

THE ROMAN QUESTION

The news from the Eternal City to the effect that the Roman Question had finally been settled came as an agreeable surprise to the Catholic World. During the past two years rumors of a settlement had been afloat, and there were many reports of secret meetings between representatives of the Vatican and of the Quirinal. Nothing definite, however, came from the official press of either party; thus the news of the settlement came as a surprise to most people.

What is, or rather, what was the Roman Question? To get a fair idea of it, it is necessary to study it from its origin.

When St. Peter came to Rome and established his See there, he possessed little of this world's goods. Like his Master he lived in poverty; like Him also, he died an ignominious death, bequeathing to his successor not gold and silver, but a rich legacy of spiritual authority.

Some three centuries later the Emperor Constantine moved the seat of the Empire to Constantinople, leaving a governor in charge of the Western Empire whose capital was Rome. The West, thus neglected and left without sufficient protection, was a prey to invading hordes from the North; and on different occasions Rome was saved from destruction only through the zeal and activity of the Popes. Thus the temporal power of the Pope began to develop gradually. The Roman people looked upon him as their Lord, not only in spiritual, but in temporal affairs as well. Many presented him with large tracts of land, and the beginning of the Papal States was made.

It was not until 756, however, that these States assumed large proportions. In that year Pepin, King of the Franks, made large grants of territory to the reigning Pontiff. A few years later further additions were made by Pepin's famous son, the great Charlemagne. Thus the Papal States came into existence.

As the centuries rolled by, these possessions were the source of much benefit, and unfortunately, of no little detriment, to the successors of St. Peter. The Pope, it is true, was regarded as common father of all; he it was who acted as arbiter in many disputes between warring powers; to him also did the people of the various nations appeal—and not in vain—when oppressed and persecuted by their

tyrannical rulers. At times, however, difficulties arose between the Pope, as temporal ruler, and the rulers of different countries, to the detriment, it must be admitted, of the spiritual sovereignty of the Pope. These difficulties increased in number and intensity after the Psuedo-Reformation; but it was left to the radicals of the 18th and 19th century to begin in reality the struggle which terminated in the Roman Question.

In 1791 the New French National Assembly made the first real seizure of Papal territory. Later, Napoleon annexed all the Papal States and constituted them into the Roman Republic. In a few years, however, the States were restored to the Pope; but eight years later they were again taken over by Napoleon, to be returned in 1815 when his career came to an end.

Actual encroachment on Papal territory was not the only havoc caused by the French Revolution. Greater evils were to follow. The spirit which prompted the Revolution was still active, and all Europe was infected by and suffering from it. Revolutions were the order of the day and discontent was rampant among all the people; and the Papal States did not escape.

During the reign of Pope Gregory XVI, two revolutions occurred within his domains; and, though these were put down and order apparently restored, the spirit that prompted them still lived and activated the people. It was with such a spirit in their hearts, that the inhabitants of the Papal States greeted the succession of Pius IX, to the Chair of Peter.

A wise statesman, a prudent ruler and a lover of humanity, Pius first turned his thoughts to his subjects, especially those of the Papal States. Pius was a liberal in his views, so liberal, in fact, that he alarmed the rulers of other countries, whose ambition it was to keep their subjects in subjection. Wishing to give his temporal subjects autonomy, he instituted the Papal Parliament. The result of this and his consequent imprisonment, escape and exile are matters of history. He fled to Gaeta in Southern Italy in 1848, whence he returned to Rome in 1850.

Saddened by the failure of his efforts and seeing their futility for the moment, Pius became a conservative in his views, still planning, however, the betterment of the condition of his subjects in the Papal territory.

Events moved quickly from this time. The movement for a United Italy was on foot. With this, Pius was in sympathy; with the mode of procedure, he was not.

Cavour, Garibaldi and King Victor Emanuel of Sardinia formed a trinity whose aim was to seize the Papal States and thus make of Italy, not a number of independent principalities, but one united nation. By 1861 this was practically effected, and on September 20, 1870 the remaining blow was struck; the city of the Popes fell before the invading robbers; Rome became the capital of Italy, and Pius, a prisoner in the Vatican.

One of the first acts of the newly-formed Italian government was to pass the Law of Guarantees, whereby a yearly payment was to be given to the Pope to indemnify him for the loss of his territory. The Pope refused to accept for two reasons: it was a one side treaty, which could be revoked at will by the Italian government; and it did not recognize the sovereignty of the Pope.

The Pope does not claim, nor do his adherents, that a large amount of territory is necessary to him. But he does claim, and rightly so, that he is a sovereign in his own name. Endowed with power from on high, he numbers among his subjects men of every nation in the world.

Thus situated he must not only deal impartially with these subjects, but from him must be removed all suspicion of partiality; and to do this, he can be the subject of no earthly ruler; he must be a sovereign in his own name. It was this sovereignty that the Italian Parliament overlooked, and because of this, their Law of Guarantees was rejected by the Pope.

Pius IX, in protest, remained in the Vatican until his death. Leo XIII, his brilliant successor, Pius X, Benedict XV and the present Pope followed his example. Thus for fifty-nine years have the Popes been prisoners in the Vatican in protest to the actions of the Italian Government. Such, in brief, is the origin and history of the Roman Question.

The question has been a thorn in Italy's side ever since it began. Time after time efforts were made to effect a settlement, but to no avail. And it was only in recent years that the light began to shine, and a solution satisfactory to both parties seemed to be possible.

Mussolini, urged on by his ambition as well as by his sense of justice and a realization of the detriment caused

to Italy by this situation, finally came to terms with the Vatican, and on February 11th of this year the agreement was signed in the Lateran. Thus was brought to an end the famous Roman Question and the imprisonment of the Popes.

The terms of the settlement are briefly these: the Pope is to have possession of a small territory including the Vatican, now known as the Vatican City, together with a few other properties in Rome, and the summer residence of the Popes on the Mediterranean, over all of which he will have undisputed sway. He will also be paid a sum of money to indemnify him for the loss of the Papal States.

Although the territory now recognized as belonging to the Pope, is considerably smaller than the Papal States previous to 1870, yet it is no less than the Pope asked for, as it gives him political independence without embarrassing him with the cares of a large temporal kingdom.

There is no doubt but that the settlement of the Roman Question will have a momentous effect on the world at large. By all right minded, intelligent people, the news will be received with gratification. But, as usual, there will be some who will criticize, as they always have done.

G. M. '30

But how can he expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?
—Wordsworth.

Care to our coffin adds a nail, no doubt,
And every grin, so merry, draws one out.
—Wolcot.

There is probably no man living, though ever so
great a fool, that cannot do something or other well.
—Warren.

Could we forbear dispute, and practise love,
We should agree as angels do above.
—Walpole.