

THE AMERICAN PILGRIMAGE TO ROME.

It would seem wonderful at any time to find numbers of men and women leaving their homes and occupations for weeks and months, merely to gratify a religious impulse. But it is especially extraordinary that when the temporal sovereignty of the Papacy has ceased, and apparently the great Powers have acquiesced in its cessation, Catholics from every portion of the universe should flock to the feet of the Holy Father to manifest their sympathy with him in his misfortunes, and testify their unalterable devotion to the Chair of St. Peter. The constant stream of Catholic visitors to the Vatican forms, as it were, a visible condemnation of the policy which has despoiled Pius IX. of his dominions, and a living protest against the infamous persecution to which the Catholic Church has been exposed. The American was but one out of many pilgrimages; yet, in some respects, it was the most remarkable of them all. The distance to be travelled was immense, the fatigue to be endured corresponded with the length of the journey, and the cost was an item of considerable importance. The persons composing the pilgrimage were not altogether of that class of society to which an expedition to Rome could be a mere pleasure trip. They were mostly persons engaged in business avocations, who set about their pilgrimage in a serious and devout fashion, setting at nought all the rules usually followed by undertakers of holiday excursions. They, at first, intended to exclude ladies from their number, and only reluctantly admitted to companionship a few zealous women who would not be excluded. They chose for their Director on the way out a grave and pious prelate, Bishop Dwenger of Fort Wayne, who labored indefatigably to supply during the voyage from New York to Havre, spiritual ministrations to his fellow-travellers. Masses were said on board every day, instructions were held twice a day, and a kind of spiritual retreat was practiced by the pilgrims. It was not without difficulty that this part of the programme was carried out. The exclusive use of the second cabin of their steamboat had been paid for; but by some neglect this advantage was not enjoyed, and some Frenchmen of the Communist class gave the pilgrims considerable annoyance, jeering and insulting them while engaged in their devotions. At Paris and Versailles the hotel and travelling arrangements were not made as skillfully as they might have been, the pilgrims meeting with the usual experience of those who journey in strange lands without acquaintance with the language or habits of the inhabitants. Americans travel in their own country with comparative comfort, and are accustomed to pay liberally. It seemed to them extraordinary to be compelled to endure the discomforts of European railways and the extortions of French hotels, to which unwary guests are inevitably exposed if they cannot make their wants understood. Once arrived at Rome the pilgrims were at ease. They found a warm welcome, compatriots and friends. Dr. Chatard, Rector of the American College at Rome, Monsignor Kirby, of the Irish College, and Monsignor Stonor, who represented the Foreign Society for Catholic Interests, were untiring in efforts to do honor to the pilgrims. The Pope gave them an early audience, and a reception which impressed by its cordiality and solemnity the habitués of the Vatican. His Holiness gave private audiences to several members of the pilgrimage, admitting all of them to the privilege of receiving from his sacred hands the Eucharistic Bread. The Romans took the visit of the Americans as one made to themselves as well as to the Pope. Many Cardinals attended the American audience. The Roman Society for Catholic Interests, of which the noblest princes form a part, struck off a medal specially for presentation to the Americans, and gave each of the pilgrims a diploma of honorary membership. Cardinal Borromeo, on behalf of the same Society, opened his rooms in the Aliseri Palace for the evening reception of the pilgrims. Mgr. de Merode invited them to hear Mass in the Basilica, or rather within the ruins of the Basilica of St. Petronilla, lately discovered on his property at Tor Mtancia. The Mass was said by Cardinal Franchi, who administered Communion to the pilgrims, and addressed them from the centre of the apse, the spot where Gregory the Great preached centuries ago. After the sermon breakfast was served in a building on the farm, and after the breakfast Commendatore de Rossi, the archaeologist, gave in the Basilica an explanatory lecture upon the discovery of the Basilica and the monument of Nereus and Achilleus. Perhaps this was the strangest of all the experiences of the pilgrims. They came from the New World to see the Chief and Head of modern Catholicity, and now they stood face to face with the freshly exhumed monuments of the first age of Christianity. The fragments of the Damasian inscription to Nereus and Achilleus, the maimed sarcophagus, the mutilated pillars, and the stone vase, once used to collect for pilgrims like themselves the drops of oil from the lamps burning in honor of the martyrs—all must have brought up extraordinary associations of Christian life as it was fourteen centuries ago. The American pilgrims return to their homes more than satisfied with their journey. They expected civility and respect. They received cordiality and affection. From Pius IX. they had a truly fatherly welcome. The nobles and Catholics of Rome took pains to express their gratitude to the Americans for their visit. The pilgrims were, indeed, made the subject of angry and insulting articles in the revolutionary journals, but this kind of persecution excited neither resentment nor surprise. It is but natural that these pilgrimages and deputations should irritate the men against whose policy they form a protest and an appeal before the world. The bombardment of Rome and the dethronement of the Pope were either approved or condemned by all the Governments of the earth. No sovereign raised his voice in deprecation of the most uncalled-for and most treacherous invasion of a peaceful and friendly kingdom ever recorded in history. But the Catholic populations of all civilised empires are now doing what their rulers failed to do. They are expressing their strong sympathy with the dethroned and afflicted Pius IX., and publishing to the universe the moral condemnation of the perpetrators of his deprivation. The plunderers of the Pope offered him a pension which he refused. Its acceptance would have been a practical condonation of guilt, and Pius IX. would have been—if the phrase be allowable—an accessory to the fact to his own spoliation. The line of conduct adopted by His

