

ART. V.—BYWAYS OF CHURCH HISTORY.

THE Rev. Wentworth Webster, for a considerable time the holder of a foreign chaplaincy, has lately given to the world the results of his long-continued studies in the less frequented regions of Church history.¹ His object is to give information concerning the tenets of the Church of Rome "from authentic documents," and he laments, in his preface, that so many English Churchmen resort to less trustworthy sources of information. The contents of his volume are literally what he describes them as being, "Gleanings"; but he so uses the various sources of his information as to enable us to correct various impressions which, unfortunately, are widely spread among Englishmen at the present time. The importance of the book is considerable. Mr. Webster is both well informed and scrupulously fair. We shall therefore allow him, as far as possible, to speak for himself, premising that the conclusions which we shall give in his own words are amply supported by the facts recorded in his work. The papers are on a great variety of subjects, and are most of them reprints from the *Foreign Church Chronicle* and the *Anglican Church Magazine*. It is well that they should be made accessible to the public in a more permanent form.

The first paper is on the alleged relics of St. James in Santiago de Compostella. After a careful review of the evidence, Mr. Webster sums up as follows: "Can it be rightful for the heads of any Church so authoritatively to declare the literal truth of facts which the more learned members of their Church have ceased to believe in, which they have thoroughly disproved, and to impress and impose on the unlearned the belief in facts thus disproved, as is done in these decrees and encyclical letters of Pope Leo XIII.?"

In his essay on "Minor Christian Latin Poets" we note that he describes them as taking a uniformly cheerful view of the visible universe, with but one, and that a most significant exception. *Woman* is the one black spot on God's beautiful universe! "Prima mali labes heu femina! . . . erepti tu causa boni, tu janua morbis." Here we see the cause of the lax morality of East and West alike, an evil which arose early, and is never to be overcome until we are permeated by the deep moral teaching of the first chapter of Genesis. Matter, said the Gnostic and the Manichæan, is essentially evil. All things, said the author of Gen. i., are of God, and all He

¹ "Gleanings in Church History, chiefly in Spain and France." By Rev. Wentworth Webster, M.A. Oxon., Corresponding Member of the Royal Academy of History, Madrid. London, 1903. S.P.C.K. 356 pp.

created "very good." From the paper on "The Spanish Church up to the year 1000," based on the work of the Jesuit Masdeu, we extract the following reflection: "It might, I have thought, be of interest, and perhaps even of service, to English Churchmen, showing as it does that even a Jesuit theologian can look back with envy on a National Church, under royal protection, and with Bishops appointed directly by the Crown." Masdeu, moreover, tells us how "there were no cloistered monks in Spain for the first five centuries, only lay hermits and consecrated virgins living in private houses." "The consecrated virgins *were not allowed to make a vow of chastity*, nor were they permitted to take the veil *under forty years of age*." "All monks and nuns," we further learn, "were subject to their Bishop both in temporal and spiritual things." But after the year A.D. 1000, as Masdeu's pages inform us, the royal power was first humiliated, then the clergy were exempted from the royal authority, then the nomination of Bishops and the power of convoking national councils was taken from the Kings, while "concubinage among the clergy, with other disorders unknown before, followed on the introduction of monasticism." Perhaps those who are so busy in reintroducing medieval doctrine and practice among us at present may listen to a Jesuit when they are deaf to the voice of "Protestant intolerance." But at least the reasonable Englishman will find here abundant cause for doubt whether modern reactionaries are likely to be of real service to his Church.

Another paper is on "Loyola and the Counter-Reformation." We regret that we can only extract from it the following passage: "One fact we may mention which seems to have escaped his pen [*i.e.*, of the author Mr. Webster is quoting]. Portugal was the favourite country of the Jesuits in Europe. Paraguay was their chief success in mission-work. Portugal was the first to expel them; hardly a trace remains of their work in Paraguay. Facts such as these should be remembered when we read of the extraordinary cleverness of the Jesuits, and of the superexcellence of their system, even while they need not make us stint our admiration of the ability, the heroism, and the saintliness of many of the members of the Order."

