

THE PREVALENT RELIGIOUS LIFE IN ITALY.

[FROM THE GERMAN.]

Michael Angelo says, in one of his letters, "Art is the imitation of God, and because the Italian people alone can enter into the deepest conception of the Deity, no other people can compete with the painting and sculpture of Italy." At this day, instead of repeating such a boast, the great artist would have mourned alike the depravation of art and the decay of religion among his people. Whence this great change? A professor in Naples, the other day, at the close of a lecture upon the corrupt Italian writers of the 17th century, proposed the same question. "Whence, gentlemen," said he, "arises this miserable spiritual condition, which has made our naturally gifted people a reproach among the nations? The only answer I can give is, from the oppression of the religious spirit. A sad tyranny has, in our country, crushed the freedom of religion, and with it the freedom of the spirit. But now, the Gospel is no longer bound, the Spirit is free, and it will free Italy." The applause with which this sentiment was received by the students shows that a new life is astir in the Halls of the Universities of Italy. But the University at Rome is still entangled in the dust and cob-webs of scholasticism. No medieval or modern history is taught there, and no branch of philosophy but logic. At a late lecture, attended by five students, the teacher—a Bishop—read a tedious excursus in regard to the day on which Vespasian set out on his return from Jerusalem to Rome. A dry disputation followed, on the question, "Do the non-Christian witnesses upon the truth of Christianity deserve credence?" On such barren instruction are the future ministers of the church trained for their work. It is a happy fact that an evangelical theological school exists in Florence, where a better system will be taught. It is a great pleasure to mingle with the professors and students there, and to feel the warm religious spirit that throbs in their teachings, their learning and their prayers.

It will be a long time, a very long time, before the religious spirit, now choked by dead forms, will attain greater life and depth. The Italian people make no distinction between the world and the kingdom of God. Things sacred and profane are so deeply and inextricably confounded in their minds, that even converted Italians cannot get the better of the confusion. In the midst of a meeting for prayer, you may hear from the lips of true Christians the cry, "To the Capital." The Romish church itself is the cause, in a very dreadful way, of this mingling of the sacred and profane. You may see one of the altar-boys crossing himself at the weekly lottery-drawing—which exerts such a demoralizing influence on Rome—and Priests assisting at the scene. Monks of the *Ara Celi* will, for a trifling reward, give the people numbers for the game of lotto; while the miserable sheet, "Armonia," in its envenomed polemic against the Protestants speaks of the "Bible and other trashy books!"

One of the noblest festivals in Rome is the Feast of Tongues, when the praises of God and of Christ are proclaimed in all the languages of the world. The conception is a sublime one; but how is one undecided when, on such an occasion, he hears two negro youths sing some of their native songs for the gratification of the crowd, and is asked, upon leaving, by a priest, "How were you entertained?" At one of the most magnificent Easter festivals, held in the Sistine chapel, a priest was seen to write in his note book, "This day attended the showy service in the Sistine chapel. Around me stood only Englishmen and Frenchmen—mere heretics. I imagine that the whole of us, myself not excepted, came either out of curiosity and not for devotion." There is no doubt that these magnificent Easter festivities are more a show for foreigners than a solemnity for Catholics. Said a Bohemian priest, in Rome, on one of these occasions: "I came from such a great distance to see my holy father. I expected much enjoyment during my visit, but I go home with a heavy heart." How like, in effect, to the visit of Luther, three centuries ago! The conclusion of the Easter festivities consists in illuminating the dome and in fire-works—in the estimation of the Romans the principal part of the feast itself.

The religious and moral condition of the people in the country and among the hills is far better than that of the city people. There is some earnestness among the more simple worshippers of the virgin and of relics; morals are purer; marriage is regarded as sacred; purity is maintained; the priests are held in respect; strangers are kindly treated, and one can go through whole neighborhoods without seeing a beggar. Much more endurable is the naive devotion here shown than the stupid fanaticism that characterizes the masses of the cities.

