

## THE DEMOCRATIC CHRISTIANS AND THE VATICAN.

BY PROF. G. M. FIAMINGO.

THE party known as the Democratic Christians has become very prominent during the last few years. Joseph de Maistre, Chateaubriand, and Lamennais, those pre-eminently Catholic thinkers, were already in the early years of the century precursors or rather prophets of this movement, which for a time has been in abeyance. Pius VII., while as yet Cardinal of Chiaramonti and Bishop of Imola, insistently fostered the correlation that exists between Democracy and Orthodoxy; when he became Pope however he forgot these views. But gradually various members of the Catholic clergy, independently one of the other, felt themselves attracted toward the Democratic Christians, who represent the least Utopian section of the socialistic doctrines promulgated in Europe during the second half of this century. Nevertheless, the Catholic clergy, trained to a blind and passive obedience to the Church, dared not press forward too much upon this road without knowing first precisely how these new ideas would be received in Rome.

Leo XIII. unhesitatingly presented a benevolent attitude toward the chief representatives of these opinions. At an audience to a commission of French workmen in 1889 he pronounced himself in a fairly explicit manner as to the "just vindication of the rights of workingmen," nor did he delay publishing the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Monsignor Ireland, the leader of the new Christian movement in the United States, at a conference held in Paris in 1892 said: "All hail to Leo XIII., the Pope of the century so providentially at the head of the Church in this great historical crisis. It seems as though she had arrived at the supreme hour of her life. The schism between the Church and the century was continually widening. She had been rejected and combated by governments, the people no longer confided in her. Social move-

ments had perfected themselves without her consent; Catholics, alarmed and discouraged, raised isolation to a law, nay, almost a dogma. Then Leo spoke, Leo acted, Leo reigned. The Church is launched upon the world, her presence is again felt everywhere, she enforces respect, she is listened to with an attention that is entirely new."

When Monsignor Ireland spoke thus, he had just returned from Rome. His mode of speaking was bright and cheerful, his eloquence free from clerical airs, he showed himself the apostle of an Idea, satisfied with his own work.

Several years have passed since then during which the leaders of the Democratic Christian movement have had ample opportunity of extending their mode of action. We are now met with this important aspect of the phenomenon; does the influence of the Democratic Christianity correspond to that which Leo XIII. and the Vatican expected?

Leo XIII. is unquestionably a pious and profound Christian, and he had publicly expressed deep sympathy with the working classes when Cardinal at Perugia. But on becoming Pope, aged and saddened also by the outbreaks of revolutionary socialism in Italy in 1878, he assumed an attitude openly hostile to the socialist movement and avoided any mention of the working classes in his Encyclical letters. He had even excommunicated the American "Knights of Labor." Hereupon Cardinal Gibbons set out for Rome with the express purpose of inducing Leo XIII. to revoke this excommunication, and not only did the Cardinal obtain this end, but he also convinced or at least pressed upon Leo XIII. the conviction that the Church could not range herself openly against socialism without thereby losing a considerable number of her adherents, especially those belonging to the laboring classes. Now, as said above, the theories of the Democratic Christians were really in accordance with the social opinions held by Leo XIII. when he was only a Cardinal. He had, however, considered it his duty, or at least necessary, to keep them secret when elected to the See of St. Peter's. If, after his interview with Cardinal Gibbons, the Pope decided to manifest his adherence to the principles of Democratic Christians, first obscurely and then openly in his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, it is surely because they were recognised by him as a wise and sure means, suggested by the new social conditions, for the acquisition of fresh members to the Church. In short, the ideas of the Democratic Christians were accepted by Leo XIII. as an expedient for propagating the Catholic faith. Such is, above

all, the view of Cardinal Rampolla, who, besides being Papal Secretary of State, exercised a great moral influence over the Pontiff, one might almost call it a great psychological sway. Hence whilst Leo XIII. proclaims the fundamental theories of Christian Democracy from the Pontifical Throne, Cardinal Rampolla overwhelms with personal attentions, or with polite letters, those prelates who in various lands put themselves at the head of this social movement.

Thus encouraged by the words of Leo XIII. and the action of Cardinal Rampolla, these prelates who have imbibed the principles of Christian Democracy are apt to go to some lengths in their actions, engaging in excessively active propaganda. Not infrequently in order to uphold this propaganda they become drawn into exaggerating and even altering the principles of Christian Democracy as proclaimed by Leo XIII. Thus Giuseppe Torniolo, a Catholic and professor of political economy at the University of Pisa, well known as having assisted Leo XIII. in elaborating the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which some say was written by him and only modified by Leo XIII., this same Giuseppe Torniolo, in a recent Catholic Congress held at Padua, proclaimed that it is iniquitous to pay interest on capital. Now, the most elementary notions of political economy suffice in order to understand that the recognition of such a theory would subvert the whole organisation of private property as at present established. These theories are the more surprising as coming from a person so cultured and self-possessed as Professor Torniolo, but they serve to demonstrate how, having once entered upon a certain train of ideas, even when wishing to circumscribe the consequences, nevertheless little by little more radical and graver conclusions than those adopted at the beginning are finally accepted. This is what has happened to Christian Democracy especially in the United States on account of the initiative taken by Monsignori Keane and Ireland. Christian Democrats leaned more and more toward socialistic theories, and it was owing only to the influence exercised in Rome by the United States that the works of Henry George were not placed upon the "Index" and hence forbidden to be read by Catholics. Thus the works of Henry George are exempt, while publications of infinitely more temperate views figure upon the "Index," amongst others, as an example, the poems of Ada Negri, which, although they were received with much favor and printed in thousands of copies, yet will never bring about a social revolution.

