

PIUS IX.

We are yet too near the living form of Pope Pius IX. to form an accurate judgment of the man. True, he is dead, and his clay is coffined, and will soon be buried out of sight, but men who have filled a great place in world-thought die slowly. When a figure has become familiar, a part of the ordinary scenes of daily life, it is difficult to think of it as gone, wrenched away, filling a part in the drama no more. When another has filled the same place for a time—has acted the same part through some scenes—then, and not till then, do we know that the past is past, and the man is really dead. And only then, perhaps, can a just estimate be formed of the character of the man, and the nature of the work he did. A great and important personage the Pope of Rome must be—being a link in a chain which may be traced back until the twilight of fable hides it, but leaves evidence that it goes farther back still. And the glory is not merely that which is derived from antiquity, and not merely a reflection of past days and deeds of greatness—but the Pope is still great, greater than any king of the earth. He is the real head of one hundred and fifty millions of human beings—his word to them is both mercy and law—his power goes forth to the ends of the earth, the delicate movements of a vast machinery are in his control—when he curses, millions tremble—when he blesses, they rejoice. If to judge another justly it be necessary to understand somewhat his position, then must the late Pope be beyond ordinary judgment, for few men can even in fancy grasp the full importance of the power wielded by the temporal and spiritual head of the Church of Rome. But according to our lights we must think and speak even of so great a person as a Pope.

Born in stormy times, as to matters ecclesiastical, living through the long period of eighty-five years, which witnessed a series of violent changes—dying at last while a storm was thundering through all Europe, Pius IX., or Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti, as was the real name of him—was never a true child of the storm. Not a man of the world at all—that is, not a cunning, crafty schemer—and not a diplomatist, but altogether a man of the Church, that is, an ecclesiastic by nature and grace, he yet seems to have had but little fitness for the high office to which he was called. He was deeply pious—dreamt dreams and saw visions—had ambitious ideas worthy of a Hildebrand, but lacked calmness and dignity and moral force—so needed to impress the world. As Priest he was devoted to his duties, doing his manifold work in an earnest way; as Bishop he manifested an admirable capacity, and had they left him there he might have done all demanded of him, filling his office. But promotion fell to his lot. First administrator of ecclesiastical affairs in an important diocese—then Papal Nuncio at Naples—then Archbishop of Imola in the Romagna—then Cardinal—and then Pope.

There was great rejoicing in all Europe when Cardinal Ferretti was called by the unanimous vote of the Cardinals to assume the Pontifical tiara. For there was a great opportunity at hand for inaugurating reforms, and he seemed the man likely to embrace it and do the needful work. The temporal power of the Popes had been most shamefully abused. Italy was corrupt from centre to circumference—high-handed authority, a pitiful subjection, and crime at the base of it all. It was the Italy of the dark ages, against which the Waldensians hurled such accusations; it was the Rome on which Martin Luther looked and became at once disenchanted. Fanaticism everywhere; misgovernment everywhere; and social and political foulness everywhere. Work enough for any man, the cleansing of those Augean stables. But it was hoped and confidently believed that the Cardinal Ferretti had heart and will for the task. He was personally popular on account of his geniality, his piety, and the capacity he had already displayed in doing the work of a Bishop.

The Italians were not only sick of their own crimes, and in want of social and political reforms, but deep in the heart of them burnt a desire for that which afterwards was called "Italian Unification." Centuries of factious excesses leading to horrible crimes, followed by long periods of silence on account of exhaustion—a silence which was only a dumb degradation, had not been able to extinguish the national spirit or destroy the deep and passionate desire that the parts of the natural whole, so violently and disastrously wrenched asunder, should be brought together again into one body politic. Not more surely did the Jews look and long for deliverance from Rome by the coming of Christ, than did Italy look and long for the re-union of its divided members. The Italian could not believe in the permanent disintegration and degradation of his country. It was hoped, and did appear at first, as if the new Pope had got understanding of the temper of the times. A storm had arisen, was sweeping with great force through divided Italy, threatening to abolish many abuses and shake to the ground some institutions, old, but not venerable, because not good, and it seemed as if the Man had come who could guide the storm and control its fury. Hope kindled an enthusiasm which could scarcely be restrained. Pius the IX. found himself the object of a strong popular affection. But the hope was doomed to end in speedy disappointment. The skies had cleared but for an hour or two—again they gathered

cloud and blackness. It was seen that the Pope had neither the heart nor the power for the work required of him. Instead of seeking to guide and control the storm of revolution, he set himself to oppose and beat it down. The first, he might have done; the last, not a stronger than he could have accomplished. He had not measured its force, nor comprehended its meaning, but dared to stand in the way—he was swept on with the other obstructions. The Revolution is ordained—it is for the people's good; God's will must be done.

