

LORD ACTON: THE CATHOLIC AND THE MORALIST.
A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS THOUGHT
FROM 1850 TO 1884.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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No Catholic layman in modern times has played a greater part in ecclesiastical affairs than did Lord Acton. Although he was neither a theologian nor a man conspicuous for his spiritual insight, his relentless call for a reform of the Church and the brilliance with which he advocated a rapprochement between Catholicism and the modern world have earned him a place in history alongside the great churchmen and divines of the nineteenth century. Acton understood much more clearly than did most Catholics of his time that he lived in an increasingly secular age, the tendency of which was to regard the Church as an obstacle to human progress. This insight led him to believe that profane scholarship, and not merely theology, must be used as a means to defend religion; and he insisted that scientific history had an especially important contribution to make, because of the position which it occupied as the spearhead of an intellectual revolution. When he began his career in 1857, as associate editor of the Rambler magazine, his foremost ambition was to communicate to English Catholics the ideas of the German Romantics, which he believed had already laid the groundwork for the recovery of religion. But the tragedy of his career was that his intentions were misunderstood by the mass of Catholics, largely because of his insistence on absolute candour, so that almost from the outset he found himself part of a resolute but small and loosely organised minority, whose views were never to triumph during his lifetime. He disputed endlessly with his co-religionists over the exigencies of the scientific

method as applied to history, strenuously opposed the official position regarding the Pope's Temporal Power, and finally conducted a vehement but hopeless struggle at the First Vatican Council against the proposed definition of papal infallibility.

In the course of these controversies, Acton's own position became increasingly intractable, and his judgements more and more severe. In part, this was a reaction to external provocation, for he was forced into the position of an antagonist partly by the belligerence of his opponents. As his candidly expressed opinions were greeted with mounting hostility, he responded by insisting more and more emphatically on his right to intellectual freedom as a scholar. At the same time, however, Acton's own views were undergoing a change. In politics, for instance, the urgent question of the Temporal Power led him to revise some of his fundamental assumptions. He had actually begun by defending the Pope's position in Italy, not only on the grounds that papal sovereignty was a necessary safeguard of spiritual independence but also on the basis of political arguments which were distinctly legitimist in nature; yet as he learned more and more about actual conditions in the papal states, he executed a volte-face and declared that the Pontiff had forfeited his claim to temporal authority on account of his misgovernment. Acton's altered position on the Temporal Power had the effect, in turn, of removing the chief practical barrier which had so far prevented him from embracing Liberalism. His progress, thereafter, was rapid. By 1864, he had committed himself almost wholeheartedly to the support of William Ewart Gladstone. Gladstonian Liberalism, and especially the earnest moral disposition which was associated with it, became a source of

inspiration to him. Gladstone's personal influence, even if inadvertently, led him gradually away from some of the convictions of his youth and provided him with a vantage-point from which he could view Catholicism more critically.

Almost simultaneously, Acton experienced a revolution in his historical methods. The change consisted primarily in a new appreciation of the work of Leopold von Ranke, especially as this related to the systematic use of manuscript sources for the study of the past. Acton had always been diligent in gathering information on historical topics, but before 1864 he had not actually researched the contents of the archives. When at last he did devote himself to this task--in Rome, Venice, Vienna, and elsewhere--he discovered that unpublished documents disclosed facts which contradicted the conventional version of history at almost every point. Much of what he found reflected, or at least seemed to reflect, unfavourably on Catholicism, and almost defiantly he published some of his discoveries in articles and reviews. Pius V, he said, had been a murderer; Gregory XIII had approved the Massacre of St. Bartholomew; and St. Charles Borromeo had promoted persecution. Acton began eventually to believe that these revelations of past scandals were directly related to what he already knew of ecclesiastical abuses in the present. Institutions such as the Temporal Power seemed to be rooted in a tradition of tyranny and cruelty. Doctrines such as papal infallibility appeared to grow out of falsehoods and fabrications that had been invented centuries earlier. Worst of all, Acton persuaded himself that many of his contemporaries were personally implicated in the crimes of the past because they defended the men who had committed

them. He found that this guilt by association was common not only among ardent Ultramontanes but also among Liberal Catholics, such as Dupanloup and Falloux.

Acton's position cannot be fully understood by relating it to a specific movement within nineteenth-century Catholicism. The severity of his judgements led eventually to his isolation even from those with whom he had previously been most closely associated. The unfolding of this process can be seen clearly in 1870, when the outcome of the Vatican Council became evident, for Acton not only remained opposed to the doctrine of papal infallibility but also placed much of the blame for its successful definition on the shoulders of the opposition party, who seemed to him to have failed by refusing to take their stand on the high ground of principle. But the greatest crisis of his life came in 1879, when he began to quarrel with Döllinger, his beloved teacher. The general point at issue between the two men concerned the validity of passing moral judgements in history. Acton insisted that it was the historian's responsibility to judge as well as to describe, and with merciless consistency he condemned to the fires of hell all those whom he believed guilty of having committed crimes in the name of religion. His arguments were met sometimes by evasions and sometimes by the charitable doctrine that historical figures must be evaluated in accordance with the standards of their own age. After five years of pointless exchanges, Döllinger brought the dispute to a close by telling Acton that their conversations on the topic had ceased for this world. Acton concluded mournfully that, after so many years of devotion to Döllinger, he had at last discovered that he had been living under an illusion,

since he had misunderstood Döllinger's essential position.

Acton spent his last years as Regius Professor of Modern History in Cambridge. All available evidence indicates that he remained till the end a devout and even an orthodox Catholic; but he never succeeded in reconciling himself to the Ultramontane tendencies of his time, or even to the views of many of those who, like himself, had struggled against Ultramontaniam. As he himself said, he was totally alone in his essential ethical position; and it is largely the uniqueness of his views which makes him a source of continual interest.

