

THE ENGLISHMAN WHO BECAME A POPE

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THE recent agreement entered into between Premier Mussolini and the Vatican, resulting in the restoration—along much restricted lines—of the temporal power of the Pope, opens up a number of unusual prospects for the future of the papacy.

For instance, there is the possibility of the election, for the first time since the Reformation, of a non-Italian Pope. While the relations of Italy and the Vatican were still unsettled, the choice of a foreign Pope would have been extremely hazardous. The Italian government, if brought into conflict with an alien Pontiff, might have used his nationality as an excuse for his expulsion from Italy and possibly for abolishing the papacy or subjecting it to the secular power. But since the Vatican has secured the rights of a sovereign nation, under treaty guaranties, these difficulties disappear, and the question already is being asked, will the next Pope be an American?

Although in pre-Reformation days there were many non-Italian Popes, it is curious that Ireland, for centuries the chief bulwark of Catholicism in northern Europe and famed as "the Isle of Saints," whence missionaries went out to convert European pagans, has never given a Pope to the Church, while Anglo-Saxon England can claim at least one Roman Pontiff. Stranger still, it has been charged—rightly or wrongly—that this English Pope was the cause of Ireland's long political subjection to England, from which she has only in our own day to a large extent freed herself.

The story of the English Pope is one of the most singular and romantic in the checkered history of the papacy. Being so little known to-day, it is worth recalling at this time. In order to follow its course more realistically, let us transport ourselves in spirit back to the year 1100 A. D.

In that year, the Norman kings had already held England for a generation; a Westminster Abbey occupied the site of the present reconstructed building, the fortress-church of Mont-Saint-Michel stood guard before the French coast, much the same in appearance as it has been described by Henry Adams in our time, and the glory of the cathedral of Chartres was already born. In Venice, St. Mark's looked out over the Adriatic, but in Rome St. Peter's was far different from the magnificent Renaissance basilica known to our modern tourists.

About twenty miles northwest of London lay the ancient town of St. Albans, where visitors nowadays seek out in St. Michael's church the tomb of the great Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, Viscount St. Albans, one-time Lord Chancellor of England, essayist and philosopher.

St. Albans was built near the site of the Roman city of Verulamium, bricks and stones from the ruins of which were used in the construction of early Christian churches, in the walls of which they are still visible. The beginnings of St. Albans itself far antedated the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. Here, according to tradition, the saint from which the present town takes its name was martyred in 303 A. D., a Christian church being built on the spot. Centuries rolled by, and in 793 Offa, the Saxon king of Mercia, who believed that he had discovered the relics of the saint, caused to be erected to "the blessed martyr's" memory a great monastery which in time became one of the wealthiest and most renowned in all England.

Before the end of the tenth century, the abbot of St. Albans began the construction of a magnificent abbey church. Wars delayed its erection, which was not pushed ahead until after the Norman conquest. It finally was consecrated in 1115, although completed long before. The great abbey church of St. Albans, much changed and restored, but with some of its original architecture remaining, still stands above the little river Ver, overlooking the pleasant English countryside. Here, in this peaceful land, much bloody fighting took place in the Wars of the Roses.

Hertfordshire, the county of which St. Albans is a municipal borough and market town, offers a typical English landscape of wooded hills and fertile valleys, with the chalk-downs of the Chilton Hills lying low on the northern horizon. Storied streams, such as

the Lea and the Colne, tributaries of the Thames, and the Ivel and the New wander through the rolling terrain. Except for the presence of railways, the general aspect of Hertfordshire has not changed much between 1100 A. D. and the twentieth century. Such was the setting of St. Albans in 1115 A. D., when the glorious abbey church was dedicated.

One day in the summer of that year, a barefoot Saxon boy of fourteen or fifteen years might have been observed trudging along the dusty highway leading to the monastery gates. The little fellow's home was at Abbot's Langley, a feudal fief of the monastery of St. Albans a short distance away. His name was Nicholas Breakspeare.