But, with all this, the question arises, how is it that the roots of Romanism have struck so deep and spread so widely through the entire population; so that even liberal journals speak of Protestantism as a peril to Italy? The explanation is found in the fact that the Italians, to attain to the spirit of the Gospel, must go through an inward experimental struggle, to which they are peculiarly averse. Catholicism requires no such inward work. The Papal churches, adorned with hangings and images, with painted domes and chancels, and with mirrors here and there, dispose the mind in no degree to thought, much less to a spiritual conflict. The worshipper, at his entrance, is often greeted with the liveliest opera and dance music, and the church is very much like a theatre, where the priest has a certain part to perform, like an actor. Curiously adorned places are the Romish churches of Italy, especially if they contain some image supposed to possess miraculous power. The walls are sometimes quite covered with votive offerings: silver hearts, waxen limbs, tresses, old clothes, paintings representing the appearance of a saint, a fall from a horse, &c., adorn or disfigure the place. The sacred image itself is concealed beneath the accumulation of ornaments. Over the doors of the churches is frequently written a notice of the length of time for which they grant indulgences. "Indulgences for 100 days." "Indulgence for 1000 years." "Indulgence for 6000 years." "Indulgentia plenaria perpetua." Often the priests seek to draw the people by hand-bills: "Here you have the same indulgence as at St. Peter's, in Rome." It is remarkable that no difference is observable in the attendance on churches which give an indulgence for 6000 years or forever, and those which offer inferior inducements of the sort.

The facility with which forgiveness of sins may be obtained is a great tie to retain the Italians in the Church of Rome. "A hundred and twenty sins can be confessed as quick as a hundred," is a Roman proverb. To gain this easy forgiveness, men and women bow at the confessional and disclose not merely the state of their hearts, but the secrets of their domestic relations and the political sentiments of their relatives. Dr. De Sanctis, who, as theologian of the Inquisition, had abundant opportunity of learning the facts, says that a great part of the instruction of the seminary, is directed to preparing the future priests, to deal efficiently with the questions arising in the confessional. Many a father forbids his daughter to go to the confessional for fear of contamination. As to the immorality of the priests, there is in all Rome but one outcry of indignation. Yet this indignation fails in that deep moral abhorrence which alone can produce practical results.

So impure is the religious feeling of the Italians, that they make the same person or thing alike an object of ridicule and of worship. It is well known that the Italians believe in the evil eye—*malocchio*—or power to injure with a look. This demon-power they naively ascribe to the holy father, and they stretch out two fingers as a gesture of self-protection. Yet they prostrate themselves in the street when the Pope appears walking or riding. A few days after Easter, there is a great audience held annually in the apartments of the Vatican. Foreign priests of high standing, with arms full of wreaths which they design to carry back with the papal blessing on them, distinguished Italians with wives and children, form a long procession. The Pope appears; all but a few Protestants, perhaps, fall upon their knees. After they have risen, the Pope utters a few words. Last year he spoke of the rising of Italy against him. "Among you," he said "are many whose sons and brothers have fallen in the struggle for me. And the war seems to have been fruitless. But God fights for his vice-gerent; have courage, hope on, God will bring everything to a good result." Then giving his benediction, he withdrew. Those near him fell down and touched the hem of his garment; mothers held up their children before him to catch his blessing. The whole scene was a lively illustration of the impression yet made by the appearance of the Pope. Another indication of life yet remaining in Italian Catholicism, is the flagellation-service during Lent. Every Saturday evening, in a little church on the Corso, assemble a number of Catholic penitents, who are supplied with whips by the attendants. The lights are extinguished; a priest delivers a discourse intended to produce repentance, and then for some minutes the cracking of the whips upon the backs of the self-torturers is heard, until the priest pronounces a blessing and dismisses the penitent flock.

