

Impressions at Mass.

IT is a common occurrence that the traveller who has spent some two or three weeks in a country which years of study would fail to elucidate is wont to seize the first opportunity of describing his experiences in print. His presumption is smiled at, and yet he carries with him a certain charm of freshness ; it may even be that he is of value by recording his impressions of details that are so all-pervading that the learned historian passes them by as things of course.

All in the spirit of the traveller, the writer bethought himself during a pleasant holiday of attending Mass at the local Chapel ; and having returned from that far country ventures to rush into print and recount the effect produced upon his mind.

The first *rencontre* on the threshold is a business-like one, a large bowl for cash in lieu of seat rent for those not renting seats. Next, much courtesy by the officials to a very obviously Protestant clergyman. After this the lighting of the altar candles, the entrance of the clergy, etc., and the procession down the chapel (of the clergy and assistants, not the boys) to asperse us with holy water. This solemnity being over, a short service began which no one seemed to have in their books ; however, it was well known, and the child of twelve beside me had no difficulty in joining in its very complicated music. After this, a change of cope, much preparation of the altar, etc., and the Mass begins. The first thing notable was the extreme complexity of the movements of the Priest and his four or five assistants. There might have been more method in it than one could catch, but the effect on a stranger was that of a bewildering complexity which must have taken long to study and perfect. The crossing about, interchanging, bowing, crossing, kissing, censing, handing of vessels, went on with a ceaseless rapidity which was a little mystifying, while one knew that this was only a trifle to the rapidity and complexity of the movements of the priest himself.

The next great surprise was that one was not to "hear Mass." I had known that some prayers were said below the breath, but I was not prepared to find that this applied to practically the whole of the Service. True, the Epistle and Gospel are sung (in Latin), likewise the Creed and the Gloria in Excelsis ; but almost the whole

of the remainder of an Office many times longer than ours was said inaudibly. Not in silence by any means. The Choir was singing all the time. For instance, one finds in one's Prayer-book the Kyrie (nine times). Priest and people start this fair, but the Choir goes on and on, while the Priest is rushing through pages of the ritual, and at length just as the Choir sing their last note, he lifts his voice "per saecula saeculorum," and all join in a great Amen. Then the Choir start another holy Song, and the Priest gets on a further stride in his undertaking, to end in the same manner as before. In short there are two services going on at the same time, that of the Priest, who is making Christ, and that of the congregation, who are quite otherwise employed. Indeed, at one time we might be said to have been enjoying three services, for the exertions of the Incense-swinger were quite worthy of that description. I understand that it is not considered at all necessary for the devout attendant to follow the prayers of the Priest: it might possibly savour of presumption. He is making Christ inaudibly, indeed invisibly; that they know, and the method is not especially their business. My little neighbour was happily engaged in reading the "Garden of the Soul", dutifully attending to her business while the Priest attended to his.

I was much pleased with the Chancel. As in most Roman churches which I have seen, it was a shallow apse, quite near to the people. I cannot bear our Anglican chancels, so long, so far removed from the congregation, so full of useless mystery, false symbolism, unpractical difficulties, and wrongness of feeling. The Roman Altar is among the people. The Choir boys are put in their place, which is quite a humble one compared with the sublime aloofness of the English choir, and the people are made to feel that *they* have an altar, and that if there is a mystery, it is one in which they all have a share. More of this later.

There were of course no "hymns" as we have them, but to my surprise there was a Sermon. And it was a very good one, what one would call an "Evangelical" sermon. For it was on Christ weeping over Jerusalem, and the preacher dealt with it just as the writer would have wished him to, first the sublime and tragic impressiveness of the scene brought out, then the warning to us of the fate of the Jews, and lastly an earnest exhortation to repent. And yet there was a curious sense of unreality about it. That

may have been subjective to the writer, but it certainly seemed so out of place. Here on the right was the Priest resting in the midst of his labours of making Christ as the way of salvation for the ensuing week, and here on the left was a young assistant explaining from Scripture what sounded as quite a different way of life. It seemed an intrusion on the main action, and his faltering manner (though with perfect precision and preparation) seemed to suggest that he felt it so himself. It seemed like a patch on an ordered whole. The following Sunday the Monsignor himself occupied the pulpit, but all he had to say (and this time quite in keeping with the occasion) was on the advantage of giving sums of £10 as an endowment to a certain charity for aged Priests, and the immense number of Masses that one would receive in exchange. The subject was put on a thoroughly businesslike basis. It was well emphasized that if one only left this sum instead of giving it now one would be losing all the spiritual return meanwhile. Indeed the words "spiritual return" recurred so often that the speaker himself seemed to get a little uneasy at their reiterated commercial ring. I should say that before the Sermon on both occasions the Epistle and Gospel, which had been already sung in Latin, were read in English, and I am almost sure from the Authorized Version. And it was pleasant to me to hear the Sunday named as "after Pentecost," for our Anglican numbering "after Trinity" only marks a time, but "after Pentecost" marks a reality, i.e. that as the first half of the year has recalled the Acts of Christ, so the second shall recall the Acts of the Holy Ghost. May we all remember that when we are teaching the "duties" of the Catechism. They must be the *delightful* duties taught and ordered by the Holy Ghost: then will our Catechism be truly Evangelical.

I was surprised at the great amount of sitting we enjoyed in the preliminary part of the service. Here was wisdom: the people were not tired out. It was certainly surprising to be seated even during the Nicene Creed. It was sung to joyful music, as I think all Creeds should be; for when should we be more joyful? And yet my impression of the Creeds from childhood upwards has always been of a penitential nature. Indeed, what could be more dirgelike or forbidding than the steadily falling monotone to which we are accustomed, while the organ plays horrible discords! No wonder I have hard work to make my children believe that when I say

"The Lord be with you," it is an exclamation of joy. And so we stood and crossed ourselves for God the Father, knelt in reverence for God the Son, and then we sat while the Choir indulged in lengthy and joyful music.

