

CATHOLIC EFFORTS IN ITALY.

FROM an able article in 'The Month,' on the Congress of the various Catholic Societies of Italy, lately held in the historic city of Venice, we take the following. The deliberations of the Congress were divided into sections; first, with regard to religious works; next, works of charity; the third subject dealt with the engrossing topic of education; and the fourth, which we transfer to our columns, treated of that important organ for good or evil—the Press. Unfortunately, the remarks of 'The Month' are too true, and it is painfully evident that the Catholic body are not sufficiently alive to having such a powerful weapon of defence as the Press at their command. The evils complained of in Italy and England are not without an existence even amongst our own community, and the misrepresentations which are daily published with regard to the Catholic Church should be sufficient proof of the evil of being left at the mercy of unscrupulous journalists:—

"The activity of the press, with the facility of conveying news, and the extension of instruction, are all so many weapons turned against the Church. Just as the Catholic press, by no means supported as well as it ought to be, has in England to contend with the giants of public opinion, who come out daily with their broadsheets, their special telegrams, and special correspondence, so in Italy the Catholic papers, treated with shameful tyranny, suppressed, confiscated again and again by an insolent Government, have to hold their own against a swarm of daily papers whose editors are paid richly both by the Government and the municipal bodies. Sometimes when we meet with such quotations as one in the respectable and religious 'Guardian,'* from a Cologne paper, accusing the religious women of Posen with promoting prostitution by under-paying the poor girls who labor for the enriching of their convents, we begin to doubt whether, after all, the Italian papers could go lower than our own in calumny against the Church. In any case, just as the 'Church Times' and the 'Rock,' the 'Times,' the 'Standard,' and the 'Saturday Review,' join their voices in a chorus against the Church, so radical, republican, royal, and courtier papers alike forget their party quarrels to cover the Catholic party and Catholic cause with contempt and outrage. Immense sums are spent, and have long been spent, by English Protestant societies to deluge Italy with controversial tracts, and they have fallen among people utterly unskilled in polemics, and liable, as were our poor forefathers at the time of the Reformation, to be led away by any ridiculous misrepresentations in a way we cannot conceive, hardened as we here are against such clumsy modes of attack. The Congress of Italy, as in France and Belgium, recognised the necessity of making every effort, for the glory of God and the good of souls, to support and foster Catholic publications, by Committees in every diocese, by printing establishments in every province. This portion of the report is so interesting that it deserves to be cited verbatim.

"I. The congress impresses on the various committees the necessity. (1.) Of endeavoring with all possible diligence to organize a great association, whose members would engage to aid in the diffusion of good papers and publications, and in the discouragement of un-Christian publications. (2.) Of circulating Christian papers in public places, especially in the streets, in kiosks, in the railway stations, cafes, &c. (3.) Of pushing forward the publication, and diffusion, if possible, gratuitously, in every diocese or group of dioceses of a *Settimana Religiosa*, like those already published, containing all that is useful, especially for the working and laboring populations. (4.) As regards non-political literature, it is suggested to give special attention to works on religious and historical points, or moral and domestic stories, or translations of similar books which have met with success abroad. It also recommends that popular illustrated almanacs, brought out in good time, and illustrated papers, be started in opposition to the almanacs and illustrated papers now in circulation. (5.) That support be given to spreading ascetical works, under the sanction of the bishops. (6.) That when such are required, small fly-sheets should be published to keep the public acquainted with what passes in politics and trade; but which should avoid all mere controversy, and maintain a thoroughly Catholic spirit.

II. The Congress trusts that Catholic literary and scientific reviews will be supported and encouraged.

"III. It praises the generous initiative of the Catholic Lay Association of Naples in founding the 'Catholic Echo,' a weekly gratuitous publication for the purpose of making known the rules and workings of Catholic associations, as well as private persons, to assist the gratuitous circulation of this organ of the Catholic movement by becoming corresponding members of the 'Circolo' at Naples."

The remaining recommendations of the Congress on this subject are in the same spirit. Catholics are urged to take steps to supply the military hospitals with good books, to establish in every province a press exclusively devoted to Catholic papers and publications, and where there are presses already existing in connection with Catholic associations of artisans, to support them so to the utmost. Finally, the erection of Catholic libraries in all populous centres, where good books may be had even gratuitously, is strongly urged, and the circulating library already existing at Turin is pointed out as a model.

It is evident that the writers of these resolutions look on the Catholic press not merely as a commercial speculation, which is to be tested by its monetary success, and which is to be left merely to its own literary merits to sink or swim, but as an instrument for good, demanding support from all who have at heart Catholic interests and the welfare of God's Church. If all such considerations are to be set aside, the Protestant or anti-Catholic paper or serial will very probably, in many cases, cater more to the tastes of the public. Its feuilleton will be more sparkling, its articles more amusing; and it is to be regretted that the right side cannot command like talent and

literary ability. Instead of lamenting the fact, or continuing to enable Protestant publications to enter our own schools, would it not be more reasonable to support Catholic publications and give them thus the chance of bettering their character? It is hard to expect self-sacrifice from those only who with little or no remuneration, but simply because impressed with the importance of the work, labor at the work of publication, while their natural supporters, who have, or ought to have, the same interests at heart, are unwilling to give even out of their abundance, or at a trifling sacrifice, the subscription to Catholic works.

