

**RELIGION IN ROME**

**The Lives of Preasts, Princes and People.**

A Protestant writer, Mr. John C. Heywood, in the New York Sun, gave the following generous and out spoken testimony sometime ago.

"When Rome first became my place of residence, I had, in regard to Roman Catholics, the feelings and notions nurtured by the strictest Protestants, and I awaited solicitations and attempts at seduction from the bad woman of Babylon. Therefore was I disappointed when priests and prelates whom I met, while cordial and engaging, rarely manifested even knowledge of a difference in our religious views, or any desire to make of me a proselyte. The experience of others may have been diverse; this has been mine.

"I began to observe more nearly the lives of the priests. And here let me say that no one is more ready to admit and avow that there are bad priests than 'Papists' themselves; nor have such priests ever been more sternly blamed than by clerical and lay members of the same communion. Something is known generally concerning the self-denial and self-devotion of these men in times of public calamity, because the world's gaze is turned to the scenes of which they are part. But these characteristics are not assumed for the occasion. They are manifested unconsciously in daily life and conversation to those who keep near to them and observe. Let me report a fact as an illustration. In the parish where I live, the parish priest's whole salary was 800 lire, a little less than 160 dollars a year. Out of this he had to pay his sacristan. The parish, like all parishes in Rome, contains many very poor people, and the priest could not refuse them all the help in his power; nay, he went beyond his financial strength, and was in the habit of borrowing money to give away, so that when his scant salary was received, a large portion of it went to cancel debts contracted for charity's sake. Not very long ago the Pope appointed this man Bishop in a distant see. Of course this was a notable advancement in honor, in place, and in fortune, or revenue. But the priest was not pleased. He obtained an audience of the Pope, and humbly prayed to be left where and what he was, pleading that he loved his people, and that they needed him. I do not know the words of the Pope's answer, but they were to this effect: that the priest was made of stuff suitable for a Bishop, and a Bishop he must be.

"The religious education of the young, right or wrong as my readers may choose to think, is heedfully compassed, and in a way which does not render the teacher a terror to the taught. I have often seen touching proofs of the affection felt for these gentle instructors by the children, not only in Rome, but in remote towns and villages of Italy, ragged urchins leaving their play in the streets to run and kiss the hand of their spiritual father as he passes by, receiving in return a pat on the head, a smile, or a kind word. Generally the parish priest, have a thorough acquaintance with their parishioners, especially the poorest of them, knowing their names, and needs intimately, and with prompt readiness they are ready to answer and call for their services, official or otherwise, by day or night, in fair weather or foul, full or fasting.

"Not less sincere must be the self denial and self-devotion of the men who belong to several of the religious brotherhoods. Voluntarily cutting themselves off from every ordinary incentive to industry, from all things which are usually esteemed pleasures of life and emoluments of talent well employed, they yet labour with an assiduity hardly known among men most ambitious of fame or of the most persistent money-getters. Let the Benedictine Order be an example, that great personality, practically immortal, like some civil corporations, in which the individual is lost. All are labourers; and when the pen drops from the hand of one, another takes up pen and theme, till, in course of time by such imperceptible successions of workmen, a composition is completed, to live and testify of the industry, learning, and great capacity of this fraternity so long as sound eruditions shall exist whose authors are only known to the world as the Benedictine Monks.

"In the face of such facts, it seems impossible to doubt the candour, humility, and devotion of these men, or at least of much the greater part of them, however persistently the correctness of their belief may be denied.

"Parishioners are held to their religious duties, or attend to them voluntarily, at any rate, so far as their observance is concerned. Recently I was at Anzio, the antique Antium, where a large part of the population, especially during the spring and summer months, are fishermen from Gaeta, Naples, and other places on the coast—a most orderly and sober collection of poor men and boys living in their boats. At the celebration of services the large church was nearly filled by them, and the permanent residents, all serious, attentive, joining loudly and with great unanimity in the responses, though very meagrely clad, and not all clean enough to sit in Grace church. I have been often affected almost to tears seeing similar sights in Rome and other places through the plain sincerity and earnest devotion of the worshippers. For them the fundamental truths of Christianity, as admitted by all Christians, and many traditions, are facts, facts as real as the Pantheon or the Coliseum or the Arch of Titus. Have they not before their eyes the tangible image of Christ on the cross, of His mother broken-hearted, holding His dead body in her arms, and representations of His resurrection and ascension? May they not occasionally see portions of the very cross on which He died, particularly at Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, with the nails and almost all of the inscription which was placed over His head on Calvary? Can they not on their knees climb the sacred stairs which he once

