

NAPOLEON AND THE POPE.

BY F. W. FITZPATRICK.

LIBERAL, agnostic, almost atheist as Napoleon showed himself, some of his acts proved most conclusively that religion, at least in some of its outer forms, had a strong hold upon him. In that, as in so many other things, he was indeed original and paradoxical. Perhaps his coronation by the Pope at Paris is the best illustration of this. To me, and I believe most people have been similarly impressed in reading that phase of history, it always seemed as if the great Emperor's insistence upon this coronation ceremony was purely to secure its political and spectacular effects. None of the Bourbons had ever been so crowned. The ceremony would be as incense to his vanity and would impress all Christendom. It came to me in the nature of a discovery, a very great surprise that he really attached other importance to that ceremony. I have lately been rummaging among some old papers, copies of state records of France, personal memoirs of Talleyrand, letters of Consalvi, the Papal Secretary of State, and find indubitable evidence that Napoleon believed at heart that the benediction of the Pope and the other forms of ceremony actually rendered his person sacred, an hallucination that he even indulged in at Elba and St. Helena. Without hope of impressing anybody by the statement, for it was made to his own secretary, he expressed great relief when the consecration was over and felt that now would he surely be invincible, for he was truly "an anointed of the Lord."

Spite of these remains of "religious fervor" and the significance he attached to the religious part of the ceremony, his supreme egotism and arrogance did not permit him, however, to treat the Pope's person with even a decent degree of reverence or respect. Pius VII had allowed himself to be persuaded by Cardinal Fesch—that uncle of Napoleon's who had given up the priesthood to become a war department officer and later resumed the frock and

became a cardinal and the Emperor's tool at Rome—that spite of his own convictions, and the opinions of the majority of the Sacred College, his voyage to Paris and part in the coronation ceremonies would be a sound political move and serve to restore peace in those troublous times. But Napoleon's requests that he lend himself to that function were so peremptory, so unfilial that even at the last moment the Pope almost refused to undertake the journey. Consalvi says that these letters were "more in the nature of an imperial order issued to the monarch's chaplain, than a humble prayer addressed by the son of the Church, begging a favor from the Holy Father." None of these letters at all accord with the suggestion made by the Papal Secretary of State that "if it was necessary that the Holy Father should leave Rome to go to Paris, it was absolutely indispensable that the letter of invitation, written by the Emperor, should not merely state that being desirous of receiving his crown at the Holy Father's hands and finding it impossible to go to Rome for the ceremony, His Majesty begged His Holiness to come to Paris for that purpose. It was necessary to add to this reason a religious motive and that motive ought to be placed as of prime importance in the letter and couched in such terms as to appear at least as important a reason as the other. It is essential to find the means of coloring this proposed voyage so as to make it appear good in the eyes of the public and of the other courts." The final summons, nevertheless, merely stated that it was impossible for the Emperor to go to Rome, therefore he "desired" the Pope to proceed at once to Paris.

Naturally, Rome insisted, however, that the form of the ceremony should be the same as that the Church had always used on such occasions, that the Pope should receive proper homage and take precedence in all things, that the Church should receive certain benefices and recognition, etc., etc., to all of which Napoleon acquiesced but not one of which did he finally accord.

Certain traits of smallness about the great Emperor are really most incomprehensible, and he did such things, not carelessly or through ignorance as to what ought to be, but with masterly malice, a studied manner that one would hardly believe possible to a man capable of such flights of fancy, such grand aspirations and who could accomplish great deeds. For instance, instead of coming to the border of his state to meet the Pope and to there render him the homage due his high office and his venerable personality, he arranged the meeting at St. Herem, near Fontainebleau. Every move and effect had been planned. The Emperor was booted and

spurred, in hunting costume, surrounded by huntsmen and dogs, and met the Pontifical cortège as if by accident. Though it was raining and the road was muddy Napoleon permitted the Pope to alight from his carriage and make several steps toward him before he even offered to advance, and then instead of a low obeisance, he merely clasped the pontiff's hand and embraced him as was the custom among relatives and close friends. They drove back together in the Imperial carriage but even the getting into that carriage had been carefully planned. It was of vital importance as to which should get in first. Courtesy was one thing, but precedence, in Napoleon's eyes created something that would thereafter be followed with all monarchs, temporal and spiritual. The driver cleverly manipulated what appeared to be restive horses so that he backed the carriage between these two, and it of course so happened that the Emperor was on the right and the Pope on the left. So were they seated and in that relation did things remain ever after!

The Pontiff from that very first moment realized fully what he surmised to be the case before leaving Rome, but Pius VII was a meek, holy and tactful man and accepted the situation uncomplainingly, still hoping, in his own words, that it would eventually work out to the greater glory of God and the peace among men.

He had so little confidence in the assurance made him by the representatives of France, that before leaving Rome he had even signed his abdication to take effect should the Emperor, for ulterior purposes, seize his person and seek by that means to dictate the policy of Rome. Telling of this act to one of the officers of the Imperial Court he made the impressive statement, "Should the Emperor attempt to control Rome and seize the Shepherd of the flock, Christ's vicar on earth, he would find in his hands only a humble monk, named Barnaby Chiaramonti!"

In conversation, in the every act of their relations, Napoleon showed himself childishly jealous of the Pope. The latter, of course, was immensely popular with the multitude. When he passed through the streets, they knelt and shouted his name and clamored for a benediction. So the Emperor finally arranged that whenever any travel was to be undertaken it should be at night, or in closed carriages that as little was seen of the Pope as possible. It had been arranged that he should say a grand Pontifical mass at Notre Dame on Christmas Day, but that, too, was changed, so that he but officiated in a minor chapel near the palace, and later a stop was made in a journey at Macon rather than at Lyons on Easter, for fear that

the very devout people of the latter city might give him a greater ovation than would be accorded the Emperor.

Only upon one point was the aged Pontiff absolutely set. Napoleon and Josephine had never been married canonically. Theirs was merely a civil marriage. The Pope may have known this but ignored it until Josephine, the day before the coronation, confessed to him and implored him to see to it that they were married properly by the Holy Church. Napoleon stormed, for even then was he lending an attentive ear to his brothers and the other enemies of Josephine, and it is quite certain that he had some idea that sooner or later it would be wise, or pleasant, or necessary to sever the connection. His actions and speech were so vehement even that his own people placed themselves between him and the Pope, fearing he would do the latter bodily injury! But on that one point Pius VII was adamant and, spite of the general impression to the contrary Napoleon and Josephine *were* married the night preceding the coronation, secretly, by Cardinal Fesch, in the chapel of the Tuileries, with Talleyrand and Berthier as witnesses.

Napoleon's retaliation was as spectacular as it was an unprecedented affront. It had been arranged that, as in all similar ceremonies, the Pope should place the crown upon the Emperor's head as the latter knelt before the Grand Altar. This is taken to represent the supremacy of the Church, even in things terrestrial. At the last moment Napoleon stood, not knelt, and suddenly taking the crown from out of the hands of the Pontiff's, turned his back to the latter and to the Altar, faced the multitude, and placed the crown upon his head *himself*!