

THE NEXT PAPAL CONCLAVE.¹

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ALL THIS TALK now going on in regard to the next Papal Conclave has something very strange about it, but nothing new. Pius IX. also had the same curious experience of hearing a great deal said about his approaching death and his successor, and the same thing has happened to every pope who has had a long life. Now this talk may be no reflexion upon the living pope, but surely it is not pleasant to think that one is living too long. In the election of a cardinal for the papacy his age is always considered, and he is chosen as old as possible in the hope that another Conclave may occur after a brief interval. When the election of Leo XIII. was under consideration one of the secondary arguments of the promoters of the candidacy of Pecci was precisely that of his advanced age. Cardinal Bartolini, the great supporter of Pecci, persuaded the four Spanish cardinals to oppose the candidacy of Franchi and to give their votes to Pecci on the grounds that Franchi was "*tropo giovine*," too young, and that there would be time enough for him to reach the papacy. A pope then who lives too long is, especially for the Sacred College, a great disappointment. Leo XIII. was not only advanced in age but had an apparently weak constitution, and it seemed to everybody that his powerful mind could not long remain in so weak and thin a body. Nevertheless, Leo has pronounced the holy benediction over the great majority of the cardinals who elected him. What a disappointment he has been to the Sacred College! It is this disappointment and a long restrained impatience that are signified by the numerous literary productions now appearing in regard to the next Conclave.

All these productions concerning the next Conclave may be di-

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vided into two classes. One class treats the question in a general way, considering the qualities to be desired in the new pope, and similar topics. Sometimes writings of this class consider the present condition of Catholicism and the position of the papacy, and subject them to criticism. Each writer believes that the change of pope may result in transforming Catholicism in accordance with his own pet ideal of religion. Productions of the second class, however, try to reveal the preparatory work going on behind the scenes at the Vatican. They frequently appear in reviews, and after mentioning various cardinals proceed to discuss the question as to which one of them stands the best chance of securing the chair of St. Peter. They set before the reader a series of personalities which, far from commanding his respect for the cardinals, represent them as engaged in intrigue and more or less vulgar gossip. Banghi, Maus, and Pappalettere pointed out Pecci some years before his election as the successor of Pius IX. But in their calculations they were assisted by the merits of Pecci himself. They were assisted also by all the follies and miseries which are summed up in the badly concealed antagonism between Pecci and Cardinal Antonelli, secretary of state of Pius IX., and by the strong antipathy of Pius IX. towards Pecci, and by the friendship between Pecci and Bartolini who in the Conclave was his strong supporter. They were strengthened too by the various outbursts of discontent and protest against the politics of the Vatican in the last years of Pius IX. And yet Pecci has retained the regard and respect of those who if they were not scornful toward the papacy were certainly not enthusiastic for it, and has thus shown a character to which gossip and petty intrigue must be repugnant. Publications then which pretend to reveal the plots and schemes of the Vatican to designate a new pope while the present one is still living cannot be free from the odious character of idle gossips. When it is remembered that after all the Sacred College is composed of old men, and all that is necessary to precipitate a whole structure of ingenious speculations is the death of one of them, it is perceived how little is the importance which should be attached to this kind of talk, an importance indeed ephemeral and fictitious.

Much greater, however, is the interest aroused by those studies which make the discussion of the next Conclave an occasion for instituting an examination into the conditions of Catholicism, and which point out in their ideal of the new pope the gaps and defects which Catholicism must repair. To this kind of literary production concerning the Conclave belongs the volume which was recently

