

THE ROMAN ARISTOCRACY SINCE 1870*

The End of the 'Blacks' and the 'Whites'

WITH the signing of the Lateran Treaty, the two parties of the 'Blacks' and the 'Whites' have disappeared from the Roman aristocracy. When, in 1870, the temporal power of the Popes over Rome ceased to exist, the Roman aristocracy could not forget its origin, and maintained with dignity an attitude of fidelity and respect towards the Papacy. The princely families of that time—and nearly all of them still exist—owed, with very rare exceptions, their own rise to the Papacy. It is certain that already in the seventeenth century the feudal nobility of the Middle Ages had disappeared. The few families which descended from them, such as Colonna, Caffarelli, Orsini, Conti, Massimo, Savelli, Publicola-Santacroce, while unable to consider themselves created by the Popes, had received from them in later times so many benefits that they were much on a level with those who owed their greatness exclusively to the circumstance of having seen one of their own blood on the Throne of St. Peter. Such was the case of the greater number: Borghese, Barberini, Aldobrandini, Odescalchi, Ottoboni, Altieri, Boncompagni-Ludovisi, Rospigliosi, Chigi, and Braschi. There were Papal families who did not live in Rome, such as the Corsini, returned to Florence, the Carafa, and the Pignatelli, re-established at Naples. In the list of the Roman Princes one also found the Ruspoli, Antici-Mattei, Lante, Cenci-Bolognetti, Sforza-Cesarini, Giusiniani-Bandini, Doria-Pamphili, and Del Drago, promoted from the marquisate to the principality on the occa-

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sion of a conspicuous marriage, and finally the Torlonia, the last-comers, who had gained the coat-of-arms and the closed coronet by services rendered to the Pontifical State. Together with these magnates there lived in Rome many families of a nobility not princely, but often older and more illustrious than the former. Pre-eminent in this category came the so-called 'Marquises of the Canopy,' that is, the Patrizi, Sacchetti, Theodoli, and Costaguti. Their title was derived from the privilege of carrying the poles of the Pontiff's canopy in solemn ceremonies. In other times such a privilege had been disputed with a fury which degenerated into scenes of violence, and to prevent such scenes, the Popes chose in perpetuity those to whom such an honour should belong. The Marquises of the Canopy have the right to the appellation of 'Don' and 'Donna,' as have the princes and dukes. Another right of theirs is that of having in their antechamber their own coat-of-arms surmounted by a canopy, and near by there is a cushion and an umbrella, called 'basilica,' to show that etiquette allows the 'Marquises of the Canopy' to receive the Pope in their own houses. For fifty-eight years such 'indumenti' have been faithfully maintained in the houses of the princes, dukes, marquises of the canopy and ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, together with the throne, with its chair turned to the wall in sign of mourning (as all could see in the Palazzo Colonna), waiting for an august visit which, as the years passed by, receded into the dim distance. Now these thrones can resume their natural position, and the cushions and the great umbrellas return to their old uses, for nothing need now prevent the Holy Father from visiting those nobles who have the right to receive him.

Allusion has been made to the attitude of the Roman aristocracy in 1870; but one must remember

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that their division into 'Blacks' and 'Whites' already existed in the last years of the temporal sovereignty of the Popes over Rome, because even then several families made no secret of their profound sympathy with the cause of Italian unity, with Rome as the capital; among such pioneer 'Whites' must be recorded the Caetani, and the Ruspoli of the Poggio-Suasa branch. These 'Liberals' were not exactly held in favour by the Vatican; indeed their actions were followed with uneasiness. The Caetani especially, with their adoption of English ways, so unusual in the life of the aristocracy of the Eternal City, were looked upon as little less than 'brands from Hell.'

The great majority of the Roman nobility remained, however, faithful to the Holy See, and at the beginning, refrained from any contact with the Quirinal. It must also be remembered that all posts at the Pontifical Court, other than ecclesiastical, were and still are, by hereditary privilege, held by members of the Roman patriciate. The supreme post of Assistant at the Pontifical Throne was given by Sixtus V to the heads of the Orsini and Colonna families, and as, after many centuries of discussion, the question of precedence had never been decided between them, it remains established that one year the service shall be rendered by a Colonna, and the next by an Orsini. Prince Ruspoli is grand master of the Sacred Hospice, Marquis Sachetti grand 'Furiere' of the Sacred Palace, Marquis Serlupi-Crescenzi grand master of the Horse, and Prince Massimo grand master of the Posts. The two last offices had of late become purely honorary, the first when the present Pontiff suppressed all the stables and carriages of the Vatican, substituting motor-cars, but it might return to honour if Pius XI should re-establish certain ceremonies such as would entail the use of the gala coach, and should he re-mount his Noble Guard. And pro-

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bably the Master of the Pontifical posts will once again exercise effectual functions.

