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# THE REVIEW AND EXPOSITOR

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BENEDICT XV.

By HON. ROMOLO MURRI, Rome, Italy.

On the third of last September the cardinals, united in conclave, elected as pope the archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Giacomo della Chiesa. This unexpected selection had for every one this very clear significance: the "princes of the Church" desired that the new pope should have qualities opposed to those of his predecessor, who should promise a pontificate of conciliation, as that of Pius X had been one of battle. Perhaps, in regard to the internal necessities of the political government of the Church (which do not at all coincide with the exigencies of the religious life, but on the contrary are frequently in discord with it), a period of repose, of putting on the brakes, and of reaction was inevitable after Leo XIII. Leo was fascinated by his dream of restoring to the Church her ancient hegemony, and had been generous in his encouragements to all initiative in scientific research and social activity from which he might hope for an increase of popularity and prestige of the Roman Church. But the movement which followed showed very soon how much deeper than he imagined was the contrast between science and democracy on the one hand, and on the other the old dogmatic and disciplinary positions of the Church and papacy. And many became

alarmed at the peril of continuing on that road. Out of these conditions arose the pontificate of Pius X in which we can distinguish two periods.

Up to the encyclical, *Pascendi*, against Modernism, he had struck at the leaders of the movement in Italy, France and England, who, in a certain way, had incorporated in themselves the new tendencies and had given to them, in sincerity and faith, too much of their very souls to give the lie to themselves and turn back at the beck and nod of the new pope. They preferred to allow themselves to be condemned and go out of the Church and see their more timid disciples dispersed. If the work of Pius X had finished with that encyclical and with the dispersion of Modernism which followed all would have gone well with the papacy. But the actions and writings of those first modernists had had effects too vast and profound. Many of those who had followed them occupied now the positions of the advance guard in the scientific and practical activity of the Church. They wished to remain; they accepted the encyclical and the anti-modernist oath, hoping, with due caution, to continue to labor in peace. But against them there was always up in arms the angry and suspicious zeal of the pontiff; while those who better understood their thought continued to denounce them as enemies, to point out errors and invoke condemnations which in the form of disapprobations and of counselings continued to fall. Journals, scientific institutions, parties and entire groups of persons were surrounded with suspicion. Even bishops and cardinals were not spared.

So there was slowly created for many an intolerable situation; and it was precisely in this state of affairs that Pius X passed from the scene. Cardinal della Chiesa seemed the man adapted to face the situation; and from their point of view the cardinals were not deceived. It was not a matter of program, since to few was it possible to think that the doctrines of the Church could incur

any peril with one pope rather than with another (so little, really, do the popes themselves influence doctrine); but it was rather a question of the quality of government; and the new pope had precisely the qualities opposed to those of the Venetian pope. The new pope is a Genoese. It is curious to note that the difference between the two men is that which subsists between the two cities. Venice, silent in the stagnant waters of her canals, shut in with her dreams of past greatness, cut off from the great highways of the world, in the minds of whose garrulous and indolent inhabitants is the tradition of the aristocratic dominion of the last centuries, rigidly conservative, diffident and cruel, incapable of initiative, tenacious of authority, not suffering any contradiction. Genoa is altogether a city of movement and initiative, of commerce also in these days, caring little for doctrinal disputes, audacious and astute, whose inhabitants have the spirit of business, the cold and calculating practicalness of the creators of wealth, the rudeness of him who goes straight toward his goal, united to acute perception of difficulties to be overcome and dangers to avoid.

Giacomo della Chiesa was born of a noble Genoese family in a little city of the Ligurian Riviera, and passed his youth at Genoa. Thus, a pope of noble birth succeeded opportunely a son of peasants. He who ascends from the most humble grades along the highways of the hierarchy often acquires a most exalted conception of authority, but ignores the formalities of command. He does not know how much grace and *finesse* and ability are always necessary to manage men, even when they are subalterns or servants. Pius X had the highest conception of his authority; and didn't spare it. To command with gentleness, to have regard for those whom he struck, to moderate word and gesture seemed to him to lessen that respect which he formerly had for the authority of the pope. So, his commands always sounded sharp and hard and gave displeasure and left behind a trail of dissensions and hard feelings.

