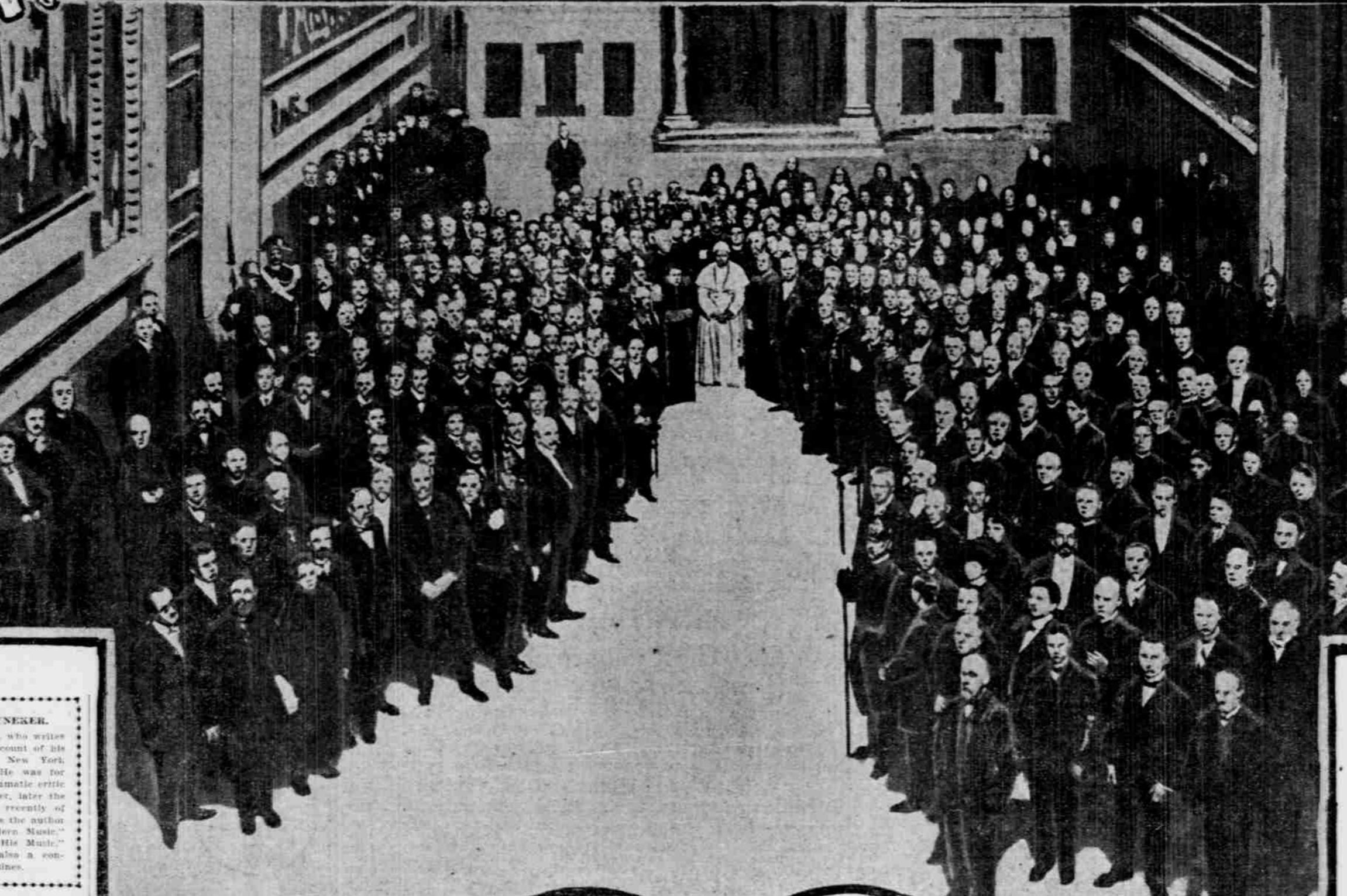


An Audience with Pius X.

