

Till after this life ended,  
 Before the unveiled throne,  
 Our songs with yours are blended  
 In perfect benison.



## The Crisis of Romanism.<sup>1</sup>

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THE volume which is the occasion of the present article is well worth reading for its own sake. M. Houtin is a most accomplished writer, and those who know French best will have the highest appreciation for his work. He is known most widely for his masterly account of Americanism, and for his two admirable volumes on *The Biblical Problem in France* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Besides these books, he has written on various biographical, historical, and ecclesiastical subjects. He is equally at home in matters of antiquarian research and of contemporary social interest. He has the right as a student to discuss the former, and he knows the latter by experience. He deals with them all by the strictest and most impartial methods of historical investigation. He has a passion for documentary evidence, and he handles all his subjects with a lightness of touch, a wit, an urbanity, and a rigorous logic which are not too common in our English theological discussions.

If M. Houtin's book stood alone, it would be a very grave sign of what is happening in contemporary France with regard to ecclesiastical affairs; but his volume is only one among many scores, written by ecclesiastics, ecclesiastics, and pious laymen, about the present crisis of Romanism. The list of books published by M. Émile Nourry alone would surprise English readers, both by their number and their titles. Every distinctive article and practice of Romanism is challenged by those who have been, or who still describe themselves as, Catholics. Besides these critics, there are many Protestant controversialists, as well as the greater multitude of anti-clerical writers. Many of the latter do not make a clear distinction, even in their own minds, between clericalism and Christianity. When they think they are attacking the latter, they are really dealing only with the former. The worst foes to Christianity in France are the clericals, who assert that the Roman system and Christianity are inseparable. France is not at bottom an irreligious country, but the very opposite. It is the confusing of religion in general and of Christianity in particular with an exceedingly vicious system which makes so many Frenchmen hostile in appearance to much

<sup>1</sup> "The Crisis among the French Clergy," by the Abbé Houtin; translated by F. Thorold Dickson. London: *David Nutt*. Price 2s. 6d. net.

that for us in England is bound up indissolubly with our notions of religion. That system is arbitrary and theocratic, and therefore it is opposed to all the intellectual, social, and political ideals of modern France; it is controlled ultimately, and ever more directly, by a foreign power, and therefore it is anti-national and unpatriotic; it is retrograde and even obsolete in its knowledge, and yet it aims at the exclusive control of education. It is not surprising that the vast majority of the French nation either hate or fear it, and that a growing number of its own adherents are becoming ever more and more uneasy, perplexed, and restive under these galling fetters.

This is the crisis which M. Houtin describes. He calls it the crisis among the clergy because it falls heaviest on the clerical body, from the beginning of their education until the close of their ministry; but it affects the whole French nation indirectly, and more especially that part of it which may still be described as Catholic. What that proportion may be is a disputed question. The present population of France is over 39,000,000. The number of practising Catholics, that is of those who obey the laws of the Church and contribute to their religion, is put by some authorities at about 8,000,000; by others it is reckoned as low as 4,000,000. The latter figure is based on the returns of certain French Bishops, which were presented recently to Pius X., to his grave displeasure and dismay. These numbers do not represent the masses of people who are christened, married, and buried by the Church, but who have no further dealings with the clergy; whose first Communion, if they make it, is also their last; who are not Catholics by conviction or Christians in practice, but who merely accept certain rites through ancestral habit or in deference to social custom. The numbers quoted include those who attend Mass more or less regularly, who do not wholly ignore the regulations of fasting and abstinence, who contribute something to the ecclesiastical finances, especially to Peter's Pence, and some proportion of whom fulfil their annual Easter duties of confession and communion. Only those who perform all these acts are practising Catholics, and strictly "in the Church." Statistics prove that the number of these is exceedingly small; and the clergy list, especially in the big towns, as well as the amount of church accommodation, show that that number cannot be large. Whether the larger number of lax and nominal or conventional Catholics be reckoned at 8,000,000 or at 4,000,000 out of nearly 40,000,000, there is a significant shrinkage compared with the state of things when France could be described truthfully as Catholic, and when the overwhelming majority of the nation was said to profess the Roman Catholic religion. That was the description given by Napoleon's Concordat in 1801, and still more was it true of the older Gallican Church down to the revolution in 1789.

