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MISCELLANY

THIRTY-TWO YEARS WITH ALEXANDER VI

In a note on Alexander VI appended to my translation of Godfrey Kurth's famous lectures, *The Church at the Turning Points of History*, I stated that "Rev. P. De Roo, author of the *History of America before Columbus*, maintains that the verdict of history regarding Alexander VI should be entirely reversed, that the case of the Pontiff is an astonishing instance of complete calumination by authors who wrote shortly after his death and that Father De Roo was preparing a *Life of Alexander VI* in which he promised to prove his contentions by means of hitherto unstudied documents, chiefly from the secret archives of the Vatican."

Since the publication of *The Church at the Turning Points of History* letters of inquiry from professors and students of history have repeatedly come to me asking about the progress of Father De Roo's work on Alexander VI. Seeing that the matter was becoming of general interest I decided to interview the author, and was authorized by him to make the announcement that he had completed a five volume work on the subject, and is trying now to arrange for its publication. In my interview with Father De Roo I learned in detail how the book came into being and how the pastor of a small town in distant Oregon conceived the idea of this gigantic undertaking and carried it to completion.

Returning from a vacation trip in Europe in 1887, Father De Roo delivered a lecture on Spiritualism in the church of one of his friends at Willimantic, Connecticut. The lecture which had been previously announced was well attended and reported by a Willimantic daily on the following day. About a week later the same paper published a reply to the lecture by the celebrated grammarian, Greene, of New York. A three months' controversy ensued from which the Professor withdrew with the "friendly advice that Father De Roo leave the mediums alone and give his attention rather to bad popes, for instance, Alexander VI."

Father De Roo accepted the challenge and wrote two articles in defense of Alexander VI. The controversy had merely whetted the appetite of the Pastor of Pendleton, Oregon, and he asked his Ordinary, Most Rev. William H. Gross, for an extended leave of absence abroad that he might study the original documents concerning Alexander VI. The scholarly archbishop graciously consented and Father De Roo set out for Rome in the summer of 1889.

Father De Roo commenced his work of research in the Eternal City in the fall of the same year. Having obtained a passcard to the archives of the Vatican he went to his task with the earnest and single purpose of getting at the facts, whatever these might be, good or bad. But he soon came to the sad realization that his seemed a hopeless task, because his general passcard did not admit him to the archives which interested him

the most—those concerning the reign of Alexander VI. Undaunted by the fixed policy of the Vatican authorities of that day, he put his case before the custodian of the archives and boldly asked for access to the secret archives on Alexander VI. Cardinal Hergenroether, the well known historian, acceded to his request. This valuable permission put within the reach of Father De Roo the one hundred and eight volumes of records of the Bulls and Briefs of Pope Alexander VI, besides records of other Popes bearing on the history of the same Pontiff.

Armed with this singular authorization he began to delve into the dormant documents of Alexander VI, with renewed hope and energy, in search of the authentic facts concerning the boyhood and youth, the cardinalate, and papacy of the notorious Pontiff.

He kept at the work for two consecutive scholastic years, copying all documents bearing on Alexander VI, employing at times as many as five secretaries. Besides the Vatican archives he examined also the State archives of Italy, as well as the numerous libraries of Rome. He spent his evenings making an analysis of the findings of the day, and in reading printed literature on the subject in Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, French and English. Maintaining his headquarters in Rome, Father De Roo visited Civita Castellana, Nepi and other places, where, as Cardinal Borgia, Alexander VI, had acted as civil governor, and there the author examined all municipal records of interest to the student of Alexander VI. He extended his investigation to the cities of Gennazzano, Tivoli, and Frascati which Alexander had visited as Pope, and Subiaco, where Alexander had been commendatory abbot during his cardinalate.

During the Roman summer vacations Father De Roo spent nine weeks studying the archives of Vienna, four weeks making researches in Munich, nine weeks in Paris, and one week in Brussels.

These investigations netted Father De Roo an aggregate of thirty-one volumes of copied documents. Besides these he had gone through not less than seven hundred volumes of printed literature, in various languages, on Alexander VI.

Supplied with this wealth of information Father De Roo returned to America in the spring of 1892. Since then he has given his leisure time to this mass of documents, comparing, classifying, analyzing, translating.

In June 1908, he resigned the rectorship of St. Joseph's in Portland, to which he had been promoted from Pendleton. For the last thirteen years he has lived in his quiet home in the outskirts of Portland, where through the kindness of the Most Reverend Alexander Christie he has enjoyed the great privilege of a private chapel, devoting all his free time to the exclusive study of Alexander VI.

As a result of his thirty-two years of labor on Alexander VI Father De Roo has now a monograph on this pope comprising five volumes of typewritten matter, containing an average of four hundred small folio pages each.