BY JAMES GIBBONS HUNEKER.

POPE PIUS X RECEIVING GERMAN PILGRIMS, OCTOBER 5th, 1905 in the SALA REGIA of the VATICAN.



JAMES GIBBONS HUNEKER.
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ATTEMPTING to describe an audience at the Vatican is a feat that requires the brush of a Velasquez and the pen of a Gautier, but as I had never been in the Vatican before my mental condition was that of childlike innocence. I went to stare and remained to pray—for at least five seconds—moreover, to carry any miserable stinger across the gulf of despair into its purgatorial haven.

Perhaps Rome at a superficial glance still affects the American as it did Taine nearly a half-century ago—a provincial city, sprawling to unnecessary lengths over its seven hills, and, despite the smartness of its new quarters, far from suggesting wealth, as does, for example, bustling, shining Berlin or the mundane suavity of Paris. But not for her, in her superb and imperial indifference are the seductive spells of operatic Venice or the romantic glamour of Florence. She can proudly say, "La ville, c'est moi!" She is not a city, but the city of cities, and it needs but 24 hours' subservience in her atmosphere to make one a slave at her eternal chariot wheels. The New York cookery, devoted to the suit of the modern-hotels, banks, cafes and luxurious theaters—soon warms of Rome. He prefers Paris or Naples. Hasn't some one said, "See Naples and die—of its smell?" As an inexperienced traveler I know of no city on its globe where you formulate an expression of like or dislike so quickly. You are Rome's foe or friend within five minutes after you leave its dingy railway station. And it is hardly necessary to add that its newer quarters, pretentious, cold, hard and showy, are quite negligible. One does not go to Rome to seek the glacial comforts of Harlem or Brooklyn.

New D'Annunzio Tragedy.
As a theatergoer I could not resist the blandishments of the Costanzi, especially a new tragedy by D'Annunzio was announced. "La Fiaccola sotto il Moggio" is its name, which may be paraphrased in English by "The Light Under the Bushel," a singularly inauspicious motto for the way, for its modest author! And it is worth mentioning that this poet, who breaks hearts for the mere pastime of serving them up in his mouth-collected, hard-art for art, how many are thy victims?—is as much the subject of gossip as the police force is in New York. They don't chatter over such significant matters as the removal of a police captain from the Tenderloin to the Bronx district; those intellectually beighted Romans have only poets, musicians and painters to discuss. And it is a loving gossip. As soon as a new work of a dramatist is announced the talk begins in street and boulevard, palace and bourse, church and cafe. You might suppose an election primary was at hand. The very coachman volunteer criticism, and if you timely inform them that in darkest New York Duse's name is known they look the very picture of incredulity smiling on a carriage seat. Thus it was that I had of D'Annunzio's vain efforts to divorce his wife, the Duchess Gallara, in order to marry the charming girl, the Rosita, daughter of the Marquis Rudini. The interest displayed in this complicated scandal shook all Italy as if by a moral earthquake. It was a sensation, the work of Duse and D'Annunzio; not so in Rome. D'Annunzio is now in Milan, working with Baron Franchetti over their new opera, to be produced next March, called "The Daughter of Jorio."

It is his successful drama of that name set to music. Therefore I listened to his new and bloody tragedy at the Costanzi with more than passing attention. Though interpreted by that robust and gifted young actor, Fumagalli, I did not care for the play, for reasons not to be given just now. But Oscar Wilde's "Salome" was the afterpiece, and this pleasing entertainment for babes in arms held me in my uncomfortable stall until the final curtain dropped. New York will probably see it first, with the seven-league boots of Richard Strauss' music; for the tragedy demands acting of a high order and a gorgeous setting. Played by amateurs on bare boards it is no longer Wilde, who is luxurious or nothing in his art. It is a skillful adaptation of Gustave Flaubert's "Herodias," and, horribly morbid as it is in its comminglement of blood

