

Current Topics

Headlines

An American millionaire said that he would not care who wrote the articles and news items in the newspapers if only he were permitted to write the headings. There is more philosophy in that than appears on the surface, for many papers convey ideas in the headings which the articles they introduce do not contain. The heading is read first, and first impressions are not easily removed. Thus, when the *London Express* headed a news item with the lurid title

"MURDER AT A CONVENT"

the reader would receive the idea that a fracas occurred at a convent resulting in the death of one or more of the inmates. Following swiftly would come the suggestion of disorders, rivalries, hatreds, and hypocrisy; and the reader would think with contempt: "that is the kind of thing that goes on in convents." The news item itself, however, merely tells that two youths, who had no connection with any convent or monastery, murdered a third with whom they had gone for a walk, and that they hid the body not far from an ancient Augustinian Priory. Bigotry and sensationalism make people stoop to contemptible practices.

A Notable Centenary

On the 24th of this month Rome will observe the centenary of Cardinal Consalvi, the famous Papal Secretary of State who, as leader of the Black Cardinals in the stormy reign of Pius VII, played so bold and important a part on behalf of the Pope against Napoleon. The aged Pontiff was a prisoner at Fontainebleau, and the Emperor strove to subdue the Church with the tactics of Jenna or Austerlitz. He had yet to learn that the authority of the Church could not be shattered by grape-shot and canister or broken by the onslaught of the Guard. The Empress Josephine was to be put away, and her place filled by the Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria. So the Emperor arranged it. He would force the Church to annul his marriage with Josephine and bless his later alliance. Was he not the conqueror of Europe, and could he not do as he willed? He ordered Talleyrand to send four distinct invitations for his marriage to the members of the Sacred College—the first to the presentation at St. Cloud; the second to the civil ceremony; the third to the religious ceremony; and the fourth to the grand reception at the Tuilleries. Sixteen Cardinals absented themselves from the religious ceremony; thirteen had already announced their intention of staying away, and three were ill.

The Vengeance

The Emperor was furious. "Inform those thirteen men that I command them to send in their resignations; that their pensions are suspended; that they have lost the rank of Cardinal," he rasped out to the Minister of Public Worship for whom he had sent. He felt that it was as easy to unmake a Prince

of the Church as to turn a waiter into a king. But the Cardinals were not dismayed. They sent a joint letter to the Emperor, telling him politely but firmly that their opposition was due to the fact that the Pope had not consented to the dissolution of his first marriage. Furies! What was this? But he would break them yet. "Confiscate all the possessions of these thirteen priests," he directed. "Keep them in prison until you hear from me." Two months later he sent them into exile in different parts of the country. He allowed them 250 francs a month as a means of support; but here again he was thwarted, for only two out of his thirteen victims accepted a sou from him. An organisation known as "The Work of the Black Cardinals" collected what was necessary for their wants. They became known as the Black Cardinals because of the fact that Napoleon had constrained them to lay aside their purple robes and dress in black.

The Bully

Napoleon now returned to his attack upon the Pope. "I shall make a concordat with that old man," he said to Talleyrand. Once more he employed the strategy of Rivoli which had enabled him to vanquish the Austrian troops. His plan on the field of battle had ever been to divide the opposing forces into several parts in such a manner that he could attack each separately with his full force. He sent the Pope's advisors into exile so that he could throw all the might at his command against the frail and aged Pontiff, worn out with grief and anxiety in his gilded prison at Fontainebleau. But in vain. The military genius that had earned for him the title of "Sultan of Fire" from the Mamelukes in Egypt, and which had written his name in triumph on many a blood-stained field from Ulm to the Pyramids, from Friedland to Montenotte, now left him powerless in the face of a feeble old man who could not draw a sword or set a cannon. To all Napoleon's arguments the Pope replied that he could come to no conclusion until the members of the Sacred College were allowed to return. Various rumors were current at the time as to what took place at the interview. It was said that Napoleon raised a sacrilegious hand against the Pope, and that he tore the ring from the Pontiff's finger. Another had it that the Pope, indignant at the insults heaped upon him by the enraged Corsican, told the latter that he was a scoundrel. When Cardinal Consalvi learned what was afoot he hastened to the side of the Pope and begged him to withdraw from the entanglements of the concordat in which the wily Emperor was seeking to ensnare him. "We withdraw for the moment. Your advice is good, my son," replied Pius. And then the Imperial wrath broke over the devoted head of the Cardinal. Napoleon was going to have him shot. He raved and swore and threatened; but the rasping voice that could strike terror to the heart of kings had no more effect upon the Pope and Cardinal than the screeching of an owl. Napoleon learned

many things when it was too late to profit by them. When the Pope excommunicated him he laughed in derision and cried: "Does this old man think that his Bull of excommunication will cause the muskets to fall from the hands of my soldiers?" His words were prophetic. If he could have peered into the near future he would have seen the remnants of the Grand Army staggering through the Russian snows in full retreat from Moscow, pursued by Cossacks and wolves; and if he had looked again he would have seen his muskets falling from frost-bitten hands. A hundred thousand men set out upon the great adventure. Twenty-thousand stragglers returned to tell the tale. What pictures of the "might have been" did that lonely captive see as he gazed from his rocky prison across the green swell of the Atlantic toward the scenes of his former triumphs in the world he loved so well?

Catholics and Hypnotism.

Until a few years ago the hypnotist was almost unknown. He appeared occasionally in a travelling show accompanied by a pallid medium made up to convey the impression that the greater part of her existence was spent upon the astral plane. But hypnotism has now passed beyond the mountebank stage. Thousands dabble in it to-day, and as a result many unsavory instances of abuse of power are disclosed—instances which, according to an English exchange, have moved Mgr. Herscher, Archbishop of Laodicea and former Bishop of Langres, to outline the Church's attitude to the practice. All creeds and classes, he says, contribute to this particular category of so-called psychical researches. Those who scorn spiritism as a fraud or self-deception are reduced by the mysterious manifestations of "personal magnetism" which, openly operating in broad day or in artificial lights, without rites or invocations, can be studied with the same unemotional attention as one accords a chemical or electrical experiment.

The Danger.

The real nature of the risk run by those who expose themselves to hypnotic suggestion is beginning to be realised. The experience of ecclesiastics and the scandals which frequently leak out in spite of discreet precautions have provoked a public examination of the religious aspect of hypnotism. Hypnotism is so susceptible of being abused for anti-social and criminal ends that its legality is no criterion to its harmlessness. Wrong has been done and evil worked unwittingly on the suggestions of the hypnotisers. The extent of the mischief is not to be measured by the dramatic stories published from time to time by sensation-mongers, but by the growing number of verified cases in which lives have been broken and vengeance wreaked.

The Attitude of the Church.

Mgr. Herscher, in a series of studies recently printed in *Les Annales*, shows how real and common are such horrors. He draws from documents in his possession deductions that imperiously impose themselves. Men of science and theologians, in so far as

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