The first volume, "The Borgia Family," gives the history of the relatives of Alexander VI and, in particular, the history of the legitimate

children of William Raymond Borgia, first cousin of Alexander VI, who are erroneously attributed to Alexander VI himself by some leading writers and an endless multiplicity of trailers.

The second volume, "Alexander VI from the Cradle to the Throne," treats of his youth, his cardinalate, and his election to the papacy. According to this volume Roderic Borgia led his class in the school of Valencia, Spain, where he studied Spanish, Latin, Mathematics and Religion. At the University of Bologna, Italy, at the expiration of a regular course in Civil and Canon Law, he graduated, not with the ordinary degree of Doctor in Civil and Canon Law, but with the extraordinary title of "The Most Excellent Jurist." In the entire period covering his youth there is no record, no mention, no whisper, no vestige, of any shortcoming in his moral conduct, in any authentic document or contemporary writing. On the contrary, the various Papal Bulls, (at least two dozen in number bestowing benefices upon him as a help in the pursuit of his studies) invariably speak of him as an eminently virtuous young man.

As a Cardinal Roderic Borgia earned the esteem, confidence, and liberal patronage of the five successive popes under whom he served. At the time of the war with the Turks Cardinal Borgia built and equipped a galley. To pay for this vessel he offered for sale the palace in which he lived, and failing to sell, he was compelled to mortgage this valuable property. To pay his living expenses at that time of money stringency he was forced to hypothecate three years of revenue.

At his election to the papacy he went into the conclave without being mentioned as a candidate. After five days of fruitless balloting the votes were equally and hopelessly divided between two cardinals, neither of whom seemed able to secure the necessary two-thirds of the votes. After the balloting of the sixth morning the cardinals decided unanimously to elect Cardinal Borgia the following day. There was but one dissenting vote, that of Roderic Cardinal Borgia.

The volume pays due attention to the vile anonymous pamphlet of unknown birthdate and birthplace, which has been extensively relied on for information on Alexander VI by both friend and foe, for the last five centuries. Father De Roo says that this is preposterous, because the pamphlet repeatedly states facts utterly at variance with proven historical data and are mutually contradictory. Thus, for instance, the pamphlet alleges that Roderic Borgia was a merchant, a lawyer, a soldier in Spain, whilst it is evident beyond the shadow of a doubt, from Pontifical Bulls quoted by Father De Roo, that Roderic Borgia was at that very time pursuing his studies in Civil and Canon Law at the famous University of Bologna.

The third volume treats of Alexander VI as Pope. It cites his acts to preserve and propagate the faith, his reforms, and plans of further reforms of the Roman Curia, the monasteries, and Catholic institutions generally, besides his defense of ecclesiastical rights and papal authority. It gives the documentary history of Jerome Savonarola, who died, in spite of the pope, a victim of his political schemes. It is also quoted in this

volume how correctly and carefully Alexander VI applied the Church laws on Matrimony, in particular regarding the so-called divorces of Stanislaus of Hungary, and Louis XII of France. After relating the various ways and means adopted by the pontiff to stimulate virtues and foster piety it closes with the history of the Sacred College and of a few rebellious cardinals during his pontificate.

The fourth volume deals with the career of Alexander VI as a temporal prince, his diplomacy with the courts of Europe, and his success in wars against the many petty princes who tyrannized their subjects.

The fifth volume makes known his assiduous efforts against the Turks, the story of his death, his means of subsistence, or financial resources. The penultimate chapter of this fifth volume contains a discussion of his morality as a youth, as cardinal, and chiefly as pope. It mentions the assurance given by four cardinals to King Charles VIII, that, in the year 1495, the pontiff was leading a life at least as holy as when he was unanimously elected to the supreme pontificate. The article praises the Pope's unusual activity, his extraordinary frugality, his boundless confidence in God, his tender love of the Blessed Virgin, his faithful attendance at solemn functions at St. Peter's, his special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, his love for the beauty of God's house manifested by frequent personal donations, his impartial justice towards his people, his charity towards the poor and the needy, the encouragement he gave to learning, sciences and arts, his fearless defense of the down-trodden. The chapter concludes by saying: "It is no wonder, therefore, that the Romans, although fickle and easily excited, never attempted to make any disturbance during all the years of his administration. The works which Alexander VI accomplished prove him to have been a great pope and king, and a father to his people."

The last chapter contains praises of Alexander VI by contemporary writers.

In a letter to me under date of Nov. 28th, Father De Roo says that he is considering having the book printed in Belgium because of the difference in cost.

RT. REV. VICTOR DAY, V.G.,

Helena,

Montana.