and lust (these characters have no real life outside of psychopathic ward), it lacks the genuine fiber of tragedy. But what has Wilde's D'Annunzio, to do with Rome, with the pope? Only that Rome, of all cities in the world, furnishes the most surprises. The palimpsests of its various civilizations are not its chief charms. It can be as new as tomorrow while basking in the neighborhood of antiquity. Besides, I didn't go to Rome to see the pope. It was the marbles of the Vatican that held me off my projected course. If Leo XIII had been alive, then, I told myself, an audience by hook or crook; but the former Cardinal Sacchi and former Patriarch of Venice had never appeared to my sense of the picturesque. He had always seemed an honest bourgeois pope, a hard-working rather pathetic pope, but a pope without the magnificent intellectual prestige of Leo XIII, or possessing the bombance of Pius X—of whom his predecessor, Gregory XVI, remarked that "seven very cats in his house were Carbonari." This was when Pius IX was the Bishop of Imola and a liberal. Those cats changed their tune after 1846.

The usual manner of approaching the holy father is to go around to the American Embassy and harry the good-tempered secretary into a promise of a ticket; but if you are not interested in clerical circles, I was not long in Rome before I discovered that both Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Merry Du Val were at heart not interested in the Vatican. So I dismissed the ghost of one idea and pursued my pagan worship at the Museo Vaticano. Then the heavy boots of three hundred pilgrims invaded the piazza of the quiet Hotel Flacher up in the Via Sallus Triana. They had come from Cologne and the vicinity of the Upper Rhine bearing Peter's pennons, wearing silver clothes and good-natured smiles. They tramped the streets and churches of Rome, did these commonplace, plow folk. They borrowed in the Catacombs and they ate their meals, men and women alike, with such a hearty gnashing of teeth, such rude appetite, that one envied their vitality, their faith, their wholesome air of having accomplished the conquest of Rome.

Their schedule, evidently prepared with great forethought and one that went abnormally to pieces when put to the test of a practical operation, was wrangled over at each meal, where the Teutonic clans congregated in full force. The third day I heard of a projected audience at the Vatican. These people had come to Rome to see the Pope. Big boned and giant like Mr. Pick visited the hotel daily, and once after I saw him in conference with Signor Fischer I asked him if it were possible—
No Evening Dress.
"Of course," responded the wily Fischer. "Anything is possible in Rome." Wear evening dress? Nonsense! That was in the more exacting days of Leo XIII. The present Pope is a democrat. He hates vain show. Perhaps he has absorbed some of the Anglo-Saxon antipathy to seeing evening dress on a male during daylight. But the ladies wear veils. All the morning of October 5 the hotel was full of eager Italians selling veils to the German ladies.
Carrriages blocked the streets and almost stretched four squares around the Palazzo Margherita. There was noise. There were explosive sounds when bargains were driven. Then, after the vendors of saints pictures, crosses, rosary beads—chiefly gentlemen of Oriental per-



POPE PIUS X.

mission, comical as it may seem—we drove off in high feather nearly 400 strong. I had secured from Mr. Pick, through the offices of my amiable host, a parti-bred badge with a cross and the motto, "Coelebs Romae, 1862," which, interpreted, meant "Cologne—Rome. I felt like singing "Nach Rom," after the fashion of the Wagnerians in act II of "Tannhauser," but contented myself with abusing my coachman for his slow driving. It was all as exciting as a first night at the opera.
The rendezvous was the Campo Santo del Tedesco, which, with its adjoining church of Santa Maria della Pietà, was donated to the Germans by Pius VI as a burying-ground. There I met my companions of the dining-room, and after a stern-looking German priest, with the bearing of an officer, interrogated me I was permitted to join the pilgrims. What at first had been a thing of no value was now become a matter of life and death.

