

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND, 1829

FOR the Catholic Church in England the year 1829 stood perceptibly for the opening of a new epoch. For the Catholic Church in Europe at large, on the other hand, it meant (although not so realised at the time) the closing of an old one. 1830 indeed was to usher in an era of Revolution. Thrones were to be shaken and dynasties disappear, wild political theories were to be acted on, the map of Europe re-arranged, and the balance of power shifted. Religion was to be insulted, cathedrals sacked, monasteries burned, priests attacked, the Church plundered and cast from her high estate. But in 1829 there was as yet little thought of all this, and on the surface of things there was only an ordered tranquillity. Yet 1829 was to be the very last of those fifteen years of peace which followed on the downfall of Napoleon, and were the outcome of that European settlement so skilfully and (as it was vainly hoped) so lastingly engineered by the statesmen of the Congress of Vienna.

Had our English Catholics of a hundred years ago possessed (as they did not) a well-organised press, and been able to call on their foreign correspondents for a Survey of continental Catholicism in 1829, the sort of *Conspectus* that might thus have been supplied to them is here set down, to form a setting and a background to the picture of Emancipation at home:—

To begin with France. The French Church of 1829, organised with some modifications on the lines of the Napoleonic Concordat, looked very imposing, and had regained much of her ancient splendour. Despite a great shortage of clergy, she did much good work. The State was behind her, and as favourable as possible. She was subsidised not ungenerously,

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the re-opening of seminaries and colleges was authorised, and the return of religious orders sanctioned. Infidelity was no longer triumphant, Christianity was becoming fashionable, religion was seen to be the firmest support of order and civilisation. The genius of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, de Lamennais, de Maistre and others had immense effect. Yet in reality Catholicism in France was in deadly peril. She was too bound up with the powers that be, too closely identified with absolutist measures, too much hand in glove with reactionaries and extremists. The State, hoping to subdue its enemies by the aid of the spiritual power, had made the Church a sort of department of police, and Catholicism had become associated with all that was unpopular and undemocratic. Thus were being sown the seeds of an anti-clericalism which has endured to our own time. And hence, when a year later the dynasty of Charles X was to fall, the Church of France was to be very nearly dragged down with it.

In its re-settlement of Europe, the Congress of Vienna had made out of Belgium and Holland the single kingdom of the Netherlands, under the sceptre of the House of Orange. Never was forced union more ill-starred, never did one work more clumsily. Nations diverse to some extent in race and language, and altogether in history and religion, were yoked together. But 1829 was the last year they were willing to be so. The Belgic provinces were already in reality seething with revolt. The Faith was in danger, the Church enslaved, Catholic colleges and universities closed, Protestantism thrust upon an indignant people. The Dutch King, an obstinate, intolerant Calvinist, broke the Concordat he had made with the Holy See, outraged the national customs of the Belgians, forced the Dutch language upon them, was false to his promises both in letter and spirit, and blind to every dictate of prudence. The 'Revolution of

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July' in France would be the signal for a national upheaval, and the foundation of modern Belgium. In Holland itself, where more than a third of the people were Catholics, the Church was kept down with an iron hand. The Government was most unfavourably disposed to it, and showed its ill-will by constant petty persecution. Every Catholic feeling was outraged and disregarded. There was no hierarchy, and episcopal ministrations were performed by a Vicar-Apostolic, who had to reside across the frontier. Nevertheless, the spirit alike of clergy and people was indomitable and unflinching. Nothing could shake it.

In Switzerland, the revolutionary and Napoleonic upheavals had brought about complete religious disorganisation. Still, the violence done to the Church in the name of freedom had caused a reaction. The Catholics of the Swiss cantons became united as never before. Their new energy and life backed up the Holy See in its efforts to obtain concordats from the various governments. By 1829 new dioceses had been mapped out, a great educational centre formed at Fribourg, and a decided Catholic revival began. A determined effort was being made to throw off the yoke of philosophic radicalism, which had everywhere in Switzerland displaced the rule of the old aristocratic oligarchies.

