ROME IN THE WRITINGS OF CARDINAL WISEMAN

A GREAT and peculiarly many-sided historic character like that of Cardinal Wiseman must always offer a number of angles of approach to the student. Speaking more particularly of his literary work, the power of retaining after death the art of making friends (to use the phrase of Hazlitt) is one which Wiseman may be said to have possessed in an exceptional degree. As a constant and ever-appreciative reader of Wiseman—nowadays, I venture to think, read far less than he deserves to be—I may perhaps in the course of years have developed some points of view which it is worth while setting out in a connected fashion: though I should perhaps warn the reader that I shall have no startling discoveries to announce, no unknown material to make public.

The peculiar importance which attaches to Rome as a key to the personality and achievement of Wiseman springs, of course, primarily from the fact that so long a period of his youth and early manhood was spent there almost without interruption: practically the whole, that is, of twenty-two years, from 1818 to 1840. And the call of Rome was one which Wiseman had felt ever since his earliest youth; in that incomparable first chapter of what is, I think, perhaps his most lovable book, the *Recollections of the Last Four Popes and of Rome in their Times* (1858), in which he describes in so marvellously graphic a fashion the arrival of the first party of English students, sent to re-occupy the English College at Rome—in that chapter he reveals that the history and antiquities of Rome had formed the bonds of a little college society to which he had belonged, no doubt as its moving spirit, at Ushaw; and when much later in life he received the congratulations of St. Cuthbert's College upon his elevation to the Cardinalate, the phrase which came quite naturally to him, in explaining why he had left Ushaw so early, when barely sixteen, was that of ' the splendid temptation of Rome.'

There were, indeed, many reasons why the call of Rome, insistent through the ages, should have made itself felt with particular strength at that time of the world's history. In a once famous poem, written in 1820 on the birth of the Duc de Bordeaux, *l'enfant du miracle* (whom by the way Wiseman in 1843 welcomed to Oscott in a graceful sonnet), Lamartine has summed up in four pregnant lines, the then condition of the world as conceived in the poet's vision, when saying of the new-born infant:

Il vient, quand les peuples, victimes
Du sommeil de leurs conducteurs,
Errent aux penchants des abîmes
Comme des troupeaux sans pasteurs.

Out of the welter of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the Papacy, putting countless would-be Cassandras to shame, had emerged with redoubled strength. To dwell for the moment only on the question of politics, I need but recall the triumphs scored by Cardinal Consalvi at the Vienna Congress, where the Pope's envoy succeeded in reconstituting the States of the Church practically to their extent before the Revolution. And in the hour of victory there was generosity for the vanquished under specially poignant circumstances: it was the Pope who pleaded more emphatically than anyone else for a better treatment of Napoleon himself, once his gaoler at Fontainebleau; and it was in Rome that the Bonapartes, hounded from pillar to post in the rest of Europe, could always reckon upon an asylum. Internationally, indeed, Rome now reaffirmed her position in the most splendid fashion and the visible symptom of this was the steady concourse there of people of distinction in every walk of life, and drawn from all over the world.

I need not here recapitulate the stages of Wiseman's quick rise to prominence in a setting of such exacting standard and where no mediocrity stood a chance. There are, however, a couple of pages in the *Recollections* which are, I always think, of peculiar value in giving us an extraor-

dinarily vivid impression of Wiseman, the rising scholar, at work in Rome and of the intellectual atmosphere of Rome at the time. The quotation is, I am afraid, of some length, but like most of what Wiseman wrote it does not bear compression. It links up with a rapid survey of some of the greatest buildings in Rome and the message which each of them carries, and then goes on to say:

'Thus does Rome sink deep and deeper into the soul, like the dew, of which every separate drop is soft and weightless, but which still finds its way to the root of everything beneath the soil, imparting there, to every future plant, its own warm tint, its own balmy fragrance, and its own ever rejuvenescent vigour. But this is only in its outward life. It would be difficult to describe what may be learned by one who will search its inward being, its innumerable repositories of art, its countless institutions of charity, its private, as well as public, resources for mental culture, in libraries, in museums, in academies, in associations for every object, from the discussion, bi-weekly, of theological themes, to the hebdomadal dissection of a line of Dante. Who has remained in Rome, for his intellectual cultivation, and does not remember quiet hours in one of the great public libraries, where noiseless monks brought him, and piled around him, the folios which he required; and he sat as still amidst a hundred readers as though he had been alone?

