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### A VISIT TO THE POPE

The Impressions of a Montrealer on Being Received by the Pontiff.

It had been for years one of the things I had most wished to do, to go to Rome and see the Pope; and when I had the opportunity of going to England last month on a short vacation, I made up my mind to make the trip to Rome. I could only spare a week or so of my time for the journey from London and return, and that only allowed me three days in Rome itself, and my friends all told me that with so short a stay I had no chance of seeing His Holiness. But they were all wrong. As it happened, before leaving Montreal I had had the good fortune to secure a most kind letter from the Archbishop, Monsignor Bruchesi, introducing me to the private chamberlain of the Pope, Monsignor Bisletti. This letter I owed to the good offices of my parish priest, who assured me it would obtain for me every possible consideration at the Vatican.

The day after my arrival in Rome, I called upon the Rector of the Canadian College, Rev. Father Clapin, to whom I had letters of introduction. He was most kind to me, and drove with me to the Vatican. We went in at the main entrance, through the famous bronze doors, where the Swiss Guards were on duty. On asking for Monsignor Bisletti, we were directed to his rooms, and in a few minutes he came in. When I presented my letter from Archbishop Bruchesi he at once told me that I should have an audience the next day at 12 o'clock. He also gave me an order admitting me to the Pope's private mass at 6 a.m. on the next day, which was June 29th, the Feast of St. Peter and Paul. I need not say how glad I was to find my journey had not been undertaken in vain.

After leaving the Vatican I made my first visit to St. Peter's. I suppose I saw the great Basilica to the best possible advantage. Everything was ready for the celebration of St. Peter's Day and the great church was in festive array. Great hangings of red and gold adorned the columns, and the Confession was a mass of the most perfect flowers of every kind. I was told that if there was a fault to be found with the interior, it was that the color of the stone gave it rather a cold effect. But this was done away

with by the red hangings, and which gave just the touch of colour required. I noticed at one side of the church a number of confessionals, and saw that they were occupied by priests of every nation and language. I went to the one with "Anglais" over it, and made my confession to an old English priest in preparation for my communion next day.

At five o'clock next morning I started from the Hotel Continental, being driven by an Irishman who told me he was for over twenty years a cab driver in Rome. At the bronze doors of the Vatican I was directed up the Scala Pia to the Cortile di S. Damaso, on the right of which is the entrance to the wing where the Pope's apartments are. Up more stairs I went, until I arrived in the Clementine Hall. Here I saw for the first time the Bussosanti, the private servants of His Holiness, who wear a striking costume, entirely of red. One of these men took my hat and coat, and handed me over to a tall footman in ordinary evening dress, who conducted me to the private chapel. I was given a place immediately behind a prie-dieu, at which three ladies were kneeling, who, I heard afterwards were the Pope's sisters. The room in which we were was separated from the chapel by folding doors, which were opened. The altar was exactly in the centre, and about fifteen feet behind these folding doors. The Holy Father began his mass at ten minutes to six, and was very deliberate in saying it. He was most devout and simple, and one would have thought it was some old parish priest from the province of Quebec who was saying mass, and not Pius X. At the proper time we went to the altar rail, and I had the happiness of receiving the blessed Sacrament from the hands of His Holiness. After his mass, the Holy Father heard another mass said by one of the priests who had assisted at his own mass. The clock had struck half-past seven when we were out again and ready to go home.

At a few minutes to twelve I was again at the Vatican, and this time I was taken up the Scala dei Principi and through the Clementine Hall and into the antechamber of the Palatine Guards, which was full of people awaiting the Pope. Through this hall and the next and the one next to it I was taken, all of these great rooms being full of people, ranged round three sides of each room. Then through the antechamber of the Noble Guard, also

crowded with people, my guide took me into the throne room, and gave me a seat a few feet away from the throne. I had begun to fear that some mistake had been made, as I had only expected to be amongst all the other people, and see the Pope as he walked through, and gave us his blessing. But here I was alone in the throne room. Presently my friend, Monsignor Bisletti, came in and shook hands with me, and told me he would come for me in a minute or two. Soon I saw him beckoning to me from a door at the side of the room, and I went to him, and he led me into the Pope's private apartments. I took a step or two into the room, and there was the Pope walking to meet me. I at once knelt, and he came up to me and put both hands on my head, pressing quite hard, and gave me the apostolic benediction. He also gave me his ring to kiss, and spoke quite kindly to me in Italian, Mgr. Bisletti interpreting to me. I asked certain favors, which he at once granted, and then he took me by both elbows, and raising me up, made me stand before him. He then took certain objects of devotion into his hands, and blessed them for me, and as I stood aside for him to pass on, he motioned for me to accompany him, and so we went out together, and as the Pope passed through the five or six halls full of people, giving his ring to be kissed by each, I walked at his right hand. In one room there were a number of children dressed in white, who had just made their first communion, and the Pope gave each of them a small silver medal. His Holiness turned to me with a smile and offered one to me.

I was thus with His Holiness for over half an hour, and had every opportunity for observing him well. He is a man over the usual height, rather stoutly built, with a very sad expression, which disappears when he smiles. He has the kindest smile and the most fatherly manner I ever saw. When he blessed me he might have been some young priest giving his first blessing to an intimate friend, instead of the Sovereign Pontiff, who is always giving his blessing.

By this I mean he seemed to have no other thought but to give me his blessing with all his heart, as he himself put it. He seemed to me one who had a great reverence for the dignity of his office, but who was personally the most simple of men. His face is the strongly marked, rugged face of a peasant, with the holiness of a good priest and the responsibility of the Pontiff toning it down. His hair is quite white, and this added to the pallor of his face, and his white soutane made him a wonderfully striking and impressive figure. But I have said enough. My cup of happiness was full, and I felt that now at last I could say my "Nunc Dimittis Servum tuum Domine" in pace.

S. M. L.

Montreal Gazette.

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