To the above-mentioned offices must be mentioned that of Marshal of the Conclave, which passed to the Chigi when the Savelli became extinct; that of Standard-bearer of the Holy Roman Church, which is the privilege of the Marquises of Montoro; and lastly the Noble Guard of His Holiness, traditionally commanded by a Roman prince, at present by Prince Aldobrandini.

And yet it is evident that the Roman patriciate, no matter what their aspirations and their feelings as Italians, found themselves in a particularly delicate situation when Rome was proclaimed capital of the new kingdom, and when the Pontiff, who up to then had been their legitimate sovereign, had to confine himself a prisoner in the Vatican, proclaiming the most absolute intransigence, and exacting the same from those who would remain faithful to him.

As far as the intransigence of the Roman nobility is concerned with regard to the new state of affairs, various degrees were shown: there were the absolute intransigents such as Lancellotti, and Massimo, who, as a sign of mourning, closed the shutters of his magnificent palace in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, protesting that they would not be opened again as long as the Pope remained confined to the Vatican. But only a few years ago, the Massimo family decided to reopen those famous shutters, allowing the sun once again to shine in their rooms. To-day they can say that such decision was prophetic.

And to the ball which Prince Lancellotti used to give every year at the Carnival in his Palace near San Salvatore in Lauro, only the most rigorously 'black' nobles were invited. The Orsini, also, followed that colour, not because they were hostile to the new régime, but, like the greater number of the Roman

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princes, because of their sense of regard for the Pontiff, and in consideration of their functions at the Papal Court.

Colonna, however, as also Doria, Caetani, Odescalchi, Borghese and Torlonia, could not conceal their liberalism. Don Prospero Colonna, Prince of Sonnino, was a brilliant officer of the King of Italy, and subsequently a politician and a Senator of the Kingdom, together with his brother Don Fabrizio. Thus the house of Colonna presented the case of one of its members who, becoming the head of that historic family, found himself obliged to choose between the dignity of Assistant at the Pontifical Throne, and that of Senator of the Kingdom of Italy.

In succeeding generations events greatly modified the division of 'Blacks' and 'Whites,' as was to be expected, and the intransigence of the first years remains an isolated phenomenon. Young men of the 'black' nobility performed their military service in the King's Army with zeal and devotion, even those who were members of the Pope's Noble Guard. And the War brought out prominently many cases of admirable patriotism and valour on the part of young men whose family traditions held them in close connection with the Papal Court.

The 'Blacks' could show themselves to be as good Italians as the 'Whites,' and the appellation had no longer any practical value, but became purely one of historic tradition. Far distant were the times described in their works by Marion Crawford and Marchesa Lily Theodoli, in which the parents of a girl of the 'Black' Roman nobility refused to allow her to marry a young man of the 'White' nobility. And indeed it would seem that even at that date those two distinguished writers were somewhat exaggerating the dramatic situations in which they placed their leading characters.

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In 1883 there was an alarm when the Corps Diplomatique accredited to the Holy See found it necessary to meet together to deprecate the case wherein a lady of the Court of the Queen of Italy was invited to a dinner-party in a 'Black' embassy. Latterly these differences have not been observed very strictly, even among the diplomats of the two Courts, so much so that last summer his Eminence Cardinal Gasparri (who only the other day countersigned the Treaty of 'Conciliation') sent to the head of the Missions accredited to the Vatican a severe admonition on the subject of such 'forgetfulness.' Truly the last mutterings of a storm to be followed by shining serenity!

The 'Blacks' and the 'Whites' now pass definitely into history. To the characteristic expression 'dopo il Settanta' will succeed that of 'dopo il Ventinove.' But so far as the attitude of the Roman nobles during the past fifty-eight years is concerned, it is only just to state that they did their best to conciliate their feelings of devotion towards the Pontiff with those of affection for their country.

GIULIO MARCHETTI FERRANTE.

Translated by E. M. COXON

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