Such indications of life are, however, rare. Indifference and ignorance are the prevailing characteristics of the

popular religion. The processions which in Catholic Germany are so grand, including rich and poor, old and young; in Italy make no stir; the people take no part in them. At the procession in honor of the Immaculate Conception, scarcely a hundred persons followed the long train of priests and monks. An astonishing ignorance of religious truth prevails. The people seldom know more than the passages from the life of Christ read on feast days; of the doctrines of their church the people have no idea, not to speak of Protestantism. Many who prefer Protestantism do so entirely on the ground that the Pope is a monarch and Christ was, as they say, a Republican. Especially towards the South are the people incredibly rude. Even in the better classes of society, show and good living constitute the centres of their life. Little stress is laid upon good morals. Domestic relations are well nigh destroyed. The children show no reverence for their parents; parents exercise no discipline; the grown up sons live a loose life in the *cafes*. In times of misfortune there is a terrible lack of sympathy. When the cholera raged, the sick were often abandoned by their relatives and left destitute of all attention. The Italians do not wish to be by when death approaches; though their treatment of the corpse is often attended with touching and beautiful ceremonies. We should bear, this highly-gifted people upon our hearts, and send them the Gospel to awaken them to spiritual life. This Gospel has begun its course in Italy. The Waldenses are revenging themselves of the bloody persecutions inflicted on their ancestors by the Church of Rome, by preaching the Gospel. Wise men and competent laborers from abroad have entered upon the field. They should be well sustained, so that through their bold and earnest labors, Italy may be provided with a true and well-grounded religion when some morning she awakes to find the Papacy in ruins.

Correspondence.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMISSION IN GEORGIA.

The following letter is from William Reynolds, Esq., Chairman of the Peoria (Ill.) Branch of the Christian Commission. It was addressed to George H. Stuart, Esq., President of the Christian Commission:

RINGOLD, Georgia, April 4, 1864.
DEAR BRO.: This place is now the extreme front of our army. The rebel pickets extend to within two miles of here, and their main force is at Dalton, fifteen miles south of this. We have a large force in and about this place, guarding the difficult passes or gaps in the range of mountains which extend in front of us.

Brother Wyckoff and myself came through from Chattahoochee about ten days ago, for the purpose of seeing what could be done for the spiritual welfare of this branch of the army. On our arrival we found the troops in admirable condition to be reached with the truth. Most of the town had been destroyed by our army, but fortunately one of the churches was still standing and in good condition for religious services. The chaplain of the 10th Kentucky, who, by the way, is one of the best and most successful chaplains in our army, made application to General Baird, who is in command of this post, for the use of this church for religious purposes. The General promptly granted the request. We at once commenced services. The house the first day was comfortably full; the next night it was overflowing, and since then hundreds have had to go away each evening unable to gain admittance. God is pouring out his Spirit most abundantly. One hundred and thirteen, thus far (in the week) have come forward for prayers. The cry is heard, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" Many have found peace in believing and are rejoicing in a new-found Saviour.

I have never seen such deep interest manifested before in the soul's salvation as appears to be now in this part of our army. Many who were formerly known as the most wicked and depraved men in the camp are now born again, and doing all they can for Jesus. Yesterday being Sabbath, I visited a majority of the regiments encamped here. A more quiet and orderly set of men I never saw congregated together either in or out of the army. I said to a soldier, I see less card playing in this camp than in any I have ever visited. "Oh," said he, "that is about played out here; a great many of the men who were most addicted to that vice, have quit it entirely, and are now doing all they can against it." God appears to be moving upon the hearts of our soldiers. There is a solemnity and an anxiety to converse upon religious subjects manifested by our brave boys, that I have never seen manifested in the army before. One young man in