'But there is an inner apartment in this great house, and he who may have penetrated into it, the very *penetrale*, will look back upon the time with a pleasurable regret. Imagine him seated alone in the second hall of the Vatican library, round which are ranged now empty desks, for it is vacation time, while above is a row of portraits of eminent librarians, many distinguished for their learning more than for the purple. A door opposite gives a view of the grand double hall beyond, divided by piers. The cases round them and along the walls are the very treasure-shrines of learning, containing only gems of manuscript lore. Above, all is glowing with gold and ultramarine, as airy and brilliant as the Zuccari could lay them. The half-closed shutters and drawn curtains impart a drowsy atmosphere to the delicious coolness, which gives no idea of the broiling sun glaring on the square without. Imagine, however, no idler—for such a one could not obtain access there at such a season—but an assiduously plodding, perhaps dull-looking emaciated student, in whose hand crackles the parchment of some old dingy volume, whose turn has come of the many around him, to be what is called collated, a verb that has no

connection with its analogous substantive. Perhaps, at the moment of a delightful discovery, that the dusky membranaceous document has, in a certain spot, a preposition or even a letter different from three companions, there enters silently a man of middle age, with lofty brow, and deep set eyes, happy in the loose drapery of home in summer—for he lives among books—and sits him down beside the solitary learner. (This is Monsignor, subsequently Cardinal Mai, the great paleographer.) Kind and encouraging words, useful practical information, perhaps a discussion on some interesting point, make a quarter of an hour's diversion from the "weight of the day and the heat"; but coming from or shared with the discoverer of Cicero and Fronto, of Isocrates and Dionysius, they may become the beginning of a long cherished and valued friendship. Hours like these, often repeated, pass not away lightly from the memory. Spent under the very shadow of the great dome, they endear Rome by the recollection of solid profit thus gained and garnered for the evil days of busier life. Any one, surely, whose years of mental cultivation can thus associate themselves, must retain a happy and a grateful impression on mind and heart.'

A passage such as this shows, in my opinion, Wiseman at his best, and as a vignette of the life of the scholars of Rome in the twenties and thirties of the last century it is, I think, quite invaluable. It stands, of course, by no means alone: and it is from the cumulative effect of all such passages, reflecting a world of leisurely, cultured discussion, that we can fully gather what was in Wiseman's mind when, in a memorandum written about 1846 and relating to his attitude towards Newman and his friends, he speaks of 'the tone of soothing and inviting kindness which from the beginning Roman education had taught me to adopt.' The power of observation and graphic description is in the passage just quoted, as so often with Wiseman, of remarkable quality, and among other passages in the *Recollections* in which this power is felt at its strongest are, of course, such very well known ones as the description of the ceremonies of Easter Week, or again the chapter which speaks of the Jubilee by which Leo XII in 1825 in so impressive a fashion, after an interval of fifty years, revived the tradition which had been allowed to lapse in 1800. Here indeed Wiseman's page becomes, as it were, a

canvas upon which he works with the boldness and sombre effectiveness of a Tintoret, as befits the character of the event which he is commemorating. Of incomparable vividness again is the celebrated passage relating to one of the most dramatic events in the Pontificate of Gregory XVI—the discomfiture of the Czar of Russia, Nicholas I, to whom during his visit to the Vatican in December 1845 the Pope addressed a crushing remonstrance on his ill-treatment of the Catholics of Poland. Wiseman had his information as to what happened, before and after the reception of the Czar, from ' an English gentleman ' who ' was in some part of the Palace through which the Imperial visitor passed '; and it is by the simple expedient of contrasting the exterior of the Czar before and after the interview that the extent of his humiliation and confusion is brought out. Apart from the Pope and the Czar and the Russian Minister to the Holy See, only one witness was present, an Englishman, Cardinal Acton; and as Wiseman notes in another place, ' Cardinal Acton wrote down, at the Pope's request, a minute account of it; but he never allowed it to be seen.' There exists, however, a picture of this historic audience, unknown to the world at large, in the possession of Lord Acton at Aldenham in Shropshire. It is the work of a contemporary German painter of no great merit, and as an interpretation of what it purports to depict, though of course enormously interesting from its associations, falls far short of what Wiseman's pen only described by implication.

