

The Catholic World

BELGIUM

THE HOLY FATHER'S SYMPATHY.

The new Belgian Minister to the Holy See, M. Van den Heuvel, presented his credentials to his Holiness on March 17. His reception by the Pontiff was most cordial. In an address which the Minister presented he said: 'Belgium is passing through the unhappiest hours of her history, because she would not consent to the violation of her neutrality. War invaded her territory, the most horrible ravages being committed. Her monuments were not spared. The rich library of the University of Louvain was burned, and many churches profaned and ruined. Several of her priests were deported and hundreds of them shot. Bishops have been subjected to humiliating treatment. Episcopal teaching itself had been impeded.' His Holiness in replying referred to the protest which the fate of Belgium had already drawn from him in the Consistorial Allocution of January 22. His Holiness continued: 'We wish that our dear Belgian children may soon salute the beautiful sun of peace on the horizon of their country. We even desire not to limit ourselves to mere wishes, but for the moment we ask the Belgians not to doubt the benevolence with which we love to surround them.'

STIPENDS OF THE CLERGY.

The offer of the German Governor-General of the parts of Belgium occupied by the invader to pay the stipends of the Belgian clergy is a sign of the eagerness of the Germans to seize any opportunity by which the appearance of a sanction by Belgians may be given to the occupation. The offer (says the *Catholic Times*) was made on the condition that the clergy should sign a declaration binding them to abstain from every act that might prove injurious to the German administration. Cardinal Mercier, in his reply, pointed out that the sacred ministers are not functionaries of the State, that their stipends were paid by the Belgian Government by way of indemnity for ecclesiastical property which the State had appropriated, and that the clergy were asked to sign no document before payment was made. Seeing that the Cardinal and the priests had no intention of signing the declaration, the Governor-General, on receiving the Cardinal's letter, decided to pay the stipends without imposing the condition as to allegiance. It may be asked: Why should the Belgian clergy accept money at all from the Germans? There is no reason why they should not, for the money will come out of the so-called indemnities paid by the Belgian people to the Germans. It is money of which the Belgians have been robbed.

ITALY

THE PEOPLE'S UNION.

In the document despatched by his Eminence the Papal Secretary of State to Count Dalla Torre, president of the 'People's Union of the Catholics of Italy,' the Holy Father carries out the promised reform in the organisation of the five great bodies devoted to social, economic, and political work for Italian Catholics whose labors are directed by the Holy See. These are the People's Union, the Electoral Union, the Economic Union, the Catholic Young Men's Society, and the Union of the Catholic Women of Italy. In the forecasts of the reform given by the secular press (says a Rome correspondent), sweeping changes were said to have been decided on by the Pope, one paper going so far as to prophesy the complete abrogation of the 'Non Expedit.' The document is not in accord with the expectations of the prophets. The reform consists in the creation of a council of eleven members, which the executive council of the People's Union will elect within the next month, and over which the president of this union will preside. Of the new council the presidents of the Economic, Electoral, and Catholic Women's

Unions, and of the Young Men's Society, will be members *ex officio*.

MEXICO

FIRM ACTION NECESSARY.

We (*Catholic Standard and Times*) learn from the summary of the tenor of recent correspondence between our State Department in Washington and the informal representatives of the factions in Mexico that a firm attitude toward these pretenders, or 'chiefs' has been assumed. Generals Carranza and Obregon, of the one party, and Generals Villa and Zapata, of the other, are informed in polite but sternly undebatable terms that there must be absolute security for the lives and the property of foreigners in Mexico, and at the same time for the free action of religion and its ministers in the Republic—in other words, that the outrages upon bishops, priests, and nuns by Zapataists and Carranzists and other lawless defenders of republican freedom must be stopped here and now. We cannot but lament that this display of firmness had not come at an earlier phase of the sanguinary imbroglio in Mexico, knowing as we now know of all the horrors that attended the throwing open of the munitions of war market to the predatory hordes that were waiting such an act to pounce upon their intended victims, the weak and defenceless ministers of religion and the unmilitary clods, the tillers of the soil, whose condition of penury for several centuries had rendered them like hopeless, dumb driven cattle rather than the citizens of a free republic.

ROME

THE POPE AND BIBLICAL STUDIES.

The war has thinned so greatly the ranks of the students of the Biblical Institute, Rome, that they mustered only about seventy when they gathered recently to attend an audience graciously given them by the Holy Father. On this occasion the President of the Institute, addressing the Holy Father, compared the work to a little plant that had struck root deeply and put out new shoots. The institute was founded ten or twelve years ago by Pius X., and for some time the lectures were given in temporary quarters; now it has a building of its own, and a library 'that will be soon, if it is not already, the most important Biblical library in the world,' observes a Rome correspondent. The Holy Father expressed his warm appreciation of the work. 'To ensure the continuance of our good will,' he said to the president, 'it were enough to mention its founder, Our immediate glorious predecessor, because Pius X. has left his mark deep, not only in the field of beneficence, but in that of doctrine, by his zeal in maintaining whole, intact, and pure, the Catholic doctrine.'

THE HOLY FATHER'S INTERVENTION.

The British Minister at the Vatican, in the name of the Government, has thanked the Holy Father for having intervened at its instance and induced Germany to agree that in the exchange of prisoners the age of liberation should be, not forty-five and upwards, as the German authorities at first decided, but fifty-five and upwards, as the British authorities desired. The following is the British Minister's letter to the Cardinal Secretary of State:—'I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the note which your Eminence was good enough to address to me, notifying the consent of the German Government to the proposal of his Holiness concerning the exchange of civil prisoners unfit for military service. I am touched by the extreme kindness of which his Holiness Benedict XV. has afforded proof by his efforts to give effect to a wish which my Government have so much at heart, and I can now assure your Eminence of its great satisfaction at the splendid success which has crowned the initiative of his Holiness. I have also the honor to tender to your Eminence my sincere thanks for your devoted attention and my congratulations on the great ability with which you have found the means of seconding the desires of my Government.'