Mazzini's letters to an English family ..

Mazzini Giuseppe
MAZZINI'S LETTERS
TO AN ENGLISH FAMILY 1861–1872 EDITED
AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY E. F.
RICHARDS ILLUSTRATED WITH PORTRAITS
AND MAP. IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL III

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FOREWORD

WRITERS have tended to minimize the value of the last years of Mazzini’s life. It has been suggested that, as regards the world, or rather his mission to it, his life came to a close with the end of the Roman Republic. Perhaps his story as told in his own intimate letters between the years 1849 and 1860 may help to readjust opinion; and in presenting to the public the closest view of his subsequent years the writer hopes to show that, though less fruitful of practical issues initiated or determined by himself, they prepared a legacy for the world which later generations may prize even more thankfully than the classic example of immortal Rome in 1849 or the unification of Italy in 1860. They brought us the considered expression of his Gospel, so far as he could embody it in words.

It is as a religious thinker, as pioneer and pilot into the further way of truth, that Mazzini has earned an undying name. Hampered as he was in every way, he never found himself able to write the desired philosophic-religious volume, the groundwork of which was indeed the groundwork of his own mind; but, after Emilie had struggled out of the ethico-economic materialism of her earlier education and had made Mazzini’s belief her own, she searched his writings and formed a rosary of gems which goes far to compensate us for the absence of his own projected book. This “rosary” is obtainable to-day,* and it does not stand alone. Supplementary to it comes the beautiful article published in 1867, The Religious Side of the Italian Question, which is again supplemented by the grand declaration of reasoned belief embodied in From the Council to God. This was the work—swiftly done, but scintillating with power—of his sinking years, and in it we see the climax of his thought, the high-tide mark of his insight and faith.

* Foreshadowings of the Coming Faith, T.P.S., 9 St. Martin’s St. W.C.2.
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In 1850 there was reprinted his *From the Pope to the Council* in which he gives, perhaps more clearly and concisely than elsewhere, his convictions about the Papacy, and the foundation of his certainty that from Italy would come the Word of the Future, that Pass-Word into the New Age for which the world is groping. A high destiny indeed! Italy once more the Lighthouse among nations! And who, not belonging to her by race or birth, harbours for one instant any thought of envy? The world will follow Italy with a glad heart when she can fit herself to articulate in action that healing word. When will she, abandoning superstition and repudiating materialism, unveil within her heart the new vision of the Trinity: Humanity ONE BODY; Progress; Association; and pronounce it to the nations?

A fatal separation has, for hundreds of years, been worked between political and religious belief, but "it is necessary to reunite earth to heaven, politics to the eternal principle which should direct them," and till that is done we shall struggle in a vicious circle of clashing interests instead of advancing out of our difficulties. But so long as men's minds are not clear as to the problem which is distracting life, so long will they be unable to see the solution. Mazzini states the problem: The great Principle of Authority, he says, embodied pre-eminently in the Pope but embodied also in princes—with whom, after ages of antagonism the Vatican allied itself—says, "Rest where thou art; I alone strike the hour of advance; when I am silent everything should rest, for all progress which is accomplished without me and beyond me is impious." But the human mind finds the germ of progress within itself, apart from any outside authority, and in spite of Authority, science and knowledge are marching swiftly forward. Men have grown shy of the word GOD, because rejecting the presentation of the Idea it stands for (as furnished by Authority), they have turned from it to what has seemed practical and useful—though without ultimate purpose or any aim beyond present and immediate future. They have turned from a confused and puzzling abstraction to the more acceptable ideas in ethics.

The unifying, if paralysing, power of Authority, is expiring, and no fresh conception of Unity has replaced it. Mankind is sick for

* In the volume of Mazzini's Essays in the "Walter Scott Library." *From the Pope to the Council* appears in a slightly imperfect form in the *Everyman* volume of Mazzini's Essays.
a transformed world, a new conception of, and hope of, heaven: "What is certain is that transformation implies death and that the new Authority can never be founded until after the complete overthrow of that which now exists." Authority founded upon immobility, upon the declaration that final truth is contained in the doctrine of the Church—using that word to signify the oldest exponent of orthodox Christianity—is doomed and dying but not dead, because the unorthodox have divorced their thought from their action. "Protestantism has given to the world a striking demonstration of want of power, of decay... Faith begets faith. You cannot expect that men should believe in yours," declares Mazzini, "when they see that it does not furnish you with the consciousness of a duty to fulfil. You have looked on with indifference whilst the liberty of the human soul was being crushed beyond your gates: you will be thought little worthy of defending it within.

"Faith is also wanting to the Pope; but he has something which replaces it: he has the audacity, the obstinacy, and the unscrupulous logic of his false principles. He attacks; you fortify yourselves for defence: he advances ever, with the continuous motion of the serpent; you move by fits and starts under the impulse of fear: he says, Servitude for all; you say, Liberty for us alone. You will not have it... You are slaves, in the slavery of your brethren. Hence it is that your contracted inspiration no longer fecundates the souls of men. There is no religion without faith in the solidarity of the human race."

"Man is one: Thought, Action, and that which causes him to translate his Thought in action, Love: behold his Trinity, the reflection of that mysterious Trinity which lives in God. He who has not the conception or feeling of this Unity—he who would destroy it by dividing faith from works, thought from action, the moral from the political man, would break the chain which attaches earth to heaven.

"Earth and heaven are for me the lowest and the highest steps of the ladder of human progress. Man is placed upon earth not to vegetate, not to expiate, not to contemplate; but to progress; to walk in the path of life according to the Law of which God has placed the germ in his heart; to accomplish his own education and that of others, to manifest, to practise his belief. Thought

* The italics are the Editor's.
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completes itself in action; faith in works. I can conceive religion in no other manner. It teaches us to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. It is supreme. It gives the law, the principles which political action ought to realize.

"The Protestantism of to-day denies human unity. It pretends to emancipate thought, while leaving action submissive and enslaved. It would join conscience and servitude, slavery and liberty. I have read the writings of men who protest against the encroachments of Catholic Rome; I have hearkened to the speeches uttered by them in their meetings.* I have not met with a single expression of sympathy for the Rome of the People and for Liberty; not a single prayer for the emancipation of Italy from the chains which forbid her all movement, all spiritual education. We have nothing to do, they say, with political questions. Is it then by leaving man in the hands of his oppressors that you would elevate and emancipate his soul? Is it by leaving erect the Idol of blind Force, in the service of Imposture, that you think to raise an altar to the God of a free conscience? Moses broke the idols to pieces; he knew well that so long as the idols existed there would always be idolaters.

"While the Pope possesses Italy, he will have a footing in every part of Europe. Papacy excluded from Italy is Papacy excluded from Europe. Place the Pope at Lyons or Seville—he will no longer be Pope, he will only be a dethroned king. Italy, setting aside the spectacle of a people aspiring to regain unity, independence, liberty, presents a phenomenon—the development of a moral revolution. Papacy was formerly a power, a visible centre of association. It waged war against feudalism; war against princely power. Therefore the people in Italy were principally Guelph . . . when the Popes perceived that the people were beginning to feel powerful, they leagued themselves with the kings. At the present time the people is neither Guelph nor Ghibelline, but stands aloof, distrustful of both, abhorring the one and despising the other. . . . In Italy is the solution of the European question. A Word once went forth from Italy which substituted a European spiritual unity for the triumph of material force. The second time she diffused over the world the example of civilization in arts and literature. The third time her hand

* At the time this was written there was considerable excitement and discussion in England over the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill which affected the status of Roman Catholics.