

EDITORIAL NOTES.

The Papal Monarch.

Cardinal Newman described ecclesiastical history as the record of the ever-doubtful fortune of a battle whose issue is itself not doubtful. The history of the popes has been true to this description. The papacy is an apt symbol of the Church, perpetually assailed yet gloriously unconquerable, always cheating the prophets who foretold its dissolution, repeatedly rising from what seemed to be death and defeat, always alive and militant. Like Christ's life, the life of His mystical body on earth is an alternation of joy, sorrow and glory. *Te Deums* and *Misereres*, persecution and peace, scandals and triumphs are the human course of the divine Church on earth.

It is something to be thankful for to have lived to see the present memorable year, when on the feast of our Lady of Lourdes was signed the treaty that settles the Roman question irrevocably, and officially restores to the Sovereign Pontiff that recognition of political supremacy and independence, the withdrawal of which recognition had for nearly sixty years made it difficult for the Pope to exercise his sublime office of Vicar of Christ and Shepherd and Teacher of all Christian people. He who is the viceroy of the King of Kings is acknowledged as an earthly king. It is among his lesser titles; and his earthly kingdom is small enough measured in acres, but it is all the Sovereign Pontiff asks—large enough to give him security, independence and liberty to rule his spiritual kingdom, which has no boundaries in earth or in heaven; yet not so large as to embarrass him with purely political concerns or embroil him in the conflicts of nations.

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It is just over fifty years since Pius IX died, it is less than sixty years since the spoliation of the papal states, and the present Holy Father is the fifth who has lived as the prisoner of the Vatican. It is a short span in the history of the venerable See of Peter, which has lived through trials, more dire and more lasting. We have seen the end of this particular trial and injustice—a triumph in the ever-doubtful fortune of the battle, a confirmation of our belief in the promises of Christ and the permanence and indefectibility of His Church, and a reminder of the never-doubtful final issue.

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Sterilisation of the Unfit.

On February 21st several newspapers gave prominence to a resolution drawn up in the form of a letter, signed by many of the foremost physicians in the land, by three bishops, and an imposing array of other distinguished persons, and addressed to the Ministry of Health.

The resolution was as follows :—

‘With a view to the reduction of the numbers of mentally afflicted, unfit, and diseased persons, an inquiry should be held into the best method of dealing with mental deficiency and incurably diseased persons, including a special inquiry into the possibility and advisability of legalising sterilisation, under proper safeguards, and in certain cases.’

This suggestion of legalising the sterilisation of mentally defective, unfit, and diseased persons is not new, and indeed we are informed that it is an accomplished fact in parts of Switzerland and Denmark. But what must have struck many readers as alarmingly new was the information, vouchsafed on the authority of Dr. Joseph Mayer, of the University of Freiburg, that ‘in the opinion of the leading Roman

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Catholic theologians, eugenic sterilisation is a principle to be approved in certain cases.' We are not in a position to pass judgment on Dr. Mayer's book on the Legal Sterilisation of the Insane. We hope in a later issue to publish a criticism of it. Meanwhile, it may be helpful if we set out some of the simple principles which Catholic theologians would use in this matter.

Sterilisation, which means the destruction of the power of procreation in a man or woman, implies bodily mutilation, and therefore such an act in itself is a violation of the fifth Commandment. It is never morally right directly to deprive a person, even if he be willing, of the generative function when the intention is none other than to render him incapable of begetting. Mutilation of this kind may be morally permissible when the direct purpose of the operation is to save the life of the patient and only indirectly and accidentally to render him sterile. Mutilation against the will and consent of the person, such as is advocated in the above report, is a crime against the rights of the individual. We cannot believe that eugenic sterilisation is a principle to be approved in certain cases by Catholic theologians. The matter has only been touched on lightly and cursorily here; but we hope later to print a fuller examination of this important matter. Meanwhile, Catholics cannot be too widely awake to the menace of immoral legislation, which daily grows apace in our dechristianised and pagan society. In view of the forthcoming general election, such a serious threat should engage the attention of the electorate no less than the very important question of justice to the Catholic schools.