The Great Schism of the West

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In His dealings with man, God is ever careful to leave a large scope for the exercise of free-will. We must not forget this, for it is only by bearing it constantly in mind that we can explain the large extent to which even the noblest and divinest of God's works present themselves to our gaze, like the gold in the ore, so largely encrusted over by and intermixed with the evil and the scandal arising out of human sinfulness. We must learn to disengage the gold from the ore, to distinguish the good from the evil, the divine from the human, and to ascribe each only to its own source.

This is especially necessary in dealing with the history of the Papacy. In the long line of Roman Pontiffs, alike in their personal character and in their government of the Church, the divine stands out in the clearest, the most dazzling, brightness to all who will observe it with open eyes; but there is a human element as well which at times obtrudes an unwelcome demand on our notice, and seems so incompatible with the divine as to excite astonishment.

With one such perplexing blending of incompatibles we now propose to deal. The Holy See is the divinely appointed centre of unity to the Catholic Church, and its endurance in that character is perhaps the crowning marvel of human history; and yet at one time the world saw for forty years the spectacle of two, and for a portion of this period of three, distinct successions of prelates engaged in bitter conflict with one another, each claiming to be the legitimate line of Roman Pontiffs, each gathering round itself a portion of the divided Christendom, and each launching out denunciations and excommunications against the adherents of the other two. If there can be so serious and long-enduring a schism in the Papacy itself, is it possible to believe that governmental unity is an essential property of the Catholic Church and the Papacy its divinely appointed bond?

But let us tell the story of the Great Western Schism, and then we shall be in a position to answer the difficulty.

The Origins of the Schism

The Schism commenced in 1378, but to explain how it originated we must first understand what were its predetermining causes. Seventy years earlier, Clement V. succeeded, if we disregard the short reign of Benedict XI., to the rule and the difficulties of Boniface VIII. He was of Gascon origin and was Archbishop of Bordeaux. He was therefore the subject of the English King Edward I., whose dominions at the time included South-Western France. But if an English subject, he was naturally French in his sympathies, and was on friendly terms with the reigning King, Philip le Bel. When the official news of his election to the Papacy reached him Clement was at Bordeaux, and although he appears to have purposed setting out for Rome after his coronation at Lyons, many circumstances combined to keep him all through his pontificate on French soil. In the first place the state of parties in Italy, and in particular at Rome, was such as to suggest that if in Rome the Pope would not be allowed a free hand in the government of the Church, and on the other hand Philip

was most anxious to keep the Pope in France in the hope of converting him into a tool for the furtherance of his own designs against the memory of Boniface VIII., and against the large wealth of the Knights of the Temple. It may be that Clement, who was of a pliant disposition and was fond of his native land, listened with no unready ear to the persuasions of Philip; nor ought we to credit him with the foresight of all the evils destined to follow from his ill-fated resolution.

The pleasant city of Avignon, on the left bank of the Rhone, which was eventually selected as the Papal residence in France, was not in Philip's territory. It belonged to the Counts of Provence, who were also Kings of Naples, and in the latter capacity, vassals of the Holy See. From them it was purchased by Clement's successor, John XXII., and it remained a Papal possession till it was annexed by the French Republican Government at the close of the last century.

Nevertheless, through its proximity to France, a residence there rendered the Popes subject to French influences, with the result that the Avignon Popes were always more or less overawed by the French Kings, and their courts became predominantly French in composition. Every one of the seven Popes from Clement V. to Gregory XI. were of French, and most were of Gascon origin, and French Cardinals were in a large majority in the Sacred College. Such a state of things could not fail to impair the reverence with which Catholic nations should regard the Holy See, as a power placed on an eminence apart, disengaged from entanglement in the rival policies of the different nations, and impartially surveying events from the lofty standpoint of Christian principles. We do not mean by this to acknowledge that the Avignon Popes were incapable of rising to the true ideal of their office. History has at last done them justice and acknowledged that they kept it sedulously in view, realizing its requirements in many striking ways.

Still, in spite of their many apostolic works, and although it is untrue to say that they submitted themselves in all respects to the dictation of the French monarchs, their sojourn on French soil rendered these Avignon Popes suspect to the nations, and the suspicions were not without solid grounds.

There were also other evils arising from the same cause. If the condition of Italy was a motive impelling the Popes to absent themselves from its midst, their absence tended to render the state of things much worse. While the Popes were present, they had been able in some degree to keep within bounds the turbulence of the conflicting parties, which, now that the restraining hand had been withdrawn, were fast converting the garden of Europe into a pile of ruins and a desert waste.

And this desolation of the Italy which they had abandoned reacted on the exiled Popes. They could no longer draw their accustomed revenues, and were compelled to impose numerous and heavy taxes on ecclesiastical property throughout the world. In no other way could they carry on the government of the Universal Church, and maintain such splendour in their courts as their high office seemed to them to require. It was most unjust to deny them the right to take this course, and the charge that in taking it they were reducing the local churches to ruin was doubtless much exaggerated. Still these charges were made by the victims of the taxation, and the Papacy became proportionately unpopular.

As the residence in Avignon went on enduring, the sense of these evils connected with it became more and more acute in the hearts of those who suffered from them. The Romans especially were urgent that the Popes should return to their natural home. On the other hand, the French Sovereigns, and the classes out of whom the Papal Court was mainly recruited, were as strenuous in urging the continuance of a state of things out of which they found so much profit. The Popes placed between

these two contending parties, although they were all of French birth, seem to have had the duty of return constantly in mind, and made periodical efforts to carry the project into effect. The only Avignon Pope of whom this cannot be said was Clement VI., and he, if he made no attempts and showed no anxiety to return, at least told the Roman ambassadors that to return would be his wish were not his continued presence in France necessary to heal the quarrel between the Kings of France and England. Blessed Urban V., who succeeded Clement VI., actually did return in 1367, and remained in Rome or its neighbourhood for three years. He, however, then returned to Avignon, where he shortly after died. Urban V. was succeeded by Gregory XI., the Pope under whom the final departure from Avignon took place.

Gregory XI's Return to Rome

The tension in Italy was then at its highest. During the absence of the Popes from Italy they appointed Legates to govern the Papal provinces in their stead. These, being members of the Sacred College, were almost of necessity of French origin and sympathies, and on that account excited general dislike; a dislike which they seem to have provoked in some cases by singularly injudicious and inconsiderate acts. Such conduct on the part of the Legates led, in 1375, to a general uprising of the Italians against them. In Rome this feeling took the form of a movement which, however, at that time, did not come to a head, to set up an Antipope. At Florence it translated itself into a war against the Sovereign Pontiff, and a largely successful endeavour to stir up rebellion in the Papal cities.

