

SETTIMANA SANTA.

How Holy Week is Observed in Rome.

NIGHT SCENE IN ST. PETER'S.

During the week that began last Sunday morning Rome becomes the Mecca toward which pilgrims flock from all quarters of the world. Not Catholics alone are drawn thither by a spirit of devotion, but thousands of persons from Protestant countries go there to witness the impressive ceremonies that attend the close of the Lenten season and the great festival of Easter. The hotels are crowded with foreigners; the different types of humanity are readily recognizable as they mingle with the dark haired and dark-skinned Italians in public places, and in the Corso and other streets one hears a confusing mixture of languages. The English tongue strikingly predominates, and one sees interminable brigades of American and British tourists, who have so arranged their Continental journey that they can spend that week in Rome when there is most to be seen, when the weather is almost invariably the best of the whole year, and when all Italy is putting on its brilliant hues of spring. When the Holy Week comes in Rome, all nature seems to burst forth from the chains of the dull winter; the sunshine dances merrily over the gloomy old palaces, glistens on the gilt crosses and the stained glass windows of the legions of churches, illuminates the remotest corners in the narrow streets of Trastevere, banishes the damp, musty smell from all the galleries and crypts, and smiles back at the city from the muddy surface of the Tiber as it hastens toward the sea. The Pincian and the Gianiculum put on once more their glowing robes of green; the Coliseum is aflame through all its vaults and crumbling terraces with its thousands of wild flowers; the Castelli Romani, away off across the Campagna, show themselves again through the clear air of the springtime, and the odor of violets is everywhere in the atmosphere of the city, a constant reminder that there has come once more "la Settimana Santa."

WHAT THE ROMANS DO IN HOLY WEEK.

The shops are comparatively deserted. One misses the throngs of idle promenaders in the streets. The villas are no longer crowded with carriages. The social gayeties have come to a full stop. It is the period when the Romans themselves set aside the routine of their everyday existence and visit the great temples and other places of amusement where, ordinarily, only the strangers in the city are to be seen. They decorate their parish churches and chapels, inspect and aid the public institutions of charity, make visitations to their favorite shrines inside and outside the city walls, attend the solemn ceremonies in the huge cathedrals, and at some hour or other of one of the three days or all climb the Scala Santa on their knees. The great nobles are seen driving in their gorgeous equipages from one church to another. Crowds of well-dressed people on foot are making the same round, and the poorer people and the peasants from the surrounding country join in the procession that moves from church to church.

The distinctly religious ceremonies begin on Holy Thursday. Each principal street in the Eternal City has several new edifices, and the round of the allotted number of churches—seven—is, of course, more easily made there than elsewhere. There are few Romans, however, who fail to include in their list one of the three great

basilicas—St. Peter's, St. Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni Laterano, all at different ends of town. In each of these enormous temples there is held, in the late afternoons of Wednesday, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, the solemn service of the Tenebrae, or the singing of the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The choirs of these churches, composed entirely of male voices, are famous throughout the world. A large orchestra accompanies the singers.

The services are precisely the same in the three cathedrals, and there is little, if any, superiority in any of the choirs. A sort of tradition, however, exists among the Romans that Holy Thursday is the day to be devoted to St. Peter's. Realizing this, many foreigners are also attracted thither on that day instead of to the other churches. The throng is consequently enormous. The huge temple, capable of holding nearly 40,000 people, is crowded from vestibule to recesses. The wide steps approaching the church are jammed with people, and the great piazza in front is massed in its nearest part with promenaders, with thousands of waiting vehicles of every sort as a background.

Inside the basilica the strains of the orchestra and the deep volume of song issuing from the choir in a side chapel float over the heads of the human sea. The lighted candles on the triangle in front of the chapel altar are extinguished one by one at the close of each sorrowful canticle. When throughout the enormous cathedral surges the startling sound that symbolizes the fury of the elements and the chaos of the world at the moment of the Crucifixion, the last candle is extinguished and the service is finished. Daylight is almost gone. The priests, attendants and choir file out of the chapel and the church. Servants come from the sacristy on either side, bearing tall, lighted tapers. They carry these down the long nave, through the dense crowds, lighting on the way huge torches that are placed at intervals about the church. The torches throw their waving lights and shadows here and there with weird effect. Over head, the lofty roof and dome are deep in darkness. The white faces of the waiting thousands add an intense solemnity to the scene. Presently a way is opened from the sacristy to the altar under the great baldachino in the upper centre of the church. Through this marches a procession of priests chanting the appropriate psalms, and lighted on their way by the candles carried by surpliced acolytes. The procession halts under the baldachino, and the canons of St. Peter's, mounting the low steps, proceed to the altar, which is stripped of all cloths and ornaments. The altar is then washed and anointed, emblematic of the setting of the table for the Last Supper, the priests surrounding the spot continuing, meanwhile, the chanting of the proper ritual. When this service is concluded the procession leaves the church as it entered. The enormous congregation remains, however, in the dimly lighted cathedral, waiting for the last ceremony of the day. In a silence that thrillingly accentuates the gloom of the huge temple, the thousands face toward the space under the main dome, anxiously watching for a signal.

THE LAST CEREMONY OF THE DAY.

