused the bitterest conflict was that of M. Fabre's lay college. The mayor protested to the sub-prefect of the attitude of the curé who 'has gone so far as to say from the pulpit: 'How do you expect me to support an institution whose pupils emerge rotten to the marrow of their bones?'

1 For example, ADI T 361, 447.
3 ADI 53 M 38.
4 ADI 53 M 45.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

This last incident has ended by exasperating the population which is very proud of its college.

The curé refused to say mass in the chapel of the college. The mayor's continued efforts to get the curé changed met with no response from the bishop. Consequently the school question became the central subject of conversation in local cafés and cabarets. The mayor in a letter to the sub-prefect insisted that the situation was worsening: 'almost the entire population, which sticks by the college, is very exasperated'.

An interesting indication of the mood of the more vocal of the supporters of the college is furnished in a letter written by one of them to the sub-prefect in September, attributing the struggle not to the personal malevolence of the curé but to a determined, co-ordinated clerical plan to destroy lay education in the department. As a pointer to the attitude of the growing number of militant anticlericals in the Isère in the late 1869 it deserves quotation. 'The curé has done what every priest in France would have attempted to do. Since they all obey the same instruction, all are forced to act in similar ways and to show the same hostility to the institutions and personnel of lay education. One might put a bit more fire into it, on the other hand another adds not a bit more tolerance—for he has not the right to do so, and he would keep himself from doing so—but a bit more mildness. It is not a difference of principle or of rules, but only a matter of temperament. Since it is a question of a ceaseless conflict against the college and against all lay schools we must not blame our curé any more than all the others. It is the clerical spirit which wants it to be that way and it will be like that, as in all political matters, for as long as our clergy, while finding solid support and inexhaustible protection in the French government, continues always to receive its orders and inspiration from abroad.' The writer claimed that the clergy were trying to undermine the school by overthrowing the present municipal administration.

The surprise defeat of the marquis de Vaulserre by Marion in the 1869 general election can be largely attributed to a widespread popular reaction in the rural areas of the canton, as well as in the chef-lieu, against clerical pretensions. Crémieu presents in
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

microcosm the entire range of abuses which provoked the rise of anticlericalism in the Isère—an ultramontane, legitimist clergy, interfering openly in local and national elections, and trying to destroy lay education.

The educational conflicts worsened in the late 1860s as Duruy's education policy won much lay support and provoked much clerical antagonism. The reports of the Inspecteurs primaires for the last four years of the Empire illustrate how widespread in the Isère the friction over such issues as the extension of free education, the establishment of girls' secondary education, and the founding of bibliothèques scolaires. ¹ In a terminal report of 1866, the inspecteur primaire of Vienne insisted that 'the wishes of the population with regard to primary education are the same as those that I have already made known—free schooling and teaching given by the institutrices and institutrices'. Unfortunately, 'the clergy in the arrondissement of Vienne views lay teaching with very little favour'. In November, he noted the warm welcome for measures such as adult evening classes among the working class and among men with generous ideas. But the setting up of adult education courses, which are a such a powerful means of spreading civilization and morality, has displeased the clergy immensely—they seem to fear the extension of education. ²

By December 1869 the inspecteur primaire of Grenoble was reporting as 'the only fact worthy of note...the reaction in people's minds in favour of lay schools', and he ascribed this to the

¹ ADI T.489.
² C. G. Duveau, La Vie ouvrière en France sous le Second Empire (1846 445: 'The bitterness of the social struggle makes the worker want to be educated'. Cf. also C. Eménil, Essai sur la vie ouvrière dans le département de l'Isère 1871-1914 (Grenoble D.E.S. typographie), 84-6, notes a great deal of working-class concern with education in the latter years of the Second Empire. Foundry workers in Pontcharra gave support to free compulsory lay education—so did a number of militants in Vienne. It was a worker, Alphonse Alloud, who organized the visit of Macé to that town in 1871 and who supported the Ligue de l'Enseignement. In 1869 a Cercle d'étude progressif des travailleurs was set up in the department (p. 109). In the 1870s another group Le sou des écoles, which was specifically anticlerical, contained a number of Grenoble workers.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

fact that 'congregational education is too exclusively religious', and the popular questioning of the value of teaching theological 'abstractions which are incomprehensible to children at the expense of all else. In his third terminal report of 1870 he again emphasized that 'without a doubt religious instruction ought to be the basis of popular education: but not everything ought to be sacrificed to it. That is, however, what happens in almost all congregational schools and in those where the curé lays down the law to the instituteur. They do not go beyond scripture, catechism and religious history.'

