

When the Pope Dies

How the College of Cardinals Elects the New Pope

THE meeting of the cardinals for the election of a Pope is called a conclave, from *clavis*, a key. The name is justified by the fact that during the election the princes of the Church are actually under lock and key. This custom arose out of stern necessity, and can be traced back no further than the thirteenth century. Several times in those troublous days the need of an immediate choice became so imperious that the people resorted to the expedient of shutting the college up until an election was made. Such was the case when Innocent III died at Perugia, in 1216, and the election of Honorius III was in consequence accomplished in two days. Gregory IX was elected under similar circumstances at Rome in 1227, the election requiring but eleven days.

In the Middle Ages a papal election might be held almost anywhere in southern Europe, but for a long time there has been no election out of Rome, and usually the conclave is held in the Vatican. The conclave that chose Pius VI in 1775, however, was held in St. Peter's. Directly after the death of a Pope, under the direction of the chamberlain, the arrangements are made for the coming gathering. For centuries it was the custom to erect little wooden cells, each about nine by twelve feet; and the materials, numbered for putting together, were kept always in readiness. At the conclave of 1878 for the first time these cells were not used, but small apartments of three or four rooms each were specially constructed in the great halls of the Vatican. These little suites were much more convenient than the cells, since each cardinal is allowed two attendants, who were thus able to lodge near him and be constantly at his service. On the other hand, this arrangement necessitated the spreading of the cardinals over a large space in the palace, which made communication less easy.

On the morning of the tenth day after the death of a Pope occurs the inaugural of the conclave. The cardinals form in solemn procession in order of rank, and usually proceed to St. Peter's, where the mass of the Holy Spirit is sung, at the close of which a sermon is delivered by some ecclesiastic previously appointed by the college. This is known as the election sermon ("*Pro Eligendo Pontifice*"), and the preacher's duty is to exhort the cardinals to lay aside all prepossessions and preferences of their own, and to fix their eyes on God, so that as speedily as possible a shepherd may be chosen who may be equal to the exigencies of the times. A master of ceremonies then takes the papal cross and behind him follow the cardinals. Before the cross go the attendants and the pontifical choir singing "*Veni Creator Spiritus.*" Having arrived at the

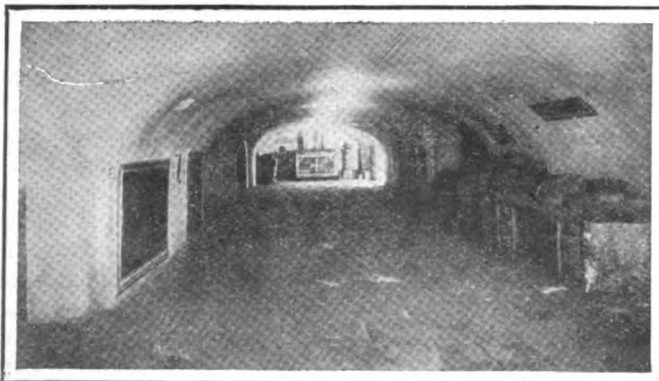
chapel of the conclave, the dean of the cardinals reads the Apostolic Constitutions relating to the election of a Pope, and each cardinal takes in turn an oath to observe them. The dean exhorts them to fulfill the obligations resting on them in so grave a matter as the election of the head of the Church, and the cardinals then betake themselves to their cells or apartments.

In the afternoon the college meets and receives the oaths of all the officers and attendants of the conclave. Of these there are a large number, of which it is necessary to specify only two: a governor, who is a prelate, and a marshal, a secular officer. In the evening the conclave is officially closed. Then all except the cardinals, their authorized attendants, and the sworn officials are required to leave the palace. All doors save one have been walled up ere this; now the last is locked and the keys placed in the keeping of the chamberlain. The governor and marshal henceforth keep strict charge of this door and both egress and ingress are forbidden. To this rule there is an exception, however: a cardinal arriving late must be admitted and a member of the conclave may be permitted to leave on account of sickness. Three cardinals with the chamberlain verify the report of the official that all but those having business there have been excluded, and the chamberlain usually makes a further round before retiring for the night to assure himself that all is right.

The night is spent in silence, the hours not given to sleep being presumably devoted to prayer and pious meditation. The chamberlain does not trust too much to this charitable presumption, but stations sentinels to see that no communications are held in secret during the night. In spite of this cardinals do manage to prowl about and electioneer every night while the conclave continues. On the following day the real business begins, that of election. In theory there are three methods by which a Pope may be chosen. The first is election by "inspiration," "acclamation," or "adoration," for all three terms are used to describe it. This is accomplished in those rare cases when all minds turn at once to some one as the sole possible candidate and he is saluted by unanimous acclamation. The election of Gregory VII is described as occurring in this way. The obsequies of Alexander II were performing and Hildebrand as archdeacon was directing them. All at once clergy and people with one voice cried out, "Hildebrand is Pope! It is the will of St. Peter! Hildebrand is Pope!" And he was immediately enthroned



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Papal Guards at the entrance of the Vatican



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The Crypt at the Vatican where Pope Benedict will rest with his predecessors

and crowned. Such elections, however, though always possible in theory, have been rare and none has occurred in recent times. Another method is known as election "by compromise." Not infrequently a deadlock occurs in a conclave and the cardinals agree to depute the election to a committee and to abide by its decision. Elections by this method have been not infrequent, but it has not been necessary to resort to it latterly. The commonest method is now, and probably always has been, election "by simple ballot."