published by Le Sar Péladan, *Le prochain conclave*, and which has the pretentious and somewhat arrogant sub-title "Istruzioni ai cardinali." This sub-title, however, reflects the weakness of the whole book which is a series of severe reflexions, a revelation of the seeds of death, as Péladan himself expresses it, which are hidden in the palace of the Roman Pontiff. This criticism of the conditions of Catholicism the author completes with what in his mind constitutes the ideal of the Catholic religion, namely, humanisation, which he believes may be realised by the new pope. Péladan's book is lacking in scientific and historical precision. We read, for instance, that in the early times of Catholicism the pope was elected by Roman bishops alone. Nothing could be more erroneous. The first authentic document concerning the election of a pope is the *Epistola* written by Cornelius after being deposed by the Anti-Pope Novarius and who had again assumed the chair of St. Peter to which he is said to have been elected by sixteen bishops present at Rome. Now Péladan mistakes this special fact for a general proceeding in the election of all the popes. On the contrary, as in the early times of Christianity, and until this system was prohibited by the Council of Antioch (341 A. D.), many bishops and a few popes were nominated by their predecessors, so after the time of Constantine there concurred in the election of the pope the suffrage of the people, the presence of almost all the clergy, the vote of the assembly of the oldest priests and a concourse of men of high consideration. Of such errors in regard to fact there are in Péladan's book not a few. Italians, according to Péladan, number twenty-five million, not thirty-one million.

But in spite of all this it must be recognised that the work of Le Sar Péladan has a value and merits our consideration. Péladan is a romancer, a mystic, and a decadent besides, and is a believer in the Christian Catholic religion. It may be understood, therefore, that in his mind is established the custom of taking abstractions for reality, of taking ideas as real facts and construing them as such in order to reach a new hypothesis and new abstractions, without suspecting in the least that he must thus arrive at a point far removed from reality. From the top of an edifice of abstractions the reality of life and its institutions appears sordid and mean. And Péladan who places himself in an elevated position and is inspired by an ideal undoubtedly far removed from reality, is able to see contemporaneous Catholicism in a way not possible to ordinary individuals who think that what they observe from day to day is natural and just. The criticisms of Péladan show sometimes real gaps

and weaknesses, but they show also the religious needs of a mind of large scientific culture, that is, of an intellectual development superior to what has heretofore satisfied Catholicism. Péladan is not the only cleric who predicts for the next pope and for the Catholic Church better times than those in which the author writes. "Well or ill, Péladan has spoken some necessary words, words which have been spoken by no one else. They will irritate many minds enthusiastic over the constituted religious order. Other minds more subtle will be chilled by them."

Catholicism must be humanised. That is the sentiment which inspires Péladan's whole work. Péladan never explains comprehensively what he means by the humanisation of Catholicism. When he notes that the people of the cities are withdrawing from the Church, that persons of high culture are turning towards new religions, and that we are in the presence of the masses who are deserting, and of an *élite* who are reflecting, Péladan concludes that all that is necessary to bring back the masses and to hold the *élite* is to create some more saints and to recognise the demands of humanity. It is necessary, he thinks, to diffuse knowledge high and low in order to re-establish on the one hand the equality so dear to the masses, and on the other to construct a hierarchy. How Péladan would explain all this, it would be difficult to say. Whoever is pope, and whatever may be the character of the Sacred College, it would be difficult to create more saints in an historical epoch when no more are desired, and at the same time to humanise and idealise religion for persons of culture. One cannot understand, indeed, how it would be possible to develop Catholicism for persons of culture on the one hand, and for the masses on the other. What effect would the "saints" created by Catholicism for the masses have upon the rest of the population, that is, upon the *élite*?

Nor does Péladan explain how Catholicism is to create these saints. When has Catholicism ever created in a conscious and pre-determined manner any of the saints whom believers now adore? If Catholicism had practised such artifice, undoubtedly it would not have developed as it did seventeen or eighteen centuries ago, nor would it have that moral position which it now occupies. And yet there remains the fact established by a believer like Péladan that the population of the city is withdrawing from the Church, and cultured people are losing faith in Catholic dogmas which are found to bear a strong resemblance to those of other religions old and new. But his remedy for the decline of Catholicism set forth in a manner confused and contradictory has all the appearance of