Benedict XV has already shown himself in this regard to be very different. From the first days of his pontificate he has abounded in courtesies toward those who failed to obtain the pontifical power; and for the enemy who fled he built a bridge of gold. Having decided to go in the opposite direction to that of his predecessor he has been on his guard not to offend the men who enjoyed his confidence. He has recalled those who fell in disgrace under the former pontificate, and put them, with much graciousness, near the others. And we need not expect from him sudden and hard courses of action; but, rather, able adjustments of difficulties, counsels of concord, of calmness, of prudence, well-thought-out measures which will be conciliating in substance but even more in form.

The new pope did not enter at once into the priesthood. He was spared the education in the schools of the priests, that are so cold and mortifying, that tend to dry up and falsify the mind of the young men. He attended the public schools at Genoa and the University, taking the degree of Doctor of Laws. Not long ago in an address before a body of representatives of the Federation of Catholic University Students he recalled how that when he was a student there was no such Federation (which was founded some years later by the writer), but that there was constituted a Catholic Committee for expressing, in some way, homage to the pope; and that he was secretary of that committee. He is, therefore, much better prepared to appreciate the work of the laity against which Pius X had such evident and tenacious antipathy; and his election has been, therefore, hailed with real joy by all the heads of Catholic organizations in Italy. The first acts of the pontiff have shown that their confidence has been well placed. At a nod from him the bitter struggle that the intransigents had waged against them ceased as if by magic.

Once on the road toward the priesthood, the young Genoese lawyer entered, at Rome, the college for priests

called Capranica, a quiet asylum founded by the benevolent and condescending spirit of a Rome that is past, where a few select young men are prepared for the "career" that is rarely wanting; who became habituated to the insinuating and prudent manners that such a career demands. From there he passed to the Academy of the Noble Ecclesiastics which prepares one for a diplomatic career, and aims much more at forming diplomats than priests. The few that live together there form the habit of looking upon the Church much more as a political regiment than as a religious society, and there acquire the taste for luxury and the habit of command. From those years on, the fortunes of Della Chiesa were linked indissolubly with those of the future Cardinal Secretary of State of Leo XIII, Mariano Rampolla. When the latter was selected as Nuncio to Madrid he took with him Della Chiesa, and later brought him back to Rome, employing him in the department of the Secretaryship of State when he (Rampolla) was nominated cardinal and called to take the highest and most prized position of trust by the side of Leo XIII.

For many years Della Chiesa has remained at the Vatican. His life as a mature man has been that of a bureaucrat and officeholder. He had to be in full harmony with the general lines of action of which he had to be the faithful interpreter and executor. And it was not difficult. In Leo XIII and his celebrated Secretary of State one cannot fail to recognize the highest conception of the function of the Church in the world, a sincere and active purpose to care for her interests and glory, a notable serenity of mind, a constant carefulness for prudence and doing things in due bounds, a great dignity and correctness in manners. They lacked knowledge of the modern world and they labored for illusions; but they did it all in grand style. Young Della Chiesa must have felt the internal vanity of that policy; but he seconded it always

with the ability of a courtier, with the docility of an employee and with the respect and esteem for the authors of that policy which they merited.

Little of stature, bow-legged, agile and quick of movement, shut in as in an atmosphere of expectation and diffidence, with a faint ironic smile on his lips, gracious in manner but brief and cautious in word he promised in his very aspect the *souplesse*, the reserve, the astuteness which are necessary for a man who governs. All these qualities must have greatly helped him upon the death of Leo XIII when he, Rampolla being shut up in his solemn silence, had to remain for five long years at the same post of duty that he had formerly occupied, with superiors so different, in the service of a policy which he must have, in his inner heart, not only condemned but derided.

In fact his removal, after five years, was a promotion. Pius X wished, personally, to consecrate the new archbishop of Bologna who, however, received the cardinal's hat only after the death of his protector and friend, Cardinal Rampolla, through whom, as by a sort of ideal heredity, he attained unto the tiara.

Permit the writer to recall a personal experience. One day, more than twelve years ago, I went to the Vatican for the purpose of talking with the then representative of the Secretary of State. I had already known him during his frequent visits to the college, Capranica, and in recent years I had gone frequently to Cardinal Rampolla and to him concerning matters that pertained to my Christian democratic movement. I went to him to repeat verbally what I had written a few days before,—that all the Italian Catholic youth was now in a ferment, agitated by a most noble ideal; but that there was growing up against them the opposition of the elder clergy, of bishops, of Jesuits and of the heads of old associations; that it was needful for the Holy See to intervene with a plain word and say whether or no it wished that we should continue.

