

THE SECOND ADRIATIC CONCORDAT

THE recent attempt to settle the relations between the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of Jugoslavia has been attended by tumult in the streets of Belgrade and in the minds of some religious publicists in this country who have seen in it an example of Roman Catholic aggression. Yet consider how subtle must be the diplomacy of the Vatican, when its schemes are initiated and promoted by the State, while the Catholic populations of Croatia and Slovenia look passively on, contenting themselves in their newspapers with chronicling the facts, almost without comment.

The following piece of documentation, representing the somewhat detached point of view of a Catholic Croat towards the whole business, may help to set things in proportion.

The first steps towards the Concordat were taken by the Government more than ten years ago, when a delegation, headed by M. Yanitch, was sent to Rome. The negotiations, however, hung fire owing to some bother over undiplomatic interference with the affairs of the Slavonic College of St. Jerome. Eventually, on July 25th, 1935, an agreement was initialled in Rome by Cardinal Pacelli, for Pope Pius XI, and Dr. Auer, the Minister for Jugoslavia.

At the time it was expected that ratification would take two years. The present Government of M. Stoyadinovitch set to work to obtain the necessary majority in the Skupshtina in favour of the Concordat. It was laid before this parliament in November 1936, and a commission was appointed to study the bill, the president of which was Dr. Yanitch, formerly Minister of Religion. Immediately the opposition broke in a storm of speeches, articles and pamphlets. Perhaps the affair was not too well managed on the Government side. Anyhow it felt bound to seek further explanations and qualifications from the Holy See through the Apostolic Nuncio.

The difficulties can be ranged under four heads: the with-

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drawal of active priests from political life; the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to Slav minorities in Italian Istria; the inculcation of Yugoslavian patriotism in Catholic schools and seminaries; the Government inspection of such establishments.

The explanations furnished by Rome were considered to be favourable and the Skupshtina passed the Concordat by 166 against 128 on July 23rd. Three steps remain before it finally comes into law, approval by the Senate, the royal assent, and the exchange of the instruments of ratification between the high contracting parties.

The Concordat is strongly pressed by the Government. The Prime Minister declared its reasons in his speech before the commission on July 9th. There are nine religions legally recognized in Yugoslavia, the three principal ones being the Catholic, the Serb Orthodox, and the Moslem. Equality and freedom of religion is the theory of the country, proclaimed by the late King Alexander as Prince Regent on July 24th, 1918, confirmed by the regulations of the Ministry of Religion in 1919, affirmed in the Constitution of Vidovdan and in that of 1931. The religious equilibrium was not, however, observed in practice, chiefly at the expense of the Catholics. For the rights and privileges of the Serb Orthodox had been secured by law in 1923, and the status of the Moslems had been regulated in 1936. The position of the Catholics still demanded settlement. The new Concordat does not propose to give them preferential treatment or substantial privileges beyond those possessed by the Serb Orthodox. After twenty years' existence, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia now seeks to fulfil the proverb, *frater est carus, cuiusvis sit religionis*. This was the first reason for the Concordat according to the words of M. Stoyadinovitch: Catholic equality of privilege and right with the other religious bodies. In order that the Catholics should not appear to enjoy a specially favoured position, the Government was prepared to extend to other religions any special concessions granted by the Concordat.

Another reason advanced by the Government was the fact that a Concordat had existed with the Kingdom of Monte-

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negro (now a part of Jugoslavia) since 1887, and that another was being negotiated with Serbia immediately after the outbreak of war in 1914. There were few Catholics in those countries then, yet in the new Kingdom of Jugoslavia they number five million, owing to the inclusion of Catholic regions formerly belonging to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Were the new Concordat not attempted it might be said with justice that the Serbs were discriminating against the Catholic Croats and Slovenes.

The underlying reason in favour of the Concordat was not emphasized by the Government. The stability and unity of the Kingdom has been threatened for years by the discontent of the Croats. They have little desire to be merged into Jugoslavia, by geography and tradition they look to the West rather than to the East; they are a distinct people, and would prefer the break-up of Jugoslavia to the loss of their own nationality, though the fear of Italy somewhat cramps their action. The Government above all seeks to promote the unity of the Kingdom, in the spirit of the testament of King Alexander. It would remove one cause of disunion by recognizing the religious rights of the Croats and would strengthen its own position by having the friendliest relations with the Holy See. Whether the Concordat would have this effect remains to be seen.

That this is the diplomatic purpose of the Government in furthering the Concordat seems borne out by the reply of M. Stoyadinovitch to the opposition. He reminded the Orthodox clergy that they had changed since the days when their great statesman Nicholas Pashitch proposed a Concordat in 1914 in order that Serbia might be well armed, even morally, for war. It is a just inference that the Government in the present case is animated by similar intentions, not that these are bellicose, but that it desires to weld the State into a single whole, that it may present a united front against possible enemies, and that it may hold its present territories against aggression. From this point of view an agreement with the Holy See is desirable in the same way as the Pact with Italy.

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