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LONDON, SATURDAY, JAN. 31, 1925

MUSSOLINI AND FREE MASONRY

There is much in the newspapers just now about Mussolini's "war on Free Masonry." A special cable to The Mail and Empire declares that this "war" was due to the "desire to win the good graces of the Catholic Church" which alone "can save Mussolini for a long term of power." He tells us further that "the Vatican apparently has swallowed his bait, owing to its extreme nervousness about Protestant proselytizing in Rome itself the Freemasons' disbelief in the Church and the haunting fear that the dictator's fall will usher in the reddest of terrors."

All such news and views as well as the prediction—not heard so frequently of late—that Mussolini's hold on the Italian people is weakening rapidly, must be taken with more than a grain of salt. With the wisdom and experience of nineteen hundred years and the unwavering faith in the promises of Christ, the Vatican is never so "nervous" and "fearful" as to swallow political bait of any kind whatsoever.

It is well to recall the origin of Fascism in order rightly to understand the present situation in Italy.

The Italian Socialists brought disaster on their fellow-countrymen during the War but that military disaster was brilliantly retrieved. After the War these extremists secured practical control and menaced Italy with the horrors of Russian Bolshevism. The Government was so pitifully weak that Fascism was born to save the life of the nation. It was successful for the past two years Mussolini has been the Fascist Prime Minister of Italy with the good will and co-operation of the overwhelming majority of his countrymen. For this fact so good a democrat as the American Ambassador to Rome emphatically vouches; and Ambassador Child is not less emphatic in his testimony as to the great good Mussolini has already accomplished.

Communist Socialism, however, is not dead nor has its spirit changed. An extract or two from a wireless despatch to the New York Times makes this clear:

Rome, Jan. 14.—Cheers for Lenin, cries of "Long Live Russia" and "Long Live the Revolution" threats of what will happen to the Italian Bourgeoisie when the proletariat carries out its "fast approaching revolution," and singing of the "Red Flag" were again heard in the Chamber today for the first time in two years.

Deputy Grieco was the Communist spokesman and the following are specimens of his political faith and hope:

"The only way to strike down Fascism," he continued, "is to strike down the Bourgeoisie, and only the proletariat can do this. Over Fascism's dead body the victorious proletariat will pass . . . But soon the whole Bourgeoisie will be dragged before revolutionary tribunals."

"We must remain by the side of the Russian workers and peasants," he concluded. "We salute Russia from which springs the light that irradiates throughout the world. Long live the revolution of the Italian workers and peasants! Long live Communism!"

It is hardly likely that the Italian people, released by Fascism from Communist terrorism, will throw over their Fascist pilot before reaching the port of national security. Mussolini will be given the mandate to finish his work; for the choice of the Italian people lies really between Fascism and Communism.

There is another consideration which throws light on the Italian situation.

The two-party system has been practically the sole political experience of English-speaking peoples. In European countries, on the contrary, there are so many political parties that none ever has a clear majority. Hence in most of these countries there is always governmental instability in a degree hard for us to imagine. In Italy before the Fascist counter-revolution, there was governmental impotence. To overcome this Mussolini, before the last Italian election, had an electoral law enacted giving to the party obtaining the largest number of votes—even though this was not a majority—two-thirds of the representation in Parliament. That gave the necessary stability and power to the Government to carry on its work of reconstruction. But this was a departure from representative government that could be justified only by the emergency. This electoral law was bitterly attacked as giving the Fascists an unfair advantage. The Fascists agreed that the emergency no longer existed and on January the 17th instant passed an electoral law which the cable tells us through the newspapers is "akin to the British;" and that "the Opposition expresses satisfaction and everyone seems pleased."

One obvious inference is that the Mussolini Government is quite willing to go to the Italian people on its two years' record and is confident of the result. After this coming election, at least, the term Dictator may as justly be applied to Stanley Baldwin as to Benito Mussolini.

With regard to "the war on Free Masonry" it is necessary to remember that while in English-speaking countries Free Masonry is, as a rule, non-political, in Latin countries it is intensely political. As the Roman correspondent to the New York Times puts it:

"Free Masonry in Italy and in America are declared to be two different things. In Italy Free Masonry is said to be an eminently political organization. It has great power in the Government bureaucratic machine. Supporters of the bill to outlaw it contend that it uses this power for corrupt and personal ends."

