

## THE POPE'S FOREIGN MERCENARIES

THE arresting phrase occurs in one of the rich crop of paragraphs called up by the recent return of Italian recognition of the Temporal Power. The pre-1870 Papal Railway, the old Papal Coach, the States of the Church Navy, and of course the famous Foreign Legions of the little Roman Army, each has served as a convenient peg on which to hang some sort of an article. Wonderfully interesting many of them have been. Only if we get some real facts down in black and white, they may prove scarcely less interesting.

Let us begin, then, with the Papal Army of to-day. First comes the famous Swiss Guard. Only it hardly concerns us English. For nobody but a Swiss may join it, and incidentally no Swiss may outside his own Army join anything else. It is his Government's solitary exception to its Foreign Enlistment Act. Next comes the Noble Guard, the Corps to which Pope Pius IX was in his youth refused admission through a bodily weakness. With the exception of the war years, enlistment has always been rigorously confined to the Roman aristocracy, and our only thought for it need be that next to our own Life Guards at Whitehall it provided until recently the world's last remaining instance of a mounted guard. There used to be five—at Petrograd, Potsdam, Paris, the Vatican, and Whitehall. To-day, our pageant of a guard over a Palace which is not there stands magnificently solitary in its class. Next in the Papal Army comes the Palatine Guard of Honour, a force of volunteers, whose only function is a parade order on occasions of great ceremony, and last of all we have the Pontifical Gendarmerie, really the Vatican Police.

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Some three or four years ago, by the way, they 'downed swords' for higher pay, and if anyone ever writes a history of strikes their gesture will probably be bracketted with the affair of the Apostles. These were the old gentlemen whose business it was in the Easter ceremonies of Vienna to have their feet ritually washed, and who some years back with an astounding modernity seized the opportunity at the very last moment, with all the crowds expectant, to press a united claim for higher honoraria. One supposes that to be the correct term of the ultimatum.

So far, then, we have a Roman Army in which, with the centuries-old exception of the Swiss, no foreigners can have any practical part. How, then, to arrive at our title? And the answer comes that before 1870 it was different. As far back as 1723 there is a mention of some German Guards serving under the Pope, and with the troubles that began in the Italy of about the eighteen-fifties the Papal Army comprised increasing proportions of foreigners. Apart, for instance, from the French soldiers supporting Rome as allies, there were other French fighting actually under the Pope's flag. The famous Antibes Legion, it was blessed by His Holiness in 1866, and there was what they called the Roman Legion under Adjutant-Major Prevost, a whole regiment taken from the French service and presented to the Pope. Catholic Brittany, in particular, was to the fore in the movement, subscribing for a battery of guns and so many stands of Remington rifles. And then even when 1870 was all over and Rome had fallen, many of these French ex-soldiers still stood by unofficially, hoping yet to be used. Headed by Monsieur de Charette, they went on drilling to be ready. For their colours they had the Banner of the Sacred Heart. For years and years there existed in France a skeleton army known as the Militia of Jesus. The fighting was over, and the battle

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lost—for the time. If ever it was waged again, the Militia was ready.

Our own first contribution from the English-speaking Catholic world came in 1860 with a Major O'Reilly's Irish Brigade to serve against Garibaldi. They were all volunteers, and their fares to Rome were raised by subscription. There is a mention of them as being reorganised by the famous Papal General Lamoricière, and there is considerable mention of them after their disbandment. For the Pope had a medal especially struck for them, and indignant questions were asked in Parliament about the legality of the men wearing it. For an English nobleman to be granted a foreign title was a graceful tribute, but these men were Irish and Roman Catholics. It was different. And with the coming of the Zouave movement there was more indignation still. We had our own Zouaves in the British Army. It is true that they had nothing to do with Algeria, where Zouaves come from, but Queen Victoria, on a visit to Paris in 1858, had been struck by the uniforms of some French Zouaves, and had adopted it for our West India Regiment. There were Zouaves in the American Civil War. It was even said that one great American city put its fire brigade into Zouave uniform. There is a French word which means to play the Zouave, to be, as one might say, a bit of a lad, to belong to one of the regiments which shot the 'Emden.' Of a certainty, the Zouave movement was spreading. Still, for the Roman Catholics to take it up was going a little too far.

