

The Catholic World

FRANCE

BLESSING THE AIR.

In Brittany, where ancient traditions linger together with an old world piety, the fisher folk and the peasants call down the blessing of heaven every year on the sea and the fields, which give them their livelihood. But since besides the two elements of land and water, man has added a third, the air, as a field for his exploits, it is not surprising that from Brittany should emanate the idea of a benediction of the air. In a recent seacoast hamlet, Le Platin, not far from Royan, on a slope among wind tossed fir trees and oaks, rises the little chapel of Notre Dame du Platin, patron saint of airmen, which was consecrated only a year before the war. Since then, this modest, votive shrine has been the goal of many a pilgrimage, and has received innumerable vows and thank offerings. From its spire flutter hundreds of oriflammes, bearing the national colors of the various allied nations, of all airmen who had fallen victims to man or the element. After the service, the procession moved toward a point which dominated the sea. Here from a balcony the Canon of Royan solemnly blessed 'the waters and the airs,' the ceremony being witnessed by a large concourse of people, after which, in keeping with the occasion, a sermon was preached in the open air. The preacher's pulpit was a bench, canopied by the branches of an ancient yew tree, in front of the chapel, which was decked with flags and banners.

MORE INTOLERANCE.

The members of the French hierarchy continue to urge upon their people the importance of the national loan. The Archbishops of Auck and Algiers, the Bishops of Agen, Bayeux, Beauvais, Grenoble, Lucon, Meaux, Nice, and St. Claude can now be added to those who have addressed letters to the clergy and people on the matter. The Bishop of Grenoble authorises his clergy to collect for the Bank of France. The manner in which the Government repays this help is, however, sadly instanced by an incident in the archdiocese of Rouen (writes a Paris correspondent). On the very day that the appeal of Archbishop Dubois on behalf of the loan was read out in all the churches his Grace was engaged to bless and lay the first stone of a new sanctuary erected to the memory of French soldiers who have died on the field of honor at a place we will call S. les R. But the Socialist Mayor of the place suddenly forbade the public ceremony on the very morning itself. Naturally, at such short notice many persons did not cancel their arrangements and there was a goodly crowd waiting for the Archbishop. This the Mayor made the occasion for a display of police and armed force, and when the Archbishop arrived he could hardly enter the enclosure for the private ceremony, the public ceremony taking place at the parish church. The inhabitants were disgusted with the affair, and pointed out that only a few weeks ago in Rouen itself the English dedicated two chapels, one Catholic, one Protestant, publicly with no interference whatever from the authorities. They wished to express their indignation by withholding their subscriptions from the loan, but this the Archbishop would not allow.

ROME

THE POPE'S SIXTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY.

The good wishes and messages of congratulation which reached the Holy Father on the recurrence of his birthday, 21st November, came from all parts of the world (writes a Rome correspondent). At the Vatican the occasion was observed in that quiet, dignified fashion so characteristic of it, the Pope himself celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Sala Matilda, assisted by the students of the Spanish College. During the

day the various military corps of the Apostolic Palace wore their gala uniforms, and from their barracks flew their respective banners. In the evening the band of the Papal Gendarmes rendered choice musical selections in the Court of S. Damaso. In a condition of remarkable vigor of mind and body Pope Benedict XV. has entered on the sixty-third year of his life. Few men in Rome lead a more active life than his Holiness. There is one particular worthy of special note, inasmuch as it illustrates the thorough manner in which the Holy Father throws himself into his work. Several private secretaries are attached to the Pope's office to expedite his vast correspondence. After each delivery the letters addressed to his Holiness personally are laid on his desk, and each of them is opened by his own hand, so that anyone, high or low, can get into direct communication with the Supreme Pontiff.

AN IMPLACABLE PRESS.

There is no relaxation of the malignant attitude of the anti-clerical Italian press against the Pope (says the London *Universe*). It is implacable and not to be satisfied. If his Holiness speaks, he is wrong; if he keeps silent he is wrong; and, so far as mere words go, it is the fable of the wolf and the lamb brought up to date. The most magnanimous intentions of the Holy Father, his merciful initiative, his heartfelt solicitude, are twisted and distorted and vilely misrepresented by these irreconcilable prints, which substitute sophistries for arguments and gratuitous malignities for facts. Why cannot they be honest and say what all men know they feel: He is the Pope, and therefore, *Anathema!* But it would be thought that even with these hostile journals the Pope would have been safe from denunciation by reason of his telegram on the recent air raid on Padua; which said that he deplored and reproved aerial bombardments over 'innocuous or open cities, by whomsoever perpetrated.' There's the rub in the last three words. The air raid on the open and innocuous city of Padua is condemned by a general condemnation of all similar raids on places similarly circumstanced—a condemnation which extends to the past, and stands for the present and the future. And these critics forget one important fact: This condemnation is the last thing—not the first. They ignore that which must be patent to most thinking people; namely, that delicate diplomatic negotiations have been going on for many months—which could not by their very nature be made public—by which the Pope hoped to prevent air raids on any innocuous and open cities by whomsoever perpetrated, and it is only when these hopes have been foiled by the outrage on Padua that his Holiness condemns the particular crime by a general denunciation of all such crimes. To say, as these journals do, that the Pope should have confined himself to the particular circumstances is to beg the question. If the commission of such outrages is to be deplored and condemned by the Pope at all, he must, in the name of consistency, deplore and condemn them as he has done, 'by whomsoever perpetrated.'

GENERAL

SECULARISTS MADE 'SIT UP.'

A law has recently been passed by the National Assembly of Panama making civil marriage compulsory and giving it precedence over the marriage performed by the Church, says *America*. Officiating priests or ministers are threatened with fine or imprisonment, or both, if a marriage should be performed in their churches before the civil ceremony. The demonstration which took place in answer to this violation of the most sacred rights of the people is thus described in a letter written from the Canal Zone:—'Handbills announcing the meetings were distributed throughout the city by the thousands. They had the desired effect and fully 5000 men were present at the demonstrations; the women having been advised not to be present. The Panamanians were thoroughly aroused and Panama City had never witnessed in the past such a demonstra-