The following extract from an article in the Encyclopedia Britannica gives us what may be considered unbiased testimony to the facts here alleged:

"During the last three months of 1904 public opinion was diverted to the cognate question of the existence of masonic delation in the army. M. Guizot de Villeneuve, Nationalist deputy for Saint Denis, who had been dismissed from the army by General de Galliffier in connexion with the Dreyfus affair, brought before the Chamber a collection of documents which, it seemed, had been abstracted from the Grand Orient of France, the headquarters of French Free Masonry, by an official of that order. These papers showed that an elaborate system of espionage and delation had been organized by the Free Masons throughout France for the purpose of obtaining information as to the political opinions and religious practices of the officers of the army, and that this system was worked with the connivance of certain officials of the ministry of war. Its aim appeared to be to ascertain if officers went to Mass or sent their children to convent schools or in any way were in sympathy with the Roman Catholic religion, the names of officers so secretly denounced being placed on a black-list at the War Office, whereby they were disqualified for promotion. There was no doubt about the authenticity of the documents or of the facts which they revealed. Radical ex-ministers joined with moderate Republicans and reactionaries in denouncing the system. Anti-clerical deputies declared that it was no use to cleanse the War Office of the influence of the Jesuits, which was alleged to have prevailed there, if it were to be replaced by another occult power, more demoralizing because more widespread. Only the Socialists and a few of the Radical Socialists in the Chamber supported the action of the Free Masons. General Andre, minister of war, was so clearly implicated, with the evident approval of the prime minister, that a revulsion of feeling against the policy of the anti-clerical cabinet began to operate in the Chamber."

Marshal Foch, the hero of the Great War, was a victim; but that is another story.

It is the political activity, the secret political activity, of the Masons, that Mussolini aims to suppress. That this, and not a bid for Church support, is Mussolini's motive, is made clear by this paragraph from a recent letter from the New York Times' Roman correspondent:

"Mussolini always has been a violent hater of Free Masonry. He first made his mark in public life at the Congress of the Socialist Party in 1912, in which he proposed and secured the approval of a motion declaring it incompatible to be at the same time a Socialist and a Mason. Soon after his advent to power in 1922 he faced his Fascist followers with the same dilemma, declaring that they must choose between Fascist or Masons. This measure having merely increased the agitation of the Masons against him, he has now resorted to the even stronger step of introducing his legislative measure to outlaw Free Masonry if it does not abandon its character of a secret society."

Note the last words: "if it does not abandon its character of a secret society." That is if it does not substitute open and responsible political action for secret machinations that may be inimical to the general welfare. We give on page 1 the text of this much discussed legislative measure. It will be seen that its object is not to prevent Free Masons from exercising their full political rights; but to force them into the open and to assume responsibility for their political activities.

The preamble of Mussolini's Bill makes this still clearer. It argues that political freedom consists in the right which the law grants to all citizens to speak and act in public to attain certain ends that are, or are supposed to be, useful to the community. The law now proposed, the preamble says, also imposes certain limitations on this right in order that all citizens may enjoy it equally. Any one who, by speaking or acting in secret, attempts to escape these limitations, is, therefore, acting against liberty, one of the fundamentals of which is the equality of all citizens. From which it is deduced that all secret political activities are unconstitutional.

This famous measure was introduced on the basis of a report of a Commission of fifteen members that had been entrusted with the task of appraising the possibility of amending the Constitution of the Kingdom of Italy. This Commission, composed mostly of Senators and University Professors, unanimously advised the suppression of all secret societies in general and of Masonry in particular. This advice is based on specific reasons which are set forth in detail. And the Commission concludes as follows:

"Free Masonry has penetrated into the most delicate organs of the national life, using as its lever the chief banking institutions, which are enslaved by the Masonic elements. Its chief weapon is secrecy, which debases men's conscience, making them prone to intrigue and obliging them to submit to discipline against which they cannot rebel without breaking their vows; which forces them to maintain an internal solidarity which annuls, or overcomes, every other duty of loyalty or justice, and which insures impunity to any one who profits by it."

It is said that the Italian Free Masons are using their influence to depress the lira; and it seems that no considerations of loyalty or justice will be allowed to interfere with this form of treason to their native country and injury to their fellow countrymen. If thereby they may lessen Mussolini's prestige and influence.

The special correspondent of the Mail and Empire and the New York World, from whom we quoted at the beginning of this article, bears this out:

"The Government has been put in a curious situation by the fall of the lira, which apparently is going on steadily."

"The Freemasons, who have been so hard hit by the bill against secret societies that they have had to dissolve lodges all over Italy, are finding allies in Free Masons on Bourses throughout the world. The battle, which should be waged in the Chamber of Deputies, has been taken from the politicians by the bankers."

