

Miscellaneous.

QUEEN ISABELLA'S CONFESSOR.

Sir George Bowyer vouches for the fact that Monsignor Claret, the confessor of Queen Isabella of Spain, is "a most exemplary ecclesiastic; that "his whole life is devoted to charity and piety," and that he is "universally venerated as a most devout and practical Christian."

Lady Herbert, the widow of the lamented Sidney Herbert, who, since she was left a widow has herself gone over to the Romish Church, adds her testimony, in her "Recollections of Spain," assuring us, that Monsignor Claret is "a man remarkable for his great personal holiness and ascetic life."

We accept these testimonies without any difficulty, and shall offer no resistance to the admission of M. Claret into the company of that small body of ecclesiastics who are exceptions to the general rule. The ordinary repute and general estimation of the Spanish clergy is, that they are not holy men,—that they are not even decently moral men. As to this fact, our readers may consult Blanco White, himself a Spanish priest, or Inglis, or Meyrick, or any other of a dozen travellers who have described the state of Spain within the last twenty years.

Monsignor Claret, however, is to be taken to be an exception to the general rule. According to Sir George Bowyer and Lady Herbert, he is a very saintly man. But this fact introduces, of necessity, a very awkward and difficult question.

This Queen is a "very religious" Queen. She is constantly in the habit of going to mass, and of communicating. But she cannot do this without first confessing and receiving absolution. She must have lived, then, for years, in the habit of daily sin, of the most flagrant kind; and in the habit of going day by day, to kneel before her confessor, and tell him, again and again, of her habitual transgression and then to receive from him a full and free absolution and pardon: so that she rose from her knees before him, a cleansed sinner, fit to go straight into the church, and receive into her lips the "tremendous and unbloody sacrifice." And all this horrible and wicked travesty of sacred things has been transacted day by day, for years past: and this Monsignor Claret has been the chief actor in it: and yet we are assured by Sir George Bowyer and Lady Herbert, that he is a "most holy," "most exemplary," and "most devout" man!

Now, these most frightful and revolting facts bring the whole Romish system before us; and, if we would understand the matter at all, we must find our way through a whole wilderness of very tangled questions. In fact, we have here what Romanists and Ritualists term the "sacramental system" brought to a practical test.

The broad fact, which stands in the view of all the world, is, that Queen Isabella has been living the life which Louis XIV. lived, and which many other sovereigns have lived; but which is made more than usually revolting in their cases, by the cloak of religion which is

cast over it. We have had, nominally, Protestant sovereigns who have lived no better lives than Isabella of Spain, but then we give them up to plain censure, and we say, that the less any talk of religion is heard in their cases, the better. The single point which offends us in the present instance is, the thrusting forward a dignified priest of the Roman Church, as having a part in all this immorality. The people of Spain have thrown down the statue of their Queen, and have dragged it through the streets. This was the verdict of common sense and of outraged national feeling. But if the people were substantially right, then the saintly Monsignor Claret must have been frightfully wrong. He has seen, for a dozen years past, the Queen sinning, constantly and perseveringly, and not repenting. He has seen her going on, unblushingly, in a reckless course of profligacy. And yet he has, in the full knowledge of all this, "confessed and absolved her, week by week, or even day by day: and has left her to believe the fatal lie, that he, a poor, weak, and sinning creature, could actually pardon and cancel all her sins. Others may call Monsignor Claret "a holy" and "deeply religious man," if they will; but we should be very unwilling to award him any such commendations.

It is not, however, of him, so much as of the system, that we complain. Without any doubt or hesitation, we say, that the Romish Church has flagrantly sinned in the case of Queen Isabella. Her moral offences were known to all men, yet her confessor could "shrive her," week by week, and even her "Holy Father the Pope" could stoop to send her a signal token of his approbation, the golden rose, blest by him, and held to confer peculiar privileges. Thus sanctioned and approved by the chief men in her Church, how was poor Isabella to imagine that she was, after all, a wretched offender against even the decencies of life, and an object of loathing to nineteen-twentieths of her own subjects?

Now, assuming for argument's sake that all this pious devoutness is really genuine, and not assumed to mask their real aims, is it not in conformity with all experience that Ultramontanism should choose agents of this kind to use as instruments and tools in carrying out its designs? Is it not notorious that the Jesuits, for instance, have been always careful to select, for some of their agents, persons whose simplicity and respectability placed them above suspicion, while their bigotry and enthusiasm rendered them the most useful of emissaries?

But Ultramontanism has already made itself so odious even at Naples and Vienna that it has been totally ejected in the one place, and its power broken in the other. The only places where it has lingered thus long are Rome—its natural seat and centre—and Madrid. But the Spanish people have awakened at length to the evils of the system, and in spite of the Pope, and the pious and immaculate Father Claret and his coadjutress the Bleeding Nun, and the myriads of clergy spread all over the country, have "pronounced against this bad Government and its authors, the Bourbon dynasty."