In September 1869 the inspecteur primaire of Vienne, while commenting on the existing uneasy calm, added: 'as soon as a change comes, then immediately the hostility which exists underneath will be brought out'. The 'liberalization' of the Empire provided the first favourable opportunity for criticism of the Church's role in education in the department. The fall of the Empire was to release the accumulated resentment of two decades in which the two streams of anticlericalism—the 'ideological' hostility of committed republicans to the Church's obscurantism, and the strictly parochial resentments of local populations to the tactics used by the clergy to dominate communal education—reinforced each other to produce many attempts at laicization in 1870-1. The campaign conducted by the Ligue de l'Enseignement, or by the radical Réveil du Dauphiné gained its strength at the communal level. In the Isère, at least, laicité was not the brainchild of liberal intellectuals but thrust upon sturdy Catholic peasant masses, whatever Catholic historians might claim to the contrary.

iv. Working-class anticlericalism

It is a commonplace of criticism of the French Church that, after its brief flirtation with democracy and social reform in 1848 it linked itself unequivocally with social and political reaction. Archbishop Affre of Paris had given his support to the democratic wing of Social Catholicism in the 1848 but, with rare exceptions like Mgr Giraud of Cambrai, the vast majority of the hierarchy closed its eyes to the implications of industrialization

and urbanization.1 The 'liberal Catholicism' of Dupanloup stopped short of an understanding of social problems, and Montalembert apostasized briefly from his liberalism to support Louis Napoleon's dictatorship as a safeguard against the gales of socialism which threatened to overturn the frail raft of civilization and culture.2 This espousal of the cause of social conservatism by the hierarchy after the June Days wrecked the nascent Catholic democratic movement centred round the journal *L'Ère Nouvelle* and including, for example, Ozanam who had stood for election at Lyon on a platform which included 'the right to work', and progressive income tax.

As Durossel has shown, in provincial France democratic priests were severely disciplined. Social Catholicism fell back into paternalist charity. The links which in the 1840s had developed in Paris between the Church and such working-class journals as *L'Atelier* were snapped.3 The ideological gulf between urban workers and the Church created a mission problem in the cities which the inflexibility of the parish system, incapable of coping with the influx of rural migrants, merely accentuated.4 Proudhon epitomized this working-class bitterness with his rhetorical question: 'Is there a single honest man in France today who does not say to himself: “Shall I die without killing a priest”?'

The revolution of 1848 in Lyon contrasted with Paris in having

2 C. Mercillat, *Le Décor de l'Orléanais sous l'épiscopat de Mgr Dupanloup 1858-76*. Dupanloup's colleague Montalembert, who spent his life trying to marry Catholicism with constitutional government, confessed to sharing 'not the indifference but the ignorance of the majority of the politicians concerning the working class'.
3 For the bitter rejection of Catholicism on account of its acceptance of dictatorship and social exploration see the eloquent testimony of a member of the *Atelier* group, Corbon in *Le Secret du peuple de Paris* (1866) and *Pourquoi nous vous délaissions* (1877).
4 See, for example, F. Chevalier, *Pratique religieuse et formation d'une grande ville* (1964), a study of Marseilles.