It was under these circumstances that, attended by his Court, Gregory took his departure in the autumn of 1376, and reached Rome in the following January. Although the Romans had realized so forcibly that the welfare of their city was bound up with the presence of the Pontiff in their midst; although they had entered into a treaty with their returning sovereign, had promised him a peaceful rule, and had received him with all the marks of intense rejoicing, it soon appeared how unready they were to subject selfish interests to the fulfilment of their promise. Gregory had an unquiet life during the short time which intervened before his death, which occurred in March, 1378.

The Election of Urban VI

There were sixteen Cardinals in Rome at the time of Gregory's decease, and of these four only were of Italian nationality. One, Pedro de Luna, was Spanish. The other ten were French, and of these ten five were Limousins. There were besides seven absent Cardinals, of whom six were at Avignon. All these were likewise of French birth. In virtue of a Constitution published by Gregory XI. just before his death, the Cardinals present at Rome were not to await the arrival of their absent colleagues, but proceed to terminate the anxieties and dangers of the interregnum by an immediate election. The Italian Cardinals naturally desired an Italian Pope, and believed that only by this means could the evils of a renewed Avignon residence be prevented. The "Ultramontane" Cardinals were, however, in a large majority, and as they had shown their attachment to Avignon by their endeavours to prevent the late Pope from quitting the pleasant abode, it was natural to anticipate that they would demand a Pope of their own mind and therefore of their own nationality. There was, nevertheless, a division among the Ultramontanes themselves, the Limousins desiring, and the rest opposing, the choice of a Limousin. The effect of this cleavage was to make the balance of parties in the Conclave more equal, and to give the Italians a better chance.

But beyond their own inclinations, there was a grave external consideration for the electors to take into account. The Roman citizens were bent on doing their utmost to prevent the election of another French Pope, lest another Avignon residence should be the result; and they were taking measures to force their will upon the Cardinals. A mob, partly armed, was going about the city crying out: "We wish for a Roman Pope or at least an Italian one." It did not hesitate to assail the Conclave itself, and perhaps to threaten the electors with death if the popular desire should be disregarded. How far the Cardinals yielded to this pressure is in dispute, and it is out of this dispute that the schism arose. This much is certain that, whether through the pressure or in spite of it, they speedily agreed among themselves, and on April 9, 1378, elected the Archbishop of Bari, Bartholomew Prignani. Prignani was a Neapolitan, and so far likely to be acceptable to the Romans. On the other hand, he owed his promotion from humble rank to the Limousin Cardinal of Pampeluna, Pierre de Monteruc, had lived a long time at Avignon, and had contracted in some degree the manners of the place. It might therefore be hoped that, though Italian by origin, he would in gratitude continue to stand by the party with which he had been hitherto associated. Prignani obtained at once fourteen out of the sixteen votes, and eventually all. But so fearful do the Cardinals seem to have been lest the Roman people should be enraged at their choice, that when in their impatience to hasten the election, the populace broke into the Conclave, they adopted a stratagem to protect their persons from violence. They caused, or at least encouraged, the spread of the rumour that Tibaldeschi, the Cardinal of St. Peter's, an aged Roman, had been elected, and meanwhile they themselves withdrew to safe places. There seems to have been reason for their fear. As soon as the people discovered that Prignani was the elect, they were filled with indignation. They were, however, eventually quieted down, and the Cardinals being brought back proceeded to complete the election and crown the new Pope, who took the name of Urban VI.

Urban VI's Character and Early Actions

There is agreement that till his election Urban was a man whose conduct had given edification.

The new Pope [says Pastor] was adorned by great and rare qualities; almost all his contemporaries are unanimous in praise of his purity of life, his simplicity, and temperance. He was also esteemed for his learning, and yet more for the conscientious zeal with which he discharged his ecclesiastical duties. It was said that he lay down to rest at night with the Holy Scriptures in his hands, that he wore a hair-shirt, and strictly observed the fasts of the Church. He was, moreover, experienced in business. When Gregory XI. had appointed him to supply the place of the absent Vice-Chancellor, he had fulfilled the duties of the office in an exemplary manner, and had acquired an unusual knowledge of affairs. Austere and grave by nature, nothing was more hateful to him than simony, worldliness, and immorality in any grade of the clergy.

He had, however, one great fault, a fault which sometimes accompanies the burning zeal for reform of a good man and frustrates all his efforts. He was harsh and unbending in his measures, rough and rude in his manner, and showed himself to be utterly without tact or considerateness. The day after his coronation he began to give offence. He rated the Bishops present for being absent from their dioceses, and called them perjured villains. He told the Cardinals they were gluttons, and threatened to take upon himself the regulation of their houses and tables. When a collector came in with the results of his collection, he was rudely told to take his money and perish with it. These were small matters in themselves, but they foreboded a mode of treatment the prospect of which filled the worldly-minded electors with fear, and to fear was added intense disappointment when Urban

announced that he had no intention of quitting Rome for Avignon, and that, to prevent that calamity ever happening again, he was proposing to restore the balance in the Sacred College by creating a large number of Italian Cardinals.

The Cardinals' Opposition

The Ultramontane Cardinals at this prospect forgot their internal differences and banded together for self-protection. On the plea of avoiding the summer heats, they obtained leave from the Pope to withdraw to Anagni, a town on the neighbouring Campanian hills, and soon after to Fondi, which lay in the Neapolitan domains. This further withdrawal to Fondi was rendered possible by another blunder on the part of Urban. Joanna of Naples was naturally well disposed towards Urban, and she sent her husband, Otho of Brunswick, to salute him on his election, and to solicit for the said Otho the succession to the Neapolitan crown which was a fief of the Holy See. Urban, instead of gratifying, managed to offend the royal pair by his brusque refusal, and they at once took against him and were glad to invite the recalcitrant Cardinals into their territory.

Feeling themselves now sufficiently strong to take up a position of declared opposition, these Cardinals wrote to their four Italian colleagues who were still with Urban, asserting that his election had been invalid on account of the violence to which the electors had been subjected, and summoning them to Anagni to consider what should be done to remove the scandal from the Church. Urban on this sent the Italian Cardinals to Fondi to negotiate. He offered to submit the case to a General Council, but declined absolutely to resign. On their refusing this offer and managing to draw off from him even the three Italian Cardinals (the fourth, the aged Cardinal of St. Peter's, was on his death-bed), he went the length of creating, on September 18th, twenty-eight new Cardinals. This determined the Cardinals at Fondi. They proceeded, on September 20th, to elect the Cardinal Robert of Geneva, who took the title of Clement VII. Thus the schism was commenced.

We must pass over all intermediate events and say that Clement was shortly after compelled to withdraw from Italy and take up his residence at Avignon. He was recognized as Pope by the King of France, the Count of Provence, Joanna of Naples, and by Scotland. Urban, on the other hand, retained the allegiance of Germany, of all Italy, save the Neapolitan territory, of England, Flanders, Hungary, Sweden, &c. The Spanish kingdoms remained for a time neutral, but eventually adhered to Clement.