In truth, it would be difficult to speak too strongly on what we may almost call the infatuation which reigns among English Catholics as to the whole question of literature, whether periodical or art. It is the symptom of a deep-seated and complex evil, having its root in imperfect education, an education which gives no taste for reading or for knowledge, no aptitude for serious thought or application of the mind, and which prepares the minds of the young to find their most congenial food in novels, and their most strenuous occupation in the emptiest frivolity. Such an evil is not remedied in a day, but the time may soon come, when, if it be not remedied, it may lead to a falling off in faith and Christian practice which may cast upon the Catholic name in this country much disgrace and misery. If there is one thing more than another that makes us long for some such meeting among ourselves as that Catholic Congress of Venice of which we are giving an imperfect account, that thing is the hope that such a meeting could not take place without giving a great impulse to Catholic literature in the widest sense of the name. No doubt there are other wants in abundance, and we have no wish to put this want, before all others. Literature, however, in the case of a Catholic community such as ours, has this claim to priority, that to promote it is to promote all the rest of our requirements. It is of no value if it stops short in itself; but the moment a community wakes up—as it is time enough that we should wake up—to a sense of the dangers and duties of our position, its first step, in modern times, after doing all that can be done to secure the blessing of heaven and the approval of authority, must be to look to its public organs and its literary weapons. We do not need so much any new machinery. We have already what might become our '*Settimana Religiosa*,' or at least our '*Mese Religioso*,' in that class of periodicals of which, if we are not mistaken, the '*Messenger of the Sacred Heart*' is the oldest and best established member. It might require a little expansion to make it into a '*Chronicle of Religious and Christian Works*,' but that would be no difficulty, if only all those who are bound to take an interest in the immense range of activity included under that title would but convince themselves that, if it is a Christian duty to labor according to their means in the formation of holy enterprises, it may be an equal duty—on the discharge of which even more may depend—to promote the circulation of such information about them as may be an encouragement and an incentive to others to engage in them.

The Congress at Venice concludes its report on the subject of the press by some recommendations which are worth recording. Journalists are exhorted to attend particularly to historical corrections as to matters of fact, which are so often misrepresented and distorted by anti-religious writers. The journalist in England who undertook to correct even a tithe of the historical misrepresentations of the press in this country would have a hard time of it, certainly—but the thing should be begun, and it would succeed in the long run. It is also recommended that a paper should be printed for distribution on Sundays and holidays of obligation with the special object of furnishing the people with some reading in keeping with the services of the day. This has already been done for three years at Milan. And Catholics in general are reminded of their duty, not to support in any way any publication that is not strictly Catholic. It is proposed to found associations to oppose bad publications, books, papers, photographs, and the like, as also to use legal means against anti-Christian calumniators of the Church or priesthood.

There remains yet one more section of the report of this interesting Congress to which we have not as yet drawn attention—that which relates to Christian Art, under the two heads of architecture and music. There is much under the former of these two heads which might form the subject of remark, especially the efforts suggested by the Congress against the profanation of Christian cemeteries and the destruction of sacred images, which is being carried on in some parts of Italy by public authority. The question of sacred music touches on a more dangerous subject, not, apparently, so much on account of its intrinsic difficulty, as on account of the inflammatory character of certain minds which are too much inclined to dogmatize on the subject. The Congress of Venice speaks on the point with the moderation and calmness which are usually found in those who speak with more or less authority on the subject. The Congress recognises, as true church music, the chorale and Gregorian chant, with or without the organ, and the music called '*alla Palestrina*.' It acknowledges as less becoming "*meno conveniente*," the dramatic music, and remembers that "*instrumental accompaniment*" (the orchestra) is only tolerated by the Church. It desires to see the authorities to whom it belongs to regulate Church music, sanction both the Gregorian and the "*Palestrina*" music, as well as orchestral music, provided it be secondary and as a support to the singing. Gregorian music it would wish to see taught, in order to prepare the people for a regeneration of musical taste. There is no extravagance or strong language here—no branding with "*dishonesty*" those who take a different view from that taken by the Section. Italian music, as everyone knows, is beautiful in kind: but it is too often merely pretty, too often theatrical, and it is generally unscientific. The approbation given by the Holy Father to the music composed by Cappocci for St. John Lateran's, in 1855, seems to point rather to a correction of the vices of the style to which that music belonged, than to the proscription of the style altogether.

*See July 29th, 1874.