---

**THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES**

strong anticlerical overtones,1 and the influence of the city extended to the industrial communes of Bas Dauphiné where more than twenty communes evicted their curés.2 Claude Éminique has stressed that the working classes in the industrial communes around Lyon had already drifted away from the Church and that in those aspects of life in which contact was maintained they saw it as a tool of capitalism. In the textile industry, for example, employers used nuns to supervise institutions for orphans who worked in the silk factories of Vizille and Voiron. These children were lodged and fed but not paid. The Church was exposed to the double accusation of exploiting the young and of helping to undercut wage rates.3 The religious and administrative authorities made frequent despairing reference to the popularity of wine shops (cabarets) among the workers and the serious effects this had on religious practice, in Vienne and other towns.4

A number of priests in the department in the 1840s had followed a certain Abbé Clavel who had favoured more democratic structures both within the Church and in society and had been severely critical of the conservatism of Mgr de Brilliard.5 In 1848 Abbé Koenig of Tullins stood as a radical candidate in the national elections. But a prefectoral report of 1850 stressed that he had few

---

2 F. Rudé in E. Esméonie, *La Révolution de 1848 dans le département de l'Isère*.
3 C. Éminique *Essai sur la vie ouvrière dans le département de l'Isère* 1871-1814 (1953), 78. A report in the ministry of cultes (in September 1858) complained of 'fickle religious spirit among the workers' in Isère and of workers 'in the workshops who have escaped from moral control'. ADI 52 M 48. Attempts by employers to remedy this by introducing religious orders to teach child workers in the factory proved unsuccessful. ADI 52 M 42. Sub-prefect of St Marcellin, 4 December 1864.
4 ADI 162 M 8, ADI 16 M 7. For example, Sub-prefect of La Tour du Pin, 26 October 1882, lamented that the enormous numbers of cabarets in his arrondissement (1,125) kept workers away from church, wasted their money, etc. Cf. Duveau *La Vie ouvrière en France sous le second empire* 499, 510-11, 531.
5 Vigliar, op. cit., vol. 1, 142-65; vol. 2, 94-118.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

supporters among the clergy in the department. 1 The handful of left-wing priests who survived into the Empire soon found themselves harassed and dismissed by the bishop, Ginoulhiac. 2 This latter supplies a fine example of the virtues and inadequacies of liberal Catholicism in mid-nineteenth-century France. An Orleanist, a one-time youthful admirer of Lamennais, a tactful and moderate opponent of legitimist extremists during the Italian crisis of the 1860s, a scholarly opponent of infallibility at the Vatican Council, he nevertheless stopped short of an understanding of social problems. 3

The career of Abbé Koenig in Tullins raises the interesting possibility that the French working class might have been attracted back to the Church had its ministers shown themselves more sympathetic to their genuine grievances. Tullins was a steel and textile commune with a population of some 4,500. It had a past history of radicalism—food riots in 1847, a radical mayor Masson during the Second Republic, a majority vote for Ledru Rollin in the presidential election and against Bonaparte in the 1872 plebiscite. 4 What makes its history of interest is the presence there of an abbé démocrate, Koenig, who had taken up his post in 1835 and who made himself an extremely popular figure in the town. The sub-prefect in a detailed report on Koenig’s career written for the prefect on 14 December 1860 outlined the features of Koenig’s twenty-two years in Tullins, culminating in his removal in 1857. The sub-prefect had no illusions as to Koenig’s unusual qualities—‘gifted with a remarkable degree of intelligence and with a rare cunning, he had not hesitated to recruit an army of evil acquaintances in order to enhance his personal influence’. These contacts he used in order to arouse in the masses of Tullins

1 AN F. 19 5813, Prefect to Minister of Interior.
2 ADI 52 M 36, Report of Juge de Paix of Mens, 16 February 1858, on dismissal of Abbé Laval of La Mure for radical sympathies.
3 Druillets, L’Art de L’imaginer in Le Mouvement social (1966), comments that his pastoral letters in his industrial archdiocese of Lyon, to which he was elevated in 1860, lack the social awareness of his legitimist predecessor, Bonald.
4 ADI IV v 115, Parish records of Tullins, Sub-prefect of La Tour du Pin, 1860.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

government which has saved them, these men still dream of fresh disasters with fresh dynasties'. The Commissaire de Police refused to accept such stratagems and insisted that Koenig was still associated with many ex-republicans while in his frequent provocative sermons 'it seems to me that there is incitement of hatred against one class of society'.

