FRANCE AND THE HOLY SEE

AT a meeting of the French Academy in Paris at the end of November, two pronouncements were made concerning the renewal of diplomatic relations between France and the Holy See which are so remarkable that they deserve quotation in some detail. The occasion was of unusual importance, for it coincided with the recent troubles in French politics which had compelled M. Poincaré to reconstruct his Government, as the result of attacks by the Radical Party, directed very largely against his proposal to encourage the French foreign missions. M. Herriot and his colleagues had been compelled to retire from the Ministry, and M. Poincaré had to form a new Government drawn very much from the same elements which composed the old Bloc National. Once again, during November, the old controversy over the relations of Church and State had cut across party politics in France; and M. Poincaré, after going to the furthest possible lengths in concession to the old sectarian spirit, had decided to trust to his own prestige and persuasive powers to carry the Chamber with him.

Such were the conditions when one of the picturesque formal meetings of the French Academy was held for the purpose of admitting a new Academician. It happened that the new Academician was one of the most important of French diplomats, and that he had been elected to replace the late M. Jonnart, who had been appointed as the first French Ambassador to the Vatican after diplomatic relations were restored in 1922. On such occasions the new Academician is required to deliver an elaborate panegyric upon his predecessor; and another member of the Academy delivers a formal reply, which reviews the qualifica-

tions of the new member and discusses his public career. On November 29th, when M. Paleologue thus appeared for the first time in the green uniform of the Academy to pronounce his eulogy upon M. Jonnart, it was one of the politician members of the Academy, M. Barthou—who has been Prime Minister, and who is a prominent member of the present Government—who had to pronounce the address of welcome to M. Paleologue. The exchange of compliments was made all the more significant because M. Poincaré, who is likewise an Academician, was present in his green uniform on the platform; and in the front of the hall, which is always crowded with distinguished visitors on such occasions, sat Cardinal Dubois, the Archbishop of Paris.

It would have been very easy to avoid any reference whatever to the major problems involved in the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Vatican; for M. Jonnart had gone there only at the end of a very active public life. M. Paleologue had also filled many positions in diplomacy, besides having been head of the Foreign Office. But the conditions under which the addresses were delivered decided both speakers to make unexpectedly strong declarations on a controversial subject. And the presence of both M. Poincaré and Cardinal Dubois, as well as Mgr. Baudrillart (who has invented a curious green uniform of his own as an ecclesiastical member of the Academy), added a certain piquancy to the scene.

M. Paleologue, in an admirably polished academic speech, surveyed all the earlier phases of his predecessor's public career. But it was when he came to the last phase, after the conclusion of the Great War, that he stimulated curiosity. He explained that the last responsibility undertaken by M. Jonnart had resulted from negotiations which took place when he himself had been Secretary General at the Quai

d'Orsay. 'For seventeen years,' he began, tackling the delicate question with engaging frankness, 'France and the Holy See were no longer acquainted, either officially or semi-officially. Their divorce was complete: the gulf was unbridgeable, and grew wider from day to day. The disadvantages of that situation —I speak only from the French point of view—had very soon revealed themselves in our foreign relations. Our rivals had lost no time in taking possession of the position that we had abandoned to them. All those works of propaganda which our missionaries had sustained abroad for centuries, and which have done so much to extend the influence of France, were endangered. Even our diplomatic action was constantly disturbed.'

'Within our own frontiers,' he went on, 'the rupture of our relations with the Court of the Vatican produced results no less injurious. Our secular clergy were left at times completely unprotected against the claims of Ultramontane Absolutism. And in the selection of bishops our clergy could no longer count upon any mediator qualified to defend at the Holy See their rights and their traditions, to safeguard that national imprint, that free and spontaneous character, that breadth of feelings and of views which, within the universal Church, have always distinguished the Church of France. The blunder which we had committed in 1905 . . .' (and many eyes must have turned curiously towards M. Poincaré and M. Barthou when he used such words) '. . . . had often been admitted even by those who, in our conflict with Rome, had shown themselves most aggressive.'

Not content with this highly provocative statement, the ex-Ambassador went on to emphasise the affront to the Holy See that had been involved in the rupture of diplomatic relations. He proceeded, with startling candour, to suggest that France had been ex-

tremely fortunate in being able to renew the relations without being rebuffed. 'We had not only wounded the Sovereign Pontiff in his dignity,' M. Paleologue went on; 'we had raised between ourselves and him the obstacle of a principle upon which no Pope could compromise. The Government of the Republic had, by its own unfettered decision, decreed a new form of organisation for the Church in France, and it had claimed to oppose that organisation to the Holy See without ever having consulted it beforehand. In that way, from the Papal point of view, we had attacked the autonomy of the Apostolic power in what was super-eminently its own domain. That is why all the attempts which were made to recreate, even in the most discreet form, some sort of contact between France and the Holy See failed one after another. It was soon manifest that the renewal of diplomatic relations would remain impossible so long as the Government of the Republic shrank from taking the initiative openly in an official negotiation.'

Then, M. Paleologue continued, the Great War broke out. 'Our absence from the Vatican gave to the German Empires every opportunity for pleading their own cause there, and we remember how they used their opportunity to advantage. In 1919 the Peace of Versailles transformed Europe. And at the same time Pope Benedict XV saw all the States sending Ambassadors to surround him. Was France, in the hour of her victory, France around whom so many renascent nations were to gravitate henceforward, was she to persist in refusing to recognise the Sovereign Pontiff? To M. Millerand,' declared M. Paleologue in remarkably emphatic language, 'who was at that time Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, belongs the credit for having undertaken the decisive negotiations with the Vatican. My own

functions as Secretary General at the Quai d'Orsay gave me the privilege of taking part in them.'

