

HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

The Editor of the British Critic, (says the *Catholic Herald*) known to be Mr. Newman, in the last number, bears no equivocal testimony to the authority of the Holy See. In speaking of the French Revolution, and the constitution of the clergy as framed by the National Assembly, he says:

Glorious, indeed, was the state of the church when the very children were born from their infancy, and when being a Catholic was equivalent to being a candidate for martyrdom. Many specious arguments might have been urged for the constitution; it was said that no essentials were touched, that only the external machinery of the church was changed. The French bishops, however, were well aware that the real question at issue was, whether the French church should be materialized, and as it were, absorbed into the world; they suffered for their adherence to the Holy See, the proper medium of communion with the Catholic Church. It was, not however, in France alone that the great antichristian power of the French Republic aimed at extirpating Christianity; the church suffered also, in the person of its head, Pius VI. The Directory, amongst the conditions of a treaty, required of him to withdraw his condemnation of the constitutional clergy. As was expected, he refused, and the French general in Italy, on some assumed grievance, received orders to make the taira shake on the head of the pretended chief of the Universal Church. The Pope was made prisoner and dragged from place to place till he died at Valence, August 29, 1799.

The French Directory now flattered themselves that the Church was dead with the earthly representative of her divine head; short-sighted men! they set their signet on the tomb and placed a watch around it—could they have looked forward but two short years, they would have seen their own idol, whom they had set up, lending his hand to restore the church to the earthly honors of which they had robbed her, only to make her heavenly glories the more radiant. Little did the imperial despot know with what powers he was meddling when he re-established the church; he fancied that he was only adding a lustre to his own triumph, but he was all the while but a blind instrument in the hands of God. Our limited space will not allow us to go fully into the details connected with the concordat of 1802; we shall confine ourselves to such circumstances as are proper to bring out the nature of Napoleon's relation with the Holy See. It is strange that he should have recourse to Rome at all in the matter, especially as many persons about him are known to have urged him to set up a Gallican Church, without communion with the rest of Christendom. With that strange instinct, however, which extraordinary men possess, he would have his church Catholic, since such was the will of the majority of the nation, and the notion of a Catholic Church out of communion with Rome does not seem to have struck him. 'Many persons,' said he to Bourienne, 'would have me found a Gallican church,

and make myself its head; but those men do not know France; if they had known it, they should have known that the majority are very far from this rupture with Rome. The Pope must push me to extremities before I make up my mind to it; but I do not think it will be so.' The same conversation records his reasons for restoring religion. 'In all countries religion is useful to the government; it must be used as an instrument for acting upon men. As a matter of police the religion of a state should be absolutely in the hands of him who governs it.' From Rome alone could the despot obtain possession of the heavenly powers of which he wished to make use as a stepping stone to his exaltation; to Rome, therefore, he applied. His anxiety for the success of the negotiation may be inferred from his instructions to his ambassador: 'Treat the Pope,' he said, 'as if he were master of 200,000 men.' On this most military estimate of the greatness of his Holiness the ambassador acted, and the concordat was concluded. We are not going to enter into its details; suffice it that it corrected the crying evil of the constitution, by prescribing that canonical institution was to come from Rome, on the same footing as before the Revolution."

He remarks the firmness with which Pius VII. refused to admit two constitutional bishops to intervene at the coronation of the Emperor, until they had formally retracted their errors:—

"Another piece of treachery on the part of the Emperor was the appointment of twelve of the constitutional bishops to the sees. The Pope has been blamed for his want of firmness in quietly allowing these men to become rulers of the church of France. He was however, deceived by one of the emissaries of Napoleon, who assured him that they had renounced the constitution.* However yielding Pius VII. was in other respects, on this one point he was firm, and made a vigorous stand against the imperial will. Every thing else the Pope was willing to give up; Cardinal Gonsalvi in his name declared that 'his Holiness is ready to pass over all canonical rules, all but doctrine;' he acknowledged that one concession which he made 'had no example in the eighteen centuries of the church'—but he would not accept the constitutional bishops without a retraction of their errors. 'Such a measure,' he says, 'would wound the substance of the deposit of the faith; besides which the conscience of the Holy Father and the obligations of his apostolic office oppose insurmountable obstacles to it.' By the year 1805, when the Pope was at Paris, all but two had submitted themselves to the Holy See. Napoleon did his best to entrap the Pope into receiving these, in spite of their refusing to do what was required of them. The formula which they were ordered to sign contained a declaration that they 'adhered and submitted themselves to the decisions which had emanated from the Holy See, on the ecclesiastical affairs of France.' It appears that the refractory bishops were

* Mem. pour servir à l'Hist. Eccl. vol. iii, p. 421.

by express agreement to be excluded from the ceremony of the coronation;† on the evening however, before the Emperor was crowned, he read over to the Pope in a hurried manner a paper purporting to be the retraction of one of the refractory bishops. His Holiness took home the paper, and on reading it discovered that the word 'canonical' had been substituted for 'ecclesiastical.' He immediately wrote to Napoleon to signify that he could not accept it, and to beg him to take measures that nothing should 'trouble or stain the august ceremony which was to take place the next day.' Napoleon felt that he was foiled, and fretted exceedingly at the power which the quiet dignity of the Pontiff exercised over him; the result was that before Pius VII. had left Paris, all the bishops had, at least externally, submitted to him.

