

Saint Pius X

Scourge Of Modernism

By Monsignor John P. Carroll Abbing.
Catholic Truth Society of Ireland No.bh663a (1963)

WE were very loath to leave the old Venetian town of Castelfranco behind us. We should have liked to linger in the cool shade of the mediaeval walls; to wander through the old streets of the town; to inspect the cathedral with its famous altar-piece by Giorgione. But we had no time to spare for these pleasant occupations, so we turned our backs upon the town and set out along the road which leads to Riese.

It was an uninteresting road, dusty and sun-baked, and it seemed interminably long. Our thoughts went back to those days, more than a century ago, when a little peasant boy tramped through rain and sleet in winter and the scorching rays of the sun in summer, to and from school, fourteen kilometers every day, along this monotonous road. He was a sturdy little fellow with curly hair and a bright intelligent face. He did not seem to mind the roughness of the way, for he had taken off his shoes and had slung them over his shoulder. Of course, there was an added reason for that: he knew that his parents could not really afford to buy shoes for him so he made them last as long as possible. It was a pleasant sight to see him as he walked along merrily in his bare feet, not minding the dust or the frost, and holding in his hand a little satchel which contained his dinner, a piece of black bread. How easy it was to see in him the warm, generous heart, humble and self-sacrificing, which within a few years was to cast its glory over the whole Church.

So we trod in the footsteps of little Bepi Sarto until, turning a corner, we saw in front of us the little cluster of houses which is Riese, and above them the tall bell-tower of the village church.

And here on our right was the humble cottage which we had come so far to see. Our pilgrimage was at an end. We were crossing the doorstep of the house where Pius X was born.

EARLY YEARS.

It was on the 2nd of June in the year 1835 that a second son was born to Giovanni (Gian) Battista Sarto, the village postman, and his wife, Margherita Sanson. On the following day, according to the good custom of those parts, he was taken to the church to be baptised, receiving the names Giuseppe Melchiorre. Little did the old parish priest think that the baptismal book in which he made a note of the event would one day be bound in gold and guarded jealously, as one of the greatest treasures of Riese.

Of little Bepi's childhood we need say little. Under the wise care of his mother, he was brought up to love God and His holy Mother. It was his great delight to serve Mass, and very often, when the church bell rang while he was in the fields, he would hasten to borrow the shoes of one of his companions, so that he might run and serve at the altar. It is no wonder, then, that before many years had passed he conceived a great desire to be a priest and to offer the holy sacrifice himself.

Up to this he had been frequenting the elementary classes at Riese, receiving special instruction in Latin from the curate, who noted with satisfaction his quick intellect and remarkable memory. In 1846, he was old enough to attend the grammar school at Castelfranco. He made great progress there so that at the examinations held in 1850 he was first in every subject.

The next thing to be done was to send him to a seminary, for he had now told the parish priest of his desire; and the good old man, full of joy and enthusiasm, had persuaded Gian Battista to submit to the divine will and to give his son to God. But where was the necessary money to come from? Neither Gian Battista nor the parish priest had any to spare. But little Bepi was not dismayed; he trusted in divine Providence and it was quick to come to his aid.

Cardinal Monico, the Patriarch of Venice at that time, had the privilege of nominating students for several free places in the seminary of Padua. When he was told of the plight of little Bepi Sarto, the Cardinal, who had himself been a poor boy of Riese, at once agreed to send him to the great seminary to continue his studies for the priesthood. So Bepi received the cassock, and was for eight years a student of Padua, doing all things well for the glory of God; striving all the time after that goal which was to be the ideal of his whole life — to be a holy priest.

CURATE AND PARISH PRIEST.

Once again, Giuseppe Sarto passed along the road from Riese to Castelfranco, but this day of 1858 he did not notice the dust; he did not see the familiar landmarks which had relieved the monotony of the long road in his childhood. One thought filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else: "Today I shall be a priest of the Most High." And he strained his eyes to catch a first glimpse of the old city where he was to be ordained.

For his mother that was the happiest day of her life. Many years afterwards, she was to see him clad in all the splendour of the Cardinalate, but her heart did not beat with the same intense joy as on that morning when he became one of the anointed of God — a priest.

A few days after his ordination he was appointed as curate to Don Antonio Costantini, the archpriest of Tombolo, a village of about 1,500 inhabitants. Don Antonio conceived an immediate liking for the young curate, and being a zealous man, determined that he should be as well prepared as possible to labour for souls. To this end, he tried to form him in the ways of parish life, paying special attention to the criticism of his sermons, and showing him how he might improve his delivery and manner of address. But in private, Don Antonio wrote delightedly to a friend: "They have sent me a young priest as curate with orders to form him to the duties of a parish priest, but I assure you that it is likely to be the other way about. He is so zealous, so full of good sense and other precious gifts that I could learn much from him; one day or another he will wear the mitre, of that I am certain, and afterwards?... Who knows?"

Gradually Don Giuseppe acquired quite a reputation for his preaching, and the neighbouring towns strove to secure him for their special sermons. This success, however, had no effect on the young priest except to make him humble himself and give all the glory to God. He saw in himself only a poor and unworthy disciple whom the Master was pleased to use as a humble instrument for the salvation of souls.

The young curate of such a parish did not receive much for his upkeep, but even out of his slender allowance, he gave the greater part to the poor. He found it impossible to refuse them anything, so that time and time again he had to pawn his watch. As for the fees which he received for his

sermons, he never returned to Tombolo with them in his pocket: they had gone to the relief of some poor soul on the way. When Don Antonio remonstrated with him and pointed out that he should save some for his mother, he would reply: "These poor people were in greater need than she; our Lord will provide for her also." So great was his faith in divine Providence.

Don Antonio at this time had very bad health, and was often so weak that he could not even rise to say Mass. Accordingly, all the work of the parish fell upon the curate. But no one would have imagined that it was hard work for him, so cheerfully did he fulfil all his duties. He was at the beck and call of everyone, especially of the sick and needy, for affliction of every kind made a deep impression on his tender heart. Well might the people of Tombolo apply to him the words used with reference to his divine Master "Pertransiit benefaciendo!" He went about doing good.