It is instructive to notice on what plan this division of the nations between the two obediences was formed. Dr. Creighton tells us that "when the schism was declared and the two parties stood in avowed opposition, allies began to gather round each from motives which were purely political."

This is a way of interpreting what happened which is not unnatural in a Protestant writer. It does not, however, take sufficiently into account the hold which the Catholic faith has, and ever has had, on the hearts of its adherents. If we examine into the facts more carefully, we soon perceive that the charge of acting under political bias (for even there it did not amount to more than a strong bias) lies exclusively at the door of France and those rulers who were under her influence. "From France the evil proceeded, and France was the chief and, in fact, essentially the only support of the schism; for other nations were involved in it merely by their connexion with her."

The French Influence

In France the Court party were intensely mortified at the loss of the advantages to their national interests of a French Papacy, and were determined to get it back again, almost at any cost. Joanna of Naples was filled with vindictiveness against Urban for the rebuffs experienced at his hands. There may also be some ground for attributing the part taken by distant Scotland to its hostility to England. France of course had her case to present in justification of the part she was taking, and it was natural that the Scotch, her constant allies, should be biassed in its favour. French influence also is discernible in the part eventually taken by the Spaniards. While we must recognize that they remained strictly neutral until they had first taken elaborate evidence from witnesses on behalf of both parties, we must account it significant that the Spanish decision in favour of Clement synchronized with an important royal marriage and consequent alliance between Spain and France, an alliance sorely needed by each of the parties to strengthen them against their common English foe. These countries, where French influence is so clearly discernible, were the only countries which adhered to Clement. We must besides bear in mind that where the sovereign adhered to one of the rival obediences the sympathy of all his subjects was not necessarily in the same direction. In this respect Urban had also probably the allegiance of the vast majority. Thus, when Joanna of Naples first went over to Clement and invited him to her territory, the Neapolitans rose up against him and showed their teeth so decidedly that he was constrained to embark at once for Provence. And when twelve years later, in the first year of Urban's successor, Boniface IX., the Jubilee was held at Rome, it was noticed how numerous were the French pilgrims who flocked to the Eternal City, as if anxious to use the opportunity offered of showing whither their hearts inclined them. Nor does there seem sufficient reason for attributing the adherence of the vast majority of the nations to Urban to exclusively political motives. The grounds on which the English accepted Urban are given by Rinaldi. They are as convincing a statement of Urban's case as we can find anywhere.

The Question of Validity

But can we come to any conclusion as to which of the two elections was valid? Certainly if we are to be led by the authorities collected long since from the Vatican archives by Rinaldi, the continuer of Baronius, there cannot be any doubt in the matter. The Archbishop of Bari was just the one candidate in whom the three parties of the Conclave, the Italians, the Limousins, and the others could come to an agreement; and the proposal to elect him actually came from the Limousins, who regarded him, as we have said, as one likely, on account of his previous connexions, to govern according to their ideas. He was elected by nearly all the first time, and, according to many witnesses, by all in a second election held for the sake of greater certainty during a lull in the clamour going on outside. His election was deemed likely to dissatisfy the Romans, and on that account when the latter broke into the Conclave, instead of making his name known at once, the electors took measures to entangle the invading and excited crowd in a misapprehension. They caused the idea to get about that the Roman Cardinal Tibaldeschi was the elect, but that he was refusing to accept. While the invaders were forcing the aged man on to the throne and vesting him, in spite of his own protests and resistance, in the Papal garments, they used the opportunity to escape from the Vatican and secure themselves, some in the fortified Castle of St. Angelo, some in castles outside the city, the less unpopular in their own residences within the walls. They actually came back the next day (all save the four outside the walls) from their places of security to complete their act by enthroning the elect, and a few days later they all without exception conducted the

coronation with all the accustomed ceremonies. Without protest they permitted Urban to receive homage from all classes, even from the representatives of the sovereign powers. With their own hands they wrote letters abroad to their respective sovereigns and their respective friends, letters both public and private, and among them a joint official letter to the Cardinals remaining at Avignon. And in these letters, not in mere formal terms, but with a certain cordiality of language, they convey the impression that Urban had been truly and unanimously elected, and that he was in their estimation the kind of Pope who should give general satisfaction. Specially noteworthy among these letters is one written six days after the election and before the coronation, to the Emperor Charles IV. by the Cardinal Robert of Geneva, destined so soon to be set up as the opposition Pope. For three months the Cardinals continued in this course, during which time they frequently solicited and obtained favours for themselves and their friends, and took their proper place and part in all the Consistories. It was not till the early summer that they withdrew from Rome to Anagni, and not till the end of July that they declared their opposition. On these grounds, which strong in themselves would seem still more convincing if adequately stated as they are to be found in Rinaldi, it would seem certain that Urban's election was valid.

And although, besides Rinaldi there is Baluze to reckon with, and Baluze's Lives of the Avignon Popes certainly presents a very forcible case in favour of the rival line, the preponderance of opinion has continued to be in favour of the Roman line; nor, of Catholic opinion only, but of Protestant writers also. Pastor says:

"The most renowned jurists of that age, as John of Lignano, Baldi of Perugia, Bartolomeo of Saliceto, composed elaborate judgments in favour of the validity of Urban's election... and the most distinguished Catholic investigators of our days have taken the same side, as Hefele, Papencordt, Hergenrother, Heinrich; as also many Protestant writers, such as Leo, Hinschius, Siebeking, Lindner, Gregorovius, Erler."

Probably this verdict of the historians will continue in spite of the additional documents from the Vatican secret archives, first published in 1889 by the Abbé Gayet in his *Grand Schisme d'Occident*. These new documents, however, have at least shown us that we had not previously the full strength of the case for the seceding Cardinals placed before us. They consist, with an exception or two, of depositions taken, for the sake of the Spanish Sovereigns, from nearly all the seceding Cardinals, and from other persons of importance through their position or means of observation, who were mixed up in the events of the disputed election. They exhibit the Cardinals to us in a pitiable plight, the victims of a most abject fear, from the moment when they entered the Conclave to the time when three months later they found themselves at Fondi; and purely under the impulse of that fear performing every one of those duties of electors, the performance by them of which has been taken as evidence that they had freely concurred in Urban's election.

Pastor describes Gayet's work as one of which the value is derived exclusively from the Appendices, that is, from the text of the newly published documents; but at all events, Gayet's documents have caused Pastor's second edition to enter into a much more careful discussion of the story of the election than the author had previously considered necessary.