ascended to Pilate's palace, and worship in the church on the spot where St. Peter, flying from martyrdom, met Him and said, "Domine quo vadis? May they not kiss the chains which held St. Peter, and visit the place where he was crucified, head downward? May they not also see the fetters with which St. Paul was bound, and the three fountains where he was beheaded? And palpable (to them) proofs of many other sacred facts? Do they not tread the same ground and breathe the same air as some of the apostles and martyrs?

"If we confine our attention to the patrician and richer portions of the Roman population, the class from which 'society' is composed, we shall remark the good breeding, respectful conduct, and filial devotion of children, even after they have become men and women: the ties and attractions of home, the general purity of the young men, the uniformly modest deportment of the young women, the absence of profanity and ribaldry, decent and regular observance of religious duties, reverential respect for sacred things, no pride of place in the churches, the prince and the beggar kneeling literally side by side on the stone floors. With this class the custom of alms-giving is a tradition and a constant practice. In that regard there are persons of exceptional eminence. I know a lady, granddaughter of a king, whose mother would have been a queen had not force interfered with hereditary right, who has despoiled herself of her personal jewels, selling them to obtain means to prosecute her charities. She is a very early riser, and most industrious worker for many charitable organisations, a non-faustidious watcher by the poorest cots when she can help or console, and a modest, cheerful member of society, enjoying heartily balls, dinners, and other social, innocent pleasures. A few days ago a young prince, not yet forty years old, died suddenly. His beneficent acts were proportioned to his large means, and his chief aim in life was plainly to be good. His funeral was of the most unpretentious kind, absolutely without pomp or show of mourning, according to the rules of the religious confraternity to which he belonged. Another prince, whose title is not so old, a very rich man, absorbed all his long life in affairs, yet failing not to attend church every day, sustains an orphan asylum where seventy fatherless and motherless children are supplied with all they need; a school for boys and girls where, besides instruction, they receive food at noon; an infant retreat where young children of both sexes are fed and taught during the day; a holiday school for boys and girls; a hospital for old men and women, where all their needs are supplied, and where they may remain till death; a doctor, surgeon, medicines, bread and meat for the poor sick in the whole of a large parish in Trastevere; a hospital for the treatment of diseased eyes when the sufferers cannot pay for such treatment. He is now building a new hospital for poor people who have need of surgical operation. Besides, he gives monthly aid to many indigent persons in Rome, and to greater numbers makes gifts on Christmas, Easter, in the month of August, and on All Saints' Day. He has beds and linen dealt out to the needy; he furnishes food and wine to several monasteries; on New Year's Day he makes particular distributions. He gives away many books of devotion; he supports missionaries; helps priests and poor folk, not only in various parts of Italy, but out of it also; has renovated and richly decorated many churches, and so forth.

Now all these things appear to me fruits of religion, and "by its fruits shall ye know it." Whatever may be said of the Roman Catholic faith and practice, that it is corrupt, erroneous, bigoted, what not, I have never seen in any other place Christianity so actual, so much a constant fact, so much a part of life, as in this Roman Catholic Rome. Of course, in all that is said here I speak of clerical Rome, or, if you please, pontifical as distinguished from royal Rome. That there are black sheep in the flock cannot be doubted. No more can it be doubted that there are among the shepherds wolves in sheep's clothing. Since both flock and shepherds are men, the absence of such would be marvellous. But when I note the vital religion of laymen belonging to all classes, and especially the self-denial, the self-devotion, the earnestness of the clerical body as a whole, and am forced to admit the absence of worldly motives, greater popularity as preachers, a rich and fashionable congregation in some city, means to indulge in greater luxury, opportunities to provide for a growing family, and so on, I cannot doubt the heartfelt sincerity of these men, the honesty of their belief, and the fact that they find their reward in well doing, or look for it hereafter. Nor can I refrain from paying them—the true shepherds, not the wolves—a tribute of profound and reverential respect.

Such are the impressions which a somewhat careful and prolonged observation of Roman Catholicism in Rome has produced on me.

JOHN C. HEYWOOD.

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