It was a future Cardinal Archbishop of Mechlin who conceived the idea of the Pontifical Zouaves, and the scheme spread like quick-fire through the Catholic world. In our own Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, committees were formed to raise funds and recruits. In London they opened a banking account in the name of 'St. Michael.' Parish priests submitted

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lists of possible recruits. The would-be Mercenary must not only possess a high standard of physical fitness, but must be a practising Catholic of good character. Once accepted, the Committee did the rest, and found the transport to Rome. Our English Committee under Lord Denbigh even sent across the Continent two Catholic lads, aspirants of youthful age who had run away from the tender care of Worcester Workhouse. And all over the Catholic world the same thing was happening. When in 1869 the 'General Abbattucci' sank between Marseilles and Civita Vecchia, twenty-three recruits for the Pope's armies were drowned. Two of them were London Italians, and there was Mass for them at the Hatton Garden Church.

The fortunes of our English-speaking contingents were varied and peculiar. The old Catholic families contributed liberally, and, indeed, for a time it was considered the correct thing to have served for a term as a private in the Papal Zouaves. So many young men of this class there were that there was once a proposal to organise a Cricket Club in the Zouave Barracks in Rome. An alternative excitement, by the way, was that part of the barracks was once blown up by an infernal machine, a time-bomb as we should call it in these politer days. Far less happy, on the other hand, was the story of one of the Irish contingents. Originally raised as Catholic Scotland's gift to His Holiness, it was supposed to consist of Highlanders, and at one time every man wore the kilt. In practice the bulk of the recruiting was in Glasgow, and the Highland element so far as the rank-and-file was concerned was soon swamped by Irish immigrants. So came about the anomaly, His Holiness's Own Highlanders, who were mostly kilted Irishmen, officially termed the Scottish Zouaves, a style which may one day sadly perplex the military historian of the future; officially termed, we say, for there was no secret about the busi-

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ness. The Foreign Enlistment Act was as yet non-existent, and either side was impartially allowed to recruit as it would. The Highland-Irish-Kilted-Zouaves, in fact, in their passage to Rome, marched in splendour through the streets of London, being greeted with roars of applause from a populace which, while disapproving of the Pope, was kind enough to admire the singular audacity of this particular body of his adherents.

Once arrived, however, in Rome the glory soon departed. Fifteen halfpennies every five days was the Mercenary's pay, with a coffee which the Irishman did not understand for breakfast, and a 'soupe' which he understood still less for other meals. It might be all well and good for the young English Zouave of means. Three-halfpence a day left little margin for supplementary meals for the Glasgow Irishman with nothing else in his pocket. He could not understand the language, for in the confusion they had given him Italian corporals and sergeants. Nor were his fellow-Catholics of the English contingents of much moral support to him. To tell the truth the two bodies were as apart as the poles. There came, for instance, the anniversary of the executions of the Manchester Martyrs, and the Glasgow Irish insisted on subscribing from their halfpence for Requiem Masses in some of the Roman Churches. 'Manchester Murderers,' the English mostly called the business, and so the dissension grew till not even the bond of common Faith could bridge the gulf of different educations, politics, and outlooks. And in the end Cardinal Antonelli, with an eye on the sympathies of Catholic England, disbanded the Glasgow Zouaves as an integral body. It was an unhappy end to a day that had begun with promise so bright.

