

## AN AUDIENCE OF THE POPE.

To be privileged to have an Audience of the Pope, and to receive the Benediction of Pius XI was keenly desired by the majority of the British Nurses (some of whom were members of the Roman Communion) taking part in the Tuberculosis Congress.

For some days after we arrived in Rome it seemed uncertain whether this desire could be fulfilled, for September is a month in which an endeavour is made to afford some relaxation of the labours of His Holiness, and Audiences were being refused; further, many of the medical members of the Congress, who had come to Rome from all parts of the world, were very desirous of being received in audience. However, much to our pleasure, we were eventually informed that the Holy Father would receive us on September 29th, and accordingly our party, correctly attired in black dresses and veils, assembled at 12 o'clock at the steps of the Vatican (which is extraterritorial) and, after ascending the marble stairs and passing the Swiss Guards, in their picturesque scarlet and yellow uniforms, designed by Michael Angelo and never since altered, were ushered into a circular hall, paved and lined with lovely marbles, and containing rare and beautiful furniture.

Some time elapsed before we were summoned to the Throne Room, but it was time interestingly spent, observing Cardinals and Monsignori, as they passed through, and the attendants in coats and knee breeches of handsome crimson brocade.

Sometimes a girl in white would be included, and we thought at first that it was one seeking the blessing of the Holy Father after her confirmation, or a bride desiring a benediction on her married life with its new responsibilities, but we were told that girls up to the age of 18 may appear in white, and that the privilege is also extended to certain others. For instance, it is possessed and used by the Queen of Spain.

At length we were summoned to the Throne Room, and realised that through the doorway on our left before which stood two Papal Guards with crested helmets, the Pope would enter. We greatly admired the way in which the crimson-clad attendants marshalled the party with celerity and sureness, and adjusted any slight deviation in dress which was not *de rigueur*. Then came the supreme moment. Quietly, with no ostentation, or proclamation, vested simply in a white cassock and tippet and wearing a pectoral cross, Pope Pius XI entered the Throne Room, and all present knelt to receive his blessing. Passing round the room and pausing before each one, he held out his hand giving his ring to be kissed, and then standing before the Throne gave, in Latin, a general Benediction.

## THE BENEDICTION.

"Lord come to our help."

Response: "You Who have made Heaven and Earth."

Then making the sign of the Cross the Holy Father said:

"God omnipotent bless you."

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The simple ceremony was over, and as we left the Throne Room we were conscious that we had been in the presence of a Potentate of simple and kindly saintliness, and that we were the better therefor. Is it the fact that virtue goes out of him which makes these Audiences exhausting to the Pope, as we are told they are?

One wondered as one descended the stairs why the Fathers in God of the Anglican Communion do not set apart times, and receive in their palaces, certain of the faithful who desire their benediction. The church would surely gain an additional spiritual force thereby.

Be that as it may, the fact that the practice is one which commends itself to so many thousands of Christians throughout the world is proof of its power to satisfy a need of human hearts.

## THE BLUE NUNS OF FIESOLE.

## A WELCOME TO ITALY.

So that was Italy! As we gather the guide-books together and set them on the shelf with others of their kind we survey, in memory's picture, the journey out, experiences in Rome and Florence, the return journey through the beautiful Italian country and across the Apennines; but all the time we are sensible, in a curious subconscious sort of way, that the store of treasure we have gathered in Italy has little of really intimate relationship with the information, contained in these guide-books, with which we crammed ourselves at odd moments before our departure from London. "Mere canned knowledge these, but very useful as finger-posts" we find ourselves reflecting. Then suddenly there arises in our minds the memory of something, stored away in some file or another, which does have some part of what is *our* reality of Italy, something that has kinship with the feelings that rose within us on our Italian tour and that seemed indeed to give us our first glimpse of it and brought to us, over miles of land and sea, in a simple yet subtle and intimate way, the greetings and welcome of Italy. No, don't be curious, this something has no special mystery about it, it is but a scrap of paper after all, just a letter with a foreign post-mark, but it breathes a kindness that translates itself in a fine courtesy and, when it arrived, we felt that all our dreams of Italy would come true, that we should touch, as though with our finger-tips, those gates to the spiritual that are named—Italian Art. The closing sentence of this letter, of which I write, is quaintly sweet in its expression, "From the time you start I shall daily ask dear St. Joseph (who had charge of the most precious pilgrims the world ever saw) to guide and protect you all." As we read the letter on its arrival, the sunshine of Italy seems all about us and the dream of many years—a journey to Rome—suddenly becomes a reality.

We reach Florence and soon, over the heads of a noisy, hustling crowd, we catch a glimpse of one whom, long ago, we learnt to think of with sincere regard and respect, not alone because of her high ideals and achievements in nursing as such, but because of the fine professional spirit in her which led her, early in her professional career, to recognise that "science and religion should go hand in hand" and that therefore nursing must take its place, in the life of the world, as a professional entity; thereby she saw it as her duty to join a professional organisation and so to lend her support and encouragement to the evolution of the healing art both in the Institution to which she belongs and out in the world generally. Such an one is Sister Alacoque D'Arcy, and to her, and all other Members of the Little Company of Mary, the sick and the suffering in many parts of the world owe a deep debt of gratitude. It was our good fortune that, at the time of the Tuberculosis Congress, Sister Alacoque happened to be stationed at San Girolamo, a Convalescent Home which belongs to the Little Company of Mary, and which stands high on the heights over Florence. She told the Reverend Mother there of our intention to attend the Congress at Rome and the latter immediately instructed her to send us an invitation to break our journey at Florence and spend a few days at Fiesole; the kindness of the Reverend Mother, which by the way was reflected in every-one working under her administration, was no small factor in making these few days at Fiesole full to the brim of enjoyment and rest. But this is a digression.

We are still, you must imagine, on the noisy, crowded platform of the station at Florence, right grateful for the kindly welcome we read in a face framed in white under a black veil with a lining of blue. We get into the car, which the Reverend Mother of San Girolamo has sent to meet us, and soon we have left the streets of Florence

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