The rules of Gregory XV for the preparation of ballots are curiously minute; in connection with his bull, "*Decet Romanum Pontificem*," not only does he give a full description but diagrams accompany the text, as sample ballots. The voting is secret, and therefore the ballot is in three divisions. In the upper part of the ballot each cardinal writes his name and title, thus: "*Ego, Robertus Card. Bellarmine*." This he folds down and seals and it is not examined save it becomes necessary to verify all ballots. In the lower division he writes a number and a motto, known only to himself, so that he may be able to identify his own ballot in case of necessity, thus: "*18. Gloria in Excelsis*." This he folds up and seals. All that is visible to the tellers is the middle part of the ballot, in which he writes: "*Eligo in Summum Pontificem Rev. D. meum Card. —*," filling the blank with the name of his candidate.

In general only a member of the College of Cardinals has been regarded as eligible to the papacy since the time of Nicolas II. But he admitted exceptions to this rule in case of necessity, and, as a matter of fact, between his day and that of Urban VI (1378) nine Popes were chosen from outside the college. Since that time none but a cardinal has been elected and the precedent has acquired practically the force of law.

The voting sessions are held in the Sistine Chapel and two ballots must be taken each day, the first directly after the morning mass, the second in the afternoon, usually about four o'clock. About two hours are ordinarily required for the taking of a vote. When the votes are ready to be given each cardinal advances in order of rank to the altar, where the tellers stand, kneels and offers a short prayer and then, holding his ballot over the great silver chalice that serves as an electoral urn, he repeats in a loud voice the electoral oath: "I call to witness Christ the Lord, who will judge me, that I choose him who I judge before God should be chosen, and I will do the same on the 'accession.'" Then, laying the ballot on the paten, he causes it to slide into the chalice, salutes the cross and returns to his place.

When the votes have been verified and counted and the result is announced, if nobody has received the necessary two-thirds majority, cardinals have the privilege of changing their votes. A ballot of the same general character as the one before used is prepared, but in the middle each writes: "*Accedo Rev. D. meo Ego Card. . . .*" If he does not wish to change his vote, he writes in the blank space *Nemini*, nobody. At a late conclave a nervous or absent-minded cardinal wrote in his first ballot, "*Eligo, etc., Card. Neminem*," and the ballot was read out by the tellers amid hilarious laughter of the cardinals. It sometimes happens that exactly two-thirds of the total number of votes have been cast for somebody. In that case all the votes are carefully verified; the tellers open each one and if it turns out that any cardinal has voted for himself the result is invalidated and there is no election.

After the concluding of the voting the ballots are burnt in a little stove kept for the purpose; and when the people gathered without see the smoke go up they know that no Pope has yet been chosen. This is supposed to be their only means of information, for besides the oath of secrecy imposed on all inmates of the palace, no communi-



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The Sistine Chapel, where the new Pope is elected. It is cut off from all communication with other parts of the Vatican during the balloting.

cation with outside persons is permitted except in the presence of the marshal and governor. Nevertheless, in some way the secrets leak out and the proceedings are reported from day to day with tolerable accuracy. The rules of Gregory XV provided that if a choice were not made within three days, for the next five days the cardinals should be restricted to one dish at each meal and thereafter should be confined to bread and wine or water until they completed the election. These rules have now been relaxed, but long deadlocks have also become infrequent.

Will it surprise anybody to learn that, notwithstanding all these strict rules and these solemn oaths, there is often a great deal of wire-pulling and electioneering in a conclave? As so often happens in our Presidential contests, the successful candidate is frequently not one of the several who have been hotly pressed by friends or have used all their arts to advance themselves, but a "dark horse." Some of the ablest and best and also some of the weakest and worst of the Popes have been chosen because the favorites were only strong enough in the conclave to kill off each other.

When, by any of these methods an election has been made, the dean of the cardinals goes to the Pope-elect and in a loud voice asks, "Do you accept the election, canonically made, to the supreme pontificate?" The answer is communicated to the assembly by the prefect of ceremonies. By a second question the dean asks the new Pope what name he wishes to take and on receiving his reply announces it in a loud voice to the electors. The official act of election and acceptance is then prepared and in the meantime the Pope is conducted to the altar, if he has not gone there at once on notification of his election. The robes of a cardinal are removed, and the pontifical garb, made ready in advance, is put upon him. He is then placed on a chair, back to the altar, the chamberlain puts on his finger the Fisherman's Ring, and all the cardinals in turn give him the first obeisance, kneeling before him and kissing his foot and hand and receiving from him the kiss of peace. The first official act of the new Pontiff is to confirm the powers of the former chamberlain, or, if he prefers, to appoint another.

Preceded by a choir singing "*Ecce Sacerdos Magnus*," the senior cardinal deacon goes to the balcony and says to the people: "I announce to you a great joy. We have as Pope the most eminent and most reverend —, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who has taken the name of —." And thus the world is made aware that the Church has a new Pope.

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