

Catholic Faith. No doubt, not now for the first time in the world's history has the fool said in his heart there is no God; nor now for the first time has the materialist found in his unbelief a reason why he should rush on sensual pleasures. But never before has infidelity been found so thoroughly organised, so aggressive, so powerful to destroy. It neglects no channel by which anti-Christian influences can be made to reach men's souls. It is master of the press; in the newspapers which lie even upon the tables of Catholics; in the periodicals edited by infidels, which have free circulation; in the works of fiction wherein they seek their pleasure; in the handbooks which popularise the discoveries of science; and in the learned treatises which are the boast of universities: its baleful forces are constantly at work, now subtly impregnating men's minds with dislike of creeds, now crushing faith at a blow, and now again sapping it by undermining the natural truths upon which the Christian demonstration rests. It assumes to be the dictator of the physical sciences; and its apostles though they superciliously disdain even the bare knowledge of what revelation teaches concerning the origin and destiny of man and of the world, loudly proclaim to the youth, who, obeying the Materialist tendencies of the age, throng in eager crowds to their schools, that faith cannot be reconciled with science. It aims at political power, and when it secures it opposes an iron barrier to all legislation, however just, which might favour the religious interests of the people; while it forces upon millions of believers social institutions based on principles condemned by the Christian faith. And thus the name of Jesus—that name which is above every name, and than which no other under Heaven has been given to men where they may be saved—is made a sign to be contradicted and blasphemed, and the Catholic Church, which, with adoring love, ever has that name in her heart and on her lip, has been doomed by an aggressive infidelity to perish beneath its blows.

But, in spite of all these exertions, the sacred name of Jesus still commands the love and awe of millions. Never has the Church exhibited a unity more perfect than that which now binds throughout the world the faithful to their bishops, and the bishops to the sacred Head of the Church, the Roman Pontiff. This majestic spectacle of two hundred millions of believers, held together in the unity of one mystic body by the living power of the authority of the Infallible See, maddens the enemies of Christ into an anger mixed with fear. On the one hand, their rage against the Church urges them to open violence against her; on the other, the dread of arousing formidable opposition counsels more guarded proceedings. Hence, for the most part, they prefer indirect attacks upon the Church. Professing to tolerate, nay, even to respect the Catholic Church for its many services to society, they declare their aim to be merely the destruction of priestcraft, or of Ultramontanism, by which names they designate the Divine authority given by Christ to the pastors of His Church. This hypocrisy can deceive no one. The Emperor Decius was undoubtedly one of the most deadly enemies who have at any time sought utterly to annihilate the Church. And yet, when St Cyprian would describe in a single phrase the implacable rage that drove this man to drown, in the blood of the faithful, the very name of Christ, he could find none more fitting to portray the cruel persecutor than this—that he was “tyrannus infensus Dei sacerdotibus” (g)—a tyrant who hated the priests of God. And do not the same words most truthfully depict the Deciuses of our own day, who seek to justify every iniquity to which their hatred of the Church urges them by the plea that it is intended for the repression of priestcraft?

And as in the third, so also in the nineteenth century, the first blows of the haters of God's priests should naturally fall upon the great High Priest of the Vatican, sitting at Rome “in the place of Peter, and in the rank of the sacerdotal chair.” When St Cyprian (f) praises Pope St. Cornelius, who “sat fearless in the sacerdotal chair at Rome at the moment when the tyrant who hated God's priests uttered very horrible threats, and with much more patience and endurance heard the rise of a rival prince than the appointment of God's priest at Rome,” does not the holy martyr point to the life the successor of St. Cornelius, the glorious Pontiff Pius IX.? Fearless, he sits at Rome in the infallible chair of St. Peter, confronting the rage of the haters of God's priests; fearless, he listens to them as they utter their terrible threat—“fanda et nefanda;” fearless, he smites with the authority of Peter and of Christ each fresh attempt against the authority of the Church. Nay, more, he warns his enemies that the forces of evil which they have let loose against that authority will infallibly sweep away in their recoil the authority of civil government; but his words are unheeded, and the rulers of the world—dupes or accomplices of a darkly secret power standing behind their thrones—are forced, like Decius, to witness with patience the rise of the revolutionary rivals who hurl them from their place of pride.

“But, though impervious to fear, the heart of Pius IX. is but too open to sorrow, not indeed for his own sufferings, or for the loss of sovereignty, or for the loss of personal liberty, but for the desecration of Zion, for the abominations he is forced to see standing in the holy places of Rome, and, above all, for the persecutions inflicted on the Church by the attacks made on ecclesiastical authority. Like Matthias beholding the evils come upon the conquered Jerusalem, he cries out:—“Woe is me, wherefore was I born to see the ruins of my people, and the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there, when it is given into the hands of the enemies? The holy places are come into the hands of strangers; the temple has become as a man without honour. All her ornaments are taken away. She that is free is made a slave. And behold our sanctuary, and our beauty and our glory is laid waste, and the Gentiles have defiled them.” (j) In the two years that have elapsed since the capture of Rome, Pius IX. has seen his palaces rifled, churches and ecclesiastical buildings seized for profane uses, numerous charitable institutions in his States confiscated, the enforced alienation of the property of religious orders, religion completely banished from the schools, episcopal authority even over