the 10th Kentucky, who has been regarded as one of the wildest in the regiment, came to our meeting a few evenings ago, and at the close came forward for prayers. The next morning I called at his tent to see him. He told me that at the battle of Chickamauga, last fall, a ball struck him in the breast bone, glanced off and thus saved his life. He thought, "if that bullet had penetrated my heart, where would I be now? Lost!" He there promised God if he would save him through that battle he would seek the kingdom of heaven. God saved him but he forgot his promise until that night. The Spirit said, "Come now, or it will be forever too late." The devil said, "Not now—to-morrow." He deliberated a moment—remembered his vow at Chickamauga, and determined to arise and go forward. He did so. He went from the meeting, not to his tent, but to the woods, and there, upon his knees, gave himself to Jesus. He arose a new creature, and is now a Christian. Another came to the meeting, was convicted, but could not find peace. A few nights afterwards he was upon picket, feeling miserable on account of his sins. He dropped upon his knees beside a tree, and looking up to heaven, cried "Lord be merciful to me, a sinner." Jesus heard that prayer, and light broke in upon his soul. He also arose feeling that his sins were forgiven and washed away in Jesus' blood. Numerous instances of this kind occur daily. God's Spirit is abroad throughout the camp with great power. The prayers of Christians at the North, of mothers and wives, have been heard, and are being answered in the army. God is rewarding the labors of the Christian Commission wonderfully. No such field of labor was ever opened before to the Christian public. If the friends of Jesus wish to win souls to him, here is the place to labor. While our ministers at home are laboring and preaching to gospel-hardened congregations, with occasionally one or two additions to the fold, here men are hungering for the word of life, and with the same amount of labor, hundreds could be brought into the Kingdom. Let our northern churches lend their ministers to this work, and send to the Commission the means of forwarding them.

Miscellaneous.

GOD OBSERVANT OF SMALL THINGS.

He upholds the sparrow's wing, clothes the lily with his own beautifying hand, and numbers the hairs of his children. He holds the balancing of the clouds. He maketh small the drops of rain. It astonishes all thought to observe the minuteness of God's government, and of the natural and common processes which he carries on from day to day. His dominions are spread out, system beyond system, system above system, filling all height and latitude, but he is never lost in the vast or magnificent. He descends to an infinite detail, and builds a little universe in the smallest things. He carries on a process of growth in every tree, and flower, and living thing; accomplishes in each an internal organization and works the functions of an internal laboratory, too delicate all for eye or instrument to trace. He articulates the members and impels the instincts of every living mote that shines in the sunbeam. As when we ascend toward the distant and the vast, so when we descend toward the minute, we see his attention accumulated, and his skill concentrated on his object, and the last discernible particle dies out of sight with the same divine glory on it, as on the last orb that glimmers in the skirt of the universe. God is as careful to finish the mote as the planet, both because it consists only with his perfection to finish everything, and because the perfection of his greatest structures is the result of perfection in their smallest parts or particles.

The works of Christ are, if possible, a still brighter illustration of the same truth. Notwithstanding the vast stretch and compass of the work of redemption, it is a work of the most humblest detail in its style of execution. The Saviour could have preached a sermon on the mount every morning. Each night he could have stilled the sea, before his astonished disciples, and shown the conscious waves lulling into peace under his feet. He could have transfigured himself before Pilate and the astonished multitudes of the temple. He could have made visible ascensions in the noon of every day, and revealed his form standing in the sun, like the angel of the apocalypse. But this was not his mind. The incidents of which his work is principally made up, are, humanly speaking, very humble and unpretending. The most faithful pastor in the world was never able, in any degree, to approach the Saviour in the lowliness of his manner and his attention to humble things. His teachings were in retired places, and his illustrations drawn from ordinary affairs. If the finger of faith touched him in the crowd, he knew the touch and distinguished also the faith. He reproved the ambitious housewifery of an humble woman. After he had healed a poor being, blind from his birth—a work transcending all but divine power—he returned and sought him out as the most humble Sabbath school teacher might have done; and when he had found him, cast out and persecuted by men, he taught him privately the highest secrets of his Messiahship. When the world around hung darkened in sympathy with his cross, and the earth

was shaking with inward amazement, he himself was remembering his mother, and discharging the filial cares of a good son. And when he burst the bars of death, its first and final conqueror, he folded the linen clothes and the napkin, and laid them in order apart, showing that in the greatest things, he had a set purpose also concerning the smallest. And thus, when perfectly scanned, the work of Christ's redemption, like the created universe, is seen to be a vast orb of glory, wrought up out of finished particles. Now a life of great and prodigious exploits would have been comparatively an easy thing for him, but to cover himself with beauty and glory in small things, to fill and adorn every little human occasion, so as to make it divine,—this was a work of skill, which no mind or hand was equal to, but that which shaped the atoms of the world. Such everywhere is God. He nowhere overlooks or despises small things.—Dr. Bushnell.

NECESSITY OF DETAIL TO EFFICIENCY.

