

OUR ROMAN LETTER

(By "STANNOUS.")

It is just thirty-six years ago this month since Dr. William J. Walsh came here to prepare for his consecration as Archbishop of Dublin. The function took place on August 2, 1885, in the little church of St. Agata dei Goti attached to the Irish College. In last month's notes from Rome I referred to Cardinal Manning's opinions of the infamous Errington episode in regard to Dr. Walsh's nomination to Dublin, and I gave some extracts from the Cardinal's letters in evidence of his general views on English intrigue at the Vatican. In this connection it seems a far cry from the name of Westminster's brilliant prelate to the memory of the ebullient spirit of the London *Tablet's* fighting founder. Yet for all the apparent differences between Frederick Lucas and Henry Edward Manning, analogies are not wanting in their lives. Both were born Englishmen. Both were converts to the Church; Manning from the torquism of the Established Religion, Lucas from the non-conformity of the Society of Friends. Both became militant Catholics; the layman amid the dust of the arena of journalism, the cleric in the conflicts of ecclesiastical dispute. Against each of them there has been levelled the charge of fanaticism. But none has called in question the courage of either man when face to face with what he believed to be a danger to the Church. On this very subject of political intrigue at the Vatican Manning had more than once risked the displeasure of Leo XIII. In an earlier pontificate, but on the self-same protest, Lucas, forty years before, had called down on his head Wiseman's episcopal rebuke.

What Lucas thought of English intrigue at the Vatican is well-known from one famous fight of his crowded life. In an article published in the London *Tablet* in August, 1846, just two months after the elevation of Pius IX to the Papacy, he wrote the following prophetic words: "An English Embassy would be the headquarters of English and Protestant intrigues rather than of clerical ones. If an English Catholic were the ambassador, a door would be opened for all kinds of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic influence, and every Church measure of importance that was referred to Rome or made the subject of public discussion here would be made also the subject of diplomatic misrepresentation and underhand influence in the Holy City. The same would be the case, though perhaps in a less offensive degree, if the Ambassador were a Protestant." At the time these words were written Bishop Wiseman, as he then was, had already come to Rome on purely ecclesiastical business for the English Vicars Apostolic. An American priest with the Irish name of Connolly was at the same time busily engaged here in trying to establish an English Embassy in Rome. This reverend gentleman was a convert. He had been a parson. His wife had become a nun on his reception of Holy Orders; it is credibly asserted that afterwards, when he left the Church, he claimed back the lady. Wiseman seems to have made the most of his opportunities to second the American gentleman's efforts for the proposed embassy. It was not the first time that Wiseman had discussed the matter with a Pope. As far back as March 1835 he had had a conversation with Pope Gregory XVI on the same subject. The result of his conversations with the new Pope was rather more satisfactory to Wiseman, for he left Rome in a hurry and rushed back to England in the hope of arriving in London before the date fixed for Lord Minto's departure. Minto was father-in-law of the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, and was a member of the Cabinet; he was going to Italy on a roving diplomatic commission. Wiseman's hurried journey homewards was not without a very definite result. As a consequence of his overtures to the Ministry Lord Minto was instructed to visit Rome "as an accredited organ of the British Government." The authentic organ of the British Government played its sweet strains here for more than three months. But the accredited organ-grinder really effected very little. He was checked at every move by the then Rector of the Irish College, Dr. Cullen, afterwards Cardinal Cullen of Dublin. None the less the history books of the period felicitously describe his visit as having done much useful work in breaking down the barriers which separated the British and the Papal Governments. In the

end he felt himself able to state to his colleagues in the Government that diplomatic relations with the Vatican were feasible and that an effort to establish them would probably have the approval of the Pope. Wiseman's pourparlers had apparently been crowned with success, but the future Cardinal had reckoned without the clear-sighted honesty of men like the brilliant editor of the *Tablet*.

As I pointed out last month, a Bill was soon introduced in the British House of Commons to obtain the necessary legislative blessing for the proposed diplomatic *rapprochement*. The Bill was received with great joy by the Catholic Tories of England. The *Rambler*, a Catholic review edited in the interests of the converts by one of their number, Mr. John Moore Capes, had the following paragraph which well expresses the blessed feeling of thanksgiving which warmed the hearts of the Catholic elect. It is to be found in the *Rambler* for February 19, 1848.

"Bitter for the fate of Europe was the day when the last Nuncio left the shores of Britain. Accursed was that delusion that separated for three centuries those who had been true friends and brothers, notwithstanding all the contests that had sprung up between Kings and Popes on their respective privileges. And right joyfully and thankfully shall we welcome the hour when we see the last of that preposterous remnant of days of cruelty and ignorance which now forbids the Queen of England to treat with the greatest Prince of his age."

This is certainly Stiggins in high life. Whatever may have been the immediate occasion of the departure of the last Nuncio from the shores of Britain, the cause of the separation before the writer's mind was the marrying proclivities of Henry VIII. Only an Englishman could call bluff King Hal's amours by the delightful name *delusion*. English history is full of such instances of unconscious humor. Delusion indeed!! As Mr. Dooley might say to his friend Hennessy, 'twas the poor women the dirty blagard was deludherin'.

Lucas, however, saw through the purpose of the Ministry. In the pages of the *Tablet* he declared war on the measure. He openly charged the Government with the expressed intention of striving to employ the spiritual influence of the Holy See in Ireland as an instrument of British rule. He was so warmly outspoken as to state that "to the army of spies and perjurers by whom what they call law in Ireland is to be upheld, is to be added, they hope, a great supplementary spy in Rome, whose spiritual influence is to help out the thorough performance of that dirty work which native tools are unable to accomplish." This was strong language, with a vengeance. But Lucas was an earnest man and, being English himself, he knew thoroughly the gentry he had to deal with. It was soon apparent that he had the great mass of the Catholic public behind him. The Irish bishops also were up in arms against the proposal. Despite Wiseman's influence even the English Vicars Apostolic resolved to put up a fight. Led by the venerable Bishop Briggs some of them got in touch with their Irish episcopal brethren. In the event two episcopal deputations set out for Rome, one from Ireland and the other from England, to protest against the proposed diplomatic innovation. Meanwhile Lucas was making the welkin ring in London. He called a public meeting of Catholics against the Bill. It was held on Monday, March 20, 1848, at the Freemasons' Hall. Without the attraction of a single great name the hall was filled to overflowing. The chairman of the meeting was Mr. W. J. Amherst, afterwards Father Amherst, S.J. The principal resolution, the terms of which I quoted in my last month's notes from Rome, was proposed by Lucas and seconded by the Oxford convert, W. G. Ward. Ward was one of the most militant of English Catholics. He was candid to a fault and was described in later life by his friend Tennyson as *grotesquely truthful*. The same epithet might have been justly applied to Lucas himself. Among the priests present was Father Whitty, then a young man almost fresh from Maynooth and afterwards Wiseman's Vicar-General. The meeting was very enthusiastic, and Lucas made a brilliant speech. What was strangest of all at a meeting of Catholics in England—the names of blue-blooded Catholics like the Howards and the Talbots were greeted with hisses and groans and derisive laughter. It certainly looked as if that meeting sounded the death-knell of the House of Lords Catholic. But the end is not yet.

(To be concluded.)