In the United States the Democratic Christian movement has

advanced so far beyond the limits assigned to it by the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* that the followers of Monsignor Ireland and Keane almost constitute a new Catholicism based upon social foundations differing substantially from those of Roman Catholicism, notwithstanding the Papal Encyclical on the conditions of the laboring classes. No wonder that Monsignor Ireland and Keane are no longer in favor at Rome. Monsignor Keane was compelled by the Vatican to resign the rectorship of the Catholic University at Washington and was summoned to Rome. At Rome he was nominated Counsellor of one of the Congregations of the *Propaganda Fide*. The newspapers hastened to report this fact as though it were of great importance, but the nomination denoted no special honor. The Pope then nominated Monsignor Keane Canon of Santa Maria Maggiore, thus securing to him a permanent but by no means large income. This treatment of Monsignor Keane is very different from that which the leaders of the Democratic Christian movement received when they came to Rome some years ago. The Papal condemnation at last of what has been named "Americanism" is a thing well known by everybody.

If in the United States the socialist character of the Democratic Christian movement becomes more and more accentuated, in Europe it rather takes the form of a political party having a socialist programme. This characteristic European Christian Democracy is more conspicuous in Italy than elsewhere. Take, for example, the last document issued by the "Directing Council of the Work of Congresses and Catholic Committees in Italy" to the presidents of their Provincial Committees on the approaching political elections. In this document, which bears the date of March 3, 1897, it is said that the *non expedit*, which, by a solemn declaration, was approved by the Pope in audience on June 3, 1886, a declaration ratified in the Pontifical Letter of May 15, 1895, *prohibitionem important*, is by no means revoked and must therefore still be enforced.

"Now no more is necessary for Italian Catholics and especially for those belonging to Catholic Societies and Committees in order to know their special duties, and to make these known to others, duties which consist of two points:

1. To abstain entirely from political elections.

2. To dissuade all Italian Catholics from taking part in the same and from transgressing a prohibition which is absolute and general, even in those special cases when it might appear that some advantage would be gained by the success of a deputy of

temperate views over another with opinions openly hostile to Catholics."

This language on the part of the Directing Council of the Work of Catholic Congresses is most explicit. It leaves no loophole for doubt and at the same time makes clearly manifest the object aimed at by this absolute command that all Catholics shall abstain from taking part in Italian political life. It does not, however, attain its object, which is that of paralysing this same political life. Now these Italian Catholics who have formed themselves into societies for the propagation of the new Christian Democratic principles, hold frequent congresses and publish many manifestos concerning the solidarity which binds them in the performance of this social work. Still in reality their secret motive and their true object is essentially political, and under the guise of a purely social movement they continue their campaign for the recovery of the temporal power.

Now in Italy the work of these new Catholic societies is based on a socialistic programme, whether it be that of Christian Democracy or the rural banks now instituted everywhere by the Catholics for the purpose of lending small sums to those peasants who make a public confession of Catholic faith or whatever other form it takes, and this entire social movement though it appears inspired by purely philanthropic aims is on the contrary called in Italy, and rightly, "the clerical reaction." Hence this "clerical reaction" is opposed by all liberal Catholics who assign a purely spiritual function to the Church, and these constitute the great majority of Italian adherents to the Roman Church. Even in Italy, therefore, the new principles of Christian Democracy create a profound divergence among Catholics. Thus the Vatican by encouraging the principles of Christian Democracy runs counter to the views of all such Catholics whose opinions are for the most part ultra-conservative, and who regard Christian Democracy, even when held within certain limits, as a concession made by Catholicism to socialism. Such Catholics fear that, the door having once been opened to compromise, it will be found difficult to stop at the right point. Even in Italy, therefore, the principles of Christian Democracy, in lieu of gaining new followers for the Church, excite a schism among Catholics upon a most serious political question and is the cause of the sense of distrust with which conservative Catholics regard the Vatican that sympathises with those subversive social ideas. The effects of the opinions held by the Italian Christian Democrats on Italian Catholics reveal themselves in a series of facts, more or

less evident and explicit, which cannot be ignored by the Vatican. Thus when some months ago the Abbé Rinaldo Anelli, a priest who had sacrificed all his energy and patrimony to the improvement of the conditions of the working classes, committed suicide at Milan, those newspapers which reflect the Vatican atmosphere commented most unfavorably upon the sad event, blaming Abbé Anelli for having "dedicated himself more to the material well-being of the people than was justified by his priestly profession." This means that the organs of the Vatican, instead of praising and urging on the work of the Christian Democrats, as formerly, now deplore their activity which they pronounce as excessive!

