

arguments which render faith most credible to natural reason and such as cannot fail to make every well-balanced mind, which has not been perverted by vice or passion, embrace it and love it. May this protest of mine, which I have deliberately drawn up, and which I leave to posterity, subscribed with my own hand, and which shows to all and every one that I do not blush at the Gospel; may it, as I have said, produce some good fruit.—Signed at Milan, January 6, 1815.—Alessandro Volta.' Dr. Walsh says:—'Volta lived twelve years after writing the above, and was looked up to as one of the great thinkers of Europe and as one of the most important men of Italy of his time.'

More 'Fablegrams'

Of late there have been frequent complaints on the part of even secular papers regarding the onesidedness and biassed nature of the 'news'—political and otherwise—transmitted by the cable agents. If the patrons of the dailies in question had suffered one-tenth as often or as much as Catholics have from the same cause, they would have good reason to be restive. Here is the latest sample of the 'crammer's' penchant for anti-Catholic canards. A recent Reuter's telegram to the Home papers reads as follows:—'The *Imparcial*, in a leading article, implies that difficulties have arisen between the Vatican and the Government (supported by the Crown) with regard to the modification of the Concordat proposed by the latter. The Vatican, according to this story, at first gave a flat *non possumus* to the suggestions put forward by the Spanish Government. After the reply of the Spanish Government that if such was the attitude of the Vatican, they would present a Bill to the Cortes reforming the Concordat as they deemed fit, without preliminary negotiations with Rome, the Pope addressed himself through the intermediary of the Nuncio to King Alfonso, with a view to preventing the status of the relations between Spain and the Vatican being in any way assailed. The King considered the refusal of the Vatican to enter into negotiations with his Government, which, he said, enjoyed his entire confidence, to be unjustified. He remarked, while protesting his submission to the Church, that a modification of the Concordat was possible now, as it had been at other times, and that he, as a recognised Constitutional monarch, had to bow to the wishes of his people, expressed by his Government.'

At the most the condition of things described is only 'implied' in the *Imparcial* article; but of course the cable agent did not feel under any obligation either to himself investigate the truth of the story, or to wait until its accuracy had been otherwise established. As a matter of fact, the yarn is, purely and simply, a fabrication of the anti-clericals. The *Correspondance de Rome* positively denies that the Vatican has at all addressed King Alfonso, either directly or indirectly, and recalls the fact that, since the time of the Maura Cabinet, there exists at Madrid a Commission formed by the representative of the Holy See and the Spanish Government to study the possible modifications of the Concordat. The official *Osservatore Romano* publishes, in addition, the following denial:—'We are authorised to oppose to the biassed information of the *Imparcial* a most emphatic denial. The Holy See has never refused to enter into amicable negotiations with the Spanish Government about the Concordat or other disputed points, in conformity with Article 45 of that Concordat.' It is not in the least likely that Reuter's representative troubled to transmit a word of the express and explicit refutation of the lie which he had been in such a hurry to put into circulation.

During the week two similarly fishy-looking stories have appeared in the cable columns of the daily press. They read as follows:—'Rome, April 20.—M. Jansen, a Belgian priest stationed in Italy, is said to have been ordered to resign his Vatican offices and to retire to a monastery for three months because he spontaneously wrote thanking Mr. Roosevelt for his services to Catholics in America. It is also unofficially reported in Rome that the Nuncio at Vienna has been recalled for visiting Mr. Roosevelt when the ex-President was in that city.' Here again the story has no better foundation than the gossipy 'it is said,' or 'it is unofficially reported'; yet the cable agent rushes to blazon it to the ends of the earth. It is comforting to reflect that by the time the Rev. Dr. Cleary returns a beginning, at least, will have been made towards the establishment of a Catholic News Agency, which will enable us to squelch such canards as these before they have time to do very much harm.

'Away from the Church': A Protestant Problem

According to the New York *Independent*, the number of those who in recent times have officially and legally severed their connection with the Protestant churches in

Germany has grown at such an alarming proportion that the Church authorities, synods, and conferences are seriously discussing this burning problem. 'In Berlin alone,' says the *Independent*, 'the daily average of those breaking away from the Church is 300, and in the *Cultus Ministerium* five extra clerks had to be engaged to attend to this new business alone.' The stream of defections appears to be most marked in connection with the working classes. There has all along, for some thirty years, been a small contingent, ranging from 1000 to 2000 annually, who broke away from the State churches. 'But in 1906,' says the same authority, 'there was a sudden jump all at once to 12,007 in Prussia alone, although the year before it had been 9158, and 8802 in 1904. It is principally the working men who are affected by this away-from-the-Church agitation, and in Berlin alone, during the past three years, more than 17,000 working people have left the Church for good. At the present rate the losses to the Protestant churches are at least 30,000 per year.'

Apparently the causes of this wholesale exodus are not very easy to define. 'The Social Democratic hostility to the Church,' continues the *Independent*, 'is only in part the cause of the trouble. . . . The reason assigned by most applicants is that they want to be freed from paying further Church taxes (*Kirchensteuer*), which they can do through such a declaration, and which is the only tax which the German can in any way escape. Conservative papers express their surprise that the number who sever their connection with the Church is not larger, as those who do, it is claimed, are only dead branches of the Church at any rate, and had not internally been members for years.' If that be so, the proportion of dead branches—30,000 per year—is surely tremendously large. 'Many hesitate because, by making such a declaration, they forego all claims on the Church, such as the services of a minister at baptisms, marriages, and funerals, pastoral visits for the sick and dying, participation in Communion, and the like. As in recent years the payment of the Church taxes has been obligatory on not a few who before this had been excused because of their small incomes, it is thought that the sudden increase of these Church insurgents is attributable to this cause. Both religious and social conditions combine to produce this agitation. Radical religious thought . . . and the failure of the Protestant Church to do justice to the social problem, especially among the working men, are all factors in the trouble.'

Although the Conservative papers profess to regard the defaulting members as 'dead branches,' they are nevertheless seriously concerned at the position. 'Some Protestant periodicals profess to be fairly pleased with this insurgent propaganda on the ground that it rids the Church of undesirable members; but it is very evident that they nevertheless are worried, and ask, What next? So far at least the crusade has not brought forth any disestablishment project, and Church and State seem to be more closely united than ever in trying to stem the tide of an inner break-up of some of the Protestant State churches of the Fatherland. Liberal theologians, as well as conservatives, are trying to stem the tide.' As far as the facts are available, it would appear that the great majority of the defections are due to monetary considerations—the gaining of exemption from particular taxes—rather than to any question of principle or religious conviction. At the same time, it is evident that an exceedingly large number of Protestant Church members in Germany must hold their religious beliefs very lightly. It is an outrageous thing that the Government system of taxation should be so arranged as to offer what is practically a bribe to poor people to give up their Church, and it is matter for regret that Protestant Church membership should be depleted from such a cause. The loss to Protestantism is a gain only to the ranks of unbelief. Catholics have suffered too much from 'Souperism'—both official and individual—not to be able to sympathise with others who are similarly victimised.

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