Rome itself occupies naturally the foreground of interest with Wiseman, but his eager and observant eye travelled far beyond the city walls and as an interpreter of the scenery and life of the Campagna, the Alban Hills and the whole *Agro Romano* he is also singularly worth listening to. How warmly he felt for Sant 'Agnese on the Nomentan Way and all its associations is abundantly clear from his writings, notably, of course, from *Fabiola;* and the memory of the venerable basilica in its glorious setting of grand and desolate landscape will sometimes stir in him with

peculiar poignancy—as witness, for instance, the letter to Manning, written from London on January 30th, 1857: 'I write at a dismal *Ave Maria,* white sleet falling upon the muddy streets, envying your walk to-morrow morning along the Via Nomentana and dear St. Agnes and her lambs.' His corner of the world beyond all others, in the Horatian sense, was, however, the village Monte Porzio, one of the most delightful of the Roman Castelli, among the Alban Hills situated on the road from Frascati to Palestrina. Here the English College possessed then, as it still does, a country house in a lovely situation, and here Wiseman first as a student and then as Rector of the college spent a long series of happy vacations, thereby extending in a thousand directions his acquaintance with classical and Early Christian archaeology, with Italian life and manners, with Italian farming, viti-culture, and so on. A good deal of this is reflected in the *Recollections;* but it is in one of his less widely read books, the *Essays,* that, reprinted from other publications, you find several of his most valuable and informing studies on the character of the Italian peasantry, on the mimicry of the Italians, and so-on. Indeed, there is in one of them a passage which, though derived I should think from hearsay, has beyond its value of what we might call ethnography, a peculiar interest as a side-light on history. The passage in question relates to the language of gesture current among the Neapolitans. 'A curious example occurred' (Wiseman writes) 'of the utility of gesture some years ago. When old Ferdinand, the darling of the Neapolitans, returned to his capital after the foolish Revolution of 1822, he presented himself at a balcony, to the assembled multitude of repentant and delighted *lazzaroni.* Neapolitans never speak: they always shout; and, in newspaper phrase, to obtain a hearing was, on this occasion, out of the question. The king, however, was a thorough Neapolitan, and understood the language of the fingers, if he did not that of flowers; so he made his address, for we cannot call it a speech, in it. He reproved them for their past naughtiness, he threat-

ened them with greater severity if they again misbehaved, and, after exhorting them to good conduct, ordered them to disperse and go home quietly. Every gesture was understood, without a word, amidst the most deafening sounds.' We hear little of episodes like this in the average books on the *Risorgimento;* and yet I feel that somehow they put the whole thing into quite a different and a much truer perspective.

But to return to Monte Porzio, it was there, as I said, that Wiseman came perhaps to closer grips than anywhere else with Italian life, with the very soil of Italy, and the fruits of her rich earth; and the affection which he in that way contracted for the place never left him. Whenever in later years he returned to Rome for longer or shorter visits, he always spent some time out there, and Canon Morris has recorded a touching episode from the days of Wiseman's last illness. 'One afternoon' (Morris notes) 'he said to me, "I am sure it would do me more good to have a long talk about Monte Porzio than to be kept so much alone." I answered, "Well, let's have a good talk about Monte Porzio"; and then he straightway flung himself into it. "I can see the colour of the chestnut trees, and Camaldoli, and the top of Tusculum. What a beautiful view it is from our Refectory window! A new-comer does not value Monte Porzio properly. It takes a hard year's work in Rome to enable you to appreciate it. I loved it dearly. I keep a picture of it in my bedroom, both here and at Leyton. They have kept the Rector's chair in the place where I used to sit. I got that gold chair for Pope Leo's reception, and I always used it afterwards. I used to sit there writing for hours after everyone was in bed, and then I would refresh myself by a look out of the open window into the moonlight night.' " Words such as these give us, as it were, a short cut into the understanding of all that Rome meant to Wiseman; how it moulded him, how it stamped him. This was a reaction closely akin to that which was felt a few years later by one of the greatest thinkers and interpreters of history in the nineteenth cen-

tury, Jacob Burckhardt, when in one of his rare poems written in 1846 he describes the feelings to which Rome gave rise in him:

Hier war's, mein Junge, wo mir einst
Im Herzen alle Wünsche schwiegen;
Mein Schicksal schwand, vertrauensvoll
Dem Weltgeschick sich anzuschmiegen . . . .

Indeed, I feel no doubt that the very fact of dating a document ' Out of the Flaminian Gate of Rome ' in Wiseman's mind straightway was productive of a flavour which could not fail to make it universally acceptable. In considerations such as these lies, I submit, the key to much of Wiseman's success; as indeed also to some of the difficulties which, however unjustly and undeservedly, he encountered in his career.