In this conflict we may take for granted that the news agencies and special correspondents will continue to tell the reading world of Masonic martyrdom and Fascist tyranny. We have tried, without passion or prejudice, to give our readers the facts of the case. Next week we shall show some of the unfair distortion of facts and unwarranted inferences that are calculated to create a very false impression in the premises.

WHAT THEY DID TO THE BIBLE

By THE OBSERVER

When Saint Jerome undertook the translation of the Bible in the fourth century, he had been soaked in the learning pertaining to the Sacred Scriptures for a period of thirty years. He had been for the greater part of his life the pupil of the greatest authorities on the sacred writings who were then alive. One must remember also that the fourth century was eleven hundred years nearer to the time of the Apostles than was the time of the Reformation. The handwriting of the four evangelists, Saints Mathew, Mark, Luke and John was still in existence or had only been gone for a very short time.

The Church in the east, centering around the authority of the patriarchs of Constantinople, who in their turn were in close communication with the Popes, was not yet in schism. The traditions of the Apostles were still very fresh in the sees they had founded. The Roman Empire was not yet broken up. The barbarians were only just commencing to invade the territories of that empire or at least had not yet made enough gains to disturb the security of sees and libraries and schools and teachers, and not yet enough change had been wrought in the situation to undermine and to destroy the work which the Church had done in converting the pagans of the Roman Empire. Such destruction and such disturbance did come later, and only a little later, than the time of Saint Jerome. But when the great work of translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Vulgate, which is still the Church's great authorized version, was completed by Saint Jerome, none of those great convulsions which shook all Europe and all the east, and which set for the Church a new work of civilization and conversion, had yet made much progress.

Saint Jerome, therefore, had great advantages in undertaking his great work. He was familiar with all the copies of the Scriptures that were in existence. He had travelled all over the Christian communities in both east and west, in Asia as well as in Europe. He had been in close touch with the greatest scholars of the time; and those scholars were, so far as regarded the Bible, as much ahead of the scholars of the twentieth century as the latter are ahead of them in regard to electricity and mechanics. Those were the days when men of learning and sanctity gave the whole of their lives to the study of the Scriptures; and amongst such men Saint Jerome was pre-eminent. The conditions of the times, and the availability of the ancient manuscripts favored him exceedingly, to an extent which was impossible to those who attempted the study of the sacred writings at a later time. His work was done before the Roman Empire came to its end, that is, before Alaric took the city of Rome and laid it waste, which was for practical purposes the end of that empire.

Saint Jerome finished his work ten hundred and seventy-eight years before Luther was born; and his work is still treated by the Church as the best and most authentic version of the sacred writings in existence, and thoroughly trustworthy. Now, let us consider what was the situation of those who attempted to revise the work of Saint Jerome after the Reformation began. In the first place, think of all that had come and gone in the meantime. The whole situation of the known world had changed, and changed not merely once but several times. The destruction of the Roman Empire led to fearful changes, political, social, and religious. The Church of God which had but shortly before succeeded in Christianizing the Roman empire, was faced with the task of converting the barbarian conquerors of that empire.

What did that mean? It is almost impossible to realize all that it did mean. All institutions, political, social, and religious, were uprooted in so far as military conquest can do such things, and everywhere the first idea was to destroy whatever had to do with the religion of the conquered Christians. The ancient manuscripts which had been open to Saint Jerome were in large part destroyed. Peoples were extirpated with all that they possessed. Communications were broken. Teaching was interrupted. Libraries were burned. Sees were ruined. Old settlements came to an end and new ones were started. Scholarship became uncertain because of unfavorable conditions. The unsettled conditions were favorable to heretical movements, and there were many such movements. A large part of the work which the Church had done up to that time was smothered in chaos.

Next came the Mohammedan movement; which drove the eastern Christians out of the Catholic Church in millions at the sword's point, and devastated their countries with all that they possessed, especially all they had in the way of writings and libraries. Consider what that meant in those times. Saint Jerome was in the habit of copying with his own hand whole books which he could not acquire for his own. There was no printing then, nor for a thousand years afterwards. Consider what it meant to have a collection of manuscripts destroyed. And consider what it meant to have communications between the Pope and the far-flung sees of the Church interrupted so seriously.

We shall have further comments.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

THE ITALIAN Department of Railways has appropriated the equivalent of £2,500,000 for new rolling-stock to meet the extra traffic demands of the Holy Year. Another example of the benefit accruing to Italy, even in a material sense, from its possession of the capital of the Christian World.