In May, 1867, Don Giuseppe was appointed parish priest of Salzano, an important parish of over 4,500 inhabitants. The heart of Don Antonio was full of sorrow at the departure of his young curate, and the peasants of Tombolo were inconsolable. The people of Salzano, on the other hand, were surprised that a curate from such a place should have been chosen as their parish priest, for they expected that as usual, some dignity of the diocese would receive the appointment. But when they had heard his first sermon, their admiration knew no bounds. "What was the Bishop thinking of to leave a man like this buried for so long among the yokels of Tombolo?" they said.

It was not long before his new parishioners discovered that the virtues of their parish priest were not confined to his sermons. His warm heart opened out and gathered in his new children, and they, in their turn, seeing his Christ-like charity and care for their souls and bodies, responded accordingly. Although he was now receiving more money than he had done before it was not sufficient for his inexhaustible almsgiving, so that on many occasions he found himself with no food in the larder and no money to buy any. No wonder that his sister, Rosa, who kept house for him, was almost at her wits end!

His people often saw him early in the morning, opening the church doors and performing many of the humblest offices of the sacristan. "When I am old and infirm it will be the sacristan who will have to get up early," he would say, laughingly.

In the year 1873, however, when cholera broke out, his self-consuming charity shone forth in all its splendour. He nursed and tended his beloved people; prepared the sick for death, administered the sacraments, and comforted the living. "If it had not been for Don Giuseppe I would have died of fear and sorrow," said one old man years later.

Not even at night did he get any rest, for he had to attend the funerals of the victims of the plague, who could not be buried during the daytime on account of the infection. Sometimes it happened that he had to help to carry the coffin and to dig the graves himself.

It is quite certain that his strength could not have lasted much longer under so great a strain. Fortunately, the Bishop had already been informed of his too great exertions, so that at the earliest opportunity he was moved from Salzano.

CANON OF TREVISO.

Once more, a flock was deprived of the loving care of its pastor, but this time the people were consoled by the great honour which Don Giuseppe received. He was appointed Canon of the Cathedral of Treviso, Spiritual Director of the seminary, and Chancellor of the diocese.

As soon as he learned of the Bishop's decision to promote him to the Canonry, he begged, with his customary humility, to be allowed to remain a simple parish priest. But the Bishop could not be persuaded to let him stay at Salzano, where he had been overworking and starving himself for his people. So Don Giuseppe went to Treviso and undertook his new labours cheerfully and with the self-sacrificing zeal which was characteristic of him. Perhaps the new work was not so congenial to him after the more active life at Tombolo and Salzano, but, if such was the case, he showed no sign of it. He did everything for the glory of God and not for his own satisfaction, so that he undertook every kind of work with the same cheerful readiness.

He threw himself with special ardour into his work as Spiritual Director for it was a task most dear to his heart, to form priests who would be worthy ministers of Christ and of His Church. As a professor who was there at the time tells us "He never wandered into vain speculations, but was always most practical, striving to form priests who would be able to face the world and its difficulties; to evangelise, correct, instruct, and counsel the faithful." His opening discourse to the students was remarkable for its humility:

"You expect to find in me a man of great experience, of profound ascetical and theological knowledge, but I have none, or practically none of these qualities; I am only a poor country parish priest, who has come here by the will of God; but just because I am here by the will of God you must resign yourselves to listening to the words even of a poor parish priest, and bear with me."

From the famous Encyclical which, as Pope, he addressed to the priests of the world, we can gather some of the thoughts which he must have impressed on the minds of the students at Treviso.

"A priest cannot stand alone; for good or for evil, his life and behaviour necessarily affect his people, and when that life is truly good how great a blessing it is to them."

"Since you are merely God's instruments in the salvation of souls, these instruments must be such as He can handle. And why? Do you think that God uses us to further His glory because of any inborn excellence or of any qualities acquired by our own personal effort? Not so, for it is written: 'The foolish things of the world has God chosen that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world has God chosen that He may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, has God chosen, and things that are not that He might bring to nought things that are.' There is one thing, however, which unites man to God, one thing which makes him pleasing, and His not unworthy coadjutor, in the dispensation of His mercy, and this one thing is sanctity of life. If this holiness, which is the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, be wanting to the priest, he lacks everything."

Very soon, an even greater burden was laid upon the shoulders of Monsignor Sarto. In 1879, the Bishop died and he was elected Vicar Capitular, so that to him fell the administration of the diocese while it remained vacant. He filled this office until June of the following year when Monsignor Callegari, the new Bishop, took possession of the diocese. Two years later, in 1882, Monsignor Callegari was succeeded by Monsignor Apollonio. Both of these Bishops appreciated to the full the sterling qualities of their Chancellor. They noticed with admiration the prudent and competent way in which he solved the most intricate problems of the diocese. They found in him not only an efficient administrator, but also a trusted companion and counsellor. Slowly but surely the reputation of Monsignor Sarto began to spread, even beyond the limits of the diocese, and men looked upon him as one who would before long be called to the episcopate.

One day a friend said to Monsignor Sarto: "There is one thing which I cannot understand."

"What is that?"

"Why they do not realize at Rome that you have all the qualities necessary for a Bishop?"

"Do you think that that is the kind of thing you should wish for a friend?"

"And why not? Doesn't Saint Paul say...?"

"Leave Saint Paul alone!... The cross is a joyous burden so long as a priest wears it under his cassock; but as soon as he has to wear it outside, even though you attach it to a chain of gold, it becomes a real burden. Let us talk about something else."

BISHOP OF MANTUA.

It was towards the end of the summer of 1884 that Monsignor Apollonio summoned Monsignor Sarto one day to his private oratory.

"Let us kneel here before the Blessed Sacrament and pray about a matter which concerns us both."

The poor Chancellor did not know what to think, and feared that something had happened at Riese; but when he had risen to his feet again, the Bishop said with emotion: "I am happy and yet at the same time sorry to tell you that the Holy Father has appointed you Bishop of Mantua."