It is a fact of history and of observation, that all efficient men, while they have been men of comprehension, have also been men of detail. I wish it were possible to produce as high an example of this two-fold character among the servants of God and benevolence in these times, as we have in that fiery prodigy of war and conquest, who in the beginning of the present century, desolated Europe. Napoleon was the most effective man in modern times—some will say of all times. The secret of his character was, that while his plans were more vast, more various, and of course, more difficult than those of other men, he had the talent, at the same time, to fill them up with perfect promptness and precision, in every particular of execution. His vast and daring plans would have been visionary in any other man; but with him every vision flew out of his brain, a chariot of iron; because it was filled up, in all the particulars of execution, to be a solid and compact framework in every part. His armies were together only one great engine of desolation, of which he was the head or brain. Numbers, spaces, times, were all distinct in his eye. The wheeling of every legion, however remote, was mentally present to him. The tramp of every foot sounded in his ear. The numbers were always supplied, the spaces passed over, the times met, and so the work was done. The nearest moral approximation I know of, was Paul the Apostle. Paul had great principles, great plans, and a great enthusiasm. He had the art, at the same time, to bring his great principles into a powerful application to his own conduct, and to all the common affairs of all the disciples in his churches. He detected every want, understood every character; set his guards against those whom he distrusted; kept all his work turning in a motion of discipline; prompted to every duty. You will find his epistles distinguished by great principles; and, at the same time, by a various and circumstantial attention to all the common affairs of life; and, in that, you have the secret of his efficiency. There must be detail in every great work. It is an element of effectiveness, which no reach of plan, no enthusiasm of purpose, can dispense with. Thus, if a man conceives the idea of becoming eminent in learning, but cannot toil through the million of little drudgeries necessary to carry him on, his learning will be soon told. Or, if a man undertakes to become rich, but despises the small and gradual advances by which wealth is ordinarily accumulated, his expectations will, of course, be the sum of his riches. Accurate and careful detail, the minding of common occasions and small things combined with general scope and vigor, is the secret of all the efficiency and success in the world.—Dr. Bushnell.

COMMERCIAL WITHOUT CHRISTIANITY.

There are now and then lessons taught to the world of such a character, and with such emphasis that they never need to be repeated; they are learned once for all, and such a lesson has been given in the history of the British East India Company. Here was a country—India—wonderfully rich in resources and population, consolidated, to a greater or less extent, under a strong government, proving itself, indeed, strong enough by its own arm to keep down an uprising empire till help could arrive, exercising its sway over a docile people for at least a century and partially for two centuries,—a country advancing slowly but certainly in all the elements of civilization, and yet, at a certain moment, a sudden outbreak occurs in a northern province, and at once with telegraphic speed half the peninsula is in arms and pauses at nothing in the determination to rid itself of its hated rulers. It spares neither age nor sex nor character, but sweeps in one common butchery all that bears the name of European. A spark seems to have caused the explosion, but the train and the magazine were there before.

As if to point out so emphatically that the whole world should see without the possibility of mistake where the error had been, the provinces and the only provinces which remained unshaken during the insurrection, were those in which missionary labors had been most successful and abundant, and where Christianity had the most wide-spread power. These were, indeed, all that saved India to England. Had the presidencies to the south and east joined in the revolt, its salvation would have been impossible. However men may explain the fact, there it stands—that those parts of India were most faithful where the gospel of Jesus Christ had the most power, and that the very classes most under the influence of the Company and most courted and caressed by it were the first to throw off their allegiance. As a Commercial Corporation it did all it could for them, and designedly and deliberately withheld

Christianity; and the end was disaster and ruin, only prevented by Christian soldiers and faithfulness of Christian men. The common consent of mankind seems to have determined, with a uniformity which is wonderful as it is universal, that here, just here was the fatal error of the government of India; so that without one solitary dissenting voice in England, a total reversal of the whole policy in regard to religion has been demanded; and so clear has been the case that not an objection has been raised against it. The world sees that even for its own safety commerce cannot with impunity be a Godless thing; it must connect itself with higher interests than mere commercial advantage, or else court its own destruction.—Rev. W. Aikman.