By 1854 Koenig's relations with the municipal administration were improved by the presence of mayor Masson who shared his political predilections. The years 1854-57 were thus marked by incessant republican propaganda in Tullins and administrative hostility to all clergy other than Koenig. In January 1858 the head of the gendarmerie impériale of St Marcellin wrote to his commander in Grenoble his impressions of the political situation in Tullins. He said that when he had arrived in the arrondissement in 1854 'I was not long in noticing the hatred which exists between rich and poor in that commune, and above all between the police and the municipal leader, the mayor M. Masson, who since the revolution of February 1848 unfortunately exerts a fatal and disruptive influence on the least honourable section of the community, belonging to the demagogic party, which was previously led by the curé, Koenig. He has never been willing on several very difficult occasions to lend his assistance to the police when they requested it.' Masson delighted in freeing prisoners arrested by the police. With his assistance the police would have caught 'those who for several years past amuse themselves by spreading seditious writings against the Emperor and other insulting and outrageous pamphlets concerning the new priest'. He remarked on the degree of class conciliation which other areas of the arrondissement managed to achieve: 'At Tullins, on the other hand, the antagonism between the poor and the rich became more evident every day'. Koenig was cited as 'the prime cause of all these events'.

The anticlericalism of the local administration was well illustrated in its relations with the curé of Fures, a heavily industrialized suburb of Tullins two kilometres away, with a

1 ADI IV v 115, Police Commissioner of Tullins, August 1853.
2 ADI 52 M 35, 1 June 1858.

THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

population of some 1,500 and rapidly growing textile factory. The prefect and the bishop agreed that the moral welfare of the workers required the building of a new church there. Masson was violently hostile. In 1854 he indulged in protracted polemics with the new priest who had acquired a plot of ground for a cemetery without administrative permission. In the summer of 1856 he refused the Fures parish council's request for financial assistance for the curé's lodging, font, and bell. Masson insisted that the Tullins municipality was already in debt, had heavy commitments on roads and schools, and had no intention of making 'useless expenditure'. The sub-prefect had to warn Masson that under no pretext could the municipal council escape paying for the curé's lodgings and then had to contradict the mayor's assertion that he had the right to be present at the financial meetings of the Fures parish council. Masson tried to get the permission to build a church revoked by the minister of cultes, protesting that one church and one priest's house were quite sufficient for any municipal council to have to keep up.

Until 1857 the full extent of Tullins' anticlericalism was veiled by the fact that in Koenig it possessed one of the few radical priests in the department. In 1857 the departmental authorities in a despairing effort to remove such a subversive influence moved him to the parish of Domène. This news was met by violent popular protests, threats to sound the tocsin, petitions to the ministry of cultes (signed by Masson) which circulated in all the cafés. Months after Koenig's departure the comissaire de police was protesting of 'violent unrest which time has not yet calmed'. The man who bore the full force of this hostility was the new curé, Abbé Mège. In December 1857 the sub-prefect reported 'a poster containing outrageous comments against M. Mège, the curé of Tullins, was found on 14 October in Rue St Laurent.

1 ADI IV v 115, Sub-prefect of St Marcellin to Bishop, January 1854.
2 ADI IV v 115, Sub-prefect of St Marcellin to Prefect, July-August 1856.
3 ADI IV v 115, Parish Council of Fures to Prefect, 7 May 1856.
4 ADI IV v 115, Prefect to Sub-prefect, 30 June 1856.
5 ADI 52 M 35, 6, Sub-prefect to Prefect, October 1857 and February 1858.
THE CONFLICT IN THE VILLAGES

paigms. After Villafranca there were many complaints that the emperor had left his task half finished. The local clergy, however, including those in rural areas of the canton, expressed strong ultramontane leanings. In July 1859, Mége was bitterly attacked by the mayor for a supposed refusal to sing Te Deum to celebrate Austrian defeats.