Cardinal Rampolla had said one day to me these very words: "Every day complaints pour in here against you from bishops and rectors of seminaries; but you go ahead along your road, prudent and tranquil." Those words ought to be repeated now aloud; or denied. I did not find Della Chiesa. I waited and walked up and down and meditated on the last turn of the *loggia* in the court of San Damaso. It seemed to me that the fate of the Roman Church was made luminous before my eyes. It could not be that the men who lived in that incomparable royal palace, amid so much splendor of art and luxury, habited in silks and furs, surrounded by a swarm of ambitious courtiers, should understand the new spirit of the crowds of working men who are thirsting for justice and democracy; impossible that they should descend into the midst of these armed solely with the power of original Christianity, to preach vigorous initiative, the decadence of the old society, the conquest along up the difficult steep of liberty of a new world of justice and real fraternity. Shut up in the Vatican the papacy breathed the life of other days, and so was behind the times in its dreams of worldly regality and dominion. And was this the dream that our Christian democracy had to submit to? I came down from there with a clear presentiment of the irreparable defeat of my dream.

Benedict XV has grown up and lives in that world. It is certain that he will not open up new ways for the Church of Rome. The experience of the preceding pontificate has taught him, if indeed there was need of it, for him, the danger of following tenaciously up to the last degree, the iron logic of the doctrine and discipline of Rome; a species of fatalism of a faith that is intolerant and sure of itself which would lead to the worst possible ruin.

Between the *static* conception of Catholicism and that which suggests the *historic* conception of a perennial becoming of the religious spirit in the weak manifesta-

tions of theologies and churches, and of the active, working presence of the divine, immanent spirit, there is an abyss which the Vatican cannot now fill up, and which, perhaps, will never be filled up except by its disappearance.

Between two roads equally dangerous, the return backward or development, Benedict XV will not be able to select. He will content himself with temporizings and half-measures; he will not attempt to dominate events from above, but to second them, to guide them with the little resources of government. He will talk little. He will allow the inevitable conflicts to resolve themselves, seeking only that they may not arrive at an acute stage. He will not lift himself up, as his predecessor, against the modern spirit, nor will he allow himself to be overthrown by it. Every one of his first acts is an index to this line of conduct which was easy to foresee. For example, he has not made a single pass toward Italy; nor will he; but he has shown that, for his part, he does not want to embitter the conflict. Hon. San Giuliano, Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Crown, died with the special benediction of the pope.

The Secretary of State that he has selected, after the death of Cardinal Ferrata, Cardinal Gasparri, is the man most adapted to second this policy. He, too, is cultivated, intelligent, astute, having lived for many years at Paris and many years in the offices of the Curia, bland, accommodating, incapable of acts of rigid intransigence.

His will be a pontificate, therefore, of able temporizings, of calm and of waiting. It is not so interesting to know what the pope will do; but rather up to what point the force of things, the profound crisis which burdens the Catholic conscience will seize the individual consciences and draw them into the vortex of new audacities and conflicts; that is, if from this period of waiting they pass to a new reaction, or to more perilous dissolutions and to more fervid, internal renewals. The decadence

of the Church of Rome is much more slow than many ardent spirits dream; because such decay is not measured by the abundance of the resources or the ability of the pope; but by the greater or less ability of the human conscience to construct its new spiritual life and to fashion new faiths, in which the soul may be alive to the old, having thrown aside the bark, and to direct human life. Now, the work of this lay renovation of the religious life proceeds very slowly; and the papacy profits by the slowness and all the uncertainties and errors of culture and democracy, and goes ahead and proffers its services to the "human soul athirst for the ideal and the absolute."

And now the European War places our old world at a turning point in history on the outcome of which and on the profound revolution produced by the terrible event on the human conscience, a revolution of which we cannot now measure the extent, will depend also in part the outcome, in the near future, of the pontifical government.

In Italy we are not yet even at the beginnings of a religious rebirth. Every voice is lost and every initiative dried up in an atmosphere of superstition, of skepticism, of supine servility and lust for power—an atmosphere for whose slow formation and tenacious endurance the Roman Curia, that to its own interests has sacrificed the interests of a sincere and active religious spirit, is in the highest degree responsible.