

THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS AT MADRID

AN INTERESTING DESCRIPTION

The following description, full of little intimate touches and of items of information which have only become known since the Congress, is taken from a letter to Sir Francis Burnand from his daughter, who is a nun in one of the convents in Madrid:—

A real triumph in every sense of the word, a manifestation of faith such as no country has seen for centuries. The Archbishop of Montreal, before the day of the procession, declared that nothing could come up to the Congress of Montreal; but after the procession he was heard to declare that Spain could not find its equal in any country in the world. The enthusiastic faith in the Blessed Sacrament could not possibly be found elsewhere, for in no country could be seen royalty, court, army, navy, military, and religious Orders, and workmen of every class, all united in only one desire: to do their utmost to give honor and glory to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It was more a national than an international Congress, and it was well it was so at this moment, when the Liberal Government are working away at undermining the people and trying to pass all kinds of anti-Catholic and anti-clerical Bills, etc. But the King has seen for himself how essentially Catholic his subjects are; and he himself was heard to say that his one wish was to show them how he holds to the title of Catholic Majesty, and wishes to show himself in every way worthy of it. And so he did. As I do not know what the English papers say about the Congress, I will tell you all I have heard at the risk of your knowing some of the details already. The Queen Mother came to see us after, beaming with joy and emotion at all that has passed during this memorable week!

Well, to begin from the beginning. The Pope had named as Legate a Spanish Cardinal—the King had asked for a special Legate from Rome—but the telegrams crossed, and the Pope, without giving any other reason but that 'one was already named,' sent no other. The King accepted the thing splendidly, not showing a moment of self-love wounded, etc., and gave the Cardinal the same magnificent reception and palace as had been destined for the special Legate. The different sessions took place, and the King and Queen, after the opening one, went for a few days to their place at the Granja on account of her health, but one of his aides-de-camp sent him word that enthusiasm was wanting a little owing to their absence. On this the King sent for his motor-car and came back in great haste with Queen Victoria, so as to be present at the last session, where their presence was quite unexpected. He appeared on the scene, and, with his usual *à propos*, took out a speech from his pocket and began to read it, in the midst of a general acclamation and applause. From that moment it was a complete triumph. He afterwards gave a magnificent banquet to all the prelates, the Royal Family being present.

The Procession.

The great procession began at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, God protecting the heads of all from the broiling June sun by sending a cloudy afternoon, but no rain, which was just what everyone would have chosen had they been asked. The procession took three hours from the Cathedral to the Palace, so that when the cannon announced the Blessed Sacrament as coming out of the Cathedral, the first part of the procession had already arrived at the Palace gates. The whole length was lined by cavalry and infantry, so that when the Blessed Sacrament passed, each regiment in its turn presented arms, the infantry all to a man on their knees and their swords drawn, and the cavalry all bowing on their horses. It was something splendid, they say; not a single complaint was to be heard among them as to heat, etc., as often happens when they have to wait like that on other occasions. Before the procession started, no end of watering-carts were seen to pass through the streets followed by carts with the most magnificent flowers from Valencia, which were strewed on the way so as to make a carpet of flowers. Not a

house remained undecorated (except, of course, the Italian Embassy). All the ladies and women—even the foreigners—wore mantillas. Everyone—man and woman—wore medals and white bows as Congressists—80,000 in all—of whom more than 7000 were members of the Night Adoration, to which congregation men and boys of all classes of society belong. The workmen were headed by two or three grandees of Spain (the first peers of the realm); then came all the military orders of Calatrava, Alcantara, Santiago, and Montesa in full costume; 8000 priests in cassocks and holding lighted candles, followed by no end of religious and 86 bishops. Last came the Blessed Sacrament in a magnificent monstrance of massive silver, much too heavy and big to be carried far, and so it was set on a superb chariot wheeled by priests, and followed by the empty carriages of the Palace and peers. Half-way, near the Bank, a splendid altar was erected, with everything the most costly that could be lent; and when told that they could not be sure of returning these magnificent tapestries undamaged, the only answer was: 'And what greater honor for me even if they come to be burnt, for I lend them to the Blessed Sacrament.' One would think that the shop-people, etc., would have taken the opportunity to augment their prices. Nothing of the kind, however—all lent. All this time the King was waiting on the Palace balcony with the whole Royal Family, holding a plan in his hand, and watching with great interest the different parts of the procession take their assigned places in the immense square below the Palace called the Armoury. From time to time he telephoned to know where the Blessed Sacrament was and if all was going well. He would have loved to have been in the procession, but Canalejas would not hear of it, thinking that it might be an occasion for a bomb; he had not got the same faith as all those in the procession who, although warned about bombs, etc., held to going, knowing that if they died it would be in honoring the Blessed Sacrament. All kinds of anonymous messages and letters were thrust into their hands, especially in those of the bishops, saying: 'Take care; especially on the Palace staircase,' etc. But nothing happened, and the greatest order reigned, so much so that the King could not believe his eyes, knowing that Spanish people are not noted for their order in public manifestations. What most struck him was their respect and their demonstration of faith. At last the cannon announced the arrival of the Blessed Sacrament. Immediately the King in full uniform and the Queen in full court dress, followed by the rest of the Royal Family and suite, likewise in full dress with white mantillas, were seen to descend the Palace steps and arrive at the gates. When the Cardinal arrived with the Blessed Sacrament, immediately they put aside the cushions prepared for them, and with lighted candles in their hands went down on their knees in profound adoration, all the procession doing likewise. It appears it was a stupendous moment never to be forgotten. The King said afterwards he could hear nothing during those moments except the singing of the birds above their heads, so perfect was the silence of adoration. Then the King, followed by his suite, went up one staircase and the Queen and her suite by the other, and the Blessed Sacrament in the middle, the staircase being lined on either side by officers with swords bent to the ground, and to the sound of the music of the Royal March. Then Benediction was given from the balcony to that innumerable crowd, after which the Cardinal took the Blessed Sacrament into the Palace Chapel for the Reserve, followed by all the Court. When passing through the Throne Chamber he suddenly stopped, and taking the Sacred Host solemnly consecrated the country to the Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament. The King was so touched at this ceremony that he begged in his enthusiasm that the Sacred Host be kept always in his palace, but, of course, the Bishop replied that to his great regret that could not be, as one cannot keep the Sacred Species but for a certain amount of time, but that he would divide It into as many particles as there were members of the Royal Family, and give It them in Communion in a week or so.