

OUR LETTER FROM ENGLAND.

(From our Correspondent.)

No one can visit the Vatican without feeling an embarrassment of riches, especially in the matter of sculpture. There are better pictures at Florence and in Venice, but no sculptures as a whole like those in the Vatican. The best of Grecian and of Roman art in all their periods meet here. Of course one made for the famous group of statuary known as the Laocoon, which Michael Angelo said was the real wonder of art. Lessing's admirable book led one to seize its many points of excellence. The reality fully came up to expectation. The coils of the serpent, the different agonizing expressions of the two sons, owing to the difference in the grip of the monster, the heroic but terrible struggle of the father, every muscle ready to burst with energy, and the face brim full of stern decision, are features which are best perceived and grasped when standing before this acknowledged triumph of the three Greek masters of their art. The same remarks will apply to the famous Belvedere Apollo. In a moment the alertness of attitude, the defiance of mind, and the majesty as well as the beauty of the figure, well justify the unstinted and spontaneous admiration in which the statue is regarded. It stands alone not only in its niche, but alone in the arcade hall in which it is shown, and this is suggestive of its place amongst the single statues of the world. None but itself can be its parallel. The Laocoon, as a group of figures, occupies a similar unique position in the artistic world, ancient or modern. To have seen these two works of art alone is no mean part of one's education, and they are worth traversing the whole circle of the earth to behold, examine and enjoy. I was lucky enough to approach Florence just as the sun was rising over the city. There was no mistaking the much heard of Duomo towering like a sacred mother over the red and drab cluster of houses, cupolas and campanilis. The latter of Giotto's stood clear and exquisitely beautiful against the light green morning sky. No time was lost in seeing the loveliest of Italian cities from the high point known as Santa Miniata. On reaching the best coign of vantage George Eliot's word picture (in "Romola") was found to be true in every feature. Here, right underneath one, was the gently flowing river—the Arno—leading to the sea in one direction and to Vallambrosa in the other. Right in the distance nestled Fiesole, with its charming mansions perched on the picturesque heights. Near stands Santa Croce, the Westminster Abbey of Florence; there is the Ponte Della Grazie, called Ruba Ponte by George Eliot; beyond is the Ponte Vecchio, the old bridge with its houses on either side (as London Bridge used to be), and there is the Vecchia Palazzo, the old Florentine Palace, hoary with many a grim scene. The dome of the Medici chapel is clearly seen in the heart of the city. But yonder, dominating all, is the huge dome of the cathedral (the Duomo), famous for the eloquent harangues of the saintly Savonarola. Beautiful for situation, redolent of stirring associations, indeed, is this Flower Queen (Florence) of Italy, only surpassed in quaintness by the sister city of Venice. Being different, the one on the sea, the other in the long stretching valley, they must not be compared; each is a queen in her own right, and each commands and enchains the spontaneous admiration of the traveller. Happy is the man who has seen either city. How happy then must I be to have seen both, and under the most favourable conditions! In due course Santa Croce was visited and the monuments of Michael Angelo and Galileo scanned and enjoyed. How true are the words on Galileo's tomb—*Nulli in Suae Aetatis Comparatus*. Who indeed could be compared with him in his own age, for Newton lived in a later one? Though there is a fine statue of Dante in the

Piazzo, there is no monument here, for the simple reason that, smarting under his banishment by his own Florentines, he expressly wished to be buried in Ravenna. Michael Angelo finds a fitting resting place in his native city, notwithstanding that his greatest triumphs were wrought in Rome. When standing in the Tribuna, in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, one is surrounded first by masterpieces of Grecian sculpture, the exquisite Venus de Medici, the dancing Satyr, the Wrestlers, the Knife Sharpeners, all original, and amaze one by their vigorous pose and perfect execution; and then secondly by the gems of Florentine painting. Here are the Venus, by Titian; the Madonna (of the Goldfinch), by Raffaele; and Albert Durer's Adoration of the Magi. In the same gallery the tyro in art can see its wonderful yet gradual growth in the pictures of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Perugino, Botticelli, Andrea del Sarto to Raffaele. As new ideas came in from without the artists and sculptors imbibed and expressed them, and so made a steady advance towards the full perfection attained in Michael Angelo. The pictures of Andrea, the Tailor's Son—to take his Assumption for example—made a deep impression on my mind for their workmanship, expression and

teen children, is matchlessly portrayed. Greek sculpture reached here its highest point and may well be the despair of modern artists. But for size and its stirring associations the Duomo—the cathedral—beyond being the mother church of the city, has little of interest. The west front is in its own style, and only recently completed. The real glory of Florence is the Giotto Campanili—close by the Duomo. Even Ruskin may well lament his lack of words to describe its fascination. It is a glorious combination of stateliness and beauty. It is a tower nearly 300 feet in height, but every part of it inlaid with different coloured mosaics; the windows are long, graceful arches, divided by twisted marble shafts; there are well proportioned architraves between each tier of the tower, and plenty of niches in which are lovely statues. For comeliness of design, for fullness of rich detail and for entrancing harmony of colour, the Campanili of Giotto is surely the most beautiful thing in the world; it is the very poetry of art.

