

THE THRONE CHAMBER.

A Graphic Account of a Visit to Leo XIII.

HIS APPEARANCE AND MANNER.

Soft footfalls are heard in the adjoining room, and a Franciscan monk enters. He is a strikingly handsome young Italian, tall and broad-shouldered with lofty brow, large brown eyes, and a wavy brown beard that in some unaccountable way, makes him look still younger than his thirty years. We enter upon a low toned conversation, and he informs me that he is to sail next week from Marseilles for China. I suggest that martyrdom is always a contingency of mission work among the Chinese; to which he replies that, if it be God's will, he hopes that in his own case the contingency may become a reality. Our further talk is interrupted by the entrance of several other ecclesiastics—a bronzed, grey bearded Algerian cure, two youthful pastors from the United States, and an ascetic-visaged vicar from some village by the Rhine. Still others succeed within the next ten minutes, until we number thirteen: twelve priests and a layman.

As the hour named for the Holy Father's passage approached, what a multiplicity of thoughts thronged in quick succession upon my mind! In a few minutes I was to behold Leo XIII., the successor, in an unbroken lineage extending over twenty centuries, of the Fisherman created first Pope by our Divine Lord Himself. "Panorama-like, there rolled before my mental vision the entire history of the Church—the whole grand voyage of the Barque of Peter across time's mighty flood. Full many other ships of goodly frame, launched with greater pomp and manned by seemingly abler seamen, have sailed that ocean since the Pentecostal Sunday. They have weathered occasional storms, and braved at intervals the billows' fury, only to be submerged eventually in their engulfing depths; but the Barque of Peter has ridden triumphantly on, through smiling seas and stormy, now coursing swiftly with canvas distended to favoring breezes, anon defying the hurricane's utmost fury, and emerging from the tempest stout and stunch and buoyant as ever.

Pilot after pilot has stood in turn at her helm—Gregories and Piuses and Leos and Innocents. And because their commissions were stamped with the seal of divine authority, each has steered the Barque unerringly through threatening breakers, over treacherous reefs, by rock-bound coasts—in calm or storm alike infallible. On the legitimate heir of such heroes as these, a helmsman surely worthy to rank with the most skillful of his predecessors, who can gaze without a thrill of profound emotion? Not I, for one, as is soon demonstrated.

There is a stir in the outer apartment. An official enters and bids us form in line; and a moment later the Holy Father, seated in his sedan-chair, is carried slowly through the hall. There is time whilst he passes to take merely one brief, comprehensive glance; and it discloses a frail old man, his attenuated body surmounted by a majestic head, and his full, dark eyes gleaming with a vivacity that might easily delude us into the belief that we are looking at one in the very vigor and prime of manhood. The chair is borne on; and as it disappears through the entrance to an adjoining apartment, I conclude that the function of the evening is at an end. In this, however, I am mistaken. After a brief interval—during which, being in Rome, I literally do as the Romans do, and remain where I am—a purple-robed

Monsignor appears at the door and invites us to follow him. We do so, and find ourselves in the Throne Chamber, where I am elated to behold the Holy Father seated in his pontifical chair on a dais at the farther end of the room.

This was an unexpected delight. The card I had received provided simply for my admittance to the Arazzi Hall, through which the Sovereign Pontiff was to proceed on his return from the gardens; but this was clearly a regular audience, and my heart throbbed with an accelerated movement as I realized my good fortune. We again formed in line, facing the Pope; and as I placed myself about half-way down the line, I had ample opportunity during the succeeding twenty minutes to scan at my leisure the face and figure of Leo XIII.

At first glance, and in his present posture, he is wonderfully like Chartran's incomparable portrait. One notes the slender physique, the dome-like forehead, the pallid countenance illumined by the eagle eye, the long transparent, narrow hands of ivory whiteness. And the thought arises that the artist has reproduced on his canvas, with marvellous fidelity, the very expression of the Pontiff. Yet it is not so. Chartran has depicted the far-seeing statesman, the intellectual athlete, who grapples with resolute confidence the fiercest problems that vex society; the wisdom-gifted ruler of two hundred million subjects; the indomitable champion of true liberty and real progress. But glowing in the countenance before us there is a spiritualized radiance, an apostolic benignity which not even the brush of genius can hope to reproduce.

