

MONSIGNOR SATOLLI.

His Life in Rome.

Interesting Sketch by a Former Pupil.

(Written for the Register.)

We have heard so much lately of "Apostolic Delegate," "Ablegato," "Papal Representative" and several such titles, that we completely lose sight of the man to whom they are applied and who, by his own intrinsic merits ennobles the very dignities conferred upon him.

In the spirit of the Carlylean school, which has taught us to reject the outward show—the clothes, so to speak, in order to examine more closely the wearer, we may be permitted to ask ourselves: "What of the man himself? Who is he? What has he done to merit such distinguished honors at the hands of the Holy See?" To quote the old master: "Readers and men severally are getting into



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strange habits of asking all persons and things, from poor Editors' books up to State potentates not, "By what designation art thou called, in what wig or black triangle dost thou walk abroad? But what art thou? This is the thing I would know," and this is what we would know of him whom the Holy Father has honored and whom we all accordingly revere. It is safe to presume that in our age the man who is clothed with any dignity is nearly always worthy of it. To hazard a contrary opinion would be to question the prudence and judgment of those responsible for his elevation—a thing one is not disposed to do. It is too optimistic to assert that every individual who has received public honors is a born genius. Neither is he who is placed in judgment over the tribes necessarily a man of straw.

"Many there are who go about to cozen fortune
And be honorable without the stamp of merit."

There are others, and Satolli is of the number, "who have not presumed to wear an undeserved dignity; and whose clear honor is purchased by the merit of the wearer."

A LATER BOSWELL.

Perhaps it is for this reason I have become the self-appointed Boswell of this great prelate, not, indeed, the largest kind of Boswell, but yet enough to afford an insight into the character of him who, thanks to his personal merit and its recognition by the Supreme Head of the Church has become a leading feature in American Catholic life. Born the 21st July, 1839, in Marsciano, in the diocese of Perugia, Italy, and educated in the seminary of Cardinal Joachim Pecci, now Leo XIII., he evinced, at an early age, a desire to enter the ranks of the priesthood. He was ordained in his twenty-third year and soon after was chosen to teach philosophy in the seminary where he had received his early training. Soon after the elevation of Cardinal Pecci to the Papacy, he came to Rome at the request of His Holiness and was appointed professor of theology in the Roman diocesan seminary.

EARLY TRIALS.

It is said that at first his efforts as a professor were not appreciated. He

was too abstruse for the ordinary student. His flights into the realms of Transcendentalism after the fleeting shades of Rosmini were not followed by many whose course of philosophy had been none of the strongest. In a word, the professor was lecturing over the heads of the pupils. This continued for some time, to the great dismay of the worthy rector, who, in his private conferences with the students, found that they knew absolutely nothing of the matter explained in class. Accordingly he went to the Pope, who as Bishop of Rome is the immediate superior of the college. His Holiness was told that the professor was a failure, that the students could not follow him, and that the results of the examination were most unsatisfactory. It was all the fault of "Signor il Professore" and he (the rector) had come to suggest a change.

"They cannot follow Satolli," said the Pope, "and that fact must be attributed to the inability of the students." I grant that.—to the incapacity of the professor? I deny it." The professor remained, but the students were obliged to forego much of their former "doles far niente" and put their shoulders to the wheel of study.

RECTOR OF THE COLLEGE.

In 1886 Satolli was appointed rector of the College of Noble Ecclesiastics and was given at the same time the chair of Dogma at the Propaganda. As a professor Satolli was beloved by his pupils. His disciples, as he was wont to call them, were to him every thing. He was never happy except in their midst expounding the doctrines of Aquinas or listening with unabating interest to the public disputations in which the pupils sometimes engaged. We all remember these Saturday disputations. The professor vacated his rostrum and a student took his place. A theological treatise was defended and the task of refuting it was deputed to two others. It was a mimic warfare between orthodoxy and unbelief. Eyes on the ground and arms folded, he would watch for an hour the progress of the battle. The arguments *pro* and *con* were carefully noted, and at every good thrust (especially against the ontologists) the professorial head would nod approval and now and then an occasional "Bravo" would escape his lips. These little manifestations on his part were the greatest incentives to the theological vanity of the students, who regarded their master with feelings akin to those the Academy entertained for Socrates.

COMPARED WITH OTHERS.

To those of us who have beheld him seated behind that ancient rostrum, with his broad pectoral cross and the calzotta pulled most irreverentially over his forehead, looking out from a background covered with dusty paintings of Aquinas and Liguori, the scene will be ever unforgettable. He was not, we are told, a calm reasoner like Lepidi, nor yet a profound thinker like the Jesuit De Maria. He did not descend to the level of his pupils like Ballerini, nor were his lectures enlivened by those flashes of wit that betokened the presence of Checchi, the amiable professor of morals. Yet to us he was everything. He united the qualities of all and added thereto his own originality of thought and that unrivalled eloquence which often reminded us of the rounded periods and sharp interrogations of his countryman, Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Saint Augustine has said somewhere that passion is absolutely essential to the success of the teacher. Being an authority in the matter and speaking from a personal experience of over thirty years, the words of the saintly bishop should be pondered over by instructors of youth. Satolli as professor was passionate with that fiery Italian passion which aids instead of weakening reason. I have sometimes gone to hear another professor lecture

on theories to which Satolli was bitterly opposed. During these lectures it was easy to have been deceived by the arguments adduced for the proof of the subject. It required only to return to be disillusioned. The very appearance of the master on the rostrum was a first contrary argument. Then followed those long fiery sentences of faultless Latinity, brimful of sound erudition and logical reasoning which when brought to bear upon the intellect forced an unconditional surrender, and we mentally promised never again to "enter the tent of the Ishmaelite or lie down in the border land of Moab."