PREFACE

In recent years, a good deal of new information concerning Lord Acton has come to light. Fresh studies of his career, or of certain aspects of it, have appeared, and new collections of his essays and reviews have been added to those which were compiled shortly after his death.¹ Most importantly, hundreds of his letters have been recovered and made available. Victor Conzemius has published a splendid edition of Acton's correspondence with Ignaz von Döllinger,² the importance of which cannot be exaggerated. Josef Altholz, Damian McElrath, and James C. Holland have published his correspondence with Richard Simpson,³ and their work has completely replaced the very faulty edition of Cardinal Gasquet,⁴ by which readers were for so long misled. A host of other

¹The following collections of Acton's writings have appeared since 1948: Gertrude Himmelfarb, ed., Essays on Freedom and Power (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948); Douglas Woodruff, ed., Essays on Church and State (London: Hollis and Carter, 1952); William H. McNeill, ed., Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); and Hugh A. MacDougall, ed., Lord Acton on Papal Power (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973).

²Victor Conzemius, ed., Ignaz von Döllinger Briefwechsel, 1850-1890: mit Lord Acton (3 vols.; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1971).

³Josef Altholz and Damian McElrath, eds., The Correspondence of Lord Acton and Richard Simpson, vol. I (Cambridge University Press, 1971). Josef Altholz, Damian McElrath, and James C. Holland, eds., The Correspondence of Lord Acton and Richard Simpson, vols. II and III (Cambridge University Press, 1973-1975).

⁴Francis A. Gasquet, ed., Lord Acton and His Circle (London: George Allen; Burns & Oates, 1906.)

letters, most of which have not yet been published, have at least been brought together and deposited in the Cambridge University Library, where Acton's famous manuscript notes have been housed since his death. Mingled with these letters are also a few documents of a different kind--for instance, a copybook containing jottings from an early date--the existence of which had been unknown or forgotten. The result of much diligent scholarship is that we now have the basis for a clearer, more accurate, and more complete picture of Acton than ever before.

The interest which has provoked so successful a search for sources may be attributed to two main causes. The first is the intrinsic value which Lord Acton's ideas are now seen to possess. Even though Acton achieved considerable fame and recognition in his own lifetime, he has, in general, been more keenly appreciated by those who can view him in retrospect. Developments in the twentieth century have given us a perspective on Acton's ideas which his contemporaries could never have attained, a fact which holds both in a positive and negative sense. In politics, Acton's warnings against the increasing powers of modern nation-states have been justified in an appalling way. In religion, his relentless call for a reform of the Roman Catholic Church seems almost to have been answered by the work of Vatican II. One must guard carefully against the danger of regarding Acton too readily as a prophetic figure, for such a view obscures the many important respects in which he was a product of his age and environment: his religious ideas differ from those of twentieth century reformers in nearly as many ways as they resemble them. Nevertheless, it can be said that Acton's

insights often possess a peculiar relevance in the present context and that they contribute immensely to an understanding of how we have arrived at the contemporary situation.

The second main cause of interest in Acton is the puzzle which is associated with the ethical rigorism of his later years. There is perhaps nothing for which he is more famous than for his tireless insistence that it is the historian's responsibility to judge as well as to describe. Acton wanted to examine the whole of history in the light of absolute moral standards, and he saw no reason not to condemn wherever condemnation seemed appropriate. He applied this notion, not only as a general principle, but also as a guide in very specific cases, especially when he was discussing the great religious leaders of the past. He condemned Pius V as a murderer, denounced Gregory XIII for approving the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and accused the much-revered Charles Borromeo of promoting persecution. It was indeed the severity of Acton's judgements which led eventually to his isolation. His refusal to admit that immoral Popes and fanatical Inquisitors could enjoy the benefits of salvation precipitated his break with Döllinger. He also argued with men who meant less to him personally but who wished, as Döllinger did, to write history without passing sentence on the men whose lives they scrutinised. One of the most curious incidents of his career was his controversy with Mandell Creighton, whose History of the Papacy during the Period of the Reformation offended him by the lenient view which it took of ecclesiastical scandal and tyranny. This controversy, as Professor Gooch aptly remarked, was the "first and last instance of a Catholic scholar censuring an Anglican Bishop for

whitewashing the Vatican."⁵

But although Acton's highly unusual position has attracted widespread attention, none of the many studies already devoted to him has managed to provide a detailed and satisfactory explanation of the process by which he arrived at it. Gertrude Himmelfarb's biography, Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics,⁶ has certainly not met the need. Although it is a far more serious and scholarly work than Archbishop Mathew's Lord Acton and His Times,⁷ it nevertheless fails, I think, for several reasons, to explain adequately the development of Acton's religious ideas. In the first place, Dr. Himmelfarb was compelled to work without the benefit of some of the most important sources for the study of Acton's career, including his correspondence with Döllinger. In the second place, she focussed her attention chiefly, although not exclusively, on the progress of Acton's political thought and therefore did not probe as deeply as she might have into his development either as an historian or as a Catholic. In the third place, when she did address herself to Acton's religious views, she allowed her analysis to be distorted by what can only be described as anti-Catholic bias. Although one would scarcely have thought it possible, she more than once exaggerated the degree of hostility which

⁵G. P. Gooch, "Victorian Memories: Lord Acton," Contemporary Review, CLXXXIX, (April 1956), 207.

⁶Gertrude Himmelfarb, Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

⁷David Mathew, Lord Acton and His Times (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968). This work is an expanded version of David Mathew, Acton: The Formative Years (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1946).

Acton felt toward his fellow Catholics at certain stages of his career. This is especially true of her treatment of his early years, where she confuses her own evident distaste for Catholic customs, doctrines, and policies with strong disapproval on Acton's part. The result is that she leaves us with a portrait of Acton which does not take sufficiently into account the very sharp contrast between the opinions of his early years and the views which he held at a later date--when he did indeed denounce certain aspects of Catholicism, as well as many of his fellow Catholics, in the severest terms. To fail to see the contrast between the views which he held at the beginning of his career and those which he held at the end is to fail to appreciate the magnitude of the change through which he passed. If the extent of the change is not appreciated, then the change itself can hardly be adequately explained.