It is rather singular that the names of the two Englishmen who have attained positions of universal sovereignty in Christendom, the one as Supreme Poet of the people and the other as Supreme Pontiff of the still undivided church, should have been so curiously alike. The name Breakspeare, like Shakespeare, has alternative spellings; e.g., Brekespear and Braksperere. Both men were of humble origin, and authentic biographical information about them is almost equally scanty.

The boy Nicholas' father, Robert Breakspeare, while of lowly station, seems to have come of worthy stock. According to William of Newburgh, a contemporary Augustinian canon and chronicler, the elder Breakspeare was of "slender means." Nothing is known of the mother except that she survived for many years; for after Nicholas became Pope we hear of her appealing to him for financial aid.

But to return to the boy, whom we left making his way along the English highway on that summer day in 1115. At last he reached the great outer gate of the monastery, at which he knocked timidly. In due time it was opened by a friar. The latter, recognizing the lad, admitted him and led him to the abbot, of whom he asked permission to join the brethren of the monastery. His own father, it appears, tiring perhaps of the wretched existence of an Anglo-Saxon tenant farmer, had some time before entered the monastery as a lay brother. The Norman nobility ruled the land with an iron hand, so that there was little opportunity for a son of the Anglo-Saxon peasantry to aspire to a place in the sun.

The father abbot heard the boy's story with kindly interest, and, according to the account that has come down from Matthew Paris, replied, "Have patience, my son, and stay at school yet a while till you are better fitted for the position you desire." Apparently he had been learning his letters, in what little free time he had, at the monastery school. This, in an age of widespread illiteracy, indicates unusual ambition on the part of the boy.

But it appears that Nicholas hung about the monastery until his father, shamed doubtless by his presence, ordered him away. And so, seeing nothing before him but a life as a poor farm laborer, a beggar, or a vagabond, the boy one night gathered his few belongings, wrapped them, we may suppose, in an old handkerchief, and started out along the high road to London. But in London, too, all the avenues to advancement were controlled by the ruling Normans; so Nicholas decided to shake the dust of England from his feet and try his fortunes abroad.

Thus began one of the strangest careers in the Middle Ages. Forty years later the Norman King of England, Henry II, was to meet in Italy this former humble subject of the English Crown and to greet him as his spiritual father and fellow-sovereign. For the poor Saxon boy who had trudged along the road to St. Albans and thence to London in those far-away days was now Pope Adrian IV, Sovereign Pontiff of the Universal Church and King of the Papal States.

How had Nicholas Breakspeare come to be where he was? Unfortunately, the records of his rise in the Church are all too scanty and sometimes even contradictory. Our chief authorities are Cardinal Boso and John of Salisbury, two English contemporaries and friends of Pope Adrian. Boso was appointed chamberlain to the Pope and was in especially intimate relations with him. Tradition has it that he was the Pope's nephew, but this cannot be confirmed.

According to Boso, Breakspeare upon leaving England made his way first to Arles, in France, where he continued his studies. During a vacation he went on a visit to the monastery of St. Rufus, near Avignon, about fifty miles south of Lyons, where he found the surroundings so congenial that he joined the brethren of the Cistercian Order there and was made a canon. In 1137 he became abbot.

As abbot of St. Rufus, important business for the monastery took him to Rome. He must have been of a pleasing personality and easily recognized ability; for the reigning Pope, Eugenius III, kept him in Rome and in 1146 created him Cardinal and Bishop of Albano, one of the suffragan sees of Rome.

William of Newburgh is authority for the statement that the strictness of Breakspeare's rule as abbot of St. Rufus had resulted in defamatory charges being preferred against him to the Pope by the canons of the abbey, and that it was to exonerate himself that he went to Rome. This statement, however, is not supported by Boso, nor does it harmonize with Nicholas' own words to John of Salisbury after he had become Pope:

"The office of Pope, he assured me, was a thorny one, beset on all sides with sharp pricks. He wished, indeed, that he had never left England, his native land, or at least had lived his life quietly in the cloister of St. Rufus rather than have entered on such difficult paths, but he dared not refuse, since it was the Lord's bidding."