HIS METHOD OF TEACHING.

The older heads were wont to say that Satolli was a lecturer, but not a professor. The difference, if there be one, is only in name. Every University professor is necessarily a lecturer. It is not his place to enter into details like a schoolmaster or repeat explanation like the dean. Satolli's usual method of teaching theology was what is known as the scholastic system. He first of all disabused the minds of his pupils of all errors, religious or scientific, that were opposed to the dogma under discussion. His next step was to enunciate a principle that had been previously demonstrated. This, every schoolboy knows, is the ordinary process of his Euclid's Geometry, the axioms and postulates and often propositions heretofore admitted serving as principles of demonstration for succeeding propositions. He would then show the agreeability of the doctrine to the natural and supernatural orders, and finally would establish the theological conclusion by constant reference to the Holy Scriptures and copious extracts from the Fathers. This was the system of all the philosophers from Protagoras to Aristotle, and when philosophy was applied to religion by the schoolmen, more especially by St. Thomas, this system was adopted and has been known ever afterwards as the scholastic system of theology. Satolli's commentaries on the Scriptures were most exact, as only those are that are based on a knowledge of the Ancient and Oriental languages. Nor were his expositions of the writings of the Fathers less erudite.

A THEOLOGICAL OPPONENT.

The great theological opponent of our learned professor was Rosmini. This man, the chief of modern ontologists, had made himself a name in several Italian Universities by a system of philosophy as obscure as it is untenable. Some of his sayings surpass in clearness that transparent lucidity of phrases for which the names Hegel and Fichte will go down to a grateful posterity! Rosmini was the "ame damneo" of Satolli. We listened with intense delight to his refutations that were freely interspersed with such words as "absurd, blasphemous—nearly heretical." The occasional "this individual" and like expressions expressed more clearly still his estimation of gentlemen of Rosmini's calibre. Nor did our own Herbert Spencer and Darwin escape the lash. The positivist philosophy of the former was so repeatedly pulverized that students wondered at his works being still exposed for sale at the corner of Usher's Quay.

DARWIN AND THE DESCENT OF MAN.

As for Darwin, to any one who has listened to Satolli's discourse on the origin of species, it is a marvel that Darwin's name is still accepted as a Sesame wherewith to conjure up that nameless "missing link." I well recall the day the doctrine was discussed as to the descent of the human species from the monkey. The professor after some explanatory remarks exposed the Catholic doctrine on the matter. "Darwin's theory," he said, "was opposed to all order, natural or supernatural, to all law, human or divine, and was a standing contradiction of

intense absurdity and to every science from theology to physiology. Man could never have descended by way of progression from the animal, and no man could persuade himself that he was the offspring of the monkey, except (pause) perhaps Mr. Darwin and gentlemen of his tribe, (hilarity from the end benches), who must of course be permitted to please themselves in the choice of family portraits." Occasionally little flashes like these would break in upon the class, giving fresh zeal to the intellectual appetites of the auditors.

THE ACADEMY OF ST. THOMAS.

Conjointly with Cardinal Zigliari and other distinguished prelates, he laid the foundation of the Academy of St. Thomas. This academy held its sances in the Collegio of Nobles every Thursday. Sometimes learned papers were read by the logicians of note in the Eternal City. At other times Satolli himself would lecture to the ecclesiastical students on such interesting subjects as "the motions of the human will" or "the strength of the human passions." Many a time have I witnessed a vigorous, though subdued, passage at arms between the learned Cardinal, professor Ballerini and the subject of this sketch. On such occasions we could mark the rare modesty of the man. Indeed, is not true worth always modest? Except in very rare instances, *real* science and piety—these twin sisters in the mind of the Catholic priest—go hand in hand. Those who knew him intimately know not which to admire the more, the wisdom of the scholar or the piety of the priest. Whether as professor, rector, or consultor for the various Congregations, the man was always the same—a saintly scholar. I confess to have been highly edified by observing him as he recited the divine office in his stall as Canon of St. John Lateran.

HIS MODESTY OF DEMEANOR.

In the streets his extreme modesty is apparent. Large bodies of students would sometimes pass him, and hundreds of hats would be lifted high in the air from all manner of heads, as a token of respect, yet he never heeded such manifestations, but passed quietly on, revolving in his mind, as the younger said, "whether predestination is before or after foreseen merits." He was everywhere a thinker. I have often been in his company when politics would be introduced. Here Satolli is no talker but a great listener. His occasional "yes" or "no" or "indeed" is his only answer to the queries of his interlocutor.

HIS LOVE OF THEOLOGY.

But once the conversation turns on theology he is all alive, asking questions, refuting objections, bringing the weight of his reason on the brain of the hapless listener, and the force of his hand on the table to confirm arguments strong in themselves as the club of Hercules.

As a preacher Satolli ranks high in a country of eloquent men. His students remember the large mixed audiences that attended his Lenten sermons, in the church of San Carlo. What is more surprising still, he is a mathematician, and a great one at that. It has been often said that a good theologian is necessarily a poor mathematician. It is related in the life of Cretton (unpublished) that when asked his opinion on Papal Infallibility he replied, "as a mathematician, sir, I refuse to accept it, but as a Catholic I do not refuse to believe it." There is no reason for divergence between natural science and revealed religion. True science is no more opposed to religion than reason is to grace. Both are from God. The one is the born handmaiden of the other. Satolli united them both. His examples drawn from mathematical "progressions" to confirm arguments for the infinity of God were most