The only work in which a comprehensive study of Acton's religious views has ever been attempted is Ulrich Noack's Katholizität und Geistesfreiheit: nach den Schriften von John Dalberg-Acton, 1834-1902,⁸ which appeared as long ago as 1936. It is a work which has the merit of being based on a thorough and sympathetic use of the essays and reviews which Acton published in the Rambler and Home and Foreign Review; but it also suffers from a number of shortcomings which prevent it from being regarded as a satisfactory treatment of the topic. It is arranged in such a way as to separate biographical material too sharply from the main analysis of Acton's thought; it tries to impose on Acton's ideas

⁸ Ulrich Noack, Katholizität und Geistesfreiheit: nach den Schriften von John Dalberg-Acton, 1834-1902 (Frankfurt A.M.: Gerhard Schulte-Bulmke, 1936).

a systematic character which they do not possess; and it was written, of course, without many of the most important sources. Two works have appeared more recently which remedy some of these faults. Josef Altholz's Liberal Catholic Movement in England⁹ and Hugh A. MacDougall's Acton-Newman Relations¹⁰ are based on more up-to-date information and try to relate Acton's intellectual development to the external events which shaped his career. But both these books are studies of a deliberately specific nature and therefore deal only with certain phases of Acton's activity. Neither work examines closely the important events of the years following 1864, when Acton was passing through the most crucial transition of his life. Damian McElrath has published a volume entitled Lord Acton: The Decisive Decade, 1864-1874¹¹ which addresses itself to this period; but it is not so much an analysis of the problems as it is a collection of assorted documents, many of which had been published long before. Short essays are prefixed to the documents, but they do little to further our understanding of Acton's subjective development.

⁹ Josef Altholz, The Liberal Catholic Movement in England: The 'Rambler' and Its Contributors, 1848-1864 (London: Burns & Oates, 1962).

¹⁰ Hugh A. MacDougall, The Acton-Newman Relations: The Dilemma of Christian Liberalism (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Damian McElrath et al., Lord Acton: The Decisive Decade, 1864-1874. Essays and Documents. (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1970).

Professor Sir Herbert Butterfield's numerous essays¹² have done more than anything else to point the way to a clearer understanding of Acton. They have not only shed a clear light on specific aspects of Acton's career, but have also identified the main avenues which must yet be explored if a better overall picture of his development is to be achieved. Professor Butterfield has taught us, too, a great deal about the profitable use of Acton's manuscript notes in Cambridge, which contain so much important information. But he himself, unfortunately, has not given us a comprehensive study of Acton.

It is not my purpose in the present study to attempt a complete life of Acton. It is rather to try to trace and to explain Acton's development as a Catholic and as a moralist between the years 1850 and 1884. Although his family background and his early educational experiences have been taken into account, the period of his close association with Döllinger has been chosen as the chronological framework for my

¹²Herbert Butterfield, Lord Acton (London: Pamphlets of the Historical Association, 1948); Man on His Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship (Cambridge University Press, 1969); "Lord Acton," The Cambridge Journal, VI, (May 1953), 475-485; "Acton on the Massacre of St. Bartholomew," Cambridge Historical Journal, XI, no. 1, (1953), 27-47; "Journal of Lord Acton: Rome 1857," Cambridge Historical Journal, VIII, no. 3 (1946), 186-204; "Acton: His Training, Methods, and Intellectual System," in Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G. P. Gooch, planned and edited by A. O. Sarkissian (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1961).

work. It was when Acton went to study under Döllinger in 1850 that he entered upon the intellectual course which determined his career; again, it was when he finally broke with his teacher over the question of moral judgements in history that his progress toward the ethical rigorism of his later years reached its virtual completion. In the pages that follow, Acton's development has been very deliberately placed in the context of the great ecclesiastical controversies which impinged on his career, for, apart from these controversies, it is impossible to understand his progress; but no attempt has been made here to add substantially to what is already known of these controversies themselves. Although I have shed whatever new light I could on events in which Acton played a part, I have in no sense tried to write a new history of the Liberal Catholic movement in England, of the minority party at the First Vatican Council, or of Roman Catholic opposition to the Temporal Power. I have tried instead to understand and explain how these various phenomena influenced Acton's development and how in the end--in conjunction with important changes in his historical methods and political ideas--they caused him to adopt a much revised and far less happy attitude toward his native Roman Catholicism.

In attempting to carry out my plan, I have received the gracious and valuable assistance of many people. I am indebted, above all, to the Reverend Bernard M. G. Reardon, under whose patient supervision this dissertation was prepared. But I would also like to thank the following people: the Very Reverend James J. Hennesey, S.J., who first aroused my interest in Acton; Professor Sir Herbert Butterfield, who generously took time to discuss Acton with me; Mr. I. Lunden, who

gave me the benefit of his extensive knowledge of Acton's ideas; the Reverend Victor Conzemius, who offered me advice concerning Döllinger as well as Acton; my brother-in-law, Mr. Cameron Pulsifer, whose informed comments on matters related to Acton's career were a help; Mr. and the Hon. Mrs. Douglas Woodruff, who allowed me to examine the Acton papers which were then in their possession; the Reverend Bernard Payne, who placed the marvellous library of Ushaw College at my disposal; Dom Philip Jebb and the monks of Downside Abbey, who made it possible for me to see the Acton letters which are kept in their archives; and Mrs. F. Walsh, who carefully prepared the typescript of this dissertation. I wish, too, to acknowledge my special debt to my wife, Sandra, for her tolerance, encouragement, and support.

The preparation of this work would have been impossible without the financial assistance of the Canada Council of Arts and Sciences. I am grateful not only for the doctoral award which I received from the Council but also for the courteous and efficient help of the Council's officers.

Although it goes without saying that the faults of this study are entirely my responsibility, I could not have managed without the kindness and co-operation of all those mentioned above.

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NOTE ON REFERENCES

Every effort has been made in the pages that follow to present footnotes in as clear and straightforward a manner as possible. The author's guide in these matters has been Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Third Edition, Revised). The form laid down by Miss Turabian has been followed in all but a very few cases, where clarity seemed to demand small adjustments.

Two special cases, however, call for a word of explanation.

The first of these concerns footnotes to documents contained in the large collection of Acton papers which was until recently in the possession of Mr. and the Hon. Mrs. Douglas Woodruff. The author first consulted these papers at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Woodruff; he examined them again after they had been removed to the Cambridge University Library. Since they had not been catalogued when he saw them, however, it has not been possible to provide footnotes as precise as those which refer to catalogued material. The method adopted has been to describe the document (in the case of letters, by giving the name of the writer, the name of the recipient, and the date); to indicate that the document comes from the collection in question by the use of "Woodruff Papers" as a general description; to give the location of the document as C.U.L. [i.e. Cambridge University Library]; and, wherever possible, to indicate the bundle in which the document was found by describing its contents (e.g. Wetherell Correspondence, Family

Correspondence, etc.).