We must be content to give very briefly our reasons for considering that Rinaldi's verdict still holds the ground, in spite of Baluze and Gayet. It is necessary to begin with an important distinction. The question on which all turns is not whether there was force applied by the Romans, but whether its application was the determining cause of the election of Urban. To what extent the threats of the

Roman mob went, how soon they began, and how much they meant, may be disputed: but that there were threats, and that the Cardinals had solid reasons for thinking that their lives were in peril, seems established beyond the possibility of question. Nor can it be denied that the Cardinals were influenced by the threats to some extent. The rapidity of the choice was certainly due to this cause: for had it not been present, the balance of feeling among the electors pointed to a long Conclave. We may allow also that the demand of the mob entered into the motives which caused the choice to fall upon Urban. It seems quite certain that they did not exclusively cause it. For it is clear that the Cardinals were, as stated above, split up into three sets, on account of the dissension between the Limousins and the other Ultramontanes, and that the Archbishop of Bari was the sort of candidate in whom the three sets might be expected to agree as soon as it became manifest that none could carry its own special favourite. But even if the violence of the Romans did not primarily determine the election of Prignani, it must at least have entered in later as an important reason for electing him. Not only might it enter in, but it should have entered in. The intense feeling of the future Pope's immediate subjects that they ought to have a Pope who would remain among them was a material point for the electors to consider; quite as material as their own strong desire to have a Pope who would lead them back to Avignon. What then is the crucial point? It is this. Did the pressure applied succeed in rendering the election null by rendering it no true exercise of judgment at all?

A first answer in the negative to this question seems to be that the Romans never made the slightest attempt to press upon the Cardinals any particular individual. "We want a Roman, or at least an Italian," they said; and, although we must condemn the threats with which they accompanied their demand, the demand was in itself both reasonable and moderate. An abundance of suitable Italians, and even of Romans, could doubtless be found, any one of whom the Romans were prepared to accept. Presumably, knowing the usual practice of elections, they thought of the four Italian, or the two Roman Cardinals, in the Conclave, and this is how their clamours were interpreted by Roderigo Bernardi, the Spanish representative, who took evidence later on, from witnesses who had been mixed up in the affair, for the sake of the King of Castile. Still they did nothing to press these names on the Conclave, and in fact no one of them was chosen. On the other hand, they most certainly never pressed upon the Conclave the Archbishop of Bari, a man whose name was so little known to them, that when they first heard it mentioned as that of the elect, they mistook it for the name of another who was specially displeasing, and received it with expressions of intense indignation. Thus in their selection of Prignani from the indefinite number of Italian prelates, the Cardinals cannot reasonably be said to have been following any other preference save their own. In short, although there was intimidation, it was intimidation resisted, not yielded to, or so far as it was yielded to, yielded to only to the extent of hiding the true choice for a while and protecting it by the counterfeit presentation to the intimidators of the Cardinal of St. Peter's. arose. St. Catharine of Sweden, as we have said, was in Rome at the time of the Conclave, and was familiar with most of those who took part in it. St. Catharine of Siena, though at Florence, had for some time been labouring actively in the cause of the re-establishment of the Papacy in its natural home, and had her hand on all the springs of authentic information. St. Vincent Ferrer, on the other hand, was at the time of the Conclave a young Dominican at Barcelona engaged in his studies, and did not come into contact with any of the persons concerned till seven years later, when he heard the story from the interested lips of Pedro de Luna. Blessed Peter of Luxemburg was also far off in his own country, and still younger when Urban was elected. He was then but ten years old. He also only came in contact with the party of Clement some years later, and he died at the early age of eighteen. St. Vincent, too, although for a long time he adhered to Pedro de Luna at Avignon, became afterwards convinced that

Pedro was in the wrong, and was mainly instrumental in detaching France and Spain from his allegiance. In the testimony and conduct of these saintly persons, we have the advantage of evidence which is at least free from the suspicion of insincerity or of any lower motives.

The Condition of the Church During the Schism

We have terrible accounts of the condition of the Church while this disastrous schism was running its course.

Uncertainty [says Pastor] as to the title of its ruler is ruinous to a nation; this schism affected the whole of Christendom, and called the very existence of the Church into question. The discord touching its Head necessarily permeated the whole body of the Church; in many dioceses two Bishops were in arms for the possession of the episcopal throne, two abbots in conflict for an abbey. The confusion was indescribable.

"Kingdom rose up against kingdom," says Abbot Ludolf of Sagan, "province against province, clergy against clergy, theologians against theologians, parents against children, and children against parents." And we can readily imagine what further evils must have sprung from the all-pervading discord, evils all the more lamentable because the schism occurred just when there was urgent need for large reforms in the life of clergy and people. We must not, however, imagine things to have been worse than they really were. The fact that all through the schism a preacher like St. Vincent Ferrer could be passing through every country, stimulating the fervour of the just, and arousing sinners to penance on every side, shows how possible it was even then for the spiritual power of the Church to assert itself, for the good corn to hold its own in the midst of the tares.

The Search for Reunion

Although the different nationalities ranged themselves differently around the rival claimants to the Papacy, all were united in deploring the schism, and in demanding its removal. How the good must have deplored the evil needs no explanation. And the worldly-minded sovereigns also soon discovered that they had more to lose than to gain by its continuance. Rival Popes meant contests everywhere, and so grave an unsettlement of consciences as a sovereign found it hard to deal with. And then an Antipope needed to be supported, and supported exclusively by his own obedience; and the Churches of France soon discovered how heavy a financial burden, far exceeding the taxation against which they had complained in former days, was now laid on their shoulders.

But how was the reunion of the two obediences to be obtained? Urban, as we have already heard, proposed the convocation of a General Council and offered to submit to its verdict on the facts. This plan was not acceptable to the Cardinals, and passed out of account till much later. In the earlier years of the schism the efforts for reunion took chiefly the form of inquiries into the facts of Urban's election, and discussions of the points of law involved. When Urban died in 1389, after an eleven years' reign, hopes were for the moment formed that a settlement might be reached by the general recognition of Clement. But the Roman Cardinals were not prepared to pay for reunion so great a price as the acceptance of another Avignon succession. They accordingly elected Peter Tomacelli, who took the name of Boniface IX.

Boniface, on his election, wrote in friendly terms to Clement, urging him to resign, and offering in that case to make him Apostolic Legate to the lands which were at the present acknowledging his

authority. When this offer was refused he next sent legates to the French King, begging him to work for reunion. This led to the University of Paris being invited by the King to consider the best steps to heal the schism, and from that time we find the University taking the lead. It proposed three plans: (1) that Boniface and Clement should simultaneously resign and a new appointment be made by the two Colleges of Cardinals fused into one; (2) that the question should be referred by the contending parties to arbitrators by whose sentence they would undertake to abide; (3) that a General Council should be convened. The first plan seemed the best, and it was at once proposed to the two Pontiffs. The Cardinals at Avignon found it acceptable, and pressed it upon their master. But Clement upon this was so enraged that his health became seriously affected, and very soon after he was seized by a stroke of apoplexy and died. (September 16, 1394.) Here was another good opportunity of ending the schism, and the University of Paris urged the King of France to use his influence with Clement's Cardinals, and induce them to delay filling up the vacancy until it had been first ascertained what Boniface was willing to do for the peace of the Church under the new circumstances. But the Avignon Cardinals, for whatever reason, were not of that mind, and having heard of the message from the King while it was on its way, they resolved to anticipate its arrival, and elected Cardinal Pedro de Luna, who took the title of Benedict XIII.