The humble soul of Monsignor Sarto was filled with dismay. Convinced as he was of his own unworthiness he felt that it was his duty to write to Pope Leo XIII and beg him to appoint some more suitable person. But his reputation had gone before him to the Vatican, and his efforts were of no avail. So, confessing his own weakness, and trusting in the divine strength to help him, he resigned himself to the will of God and set out for Rome.

After he had received episcopal consecration in the Eternal City, he returned to Treviso, where he remained for some time. Before taking possession of his diocese he addressed a letter to the Mayor of Mantua; it ended with these striking words: "Your new Bishop, poor in all things but rich in love, has no other desire than to procure the salvation of souls and to form among you one family of friends and brothers.

"For the advantage of souls I shall spare myself neither care, nor vigils, nor fatigues, and shall have nothing more at heart than your salvation. Perhaps someone will ask on what I am relying for the fulfilment of my promises. I reply: on hope... the hope of Christ... (Quoting Saint Paul,) I can do all things in Him who strengthens me!" Such was the message of the Bishop to his flock.

The new Bishop found Mantua in a lamentable condition. Innumerable political wrangles had uprooted all charity and brotherly love from among the citizens, and class was set against class. The people no longer observed the feast days, and were quite ignorant of Christian Doctrine. Many of the priests were imbued with the ideas of the "new Italy," and had lost the ecclesiastical spirit: some of them had even gone so far as to embrace heretical doctrines and had made shipwreck of their faith.

Monsignor Sarto viewed with sorrow this terrible state into which his diocese had fallen, but did not allow himself to be disheartened. In exhorting his priests to join with him in fighting the evils which existed, he said: "Do not believe that there are such things as insurmountable difficulties; a strong will, a sincere love for the sacred ministry, as also an intelligent pastoral zeal, united to the grace of God, can accomplish everything."

Under his firm but gentle rule, Mantua became once again a city of peace and concord. The seminary, which had been in a sorry plight, was re-organised and put on a firm basis, so that before long it held as many as 147 students; the priests who had been neglectful of their flocks were brought back to a realization of their priestly duties, and the sheep who had strayed were brought back to the fold by their zealous pastor. Not even the hardest hearts could withstand the onslaught made upon them by the noble example of their Bishop. How true were the words of Leo XIII! "If the diocese of Mantua does not love its new pastor, it is a sign that it is incapable of loving anyone, for he is the most worthy and the most lovable of Bishops."

One morning a knock was heard at the door of the Bishop's palace. Monsignor Sarto went to open the door himself, as he had no servants and his sisters had not returned from Mass. He found a young Monsignor waiting outside who had come to ask for permission to make some researches in the diocesan archives. He had just been to say Mass in the cathedral.

"Then you have not yet had breakfast? You must let me get you a cup of coffee " — and the kindly Bishop led the young Monsignor into the kitchen.

Thus did the future Pius X prepare the breakfast of Monsignor Ratti, the future Pius XI.

The following episode illustrates the Christ-like charity of Monsignor Sarto while he was Bishop of Mantua.

A certain business man of Mantua wrote an anonymous pamphlet full of libels against his Bishop. It was not long, however, before the latter discovered the author of the scandalous document. "That poor man has more need of prayers than of punishment," he replied to those who advised him to take legal action.

Shortly afterwards the same man found himself in great financial straits. His creditors wished to have him declared guilty of fraudulent business transactions. All seemed lost, when some anonymous person sent him the sum of money necessary to cover the large deficit. Afterwards it was discovered that the generous friend was Monsignor Sarto, the Bishop whom he had maligned.

In this way, by charity and gentleness, did the Bishop of Mantua conquer for Christ.

IN THE CITY OF THE LAGOONS.

On the death of Cardinal Agostini, Patriarch of Venice, in 1891, Monsignor Apollonio was appointed to succeed him. Owing to his weak state of health, he begged that he might be excused. The Pope agreed and nominated Monsignor Sarto as Patriarch in his stead. The dismayed prelate had no alternative but to accept, as the Cardinal Secretary of State had warned him beforehand that a refusal would be very displeasing to the Holy Father.

In the next Consistory, Monsignor Sarto, Bishop of Mantua, was raised to the Cardinalate and three days afterwards was promoted to the Patriarchate of Venice.

The new Patriarch found it impossible to take immediate possession of his diocese. On the pretext that the privileges conferred upon the Republic of Venice by the Papacy in times past had passed to the Italian Government, the latter claimed the right to nominate the Patriarch. They accordingly refused to recognize the appointment of Cardinal Sarto. In the meantime, the Cardinal returned to Mantua, intending to remain there until such time as it would be possible for him to go to Venice.

His first visit after his return was to Riese. Once again, Giuseppe Sarto passed along the dusty road from Castelfranco, but this time as he entered his native village all the bells were ringing and the whole countryside had turned out to meet him. He recognised many old familiar faces, while the young people whom he did not know cried out to him, "I am the daughter of Bartolomeo who was your friend; give me your blessing!" "I am the son of Andrew, your comrade..." His fine eyes shone with pleasure as he looked round on them all, while the merry smile, which they had known so well, played on his lips. But there was one face missing from the crowd, and he hastened to the little cottage where his mother, now too old and infirm to go to meet him, was awaiting her son.

On the following day, which was Sunday, the Cardinal celebrated Mass for the people. After the Gospel, he preached with such simplicity and feeling that many of the congregation were in tears. That night every house was decorated with lanterns and the whole village was filled with peasants from the outlying districts. It was a feast day in Riese.

On the third day, he robed himself in all the glory of the Cardinalate, and went to show himself to his mother. As he stood by her humble bedside, a Prince of the Church, she wept for joy; yet her heart was full of sorrow, for she knew that this would be their last meeting on earth. Later in the day, he embraced her tenderly for the last time, and so they parted; sadly, for the heart beneath the purple was as tender and as humble as ever.

At length, on the 24th of November, 1894, Cardinal Sarto made his entry into Venice. As he made a triumphal progress along the Grand Canal his launch was followed by a fleet of gondolas and boats of all descriptions, while the bridges and roofs were packed with a shouting and exultant multitude of citizens. Only the windows of the municipal buildings remained undecorated, and among the thousands of Venetians who went out, almost delirious with joy, to meet their Patriarch, the members of the anti-clerical municipality alone had no place.