And now the two American priests are kneeling at the throne, and my turn is next. The Americans are talking Latin—the Pope does not understand English—but my distrust of my fluency in that classic tongue, and determine to essay conversation in the more familiar French, which the Holy Father speaks with perfect ease and accuracy. I am agitated by a hundred varying emotions as the secretary, standing at the right of the throne, takes my card and presents me to His Holiness; and when I kneel at his feet and kiss the fingers he graciously proffers, I doubt my ability to speak even English, or do aught else than burst into a flood of grateful tears.

A glance at the gentle face above me however, helps me to master myself, and the soothing tones of the Pontiff's voice set me comparatively at ease. How graciously he speaks, and with what fatherly tenderness he listens to and grants the various petitions I am emboldened to present! He inquires about my home, my occupation, the standing and prospects of the college with which I am connected, the number of students attending it, the branches I teach, the names and purposes of the Catholic magazines to which I contribute; and concludes by bestowing his special blessing on college, professors, and students; and on the magazines, their editors, writers, and subscribers. He extends his hand once more. I touch his ring with my lips, stoop down and reverently kiss the cross embroidered on his silken slipper, then rise and retire.

My heart is overflowing with purest joy. My interview with the Holy Father has lasted only some four or five minutes; but the memory will endure through all the coming years. Contact with his personality is an energizer of faith, a stimulus to hope and high endeavor; and as I glance, while leaving his presence, at the handsome young Franciscan who has succeeded me at his feet, I know that his missionary zeal will glow with intense ardor, and his soul aspire with fonder longing for the possible martyrdom to come, because of this privilege he is now enjoying—an audience with Leo XIII.—*Rev. A. B. O'Neill.*

Chat About Books and Authors.

Robert Louis Stevenson used to say that the Duke of Wellington did his duty as naturally as a horse eats oats.

Ibsen's new play has this bit of wisdom; "Labor and trouble one can always get through alone, but it takes two to be glad."

Mr. Andrew Lang is publishing a novel dealing with the life of Joan of Arc, on which subject he is an enthusiast.

Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson, whose stories of Irish life are the best that have been written for a quarter of a century, is about to publish a book of short stories. She has also a novel half finished.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was the result of a nightmare, "Indigestion has its uses," said Stevenson in a letter; "I woke up, and, and before I went to sleep again the story was complete."

An autograph letter from Charles Lamb to his publisher, found recently, says, "Pray let Matilda keep my newspapers till you hear from me, as we are meditating a town residence. C. Lamb. Let her keep them as the apple of her eye"

Lately nearly all the honors for fiction have been going to Scotchmen. Robert Louis Stevenson, J. M. Barrie, S. R. Crockett and "Ian Maclaren," have done so well that Mr. Zangwill warns his readers against "the zealous Scotchmen who cry "Genius" at the sight of a kilt, and lose their heads at a waft from the heather."

Mrs. Humphrey Ward and Mr. Eugene Field are opposites. At a recent dinner in England they sat together. Mrs. Ward was silent and impressive, Mr. Field silent and impressed. Finally Mrs. Ward asked to be told about the manners and customs in Chicago. Mr. Field yielded to the assumption that Americans are barbarians or worse by saying, "Well, Mrs. Ward, when I was caught, I was living in a tree."

Mr. Henry Harland, the editor of the much talked about Yellow Book, is a man of continuity of purpose. When he was a younger man he determined to write a story. His office hours would not give him the opportunity he required, so for a whole winter he went to sleep after evening dinner, rose at two a.m., took some black coffee and worked until breakfast time. And he succeeded in turning out a good story.

"Ian Maclaren" (Rev. Jno. Watson) has the art of making men shed tears over his stories. He met a friend one day who said, "I owe you a grudge. I spent the whole of yesterday evening making a fool of myself over your book." Most people will not admit that a man has sensibilities fine enough to improvise waterworks displays, as Thackeray termed them, but the man who can prove the contrary is surely possessed of a great power. Mr. Watson says he was induced to write by Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll who told him to write stories and gave him no peace till he did so: "Nicoll is a wonderful man; he sees what nobody else can see; he's just 'no canny.'"

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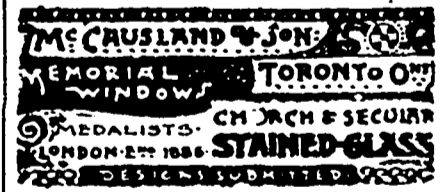
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