



THE FRENCH GENERAL'S RECEPTION.

MY INTRODUCTION TO THE POPE.

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POPES, like other mortals, though styled infallible, are still open to the same temptation, and swayed by the same passions as their fellow-men. It is therefore most unfair to magnify their defects, and publish their faults in that cruel manner in which it has been done by those who think they destroy a whole faith by showing that the great administrator of it is otherwise than immaculate. It is equally ridiculous to deny that many very bad Pontiffs have existed. The real fact is that there have been good and bad men who have been selected to wear the triple tiara; and herein we recognise the wise hand of Providence, which often chooses the most strange instruments to carry out His all-wise decrees.

Pope Pius VII. was Pontiff when I (as a mere youth) visited Rome, and Cardinal Gonzalvi was his Prime Minister: and I firmly believe that the sacred throne never supported a more truly pious and good man—a man of more enlightened and generous principles than the sovereign I have mentioned; while few will deny the abilities of the lay Cardinal, whose statesman-like qualities have seldom or never been surpassed.

Rome, in 1820, was certainly the most delightful residence in Europe. The English visitors were all of the very first rank. Snobocracy then looked upon a journey to the Eternal City, as a privilege reserved for the upper classes only. It took some twenty, or even twenty-five days, to reach the throne of Papacy; so none but

those wholly free from the trammels of business could undertake the trip. The class assembled were consequently of a certain equality, and nothing could exceed the cordial manner in which they mingled together; hence the respect they inspired.

The then Duchess of Devonshire, to whom Rome owes the discovery of half her Forum and the disinterring of many of her finest monuments, led our society; and as she always acted in concert with Cardinal Gonzalvi, and as his Eminence not only admired her grace, but generally deferred to her judgment, English and Italian society commingled in the most sociable manner. I have met Gonzalvi swallowing chocolate cakes at the house of a British banker, where he had dropped in without invitation; and I have seen my own immediate relations, without ceremony, receive the Queen and young King of Eutruia, who had called, *en passant*, for the purpose of asking to taste a cup of "the à l'anglaise." In every ball-room the red stockings of more than one cardinal might be seen moving about, while some of the highest functionaries would hint that—being only "lay priests"—they could, whenever they thought proper, throw aside the red hat and the purple stocking, and espouse a pretty English heiress, if they thought it fitting so to do.

The most magnificent public *fetes* that ever were given, were celebrated about this period. They were planned and executed by Gonzalvi. I have myself been at a banquet of this kind given in the ancient Capitol, to which twelve thousand persons were invited. From all parts of Italy, Germany, and even from France

strangers came to assist at it. Two sovereigns were present, as were also two English dukes. The *élite* of many countries graced the old halls; and as their wit and laughter echoed through the arched roof, all was gaiety—a somewhat strange fate for a building designed for such different purposes. Indeed, I felt this strangely, while I eat my supper, leaning against the identical group representing Romulus and Remus suckled by a she-wolf, which was struck by lightning (yet apparent) at the instant that Julius Cæsar was assassinated. The marks of the electric fluid are still visible.

In a word, modern Rome was worthy of ancient Rome, in those long past days; for, though her warlike tone had passed away, it had been usurped by scenes of dazzling brilliancy and pleasure; and, as Prince Kaunitz, the Austrian ambassador, drove past, preceded by a band of running footmen dressed in the gayest attire, carrying flambeaux—or a gay party of pleasure-loving people dashed on to lunch at Tivoli—the visitor almost forgot that he was so near the head of a mighty religion, till reminded of it by the approach of some gorgeous procession, glittering with gold, and headed by a prince of the Roman Church.

In the midst of all this pomp, however, his Holiness was seldom (save on some sacred occasion) seen. He lived almost entirely secluded, his sole desire being to do good in this world, and gain a heaven in the next. His personal expenses were limited in the extreme, yet he put by nothing. He gave all that could be spared in charity. I am a Protestant—I am what is styled a *strict* Protestant,—but I do verily believe that the best man that ever lived was Pope Pius VII. of happy memory.

Well I remember how nervous I felt when the Abbate Taylor (an Irish dignitary) called upon me, and told me that my wish was about to be gratified,—that his Holiness would receive me the next morning, and that the Honourable Mr. T— was to share the honour. He then instructed me in the necessary forms, which I will hereafter relate, and trotted off to my friend to inform him of our good fortune.