The following day he addressed the people in these words: "I have not seen you before, but I will bear you all in my heart; parish priests, clergy, magistrates, nobles, rich men, sons of the people, and beggars, you are my family; my heart and my love are yours. From you I seek nothing but a corresponding affection. This is my only desire, that you will be able to say with all sincerity: our Patriarch is a man of upright intentions, who holds high the untarnished banner of the Vicar of Christ, who seeks nothing except to maintain and defend the truth and to do good."

The new Patriarch set to work immediately to establish better relations between the civil authorities and himself. Although he was dealing with men who were bitter in their hatred of the Church, he always acted towards them with the greatest charity. His first letter to the Mayor of Venice was a manifestation of his fearless and apostolic spirit.

"Although our fields of action are far apart, in both of them we are striving after one end alone, namely, the good of the citizens. There can be no collision between the two powers since there is one Author of religion and of society. Accordingly, I hope to find in the representatives of the city the help which will render my pastoral duties less onerous. I hope for it and I feel sure of it."

Within a short time, he had organised the Catholic forces so well, besides winning over the more moderate members of the opposition to his side, that at the forthcoming election a government more worthy of so Catholic a people was elected.

The Venetians were not slow to realize what a treasure they had in their midst. When they saw the crowds of beggars and poor suppliants who flocked daily to the Patriarch's door, knowing that here

at least they would find help and sympathy, it seemed to them as though the days of the Apostles had returned. But even they could not perceive the depths of his simplicity and humility. When they saw the grand figure receiving the dignitaries of the State with becoming splendour they did not realise that as soon as the ceremony was over he would retire to his little study to set about the business of the day, a humble priest once more. Nor did the visitors who dined with him realise that it was only by the efforts of the Patriarch's sisters that the table had been set so elegantly and the food so daintily prepared. When he was alone he dined as frugally as in the old days and in the simplest possible manner. Even as a Patriarch he had very little money to spare, so that every penny that he could save by stinting himself was so much the more to give to his beloved poor. Once again, the Patriarch's watch and ring found themselves in pawn, and the little presents which he had received disappeared one by one as some case more pitiful than the rest met his compassionate gaze.

When the Venetians saw the distinguished figure disappear into some miserable hovel or climb up the stone steps to a poverty-stricken attic, they would say to one another: "He never thinks of himself; he is wearing himself out for us." So beloved was he by the rough gondoliers that his appearance among them was greeted by shouts of joy. "Here comes the Patriarch of the gondoliers," they would cry.

The Eucharistic Congress, which was held at Venice in the month of August, 1897, gave Cardinal Sarto an opportunity of doing honour publicly to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. His great love for the Blessed Sacrament manifested itself in his untiring efforts to make the Congress a great success, by fostering in the hearts of the people a fervent devotion for their Eucharistic Lord.

The people responded, and the Congress was the signal for an unparalleled outpouring of love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Never, even in the days of her glory, had Venice witnessed such scenes of splendour. As the final procession of the Blessed Sacrament passed by, men thought that they had never seen a sight so wonderful. Jesus Christ surrounded by His Cardinals, Bishops and priests, had come to reign among the people of Venice: they knelt in humble adoration, and the heart of the Patriarch was full of gratitude as he knelt with them to adore his Lord and Master.

ON THE CHAIR OF SAINT PETER.

The death of Leo XIII on July 20th, 1903, filled the whole world with sorrow, but no one mourned the dead Pontiff more than Cardinal Sarto. As he spoke of the virtues of the late Pope, his eyes filled with tears. "If you only knew how much he had done for me. After our Lord I owe everything to him," he said sorrowfully.

Six days afterwards, he had to leave for the Conclave. At the same time, he arranged to call for his sisters at Passagno on his way back from Rome. But his sisters, and indeed, the whole city, which turned out to greet him as he made his way to the station, seemed to have a premonition that they had seen him in Venice for the last time.

"Bless us once more," they cried in a kind of anguish; and the eyes of the Patriarch were full of love as he turned to give one last blessing to his people.

"Come back! Come back!" they cried.

"Alive or dead I will come back." But he was not to be seen again in the city of the Lagoons.

At eight o'clock on the evening of July 31st, all the doors leading to the part of the Vatican where the Conclave was to be held were sealed up, not to be opened again until the Pope had been elected. In the Sistine Chapel, where the actual voting took place, thrones had been placed round the walls for the Cardinals. All was ready for the Conclave.

Next day after Mass, the Cardinals assembled and the voting began. Each in turn wrote the name of his candidate on a piece of paper and then placed it in a chalice on the altar, at the same time taking the following oath: "I call to witness the Lord Christ, who will be my Judge, that I am naming the one whom before God I think ought to be elected." A majority of two-thirds of the votes was required.

The results of the first three scrutinies were as follows: 1st scrutiny: Rampolla, 24; Gotti, 17; Sarto, 5; other votes, 16 – total, 62. 2nd scrutiny: Rampolla, 29; Gotti, 16; Sarto, 10; other votes, 7 – total, 62. 3rd scrutiny: Rampolla, 29; Sarto, 21; Gotti, 9; other votes, 3 – total, 62.

After the second scrutiny, when it seemed likely that Cardinal Rampolla would be elected, Cardinal Puzyna rose during the voting for the third scrutiny, and delivered the veto of the Emperor of Austria against the election of Cardinal Rampolla.

Footnote: One of the first acts of Pius X after his election to the Papacy was to abolish forever the right of veto.

The Cardinals were astounded at this intolerable interference of the secular power, with the result that, far from the veto having the desired effect, the fourth scrutiny showed that the votes for Cardinal Rampolla had increased to 30. But the votes of Cardinal Sarto had also increased to 24. The humble Cardinal could stand it no longer and with tears in his eyes, he begged the other Cardinals not to think of him, who was so unworthy of this, the highest dignity on earth.