The other special case concerns essays and reviews by Acton which have been reprinted. In first full references to such writings, the original place of publication is given, including the pages on which the item appeared. This is followed by the editor and name of the work in which the item has been reprinted and the precise page on which the passage in question occurs. In all subsequent footnotes to the same writing, only the work in which the item has been reprinted is mentioned, followed by a page reference.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ASC . . . Josef Altholz, Damian McElrath, and James C. Holland, eds. Correspondence of Lord Acton and Richard Simpson. 3 vols.
- Correspondence . . . J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence, eds. Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton.
- DB . . . Victor Conzemius, ed. Ignaz von Döllinger Briefwechsel, 1850-1890: mit Lord Acton. 3 vols.
- Decisive Decade . . . Damian McElrath et al. Lord Acton: the Decisive Decade, 1864-1874. Essays and Documents.
- ECS . . . Douglas Woodruff, ed. Essays on Church and State.
- EFP . . . Gertrude Himmelfarb, ed. Essays on Freedom and Power.
- HES . . . J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence, eds. Historical Essays and Studies.
- HOP . . . J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence, eds. History of Freedom and Other Essays.
- L&D . . . Charles Stephen Dessain et al., eds. Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, vols. XVIII-XXII.
- LMG . . . Herbert Paul, ed. Letters of Lord Acton to Mary, Daughter of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone. Second edition, revised.
- LMH . . . J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence, eds. Lectures on Modern History.

Chapter I

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

No layman in modern times has played a greater part in ecclesiastical affairs than did Lord Acton. Although he was neither a theologian nor a man conspicuous for his spiritual insight, his relentless efforts to promote reform within the Church and the brilliance with which he advocated a rapprochement between Catholicism and the modern world have earned for him a place in history alongside the greatest churchmen and divines of the nineteenth century. Acton understood much more clearly than most Catholics of his time that he lived in an increasingly secular age, the tendency of which was to regard the Church as an obstacle to human progress. He passionately believed that the profane sciences must therefore be used as never before in order to safeguard and promote belief, and he insisted that historical studies and political philosophy had an especially important contribution to make, because of the position which they occupied as the spearhead of an intellectual revolution. When he began his career in 1857, as associate editor of the Rambler magazine, his foremost ambition was to communicate to English Catholics the ideas of the German Romantics, which he believed to have sponsored the most important religious revival for generations. The tragedy of his career was that his intentions were misunderstood by the mass of Catholics, largely as a result of his insistence on absolute candour, so that almost from the outset

he found himself part of a resolute but small and loosely organised minority whose views were never to triumph during his lifetime. He disputed endlessly with his co-religionists over the exigencies of the scientific method as applied to history, strenuously opposed the official position regarding the Pope's Temporal Power, and finally conducted a vehement but hopeless struggle at the First Vatican Council against the proposed definition of papal infallibility. In the course of these controversies, his own position became increasingly intractable, and the sanguine hopes which he had entertained in his youth gave way to a tendency to judge Catholics and even Catholicism itself with a severity which has become legendary. Eventually he was so overwhelmed by a feeling of total isolation that he abandoned all hope of influencing Catholic policy and withdrew entirely from active participation in the affairs of the Church. Yet even in his later thought--in the notes which he kept for his History of Liberty, in the lectures which he delivered as Regius Professor--one can discern clearly the extent to which his mind had been shaped by a concern for religious matters.

The exceptional place which religion occupied in Acton's life was perhaps due in some measure to his family background. Not only was he guaranteed by birth a prominent place among the "old" Catholic laity of England, but he also numbered among his relatives men who had held positions of considerable influence within the hierarchy of the Church. His father's brother, Charles Januarius Acton (d. 1847), had been a Roman cardinal and had served as special adviser to the Holy See on matters concerning England. His mother's great uncle, Karl Theodor von Dalberg (d. 1817), had been Archbishop of Mainz, Elector and Arch-Chancellor of

the Holy Roman Empire, and later Prince-Primate of Germany and President of the Confederation of the Rhine. In the case of his mother's family in particular, participation in ecclesiastical affairs was a deep-rooted tradition, reaching as far back as the fifteenth century when Johann von Dalberg had been Bishop of Worms and Chancellor of the University of Heidelberg. In the late sixteenth century, a Dalberg had been Archbishop-Elector of Mainz; in the early eighteenth, another had been Prince-Abbot of Fulda, the famous Benedictine monastery.

Yet notwithstanding this distinguished Catholic lineage, it is clear that it was Acton's education, far more than family influences, that fostered his interest in religious affairs. From a very early age, it brought him into contact with the leading Catholic figures of his time and enabled him to remain abreast of the most important developments within the Church. His schooling began in France, at the preparatory seminary of S. Nicolas de Chardonnet, which during his brief stay was under the supervision of Félix Dupanloup, who was later to become famous as a prominent member of the Liberal Catholic movement and as a leader of the Minority at the Vatican Council. From there Acton returned to England, in order to study at Oscott College, which by the time he arrived was already established as the undisputed centre of the English Catholic revival. The unique position which Oscott occupied in the 1840s was due chiefly to the efforts of Nicholas Wiseman, the future Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and then president of the college. Wiseman, convinced that the school was meant to serve a higher purpose than the education of a few boys,¹ had converted it into

¹Wilfred Ward, The Life and Times of Cardinal Wiseman (2 vols.: London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), I, p. 348.

a gathering point for visiting Catholic dignitaries and, more important, had opened wide its doors to converts from nearby Oxford, many of whom came there to be received into the Church. Acton spent a total of five years at Oscott, after which he lived for a time in comparatively obscure surroundings at Edinburgh, where he was placed under the tutelage of a certain Dr. Logan. But in 1850 he departed once more for the continent, this time to take up residence in the home of Ignaz von Döllinger. Döllinger had long been associated with the celebrated Munich Circle and had in his own right acquired a reputation as perhaps the greatest Catholic historian of his time. The impression which his novel ideas made upon Acton was so deep that it shaped the course of his entire career.