IS STREET PREACHING ILLEGAL?

The Presbyterian of last week has some remarks on this question worthy of general attention. Mr. Baxter is we believe, a Minister of respectable character, known for his Millenarian writings, in which Louis Napoleon is described as anti-Christ.

A minister of the Episcopal Church (the Rev. Mr. Baxter) was arrested by the police of Philadelphia, Sabbath before last, for preaching in the public streets of the city, and afterwards arrested on the same day for preaching from the window of a hired hall to a company who stood on the side-walk before him. There was no allegation that the people assembled were in any way disorderly, or that any thing was said or done tending to the disturbance of the public peace; and the whole offence seems to have consisted in a violation of a city ordinance relating to the obstruction of side walks. In making these arrests, it is to be presumed that the police acted under instructions from the Mayor of the city; and it is understood that this is a general rule, to be enforced in the case of every minister of the gospel. The matter is of sufficient importance to call for a few remarks.

Street-preaching is not, by any means, a novel thing. Apostles were accustomed to lift up their voices in great thoroughfares, and we do not doubt that our Saviour taught as readily to companies gathered in the streets of Jerusalem as to those who came to him on the hills or by the sea-side in Galilee. In heathen lands, the missionaries of every Church preach on the highways, and in the midst of the crowded avenues of trade. In London and other cities of England, many open-air speakers proclaim the gospel every Sabbath, on week-days. The Bishop of London has, by preaching in the open air, done in London what it seems would be illegal for Bishop Potter to do in Philadelphia, and the minister who was arrested in Philadelphia received express permission to exercise his ministry in the streets of New York. Why should Philadelphia be made so marked an exception in regard to open-air religious services?

EDUCATION IN ITALY.

The amount devoted to education by the Sardinian budget of 1863 was 18,128,078 francs—a larger proportion to the population than in either France or Prussia. The Universities receive about five millions. The present number of the universities is 21. The examinations are not very strict, only about 5 per cent. being rejected, while in Paris 20 per cent.; in Belgium 30 per cent., and in Oxford about 25 per cent. are "plucked." The Minister of Public Instruction is Signor Matteucci. Before 1859 the only organization for public instruction was in Sardinia. The Turin University has 800 to 900 students; the university of Naples was reported in 1861 at 10,000, but the minister could only find between 2,000 and 3,000. The number of Lyceums is 89—pupils, 6,000. Only 1,000,000 of children are in the elementary schools, out of three millions; and only one-eighth of these in the two Sicilies. In the universities are 31 chairs of theology.—British Quarterly Review.

THEOLOGY IN PORTUGAL.

The state of theological learning in Portugal is at a very low ebb. A correspondent of the *Neue Evang. Kirchenzeitung* says he looked over the theological part of the Catalogue of the Public Library of Lisbon, (some 300,000 vols.) and found only one work on doctrinal theology of the present century; and that was written in 1817, on Antichrist. The *Gazeta de Portugal* is an able journal edited by a man of talent—Teixeira de Vasconcelles. The *Fe Catholica* is ultra-montane, edited by Ribeiro Gomez de Abreu Laurencio, who is writing for it a criticism on Renan's Life of Jesus. The late Jose d'Almada labored earnestly to awaken religious feeling, as editor of several periodicals. In one of his articles he said that "the sermons of the best pulpit orators in Lisbon were written for them by a poet." FERREIRA.

LUTHER said: "Prayer is the Christian's business." Yes, says Else in the Schoenberg-Cotta Family, it is the leisure he makes for prayer which gives him leisure for all besides. It is the hours passed with the life-giving Word which make sermons and correspondence and teaching of all kinds to him simply the outpouring of a full heart. Paul, though assured by the Lord himself that he should bear testimony to him at Rome, used all proper means for his own preservation; so far was he from thinking that the divine decrees and man's free agency are incompatible; or that the purposes of God, even when known, render the use of means needless or useless.—Dr. Scott on Acts 25: 11. The great wisdom and security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to put a violent stop to its beginnings, its first motions and actings. Venture on the first attempt. Die rather than yield one step to it.—John Owen.