At last, it became quite obvious that before long he would be elected. After the fifth scrutiny, the Cardinal Dean sent young Monsignor Merry del Val, the Secretary of the Conclave, to persuade Cardinal Sarto not to persist in his refusal. The young man entered the Pauline Chapel and found the Cardinal kneeling alone before the Blessed Sacrament, with his face buried in his hands. He approached quietly and communicated to him the message of the Cardinal Dean. The older man turned imploring eyes upon him, while the tears ran down his cheeks. "No, no, tell him, I beseech you, not to think of me: tell him to do me this kindness, not to think of me," was his only reply.

But at the seventh scrutiny, Cardinal Sarto was elected Pope, and with bowed head accepted the cross laid upon him. "If this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, Your will be done," he said in a low voice.

When he was asked what name he would take, he replied, "Because the Popes who have suffered most for the Church in these times have borne the name of Pius, I also will take that name."

So on the 4th of August the windows on the balcony of Saint Peter's opened, and Cardinal Macchi appeared before the thousands assembled in the Piazza of Saint Peter's. In the breathless silence which followed, he said in a clear voice: "I announce to you tidings of great joy: we have a Pope, the most eminent and most reverend Cardinal Sarto, who has taken the name of Pius X." In the thunderous acclamation which followed this announcement, only the great bell of the basilica could be heard sending forth the joyous news to the whole city. *Habemus Pontificem*. 'We have a Pope – a bridge-builder – a Pontiff.'

No longer was Giuseppe Sarto the pastor and father of only one people. The paternal care which had strengthened and comforted so many must now be universal. His heart, which had embraced the villagers of Tombolo and the people of Salzano, had been large enough to enfold the diocese of Mantua and the Patriarchate of Venice. It was now to become evident that his love for souls knew no bounds. His protecting arms were to encircle the whole world, his tender glance was to rest affectionately upon every nation under heaven. He was to be the good shepherd, solicitous for the sheep that had strayed, and strong enough to withstand every danger that might threaten his flock. The wolves, and there were to be many of them, would never find the sheep deserted; the shepherd would always be there, ready to lay down his life, if necessary, for his flock.

When the election of Cardinal Sarto to the Papacy was first made known, the enemies of the Church rejoiced, thinking that they would soon be able to bend to their own wills a man so simple and unversed in international diplomacy. But they were soon undeceived. When his first Encyclical sent forth this message and challenge to the world, they were compelled to admit that with Pius X at any rate gentleness did not spell weakness. Sanctity may mean unworldliness, but it does not necessarily signify ignorance of the world.

"There will be no lack of men who, measuring divine things by human standards, will try to penetrate the innermost purposes of Our mind, wresting them to earthly ends and the aims of parties. To cut off every vain hope of theirs We declare to them with all sincerity that in the midst of human society, We desire to be nothing, and with the divine aid, We will be nothing, but the minister of God, whose authority We bear. The interests of God will be Our interests and We are resolved to devote all Our strength and life itself to them. Therefore, if any one should ask Us for some phrase to express Our purpose, We will always give this one and no other: 'To restore all things in Christ'."

A few days after the election had taken place, Monsignor Merry del Val presented himself before the Pope in order to pay his respects to Pius X before leaving the Vatican. Now that the Conclave was over the Secretary had no reason for remaining there any longer.

"What! Monsignor, do you wish to abandon me?" asked the Pope kindly.

"No, Holy Father," replied Monsignor Merry del Val with emotion, "I do not wish to leave Your Holiness, but my task is finished. The Secretary of State, whom Your Holiness will appoint, will take my place."

"Come, come, Monsignor, remain here as Pro-Secretary of State until I have time to make my decision."

Several days passed; the Pope consulted the Cardinals and finally appointed Monsignor Merry del Val as his Secretary of State, at the same time signifying his intention of creating him Cardinal at the next Consistory.

"Let us work together, let us suffer together for love of the Church," were the words of Pius X to the young prelate. Thus were two noble souls joined together in one great work — the restoration of all things in Christ.

One of the first duties of the new Pope was to receive the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. After their audience with the Holy Father, they proceeded to the Borgia apartments, where the Pro-Secretary of State was waiting to receive them.

"What impression did the audience make upon you?" inquired Monsignor Merry del Val. The answers which he received astounded him. When they were all seated, the Prussian minister suddenly rose and put the question which was uppermost in the minds of them all: "What strange quality does this man possess which can attract us so strongly?"

The keen observer and great historian, Baron von Pastor, asks the same question, but he tries to find the answer himself. "There are some men," he writes, "who exercise so strong a fascination that no one can resist them. Among these chosen men, we must number Pius X. It was not only his touching simplicity or his angelic goodness which conquered everyone: he united with these qualities a charm so irresistible that the only way to describe it is to say that everyone who came near to him felt that he was in the presence of a saint."

The diplomats and great families were not the only ones who had the privilege of an audience with Pius X in those early days of the Pontificate. Every Sunday the people of each of the Roman parishes in turn came to the Vatican, and there the Pope received them in the open air, and preached them homely little sermons on the Gospels.

"The great parish priest of Rome and of the world," writes Rene Bazin, "spoke like Saint Peter, with power and love. Those who heard him, the poor and those who were not quite so poor, were deeply moved, perceiving how the Pope loved them. When he had finished speaking and had given them his blessing, they sang the hymn: 'Noi vogliam Dio,' ('We Long for God') and so departed, bearing in their minds a great picture: that of a Pope whose countenance shone with regal majesty and infinite tenderness, like the face of Jesus as he gave to the multitudes the treasures of His divine world."

"Pius X," writes Father Fachinetti, "felt all the weight of the tiara and of the great responsibility which it signifies, and perhaps it was this which made him avoid all pomp even in the most solemn functions, at least as far as his own person was concerned. 'What a punishment' — he was heard exclaim one day — 'what a punishment to have to follow all these usages of Court! I feel like Jesus captured in the Garden when they lead me along surrounded by soldiers!' Thus he felt!" Wilfred Ward saw him during one of the functions in Saint Peter's, and wrote: "His face amid the scene of triumph spoke of the vanity of all earthly glory. He had ever the look of one who is weighed down by the sins and sorrows of mankind — a look befitting the Vicar of Him of whom we speak as the Man of Sorrows."