'Such was Napoleon's conduct before he broke with the Holy See: he flattered himself that the benefit which he had conferred upon God's church, by raising it from a state of persecution, was to be repaid by its abject submission. The church was to be one of the steps under his imperial throne, and to be satisfied with being covered with cloth of gold and velvet, as the price of being trodden under his feet. He little knew what powers he had come; the poor passive church became an earthquake, which opened under him and swallowed his ill-gotten throne.'

On the excommunication of the Emperor and his partizans, he adds:

"Amidst the astounding events which follow one another with lightning speed in the history of Napoleon, this little act of the Pope's is almost imperceptible, but who knows what unseen powers fought with England against him whom the church had condemned? With all his indifference, Napoleon showed great uneasiness when he heard the news; † he, however assumed a lofty tone, and wrote to Eugene Beauharnais in the same hypocritical strain which had characterized his letters to the Pope; 'Does the Pope think,' says he, 'that the arms will fall from the hands of my soldiers?' Could he have looked forward a few years, he would have seen that this was precisely what did happen to him; the numbed fingers of his soldiers refused to bear their arms in the memorable Russian campaign.

"The events which followed this excommunication show more than ever the real object of Napoleon in restoring the church in France: since he could not make the Pope his liege-vassal, he determined to destroy the line of St. Peter. On the 6th of July the Pope was dragged from Rome and conveyed to Savona. In the case of Pius VI. the Directory had allowed the cardinals to disperse themselves, and thus to get beyond their power; on the death of the Pope a sudden fortune of war had driven the French from Italy, and enabled the cardinals to assemble for the election of Pius VII.; scarcely had he taken possession of Rome, when the battle of Marengo

† Artaud, Vie de Pie VII., from which the greater part of this account is taken.
‡ Bourienne, vol. 8, c. 14.

put the north of Italy again in the hands of the French: it seemed as if Providence had swept them away on purpose to clear the way for the election of a new Pontiff. Napoleon determined that this should not happen again: all the cardinals, except those whose age rendered the journey impossible, were conveyed to Paris; the annulus Piscatoris was also taken thither and shown in triumph. If ever Rome seemed on the eve of perishing, it was then. Napoleon's whole efforts were bent on effecting a separation between the French church and the Holy See; for this purpose he turned theologian; he raked up all the old maxims of the Gallican Church, and the famous four articles of 1682, which may be called the symbol of Gallicanism, were over in his mouth. The Pope, however, was by no means impotent; though all communication between the church and her head was strictly cut off, though the cardinals and even his confessor were removed from him, though he was obliged to write by stealth, and pens, ink and paper, were removed from him, still he had only to suffer and remain passive; he alone had powers which were necessary against his enemies, and his mere inaction was sufficient to vanquish the Emperor."

He ascribes to momentary weakness the preliminaries entered into by Pius VII. with Napoleon, for an arrangement.

"The Emperor, amidst the disasters resulting from the Russian-campaign, had leisure to torment his illustrious captive. After besieging him with the entreaties of the prelates of his own party, he himself unexpectedly entered his apartments. What passed during the interview was never known for certain, but in a few days the articles of an agreement between his Holiness and Napoleon were published. By this unhappy document Pius agreed to remain in France, to give up the patrimony of St. Peter, and to allow the Metropolitan to give canonical institution to a bishop, in case he himself did not do so within a given period. Thus, after years of a noble resistance, Pius VII. in a moment of weakness gave up what his predecessors would rather have died than yielded.* It is not wonderful that he acted thus, considering the temptations which surrounded him; still the truth cannot be denied, Pius was not a Gregory or an Innocent. It is said that the great reason which induced him to yield was the misery which his companions in exile were suffering on his account, and the confusion which reigned in the church, now that all channel of communication with her head was cut off. Had, however, St. Gregory VII. started back at the sight of the inextricable confusion into which his opposition to Henry had plunged Christendom, at the miserable wars which it had excited, the church might now have been but a vassal of the state. Our object, however, is not to examine the conduct of the Pope, but to prove how unworthy was Napoleon of the honorable titles which have been heaped upon him. The remainder of the story is soon told: Pius VII. soon recovered from the fault which he had committed, and retracted his concessions. This, of

* Here Artaud takes for granted the fiction published by the Emperor, of the Pope's compliance with his wishes.—ED. CATHOLIC.