As long as Gallicanism flourished, the nation was the Church and the Church was the nation. The religion may have had its faults, but at any rate it was national and patriotic. It appealed to the vast majority of Frenchmen, and was interwoven with the whole course of their history. With the Concordat all that was altered. The restoration of the Papacy and of the Jesuits in 1814 led to that increase of centralization, obscurantism, and Vaticanism which were flaunted in the Syllabus of 1864, and which culminated by the definition of Papal infallibility in 1870. Since then the

centralizing and arbitrary process has gone on unchecked; and a century of Vaticanism, even under the Concordat, has led to the de-Catholicizing of France, and to the shrinkage, which has been pointed out, in its Catholic population.

Such, on one side of it, is the cause of the crisis with which M. Houtin deals. As has been remarked, M. Houtin is only one among a crowd of similar writers. The most recent, and in some ways the most interesting, of them is the anonymous American author of some "Letters to Pius X.," who points out that "Catholicism and Romanism were not always one"; that "the old Catholic independence is lost, the old episcopal dignity sunk to serfdom"; and, he adds, "weakness, the inevitable consequence of subservience, is the universal result." Bishops are chosen principally for their Papal zeal, that is for their subservience and flattery. Strong men, scholars, and thinkers, are suspected and repressed. Episcopal action is narrowed continually by the Papal administration; Bishops are now little more than consecrators of holy oils, christeners of bells, ministers of Confirmation and Orders. Neither initiation nor administration is left to them. They have no security of tenure, but depend helplessly on the good-will of the Apostolic See. Priests, in like manner, depend absolutely on their Bishops, and are appointed for very similar reasons; submission and abundant contributions are the two chief virtues in favour at Rome. It is not surprising, in these circumstances, that the Church is withering, and that Rome dreaded above all things, at the separation of Church and State in France, the re-establishment of an independent episcopate and clergy. Since 1814 the Papacy has been steadily killing Roman Catholicism. The process has been hastened in France by separation, which has removed the last feeble barriers against the unchecked bureaucracy of the Vatican; but this process is not limited to France: it prevails now throughout the Roman system, and is continually growing. Mr. Gladstone pointed out the dangers of Vaticanism to the State, but he failed to see how utterly destructive it was bound to prove to every Church that was submitted to it. For this reason, the Papacy is not nearly so dangerous to Governments and to society as many people imagine. The system emasculates its supporters, and most of all its chief administrators. The more perfectly it is carried out, the feebler it must become; just as the Roman Catholic system devours every country, intellectually, physically, financially, in proportion to its predominance there, as Spain has shown, as Ireland is now showing.

But the internal or intellectual crisis among the French clergy is no less grave than the disciplinary or administrative crisis. A system which only exists by manipulating history is bound to suffer educationally in two ways. Those who submit to it blindly are educationally weak, and their standard is far below the average acquirements of these times. Those who acquire a better knowledge, who have both the courage and the honesty to use it, rebel sooner or later against the system. Either they go out of it, or they remain only in the hope of working a future and a gradual reformation. The numbers of clergy who go out are large. They are reckoned at 1,000 in the last ten years. The recruiting of the seminaries has become very difficult. In 1888 there were 2,169 vacancies among the parochial clergy, and 1,679

ordinations. In 1903 there were 2,560 vacancies and 1,649 ordinations. The vacancies will certainly increase, and the ordinations diminish, as education extends and the effects of Separation come to be appreciated by Catholic parents. The methods and policy of Pius X. will certainly add enormously to the intellectual difficulties of existing and intending clergy; and besides the difficulty of finding men, there is the ever-growing difficulty of providing money to maintain them. This, again, is due very largely to the aggressive and selfish policy of the present Pontificate. Rome, as has been noted, feared an independent clergy, and it vetoed every law because its jurisdiction was ignored by the State in dealing with what it held firmly and properly to be a domestic question.