The heart of Pius X was often laden with sorrow. Day by day news reached him of persecutions, in Spain and Portugal, in Russia and Germany, and he wept as he thought of the sufferings which his children had to undergo. But it was on France that he turned his most anxious gaze, for it was in that country that the enemies of the Church were making their greatest efforts to tear the people from their allegiance to the Vicar of Christ.

PIUS X AND FRANCE.

For many years, even before the ascension of Pope Pius X to the throne of Saint Peter, the anti-clerical governments of France in union with the French Freemasons had made it their aim to separate the Church and State, to seize the property of the Church and to make a complete and definite break with Rome.

With this end in view, religious instruction had been forbidden in the elementary schools, divorce was re-established in the civil code, prayers at the opening of Parliament were abolished, members

of Religious Orders were not allowed to teach in public schools, clerics were not to be exempted from military service, children were compelled to read irreligious books in the schools, officers in the Army and Navy and other public officials, who practised their religion, were refused promotion or dismissed from their posts.

This was the situation which Pius X was called upon to face. In a letter which he addressed to the President of the French Republic he protested against the injuries inflicted upon the Church and reminded him that these acts were violations of the Concordat signed by the Holy See and Napoleon I. Monsieur Loubet replied by denying that the French Government had any intention of breaking the Concordat. This protestation brought no conviction with it, for it was obvious to everyone that the French Government was only waiting for an opportunity to break with Rome. As Monsieur Combes said in the previous March: "To denounce the Concordat just now without having sufficiently prepared men's minds for it, without having clearly proved that the Catholic clergy themselves are provoking it and rendering it inevitable, would be bad policy on the part of the Government, by reason of the resentment which might be caused in the country."

It was not long before they managed to trump up an excuse.

About this time, the Pope found it necessary to summon two French Bishops to Rome. The French Government, maintaining that the Pope had no right to correspond directly with any French prelates, pretended to find in this act a violation of the Concordat. Diplomatic relations with the Vatican were severed and on the 9th of December, 1905, the Law of Separation was passed, by which the annual revenue of the Church was suppressed, and lay "associations" were ordered to be set up in each parish to administer the Church property.

Then the Pope spoke: "We denounce and condemn this law passed in France on the separation of Church and State, as being injurious to God, whom it officially rejects by stating that the Republic should not recognise any cult. We denounce and condemn it because it violates the natural law, the law of nations, and the public fidelity which is owing to treaties. (We condemn it) as contrary to the divine constitution of the Church, to her essential rights and to her liberty... We denounce and condemn it because it is seriously injurious to the dignity of this Apostolic See, to Our person, to the Episcopate, to the clergy and to all French Catholics."

The Pope then condemned in unequivocal terms the proposed "associations," showing clearly that such lay administration would be most harmful to the Church.

The French Government replied to this condemnation by seizing all the property which remained to the Church, so that the clergy of France were rendered penniless.

Pius X had foreseen this and had deliberately rejected wealth and slavery, in favour of poverty with liberty. He had relied upon the fidelity of the French clergy and had called upon them to lose all for the good of the Church.

At a word from the Pope, the Bishops gave up their palaces and the priests their presbyteries; their incomes were gone, so that they had to depend on the charity of the faithful for their sustenance. But in their poverty, the poverty of Christ, the Church in France found its freedom, so that a few years later a French writer could say: "Our Church is truly and entirely Roman; and, therefore, all these attacks on its members have no effect except to attach them more securely to the fount and centre of their life. The religious life is everywhere increasing in depth and in intensity."

The anti-clericals had tried to stamp out the Church, but their very efforts in that direction had only made her spring up with renewed life; they had tried to bind her, but they had failed because the ropes which they used were the goods of this world, and upon the throne of Saint Peter sat a man who despised the world and everything which it could offer.

PIUS X AND MODERNISM.

We now come to what is always a sad page in the history of the Church — the defection of her own children.

Pius X had read with grave concern the writings of many intellectual men of various nations who were trying as they expressed it, to "modernise" the Church, "to form a new credo," which, they thought, would be more in accordance with the discoveries of modern science. They wished to reject everything which they could not reconcile with their own preconceived ideas. They treated the Church not as an infallible and living body, but as some archaic document which they could change to suit their own convenience. But why should they respect the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, when they rejected our Lord Himself? They attacked Revelation and the Gospels, denying, not only the authority and inspiration of the Holy Scripture, but the divinity, miracles and teaching of Jesus Christ Himself; nay, even the very demonstrability of the existence of God.

But they did not state all this in so many words: at least not at first. They were much more subtle than that. Sometimes, as was the case with the Abbe Loisy, they published under assumed names pamphlets and articles against the Church and her doctrines, although at the same time they posed to the outside world as loyal sons of the Catholic Church.

But their tricks and stratagems could not deceive the vigilant Pontiff, who saw, under their protestations of loyalty, the spectre of heresy which lay hidden in their souls. On the 15th of April 1906, in a letter full of heavenly wisdom, Pius X defined Modernism as "the synthesis and poison of all heresies": on the 3rd of July, 1907, he denounced as heretical 65 of the Modernist doctrines, and, finally on the 8th of September came the Encyclical, "Pascendi dominici gregis," like a roll of thunder throughout the Catholic world. With calm and measured words, it tore the veil from the concealed heresies of the Modernists, and exposed their insidious doctrines to the light of day.

In an Encyclical Letter, which he wrote for the Centenary of Saint Anselm, Pius X has the following momentous passage: "The Modernists fell into so great a pit, not because they possessed a profound and solid culture, for in reality there can be no opposition between reason and the faith. The true cause was this: they had an extraordinary opinion of themselves." And, as he wrote in another Encyclical, "True reformers are distinguished from false ones in this, that the latter seek their own good and not that of Christ."

With words of fire, Pius X had cast out the serpent.