Holiness was followed by Catholics. The prisoner of the Vatican is to-day comparatively richer than his conqueror. The treasury of the invader is empty, and the king's civil list is bankrupt. The Parliament of United Italy declares itself incompetent to provide funds essential to the defence of the new kingdom. But the liberality of Catholics enables Pius IX. to maintain his small Court and dispense charity even to his enemies. He relieves much of the wretchedness and misery introduced into Rome since 1870; and to many distressed servants of the new Government, who apply to him for charity, he sends relief in the shape of not of depreciated paper, but of sounding golden coin. Pius IX. will make no compromise with his foes. They would gladly make him their tool. The *Servus Servorum* refuses, however, to follow the car of revolutionary triumph, or to be the willing slave of an earthly king. He acts, speaks, and suffers, not in his own name or person, but in the name and person of the persecuted Church. His passive resistance to overwhelming violence, and his constant protestation against the usurpers of his rights, are regarded with mingled feelings of disappointments and rage by the enemies of Catholicity, who vainly hoped to separate the cause of Pius IX. from that of the Church, and to make the downfall of the Pope an instrument for destroying Christianity. The judgment of the Catholic world is now plainly pronounced; and the verdict of Catholic opinion in every portion of the globe is distinctly in favour of the present occupant of the Pontifical throne. The Vicar of Christ is one with his flock. Shepherd and fold stand or fall together. Persecution may lead to the withdrawal of a few unfaithful and false members, but renders the faithful and true disciples more united and loving. The American pilgrims said to the Pope: "We are come to profess our devotion and to offer to you ourselves, our property, and, if you require it, our lives." This message of American Catholics is identical with that of all Catholics. It is the great message with those already sent to the Vatican from Great Britain and Ireland, from France, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Austria, and Australia. The persecuted Catholics of Germany and Switzerland hold the same language of earnest attachment to the Head of the Church, and firm resolution not to waver in allegiance to the Holy See. We believe these pilgrimages will continue and even increase in number. That they do immense good, we have no doubt. They afford consolation to the august Head of the Church, who feels cheered and sustained by the devotion of Catholics. They satisfy the inward aspirations of the pilgrims themselves, who find their faith confirmed by intercourse with the Supreme Pontiff, and are impelled by an irresistible impulse to manifest their allegiance in person to their spiritual Head. And these pilgrimages form besides an outward testimony to the nations, and to the statesmen who rule the destinies of kingdoms, that the cause of Pius IX. is the cause of Catholicity, and that the policy of His Holiness is endorsed by the suffrages of Catholics in every part of the world.

These pilgrimages also furnish an unanswerable argument to those who assert the decline of Catholicism and who affirm, in spite of such evident proof to the contrary, the disinclination of the Catholic laity to embrace the cause of Pius IX. and to follow the decisions of the Vatican Council. Infidels say that Christianity is effete and moribund, and point mysteriously to some gospel of the future which will supersede that of Jesus Christ. These rapid assertions of unbelievers are contradicted by the experiences of every passing day. The Church in America, at all events, shows no tokens of decay, and the pilgrimages to the Vatican arriving from various quarters of the globe prove that vigorous life still beats in the heart of the Catholic Church. If dangers threaten the faith in Europe we may remember Cardinal Castracani's saying, that the salvation of the Church will one day come from America.—'London Tablet.'

THE CRISIS IN BELGIUM.

(From a correspondent of the 'London Tablet'.)

WITHIN the last few days Catholic Belgium has passed through an all-important crisis. The agitation here has been intense, and I very much doubt whether the importance of the interests at stake has been as yet appreciated by our Catholic brethren in England. According to the Belgian Constitution, one half of the Parliament had to offer itself for re-election this year, and on the result of this election depended the fate of the present Catholic Ministry, and therefore, of the welfare of the Catholic body of Belgium. Within the last few years the Liberal party have been making Herculean efforts; in many ways they had vastly improved their forces and their positions and there was the greatest fear in many minds of their ultimate success. The Catholics, of course, could not be behindhand, and every nerve has been strained, every human means that seemed possible has been developed in order to secure the victory. The excitement has been steadily growing for the last few months. Not only the scenes in the Chamber, but still more, perhaps, the exertions of the newspapers on both sides have borne witness to this. To the 'Bien Public' of Ghent every praise is due for its untiring drilling of the Catholic electors. Indeed, the press, in one shape or another, plays the chief parts in these contests. Newspapers, placards, letters are constantly being issued, and on the eve of an election all available hands are set to work, even on the mechanical part of the business. I am told, for instance, that at Ghent the Catholic students devote themselves at such a time to turning the rollers, cutting, folding, and whatever other duties are connected with the mysteries of printing.

Indeed, the Ghent election has been the central point of the whole campaign, and on Ghent depended in the long run the whole chain of results. The city itself would decidedly be a thoroughly un-Catholic constituency, but it is the Catholic peasantry of the surrounding district who alter the face of affairs. This makes the struggle difficult for us, because the poor Catholic peasantry have to be instructed, drilled, and protected, not only for sophistry, but even from open violence. For the study burghers have lost none of the warlike and turbulent spirit which made them famous for several centuries, since the time when they defeated Edward I. of England with his 25,000 men in the 13th century, and held their own against