Before the election, however, all the Cardinals bound themselves by oath to work for the extinction of the schism, and each engaged that if elected he would be ready to resign the dignity whenever such a course should seem to the majority of his Cardinals to be required by the interests of peace. As Boniface was like-minded, one might have imagined that the desired peace would not be long delayed. But the difficulty was that each party believed firmly in his own title, and was fearful lest resignation should be taken to imply a doubt about its validity. It is to this effect that Pedro de Luna expresses himself in his answer to the French King's messengers when shortly after his election they arrived at Avignon and finding him installed already in the place of Clement, proposed to him the plan of simultaneous resignation.

Pedro's refusal on these grounds naturally aggravated the ambassadors immensely, seeing that he had himself quite recently been striving in favour of the plan and had urged it on his predecessor; seeing also that his own Cardinals now united with the royal ambassadors in pressing it upon him, and thereby supplied the condition on which he had undertaken to resign when he took the oath previous to election. In their desire to end the schism quickly, and their perplexity how to do it except by the way of mutual cession, the University of Paris recommended that pressure should be put upon Benedict by withdrawing allegiance from him, without, however, transferring it to Boniface. The withdrawal took place in July, 1398, and as the greater part of his Cardinals joined in it, Benedict found himself almost entirely without a following in France. This state of things lasted for five years, when on Benedict escaping from the captivity in which he had been held at Avignon, and making the French King some overtures which proved to be delusive, he was acknowledged in France once more.

It was at this time that in order to give some evidence of sincerity he sent an embassy to Rome. Boniface, whose plan for abolishing the schism was like that of his predecessor, the summoning of a General Council, held some discussions with the legates of his adversary, but in the midst of them succumbed to a disease from which he had been for some time suffering. Another excellent opportunity thus arose, and the Roman Cardinals at once inquired if the legates had authority to promise resignation on the part of Benedict, offering that in that case they would delay the election of another Pope until arrangements could be made for the two Colleges to unite in conducting it.

But Benedict had no intention of resigning, and his legates had received no faculties to promise this in his name. The Roman Cardinals were accordingly driven to proceed at once to the choice of a successor to Boniface. After each had bound himself as before to resign, if elected, should the cause of reunion require it, they elected Cardinal Cosmato Migliorati, who took the name of Innocent VII. (1404.) Innocent followed his predecessors in looking to a General Council as the true remedy, and he at once proceeded to summon one to be held at Rome in a year's time. But seditions, arising in the city from the substitution of a weaker hand for the strong rule of Boniface, effectually prevented this Council from being held at the appointed time, and in the following year (1406) Innocent's short reign came to an end.

Gregory XII and the Hope for Resolution

The fairest hopes were conceived from the character of the next Pope of the Roman line. Angelo Corario was at an age when personal ambition seemed no longer conceivable. He was, moreover, known to be most anxious for reunion, and the Cardinals who elected him felt implicit confidence in the sincerity of his intentions. On the other hand, it was known that Benedict had been coerced by the sovereigns of his obedience to promise resignation when either his rival should promise the same, or should be removed by death. It may be said why in that case did the Roman Cardinals not defer the election? But it was dangerous, in the disturbed state of Italy, to leave Rome without a ruler, and so it seemed better to elect one who had bound himself like Benedict to resign if the Church's interests required it, and who could be trusted not to break his word.

Gregory XII. (for so the new Pope styled himself) by his first step justified the confidence placed in him. He sent at once to propose a personal interview with Benedict to arrange for their mutual resignation, and he offered to accept any place of meeting which his rival might select. Benedict, with more craft than generosity, named Savona, a town in Savoy, where Gregory would have been completely in his power. Gregory, nevertheless, at the first agreed to the nomination, and though much disappointed and full of anxiety, after some delay and negotiations, moved in that direction. Eventually, however, he drew back. He was greatly blamed for this step, which was taken as evidence that he was insincere after all in his professions of readiness to sacrifice himself for the good cause. It may well be that he had sound reasons for his refusal. Rightly or wrongly he suspected Benedict of foul play, of endeavouring to draw him into hostile territory, not with any view to mutual resignation, but only to get possession of his person, and so ensure the continuance of the rival line. Still, whether these suspicions were well grounded or not, it is at least certain that Gregory's own Cardinals shared the opinion that he was playing false, and seven out of the eleven abandoned him. Benedict's Cardinals also at this time departed from their chief in the conviction that no effectual measure for the restoration of unity could be expected of him. The Kings of France, Germany, Hungary, and Navarre likewise withdrew from their previous allegiance to Benedict and Gregory. Thus was formed a neutral party, proposing to itself to work for the union of the conflicting obediences by compelling the resignation of the two claimants.

The Council of Pisa

The seceding Cardinals of both obediences met together at Leghorn in Etruria in July, 1408, and issued an Encyclical letter convoking a General Council for the following year at Pisa, and summoning to attend it the bishops, prelates, doctors of theology, and princes of Christendom. Gregory and Benedict were also called upon to appear and fulfil their promises to resign, and were

told that if they refused to confirm the action of the Council, it would deem itself competent to act independently of their sanction. To this step Gregory responded by convoking a Council of his own at Aquileia, on the plea that Pisa was an unsafe place for him to attend; and Benedict for the same reasons convoked one at Perpignan, a city which at that time lay just within the Spanish borders.

The Council of Pisa met at the appointed time, and after useless negotiations to obtain the presence or submission of the contending Popes, proceeded to depose them both. We say depose, but there is a tone of hesitation in the language of the sentence, reflecting the doubts about the legitimacy of their position which were current among the members. The two Popes are pronounced to be notorious schismatics, heretics, and perjurers, and on this account *ipso facto* deprived of their office. Only on this basis does the Council modestly venture to add its own declaratory sentence of deprivation. The charge of perjury had reference to the oath each Pope had taken at his election to resign when the cause of reunion demanded it. The charge of schism meant that they were dividing the Church for their own personal interests. The charge of heresy is harder to make out. Certainly there was not the faintest trace of heresy to be detected in either Gregory or Benedict. But there was a theological opinion, of a somewhat academic character, that a Pope who should lapse into open heresy *ipso facto* ceased to be Pope, and they were anxious to avail themselves of this idea to supply for the uncertainty of their own judicial competence. Thus they sought to discover constructive heresy in conduct which might be deemed to imply contempt of the article of faith: "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."

Having deposed the two Popes, they proceeded to elect another, Peter Philargi, who took the name of Alexander V. And thus it came to pass that, since Gregory and Benedict still continued to hold their ground and retain the allegiance of many, the Council which had sought to extinguish the schism succeeded only in aggravating it the more. There were now three lines of claimants to the Papacy instead of two; for when Alexander died in the following year his Cardinals elected Baldassare Cossa, who took the name of John XXIII.