THE POPE OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

The Blessed Sacrament is and has always been the centre and mainspring of the Christian Life. The Apostles, gathered round the supper table, received from Our Lord His Body and Blood, and were united most closely with Him, and through Him with each other. The early Christians, dispersed by persecution, nevertheless met in the catacombs around the Eucharist table and were joined together once more by the sweet bond of Christ. From the Holy Eucharist they drew the strength and comfort which they needed, just as millions of Christians were to do after them.

Wherever devotion to the Blessed Sacrament waxed strong, the Faith burned with a clear and steady flame, but where this devotion was lacking the Christian life lost its inspiration and grew cold. Time and time again, the devil had attempted to crush this love for the Eucharist, but his efforts had all met with failure. Persecution had broken out and churches had been destroyed, but Catholics had met in cellars and on the bleak hillsides, risking life and fortune, in order to receive their Eucharistic Lord. Heretics had denied the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and had tried to poison the minds of men with their doctrines, but the lamp of faith was not extinguished and the Catholic people still approached the altar rails to receive the Bread of Life.

Then a new heresy arose; a much more subtle and dangerous heresy, for it made its appeal to the very reverence which Catholics had for the Holy Eucharist. Under a pretext of respect due to God, the Jansenists, for so the new heretics were called, demanded such conditions of perfection from the faithful before they could approach the Sacrament of the Altar, that it would have been impossible for most Catholics ever to receive Holy Communion.

The results of the heresy were widespread, and this despite the repeated condemnations of the Popes. Frequent Communion became an almost unheard of thing, and, as for the children, they were not allowed to make their first Holy Communion until their 12th or 14th year, with the result that many died without receiving the Holy Viaticum.

This deplorable attitude towards the Blessed Sacrament lasted for more than two centuries, so that even when the twentieth century dawned there were still to be found priests of the old school who were unwilling to give Holy Communion frequently to their people.

As Bishop of Mantua, Monsignor Sarto had striven vigorously to uproot the last traces of Jansenism from his diocese, and had unceasingly urged his priests to remember the words of our Lord: "Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood ye shall not have life in you," reminding them that it had been the custom in the early Church for the faithful to communicate frequently, even daily.

But when he became Pope, he no longer urged and begged that the people might be given the Bread of Life: he authoritatively put an end to all controversy and commanded that the faithful should be brought back to the practice of frequent Communion.

"Frequent and daily Communion since it is a thing most desired by Jesus Christ and His Church, cannot be denied to the faithful so long as they are in a state of grace and have the right intention, which consists in an ardent desire to please God, to unite oneself more closely with Him, and to make use of this remedy against the weaknesses and defects of human nature. And, although it is most desirable that those who receive Communion frequently should be free from venial sins, at least from those that are fully deliberate... nevertheless it is sufficient if they are free from mortal sins and have a firm resolve not to commit any in the future."

This first decree on Frequent Communion evoked a storm of criticism. Even good and learned men murmured against it and openly accused the Pope of indiscretion, fearing that it would lead to a decrease of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. The Pope replied by pointing out that the primary reason for the institution of the Holy Eucharist was not that men might show honour to God, but that they might receive, through this close union with Christ, strength to conquer concupiscence, to wash out little everyday faults and to avoid the grave sins to which they might be tempted. So, undismayed by their criticism, he set out bravely once again to complete this part of his restoration

of all things in Christ and issued a special invitation to the children, so that they also might be brought to the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He did this by means of two further decrees.

The first decree established the right of all children to communicate frequently as soon as they had made their first Holy Communion; the second, the famous decree, "Quam Singulari," fixed the age at which children should be allowed to make their first Holy Communion at the age of discretion; that is, the age when they can distinguish between ordinary bread and the Bread of Life. This, the decree stated, would normally be about the seventh year; of course, it might be much earlier than that.

All the biographers of Pius X describe how an English lady, together with her little boy of four years, received a private audience with the Holy Father.

The Pope watched him attentively and then, drawing the child to him, inquired how old he was.

"He is only four, Your Holiness."

The Pope turned to the child and asked gently: "Whom do you receive in Holy Communion?"

"Jesus Christ!"

"And who is Jesus Christ?"

"Jesus Christ is God," answered the child without hesitation. The Pope was delighted.

"Bring him to me tomorrow and I will give him his first Holy Communion myself."

The good effects of the Eucharistic decrees of Pius X, which constitute, as Rene Bazin says, "one of the greatest acts of the Papacy at all times," became most evident in the increased and ever-increasing love for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament which manifested itself all over the world. At the Vatican, hundreds of letters were received from people of all classes, including many from children who wrote to thank the Vicar of Christ for giving Jesus to them. They delighted the heart of the aged Pontiff who read them all with tears of thankfulness that he had been chosen as the humble instrument of bringing Jesus into their hearts.

Undoubtedly one of the happiest days of his life was when, in the spring of 1912, four hundred little first Communicants came from France to thank the Pope personally in the name of the children of France. Their audience with the angelic Pontiff made a lasting impression on them. They had not been at all shy — they said — that had not been possible, he was so kind. "There were tears in his eyes; but many of us cried too." Almost all who could get near enough to speak to him asked him for some favour: 'Heal my sister, Holy Father'; 'convert my father'; 'I want to be a priest'; 'and I a missionary'. It must have been like that when the people flocked round Jesus in Galilee.

"Suffer little children to come unto me," had been the words of our divine Saviour. Pius X, in leading them to the feet of Jesus, received from His divine Master an aureola of glory which will surround his name for ever.

"The Pope of the Eucharist": "the Pope of the Blessed Sacrament": could there be more glorious titles?

THE WONDER WORKER.

"These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name they shall cast out devils... They shall lay their hands upon the sick and they shall recover." This was the final promise of our divine Lord to

the Apostles. It does not astonish us then when we read in the Acts of the Apostles that the people of Judea "brought forth their sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that, when Peter came, his shadow at the least might overshadow any of them and they might be delivered from their infirmities." Why therefore should we be astonished if nineteen centuries later the 258th successor of Saint Peter brought the sick back to health by the power of his word and healed the infirm with the touch of his garment?