The mesmerizing influence of the large and enthusiastic body of pilgrims was beginning its work. I knew it, for had I not night after night, year after year, sat out execrable plays in the theaters of New York, plays whose sentiments I loathed, whose sentiments, nevertheless, brought tears to my uncritical eyes, and all because no man is strong enough to quite withstand the electric currents circulating through a gathering of his fellow-men? Mob-mania, it has been called by Le Bon in his "Psychology of the Crowd."

After standing above the dust and buried bones of illustrious and forgotten Germans, we went into the church and were cooled by an address in German of a worthy cleric whose name I cannot recall. I remember that he told us that we were to meet the Vicar of Christ, a man like ourselves. He emphasized, strangely, so it appeared to me, the humanity of the great prelate before whom we were bid-

den and ill at ease. There were uncounted and guttural noises. Conversation proceeded mainly, some boasted of being heavily laden with rosaries and crucifixes, for all desired the blessing of the Holy Father. One man, a young German-American priest from the Middle West, almost staggered beneath a load of pious trinkets. The guilty feelings which had assailed me as I passed the watchful gaze of the Swiss Guards began to wear off. The Sala Regia bore an unfamiliar aspect, though I had been haunting it and the adjacent Sistine Chapel daily for the previous month. An aura, coming I knew not whence, surrounded us. The awkward pilgrims with their daily manners, almost faded away, and when at last a murmur went up—"The Holy Father! The Holy Father! He approaches!"—a vast sigh of relief was exhaled. The tension had become unpleasant.

We were ranged on either side, the women to the right, the men to the left of the throne, which was an ornate-looking tribune. It must be confessed that later the fair sex was vigorously elbowed to the rear. In America the women would have been well to the front, but the dear old Fatherland indulges in no such new-fangled ideas of sex equality. So the polite male pilgrims by superior strength usurped all the good places, but a few some men in evening clothes—solitary in this respect, with the exception of the Pope's body suite—patrolled the floor obsequiously, guarded by the Swiss in their hideous frocks.

A murmur on Michelangelo's taste if he designed such hideous uniforms! I fancied that he was no less than a Prince of the royal blood, so masterly was his bearing. When I discovered that he was the Roman correspondent of a well-known North German gazette, my respect for the newspaper man abroad was vastly increased. The power of the press—"His Holiness comes!" was announced, and this time of no more, a false alarm. From a gallery facing the throne, a man entered the inevitable Swiss Guards; followed the officers of the papal household, grave and reverend seigniors; a knot of ecclesiastics, all wearing purple; Monsignor Pick, the papal protonotary and a man of might in business affairs; then a few stragglers—anonymous persons, stoutly bald, officious—and, finally, Pope Pius X.

He was attired in pure white, even to the sash that compassed his plump little figure. A cross depended from his neck, and a large square emerald surrounded by diamonds. Though 73, the Pope looks 10 years younger. He is slightly under medium height, his hair is white, his complexion dark, red-veined and not very healthy. He seems to need fresh air and exercise; the great garrets of the Vatican are no compensation for this man of searrows, boneset for the sultry lagoons and stretches of gleaming waters in his old diocese of Venice. If the human in him could call out it would be "Venice!" not the Vatican. The flesh of his face is what the painters call "ecclesiastical flesh," large in grain; his nose, broad, unamiable; his brows strong and harmonious. His eyes may be brown, but they seemed black and brilliant and piercing. He moved with silent alertness. An active, well-preserved man, though he achieved the biblical three-score and ten last June, I noted, too, with satisfaction, the shapely ears, artistic ears, musical ears, their lobes freely detached. A certain resemblance to Pius IX there it, but Pius X is not a man of

mediocre intelligence. He is not so amiable as was the good-tempered Pope who was nicknamed by his intimate friend, the Abbe Lizer, "Pia Niba," because of his musical proclivities. Altogether, I found another than the Pope I had expected. This, then was that exile—an exile, yet in his native land; a prisoner in sight of the city of which he is the spiritual ruler; a Prince over all princes; a king and monarch, yet withal a feeble old man, whose life might be imperiled if he ventured into the streets of Rome.