And how appropriate their music is! It was all different from our patched-on hymns: it was part of the movement itself, somewhat archaic perhaps, and too complicated for a stranger, but quite their own, a veritable part of the whole progression, belonging to the service in the same dignified beautiful way that the painted windows of an ancient church belong to its very structure.

What was the note of the whole service? Joy and awe at the Coming of Christ. There was no instruction, if one excepts the Epistle and Gospel when they are repeated in the vernacular, and the Sermon, which I believe is in most countries a rarity. There was little or none of the expression of penitence which forms so much of our Office. Of course there was the Confession. But sung rapidly in Latin it hardly left its mark on the service. I presume that the action of Penitence is appropriated by the Confessional. The result is that the Mass loses the austerity which we associate with it and becomes the happy feast of the Family. I venture to think, at the risk of criticism, that we have lost this family feeling by the insistence on the note of penitence. In our Catechism we are told of the "strengthening and refreshing of our souls," but when we come to the Service itself there is scarcely anything of the one or the other.

So I must give them one more good point, the feeling of fellowship in the whole. I hope it is not unfair to say that as compared with an Anglican service, there was a feeling that it was the people's service and not the Priest's. Perhaps it was the universal singing, perhaps the frequent use of the word and idea that the people were "assisting" the Priest in his great action; perhaps it was that so many of the laity were actively working with the Priest, or again the invitation to the congregation to make a "spiritual communion"; but one seemed to catch a sense that there was no feeling of the resentment that is connoted by the word "sacerdotalism."

Here as elsewhere they seemed to combine most successfully the two lines of autocracy and democracy into a happy unity.

Thus far then one has only praise for the Service. What is to be said on the other side is: the Service had one only object, the

Making of Christ. If one once believes that, then nothing could be more entirely suitable to its purpose than the Mass. Without that key it seems monotonous that the people should have the same service without any variation week after week ; it seems a pity that they should receive no instruction ; it seems strange that all should be in Latin, and that the people should have no intelligent participation in what the Priest is doing. But if salvation is through Christ, and Christ is Some One on the Altar, and if He only comes there by the performance of a complicated ritual, then all is logical and intelligible. And also the possession of this Ritual, this mighty Secret, will make a bond of brotherhood and family pride very strong indeed among those who only have the right to practise it : here is a veritable instance of Freemasonry, a Society bound together by the knowledge of and right to a secret Rite of power, once a secret as to its whole content, and still a secret in its spiritual aspect.

And yet in the " Canon " of the Mass (only a very few prayers, including the Consecration), there stands a mysterious passage, of a profundity so great, so one Pope declared, that the human intellect could scarcely suffice to penetrate it. For does it not pray of the consecrated Elements that God will command His angel to carry " haec " (these things) to the heavenly altar ? And how can Christ be spoken of as " haec," and how carried by an angel to an altar, or why ! No wonder the mystery was great to Innocent, for there stands the witness of antiquity that the elements are not transubstantiated, that the Service is not the Making of Christ. So then, if the Service is truly the Making of Christ, nothing can be more suitable. But if the Sacrament of Christ be something different to this, then how insufficient a fare for the soul, how poor a ministry. No Psalms, no Lessons, no varied Hymns, no Prayers for various needs, no exposition of the great Sacrifice of Christ, no study of His character and varied message, no moving to repentance and trust, but always the miracle of making Christ upon the altar, the all-sufficient and only medicine for all the ailments of all the faithful.

And through it all there is that queer sense of the absence of Scripture and Scripture proof, that aloofness from Scripture, that feeling of the self-growth of the ritual apart from the holy Word, that absence of any guarantee that these things are so. It made one picture the feelings of an early Christian who strayed into a gathering

for the rites of Mithra. There he would have found an attractive ritual, a sense and fount of moral earnestness, a venerable hierarchy, a reverent and prostrate people, an imitation very close to the things which he believed and loved. And yet, under all the thought would have imperiously arisen, "But is it true? Is there a reality underneath it? Is Mithra a presence or a myth?"

And so the Service ended in its abrupt queer way, suddenly running down without blessing or climax after the reading of John i. 1-14, and we departed home; and when I tried to compare the result of the Mass with the feelings left by the Holy Communion, it seemed to me that in the one case I should be taking away Christ Whom I had found within by penitence and prayer and made my own more deeply again, but in the other I was leaving Him behind, less near to hear me than in the shrine, less potent to observe me, less awful to offend against.

If Christ comes objectively, actually, upon the Altar in the Sacrament, as He came of old, if this is His one and chosen way of coming to bless us, then nothing else matters in religion: the Mass and the Mass alone is the religion for Catholics. But if His coming is measured by my faith and inward disposition, if He comes not to the Altar but to my poor heart, if, as history testifies, the precise performance of the Ritual may in days of darkness consist with the coming of every evil spirit, then the emphasis of this service is wrong, and they are seeking Him without when they should be seeking Him within. At the very best, and where high views of Christ prevail, they are going back to the times preceding Pentecost. It was "expedient" that they should lose His local presence that they might find it in the Spirit. And I thought that this religion might avail for the times of ignorance: it might have lighted many souls in days when the key of knowledge was hidden away and lost; it was as the moonlight shining on the lonely traveller, guiding and guarding him through many perils. But when the Daystar has arisen then that which is in part is done away. The Sun has risen, and the Light is shining.

W. B.