In speaking of Wiseman as the chronicler and interpreter of Rome of his day, I have hitherto mainly stressed the importance of Rome for the formation of Wiseman's character and personality. There is, however, yet another aspect of his writings on the subject referred to which deserves fuller notice than I have so far given it, and it is upon this aspect that I should now like to offer a few remarks. I am thinking of the importance of Wiseman's writings on Rome for that rewriting in the spirit of objectivity of the whole history of Italian unification which surely by now is overdue. Wiseman, of course, dying in 1865, did not live to witness the glories of the campaign of Mentana in 1867, or the tragedy of the over-running of the States of the Church in 1870: but a book like his *Recollections* is to a large extent a vindication of the Temporal Power, being indeed, at the time of its publication in 1858—that is, two years before the campaign of Castelfidardo—greeted by many contemporaries as such, notably in France, and among its not least interesting passages are those which treat of the economic conditions of the States of the Church, pages which show the practised hand of a man of affairs such as Wiseman, as head of the English col-

lege, and manager of the Monte Porzio estate had become. Now, as the nineteenth century saw to it, that the current notions about, say, the Stuarts and the Jacobite Movement were radically corrected, so there devolves, I think, upon the twentieth century the duty of revising many of the fallacies which in the great majority of publications have long figured as history concerning the nineteenth century: and there are unmistakable signs that the counter movement to which I have referred has already set in. I need but recall—to choose an example most immediately at hand—Mr. Algernon Cecil's brilliant revaluation of Metternich, which was published only quite recently. Now as regards the unification of Italy, such has been the unchecked flow of partisan literature in glorification of it, that many of the salient facts on the other side have tended to be overlooked and forgotten. That the attack on the States of the Church in September 1870 was an entirely unprovoked attack is, of course, admitted on all hands; but how many people are there who remember that on August 17th, 1870, the Foreign Secretary of Victor Emmanuel, Visconti-Venosta, declared in the Chamber of Deputies in Florence that ' the obligation which Italy has undertaken, neither to attack the Pontifical frontier nor to permit it to be attacked, even if it were not enforced by treaties, would still be enforced by other sanctions provided by the ordinary law of nations and the general political relations of States '—fine sentiments these, which did not, however, prevent the selfsame Government less than a month later from invading the States of the Church without so much as a shadow of an excuse. I am choosing here at random something that is an undisputed historical fact, and which yet you hardly ever see referred to. *Il tempo è galantuomo,* say the Italians, and it is true that the logic of history sometimes by itself causes a justification of the past to materialize. Everybody is aware of the taunt which used to be hurled at the Papacy, that it was not defended by native troops, but by ' foreign mercenaries '—a taunt which in itself was entirely inaccurate since by far the

greater proportion of the Papal army consisted of natives, only they were not, of course, conscripted: and conscription linked up with what I can only call a purely zoological idea of nationalism, the late nineteenth century everywhere in Europe but in England had come to look upon as a mighty fine thing—with the results that we all know. Now when during the war Benedict XV, in 1917, issued an appeal for peace, accompanying it by a programme of reconstruction aiming at the prevention of war, one of his chief points was that there was to be no more conscription in the world, and in proposing that, the Papacy could remind the world that as long as it was a temporal power it had never introduced conscription. I remember how, on reading that in 1917, I felt that here was one of those cases, less rare perhaps than one usually thinks, when history itself makes amends: and if I may here introduce a personal parenthesis, it so happened that a few months later I found myself in Rome as Secretary to the Mission which was negotiating with the Vatican the recognition of the independence of my country, Finland: and well do I remember what a relief it was, having travelled across, as I had, practically the whole length of war-scarred Europe with nothing but Chauvinist sentiment aflame in each country, finally to reach a spot where there was concern for Europe as a whole. In a conversation which I had with Cardinal Gasparri at that time, I ventured to say how much I, as a student of history, had appreciated in the Pope's appeal to the world the reference to the Holy See's attitude as regards conscription. The Cardinal, I thought, was rather interested in my stressing this point, and he gave me a piece of information which I should imagine is not very generally known—namely that that reference, of which he fully admitted the appositeness and felicity, had not been put into the first of the two documents of which the appeal consisted, but into the second—and that because it had really been an afterthought. What is needed is, I think, more such afterthoughts, and when the history of Italian unification comes to be reconsidered in the spirit

of impartialness, I hope that full use will be made of the invaluable material towards that end contained in the writings of Cardinal Wiseman on the City and the cause he knew and loved so well.

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