Cardinal Breakspeare rose rapidly to prominence in the councils of the Church. In 1152, we find him entrusted with a mission to Scandinavia as Papal Legate. In Norway he reorganized the Church, establishing the archiepiscopal see at Trondhjem, where stood the shrine of St. Olaf, the patron saint of Norway. He is credited also with having reformed the civil institutions of the country. According to Snorro, Cardinal Breakspeare earned greater popular honor and deference in Norway than any other foreigner who had ever visited the country. He also did important work in Sweden, uniting that country in closer bonds with the Papacy.

On Breakspeare's return to Rome from his successful mission in the North, he was acclaimed with great applause. The reigning Pope, Anastasius IV, dying soon thereafter, Breakspeare on the very next day was unanimously elected to the vacant throne. The date was December 3, 1154. He took the name Adrian IV.

Adrian's reign of not quite five years was destined to be one of the most turbulent in the history of the Papacy. We may well believe that at times he wished that he had never set foot in Rome. The Pope at this time was a full-fledged temporal sovereign, ruling large sections of Italy. The political conditions in that country, when he assumed the tiara, were bordering on anarchy. The local barons were engaged in warfare among themselves as well as with

the Pope, and travel on the highways was at the mercy of their depredations. Rome itself was in revolt under the leadership of the brilliant Arnold of Brescia. For a time, the Pope had to flee from Rome. Finally, he placed the city under interdict. This had the desired effect. Arnold escaped into the country but later fell into the hands of the government, and, in accordance with the harsh customs of those days, was burned at the stake.

Hardly had these difficulties been surmounted when Adrian found himself at odds with the Emperor, the renowned Frederick Barbarossa, who was coming to Italy for his coronation as head of the Holy Roman Empire. Adrian went out to meet him at Sutri, some thirty miles north of Rome. On June 9, 1155, the Pope and the Emperor met. The Pope, on horseback, expected the Emperor to hold his stirrup while he dismounted, but the Emperor refused the act of homage. Adrian quietly dismounted and, in a conference with Frederick, insisted that before he could have further dealings with him, the required homage must be performed. The Emperor finally yielding the point, another meeting was arranged two days later. Frederick on foot came to meet the Pope on horseback, and meekly held his stirrup. Then the Pope agreed to crown him as Emperor, the coronation taking place shortly afterwards in St. Peter's.

While the coronation services were going on, Frederick's troops encamped in the city were attacked by the Roman republican faction. After a long day of fighting, the latter were defeated, with losses of 1,000 killed or drowned in the Tiber and 200 prisoners. The Romans, however, managed to hold the city; so the Emperor decided to withdraw. Bidding farewell to the Pope at Tivoli, he turned northward, burning Spoleto on his way.

Adrian's next troubles were with the Norman king of Sicily, William I, who had ascended the throne in February of the year in which Adrian became Pope. Open warfare followed Adrian's refusal to recognize William's kingship. William, at the head of his troops, ravaged the Italian country, whereupon Adrian excommunicated him. The Pope himself took the field with his forces. It was during this troubled period that John of Salisbury visited him at Beneventum in the summer of 1156 and spent three months with his fellow-countryman.

King William seems to have got the better of the struggle; in

June, 1156, the Pope had to agree to peace. He confirmed the king in the possession of large territories, while the king on his part took the oath of allegiance to the Pope, with the promise of an annual tribute and the defense of the papal lands.

Adrian then made peace with the turbulent Roman populace, and early in 1157 returned to the Imperial City. But his recognition of William's pretensions greatly angered the Emperor Frederick, with whom the Pope soon found himself in open hostilities. Adrian formed a league with the Lombards against the Emperor and once more entered into the midst of a campaign. He was about to issue an edict of excommunication against the Emperor—always a convenient weapon against an enemy whom a mediaeval Pope could not thrash in a stand-up fight—when his troubles were ended by his own sudden death, of quinsy, at Anagni, on September 1, 1159.

