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PIUS THE ELEVENTH

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PIUS THE ELEVENTH

When the son of a Lombard silk weaver ascended the Chair of Peter the world was not astonished, accustomed as it had been for centuries to the surprises of ecclesiastical democracy.

Born May 31, 1857, within sight of the Alps and familiar from youth with the rounded "cols" and the green "vals" of this loveliest region of Italy, Achille Ratti grew up amid the charms and advantages of what is also the most historical region of Europe. Desio, his birthplace, is almost a suburb of ancient Monza, the city of the Iron Crown and the custodian of the oldest traditions of Lombard life and culture. Near by, at Legnano, took place the great battle (1176) in which the Guelph commoners of Milan broke the pride and the heart of Frederick Barbarossa and shattered the stiff feudalism that hung like a yoke on the necks of the rising "popolo." For that matter, there is scarcely a village of Lombardy whose name does not shine on some page of history. Readers of the "Promessi Sposi" will recall the delightful descriptions of Manzoni—the fertile meadows and pastures, the festooned and trellised vines, the fruit trees rich with sweetest gifts, the blossoming mulberrys, the uninterrupted crops, the immemorial but complex system of irrigation, the blue lakes and the bluer skies, the distant white line of glaciers, the dense population, the marvelous industry of the peasants and the weavers.

Three thousand years of history lie before us between Milan and the Alps. Etruscan and Celt, Roman and Lombard, Frank and Spaniard, German and Frenchman, have in turn been masters of this fair land, and in the Milanese dialect each powerful race has left some trace of its passage. Like Belgium, these level spaces have been the cockpit of Europe, while be-

tween times its own Viscontis and Sforzas imposed their stern rule on the proud burghers and thrifty peasants of this vast plain over which the flowing waters of the Alps pour forth daily the most inexhaustible sources of natural wealth.

At an early age this peculiarly active and strenuous boy entered the Seminary of Milan and came thus into daily contact with the rich and varied life of a city that yields to none, save Rome, for antiquity and splendor, for the civic virtues of its people, or for the magnificence and elevation of their municipal temper and life. Celtic roots and German words can yet be detected in the dialect of the citizens as they sip their beer or wine on the broad spaces of the Duomo piazza; Sant' Ambrogio, rises yet on the site where that great Roman magistrate originally built it (386), and where the next year he baptized the young Augustine of Hippo; all about the city are scattered relics and reminiscences of Lombard and Carolingian administration; the Cathedral laments yet the relics of the Three Magi which Frederick Barbarossa gave to Cologne after he had burned Milan to the ground (1162); Milan still preserves the drawings and manuscripts of the first great engineer of Europe, Leonardo da Vinci; after five centuries the Castle of Milan rises yet four-square in the heart of the city, an aged but true witness of virtue and vice, of sanctity and wickedness, of dynasties and races, of the sciences and the arts, of all the passions and emotions which could dilate the human heart in those eventful ages. What richer nourishment of the historical spirit, the literary tastes and accomplishments of the future scholar who was to raise Milan to a new level of greatness? The city abounds in picture galleries and museums. The Brera Gallery, an old Jesuit College, is one of the best in Europe. Milan's learned institutes of the sciences, arts, music, and history are famous. To its Scala Theatre music and song are deeply indebted. The palaces of its great families, the Borromeos, the Trivulzios, the Littas, open yet their broad portals; half the art of Italy is yet treasured in its churches, beginning with the glorious "Last Supper" of Leonardo da Vinci. Here Catholicism entrenched itself for the final conflict with the great Teutonic revolution, and in the person and works of Saint

Charles Borromeo (1538-84) opened the new ways along which seemed destined to return its golden age, the ecclesiastical seminary, the missionary college (*Collegio Elvético*), the diocesan communities (*Oblates*), the synod, the retreat, the frequent sermon, the religious instruction of children (catechism, Sunday schools). Here one can see the Great Hospital, with its nine courts, one of the largest in the world. Here above all, in the heart of the great city, rises the incomparable white bulk of the cathedral, with its six thousand statues, all culminating in the gilded figure of the Blessed Virgin, in some aspects the greatest church of Christendom.