But by comparison with what had gone before, Tallins enjoyed relative calm in the 1860s. It is true that in the elections in 1861 for a new mayor the clergy 'carried out an active propaganda campaign' and gave rise to a violent argument between ex-mayor Richard and Abbé Cled, when the former warned 'His Excellency the curate to indulge in less electoral agitation'. Thereafter, however, for several years, the only documented clashes were over the municipal council's continued reluctance to spend money on the church.

However, the growth of militant anticlericalism in the 1869 legislative elections in Isère did not by-pass Tallins. Indeed, with Voiron, Tallins provided the nucleus of the radical campaigns of Nugues and Réal. Predictably the republican election committee was headed by Masson. After 4 September 1870, a conseil cantonal was set up, dominated by the radicals of Tallins itself, suspicious of the 'apathy' of the local rural areas. A society for 'Republican Education' was established including Masson among its members. A secular secondary school was planned. In a report to the prefect in November 1872, the commissaire spécial de police described the popularity in Tallins of Le Siècle and Le Réveil du Dauphiné, papers which he criticized for 'that tendency to relate nothing but the shameful behaviour of clergy and of certain religious congregations. The canton of Tallins, and above all the town itself, contains a large party of radical republicans who approved of, and to all appearances still approve of, the Paris commune and all its works.'

---

1 ADI 52 M 38, Sub-prefect, August 1859.
2 ADI 52 M 38, 20 April 1859.
3 ADI 52 M 82, Sub-prefect to Prefect, 18 June 1861.
4 ADI 51 M 1, Justice de Paix to Prefect, 9 May 1869.
5 ADI 51 M 82.
CONFLICTS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

Conclusion

There is much evidence to suggest that the years 1869-71 saw a strong wave of anticlericalism in Isère. This was most militant in industrial bourgs such as Voiron where, under the influence of a highly articulate artisan, Alexis Favre, St. Bruno’s church was used as a Republican headquarters in early 1871 and local clergy ‘insulted, struck, and dragged in the mud’. The administration lamented that Favre’s anticlerical brochures were widely distributed in surrounding rural areas just as in northern Isère they were alarmed at the profusion with which the most ‘advanced papers have spread to the most remote hamlets.’ Rural suspicion of clergy had been accentuated by the clergy’s hostility to the 1859 war and to Italian unification—for the Habsburgs were not popular in a border department which remembered the 1815 Austrian occupation. Rumours of secret gatherings of clergy and legitimists to support the Pope outraged ‘men who know nothing except their work’ in rural St. Laurent de Pont to such an extent that ‘fathers stopped going to church and stopped their children attending,’ calling for the dismissal of clergy whose political principles are diametrically opposed to our own . . .’ Dozens of churches emptied in protest at sermons attacking Louis Napoleon’s Italian policy. 1 The national elections provided an outlet for widespread anticlericalism. In 1869 the most striking result was the success of the ‘advanced’ Marion, a Freemason, in rural Cremieu, an area traditionally dominated by the power of nobles and clergy. The local rural population was not hostile to the Empire but could not stomach voting for an official candidate who was a Catholic noble. ‘The only persistent rumour that has gone around is that M. de Vaulserre was a clerical, a friend of the clergy. With the best will in the world it is impossible to persuade a peasant in our countryside that a clerical can be a true friend of the government’. Marion’s election campaign stressed that ‘the clergy had too much power . . ., wished to restore the feudal regime and bring back the tithe.’ 2 The local population, in

some cases already involved in clashes over education agreed with this analysis. Already, a decade before Ferry, the Church was beginning to pay for its misconceived administrative and educational policies and for its political involvement.

---

1 ADI J. 116 Fonds Chaper, Dossier on Alexis Favre; ADI SM. 16 May 1869 and February 1870; ADI SM. 32, M 38; 52 M 42; 52 M 44. IV V 96.
2 ADI SM. 16 Justice of Peace of Beaurapaire July 1869.