

12. THE IMPERIAL TROOPS IN THE QUIRINAL

After nine years, in a form much more grave, the drama of Pius VI is repeated. At that time the Holy See had as an adversary a revolutionary State, informed, tumultuous, which no European power recognized; but now it sees itself obliged to defend herself from a universal Empire returned to life by means of a new invincible Charlemagne.

For a year and three months the situation of Pius VII is becoming each day more sorrowful. The cardinals are expelled. At the end of February 1808 the Neapolitan cardinals have to leave Rome, and at the end of March all the subjects of the King of Italy must leave. Cardinal Doria is among them and is captured by General Miollis.

On 27 March all of the papal military are incorporated into the troops of the French army.

On 7 April the French enter the Quirinal and disarm the Swiss Guard.

The pope instructs the Italian bishops that they are not to take the oath to the invading government; in response to this the French official censure private correspondence of the Vatican, putting its seal on the letters of the new Secretary of State, Cardinal Gabrielli, who is expelled the following day and sent to Senigalla, his episcopal city. On the morning of September, 1808 the Major Muzio, a Piedmont official, enters the Palace of the Holy See; he belongs to the Major State of General Miollis in Rome. He carries a letter from the same Miollis, which he puts into the hands of Cardinal Pacca.

The General says in it that he is very indignant that the cardinal published a Pontifical Notification to the Italian bishops; for that reason the cardinal is to leave Rome on the following day, and he is going under

custody to Benevento, his native town.

Cardinal Pacca responds without a change:

“In Rome I received orders only from the pope. If the pope does not permit me to leave, I will not leave. In any case, I will go immediately to His Holiness to tell him what you communicated to me so that I can receive orders from him.”

“But,” objects Muzio, “General Miollis has ordered me to make sure that his eminence not leave this room except to leave the Quirinal. I cannot permit you to go to the apartments of the pope. The captain who is with me has the precise order to watch you and to carry out the orders of General Miollis. If something else is done, there will be a scandal. But if Your Eminence leaves the Quirinal immediately and goes to his house on the Plaza Campitelli, then he will have two days more to remain in Rome.”

“Without an express order of the pope,” answers the cardinal, “I will never leave my position; and if I cannot go in person to the pope, he can write me a note to tell me his will.”

Muzio does not oppose this proposition, and leaving Cardinal Pacca under the guard of the captain, he goes, permitting him to write a note to the Pius VII and to send it by means of a messenger of the Secretariat of State.

Time weighs heavily. The cardinal is conversing with the captain of things of little importance; suddenly the doors are opened and a voice announces: “The Holy Father!”

Pius VII enters; no one has ever seen the pope so agitated.

“Sir,” he says to the captain, “tell your sir General that I am tired of suffering so many threats from a person who is still so obstinate to call himself Catholic. I understand very well what is the purpose of all this violence; you want to take away my

ministers one by one so as to impede thereby the exercise of my apostolic ministry and of my temporal sovereignty. I command you, Cardinal, that you do not obey the orders of the General and that you accompany me to my quarters so that you can be my companion in prison; and if they wish to put into effect their scheme to take you away, they will have to use every force they have to open the doors and come to violence against us, and all the consequences of this unheard of excess will be imputed to him, the General.”

The official asks the cardinal if he would translate to French all the words of the Holy Father, and he does so faithfully.

“I will give an account of how all this happened,” says the captain, while the pope talks with Cardinal Pacca concluding this dramatic dialogue, saying: “Let us go, Cardinal,” and they go to his quarters. While some companions of the Secretary of State are coming up the stairs, a small group of those who live in the palace begin to shout:

“Love live the pope!” as if an order went out from the Quirinal to the whole city; and because of opposition to the conditions that General Miollis has given in relation to the feasts and dances of the Roman Carnival - to which the people were very much attached - the streets of Rome on those days appear deserted.

Pius VII and his first minister begin in the palace of the Quirinal a prison still more rigorous.¹

¹ But Cardinal Pacca finds himself confronted with a public adventure that is as great a fantasy that any novelist could dream up.

“In the last days of August 1808. I was told one afternoon that there was in the waiting room an unknown person sent by Cardinal Erskine, who had to speak with me. I had the person come in, and I found myself with a person of vulgar aspect, a well tanned skin and badly dressed, that he looked more like a pirate or bandit than the good man that he was. He told me he was a Franciscan Brother, dressed in this way to

disguise his mission to the French; he had arrived from Sicily in an English frigate sent by the King Fernando with letters for Cardinal Gabrielli, the Pro Secretary of State, to take the pope aboard the ship that would take him to that island, the same frigate in which he had come. Father Angiolini, a Jesuit, sent by the king to greet and assist the pope, had just sailed near the coast at Fiumicino; that on not seeing on any beach any of the signs agreed upon with Cardinal Gabrielli, he had taken a risk with grave danger to his life to land on shore and hide in the fields as he made his way to Rome; that he wanted to leave from there that very night; and that he came to tell me that if the Holy Father wanted to take advantage and sail right away, he should transfer at night to the beach of Fiumicino and announce his arrival to the crew of the frigate by lighting a lantern and blowing out it out three times; but that the frigate could not remain at that coast for more than three days.

“Hearing this talk, I found myself in a tremendous bind, for I did not know of the negotiations of Cardinal Gabrielli with the Court of Sicily and I could reasonably suppose that this treated of a spy that had been sent by the French military command to discover effectively if this really was their plan, as it had been rumored in Rome, to have the pope sail and save himself. I controlled myself and without showing anything on my face I very coldly replied that in reality I was not on to such as he told me and that neither Cardinal Gabrielli before his departure nor the pope had said to me a single word; then I asked him if he had any letter which would accredit his mission; he responded that for fear of being arrested by the French he thought it was not prudent to carry any letter that would cost him his life, as happened in the case of Vanni (Giuseppe Vanni of Calderola, the servant of King Fernando IV, on landing near Ostia was arrested as a spy, taken to the Fortress of Sant’Angelo and condemned to death by the military commission established by the French command, a sentence which was carried out on 27 September 1808 in the Plaza del Pueblo). He added that Cardinal Erskine took part in the effort of Cardinal Gabrielli and was informed of everything. After asking him a few more things, I said goodbye to him. But right away I wrote a note to Cardinal Erskine, asking him to come that very afternoon to the church in which they were observing the Forty Hours. He came, and as if we were meeting casually, I took him to the sacristy and told him of what had happened to me. The cardinal told me that the Brother had also been in his house, but that he has been sent away; that he had been told of the plan by Cardinal Gabrielli, but that he had not heard anything more of it.

He thought that it had been discarded and abandoned. I noticed that the cardinal was fearful and wanted to put himself far from the whole affair. On the following morning I told of my adventure to the Holy Father, who told me that really Cardinal Gabrielli had it in his head to flee Rome, and he had even got adequate clothing; but that he, for his part, never had any intention to do so nor to leave Rome voluntarily.”

“I have not heard” - notes the cardinal - “during the years in prison any more of this scheme, but later I knew that it was true what the Brother had said. I knew, furthermore, that the frigate belonged to the English fleet and that the British Government knew of the plan. In the frigate had been readied in a magnificent way the quarters for the Holy Father and for every cardinal that accompanied him..” Pacca, *Memorias*, Vol. I, p. 100 ff.)