

Petrus Non Moritur

Benedict XV. was not long dead before opinion was rife as to his probable successor. In the scarcity of official news from Rome between the time of his death and the election of Pius XI, there was a great deal of speculation about the result of the election, all of which was very far from the truth. So much so, indeed, that scoffers, who tried to foretell the new Pope by drawing analogies between the election procedure of the College of Cardinals and that of other institutions, had striking proof that he who is called to fill the throne of the Fisherman, as vice-gerent of Christ and Supreme Shepherd of the Church, is singled out by the unerring Voice of God. For on February 6, 1922, Pius XI, son of a weaver of Desio, was elevated to the spiritual sovereignty of 300,000,000 souls, to fulfill the commission given him by Christ Himself.

Pope Pius XI is the link in the long Apostolic chain that runs back through the ages to that day when, on the coast of Decapolis, Jesus changed Simon's name to that of Peter, and upon this rock built the unity and solidity of His Church. To Peter, and through him to his successors, was given the plenitude of jurisdiction, the fullness of truth and the promise of divine assistance to the end. In Pius XI, as his successor, the Catholic world sees the chief interpreter of the Faith, the judge of all controversy, the center and key of the marvellous unity of the Church which astounds the world; he is the fountain of spiritual jurisdiction, the doctor and pastor of the universal Church.

Achilles Ratti, a weaver's son, who, upon his election to the Chair of Peter, assumed the name of Pius XI, was born at Desio, Italy on March 31, 1857. After preliminary studies in his Diocesan seminary and at the Lombard College in Rome, he obtained the Doctorate in Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law at the Gregorian University,

and was ordained in Rome in 1879. During the first years of his priesthood he taught dogmatic theology and sacred eloquence in his diocesan seminary, and in 1888 was appointed to the staff of the College of Doctors of the Ambrosian Library, where for a time his books were his life. In 1907 he was elected Prefect of the Library.

While connected with the Library, he was a prolific writer, and Italian journals and reviews were glad to receive his articles on scientific subjects, on literature, and on art. In 1911, however, he was called to Rome and in 1913 he was made Protonotary Apostolic.

In 1918, peace-loving Benedict sent him to Poland as Apostolic Visitor. It was then that he first became prominent in the diplomatic world. He acquitted himself so well of his mission, a purely ecclesiastical one, and his tact, prudence and judgment, coupled with his far-seeing diplomacy, won for him so much warm praise from the Polish people that Benedict, in 1919, made him Apostolic Nuncio to the Republic of Poland.

As Nuncio, he succeeded admirably in settling, by his tact and courage, the difficult and delicate problems that arose from the presence of German soldiers in Poland, and the unsettled condition of the internal affairs of that country, which, at the time, was the storm-center of Europe. To Monseigneur Ratti, Father J. C. Reville, S. J., pays this glowing tribute: "In the trying times of the Bolshevik inroad almost into the suburbs of Warsaw; in the perhaps still more trying days of the plebiscite over upper Silesia, the ambassador of Benedict was as fearless as he was calm, conciliatory and just. He saw the glint of Bolshevik bayonets and stood his ground. He had come to Warsaw for the love and good of Poland. He would not desert her."

Nor did he. It was due chiefly to his indefatigable zeal in Poland's interest that two articles became part of

the constitution of that Republic—one declaring that the Catholic religion occupies the first place in the Polish State, and the other asserting that no measures can be taken by the State concerning the Catholic Church without preliminary agreement with the Vatican. Again, he was instrumental in securing the release of a great number of prisoners and hostages that were being held by the Russians. To Poland he was a guardian angel in her time of need, her saviour, who in the significant words of the late Benedict XV. himself, “established concord between the State and the Church in times that were most difficult, and under circumstances most dangerous.”

On June 13 1921, he was created Cardinal and set over the arch-diocese of Milan, near which is Desio, his birthplace. There he remained until two months ago, living almost in obscurity, known, even by name, to few outside of the Vatican and his own diocese. Then, on February 6, 1922, fifteen days after the death of the illustrious Benedict, Cardinal Ratti was elected to fill the most responsible diplomatic office in the world, to discharge the greatest of ecclesiastical and civil obligations, to represent Christ Himself on earth.

When Benedict ascended the Throne of Peter, he came into vital contact with a world, turbulent, strife-torn and indifferent to the mediation of any neutral power; the contrast between Benedict's inheritance and that of Pius XI is the greatest eulogy that can be bestowed upon the dead Pope. Pius XI succeeds to a world whose nations are at peace with one another, and to a universal interest in the Papacy whose equal has not been known for many years. At Benedict's death the nations with representation at the Vatican numbered eleven more than at his accession. This increase of Papal prestige is in itself Benedict's eulogy and his successor's recommendation, for Pius

could not have been selected if he were incapable of fulfilling the prospects of his inheritance.

According to the prophecy of St. Malachy, Bishop of Armagh, the motto of Pius XI. is "Fides Intrepida,"—"Unwavering Faith!" Surely an inspiring motto to have before him throughout his Pontificate. Alpinists to whom he was known through his daring exploits, knew that his motto as a mountain climber was "Excelsior." "Fides Intrepida" is both descriptive of the man and prophetic of the Pope. Pius XI. is a man of commanding presence, with a personality that is distinctive and charming, underlying which is an exceptionally strong force of character; the Pope is a dauntless man. Again, "Fides Intrepida" hints at uncompromising firmness in the face of serious troubles; and although the Church does not accept St. Malachy's prediction as a prophecy, in the strict sense of the word, nevertheless, his mottoes have proven apt in so many instances, particularly "Religio Depopulata" of Benedict XV., that there is every reason to believe that "Fides Intrepida" is prophetic of Pius XI.

In the present Pontiff, as in his predecessors, is seen the verification of the promise, made by Christ to his Apostles, of the continuity of the Papacy. The Church has thrived in spite of the bitterest persecutions, and will continue to thrive to the end of time in the midst of warring nations and creeds, amid the ruins of other institutions and societies, as "the city built upon a mountain," against which "the gates of Hell shall not prevail." Truly Peter does not die: he still speaks through the lips of Pius.