It had already been murmured at Mantua and at Venice that the saintly Bishop and Cardinal had laid his hands upon the sick whom he visited, and that many of them had recovered immediately. When he was elected Pope, and prodigies of the same nature were witnessed by hundreds of people in audience, it was not so easy as it had been before to hush them up. Before long all Rome spoke of the graces and miracles which had been obtained by his prayers or by his blessing.

Pius X turned away with some laughing remark all references to these marvellous happenings. "At present," he said on one occasion, "they are saying in the newspapers that I am working miracles, as though I have nothing else to do." But when they insisted, he said quietly: "I have nothing to do with it; it is the power of the keys."

On the 8th of September, 1912, the wife of the Belgian Consul in Rome went to the Vatican to ask the Pope to bless her husband, who for a long time had been suffering from a malignant disease. The Holy Father raised his eyes to heaven: "Have faith, have faith, my child; the Lord will hear you." She hurried home and found her husband waiting to tell her the joyful news that he was completely cured.

On another occasion, a poor man who was paralysed went to one of the public audiences. When the Pope drew near, he implored him to heal him. The Pope smiled kindly and touched the crippled arm, saying in a gentle voice: "Yes, yes, yes!" At the same moment, the man felt a strange sensation in his arm. Hardly daring to hope, he tried to raise it and found to his amazement that it had regained all its vigour. Before he could cry out with joy, the Pope motioned to him to keep quiet. Then, blessing him once more, Pius X moved on in silence.

In the diocese of Nimes in France lived a little girl who had been paralysed from birth so that she could make no movement except with her lips. In the year 1909, her parents took her to Rome, as she had expressed a wish to go there. In her own mind, she was convinced that if she could speak to Pius X she would be cured.

Her father took her to a public audience, unconscious of her purpose. When she had kissed the Pope's ring, the child said trustingly: "Holy Father, I have a favour to ask."

"May God grant you all that you desire," replied the Pope simply. At these words, the child sat up and immediately walked down the audience hall, to the amazement of the people present.

In Spain, there was a nun who for fifteen years had had cancer of the stomach. Eventually it spread to the throat and prevented her from taking food, so that her life was despaired of. But she applied a collar worn by Pius X to the affected part and drank a few drops of water in which she had placed a few threads drawn from another relic of the Pope.

Within a few days, the cancer had disappeared.

Miracles do not make saints, but they make manifest their singular virtue and the power and efficacy of their intercession with God. Whether the wonders worked at the Vatican by the saintly

Pontiff were true miracles it was for the Church to decide. Miracles were not needed to make men realise the astonishing sanctity of Pius X. His whole life spoke of the heights of perfection which he had reached. Poor with the poverty of Christ, humble with the humility of Christ, meek with the meekness of Christ, his soul was a flame of fire which swept the earth and kindled the love of God wherever it went. He was a man "beloved by God and men, whose memory will be held in benediction."

THE DEATH OF THE POPE.

On 2nd June, 1914, Pius X entered his eightieth year. It was to be a year of suffering for him. The war clouds were gathering on the horizon. "1914 will not pass without the outbreak of war," he said to Cardinal Merry del Val. And on another occasion: "I would willingly give my life if I could banish this horrible scourge."

On 28th June, the vigil of the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, a telegram arrived from the Nuncio in Vienna bearing the news of the assassination of the Archduke Francis of Austria. Pius X realised the full significance of the tragedy. "Here is the spark which will start the blaze," he said sorrowfully. That evening he went down into Saint Peter's to pray before the tomb of the Apostle. "We go to pray for the dead also," he said. Slowly and sadly, he made his way to the Confessional, blessing with a weary hand the few guards who remained in the great basilica. Alone he knelt before the tomb of the Fisherman and poured forth his soul in prayer, imploring his divine Master to spare His people.

A few days afterwards the aged Pontiff was taken ill. "May the will of God be done," he said, "I believe that all is over." On the 18th of August, he received Holy Viaticum. He lost his power of speech, but his eyes were fixed on the figure of our Lord on the cross. For a long time he held the hands of the Secretary of State, who had served him so faithfully and so well. The great Cardinal was overwhelmed with grief. At a quarter past one on the morning of the 20th of August, the pure soul of Pius X passed to its eternal reward.

In the years since Pius X died, the fame of his sanctity has spread to the ends of the earth and many countries have striven to outdo one another in honouring his memory. The miracles attributed to him in Rome during his lifetime were few in comparison with those reported throughout the world after his death. His tomb in the Crypt of Saint Peter's became a place of pilgrimage for countless thousands of all nationalities and petitions for his Beatification poured in from every corner of the earth. His Cause, introduced in 1923, proceeded slowly but surely. The war retarded its progress but as soon as the conflict ended and the Apostolic process began in Rome, it was rapidly brought to a happy conclusion. On June the 3rd, 1951, only 37 years after his death, Pius X was Beatified, to the joy of the whole Catholic world.

Three years later, on 29th May, 1954, Pope Pius XII, the 'Pastor Angelicus', the Angelic Shepherd', descended into the Basilica of Saint Peter's, to announce solemnly and authoritatively that his beloved predecessor, Pius X, was to be venerated as a Saint.

Of the 262 Popes who have sat in the Chair of Peter down to Pope Paul VI, 76 are Saints and 7 Beatified. Of the 76, no fewer than 30 were martyred. In the last 700 years only seven Popes — Blessed Gregory X, (1271), Blessed Innocent V, (1276), Saint Celestine V, (1294), Blessed Benedict XI, (1303), Blessed Urban V, (1362), Saint Pius V, (1572), and, finally, Saint Pius X, have been raised to the honours of the Altar. {As of 2012, we can add the following to that elite band: Blessed Innocent XI, (1689), Blessed Pius IX, (1878), Blessed John XXIII, (1963), and Blessed John Paul II, (2005). What privileged times in which we live!}

The author desires it to be understood that unless where he expressly states that the Church or the Holy See has recognised the truth of miracles or other supernatural manifestations referred to in the preceding pages, he claims no credence for them beyond what the available historical evidence may warrant.