The Rise of Gallican Theory

It was in connection with the summoning of the Council of Pisa that certain theories concerning the relation of the Pope to the Church came into prominence, which had hitherto been unheard of, or at least heard of only among men who, like Occam and Marsiglio of Padua, were notoriously disloyal spirits. The University of Paris was at the time the most distinguished home of theological science in the world, and prominent among its doctors were three men: Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Chartier, more usually called from his native place John Gerson, and Nicholas de Clemanges. Naturally the discussion of the most legitimate means of extinguishing the schism fell into their hands. They were all zealous adherents of the Church, who would not wittingly have set forth theories opposed to orthodoxy or destructive of the Church's constitution. But we must make large allowance for the bewilderment caused by the schism, and when that is done, it is not so difficult to understand how these doctors could devise the doctrine that although the Pope is the lawful superior of every individual member of the Church, he is not superior but subject to the Church as a whole, and therefore to a General Council in which the entire Church finds a voice through her representatives. This, it will be recognized, is the fundamental tenet of Gallicanism. It is imagined by some that Gallicanism is the primitive Catholic doctrine which has had to give way before a more modern Ultramontanism. The fact is that Gallicanism, the doctrine subordinating a Pope to a General Council, does not go back beyond the time of this schism, and that the doctrine called

Ultramontanism is the only doctrine which has a true title to be styled primitive. However, Gerson's influence, assisted by the difficulties of the time, commended his novel theory to the Council of Pisa, where, although he himself was not present, it found its exponent in his friend Pierre d'Ailly. We shall hear more of the doctrine presently.

This Gallican theory is of course not tenable, but even after it has been set aside we may still inquire whether the proceedings at Pisa were justifiable and valid. Excellent authorities have deemed that they were. They have argued that the Church, as represented by the Cardinals, or otherwise in their default, has the right to elect a Pope when the Holy See is vacant, and that for this purpose, as from the nature of the case they cannot, so they need not to be convoked by a living head. Their task is to determine the person, not to convey the authority. His authority is conveyed to the elect direct from God. But if it belongs to the Cardinals, or in their default to a representative assembly, to elect the Pope, must it not belong to the same persons to decide, in case of doubt, which is the true Pope, and even, if the doubt be insoluble, to set both aside and elect a third? So at least the argument presents itself to many minds and leads them to the belief that the Council of Pisa, though no legitimate Council for passing decrees on matters of faith, or for exercising superior authority over the Church, was within its competency in deposing Gregory and Benedict and electing Alexander.

There seems, however, to be a flaw in this argument on account of which it ought to be rejected. If indeed the contending Pontiffs had titles which were in themselves doubtful, the power to determine the doubt might reasonably be ascribed to the College of Cardinals, and in their default or with their permission to a General Council. But if the doubt in regard to one or other of the claimants attached not to the character of the election in itself, but only to the views concerning its validity entertained by a large body of the faithful, then it is not so easy to see on what ground the Cardinals or a Council could claim any such competence. For the Pope thus truly elected is the true Pope endowed with the plenitude of power by direct grant from our Lord, and is therefore as the supreme ruler of the Church in no sense subject to the jurisdiction of others for the examination of his title. Of course, if Gerson's doctrine were correct, the Pope would be subject to a General Council, but we are discussing now only whether apart from Gerson's doctrine the Council of Pisa had any standing ground. For the reasons given it does not seem to us that it had, since we take it as demonstrated already that Gregory, as the successor of Urban, was the undoubtedly legitimate Pope. Believing this, we cannot feel surprise that the result of the unauthorized action of the Council of Pisa aggravated instead of removing the evil. None the less we can recognize the good faith of the members of the Council, placed as they were in an extremely difficult position.

The Council of Constance

To return to history. We have seen that the result of the Council of Pisa was only to add a third line of claimants, and so things lasted through the next five years. Then (1414) another Council assembled, this time at Constance. It was convoked by John XXIII. and at no other Council had a greater multitude been brought together. There were present three patriarchs, twenty-nine archbishops, about a hundred and fifty bishops, a hundred abbots, three hundred doctors of theology, and innumerable ecclesiastics. To these were added the Emperor Sigismund in person, and representatives of all the Courts in Christendom, together with a vast number of noblemen of all ranks. The accretion on the ordinary population of the town was estimated at 100,000, and although all such computations are wont to be gross exaggerations, it is clear that the numbers present were very large.

John XXIII. was desirous that this Council should regard itself as a continuation of that of Pisa, the one on which his own claim to authority rested. He was counting also, to support him against a growing feeling that he was in the way, on the large preponderance of Italian prelates in the assembly. In both these desires he was disappointed. The general anxiety was to secure the resignation of the three claimants, and therefore to do nothing which would impede this eventuality. It seemed better therefore to leave in abeyance the question of the legitimacy of the previous Council and the status of John. Again, the other nations not wishing to be outvoted at every step by the Italians, and having greater influence with the holders of power, obtained an unprecedented voting arrangement. The bishops and prelates are the authoritative teaching body in the Church, and it is they, and they only, who have the right of suffrage in her Councils. At Constance, however, the idea was not to elicit the voice of the teaching body, but to give representation to all Catholic interests. Hence all present were divided into four nations, Italian, German, French, English, to which four a fifth was afterwards added for Spain. In the separate assemblies of each nation the subjects were first considered and determined by a majority of votes, the right of voting being accorded not to prelates only, but to the clergy of the second order, and even to the laymen. Then succeeded a general meeting, in which the "nations" cast their votes, and the decision thus taken was next referred to a General Congregation of the whole Council for final acceptance.

This arrangement was disastrous to the hopes of John XXIII., who, perceiving it, was brought to his knees, and induced to promise that he would resign. But thinking that his life was in danger, he presently withdrew by secret flight to Schaffhausen. This put the Council in a great perplexity. They were now a headless assembly. How could they proceed further? However, while they took measures to bring back the fugitive, they decided on their competency to continue without him, and, in a fourth and fifth session, they drew up two decrees to the effect that they were "a Council legitimately assembled, representing the Universal Church, and having authority immediately from God, to which every man, of whatever state and dignity, even if it were Papal, was bound to submit in everything appertaining to the faith, to the extinction of the schism, and the reformation of the Church in its Head and members." These decrees were of great importance, as we shall see in a moment.

John XXIII. was brought back after a short absence, and submitted himself to the Council, by which he was quickly deposed. The sentence makes mention of charges similar to those laid at Pisa at the door of Gregory XII. We need not inquire into their truthfulness, but we may say incidentally that John was a very different man from Gregory, thoroughly worldly and with a bad record of past conduct, at least during his earlier life. Nevertheless, he was not the monster which the Council makes him out to be.