Even in the early stages of his education, Acton was aware that he was living in the mainstream of contemporary Catholic affairs. It was this feature of life at Oscott which seemed to appeal to him most, for, along with his thirst for knowledge, he manifested from a very early age a desire to be close to the centre of events. He showed an especially keen interest in the excitement caused by the Oxford converts,² and he appears also to have enjoyed being presented to the illustrious foreign Catholics who came to visit Wiseman.³ At the same time, however, it is clear that throughout most of the early part of his schooling, he was restless and dissatisfied, chiefly because he sensed that intellectual

²See Acton to Lady Leveson [Lady Granville], n.d., in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence, eds., Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), p. 2. See also Acton's recollections of Oscott recorded in Ward, Wiseman, I, pp. 348-349.

³See Acton to Döllinger, 14 March 1855, DB, I, p. 61.

standards were somewhat lower than they might have been. There was a brief period at Oscott, after he had spent some time in the college and had overcome the loneliness common to schoolboys away from home, when he professed himself perfectly reconciled to the prospect of remaining there another seven years.⁴ He even bragged to his family about how much he was learning, claiming among other things to have become a "perfect linguist" and to have mastered a number of natural sciences.⁵ But as time passed, and as his genuinely prodigious abilities became more and more apparent, he grew less and less content. It seems that his relationships with the other boys were not entirely successful. He complained in particular that they were indolent,⁶ and, since he also appears to have objected to studying in groups,⁷ it is probable that he felt that his classmates were holding him back. Eventually he decided that he would be unable to develop properly at Oscott and proposed that the best course would be for him to leave the school altogether. "This institution," he solemnly explained to his mother, "is very good for some young people, but not for me. I am certain that my strongest passion, the desire to make a name for myself, can be satisfied only if I develop the gifts bestowed upon me from above by studying; and here I find no incentive."⁸

⁴ Acton to Lady Leveson [Lady Granville], 15 February 1844, Correspondence, p. 2.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁶ Lady Blennerhassett, "Lord Acton (1834-1902)," Deutsche Rundschau, CXXII (1905), 66.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. (Lady Blennerhassett has translated Acton's letter to his mother, for which she gives no date, from the French into German. Her version is here rendered from the German into English.)

It was primarily in order to prepare him for admission to university, but perhaps also to comply with his desire for more independent study, that Acton was removed from Oscott in 1848 and placed under the direction of Dr. Logan. Although a detailed curriculum was devised for him in Edinburgh, providing for instruction in classical languages, history, and mathematics, he was also allowed a certain amount of time to himself, during which he could read authors of his own choosing.⁹ This part of the arrangement was obviously agreeable to him, for he seized the opportunity to delve into the works of Burke, Whately, and especially Macaulay, the early part of whose History he read at least four times.¹⁰ He also engaged in what he described as "lively discussions" with Logan, who disapproved of the enthusiasm which he showed for the great Whig historian.¹¹ Acton appears at first to have taken a certain pleasure in meeting his tutor's arguments with clever rejoinders. When Logan claimed, for instance, that Macaulay sacrificed profound thought to brilliance in expression, he retorted that the words which best express an idea always sound most pleasant.¹² But eventually it became apparent that he found his new environment essentially boring and even less satisfactory than Oscott. When he was told that he would have to spend an additional year

⁹ Acton to Lady Granville, [1848?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

¹⁰ Acton to Lady Granville, 14 April [1848 or 1849?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

¹¹ Acton to Lady Granville, 2 April [1848 or 1849?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

¹² Acton to Lady Granville, 27 May [1848 or 1849?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

in Edinburgh, he complained bitterly that he would sooner "sacrifice every hope and every prospect" than face such an ordeal.¹³ He was getting far less from Logan in the way of ideas than his natural abilities demanded, and he was deeply conscious of the deficiency.

Acton was still living in Edinburgh, and still expecting to complete his education at Cambridge, when the idea first arose that he should study for a time under Ignaz von Döllinger. His aunt, Countess Arco-Valley, was a personal friend of Döllinger, and it seems that she suggested simply that he ought to spend a few months in Munich before going up to the university.¹⁴ In making her proposal, Countess Arco was perhaps as much concerned to allow Acton an opportunity to enjoy the company of his Bavarian cousins as she was to promote his education. But Acton himself, although he took for granted that his stay in Germany would be very brief, immediately regarded the project as an important chance to broaden his intellectual horizons. The enthusiasm which he felt at the prospect of receiving instruction from Döllinger may be adequately measured by the

¹³ Acton to Lord Granville, [1849]; copy in Blennerhassett Papers, C.U.L. Add. 7486, E54.

¹⁴ For Countess Arco's part in arranging for Acton to study under Döllinger, see Lady Blennerhassett, "Lord Acton," Deutsche Rundschau, CXXII (1905), 67. That Acton was still expecting to go to Cambridge and that he therefore assumed that his stay in Munich would be brief is clear from Acton to Lord Granville, [late 1849 or early 1850], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

manner in which he reacted when Lord Granville suddenly proposed to abandon the scheme entirely and to place him instead in the care of a certain Mr. Richard Raby, whose method of teaching evidently involved taking English students on educational tours of Europe during the summer months. Acton remonstrated vigorously with his step-father, urging him to appreciate that all he really wanted was the necessary facilities to pursue his studies in earnest, and adding that nothing could better suit his ambitions than the chance to "attend a person of great acquirements and enlarged views." The summum bonum for which he could hope at present, he said, was "to live alone with some really good scholar, such as Professor Döllinger, to study the classics, science, philosophy, history, and German, twelve hours a day, and to spend an hour in receiving explanations and directions from my tutor." On the other hand, if he were forced to go to Mr. Raby, he would gain nothing from the experience, since Raby was not a man of distinction in any way. He and his students were known to spend six weeks of the summer "wandering about the Tyrol," and that was a loss of time which he could scarcely afford. He would prefer, in fact, to be without companions altogether, for they would be a source of distraction. He had been preparing his mind for hard work by difficult exercises and had been using almost all his money to acquire useful books. He hoped that Granville would not think it presumptuous if he therefore entreated him to facilitate the course which he had already undertaken, spontaneously and zealously.¹⁵