The pope had now finished his circle of greeting and stood at the other end of the Sala. With him stood his chamberlains and ecclesiastics. Suddenly a voice from the balcony, which I saw for the first time, bade us come nearer. I was thunderstruck! This was back to the prosa of life with a vengeance! We obeyed instructions. A narrow aisle was made, with the pope in the middle perspective. Then the voice, which I discovered by this time issued from the mouth of a bearded person behind a huge, glittering camera, cried out in peremptory and true photographer style:
"One, two, three! Thank your holiness."

And so we were photographed. In the Vatican and photographed! Old Rome has her surprises for the portmanteau visitors from the New World! It was too businesslike for me, and I would have gone away, but I couldn't, as the audience had only begun. The pope went to his throne and received the heads of the pilgrims. A certain presumptuous American told him that the church musical revolution was not much appreciated in America. He also amused me, taking a keen interest in why an example was not set at St. Peter's itself, where the previous Sunday he had heard, and to his horror, a social mass by Bill the sacred precinct. He said he had been forced to endure in New York before the new order of things. A discreet poke in the ribs enlightened him to the fact that the sacred precincts were such questions are not in good taste.

The Pope spoke a few words in a ringing baritone voice. He said that he loved Germany; loved its Emperor; that every morning his second prayer was for Germany—his first, was it for the hundredth wandering sheep of the flock, France? That he did not explain. He blessed us, and his changing voice proved singularly rich, resonant and pure in intonation for an old man. Decidedly Pius X is musical. The pilgrims thundered the sacred floor a second time with such pious fervor that the venerable walls of the Sala Regia shook with their lung vibrations. Then the Pope quite followed the sacred floor, the men of the chamber and the buzzing began. The women wanted to know, and indignantly were their infections, why a certain lady, attired in scarlet, had not been permitted to sing in the choir. The men hurried, jostling each other, for their precious umbrellas. The umbrella in Germany is the symbol of the medieval sword.

Pius X is a democratic man. He may be seen by the faithful at any time. He has organized a number of athletic clubs for young Romans, taking a keen interest in their doings. He is an impulsive man and has many enemies in his own household. He has expressed his intention of ridding Rome and the rest of Italy of their superfluous priests and monks, those unattached ones who make life a burden by their importunities and beggary in Rome. He has turned his eye lovingly toward America, and often his back on several of the cardinals. It is open gossip in Rome that he is not beloved by the College of Cardinals, particularly since the dean of the college Cardinal Gregalia, disciplined Cardinal Ferrata. This Pope means to be master. Has he not said "There are too many cardinals and too few good bishops"? He intends stemming—a terrible task—the rising flood of bad taste in Italian churches, the gimcracks, gewgaws and mechanical art—on such a shoddy bad taste. He is very charitable. His personal energy was expressed while I was in Rome by his very spirited rebuke to some members of the athletic clubs at an audience in the Vatican. There was some disorder while the Pontiff spoke. He fixed a noisy group with an angry glance: "There are too many cardinals and too few good bishops!" He intends stemming—a terrible task—the rising flood of bad taste in Italian churches, the gimcracks, gewgaws and mechanical art—on such a shoddy bad taste. He is very charitable.

Another incident, and one I neglected to relate in its proper place: As Pius proceeded along the line of kneeling figures during the German audience, I observed a little, jolly-looking priest, evidently known to him. A smile, benign, witty, gleamed about the line of kneeling figures. For a moment he seemed more Celt than Latin. There was no hint of the sardonic rictus which is said to have crossed the faces of Roman augurs. It was merely a friendly recognition tempered by humility, as if he meant to ask, "Why do you need my blessing, friend?" And it was the most human smile that I could imagine worn by a Pope. It told me more of his character than even did his meek and resigned pose when the official photographer of the Vatican called out his sonorous "Una, due, tre!"