those programs of social reform *ab imis fundamentis*, partly good but more frequently wholly impracticable and emanating from a mind unbalanced and deprived of every sense of reality, which sees everything in a form imaginary and ideal. The social program of Plato is worth just as much as that of Karl Marx. The ideal of Leo X. of the power of the Catholic religion has just as much influence on social evolution as that of Gregory VII., who proclaimed that "The Church of God ought to be independent of every temporal power. . . . The Church ought to be free; the Pope should be allowed to absolve the priests from temporal bonds. The world is lightened by two luminaries, the sun the greater, and the moon the lesser. The authority of the Apostles resembles the sun. . . . Whatever may be the resistance encountered by him who represents Christ on earth, he ought to struggle, to stand firm, to suffer as Christ suffered. Neither persecution nor violence should disturb him in the performance of his duty." A splendid program, truly; almost superhuman! But did Gregory VII. ever realise the ideal which he proclaimed as the duty of him who represents Christ on earth, or did any other pope? On the contrary, not only in the early times of Catholicism when the popes were the heirs of the haughty imperial spirit of conquering Rome, and in the Middle Ages when the military spirit was everywhere dominant, but even at the end of our century when the Sacred College united to elect a successor to Pius IX., they have been unanimous in adhering to all the demands and protests uttered by the deceased Pontiff against the occupation of the States of the Church. These ideal programs for transforming Catholicism are in fact metaphysical abstractions. Religious evolution is carried on, more even than social evolution, by the action of unconscious forces, caring nothing for those who would instil a new vitality and secure a great prosperity to the institution itself.

Paul V. completed the colossal temple in Rome dedicated to St. Peter, but upon the façade he placed enormous letters to inform the world that he belonged to the Borghese family, which is Roman. Cardinals Mertel and Caterini, in the conclave which elected Leo XIII., gave their votes to the effect that the conclave should be held in Rome because, being old, they did not wish to weary themselves by a journey. Leo XIII., in order to enjoy the sympathy of the French government, accepted as plenipotentiary to the Roman court, a man who had been excommunicated, the anti-Christian hero of *les Bouches du Rhône*, Pombelle le *crocheteur*, as he is called by the French Catholics, who are always rebelling

against the Vatican and who are now protesting in a solemn manner in the elections at Brest. These little facts, so diverse, have at bottom a nature essentially identical. They show that the Pope and the members of the Sacred College cannot banish entirely the little personal vanities and weaknesses which are found in every breast. Catholicism in the long series of centuries of its life, in its numerous successions of popes and Sacred Colleges, has been transformed by increasing more and more the power and personality of the curia and of the one who presides over it. The pope, who at first was a simple bishop, and exercised his authority, local and diocesan, just as any other bishop, and had only a little pre-eminence on account of being the successor of St. Peter, was, by and by, proclaimed the infallible representative of Christ. The whole evolution of Catholicism is in a sense directly opposed to humanising itself and to stripping itself of every personal feature, which Catholics, like Péladan, are proclaiming as the ideal of religion, an ideal never suited to new times, always neglected by the masses, and an object of criticism for the more highly cultivated. But this is to ask of the Catholic religion what it will never be able to accomplish.

The Catholic religion is impersonated in a certain number of individuals, nor can these individuals escape from the tendencies common to all men. It is a question of a new paganism, as Emile Gebhart expresses it. As exclusiveness and the spirit of supremacy are characteristics which appear in all men, so they appear in Catholicism. When Leo XIII. spoke to the dissenting Catholics of England in order to reclaim them, he could see nothing but error in their religion, and they were naturally offended and indignant. How much greater would be the spirit of supremacy in the head of the Catholic Church if he should attempt to call to his faith the followers of Buddha and Mahomet. And that would happen to-morrow if a pope like Vannutelli, or Jacobini, or Svampa should be elected.

A conclave cannot change modern Catholicism without changing the human nature of the clergy. I cannot conceive the humanisation and the universality of Catholicism asked for by Péladan as representing the *élite* of the Catholic church, to whom he speaks at length in his book. It would be the negation of evolution and of Catholicism as it has been developed and exists to-day, as well as of the hatred of innovation, which is a very great social force, and still more powerful in religion. Religions will die rather than transform themselves, and this is especially true of the Christian religion.