We must pass over two interesting papers on "St. Teresa" and on "The Mysticism of Valdés and Molinos." From "Hispanism and Regalism" we may extract a remark on the information given us by a Canon of the fourth Council of Toledo, A.D. 633, that the *province* was the unit of ritual uniformity. The idea of "Catholic custom" in the matter of ritual thus derives as scant support from Spain in the seventh as from the Church at large depicted by the historian Socrates of the fifth century. We have next a sketch of hysteria dis-

guised as saintliness in the life of St. Philomena, and "a likeness and a contrast" discovered in the respective careers of Lamennais and F. D. Maurice. The "Life of Père d'Alzon" is full of instruction, but we cannot quote from it. From that on ecclesiastical appointments in Spain we gather that "in the Basque Provinces and Navarre, the only fervently religious provinces of Spain," no Bishop, up to the beginning of the last century, "had the appointment to a single benefice"; the livings were all in the gift of the Crown, or the clergy were elected by the parishioners themselves; and Father Larra-mendi, S.J., assures us that "these last made by no means the worst appointments."

Perhaps the most valuable of all Mr. Webster's papers are those on the recent congresses of the Roman Church. The special congresses to which he refers are those of Jerusalem in 1893, of Rheims in 1894, of Brussels in 1898, of Lourdes in 1899, and the Latin-American Council at Rome in the same year. We have not space to give the lengthened quotations we could wish to give; but we shall be much pleased if the brief allusions to the subject should whet our readers' appetite for more, and induce them to study the book itself. The first remark which Mr. Webster makes is that, whereas in the early part of the nineteenth century it was predicted that pilgrimages and other superstitious practices would speedily disappear, at the beginning of the twentieth they have become more common than ever. So says the late Professor Reusch in his "Die Deutschen Bischöfe und der Aberglaube," in which he appeals to the German Bishops to put a stop to the rapid and alarming growth of superstition. "Pilgrimages, in particular," says Mr. Webster, "are now so common that that it would be difficult in France to find any very professedly devout family one of whose members at least had not made" one or more. "Yet, with all this centralization," he says again (he is speaking of the greater authority vested in the Pope since the Infallibility decrees), "never was there a greater multiplication of new saints, new cults, of indulgences attached to material objects, of forms of popular devotion, of so-called pious beliefs and practices, at variance with what is truly Catholic" (p. 337). In other words, the Roman Church has placed herself on an inclined plane, and cannot arrest her downward progress. The smoother the way is made for her, the faster she travels on it.

Mr. Webster further points out the admissions made at these congresses concerning the gradual growth in times past of the customs which the medievalist school is making such strenuous endeavours to naturalize as "Catholic" among ourselves. As the Roman Church no longer appeals to history,

but to authority, these admissions are made without hesitation. As *our* appeal is to history, we ought to take careful note of them. Thus, the famous letter of Pliny (A.D. 120) is accepted as fixing the date when the Agape was definitely separated from the Communion, and when, therefore, the practice of Evening Communion ceased to be universal. The idea that St. Paul abolished it after he wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians is not hinted at for a moment. "The practice of Evening Communion on fast days is recorded in the Maronite Liturgy down to 1736." In the Syrian Liturgies the celebrant is directed to consume the elements "after the Mass and the departure of the people." In the "Life of St. Gregory III." it is further admitted that in early times "there was consecrated only what was necessary for the Communion of the people." So much for the antiquity and "catholicity" of Reservation! Then we hear of the greedy acceptance of wild tales about devil-worship among the Freemasons, culminating in the famous "Leo Taxil" and "Diana Vaughan" scandal, which created so vast a sensation on the Continent a few years back (though we in England, as usual, knew nothing about it), and over which Leo XIII. made himself so supremely ridiculous.¹ Then we learn how the longevity of the late Pope is seriously attributed by "pious" folk to the offer of themselves by sundry young persons as "expiatory victims," offering the years which they might have lived to protract the life of the Pope—dying, in fact, that he might live! Next we find the members of Congress complaining of the "frightful increase" of civil funerals in France, from 600 in 1873 to 16,000 in 1888. "Deaths without sacraments," we are further told, "are increasing; at the same time first communions, and even baptisms, are diminishing."² And yet we are gravely advised by many English theologians of repute to look to Rome for the best methods of bringing religion to bear on the English working classes! Among those methods we find "perpetual" and "nocturnal" adorations of the Eucharist. In it, the workman and others are taught, is "a blood which vibrates (qui tremit)." "Ecce Deus Vedster," cries the Abbé Lemire, of Paris—"The Holy Eucharist, *it is your God.*" The nineteenth century, we further learn, was the "Age of Mary"; The twentieth will be the "Age of the Sacred Heart."³ At Brussels we learn from Dom Laurent Janssens that, "quite

¹ The reader may also consult Mr. Webster's final paper on "Legend and Folk-lore, Credulity and Incredulity, in the Nineteenth Century."

