

OUR ROMAN LETTER

(By "STANNOUS.")

(Concluded from last week.)

Lucas began his great speech by pointing out that there was no member of the aristocracy present and that the meeting was essentially a meeting of the people. He read the terms of the resolution. He followed this with Lord Lansdowne's words in the House of Lords on the previous 12th of December when the noble lord had referred to the Government's hope that it might be possible to induce the Vatican to use, for England's benefit, its peculiar sources of influence in certain parts of her Majesty's dominions, that is to say in Ireland. He recalled Lord Stanley's reply to a ministerial speech at the Second Reading of the Bill. The Minister had talked glibly about the grave inconvenience of the breach between England and the Vatican, but Stanley in opposition had exposed the pretence, saying: "You know that the Pope has influence over your Roman Catholic subjects, and you seek to obtain an influence over the Pope in order to prevent his interference with your Roman Catholic subjects being carried on in a manner offensive to you. Now that is, in plain English, the object of this Bill." He told the meeting that already 20 Irish bishops had sent a memorial to Rome in protest against the measure. He boldly attacked the House-of-Lords breed of Catholic in the main argument on which they relied, namely, the quasi-Catholic argument that "the Holy See was so protected by the power of the Almighty that it was almost blasphemy to suppose that any coercion could drive it into a course in any respect injurious to the interests of the Church." In his discussion of this extravagant proposition he indulged in little rhetoric. He directly attacked the objection on the principle of historic fact. He reminded his hearers of what had happened at Fontainebleau in the days of Pope Pius VII. He told them about the Ministers of Pope Gregory XVI. and the Czar Nicholas in the early part of that pontificate. And he wound up his reply by repeating words attributed to Lord John Russell wherein his lordship had said in effect: "We have tried to govern Ireland by coercion and have failed. We have tried to govern it by conciliation and have failed also. No other means are now open to us except those which we are resolved on using, namely, to govern Ireland through Rome." As Lucas proceeded with his speech the enthusiasm of the vast meeting seemed likely to break all bounds. That speech was delivered more than seventy years ago. Time has not staled its appeal. After all the years it has lost little of its power to thrill the Irishman who reads it. Here are some extracts:

"(1) Gentlemen, this is the real design and purpose of the Bill on which you are now met to deliberate. Its authors and promoters, the members and friends of the present Government, desire, not—as has been fantastically represented—benevolently to repeal a penal law; not to wipe away a reproach from England; not to abolish a legislative insult upon Rome; but, by the aid of English fleets and armies, to coerce the Holy See into becoming an instrument of party warfare within these realms. They wish to cajole Pius IX. Having made Ireland a desolation—the Poland of the West—they wish to degrade this great Pope from the high position he occupies as the Supreme Head and Father of the whole Catholic Church into a miserable party chief, the political enemy of his most faithful subjects, the exclusive upholder of a particular line of worldly policy, which every Catholic is at liberty, as I do now, to abhor and to execrate."

"(2) Gentlemen, I am sure I speak your mind, as well as my own, when I say that they cannot, they will not, they shall not, make Rome their instrument for governing Ireland. Of all periods in the history of the world, one would think that this is not the time for entering upon so mad, so preposterous an experiment. With the crash of falling thrones resounding in our ears; with so many exiled monarchs and princes scattered over Europe like seeds, but never to germinate; with the popular power everywhere receiving fresh developments, and (I say it with regret, for I am no republican) with the gloss of mon-

archic and aristocratic rule soiled with those stains which are ominous of the future—surely the very rats of the ship should warn us against the folly of allying the destinies of the Church too closely in any country with any Government, and least of all with a Government so profoundly execrated as that of England in Ireland."

"(3) England govern Ireland through Rome! Never, never shall that day dawn upon the world. If these wretched Whig traders in politics cannot govern Ireland through justice, they cannot govern it through Rome. Nay, even if Rome itself were so ill-advised—which I am sure it never will be—as to make common cause with them in that country, it is my firm conviction that they would sooner succeed in dragging down religion to destruction than in building up their own power. In that impossible event, it would be easier for them to poison the sources of that perpetual stream of reverence with which Christian Ireland has ever watered the feet of Rome, than to make sweet the bitter springs of that undying hostility which still bubbles up against themselves."

Ward followed Lucas in a combative speech which was received with great enthusiasm. After some more speeches a priest, Rev. Frederick Oakeley (an Oxford convert, afterwards more widely known as Canon Oakeley), rose and proposed that a Memorial be sent to Rome expressive of the sentiments of the meeting. This Memorial was duly prepared and afterwards signed by large numbers of Catholic laymen and ecclesiastics throughout England. Wiseman, of course, was impelled to take action. He too sent an appeal to the Pope. In London he published a pamphlet (*Words of Peace and Justice*) in which he merely repeated the very argument which Lucas had so eloquently refuted. The whole quarrel fizzled out when, after the Bill became law, the Government refused to receive an ecclesiastic as ambassador from one who was himself the Chief Priest. So Lord Shrewsbury—the "pious fool," as he is referred to in the correspondence of the time, did not get his Roman embassy, Prince Doria, who was to have been the Nuncio at London, got at least one very freezing reception at the Vatican. The unfortunate thing in the whole affair was the odium that came on poor Bishop Wiseman. As I am on that period I should like to recall what Gladstone once said in a letter written to Dr. Bagot, Bishop of Oxford. The letter was published in the election of 1847. The English politician wrote:—"The Church of England will not fully have done her work until the Church of Rome has ceased to exist and operate in these realms."

The London *Nation* with its usual bigness of view had a very good article recently on the letter of Pope Benedict XV to Cardinal Logue. There was at least one sentiment in that article with which most Irishmen actually resident in Rome were sympathetic; namely, the sentiment that after all the persistent intrigue which for three pontificates had been carried on at the Vatican through official and unofficial channels as well as through the unauthorised meddling of political busybodies, the nett result to date is the Pope's letter on the state of Ireland. Any man, having the slightest acquaintance with the ecclesiastical archives of the last century, can testify to the fact of such pernicious intrigue. The personnel of the intrigue may have changed. The intrigue itself goes on, English Catholics resident in Rome have done their bit in this regard for good old Protestant England. The casual English visitor has made the most of his opportunities also. In no generation have there been wanting Irishmen to help the enemy. Nearly eighty years ago the Irish Bishops found a motley array of intriguers working against them—men and women of the world, even priests and bishops too. The very same is true to-day. In each generation, the task of watching those gentry, of checking their slanderous reports and of denying their lies has fallen usually on one man and on him principally. The dossiers of each succeeding generation tell how a Cullen, a Moran, a Kirby, or an O'Riordan have had thanklessly to fight this grim silent battle for the Irish Church. One wonders what secrets will be told thirty or forty years hence when the archives of the present generation are given to view. And yet, as the *Nation* justly points out, the net result is the Pope's letter. It is an open secret here that a large share of the credit for that letter must be given to Dr. Mannix, whose striking