Now, it is a mistake to suppose that all the present difficulties in France are produced by what is called Modernism, and it is a further mistake to connect Modernism exclusively with destructive Biblical criticism. All Modernists are not critics, and all critics are not destructive or extremists. Those who are can be dealt with best by the patient methods of scholarship. Truth will always in the end find its level, and it can only be reached through hypotheses and free inquiry. These of themselves imply errors by the way before the goal is reached. In intellectual matters force is no remedy, and is the worst of crimes. Since the thirteenth century Catholicism has been stereotyped, tied to a scholastic method which is dead, crushed under an obsolete philosophy. In the sixteenth century all the medieval errors were re-affirmed in the sole interests of the Papacy, which is founded only on medieval ignorance. The Papal theory was enforced by the crimes, chicanery, and violence of the Catholic reaction. Society, by degrees, has liberated itself from this tyranny, and science has been able to assert those rights which were denied and crushed at the revival of learning. Education and freedom have spread, and are spreading ever more widely, the results of knowledge. Hence the crisis in the Papal Church. The Papacy is striving to keep the men of the twentieth century back in the thirteenth. Difficulties nowadays, as Tyrrell says, "are almost entirely of a positive and historical character," and they are felt more or less by the whole educated population of Europe and North America. As education spreads, they will be felt equally elsewhere. The struggle is sharper in France because she is more logical, more intelligent, and more civilized than any other country. She is the protagonist of science and freedom. The Papacy is the protagonist of reaction and retrogression; first, because its infallibility commits it to all the errors and the evil machinery of its past; and, secondly, because whatever else may go, the Papal authority and claims are both rejected by competent scholarship and free criticism.

It is deeply interesting to see how many of the conclusions reached by the Anglican Reformers are now being repeated within the Papal Church by its own historians and critics. Modernists of this sort are only claiming precisely the same rights which we took in the sixteenth century. We can only deny those rights by destroying our own historical and theological position. Let us, then, be patient where these newer scholars may appear to differ from, or ever to deny, some of the conclusions reached by our predecessors four centuries ago. We cannot see the world altogether as they

did, for very obvious reasons. Mankind will not stand still to please the Anglican Reformers any more than to please the Roman Pontiffs. Let us look forward with courage and good hope, for we may be sure there will be no sound and permanent Christianity again in France until the Papal centralization is utterly destroyed.



## The Missionary World.

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FROM an article entitled "Little India," by the Principal of Trinity College, Kandy, quoted in the *C.M.S. North India Gleaner*, we learn of the awakening activity of the Buddhists. The missionary in charge of the Cotta district says: "Never have I known a year in which the Buddhist opposition to Christian work has been so severe and intense, and our means to combat it so limited." He gives instances of schools almost emptied of the scholars and the Government grant lost when a new Buddhist school is opened; all the influence of the local authorities seems to be used to prevent the children attending Christian schools any longer. Every Sunday Buddhist preachers from Colombo visit the chief centres and attack and revile Christianity.



For the first time in the history of the mission in German East Africa, we are told in the *C.M.S. Gleaner*, the inheritance to a chieftainship has come to a member of a Christian family. Mr. Deekes writes: "The inheritor is a small boy, the son of our teacher Yusuf. The father of the child, being an earnest, conscientious servant of the Master, desirous of having everything above board, objected to any heathen rite or ceremony in the claiming of the inheritance. For this reason he consulted me, and I called all the members of the family together, with the headmen and chiefs of the tribe, and held a council in the compound of the mission. Yusuf's fearless stand and bold testimony to the power of the grace of God in his life before that vast assembly of heathen were cause for great thankfulness. He said that if there were anything incompatible with the Christian religion which he and his son believed, and by which their lives were regulated, he would advise his son to forego the inheritance. . . . I took the opportunity of saying, 'Your heathenism must soon die; it cannot continue for long; it must give way either to Mohammedanism or to the Christian religion.' Here there was an interruption, the whole assembly with one accord declaring no less than three times: 'Then it shall be Christianity. Take our children and teach them, but away with Mohammedanism; we will have nothing to do with it. . . .' Will our friends pray for us, and also help us in every way possible to make good use of this unique opportunity?"