² P. 546 of the Report of the Rheims Congress.

³ Report, pp. 609, 610.

recently, the Sovereign Pontiff has shown how the cult of St. Antony of Padua is a powerful help to devotion towards the Holy Sacrament," and a resolution was accordingly passed at the Brussels Congress that "all devotions to the saints, and especially the cult of St. Antony of Padua and the blessed Gerard,¹ lead to devotion to the Very Holy Sacrament of the Altar and to our Lord Jesus Christ."² At Lourdes we find ourselves confronted with a new development—the "Eucharistic Heart of Jesus." This has been "legalized in *fifteen briefs*" of His Holiness the Pope. We further learn that, "since Jesus is born of Mary, it is *her* flesh which is sacrificed and suffers," and is present in the Eucharist. Whether the flesh of David, of Abraham, or of Adam, is similarly present we are not told. Lastly, at the Latin-American Congress at Rome it was decreed that the Council "should be consecrated to the Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M." The formula was repeated by the whole Council "with such fervour of heart and voice that it called forth tears of sweetest devotion and most tender trust from the eyes of many."³ The rage for novelty is responsible for the introduction of so many sensational innovations in the Roman Church, as in our own.

"We omit much," says Mr. Webster. And so do we—a great deal which we should like to include in this paper. But we trust enough has been said to make the reader ask, Why have we not been told all this before? Our insular indifference to the religious state of the Continent of Europe has much to answer for. We are, as a nation, utterly ignorant of the disastrous condition into which the imbecilities and puerilities of Roman ecclesiastics have plunged the religion of Christ among millions of people in foreign lands. On the one hand we are gravely assured by sundry unbalanced enthusiasts among ourselves that religion among us is at the lowest ebb, and that it can only be quickened into life by our adoption, as far as possible, of the Roman system, while another party among us, with a holy horror, refuses even to look at Rome as she is, and does not care to be informed of her latest extravagances and ineptitudes. The one party shuts its eyes and, as far as it can, the ears of everybody else to all the mistakes of the Roman Church; the other will not allow Englishmen to learn anything from such

¹ What "blessed Gerard" is this? Surely not the assassin of William the Silent.

² Report of Brussels Congress, pp. 112, 113. The Bishops, however, have since found it inconvenient to print, as formerly, the details of this cult. They have become too unpleasantly well known in England.

³ *Acta*, p. lxii.

mistakes. But the strongest evidence against Rome is the evidence of facts. We therefore recommend both parties to study Mr. Webster's most temperate and unimpassioned account of the extraordinary absurdities in which modern Romanism is wallowing. It will be found the most effective way of weaning sundry very ill-informed persons in this country from the foolish idealization of the Roman Church in which they have so long been indulging.

There is only one point on which we are not in full accord with Mr. Webster. In his interesting paper on the "Petite Église"—the body, we must explain, of seceders brought into existence in France by Napoleon's unfortunate Concordat of 1801—he descants on the evil of schism, and speaks of "the fatal incline along which it insensibly slides into error and all kinds of mischief." Now, we are not disposed to deny that schism is an evil, and even a very serious evil. We find this out in our own miserable disputes about the Education Act. But there are worse evils than schism. Has not the Reformation schism done far more good than evil to the world at large? Has not the Old Catholic schism brought into existence on the Continent a perpetual witness for Catholic truth, and against Roman perversions of that truth? The schism of the Concordat in France was but a half-hearted protest, and it was to this fact, not to the fact that it was schism, that all the mischief it did is owing. The Bishops allowed themselves to die out without perpetuating their order. The consequence is a *diaspora* of a few thousands, scattered over France, without ministers, without churches, without forms of worship, gradually narrowing in its sympathies, and dying of inanition for want of the nourishment by which the Christian life has ever been sustained. Is Mr. Webster sure that the present serious decay of Christianity in France, to some of the signs of which we have already alluded—the 800 secessions from the French priesthood, the alarming spread of superstition and credulity in the French Church—that this might not have been prevented had there been a body of believers in existence pledged to maintain the older standards of faith and ecclesiastical life? Old Catholicism, unfortunately, has made no progress in France. The Protestant Church, still more unfortunately, is rent from top to bottom by fundamental differences of opinion. The "one thing lacking" is an effective standing protest in favour of those elementary truths of which there "was never any doubt in the Church." Yes, there is one thing worse than schism, and that is a slavish submission to authority when authority deliberately teaches the thing that is not true.