THE "IMITATION OF CHRIST" is often referred to, after the Bible, the best known book in the world—certainly the best known book of devotion. Some idea of its diffusion as a printed volume may be had from the fact that there are over thirteen hundred separate editions in the library of the British Museum alone. And this is but a fraction of those in other countries.

HOUSING CONDITIONS in the larger cities of Great Britain since the close of the War are reflected in the figures given out in regard to Glasgow. The annual report of the Medical Health Officer of that city states that nearly 40,000 are housed by having more than three people to each room; in 14,131 cases from four to six persons; and in 1,643 cases from seven to nine persons; and in 19,000 two-roomed dwellings from seven to nine people are living. In face of these statistics slum-conditions may be said scarcely to exist on this continent, for which fact we should be duly grateful.

GERMANY is not usually regarded as in any sense a Catholic country, yet in some provinces is largely so—Bavaria particularly. This is shown by the statement that there are 480 monasteries, and 6,316 convents in the whole of Germany, and that of these the great majority are in Bavaria. The Franciscans, with 89 monasteries, and 1,827 religious, are the most numerous; the Benedictines coming next with 28 houses and 1,847 members. The Jesuits, against whom Bismarckian animus was particularly directed, and who were for so many years excluded from Germany, have now 26 regular establishments, with 328 members. Few other European countries can equal that.

CATHOLIC FOREIGN Missions have taken on renewed life since the War. Following upon the terrific catastrophe which overtook Japan two years ago a movement towards Catholicism and a more intense religious life has shown itself. In Sapporo alone, fifty native families embraced the Faith at one and the same time. In China the long catalogue of martyred missionaries within the past fifty years is a seed from which an abundant harvest may be looked for in the years to come.

IN REGARD to the latter it is given out that since the beginning of the nineteenth century, no less than 7 bishops, 84 priests, 8 brothers and 19 sisters have shed their blood for the Faith. The following are their nationalities: 78 French, 16 Italian, 16 Belgian, 6 Dutch, 2 German, 1 Spanish and 1 Irish. Five of the French martyrs have already been beatified, and to others the same recognition will no doubt be accorded by the Church in due time. In addition, there is the large number of native martyrs, clerical and lay, running into many thousands.

THE OPENING of the Vatican Archives to the scholars of the world by Pope Leo XIII. has resulted in revision of many heretofore accepted verdicts of history. Even the person of Pope Alexander VI., who has always been held up as a pattern of blackest infamy, begins to emerge from that category. That he was very far from being a saint is of course admitted by all but the tales of murder and poisoning which have been told about him are now largely traced to the violent contemporary lampoons of Silvio Savelli which were largely circulated in Rome by political enemies of the Borgia family and of the Church. "Alexander," says Lange, "as a Sybarite who cared nothing for the opinions of the world, bore these attacks with perfect equanimity, and unless they contained actual threats never took any measures in regard to them. He looked upon Rome as a privileged place where everyone should be left free to speak and write as he pleased." So much for the assumed intolerance and tyranny of the Holy See, even in an age when freedom of speech was less understood than it is now.

OF THESE lampoons Ludwig Pastor, latest and perhaps greatest of historians of the Papacy, says: "Writings like these exercised a lasting effect on the judgments regarding him, both of his contemporaries and of later times. The longer this incredible liberty in the expression of opinion lasted in Rome the more freely was it taken advantage of by the enemies of the Borgia. Literary men vied with each other in producing the most melodramatic and unheeded of accusations, and spicing them with the most caustic wit."

INDEX OF FORBIDDEN BOOKS

REASON, COMMON SENSE AND PRUDENCE POINT TO THE WISDOM OF INDEX

By Father J. B. McLaughlin, O.S.B., in Catholic Times

If you should fall under suspicion of committing, say, frauds in business, the prosecuting lawyer would give a picture of your doings that would stagger even you. He would take the details of the ordinary life you are living, and spin them into strings of suspicious looking acts, all the strings pointing one way—to the fraud alleged against you. If, again, you were suspected of a plot against Government, your same daily doings would be woven into another picture, completely different from the first, all its strings pointing in another equally suspicious direction. So, too, would it be if the charge were poisoning, or taking part in a night assault, or any other crime; in every case your innocent life furnishes materials for a very black picture of you.

