

## CATHOLICITY AND NATIONAL PROSPERITY.\*



WHEN the condition of the Catholic Church comes to be summed up in the words of an Italian journalist: "The peoples of the Papal religion are either dead or dying," one of two things must have come to pass:—either passionate hatred for all that is Catholic, is the mould in which public opinion is formed, or history has ceased to have any claim upon our confidence. We are not concerned about settling which of these statements is the correct one—though there is little doubt as to the result of an examination—the words of the laconic Italian are of more consequence. It is the old enemy returning to the attack; the oft repeated charge, under a new form:—the Catholic Church when compared with the religion of the Reformation, has done little or nothing in the work of civilization.

Catholics the world over, meet this statement with an emphatic no; and they are confirmed in their belief by a study of the social and political movement of the world, in this and past ages. Protestants on the other hand, no less ardent in their rashness, take the truth of such charges for granted. Of the latter we have but one request to make. We ask only the privilege of stating our cause; we wish that judgment be withheld until we have presented our side of the question, until we have spoken through, and if then we do not produce conviction, at least, it will have to be admitted that our position is a strong one.

To vindicate the Catholic Church and estimate the influence she has exerted in the gradual development of nations, a return to the history of the early ages is unavoidable. We must take a survey of every age, dating from the commencement of Christianity, for from that time, the Catholic Church has been a potent factor in establishing society and endowing man with the rights of citizenship. Rome of

old gave unity to the world. If she did not restore order among the factions, she at least commanded a slavish submission. Temporal authority, however, which first assumed a definitely concrete reality under the name and title of the Roman Empire, required Catholicity to give to it its proper form. Being of divine origin—for no man has power to command except by delegation—and having for object to ameliorate the condition of those in whom it is exercised, it is apparent that a knowledge alike of the source and the end of authority, cannot be dispensed with. Man must be made better by the exercise of authority, his path in life must be made less rough, otherwise authority is falsely so-called and its exercise is a usurpation of a sacred right. Pagan Rome was ignorant as well of the origin of her power as of the nature of the subject over whom she exercised it; such a lofty notion was beyond her reach, even when at the summit of her greatness. Flushed by victory after victory, until she was saluted "mistress of the world," the highest object of her existence, was the preservation of the State. The State was the only individual, the sole possessor of rights. To the State everything was subservient. Man, taken individually, had no other office to perform than that of contributing his share in the common work of State-preservation. If that share happened to be his life, there was no alternative; if it happened to be the lives of thousands, the law was still inexorable. The Roman Emperor knew not what it meant to be disobeyed. Such were the rude and ruinous notions that prevailed regarding man. What then can we not expect them to have thought of man's maker—the Divinity? Pagan Rome before the advent of Catholicity, had never heard of the idea of a personal God. Cicero has left a lengthy list of the most noted philosophers of his time, all of whom differ on vital points pertaining to the Deity. Man was wretched; he was worse than the brutes, but as yet he did not realize the full extent of his wretchedness; he knew no better. Not before the advent of Catholicity was a change

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