It comes at last. High up toward the roof, in a small railed balcony that seems less designed for use than as a capital to one of the corner columns of the dome, two lighted torches appear, carried by surpliced men. Presently a priest stands between them, holding aloft in his hands and above his head an object that, seen from below, seems incased in a massive frame of gilt. A bell is rung. The congregation kneels. While the object is turned first to one side of the church and then to the other, so as to be

visible to every one among the thousands present, another priest, standing on the distant balcony, reads in Italian a description of the venerated object. It is one of the Christian relics from the treasury of the Vatican. Thus a number of them are exhibited and described, one being announced as a fragment of the True Cross, another as one of the nails that fastened the Saviour thereto, still another as a thorn from the crown placed on the head of Christ on Crucifixion Day, a part of the veil or robe of the Virgin Mother, the handkerchief of Veronica, etc. When the last of the relics has been exhibited, and the light has disappeared from the little balcony in the distant, the great crowd moves out of the church into the piazza and thence scatters to all parts of Rome.

THE "ANGEL OF ROME."

On Good Friday the greater throngs of Italians and foreigners attend the Tenebrae in St. Marie Maggiore or in San Giovanni Laterano. The latter is the larger of the two churches and the most historic in Rome. It is also more convenient to the Scala Santa. Besides this, it is known that the great Moresbui, "the Angel of Rome," belongs to the choir of San Giovanni's. Hence thither go all the foreigners, and thousands of the Roman's, too. In San Giovanni Laterano the Tenebrae service is held in the main church. Many persons go there hours before the ceremony is to begin, that they may secure places where not one note of the thrilling and impressive music may escape them.

There are thousands of persons in this country who can recall that Good Friday scene, and few Americans ever chanced to spend Holy Week in Rome and missed the Tenebrae in "the Lateran." Down through the high vaulted nave rolls the billowing ocean of melody. Then there comes a pause that appals the great throng of listeners like a sombre shadow pursuing the sunlight. Again the soft modulation of the orchestra breaks the silence, and the blending of voices growing gradually deeper in volume, until presently there bursts forth a veritable thunder of sound. Once more an impressive wave of silence sweeps over all the church. The last light in the triangle has been extinguished. Darkness is gathering quickly. There is something of thrilling solemnity in the moment. The vast congregation waits entranced. Then out of the profound and universal calm that has settled upon it there floats upward a voice that seems something more than human. It rises gently, slowly, less like a sound than a visible thing moving on noiseless wings. Then it changes to a piteous, pleading prayer, each tone carrying a sound like a falling tear drop. Thus it floats through the darkening space. There is an instant's silence. Then once again that exquisite voice bursts into one deep, long, despairing sob that grows fainter and fainter, and ceases like the dying cry of a heart that is broken at last; and as the final note dies away there breaks forth that mad, fierce tumult that represents the hour of chaos when Christ breathed His last on the cross.

About a hundred yards from San Giovanni is the little edifice in which are thirty-three steps called the Scala Santa. One or two of these stairs are said to have been brought from the palace of Pilate, down which the Saviour passed to His execution. On all days of the year devotees may be seen climbing the staircase on their knees. When Good Friday comes, from early morning till long past the "Ave Maria," the little shrine is crowded with worshippers. It is one of the interesting features of Holy Week to the stranger in Rome. He will find all classes of people kneeling there, and if he chances there at the right hour he may see Queen Mar-

gherita herself making her devotions, side by side with a decrepit mendicant.

Easter Sunday is a gay and brilliant day in the Eternal City. The decorations in many of the churches are extremely beautiful, and an exceptional musical programme attracts throngs to the great basilicas. The flower markets are brilliant with the mass of flowers sent from all parts of the province. Society resumes at once its uninterrupted whirl. Presents are interchanged generally, as at Christmas time in this country. The illuminated Easter egg is conspicuous in all the shops. The streets take on anew their gay appearance, and on Easter afternoon all Rome walks or drives to the Villa Borghese and the Corso. The season of sackcloth and ashes is gone, and the old capital rises smiling and frolicsome to live its sunny life for another year.—N. Y. Tribune.

Catholics and the Primrose League.

The following letter has been addressed by Cardinal Vaughan to the Duke of Norfolk:—

English College, Rome, March 15.

MY DEAR DUKE—The reports published by some of the English papers that the Primrose League is about to be condemned by the Holy See are, so far at least as I am aware, devoid of foundation.

Certain speeches delivered by members of the League, who appear, however, to occupy no official or representative position in the organization, have no doubt been of a kind to attract attention and to suggest the question, what, then, is the object of the League?

For instance, one speaker declared that the League had been founded to maintain the Church of England and to destroy the influence of the Church of Rome. Such statements must, of course, be offensive to Catholics, who could have nothing in common with such intentions.

It is clear that Catholics can give no adhesion to any other than their own religion, and that they can never espouse the fatal error that all religions are good—an error which leads directly to religious indifference and to unbelief. But Catholics may, and ought, openly to profess that the principles of religion form the only solid basis on which civil society can be safely built up and maintained, and they can heartily associate and join forces with all those who labor to oppose the advance of naturalism and Atheism, and who offer a strenuous assistance to those who, by the system of education which they promote, and by other means, endeavor to eradicate from the public mind all sentiment of respect for the claims of revealed religion.

If any article in the statutes of the Primrose League is open to question through some ambiguity of expression, it is clear that it can only be accepted by Catholics in the sense which is in harmony with their own religious principles.

As to the rest, let me assure you that ecclesiastical authority in no way concerns itself with political or other lay associations, provided they neither attack nor undermine the principles of morality and of Christian doctrine.—Believe me to be, my dear Duke, your faithful and devoted servant.

HENRY CARDINAL VAUGHAN.
His Grace the Duke of Norfolk, K.G.

Have you ever noticed how much of Our Lord's life was spent in doing kind things—in merely doing kind things? Run over it with that in view, and you will find that He spent a great proportion of His time simply in making people happy—in doing turns to people. All life is good. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." All life is light, and joy, and gladness, and illumination. And when it comes the reverse to us it is because we have gotten "off the track," as people sometimes say, and the phrase is expressive. We have missed the way.