

CHURCH AND STATE IN FRANCE

VITAL POINTS IN LATER HISTORY

(Continued from last week.)

The next difficulty between the Vatican and France was in connection with the visit of the President of the French Republic to Victor Emmanuel III. at Rome. The Popes have always and energetically protested against the spoliation of the Papal States and the occupation of Rome, finally effected by Victor Emmanuel in 1870. They contend that the Supreme Head of a society like the Catholic Church, the members of which belong to all nationalities, and are scattered throughout the world, should not be himself the subject or dependent of any particular nation, but should be free from the interference, or even suspicion of interference, of any individual power in his communications with his people; that for the present, at any rate, no other means has been suggested of securing such freedom, except the possession of an independent territory; and that, until a suitable agreement has been arrived at, they cannot accept the present regime in Rome. Accordingly, the Holy See has forbidden all Catholic Rulers to visit the King of Italy at Rome; and despite many temptations and difficulties, the Catholic Rulers have loyally observed the Papal prohibition. No wonder, then, that Leo XIII. expressed his sorrow, when he learned that the Catholic President of the nation which had so long and so generously defended the territories of the Pope, had made up his mind to come to Rome as the guest of Victor Emmanuel III. It was in July, 1902, that the reports of the interchange of visits between the President of France and the King of Italy first began to circulate. The Nuncio immediately called the attention of M. Delcasse to the seriousness of these rumors, but was assured by the Minister for Foreign Affairs that they had no foundation. Still, the official journals of both kingdoms continued to give publicity to these statements, and even the dates on which the visits should take place were published. Hence the Secretary of State felt bound (June, 1903) (1) to address a note to the Ambassador of France setting forth that the Holy Father would consider the visit of the President to Rome as an offence to the Holy See as well as a personal insult to himself; while at the same time he sent a despatch to the Nuncio at Rome to be read to M. Delcasse, declaring the reasons why the visit of a head of a Catholic State to Rome, during the present lamentable situation, could not be otherwise than a grave offence to the Holy See, whatever might be the personal intentions of the visitor.

In spite of the warnings of the Holy Father, in spite of the examples of the aged Emperor of Austria (2) and of the King of Portugal, (3) both bound by close relations to the King of Italy, in spite of the special affection shown by Leo XIII. for France and the traditional position of France as the protector of the Holy See, the President arrived in Rome as the guest of Victor Emmanuel, in April, 1904. Nothing remained for the Pope but to issue a formal protest, which was presented to the French Ambassador four days after M. Loubet's entrance into Rome; (4) and to secure that the attitude of the Vatican might not be misinterpreted by the world, an official communication announcing the despatch of the protest was inserted in 'L'Osservatore Romano.' (5) The Council of Ministers met in Paris to discuss the Papal protest, and a note was sent to the Secretary of State (6) in which it was declared that the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, having already explained before Parliament the character and the object of the 'Presidential visit,' the Government must reject the considerations set forth in the Papal protest as well as the form in which they were presented. With this answer the whole incident seemed closed.

But, in a few days, a copy of the protest in the form in which it had been sent at the same time to all the Catholic powers, was published in a Paris journal. In this form of the protest a sentence was inserted which had not been inserted in the protest sent to France. The passage so inserted was to the effect that 'if in spite of that (the Presidential visit) the Nuncio had not been recalled from Paris, it was only on account of very serious motives which were entirely special.' (7) In other words, it was intimated to the

powers, that in case M. Loubet's example were followed, the Holy See might and itself obliged to recall its Nuncio; and although this had not been done in the case of France, it was not because the offence did not justify such action, but only because his presence was required by delicate relations existing between Paris and the Vatican. No insult to the Republic could have been intended by such a phrase; on the contrary, it clearly implied the Pope's special interest in the settlement of its politico-religious disputes.

The Council of Ministers met immediately, and M. Nisard was instructed to demand from the Secretary of State, (8) if the note published in the Paris journal was authentic, if the same note had been sent to the other Powers, and if the phrase regarding the Nuncio at Paris was embodied in all the other communications. The Cardinal Secretary requested M. Nisard to furnish his demands in writing, and promised to give him a written reply in an hour, or even a half-hour, if necessary. This request was quite natural in the circumstances. It prevented the possibility of misunderstanding which might easily have arisen, especially as M. Nisard, the French Ambassador, was, unfortunately, partially deaf. The Ambassador expressed himself satisfied, and retired to prepare his written questions, but hours passed and he did not return. The Cardinal Secretary sent a messenger to inform M. Nisard that he was ready to receive him, but it was the next day before the Ambassador presented himself, and this time with the information that he had been recalled on leave, and that a Charge d'Affaires would arrive the next day to take his place. He added, that his recall did not mean a rupture, or interruption, or suspension of diplomatic relations between France and the Vatican, though that seems to have been the interpretation put upon it seven days later in a debate in the French Chamber.

After the recall of the French Ambassador, the Government soon took occasion to break completely with the Holy See. The cause of the final rupture, to their disgrace be it said, was the conduct of the two Bishops, Mgr. Geay, Bishop of Laval, and Mgr. Nordez, Bishop of Dijon. Almost from the very beginning of his episcopate, very serious charges were laid before the Holy See against Mgr. Geay. They were entirely of an ecclesiastical character, and had nothing whatever to do with the political or religious questions, then so warmly discussed in France. An inquiry was deemed necessary, and the result was that in January, 1900 (9) Mgr. Geay was advised to resign his episcopal charge. Had he done so, he could easily have saved the Holy See from the disagreeable necessity of instituting a formal Canonical trial, which was sure to lead to his deposition; while, on the other hand, he could safeguard his own good name, as few, if any, would have been aware of his forced retirement. Unfortunately, after having at first accepted the decision of the Holy Office he changed his mind, and made it a condition of his resignation that he should be provided with some other diocese in France, were it only the most unimportant. In view of the serious charges made against him, this condition could not be accepted, and for full four years the Holy See allowed the matter to rest, hoping that things might improve in Laval, or that in the end the Bishop might see his way to resign. But these hopes were doomed to disappointment. The charges multiplied, and in the Spring of 1904, they were of such a serious character that further delay was impossible, and in May (1904) (10) the Holy Office once more requested the Bishop to resign, adding, that if he did not do so within one month it would become necessary to proceed further. (11)

The Bishop communicated this letter to the French Government, which immediately demanded (12) that the Holy See should recall it, believing apparently that the Pope meant to depose the Bishop in case he should not voluntarily resign; and, of course, for the deposition of a Bishop, just as for his consecration, the agreement of both Pope and President was required. The Secretary of State replied (13) that the expression *progradi ad ulteriora* did not mean immediate deposition, but signified rather that in case he still clung to office, he should be summoned to Rome for a regular canonical trial. If he succeeded in establishing his innocence, then all would be well; if, unfortunately, his guilt was apparent, then the case would be more serious, but still care would be taken that the Concordat

(1) Document, XXIV.

(2) The Emperor of Austria is bound to Italy by alliance, and besides was visited in Vienna by the King of Italy. (3) His wife is a Princess of the House of Savoy. (4) Doc. XXVI. (5) 4th May, 1904. (6) 6th May: Doc. XXVII.

(7) Si malgré cela, le Nonce n'a pas quitté Paris, c'est uniquement à cause de motifs très graves d'ordre et de nature tout à fait spéciaux.

(8) 20th May, 1904.

(9) 21st January, 1900.

(10) Despatch of Card. Secretary, 17th May, 1904.

(11) "Ne omnia facias ut S. Congregatio ad progrediendum ad ulteriora compellatur."

(12) 3rd June, 1904.

(13) 10th June, 1904.

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