In Austria, in Belgium, and especially in France, where the principles of Christian Democracy were more quickly and more widely diffused than elsewhere, these principles have nevertheless by no means brought about those results which Leo XIII. hoped to obtain when he pronounced the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and encouraged the work of those who accepted those principles and were ready to support and defend them. But if it cannot be said that Leo XIII. has been disillusioned on this subject, because the principles set forward by him in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* concerning the condition of workingmen were really his true convictions which he had long professed and publicly manifested during the Lent of 1877 in a pastoral letter, when Cardinal Bishop of Perugia, there must have been a disillusion in that section of the Vatican environment which induced Leo XIII. to favor those principles of Christian Democracy from which they hoped to obtain for the Roman Church and for Catholicism such far different results from those eventually produced. Instead, the new principles announced by Leo XIII. provoked the diffidence of those Catholics whose social sentiments were of a pronounced conservative type, and the more so because at the beginning those principles were put forth under the name of "Catholic Socialism." That word socialism made an impression upon the Catholic majority. Almost immediately all the great Catholic authors and orators repudiated this denomination, among them Charles Perin, Cardinal Langénieux, Monsignor de Cabrières, le Père de Boylesve, Professor Toniolo, but although the name of "Catholic Socialism" was changed to that of "Christian Democracy," yet the distrust and suspicion felt was not dispelled. Catholics and especially those of the middle class are profoundly conservative in their social ideas, and in trying to steer between the socialist dangers hidden in the Vatican programme that made concession to the laboring class, and

assume an entirely passive and inactive attitude toward the social question, they find themselves by reason of their innate tendencies impelled toward the latter alternative. On this account two Catholic schools of thought are now found in every Catholic country, that of the conservative Catholics, to which almost all bishops belong; and a minority that upholds the Christian Democracy encouraged by the attitude first assumed by the Vatican toward social questions.

Dissensions and differences caused by the disparity of opinions between these two schools are not infrequent. All over the world Democratic Catholics are acting with greater boldness and decision, as for the matter of that do all young factions which have faith in their future and are emboldened by their first successes. Consequently it happens that not infrequently they rebel against episcopal mandates. Desirous to act on their own account, they refuse to acknowledge any other ecclesiastical hierarchy, save the supreme authority of the Vatican, which had deputed them to propagate the principles of Christian Democracy.

A few months ago matters came to such a pass that Monsignor Couvillé, Archbishop of Lyons, was obliged publicly to censure an assembly held by the French Democratic Christians in this episcopal town. Monsignor Couvillé has since visited Rome and was received by the Pope, to whom he pointed out the gravity of the dangers caused by the dissensions now troubling French Catholics by reason of the view held by the Democratic Christians. Monsignor Couvillé's conduct was lauded, and he was ultimately rewarded with a Cardinal's hat.

A painful impression was made lately in Vatican circles by the victory the Conservatives gained over the radical Catholics in the Swiss Canton of Ticino. A fierce struggle has long waged between these Catholics and the Christian Democrats who have also manifested a desire after autonomy and an intolerance toward their ecclesiastical superiors, which can only be compared to that demonstrated by the monks of the first eras of Christianity.

In 1894 Leo XIII. issued a paternal invitation to the Christian denominations, exhorting them to return to the bosom of the Church. In so doing he abandoned for a moment the traditional exclusiveness of the Roman Church, giving instead full expression to his own merciful and conciliatory spirit. But in the latest Encyclical on this theme that constitutes, as Leo XIII. himself says, "a not inconsiderable part of his thoughts and anxieties," the Vatican's hatred of change, the ideas of ecclesiastical hierarchy,

of the supremacy and absolute superiority of the Church of Rome, have regained the upper hand. This means that since a few years that section of the clerical party which is most strictly conservative and exclusive is once more dominant in the Vatican and exercises a complete influence over the Pontiff. Democratic Catholics, by reason of the problems and questions which their doings excite amongst their co-religionists, may expect an early public manifesto from Leo XIII. This is just now being foretold by undoubted signs. In the spirit and substance of this coming manifesto the mild and compassionate character of Leo XIII. will not appear. It will be superseded by Vatican opinions, wherefore the new words of the Pope will solemnly refute the programme of the Christian Democrats put forth in the Encyclical letter *De Conditione Opificum* just as the tendency now dominant in the Vatican denies the principles of unity among the Churches, proclaimed by Leo XIII. in 1894 and upon which such extravagant hopes had been based for the future of Catholicism and of Democratic Christianity.