We have given our reasons for accounting Gregory to have been throughout the true Pope and therefore unaffected by the proceedings of Pisa. This being so, Alexander and John never obtained the rights of the Papacy; but had they done so on the principle that, in view of the uncertainty of title in Gregory and Benedict, the Council of Pisa was competent to set those aside and elect Alexander, the deposition of John at Constance would have been altogether invalid. John, however, added his own personal act of resignation to the sentence of his self-appointed judges, and thereby prevented any theological difficulty from arising.

Gregory's Magnanimous Act

The mischief wrought at Pisa was now remedied, and things returned to their previous condition. But what was to be done? The members of the Council were under the predominating influence of D'Ailly, Gerson, and Zabarella who thought with the two distinguished Parisians. They were thus inclined to give practical effect to the doctrine which these divines had recommended so enthusiastically to their notice, and exercise their pretended supremacy even over valid Popes by confirming the sentence of Pisa against Gregory and Benedict, and proceeding to a new election. The decrees, which have been mentioned, of the fourth and fifth session were intended as a basis for such action. The Council was saved, however, from repeating the scandal of Pisa by a magnanimous step on the part of Gregory.

Gregory had bound himself to resign when Benedict did, but now he determined to trust the Council of Constance and go beyond his undertaking. Learning that John was now deposed, he sent his excellent friend and supporter, John of Malatesta, to King Sigismund, and begged that Sovereign in his quality of Protector of the Church to preside over the assembly for the moment. If this were done he authorized his representative, Malatesta, first to convoke the Council in his name, thereby giving it full conciliar status, and then into the hands of the Council so convoked to resign his Papacy. Although some pretence was made by the members of vindicating their previous intentions by declaring that Gregory's offer was only accepted *ex abundantia*, there can be no doubt it was accepted with the greatest joy, and before many days were over the convocation and the resignation (both of which Gregory at once confirmed) were made. By July, 1415, Benedict was the only obstacle still remaining.

Benedict, however, was not like Gregory. Although Sigismund went in person to Spain to induce him to add his resignation to the others, he continued immoveable. It was then that St. Vincent Ferrer, who had originally held by this claimant but had gradually come to disbelieve in him, used his great influence with Benedict's supporters to cause them to abandon him. Largely owing to St. Vincent's exhortations, a meeting was held at Narbonne, when the Kings of Castile, Aragon, and Navarre came to an agreement with Sigismund to withdraw allegiance from a man who in his obstinacy seemed to them to stand self-condemned. From that moment his following dwindled away into insignificance, and he retired to hide himself in the rocky fortress of Peniscola, off the Spanish coast, the only corner of the world where he could still find recognition. Had he been a valid Pope, it is difficult to see how withdrawal of allegiance from him on the part of those who believed in his title could be justifiable. But since a separation of the entire Church from its rightful Head is impossible, the isolation in which Benedict stood from that time onwards can at least be taken as a sign that his title had been bad from the first. And in any case, fourteen years later his succession came to an end by his pseudo-Cardinals electing Martin V., who had already been acknowledged for twelve years by the entirety of Christendom.

The Election of Martin V

John and Gregory having resigned, and Benedict having become utterly discredited, the way was now open for the election of a Pope whom all would recognize. Nevertheless, two years were allowed to intervene owing to the false principles in favour at Constance, and during that time the Council sought to agree upon measures of reform, under which name they included certain limitations of the exercise of Papal right, which they hoped to press the more efficaciously on the

new Pope if previously enacted by themselves. However, they could come to no agreement over the reforms required, and with the growing weariness there was mingled the growing realization that it was impossible by any previous engagement to bind the subsequent conduct of a Pope. Whatever he might agree to previously to election, he could agree to only on the condition that it should continue to appear to him expedient for the good of the Church. If after election he should see sound reasons for changing his mind, it would be his duty as well as his right to change it, and there was no earthly power above him to restrain him. Accordingly, on November 11, 1417, Cardinal Otho Colonna was elected Pope by a unanimous vote of the Conclave, and as it was St. Martin's day, he would be called Martin V. The schism of thirty-eight years was at last over, and people hardly knew how to contain themselves for joy.

All the bells of Constance sent forth peals of rejoicing. A multitude, which is reckoned at eighty thousand, flocked from all quarters to the scene of the election. The Emperor himself, forgetting the restraint of state, hurried into the room where the electors were assembled, and fell down before the Pope, who raised him up, embraced him, and acknowledged that to him the peaceful result was chiefly due.

Theological Questions Arising

Our story is now told, not indeed adequately, but sufficiently to let the reader see what theological issues are involved. These issues are two in number: one, which was stated at the commencement of this tract, arising out of the broad fact of the long continued schism; the other emerging out of the history of the methods employed to terminate it. It will be convenient to consider first the latter of these two questions.

Did the Church become in any way committed to the doctrine broached at Constance, that the Pope, though supreme over every individual member of the Church, is not superior over but subject to General Councils?

We shall not attempt to deny that the decrees of the fourth and fifth sessions, of which we have given the purport, were intended to declare the abiding subordination of Popes to Councils, and not merely the subordination of the particular Popes, accounted to be doubtful, whose conduct was then under examination. An important class of Catholic writers have tried to explain the decrees in that more tolerable sense which the words taken alone do undoubtedly permit. But the decrees must, it seems to us, be read in the light of the sentiments entertained by those who framed them, and as the intention of the framers was manifestly to accede to Gerson's doctrine, and they used Gerson's own phraseology, we prefer to side with Hefele and hold that the decrees were meant to affirm a permanent and constitutional supremacy of Councils over Popes.

Still what the framers of the decree may have intended is of small direct consequence. At that time they were but a headless body, and they did not even follow the usual precedents in their mode of voting. The question of consequence is whether Martin V. ever gave his confirmation to the decree, for only thus could the Church become committed to its acceptance. It is claimed by Gallican writers that he did. Towards the close of the Council Martin V., then Pope, declared by word of mouth, in terms which are preserved to us in the *Acta* of the Council, that he "wished to observe and not in any way to contravene all and everything that had been determined, concluded, and decreed by the present Council, *conciliariter* and in matters of faith." The Gallicans argue that "matters of faith" is a phrase which includes the decree in question, and that therefore they were accepted by

Martin. But this is an argument so insufficient that the marvel is how any one can be moved by it. Martin was most unlikely to approve a doctrine so subversive of Papal power, as he everywhere else interpreted it. We ought therefore to require the clearest evidence before taking his words of approval as bearing that meaning. Nor do they at all point to it. The Council of Constance had before it three subjects for consideration: the faith, the extinction of the schism, and the reformation of the Church in Head and members. These three phrases are continually being employed by the members. By the faith was meant the affair of the Hussites; by the reform of the Church in Head and members was meant the restriction of simony, of reservations, dispensations, etc., on part of Pope and Bishops. Hence when Martin approved of what had been done in reference to faith, he was not contemplating the two decrees under notice, but only what had been done against the Hussites and some other similar heretics. The very occasion which elicited his so-called confirmation shows this to have been his mind. The ambassador of the Grand Duke of Lithuania was anxious for the condemnation by the entire Council of a book written by John Falkenburg which was said to contain false doctrine.