ecclesiastical seminaries set at naught, and the possession of their own houses refused to the Bishops themselves. He has seen clerical students, even when in priests' orders, dragged by the cruel conscription from the altar of the God of Peace, and forced to serve as soldiers in the army, and he now has the crowning sorrow of beholding the final ruin coming upon religious orders by the suppression of their principal houses. All these outrages against the authority of the Church are so many attempts to destroy the Church herself. “These pretensions on the part of the State,” thus write the Bishops of Tuscan to King Victor Emmanuel, “to grant or refuse its sanction to our evangelical mission, and fetter at its discretion the liberty of our ministry, which is the liberty of God, constitute an offence against the Divine autonomy of the Church and high treason against God. This is what the royal Placet and Exequatur amount to, which, in religious matters, your Majesty's Government grants or withholds at pleasure. It is not now a question of mere ecclesiastical discipline, which is changeable, but of principles and dogma, and it is a dogma of faith that the Catholic Church has the full right of self-government, and this is the right that is outraged. It is not in our power to alter in any degree the constitution of the Church, such as it came to us from the Apostles, and to the Apostles from Christ, and to Christ from His Father: “Ecclesiae ab Apostolis, Apostoli a Christo, Christus a Deo.” (k)

“Notwithstanding these truths, which are the basis of Christianity, and deeply rooted in every Catholic conscience, we have been deprived not only of the liberty of providing pastors for the flock entrusted to us, but we are not free to give parochial jurisdiction even for an hour to priests whose services may be necessary for the spiritual wants of the faithful. This being so, you, Sire, as a child of the Catholic Church, will feel in the depths of your heart that we are but doing our duty when we firmly, but respectfully, tell you that there is not and cannot be any hesitation as to the line of conduct we shall pursue in such cases, for it is written:—“But Peter and the Apostles answering, saith, we ought to obey God rather than men.” (l)

“For the discharge of our duty, curses, imprecations, insults, have been heaped upon us, and we bore them with resignation, reflecting that, before us, Christ our Lord had been loaded with curses, imprecations, and insults. We were threatened with confiscation and exile, and we took comfort, as we thought how sweet on the one hand was the liberty and sanctity of evangelical poverty, while, on the other, we considered that the whole earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. And if we shall be threatened even with death, with God's help we will meet it with calmness and serenity; reflecting that our life ought to be Christ, and that at times death is a gain, “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (m)

“We have never paltered with error; we have not burned a single grain of incense to the idol of popularity; we have never allowed the pastoral staff to stoop to the meanness, or the injustice, or the prejudices of the age. So may God give us help to continue in the path of suffering and of duty.” So far the bishops of Italy on the sad condition to which they have been reduced.

Equally harassing is the persecution of which the Church is at present the object in the German Empire. Flushed by their newly-acquired power, those who have put themselves at its head, and taken on themselves to speak and act for the Empire, have assumed towards the Catholic religion the same attitude precisely as that of the Pagan Emperors of Rome towards Christianity in the earliest age of the Church. The capital offence of which the primitive Christians were guilty in the eyes of the law was this, that they refused to admit the omnipotence of the State in religious as well as in civil matters. “We are charged,” says Tertullian, (n) “as being guilty of sacrilege and of treason: this is the chief, nay, the only accusation against us.

“It is plain, from even a cursory view of the recent acts of hostility towards the Church which have occurred in Germany, that the German Catholics may repeat this statement, and say: the only offence of which we are guilty is, that we cannot give to the State in religious matters the ready and loyal obedience which we yield to it in civil affairs.

“Thus, in the question concerning the so-called Old Catholics, when a handful of proud professors and their pupils refused to submit to the dogmatic definition of the Vatican Council, and separated themselves from the faith of the entire Catholic Church, the State insisted that they should still be accounted as Catholics, and strove to compel its Catholic subjects to receive from them, as from Catholics, religious instruction, and even the Sacraments themselves. Does not such a proceeding involve the usurpation by the State of the Church's authority to decide matters of doctrine, by defining what is heresy and what is not? And when the State, by virtue of this usurped authority, forbids the Bishops to excommunicate apostates, does it not thereby equivalently forbid the very existence of the Church itself?

“The same principle of persecution underlies the action taken by the Government against the Bishop Chaplain-General of the Army, for having placed under interdict the military Church of Cologne, upon the altar of which an apostate priest had sacrilegiously dared to offer the sacrifice of Mass. For this act the Bishop was subjected by the military authorities to a military court, and forbidden in any way to exercise his episcopal office. Nay, more, his priests were commanded to break off all official relations with him, and some were even dismissed because they declared themselves bound in conscience to obey their Bishop in things spiritual. Could religious liberty be more flagrantly violated than in this instance?

“Again, the expulsion of the Society of Jesus and of kindred orders and congregations, including the Redemptorists, the Lazarists and the Trapists, and the Christian Brothers, is an act of revolting tyranny and injustice towards the Church. It assails her doctrine, for it is an article of Catholic faith that the observance of the evangelical counsels is part of Christian perfection, and that God does really call men to this state. To prohibit the religious life, therefore, amounts to a

(g) Epist. 52.

(f) Epist. 52, 1 Machabees, ii. 7, et seq.

(j) Phil. 21.

(k) Tertull. de Præscript, 87.

(l) Acta v. 29.

(m) 2 Apol. 10.