In this Milan, itself a seminary of history, letters and the arts and sciences, Achille Ratti grew up, his impressionable youth roused ever to higher levels of thought and endeavor by the countless monuments of a rich Catholic life which his eye could not fail to admire and of which his faith held the key. Two years in the Lombard College at Rome enriched greatly his peculiar genius for historical study and research, and he returned to Milan in 1882. A brief period of teaching in the seminary, marked by sustained studies of ecclesiastical history and Hebrew, rounded out this first period of his life and prepared him in peaceful retirement for the peculiarly influential calling which Divine Providence had in store for him.

One of the most honorable offices to which an Italian scholar can aspire is a place in the learned body known as the Doctors of the Ambrosiana Library, founded at Milan some three centuries ago (1609), by Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, and committed by him to the perpetual custody of nine scholars whose sole occupation should be the administration of the books and manuscripts, research among their treasures, and publication of their researches. The great Cardinal also decreed that it should be a public library for the use of the citizens and of visiting scholars, the first of its kind in Europe, and strictly administered in that sense to the present day. Occasion offering, the young professor of ecclesiastical history and Hebrew in the Archiepiscopal Seminary was appointed (1888) one of the Doctors of the Ambrosiana, and entered upon his duties with the joy and zeal of one who had found his true calling. The saintly and enlightened archbishop who in the

early years of the seventeenth century, before the white man had founded Boston or Baltimore, endowed richly this unique institution, not only gave it a great number of books and valuable manuscripts, Greek, Latin, and Oriental, but created large galleries of sculpture and paintings, also a museum of coins, engravings, prints, and other rare objects. At his behest it became at once and remained an active democratic center of good studies, open to all Milan and to the learned men of Europe who sought principally the great collection of manuscripts, some fifteen thousand, which Cardinal Federigo had gathered from all parts of Europe and the Orient, and which ranks after the Vatican Library in the number and importance of its treasures. Its printed books number at present about five hundred thousand. Abbate Ratti was soon the right hand and the confidant of Antonio Ceriani, the Prefect of the Library, a learned Orientalist, and one of the foremost scholars in the delicate arts of reading and interpreting ancient manuscripts, particularly scriptural and liturgical texts of an early date. In this field Ceriani remains to this day a conjure-name for all trained critical workers in the slow and difficult restoration of the original text of the Scriptures. When this learned priest passed away in 1907, he had endowed his young assistant not only with a large share of his vast scholarship but also with his intellectual apparatus of acumen and cultivated industry, and with that rare sense of vision or savor which alone opens to the critical philologist or medievalist the world that lies behind the shadowy fragments of his classical or ecclesiastical page, stained or torn, faded or worm-eaten, ragged or incomplete.

It was in these surroundings, amid the opportunities of a great intellectual and art center, among like-minded men, in the heart of a community intensely Catholic and heir to a rich and varied culture no longer common, that the young priest was destined to prepare himself, however unwittingly, for the Chair of Peter. For twenty years he was the humble and devoted servant of all the scholars of Europe and America who had reason to seek his aid. Magliabecchi scarcely surpassed him in the extent of his literary good-will and fraternal service. During those years he devoted himself entirely to

the service of a studious public, the study and elucidation of the manuscripts committed to his care, and the better organization of the library, art galleries, and museum. The Ambrosiana possesses several valuable Old Irish manuscripts from the monastery of Bobbio, that nestles quasi-inaccessible in the Apennines between Piacenza and Genoa, and for centuries kept alive in Northern Italy the love of learning which characterized its sixth century Irish founder, Saint Columbanus. Abate Ratti cherished these rare survivals of ancient Irish culture and wrote with scholarly distinction about them, visited Bobbio itself with the hope of tracing the remnants of its library scattered during the French Revolution, and welcomed whatever scholar came to consult the Antiphony of Bangor, the Bobbio Missal, or any other of the Old Irish manuscripts which Cardinal Federigo secured when the decay of Bobbio permitted these treasures to be carried off to Turin, Florence or Rome. In 1891 he visited Vienna, and in 1893 Paris, on both occasions as attaché of a cardinalitial embassy. He was the guest of Oxford on the occasion of the Roger Bacon celebration and was received with much distinction. At one time he thought of visiting the United States, but the death of a near relative removed all motive.