Thus Papal confirmation was demonstrably never given to Gerson's doctrine, and, as we have already observed, it is Papal confirmation only which would have committed the Church to its acceptance. This, however, is a point which may not at once be clear to the reader, and, as it is of consequence, a few words of further explanation seem required.

Orthodox vs. Gallican Doctrine

The conflicting doctrines, then, are these. The ancient doctrine, called by its adversaries Ultramontanism, with the view of suggesting that it is only the opinion of a school and not the doctrine of the Church, holds that the supreme authority in the Church is by Divine appointment in the successor of St. Peter; that the Bishops, whether as individuals or collected together in Council are always his subjects; and that accordingly their office in a General Council is not to rule or revise his government, but to aid him with their counsels and support him by loyal adhesion to his judgments. The new doctrine, born as we have seen of the difficulties in terminating the schism, held that, since the Pope is for the Church, the Church is above the Pope, who is therefore also inferior to a General Council, which is but the Church finding voice in her representatives. Being found by the French Kings a most serviceable instrument in their persistent policy of subordinating Church to State interests, it was taken up by them and assiduously fostered. Thus it came to bear the name of Gallicanism. France was throughout the focus of its influence, an influence rendered the greater by the distinguished talent of the French theologians: but it spread somewhat beyond the borders of France, and in particular took root among English and Irish theologians, to whom perhaps it commended itself the more as being more acceptable to the Protestant sovereigns whose penal laws they were deprecating. The doctrine lived on, as we all know, till the Vatican Council, when the antiquity and truth of the opposite doctrine was solemnly defined. As the Vatican definition was that of Pope and Council combined, it bore upon its face, even according to Gallican principles, the stamp of infallible authority: and accordingly those Gallicans who were genuine Catholics had no difficulty in adhering to it in the spirit of loyal obedience. In so doing they were only acting in consistency with their own previous principles. If there were some who stood out and drifted into "Old Catholicism" and such-like heresies, it was because these were not mere Gallican Catholics, but persons already infected with the poison of heresy.

With the aid of this brief statement, it can now be seen why in estimating the significance of the decrees of the fourth and fifth sessions of Constance we are concerned only to ascertain whether they received Papal confirmation. That the decrees by themselves could advance no claim to infallibility is at least clear to all Catholics from the Vatican decisions. It might, however, be urged by non-Catholics that Papal Infallibility stands self-condemned, since at Constance it sanctioned the Gallican doctrine contained in the said decrees, while in the Vatican Council it condemned it. Such a charge needed to be examined and refuted; but we have seen that it can be refuted with complete success. Martin V. never gave any sanction at all to the two unorthodox decrees.

Unity as an Essential Mark of the Church

The second question we have to consider is this. How can unity be an essential mark of the Church, if a schism lasting so long can destroy the Church's unity at its very centre?

The answer is not so difficult as might be thought. Throughout this tract the customary designation has been retained, and we have spoken of the Great Western Schism. But this schism was not a schism in the ordinary sense of the term. For by schism is ordinarily meant withdrawal of obedience from one who is known to be the unquestionably legitimate Roman Pontiff. It is quite possible and likely that the authors of the mischief, whom we cannot but identify with the Cardinals who withdrew from Urban after electing him, were schismatics in the true sense. But the name is not truly applicable to the vast number of prelates and Christian people who, amidst so many conflicting testimonies, were utterly unable to discover which was the true Pontiff. These were not schismatics, because they acknowledged the Papal authority, did their best to discover who was its true living incumbent, and were prepared to submit at once when the discovery was made. There was, moreover, a true Pope all the time, for the fact that this truth was involved in doubt for many minds did not make it less a truth; and this true Pope was a true fountain of authority and a true centre of unity to all the world. To the large numbers who were in overt communion with him he was centre of unity and fountain of authority in the formal and direct sense, and to all those who through no personal fault were in overt communion with his rival, he was still centre of unity and fountain of authority in a very real sense. It was he towards whom their efforts to ascertain the truth were leading them, and in return, since his excommunication were never meant to brand those who were only the victims of inculpable error, they were enjoying the fruits of his jurisdiction in their reception of the sacraments from the pastors whom they deemed to be legitimate.

But it will be said, granting all that you say, is it conceivable on the supposition that the Papacy is the divinely appointed centre of the Church's unity, that God could have permitted such general uncertainty as to the true occupant of the Apostolic See to endure for nearly forty years? The answer to this is that we can only gather what is consistent with God's Providence from the actual facts. God has chosen to invite the co-operation of man's will in the election of Popes, as in the perpetuation of other Divine institutions; and where there is an elective system there is a necessary liability for doubts and disputes over the results to arise. God might interpose specially to prevent these, and He will certainly watch lest the effects should be so far-reaching as to destroy altogether an institution whose continued existence is essential to the continued existence of the Catholic Church. But beyond that we have no means of deciding at what point God must owe it to His own Majesty to interpose. We can only start from the antecedent presumption gathered from His general dealings with man's free-will in other departments of human life, which indicate that the permission of evil will probably be very large, and then go on to read the actual determinations of His

Providence in the actual events. If they seem to us at times as in the case of the great schism to be perplexing, we must await the day when God's counsels will disclose themselves to us under a clearer light. And at the same time we must be careful not to fix our attention so exclusively on the dark side of the events which trouble us as to forget that there is another challenging our attention. If it is a marvel that a schism in the Papacy should have been allowed to last for forty years, is it not a still greater marvel and a manifest proof of the supernatural character of the Papacy, that it should have been able to survive so great a strain, and recover all and more than all its pristine majesty?

Conclusion and Lessons

Still, if we must be careful not to exaggerate the laceration of the Church's unity through this schism of thirty-eight years, let us not attempt to deny that it was a terrible scandal and did incalculable harm. It must have caused the loss of innumerable souls while it lasted, and in weakening the reverence for Papal authority it paved the way for the real schism which arose a century and a half later, and is still continuing. The responsibility for so much evil must have pressed heavily on its reckless authors when they stood to render their account at the bar of the Divine justice, and it would have been well if the warning of their example had been more assiduously before the minds of those who came after them. The true lesson of the schism is to teach us how much harm can be done by powerful sovereigns when, in the furtherance of their purely temporal interests, they use the sword to overthrow God's appointed order, and subordinate Church to State. The French Kings in this were doing exactly what Henry VIII. did later. In the one case the result was to involve the entire Church in the calamities of a thirty-eight years' schism. In the other the result was to involve a noble people in the still worse calamity of utter and far more prolonged separation from their rightful participation in the Church's sacraments.