The moment for revelations had now been reached, and M. Paleologue deliberately heightened the effect. 'But what were the feelings of the Holy See likely to be towards the Republic? Two distinguished prelates brought to us from Rome the first favourable indications. One of them was the venerable Cardinal Amette, Archbishop of Paris. The other, Mgr. Baudrillart, sits among you as a member of the Academy. To Cardinal Amette Benedict XV had said: "If I am offered a finger I will offer my hand. If I am offered a hand I will open my arms." He was offered a hand, and he did open his arms. Some weeks later,' M. Paleologue went on, 'another of your colleagues, a master of history, M. Gabriel Hanotaux, who was also my own chief, undertook the happy task of representing France at the canonisation of Jeanne d'Arc. Not only did the Sovereign Pontiff lavish personal attentions upon him. In speaking of the heroic virgin, in whom the highest conscience of France's patriotism is personified, he said: "We desire that your saintly warrioress should always be represented, henceforward as in the past, clothed in armour and with her standard; we desire that she should enter St. Peter's riding on horseback."

'Having begun under such auspices,' continued M. Paleologue, 'the negotiations could not fail to succeed. Nevertheless, they were protracted'—and here once more he inserted a dexterously deferential compliment to the Holy See—'in the first place because the Vatican is never in a hurry: it has centuries to look ahead: and also because certain of the problems that had to be solved, for instance the question of the *associations cultuelles*, raised complicated difficulties from the point of view of canon law. To be quite frank, it must be admitted that in the Sacred

College of Cardinals there were a number of prelates who had no wish whatever that Liberal and Democratic France—France, as they said, in which the bad spirit, the spirit of investigation, of subjectivity, is more pernicious and more challenging than in any other country—that this incorrigible France should come back to resume her place beside the Apostolic Throne. So well could they do without her!

'Finally, after long digressions and through many obstacles, M. Briand took the courageous step of repairing the blunder of 1905 by arranging that France should henceforward have an Ambassador at the court of the Sovereign who exercises an autocratic rule over the most powerful religious organisation in the world, over the immense Catholic people, with their three hundred million souls. To undertake a mission of that importance, the name of M. Jonnart suggested itself immediately to our rulers. From his first arrival in Rome, the success of his enterprise was assured, for on the first day he won the sympathy of Benedict XV, just as he was able to gain the immediate confidence of Pius XI a few months later.'

The shrewd old diplomat in the leisure of his retirement had lifted just enough of the veil to make it certain that M. Barthou, in his reply, would have to deal with the same subject. All eyes were turned towards M. Poincaré or to Cardinal Dubois to watch what expression would be shown upon their faces when M. Barthou spoke. M. Barthou took up the eulogy of M. Jonnart where M. Paleologue had left it, emphasising the versatility and the power of his personality, which could undertake any difficult and responsible public duty. 'There were other ways, and still more important,' he said, 'in which France required to be represented. Both the time and the task were full of difficulty. It was neither without risk nor without danger that we had remained aloof

for so long from *the city of all peoples*. At all times and in all places the absent put themselves in the wrong. Charles Jonnart could gauge from the outset what injury the interests of France had suffered from so long an absence, and especially during that war period when others had been unimpeded in pleading their detestable cause. We had to regain in every field the hearing which we had lost. There are times when it is more easy to build anew than to reconstruct. The complexity of the problems which had been left in suspense and were now resumed would have appalled a less alert or less experienced man than Charles Jonnart. Time had not worked in our favour, and all had to be begun over again.

'What a mistake it had been,' M. Barthou went on, using his voice with special emphasis and with full consciousness that he was speaking in the presence of M. Poincaré, who as an old 'man of the Left' like himself, had been one of the authors of the 'mistake' before the war. 'What a mistake it had been to ignore a moral power which from end to end of the world issues its orders to three hundred million believers. There is no Government, not one, be it regarded as orthodox or infidel, whose foreign politics, to say nothing of its internal peace, does not have to reckon with it. One must be both short-sighted and short-minded to believe that the influence and the activities of France can do without the propagation of its language and its culture. True, I have learned from Pascal that it is at times "more easy to find monks than to find reasons.' But what if reason should be on the monks' side? Must we put them in the wrong, to the injury of those missions which serve the influence of France abroad and afar? Must we leave their places empty and free for rival missions, who will most often be organised by monks of other coun-

tries? Fear of words has never been the beginning of wisdom.'

Beyond that point M. Barthou would not venture, even on the privileged platform of the Institut. But this exchange of academic courtesies between the Cabinet Minister and the most famous of France's retired diplomatists gave an opportunity for some of the most illuminating revelations that have yet been made concerning the modern relations between Church and State in France. More than that, it expressed the personal views of the most experienced diplomat in France as to the disastrous consequences of any rupture with the Holy See. At the same time, it committed one of the most dexterous and most cautious members of M. Poincaré's Cabinet to a very definite pronouncement on the necessity of encouraging the foreign missions, if France's prestige in distant countries is not to go by default. M. Barthou's speech, when one recalls that it was made in the presence of M. Poincaré and also of Cardinal Dubois, is a very fair indication that at any rate the more ambitious professional politicians have no intention of returning to any attitude of hostility towards the Vatican.

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