HOLD FAST BY TRUTH

In these pictures we may note several points. None of them is true. None throws any real light on your character. If one takes the trouble to put them all together, they contradict each other, for if one were true, the others must be false. But any one of them, read alone, impresses the reader. Other readers agree that you were rash, and that the case looks black against you. Even you, reading it, think you must have been very incautious to do what can be so misconstrued. But when you see that it can be misconstrued in every opposite direction, you realize that you cannot guard against suspicion whatever you may do. The lesson I draw from these examples is, that when you know the truth (as you do about your own doings) no good comes from reading plausible arguments against it; no good, but much disquiet. And when others do not know the truth (as they do not know it about your doings), no good comes to them from reading plausible arguments against it. These plausible arguments are only useful to a judicial mind that listens carefully to both sides, and can judge how much of the plausibility on each side is due to the facts and how much to the lawyer's skill in grouping them.

REASONABLE GROUNDS

Here we have one ground for the Church's law forbidding us to read

books against religion. We have the truth, from God Himself. Plausible attacks are made on it from all sides, attacks which disprove each other when read together; what one calls too high another calls too low, and so on. But to read only one of them disturbs the mind. The case against the truth seems surprisingly strong, like the lawyer's case to prove you a thief.

If you were one whose duty it is to clear up these attacks on the truth for the sake of the souls that are deceived by them, it would then be necessary for you to read such a book, to compare it with the Catholic doctrine, to show how the facts are seen in their true light by the Church, and to explain how the unbeliever misread them. But if your duty does not require you to study both sides fully, then it will do you no good, but probably harm, to read or hear what a clever man has to say against the truth. And therefore the Church is bound to forbid it.

DIVERSITY OF INTELLECTS

Another consideration is this: In the Church are all classes of minds, from the dullest to the keenest, from the most ignorant to the most learned. And among those also who attack the Church are to be found all these classes of minds. If we arrange them on each side from the lowest to the highest, it is evident that a man higher on the ladder of intelligence can make out a case for his own side that a man lower down cannot see through nor answer. But this does not say that the unanswered case is unanswerable, or is true. It only says that you are not a match for the pleader on the other side. And since you cannot see through his arguments, it will only hurt you to read them. The Church will provide someone else to answer them—probably has answered them centuries since. No one at all, whoever clear-minded, can profit by reading only the attack on truth, without the Church's answer. And to read both will profit only those who have the education and the clearness of thought needed to follow and to weigh the thinkers on each side. Therefore, ordinarily, these attacks must not be read.

There is another fact in human nature to be considered. We are impressed by the opinions and beliefs of others. I do not mean by their arguments, but by the mere fact that they believe what we do not. If in house after house you are told that bacon brings cancer, or that it is silly to abstain on Fridays, it makes a strong impression on you. Or if even one man whom you think clever tells you so, it impresses you. It sets you wondering if your old belief will have to be reconsidered.

PLAUSIBLE REASONING

At bottom this impression seems (but only seems) to rest on a reasonable ground—that since what looks so plain to me is not plain to others, possibly I am mistaken. It does not rest on that, as a moment's thought will show. For we have always known that our religion is disbelieved by many. And that their disbelief and their objections have caused the Church to examine these things to the very roots. And that after examining them, thousands of minds of the highest order have held to the Catholic faith with the deepest conviction—sufficient proof that the faith is in complete accord with reason. Knowing this, we were at peace in our faith and sorry for those who lack it. And yet, when someone, in speech or in print, says to us personally what we have always known, that our belief seems to him unconvincing and silly, we are impressed. Why? Certainly not through our reason; he has given us nothing new to think of. Probably it is through our feelings, the feeling that shrinks from a sneer, or from conflict.

This liability to be unreasonably impressed by what we hear or read justifies the Church's law forbidding us to read attacks on religion; and her other law (Canon 1,325) forbidding us to hold religious disputes and debates with non-Catholics, unless we have leave from the Pope, or in urgent cases from the Bishop.

THE FACT THAT MATTERS

Throughout, I am taking for granted the fact that the Church has the truth from God. The Church's laws are made for those who know that fact. God has given us the truth that we may build on it. Faith in it is the foundation of our soul's life; its growth is all to be built on that foundation. It is wasting our time—our building-time—to spend it in constantly re-examining the foundations. If you stop your building to make a new examination every time a new theorist comes along to tell you that the foundations are wrong; if you stop your train every time one who does not understand suggests that it is badly built, or on unsafe rails; you can make no progress. God gives us our time to build our souls; first to learn to believe His truth, the sooner the better; and then in the light of that truth to build our soul's growth. "While you have the light, trust the light," and walk by it; for there are but 12 hours in the day.

WHERE CATHOLICS FAIL

Everything, therefore, that makes us falter in faith, question the light or distrust it, is destroying God's work, who gave us the light to walk by; and wasting the time He gives