His reign had been filled with bitterness and anxiety, foes encompassing him on all sides. Even his cardinals divided themselves into two factions on great questions of policy. As Adrian himself expressed it, "the Lord had kept him continually between the hammer and the anvil," and it was said that "the solitariness of his supreme position and unique office was increased and made more dreary by the isolation which he, as an Englishman, felt among Italians." The visit of his personal friend, John of Salisbury, doubtless cheered him much. Another of the pleasant incidents of his career was a visit from Henry II, king of his native England.

Although a number of modern authorities have cast doubt upon the affair of the donation of Ireland by Adrian, the genuineness of it appears to be established beyond dispute. It is conceded by the official *Catholic Encyclopaedia*. The deal seems to have been engineered by John of Salisbury, apparently on his own initiative, during his lengthy stay with the Pope in 1156. The transaction would have been advantageous to the Papacy by making the king of England an acknowledged vassal of the Pope; for on the church in England the royal hand lay heavy.

Most of the contention has centered round the authenticity of the papal bull, "Laudabiliter," but explicit confirmation of the incident is found in the statement of John of Salisbury in a work entitled *Metalogicus*, in which, speaking of Adrian IV, he says:

"At my solicitation he gave and granted Hibernia to Henry II, the illustrious King of England, to hold by hereditary right as his

letter to this day testifies. For all islands of ancient right, according to the Donation of Constantine, are said to belong to the Roman Church, which he founded. He sent also by me a ring of gold, with the best of emeralds set therein, wherewith the investiture might be made for his governorship of Ireland, and that same ring was ordered to be and is still in the public treasury of the King."

As this work was composed in 1159 or 1160, and the earliest existing manuscript of it dates from the period 1175-1200, the genuineness of this testimony, supported as it is by other evidence, seems practically iron-clad. Moreover, the donation was officially confirmed by Adrian's successor, Alexander III, about the year 1159, and again by letters dated September 20, 1172, although the charge of forgery has been raised in connection with these letters. At any rate, the transaction was recognized by the official acts of many succeeding Popes.

Because of the disturbed political conditions at home, Henry II did not undertake to extend his authority into Ireland until 1171, long after the death of Adrian. It is argued by some historians that Henry II never actually accepted the Pope's offer, as he did not wish to acknowledge the overlordship of the papacy, and that when he finally did invade Ireland it was for the purpose of establishing a claim by blunt "right of conquest."

The legal justification for the donation of Ireland was based on the theory of the Pope's sovereignty of all islands: that Ireland had fallen into a state of disorder, and that the king of England would, as the vassal of the Pope, restore peace, order, and security.

For the next four hundred years, the kings of England styled themselves Lords of Ireland; then, in the Reformation period, Ireland was brought directly under the British Crown. The Irish themselves acknowledged the legality of Adrian's donation, as late as 1467, when the Irish Parliament in one of its acts decreed that

"as our Holy Father Adrian, Pope of Rome, was possessed of all sovereignty of Ireland in his demesne as of fee in the right of his Church of Rome, and with the intent that vice should be subdued had alienated said land to the King of England . . . by which grant the said subjects of Ireland owe their allegiance to the King of England as their sovereign lord . . . all archbishops and bishops shall excommunicate all disobedient Irish subjects, and if they neglect to do so shall forfeit 100 pounds."

Strangely enough, it does not appear that the papacy ever formally rescinded Adrian's donation of Ireland, even after England severed relations with Rome. But that, perhaps, is no more strange than that the kings and queens of England have continued to bear the title, "Defender of the Faith," conferred by the Pope upon Henry VIII, for that royal theologian's zealous literary assaults on Protestantism.