And now we turn to the German States. The dissolution of the old Germanic Confederation, 'the Holy Roman Empire,' the break-up of its constitution, the secularisation in 1803 of the great ecclesiastical Electorates and Prince-Bishoprics, and the confiscation of the territories, property, and treasures of the Church, had thrown Catholic Germany into almost hopeless confusion, destroyed hundreds of once-flourishing chapters and abbeys, and paralysed the whole diocesan machinery of the country. Nearly all

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had made some progress. There was a new spirit alike in clergy and laity, and Catholics were far from being altogether without hope. The same might be said of Wurtemberg, Baden, Hanover, Oldenburg, and other German lands, where there were large Catholic populations always restive under their Protestant masters. All these States had by 1829 seen the necessity of entering upon concordats of one kind or another with Rome, and of not carrying repression too far.

For more than a generation the Catholic Church in Austria had been slowly recovering from that abject bondage to State bureaucracy to which it had been subjected by the Emperor Joseph II. By 1829 the administration of church affairs was tolerably free, though the bishops and clergy were still very far from emancipated from all civil control. Indeed, Metternich's whole system tended to regard the Church purely as a department of state. But the direction of education was coming back to her, the ecclesiastical appointments to bishoprics and benefices were excellent, due respect was paid to the Holy See, and the strong personal influence of the Emperors was usually exerted in the right direction. In Hungary things were much the same, and a recent National Church Council had done much good.

In Russia the outlook in 1829 was very dark, and an active persecution was in progress. The Uniat Churches were being suppressed, and the Basilian monasteries closed. Years of oppression and suffering awaited the Russian Catholics, and every effort was made to harness Catholicism to the car of the State, as a prelude to its absolute annihilation and to the wholesale forced apostasy of its people.

The once mighty kingdom of Poland, its territories dismembered and divided between Russia (which had the lion's share), Prussia, and Austria, partook of this terrible persecution. The Prussian Poles fared little

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better than the Russian ones; they were crushed and hampered in every way. Only in the Austrian fragment of Poland could the Church raise her head, and even there she was subjected to the strictest State supervision.

Spain was in a most unsettled condition in 1829. For the moment Catholicism enjoyed a measure of peace. But the extreme Liberal Party was preparing to encompass its almost entire destruction, for which the opportunity was soon to come. Violent civil war, the enslavement of religion, the wholesale spoliation of the monasteries, all these things were very near.

As to Portugal, in 1829 she was ruled by Dom Miguel, the champion of the absolutist and Conservative Party. Had he been able to maintain himself, the Church would have been secure. But though he was the choice of the Cortes, and had the mass of the Portuguese people behind him, he was no match for the extremists and Freemasons, backed by foreign Liberalism, gold, and bayonets, and he was soon to be driven out of the land. His going was to be the prelude of persecution and robbery, and the bishops and clergy were to be bound hand and foot to the State for many a long year.

Lastly, we come to the Italy of 1829. There, there was a seeming calm. In the Sardinian kingdom of the north the Church was for the moment in a healthy and vigorous condition; in the Lombard and Venetian provinces she was controlled by the bureaucratic hand of Austria, whose influence was also felt in Tuscany and the other duchies of Central Italy. In Naples things went on in the old Bourbon way, nothing in either Church or State forgotten and nothing learned. Rome and the States of the Church were once again beneath the mild sway of the Popes. But everywhere, under the surface, there was great unrest, the whole land was seething with disaffection and honeycombed

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with secret societies. Revolution was in the air, and the Catholic Church fulfilled her mission with difficulty. No one knew what the morrow might bring forth.

Such was Europe in 1829. Pius VIII, the aged Pontiff on whom in that year rested the 'solicitude of all the Churches,' could have found but little to comfort him as he surveyed the nations committed to his care. England, almost alone, by its gift of Catholic Emancipation, brought some measure of consolation to his stricken heart.

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