In 1848 the revolution was upon them; the Pope was beaten down, though he commanded earth and heaven to send him help; his detested adviser, Count Rossi, was murdered, and he himself driven from Rome—compelled to wander in disguise, and find a refuge at last in Gaeta, a Neapolitan town. From thence he carried on the only war possible for him, that is, the fulmination of decrees and curses and such like innocent things, at which the objects of his temporal and ecclesiastical anger did but laugh, most of the civilised world joining in.

After a year and a half spent in Gaeta the Pope was restored to Rome by the aid of a French army. To Rome, but not to the ancient temporal power. That had received a shock from which it could not recover. The wounded man put on fine raiment, covered himself with all the splendour of earthly authority, but the people knew that the grandeur was but seeming, and that under it was incurable weakness. That was made abundantly apparent, when in 1860 the King of Sardinia took into his own keeping a large portion of the Papal territory. That King had the mind to take it all, as being his by ancient right, and but for the intervention of France would have carried out his purpose. The Pope struggled hard, but was borne along by the resistless march of events. That temporal sovereignty, which dated back to the time when Pepin, of France, gave the Exarchate of Ravenna to Pope Stephen II. because Pope Stephen II. had baptized the world and blessed the devil in the person of Pepin, a conspirator and an assassin, came to an end under Pius IX. Completely to an end. The successor of Hildebrand and Innocent III., who had laid deep and strong the foundations of the Papal power, whose word made kings tremble, and whole nations to obey, found himself stripped of a glory, which for eleven centuries had shone in the eyes of the world, cities, towns, and lands owning him no more—the Vatican the last and only spot on earth he could call his own.

At the time when these events were happening, just when, as all men having eyes could see, the temporal power of the Papacy was tottering to its fall, the Pope asserted his own infallibility, a dogma which only a small part of the world would accept at any time. It was at best a bold, but ridiculous effort to strengthen a failing cause. It challenged the blind faith of the people; from some came eager response; from some others a distinct negative, while many others held it in secret, though silent contempt. Not much better was the reception accorded to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. It was seen that the Church had departed from its old conservative policy, had brought into contempt the once proud motto and boast of *Semper Eadem*, and turned to violence and change, to prolong, if not to greaten its own life. The Church, conscious of losing its hold upon the people, made wild, convulsive efforts to regain its ancient power.

But it was too late. Every effort ended in failure. France withdrew its protection from the Pope. Victor Emmanuel took possession of Italy, completing its unification. Bismarck led the attack in Prussia, and the Falk laws, though new, were mightier than all the dogmas of Rome. In France, Gambetta fought for the Republic, and won it, in spite of Bourbon intrigues and clerical factions. The Pope might have escaped such complete disasters had he been a wiser man, having more knowledge of the times, and more respect for the logic of events. But he allowed the Jesuits to give him a policy, and Jesuitism is not likely to lead to permanence, because its aim is to establish despotism. The personal character of Pope Pius IX. was, doubtless, admirable; he had great faith and strong convictions, and had he fallen under the guidance of wise, disinterested men, might have failed less signally, perhaps, would have won some great success. But the Ultramontanes were his guides, and they guided him to disaster.

Who the next Pope shall be, at this time of writing, we know not. The Cardinals are in conclave, and, if reports be true, harmony is not a distinguishing feature of their discussions. On whomsoever the choice may fall, the chosen must accept a lot of hardness and trouble. The Catholic world, outside of Lower Canada, is not amiable as to its mood. Unrest and dissatisfaction prevail. Education is making progress, and some changes—thoughts of freedom for the conscience, and the universal mind. In spite of all appearance, we believe that Ultramontanism is a longer. Let the next Pope pursue a policy of Jesuitism, let him refuse to recognise the teachings of history, let him continue to demand a blind belief in impossible doctrines, and the Church which now so proudly claims to be one and united, will be broken into a thousand fragments, and be scattered by the strong breath of an enlightened opinion.