

# THE COLLEGE OF BEAUPRÉAU

(15 October 1831)

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The college of Beaupréau no longer exists. We will recount with simplicity the history of its establishment and that of its ruin, so that a judgment can be reached between those who had founded it and those who turned it into military barracks. When despotism reaches a certain excess, there is nothing left to do but to talk about it. The complaint presupposes some hope and is a warning to a forgetful authority. But unprecedented events that accumulate every day prove to us that authority does not forget, that it follows deliberated plans and that, seeing malefactors respecting our cross, our churches, our seminaries, that it resolved to take on the role that had made them blush. This is why we do not complain, we simply recount to France what is being done to her, while we await in peace the inevitable justice that time, even in this world, brings to the oppressed.

The origin of the college of Beaupréau is owed neither to the government nor to a religious congregation. It was founded at the beginning of the eighteenth century by a group of families who built it at their own expense. Later, they entrusted it to modest men, whose names are not found in the intrigues of any period, I am talking about the Sulpicians. During the Revolution, the republicans and the royalists took turns in making it into a hospital. It also survived the disasters of the civil war, spared by both parties for whom it was a shared asylum. In 1809, the government sent there a satellite group from the school of Arts and Crafts of Châlons. This group abandoned it willingly after 100 days, and was transported to the Abbey of Ronseraye in the city of Angers. The building of the college of Beaupréau having no other purpose, an ordinance of 1816 earmarked it for the establishment of a secondary level ecclesiastical school. This was a restitution and not a

gift, in order to conform to the intentions of the families of Beaupréau who, in the past, had turned it over to their fellow townspeople, from whom it was confiscated. Already, one of the former professors of the house had taken away some souvenirs to a neighboring place, had tried to restore its ruins at personal sacrifice, with the help of the widow of Marshall d'Aubeterre whose charity and memory are still remembered in these areas. This aged and faithful servant, placed at the head of his former college that he had hoped to see reborn by being rebuilt, spent his entire fortune on it. He sold his properties one after the other; he repaired the buildings and added new ones. The Catholics joined their charity with his; together, they spent 400,000 francs in fourteen years to build a structure that was an object of envy. Half of the students received their education at no cost and one hundred poor families found life there through work and through charity. This was the college of Beaupréau: local people had established it with at their expense; civil war made it a hospital, the Empire, a school of arts and crafts. Louis XVIII returned it to its original purpose, a former servant of the college had sold his inheritance to enlarge and embellish it, placing his trust in the word of the Sovereign, in justice and in the honor of his country. He wished to be allowed to die there.

But on 8 September 1831, a royal ordinance abruptly dissolved the college of Beaupréau, moved it to Angers, and designated its buildings for another use. As the news about it spread, the Bishop of Angers sent one of his senior Vicars to General Bonnet. The general was surprised, affirming that no such measure had been taken, and that he expected no remedy to be needed because, despite the numerous denunciations against the college, there was nothing for which to reproach it. Two days later, a delegation of fathers of families from Beaupréau was admitted to the presence of General Bonnet, and received the same response. However, on 24 September, the ordinance was called to the attention of the Bishop of Angers. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the Sub-prefect came to inform the venerable superior of Beaupréau *that the government, having decided to educate the Vendée area in the current ideas, first of all, in order to succeed, had to destroy the influence of the Priests and establish permanent barracks at Beaupréau so that the spirit of the day be spread.* The

declaration was supported by four hundred troops who were to secure all the college surroundings. And this is how the city of Beaupréau lost an establishment that its citizens had created, and this is how the Ministry rewards a Frenchman who devoted his legacy in service to his country.

We should, therefore, learn not to place trust in our country because it is no longer with it that we are dealing; not to believe the government because, after having given our time and our sweat, it will come like a robber to carry off the fruit of our labor. If the venerable priest of Montgazon, instead of enlarging and beautifying buildings confiscated by the State from its citizens, had bought a field and erected a hut there, he could have slept in peace up to his last days. Unfortunately, he believed in the laws that protected an owner, when someone in good faith had built on his land, to pay for the price of materials and of the workers, in view of the increased value of his property. But, as the price of his good faith and of his sacrifices, he is instead evicted from a building half of which belongs to him, with no mention of compensation, no consideration of his age and of the poverty to which he willingly reduced himself. Let this incident warn, at least the Catholics, not to install one tile on the buildings the State has stolen from them, but that they finally buy something that will belong to them. Even if it is only a house of pine logs, is it not better to be at peace under its roof than to be at the mercy of those offensive predators who allow you fifteen years to increase the value of the property they took from you only to chase you away with less compassion than for a dog that had barked for fifteen days at their door?

For all that, it is not adequate to benefit from this lesson for the future, we must think of the present. Laws are explicit concerning compensation that is due for constructions made in good faith on the property of another. Catholics entreated Father Montgazon, so loved and respected by those who knew him, not to give up his rights, but to pursue a decision before the courts. It is not simply a question of his cause, but also of ours. We need to know that if Catholics can be despoiled of goods that supposedly were granted to them, they can also be denied reimbursement for work they undertook in good

faith. It would be too much for us to be victimized and hoodwinked at the same time. Let us oppose the might that abuses on its own authority, with such cowardice, the power of the right. Remember that if the mission of the Christian on earth is to suffer in order to console those who suffer, there is another mission, no less sublime, which is to preserve justice for those who are weak, by offering resistance to those who are strong.

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Excerpt from *Lacordaire Journaliste*, 1830-1848. Delhomme et Briguet. Paris, 1897. [Compiled by Paul Fesch]