To Granville, one suspects, such intensity and persistence in a boy

¹⁵ Acton to Lord Granville, [late 1849 or early 1850], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

of sixteen must have seemed highly eccentric, not to say a nuisance. He would have wanted for his step-son only an education sufficient to allow him eventually to take up a place among Whig politicians and gentlemen. Almost by instinct, however, Acton saw himself as an aspiring scholar, rather than as a man of affairs in the making, and nothing could distract him from his desire to be with Döllinger. Before he actually left for Munich, he received the somewhat surprising news that all three Cambridge colleges to which he had applied for admission had rejected his applications. Yet he seems to have greeted even this development with perfect equanimity. In later years, he would recall his exclusion from the university as an indication of the prejudices against which English Catholics had had to contend at that time.¹⁶ But to the idea that more time should be spent in Munich, and that Döllinger's tutelage should serve, not as a final preparation, but as a substitute for Cambridge, he adjusted with the utmost ease.¹⁷ He had already pointed out that "by studying under him I shall enjoy an advantage which very few in this country do."¹⁸

When Acton at last arrived in Munich, in June 1850, he was immediately satisfied that his new situation would yield all the benefits for which he had hoped. In no time at all, he was writing home that Dr. Döllinger fully realised all his expectations and that "the course of

¹⁶"Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History," in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence, eds., Lectures on Modern History (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1930), p. 1.

¹⁷Acton to Lady Granville, [1850]; printed in Correspondence, p. 6, where it is incorrectly dated.

¹⁸Acton to Lord Granville, [late 1849 or early 1850], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

life and of study upon which I am now entering pleases me as much as the most sanguine prospect I have ever entertained."¹⁹ He was especially impressed by Döllinger's dispassionate and scholarly manner, by the originality and independence of his judgements, and by his apparently inexhaustible store of knowledge.²⁰ He could think of no question for which "the Professor"--as he came to call him--did not have a quick and edifying answer.²¹ Döllinger, for his part, appears to have been equally impressed by his student's zeal for learning. Within a month, he was convinced that Acton was endowed with more than ordinary abilities and that he displayed both sound judgement and considerable powers of reflection.²² When he had had more time to observe him at work, he was pleased to report to Lady Granville that he showed no wish to spend his evenings in any way except among his books.²³ It was true, of course, that Acton had come to Munich with prejudices that needed correcting. Above all, he was far too enamoured of Macaulay, and it was necessary to open his mind to less narrow views.²⁴ But Döllinger, unlike Logan, met with no resistance in this matter. Acton readily admitted that he must begin his

¹⁹ Acton to Lord Granville, [1850]; printed in Correspondence, p. 6, where it is incorrectly dated.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Döllinger to Lady Granville, 12 August 1850, DB, I, pp. 3-4.

²³ Döllinger to Lady Granville, 12 December 1850, DB, I, p. 6.

²⁴ See C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 212; and Acton to Döllinger, n.d., quoted in J. Friedrich, Ignaz von Döllinger: sein Leben auf Grund seines schriftlichen Nachlasses (3 vols.; Munich, 1899-1901), III, pp. 72 ff.

studies by sweeping away the misconceptions which he had acquired elsewhere.²⁵

Part of the reason why Acton felt certain that Munich marked a radical new departure in his life was that he was suddenly provided with unique opportunities for scholarship. He later recalled that he had arrived as a "raw English schoolboy, primed to the brim with Whig politics"²⁶ and lacking religious ideas of his own.²⁷ Dupanloup and Wiseman, he said, had taught him nothing other than "what every average priest believed."²⁸ But at Munich he quickly found himself caught up in a whirlwind of intellectual excitement and immersed in a course of studies which combined discipline and rigour with almost limitless facilities for the exploration of new ideas. Döllinger continued him in the study of the classics, saw to it that he rapidly improved his knowledge of German, and introduced him as soon as possible to readings in history, politics, and theology.²⁹ Acton was given free use of his teacher's library,³⁰ and from Lord Granville he received an increased book-buying allowance which financed the beginning of his own famous collection.³¹

²⁵ Acton to Lady Granville, 28 November 1850, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

²⁶ C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 212.

²⁷ C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 130.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Döllinger to Lady Acton, 12 August 1850, DB, I, pp. 4-5.

³⁰ Acton to Lord Granville, [1850]; printed in Correspondence, p. 8, where it is incorrectly dated.

³¹ Acton to Lord Granville, 13 May [?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

He was admitted to the university library,³² which contained 200,000 volumes, and he was also permitted to use the fine Royal Library, which had been built up from the spoils of suppressed monasteries.³³ Munich contained as well two major archives which Acton later described as "rich in the secrets of Central Europe,"³⁴ although there is no certain evidence that he used them during his student days. He did not matriculate at the university, but he did eventually attend courses there. We know that, besides Döllinger's lectures in Church history, he heard Ernst von Lasaulx on the history of philosophy and Wilhelm Hermann on political economy.³⁵ Hermann was one of the Protestant members of the faculty, and Acton confidently assured his mother that "he is considered the most learned man in Germany in his field."³⁶ About Lasaulx he was even more enthusiastic, for he believed that without exception he was "the most eloquent and accomplished philosopher in Germany."³⁷ Everything in Munich conspired to convince him that he was living at the summit of contemporary academic achievement and that the knowledge of his previous teachers was as commonplace as he had always suspected.

³² Acton to Lady Granville, 17 November 1853, Correspondence, p. 17.

³³ Acton to Lady Granville, 4 December [?], Correspondence, p. 10; and C.U.L. Add. 5609, f. 66a.

³⁴ C.U.L. Add. 5609, f. 66a.

³⁵ Acton to Lady Granville, 17 November 1853, Correspondence, pp. 16-17.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁷ "Mr. Buckle's Philosophy of History," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (August 1858), 88-104; reprinted in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence, eds., Historical Essays and Studies (Macmillan and Co., 1907), p. 33.

The general atmosphere which pervaded the religious life of Munich likewise appeared to Acton to be entirely different from anything that he had hitherto known. In the two decades before his arrival, the famous Munich Circle, led by Joseph von Görres, had established the city as the centre of a remarkable Catholic revival, the magnitude of which made the accomplishments of Nicholas Wiseman seem almost ordinary by comparison. In scholarship, in politics, and even in art, the Munich Circle had striven to recover for Catholicism an influence in German life greater than it had enjoyed for centuries. Their success had depended partly on the brilliance of individual members of the group (Döllinger included), partly on a favourable conjunction of events, and partly on the compatibility of their ideas with the prevailing tide of Romanticism. By 1850, they had already passed their zenith, for Görres was dead, and pre-eminence in German Catholic affairs was beginning to shift to Mainz. But the important thing for Acton was that the spirit of the Munich Circle survived. The experiences of the past several years had taught the Catholics of Munich--and, indeed, the Catholics of Germany at large--to live with confidence in a predominantly Protestant world. There existed among them a mood which was easily as optimistic, yet in many respects less naive, than that which had been characteristic of Oscott. Living in their midst, Acton soon grew accustomed to bearing his Catholicism with a degree of self-assurance that was rare even among the most assertive English Catholics.