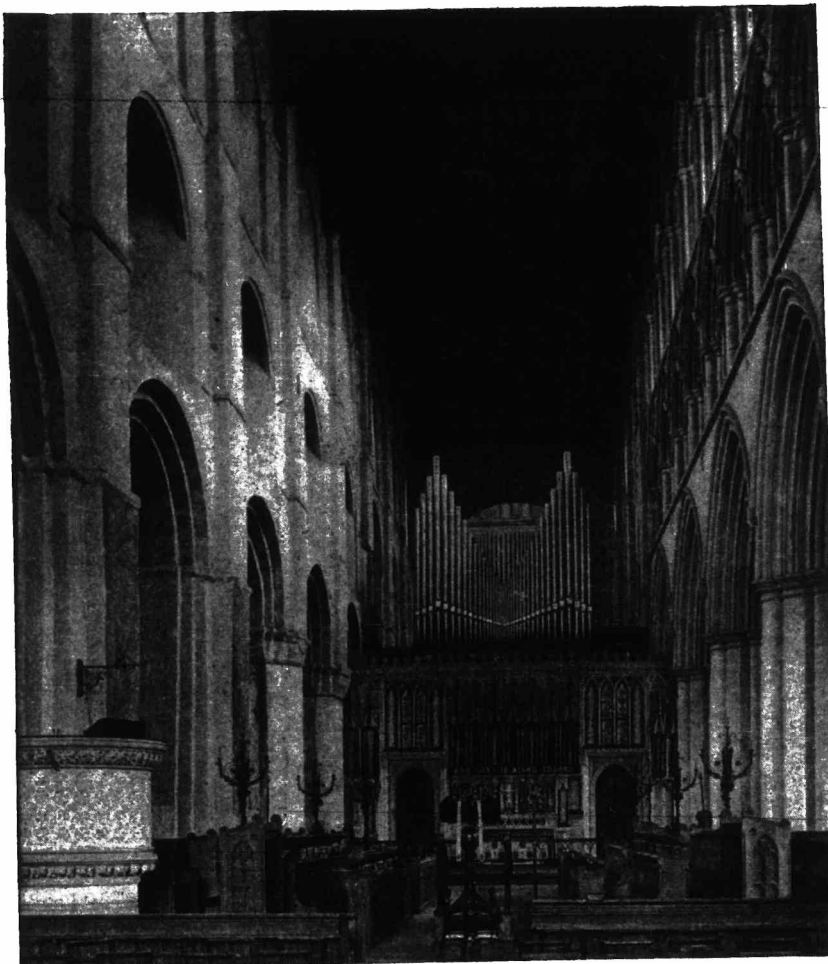
—The luxury of doing good surpasses every other personal enjoyment.—Gay.

ARE THE CLERGY TO BLAME?

Are the clergy, to any extent, to blame for the absence of the spirit of Christian liberality which is so conspicuous in the lives of many men of wealth who are connected with our churches? The following extract from an utterance of a great layman is, at any rate, worthy of their serious consideration: "One thing I have against the clergy, both of the country and in the town," said Mr. Gladstone, "I think they are not severe enough on their congregations. They do not sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts, and bring up their whole lives and actions to the bar of conscience. The class of sermons which I think are most needed are the class which offended Lord Melbourne long ago. Lord Melbourne was seen one day coming from church in the country in a mighty fume. Finding a friend, he exclaimed: 'It is too bad! I have always been a supporter of the Church, and I have always upheld the clergy. But it is really too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that we have had this morning. Why, the preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man's private life!' But that is the kind of preaching which I like best; the kind of preaching which men need most; but it is also the kind of which they get the least." One thing is certain. No preaching is worthy the name unless in some way it presents, with the searching force of a burning and a shining light, the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, how He said; "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

THE POWER OF PRAYER.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that when St. Peter was in prison, prayer was made, without ceasing, by the Church unto God for him; and in response to the prayer the angel of the Lord struck the chains from St. Peter's hands and opened the door of the prison and led St. Peter forth from the prison and restored him to his friends. The power of prayer is absolutely unlimited, and we should not forget that there are many souls in prisons of all sorts for whom we should pray. Not only are their souls in literal prisons, "all prisoners and captives," but there are souls in the prisons of sin, and folly, and vice. "I am so fast in prison that I cannot get out," says the Psalmist, speaking for such souls. They cannot get out by their own efforts; therefore we should pray that God would break the iron bars and the gates of brass for them.



ST. ALBANS ABBEY—THE CHOIR.

colour. No one can see the beautiful angels of the Monk, Fra Angelico, without going into raptures over their chaste and satisfying loveliness. Similar and even better specimens of his skill and power are found in St. Mark's Monastery, of which he was a member. I digress for a moment to say that a visit to that monastery is necessary to learn the part played by Savonarola in the history of Florence. Here he was Prior; I saw his cell, his books, his writing table and his portrait by the accomplished and devoted Fra (monk), who delighted to own the bold Prior as his spiritual father and master. In the great gallery—the Pitti—there is even more of the highest art; very nearly all are masterpieces. Who would not travel far to see Raffaele's chief work—the "Madonna of the Chair"? It equals in my mind the Dresden Madonna—a duplicate of which I saw at St. Moritz last year. In purity of look, in graceful pose, in finish of craftsmanship it is captivating and satisfying in the highest degree. No photograph or copy can convey the true and instantaneous effect the picture has on you. In this gallery is the famous Mobl—acknowledged to equal, if not to surpass, the Laocoon in the Vatican. The calm, resolute bearing, under what should be overwhelming grief for her four-