However absorbed in historical, literary, artistic, or critical studies, he never lost touch with the religious life of Milan. He was a friend and confidant of the chimney-sweeps, and prepared them regularly for their First Communion. To the Ladies of the Cenacle, the Children of Mary, and other religious associations, he gave many years of service, counsel and spiritual direction. He was always much in demand as a popular preacher of the "Month of Mary," and for many years was the helpful director of an association of Catholic female teachers. He was ever devoted to the ecclesiastical authority and the clergy of Milan, whose pride in him grew from year to year, as various high diocesan offices were confided to him.

In all the works of the famous "Azione Cattolica" of Milan Cardinal Ferrari found in him a wise counsellor and a zealous agent.

Had the placid current of his life been allowed to run its course, he would probably have followed in the footsteps of

his master Ceriani, and added one more star to that galaxy of ecclesiastical savants of whom Italy is rightly proud, the Muratoris, the Maffeis, the Zaccarias, the de Rossis, and others to whom erudition, ecclesiastical and secular, is very deeply indebted. Gradually he was finding his life-work in the researches that led to a new edition of the famous "Acta" of the Church of Milan, going back from Saint Charles to the earliest appearance of the Christian faith. The Great War intervened, and led him first to the definite custody (1914) of the Vatican Library, and then to distant Poland, where he represented the Holy See at the birth of the new constitution, took a sympathetic and helpful part in all the vicissitudes of the new Polish State (1918-21), and returned to Italy in the latter year to be made Cardinal of Holy Roman Church and Archbishop of Milan, destined no longer to deal with dumb medieval parchments, but with those human documents that furnish all content to history. On February sixth of this year he was elected Pope, took the name of Pius, and became Vicar of Christ on earth, and the two hundred and sixtieth successor of Saint Peter, declaring at the same time that the highest aim of his pontificate was universal pacification.

Universal Pacification! When all is said, what greater force exists in distracted Europe than the moral authority of the papacy? Arms and diplomacy, ambitions and suspicions and old, slow-burning hatreds, have brought civilization to the edge of the abyss; only a restoration of mutual respect and confidence can quiet the widespread apprehensions that the Great War has left behind it. In an unparalleled manner the papacy is raised today immeasurably above the aims and objects of secular life. It alone views the world situation as a whole, with cordial sympathy for all nations and races, and a just appreciation of the deep causes of the world's discontent and restlessness. The unity of Catholicism and the harmony of its vast activities are not lost upon thoughtful observers the world over, and solicit from all honest minds the query of their source and their guarantee. Surrounded by his bishops and the Catholic peoples of the world, Pius the Eleventh is an object-lesson to the chancelleries of Europe, an evidence of the mutual trust and esteem which only the Gospel

of Jesus Christ can establish and secure among men. Bad philosophies and worse men have brought human society into an almost hopeless impasse, but *sanabiles fecit nationes*, the conditions of the world are never hopeless while Christ lives and reigns in the hearts of His disciples. It is not impossible, of course, that we have entered the crepuscular hour of civilization, but it is also possible that the growing renewal of religious temper and of faith heralds the dawn of a new social life on the part of many nations and races which have long lived on low unhealthy levels, fed on a coarse naturalism, without hope and without vision, lost in a wretched mire of doubt and pessimism. In Pius the Eleventh this sad-eyed world will find a great "Paciere," a peace-maker endowed with all the qualities of that holy office, rich in those gifts of mind and heart which history, art, and letters quicken immeasurably, and of all men the most devoted by his exalted office to the restoration of the kingdom of Christ on earth and the welfare of mankind.

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