One feature of Acton's life at Munich which touched only indirectly on his intellectual development, but which nevertheless deserves to be mentioned before discussing the ideas which he learned from Döllinger,

is the feeling of increased emotional security with which his new environment provided him. Although the development of his personal relationship with Döllinger cannot be traced as precisely as one might wish, it is clear at least that it soon reached an unusual degree of intimacy. The motive for this may well have been related to the premature death of Acton's father in 1837, when Acton was only three years of age. Lord Granville, his step-father, had certainly never been able to fill the gap thus left in Acton's life, no doubt largely because of the air of levity with which he approached life.³⁸ But Döllinger, on the other hand, possessed precisely the sort of temperament which would have attracted a sober and earnest youth. Whether he wanted it to happen or not, he soon found himself, at least in some respects, playing the rôle of surrogate father. At the same time, Munich brought Acton into frequent contact with his relatives, the Arcos, among whom he seems to have found a sense of family life which was otherwise lacking to him. On holidays and other occasions, he travelled to their home at Tegernsee, where he could enjoy the company of his young cousins—one of whom (Marie) he was eventually to marry. He also developed an extraordinarily strong attachment to

³⁸The clearest description of Lord Granville with which Acton has provided us dates from a much later period, when his friend, T. F. Wetherell, was seeking employment at the Foreign Office: "You will," he wrote, "find F[oreign] O[ffice] officials much easier, more complacent, less methodical men than any other O[ffice] possesses . . . Lord Granville himself will ask whether you have been to the play, at the most unexpected moments. Then he has times of preoccupation, known by the absence of expression from his face, when it is no use talking to him.

He has a habit of dismissing most men, in the category of bores or nonentities, chiefly because they don't amuse him at dinner. If a man can be called droll, he is safe." (Acton to Wetherell, 2 April 1871, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. [Wetherell Correspondence]; not printed by Gasquet.)

Countess Arco herself. Whether this was due, in turn, to an element of strain in his relationship with his own mother is not entirely clear. But it can be said with confidence that he looked for comfort and security to his aunt (whom he usually addressed as "maman") and that his dependence on her lasted well into manhood. He once told her, in the midst of an emotional crisis, that she had provided him with the only home he had ever known.³⁹ On the same general occasion, he looked back nostalgically to his student days, when, he said, she had first changed his life "from night into day."⁴⁰

In order to understand properly the pattern of ideas to which Acton was introduced at Munich, one must first appreciate fully that the intellectual climate there was distinctly Romantic. The importance of this point, although it is very great indeed, is all too easily missed, partly because of the manner in which Döllinger had formed his own opinions. Acton himself tells us that Döllinger was a vigorously independent thinker, in the sense that he had refused to be carried along blindly by the Romantic current.⁴¹ He also indicates that his teacher had, in

³⁹ Acton to Countess Arco, [1861 or 1862], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence). For more on the crisis through which Acton was passing at this time, see below pp. 159-161.

⁴⁰ Acton to Countess Arco, 31 December 1861 and 1 January 1862, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

⁴¹ C.U.L. Add. 5643, f. 80. See also C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 32.

particular, remained aloof from the more fanciful aspects of the Romantic movement.⁴² But to say that Döllinger had been selective in what he had taken from Romanticism is to tell only half the story--as Acton well knew.⁴³ In other respects, he had entered freely into the spirit of the movement, eagerly embracing some of its most cherished assumptions. Not least of these was the emphasis which the Romantics placed on the value of tradition, continuity, and authority.⁴⁴ The renewed esteem in which concepts such as these were held had, in fact, profoundly influenced his career, for he had been quick to recognise that it was intimately connected with the success of the Catholic revival. Döllinger's outlook was determined by the belief that he had in his own lifetime witnessed a radical shift in intellectual perspective--a shift which consisted primarily in a new respect for the testimony of history;⁴⁵ and he welcomed the predominantly conservative spirit of the time, not only for its own sake, but also because it tended to highlight the value of Catholicism as a bulwark of civilisation.

The impression which Döllinger's frame of mind made on Acton was of immeasurable significance for the course of his career, since it convinced him at the outset that a special affinity existed between Catholicism and the most advanced thought of the age. The reconciliation of Catholicism

⁴²C.U.L. Add. 5643, f. 80.

⁴³C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 32.

⁴⁴"Döllinger's Historical Work," English Historical Review, V (October 1890), 700-744; reprinted in John Neville Figgis and Reginald Vere Laurence, eds., The History of Freedom and Other Essays (London: MacMillan and Co., 1907), p. 401 and p. 402.

⁴⁵See C.U.L. Add. 4914, card 57.

to modern ideas was a central theme of his education; but the entire idea was presented to him, not merely as a goal to be zealously pursued, but also as something which, in Germany at least, had already been partially accomplished. It was not specific ideas which mattered so much in this respect, although they, of course, could be important. It was a broad perspective or underlying point of view which seemed chiefly significant. In political philosophy, for instance, the first principle that Acton learned was distrust of any violent breach with the past.⁴⁶ The French Revolution was held up to him as a terrible example--an example of what happened when an attempt was made to impose abstract doctrines on events without due regard to custom and environment.⁴⁷ But although Acton certainly took the lesson to heart, he did not simply adopt the political conservatism of the Romantic school. He also grew accustomed to the notion that the anti-revolutionary reaction of the nineteenth century was part of a general restoration of uniquely Catholic habits of thought. Protestantism, because it was based on a breach with historic Christianity, stood out for its kinship with the Revolution. Catholicism, on the other hand, seemed a perfect model of permanence and adaptability. The Romantics, Acton tells us, "undertook to restore the great world of traditions"; and the Catholic Church appealed to them precisely because it was "the central and most energetic representative and assertor of that principle . . .".⁴⁸

⁴⁶"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOP, p. 391.

