

CURRENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF CONTINENTAL EUROPE.

BY PROF. J. H. W. STUCKENBERG, D.D., BERLIN, GERMANY.

GERMANY.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

At the close of the Vatican Council, the outlook for the Catholic Church in Germany was anything but promising. By many the decree of papal infallibility was regarded as impolitic, if not dogmatically false, and dissensions and defections seemed to be imminent. The various states also viewed the decrees of the Council as threatening their autonomy, and consequently assumed a hostile attitude toward Rome. The war between France and Germany, earnestly advocated by Eugénie in the interest of the Catholic Church, united Germany, and for the first time in history placed a Protestant Emperor on the throne, and made a nation essentially Protestant the most powerful in Europe, and the arbiter of peace and war, a distinction till then held by Catholic France. The history of the war, with its series of brilliant victories, and scarcely a reverse; the union of Germany into one empire, and the acquisition of Alsace-Lorraine, while France was weakened and humiliated, were all calculated to strengthen Protestantism, while the cause of Rome was regarded as having been virtually defeated in the contest. The German victories and consequent supremacy, were regarded as the best response both to Napoleon's effort to humiliate Germany and to the arrogant claims of the Vatican Council. As the Pope himself had lost his temporal power, it seemed as if now his influence must wane, and nowhere did the condition of the Catholic Church appear less hopeful than in Germany.

Fourteen years have passed, and it is hard to realize the great change which has taken place in so short a time. Scarcely had the German Empire been formed when the clerical party assumed a hostile attitude to it, because both the Emperor and the Parliament refused to comply with their request to use the influence of the nation to restore the temporal power of the Pope. From that time the Centre or Catholic party appeared in politics. As the State did not recognize the decrees of the Vatican Council, it refused to sanction the excommunication of those who rejected those decrees, and this led to new conflicts. The Bishop of Ermland declared, as early as 1871, that he would only obey the laws of the State if they were in harmony with the laws of the Church. The attitude of the ultra-montanes led the State to more decided measures. All the schools were placed under the direct supervision of the State. In 1874, after the Pope had declined to receive Cardinal Hohenlohe as German Ambassador, Bismarck declared in Parliament that he would not go to Canossa. In the same year the Jesuits and allied orders were expelled. A year later, the celebrated "May Laws" were passed by the Prussian Legislature, giving the State control over the training of the Catholic clergy, and

aiming to limit the power of the bishops over the clergy. Thus the "Culturkampf" began, which is still in progress. The Pope was highly offended, pronounced the May Laws null and void, forbade obedience to the same, and excommunicated all Catholics who rejected the dogma of papal infallibility. The Prussian laws are passed for execution, not to become a dead letter, and a strict supervision was kept over the heads of the Catholic Church. In 1877 there were only four bishops in the twelve episcopal sees of Prussia, the rest had been deposed for disobeying the laws of the State, or else had died, and no successors had been appointed.

The May Laws were intended to prevent a foreign power, the Pope, from meddling with the affairs of Prussia. The government was determined that in its theological, as well as other schools, the training should not be hostile to the national institutions. In this respect the Catholic Church is simply placed on a level with the Protestant; for in the latter all the theological teachers and all the religious instructors in the schools are appointed by the State. But the Catholics insist in having perfect freedom in their religious instruction, and their political leader recently declared that when the Culturkampf was decided in favor of the Catholic Church, a far more fierce one would begin for the possession of the schools.

While the conflict unmistakably reveals the evils of the union of Church and State, the Ultramontanes are themselves to blame for the rigorous measures adopted by the State to repel the efforts of Rome to interfere with its autonomy. But, however lenient the State may be in exercising its supervision and control over the Church in order to protect itself against the machinations of a priesthood obeying a foreign and hostile power, the Catholics have had the advantage of seeming to contend for their inherent rights, and they have done their utmost to make the impression that they fight for the freedom of religion in general, as well as for their own liberties. However much the assumptions of Rome needed a check and its arrogance a fall, the Catholic Church has established the conviction among its own members that it is a martyr for conscience sake. There are Protestants, too, who think the State has gone too far in its efforts to restrain the pretensions of Rome, and the feeling seems to be growing that religion in general should be more free from political dominion. However much Rome may have been made to feel the power of the State, the Catholic Church has undoubtedly gained strength in Germany by means of the conflict.

This retrospect is necessary to understand the present status of Catholics in the German empire. Probably nowhere, except in the Vatican itself, is the ultramontane party more powerful