

REVIEWS

HISTORY OF THE POPES, VOLS. XXXIX and XL: PIUS VI (1775-1799).

By L. Pastor. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; each 40s.)

With the publication of these two volumes the publishers have completed their ambitious task of producing the translation of the whole of Pastor's history of the papacy from the election of Clement V in 1305 to the death of Pius VI in 1799.

The reign of this last pontiff was not only the longest in all these centuries; it was also the most tragic, for he died a prisoner in the hands of his enemies—the only pope to do so for over a thousand years. When as Cardinal Braschi he entered the conclave which was to give a successor to Clement XIV, he realised how much the Holy See had suffered from the wounds inflicted on it during the reign of that unfortunate pope by the Bourbon courts, and when he saw this sad legacy become his he determined to do all that lay in his power to curb the widespread evil of caesarism.

The early years of his pontificate were sufficiently peaceful to allow him leisure to embark on a number of schemes for the improvement of the social services and for the furtherance of education and art. Noteworthy amongst these were his plans for the construction of better roads through the Papal States and for the draining of the notorious Pontine Marshes, a task hitherto regarded as impracticable. Pius, it is true, did not succeed to anything like the extent he had hoped, but he actually did manage to drain a considerable tract although at a great expenditure of time and money. Yet even today, with the combined resources of a united Italy and the improvement in engineering skill, it has not been possible to complete the draining of the whole district. The extension of the Vatican Library and the erection of the new museum to accommodate the many treasures of antiquity were other benefactions which shed lustre on his pontificate. Pastor however does not hesitate to blame him for 'a certain vanity in launching these schemes by which he wanted to make his pontificate famous and to have his name coupled with great deeds', but admits that 'he was also moved by the desire to restore the Holy See, threatened as it was, to its former reputation'.

Another but more serious fault is dealt with in detail by the author, namely, the pope's excessive nepotism. The elevation of his very deserving nephew Romoald Onesti to the cardinalate met with criticism only from Pius's enemies, but the wealth, power and dignities which he showered on Romoald's brother Luigi roused considerable ill-feeling. Nevertheless the pope continued to load this young man with favours and gifts, gave him his own surname of Braschi, secured him the hand of the daughter

of a wealthy and noble family, and as a wedding-gift presented the couple with 'a casket containing 10,000 golden doubloons, and in spite of the precarious state of the papal finances followed this up with further grants of money'. He also rented to Luigi on favourable terms much of the reclaimed land in the Pontine Marshes. The huge Palazzo of the duke of Braschi, as he was now styled, described by Pastor as 'a monument to nepotism', was attacked and nearly blown up in 1794 by a hungry mob, exasperated by rumours that the pope's nephew had made a considerable amount of money by dishonest speculations in grain. Even if Luigi merited all the opprobrious criticisms made against him, ingratitude certainly held no place amongst them, for he ever remained deeply attached to his uncle and did all that lay in his power to help him in the distress of his last years. As for Pius VI, surely the long martyrdom he suffered paid the price of his natural weakness for his kindred.

In an effort to appease the emperor Joseph II, whose mania for interfering in things ecclesiastical bordered almost on the insane, Pius VI made a journey to Vienna, the first undertaken by a pope beyond the Italian frontier for nearly five centuries. His act of condescension met, however, with scant reward and Joseph continued in his persecution of the clergy and religious until his death in 1790. The efforts of his nephew Francis II to carry on his repressive policy were arrested by the events consequent on the French Revolution. During the early days of this movement Pius VI did all he could to assist Louis XVI in his distress, although the French crown had long shown itself bitterly opposed to the Holy See, and even Louis had let himself be bullied by his government into accepting its anti-papal laws. Eventually the pope himself was engulfed in the whirlpool of the revolt and his states became a prey to the revolutionary army under Buonaparte, whose forces occupied Rome and carried Pius prisoner to France, where he died in confinement in the citadel of Valence on August 29, 1799. For five months his body lay embalmed and coffined but unburied in the chapel of that fortress, because the French Directorate forbade its being carried back to Rome. At length, in January 1800, Napoleon, who had become as First Consul the sole ruler of France, ordered the remains to be interred in a vault in the local cemetery with full military honours, but forbade any religious ceremony at the graveside and barred all clergy from attendance. When however he judged it politic to make a friend of the new pope, Pius VII, he allowed the body to be exhumed and transferred to its present resting-place in St Peter's.

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LA PENSÉE RELIGIEUSE DE LEON BLOY. Par Marie-Joseph Lory. (Bruges; Desclée de Brouwer.)

Léon Bloy provokes, in his critics and readers, a strong reaction—be it one of hostility or admiration. It is therefore almost impossible for any