Even allowing, however, for such a set-back, the Rome of the late sixties was full of its Zouaves from

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the English-speaking world. The London *Universe*, in fact, raised subscriptions to provide them with Christmas puddings, and one is glad to know that the puddings materialised and reached the men. One mentions it because it has not in history always been so. In the Crimea, for instance, a public subscription was raised for precisely the same purpose, and then fifteen years later the puddings, now as hard as cannon balls, were discovered in a building near London Bridge, where the Government Department that was to act as carriers for the national generosity had forgotten all about them. *The Universe* puddings, on the other hand, were entrusted to no Department, and reached the men. There was another subscription for them, this time for flannel underwear against the Roman mists, and again the flannel reached its goal. The bales were taken out by Father Neve, the parish priest from Taunton of all places, who was going out as chaplain to the troops. One of the chaplains, by the way, a Jesuit Father Garlache, was writing a book on the business. *The Last Days of the Papal Army* it was called, though the present writer, to his great regret, has never been able to ascertain whether it was ever actually published.

History some of these 'Foreign Mercenaries' made. There was, for instance, the Battle of Mentana, with five thousand on either side. And the Papal Troops lost two hundred men, and Garibaldi eight hundred. There were English on his side, too, for the anti-Papalists had their recruiting offices in London. Not, to be honest, that they were all exactly Mercenaries either. There was one Englishman at least fighting against the Pope, who was paying his own expenses. It was not for any special hatred of the Church. Indeed, it is to be doubted whether his theological convictions were particularly firm in either direction. The real point was that he had invented a

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new rifle, and, being anxious to try it out under actual service conditions, naturally jumped at the chance of joining one army or the other. It hardly mattered very much which. More painful was the story of another Englishman, who turned up in the early 'seventies before the Marlborough Street police magistrate with his sad confession of having involuntarily fought against His Holiness. He had been a young man of simple mind but aristocratic leanings, and hearing of the Pope's Noble Guard, which was then in every paper, had wished to join its exclusive ranks. Every private in that famous Corps was a nobleman. If, then, one joined it, one automatically became Noble, so ran his simple reasoning. It was unlucky for the young Londoner that at that particular moment he should have come into a legacy of two thousand pounds, unluckier still that in a London public house he should have met a friendly soul who by singular fortune happened to be on a Secret Recruiting Mission for that very Corps. It was exclusive, it was true. But these matters, as every Man of the World knows, can be arranged. Two thousand pounds was, oddly enough, the regular fee with which the Sergeant of the Noble Guard was accustomed to be 'squared.' And out the happy pair went, the victim refusing to part with his cash till actually in uniform. Asking long enough for trouble, he eventually found it, for his kind friend, seeing no other way of getting the money, actually accompanied him to Italy, and there, finding that the military aspirant could speak no language but his own, took him to an Italian recruiting office and claimed the bounty for bringing a volunteer. Nor was it till after 1870 that the would-be Aristocrat was able to get out of uniform and find his painful way back to London, where he bitterly complained that not only had he not been in the Noble Guard, but that he had been in the

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wrong Army altogether. And what could the magistrate do about his two thousand pounds? And such was our boasted British Justice that the magistrate did not know.

For us English there is, too, another memory of Mentana, for it was there that Disraeli made his Lothair fight and fall wounded and see an apparition. And the only drawback to the romance was that the Marquis of Bute, the original of Lothair, never was near Mentana. But it made a fine tale.

And then when it was all over, and 1870 had come and Papal Rome had fallen, they began to ship the Zouaves home again. One boat alone, the steamship 'India,' anchored in the Mersey with nearly three hundred on board, two hundred and ten from Canada and eighty-one from England and Ireland. And to celebrate their disembodiment the English naturally had a dinner. In the Liverpool Adelphi Hotel it was, and there were speeches about their treatment by the Italian Government. How they had been promised all the Honours of War, and then how they had been put into prison and fed on bread and water. The Adelphi fare must have seemed sweet indeed.

And then the very last of all that one reads of the Zouaves was months later. When the new *régime* in Rome had not brought all the delights that were promised, and there were still poor people, and some of them were starving. And they asked the Pope if they could use some of the old soup kettles that were standing idle in the old Zouave Barracks and get up a relief kitchen for the distressed.

And as His Holiness gave the little permission, he said: 'For we have no longer an army. But there are always the poor.'

And that, after all, is the true story of the Pope and his Foreign Mercenaries.

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