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ACHILLE RATTI—HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI

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IN the history of Alpine exploration many names appear of those who have served the Church. Sometimes it is the simple parish priest, a Gnifetti of Alagna, an Imseng of Saas, a Thurwieser or a Stanig from Tyrol ; sometimes a canon of the Great St. Bernard, a Carrel or a Gorret from Valtournanche ; or again a Prince-Bishop, as seen later in this volume, bound for the conquest of the highest peak in his diocese. As we read Wills' testimony to the devotion of Imseng when, having crossed the Allalin Pass, he hurries back that evening from Täsch to celebrate early Mass, or follow Abbé Gorret while he steps aside for others to win glory on his native mountain, we are conscious that something more than mere coincidence, some inward and spiritual need has brought these Churchmen to the high places of the earth. It was in the tradition of such pioneers that Achille Ratti, brought up within sight of Monte Rosa, lifted up his eyes to the hills.

There is no need here to enter fully into his career. Born at Desio near Milan on March 31, 1857, he was destined early for the Church. If much of his service was spent in the great Ambrosian Library at Milan and later in the Vatican Library, he was also much occupied in early years with parish work, especially among the children of Milan, and for three years, from 1918, he served as Papal Nuncio to Poland, returning thence to the see of Milan. Within a few months he bade farewell to the vision of Monte Rosa 'faintly flushed and phantom-fair,' as he entered the Vatican on his election to the Papacy.

Soon after his election, he granted an audience to Douglas Freshfield. 'I fear,' said Freshfield, 'that Your Holiness must find Soracte a poor substitute for the Alps.' The Pope, however, reminded his fellow humanist how in due season, like the Alps themselves, 'alba stet nive candidum Soracte.' The two men



To the Members of the
Mount Everest Expedition

Pius P. XI
gratias gratulabundus

25. VIII. 1922

MESSAGE FROM HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI, 1922.
GRATUS GRATULABUNDUS.

[To face p. 2.]

became warm friends, talking, at the Pope's request, as one mountaineer to another. Some years later, when Mr. Eaton was received in audience, he mentioned Freshfield's name. The Pope beamed with delight. 'Tell him,' he said, 'with how much pleasure I look back on his visit.' Reasons of policy prevented the Pope, to his great regret, from accepting Honorary Membership of the Alpine Club, 'but,' he added, 'I should have liked to be an Active Member.' In 1922 he sent his blessing to the Mount Everest Expedition, in whose achievements he took the warmest interest. To his great joy, he received in return a fragment of rock taken from the highest point reached. This was mounted as a paper-weight on ebony, with the names of the party on a silver shield, and it was always at hand on his study table. His gracious reply is reproduced here, from the original in the possession of this Club.

If his duties as Librarian and in other spheres curtailed his activities as a mountaineer, at least they never dimmed his love for the mountains. To the end of his days he thought of the hills and drew strength from that thought. Fortunately for us all, in his articles for the *Rivista Mensile* he is not afraid to reveal the depth of his affections and to let us share his enthusiasm. The account of his traverse of Monte Rosa, from Macugnaga to the summit and then across the Zumsteinsattel to Zermatt, is a classic model for historical research and vivid description. We see there not merely the scholar weighing documentary evidence or the Italian leading his countrymen where men of other nations have preceded them, nor only the prudent mountaineer giving generous credit to his guide's skill. As darkness envelops the party high on the mountain—'at that height, in the centre of the grandest of all the grand Alpine theatres, in that pure transparent atmosphere, under a sky of deepest blue, lit by a crescent moon and sparkling with stars as far as the eye could reach'—we can catch something of the vision revealed to one who, in that silence, felt himself to be 'in the presence of a novel and most imposing revelation of the omnipotence and majesty of God.'