The next morning we alighted at the Quirinal, and passed between a body of the Swiss Guard up the great staircase. These men were, generally speaking, very tall; and the old Spanish dress of many colours—red and yellow being the more prominent stripes,—the old-fashioned cap, the mighty halberd which they held, seemed to carry one back to ages long past: while the vastness and silence, undisturbed by the slightest sound; I confess filled me with awe. I had never been introduced to a sovereign before, and here was I, at the age of sixteen, about to be presented to one of the most austere (so I had been told by a Frenchman) monarchs in the world. I did not feel quite comfortable. At the head of the staircase two courtiers in full dress awaited our arrival, and in silence pointed to a large door, through which we passed, and entered a vast hall, lined with the Swiss Guard. The room was so carpeted that we could not hear our own footfalls, and we passed through it to another door, which opened on our approach; and in this chamber the Abbate Taylor received

us. He however only conversed in whispers; and though there were at least fifty ecclesiastical dignitaries present, an almost universal silence reigned. In a few minutes the further door opened, and the Abbé led us through the sacred antechamber, lined by the Body Guard—each soldier being a nobleman. My heart now began to beat with anxiety, and the gorgeous uniforms around me were scarcely observed by me as I approached a curtained door-way leading into the sacred presence. The curtain was drawn aside, and we crossed the threshold, led by our introducer.

Never can I forget that moment. An immense hall, without furniture, pictures, or other ornament, met my view. The windows, however, were filled with the most splendid coloured glass, which shed an awe-inspiring light through the vast chamber. At the very further end sat his Holiness, with a prince of the Church supporting him on either side. Not another being was present; and I confess I was so struck with this sudden and mysterious isolation, that I slighted for a moment the hint which the Abbé gave me to kneel on one knee. This however I did, and repeated it. But ere I had time to complete the ceremony of three genuflexions, Pope Pius had risen from his throne, and came forward to meet me. I was about to offer to kiss his foot—which every good Catholic is bound to do,—but, kindly taking me by the hand, he waved the ceremony, and said something kind in a manner which at once reassured me.

Pius VII. was above six feet in height, and very upright. He was entirely dressed in a long white robe, which added to his size, and strangely contrasted with the most dazzling black eyes I ever beheld. His age considerably exceeded seventy years; yet his voice was clear and commanding. His smile was perfectly fascinating, but his frown, which I subsequently saw, was the most fearful I ever witnessed. He spoke to us in Italian; and, in the most bland tones, desired us to remain, as he was always glad to see the "*buoni Inglesi*." I confess I felt astonished that he so designated a nation of heretics; but I soon learnt the cause of his attachment to our nation from his own lips (and he appeared to feel much pride in telling us), it appeared that an English frigate had been sent to Civita Vecchia to afford his Holiness an asylum, when Napoleon by coercion hurried him off to France. Another hour, and he would have been enabled to take advantage of English hospitality, instead of going through the mockery of crowning Marie Louise.

At this instant a signal told him that a French general was about to enter, and in an instant the whole of the Pope's appearance and manner underwent a complete change. He again ascended his throne, where he sat as rigid as if he had suddenly been turned into stone; but the kindly countenance was no longer there—a stern frown sat on his brow as the gaily decked officer of France went through his kneelings, kissed his foot, and, retiring again with three genuflexions, retired through the door. On his disappearance, the blood of his Holiness, like that of St. Janarius, seemed again to liquify, and he again condescended to address us. I subsequently learnt that so great was the horror

he entertained of the French nation, in consequence of their forcible abduction that, though he was a perfect master of their language, he had never been heard to utter one syllable of it since his return to Rome.

He now told us—and as he did so tears almost rose to his eyes—that our good "*Principe Regente*" had not only recognised him as an independent monarch, but had sent over Sir Thomas Lawrence to paint his portrait, for the purpose of placing it amongst the sovereigns of Europe in the picture-gallery of Carlton House. He further most graciously invited us to come on a future day and see the picture thus painted.

Assuring him, with truth, how happy we should feel in obeying his most gratifying order to attend, we then bowed, and, with the same formalities with which we had entered it, quitted the Palace of the Quirinal.

A few days after the interview I have described, a Papal order of nobility was conferred on the Honourable Mr. T—— and myself—an honour we duly estimated, and for which we subsequently tendered in person our grateful acknowledgments to his Holiness.