⁴⁷See C.U.L. 5751 [Roman Diary], pp. 230-231, where Acton is almost certainly recording Döllinger's opinion. See also C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 42; and C.U.L. Add. 5640, f. 4a.

⁴⁸C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 44.

To bolster this general impression, Acton had the actual testimony of leading German political thinkers. Adam Müller, the most eminent among them, had been converted to the Roman faith. Joseph von Görres, though born a Catholic, had been led by his political convictions to a warmer appreciation of his religious heritage. The more interesting case, however, was that of a man who was neither a German nor a Catholic. Edmund Burke, the greatest of all critics of the French Revolution, was given to Acton as his master in political thought. More than any other man, we are told, Burke had been the teacher and oracle of the generation of men with whom Döllinger was associated.⁴⁹ Döllinger himself had been led to Burke through the writings of De Maistre,⁵⁰ and he had been especially attracted by Burke's aversion to abstract doctrines.⁵¹ Part of what this meant was that Acton in turn was taught to think of Burke almost exclusively as a conservative thinker. He was encouraged to hold in special esteem the writings of his later years;⁵² and the single work which was most warmly recommended to him was the Letters on the Regicide Peace.⁵³ But here again one can discern much more than the strongly conservative flavour of Acton's education. Equally striking is the eagerness with which he came to identify such tendencies as a general devotion to the principle of continuity with an improvement in the intellectual fortunes

⁴⁹C.U.L. Add. 5643, f. 69b.

⁵⁰C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 127.

⁵¹C.U.L. Add. 4965, card 66.

⁵²See C.U.L. Add. 4912, card 337.

⁵³Acton to Döllinger, n.d., quoted in Friedrich, Ignaz von Döllinger, III, pp. 72ff.

of Catholicism. In a curious way, he regarded Burke as a sponsor of the Catholic revival. In one of his earliest copybooks to have survived, he wrote: "Catholics must reverence him [i.e. Burke], for he transplanted the Catholic principles of religion into public affairs."⁵⁴ Again, in notes which he kept at a much later date, he explained that Catholics had been Burke's natural followers because his doctrines were "supported by the Catholic view of history."⁵⁵ And to this he even added the observation that "Protestants of the same school frequently become Catholics."⁵⁶

The influence of Catholicism on Protestant scholars seemed to Acton, even in later years, one of the chief consequences of the Romantic movement.⁵⁷ But there was also a sense in which he knew that the central insights of Romanticism had actually been borrowed by Catholics from Protestants. The debt was one which he was especially inclined to acknowledge when he spoke of the rise of German historical scholarship, for he knew that Catholics had first learned the advantages of historical study from their Protestant contemporaries.⁵⁸ If historical-mindedness

⁵⁴ Copybook, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L.

⁵⁵ C.U.L. Add. 4967, card 65.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ C.U.L. Add. 5563, ff. 60b-61a.

⁵⁸ See "Döllinger's History of Christianity," Rambler, IV, 3rd ser. (January 1861), 145-175; reprinted in ECS, pp. 377-378. See also "M. Littré on the Middle Ages," Chronicle, I (3 August 1867), 444; C.U.L. Add. 4900, card 13; and C.U.L. Add. 4908, card 138. The point is discussed briefly by Herbert Butterfield, "Acton: His Training, Methods, and Intellectual System," in A. O. Sarkissian, ed., Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in honour of G. P. Gooch, p. 177.

was the basic principle which linked Romanticism to the Catholic revival, then precise historical scholarship was the scientific form in which this principle found expression; and for more than half a century before Acton came to Munich, historical scholarship had offered the spectacle of Protestant authors paying homage to the Catholic Church. Johannes Müller, in his Reisen der Päpste, had portrayed the medieval popes as the defenders of law and justice. His disciple, Henry Luden, had provided an heroic portrait of their struggle against the German Emperors. Johannes Voigt, Luden's student, had written an enthusiastic monograph on Gregory VII. And one historian, Heinrich Leo, had so far praised the literature of the Catholic Middle Ages, that he had cast in doubt whether the culture of Europe had even been in need of a renaissance.⁵⁹

The impression that this phenomenon made on Acton can be judged by his first attempt to explain it.⁶⁰ A more just appreciation of Roman Catholicism, and of the Catholic Middle Ages in particular, he said, was partly the product of re-awakened German national pride. This refurbished patriotism, in turn, had its roots in the great struggle at the beginning of the nineteenth century for the liberation of Germany from French rule. Longing to be free from the tyranny of Napoleon, the Germans had turned for inspiration to the earlier and happier periods of their history. They had fixed their attention on the Middle Ages in particular; and what they had discovered when they did so was that the brightest era in the history of the Church was also the brightest in the history of the German nation.

⁵⁹ Following Georges Goyau, L'Allemagne religieuse (2 vols. Paris: Perrin, 1905), II, pp. 226-227.

⁶⁰ "Wolfgang Menzel's Geschichte der Deutschen," Weekly Register, XV (17 May 1856), p. 5, cols. 2-4.

Indeed, they had found that the once great German Empire had owed its very existence to the Church. A critical view of the Reformation had then become possible for German Protestants, for they could see that it was during the Reformation era that the Empire had "resolved itself into a multitude of petty states,"⁶¹ whereas the earlier unity and prosperity of the nation had depended precisely on the connection with Rome. Even the policies of modern German states aroused sympathy for Catholicism. Their attempts to interfere in religious affairs restored the memory of the heroic way in which the medieval popes had resisted the encroachments of secular rulers. "In proportion as the knowledge of the Middle Ages increases," Acton said, "this manner of viewing history gains more adherents."⁶²

Under the influence of the German Romantics, therefore, what Acton learned to believe was that sound historical scholarship led almost inevitably to increased prestige for Catholicism. The chief requirement was simply that the truth be re-discovered and told. No one historian was responsible for persuading him of this, for he was not given a single master in history, as he had been given Burke in politics; but he was encouraged to focus his attention on the works of a single school. By the time he left Munich, Müller, Luden, Voigt, and Heinrich Leo all stood high on the list of the writers whom he most admired. So, too, did Böhmer, Gerlach, and Mensel. Among these men, Leo, the resolute critic of Ranke, was perhaps accorded a certain pre-eminence; but it was the tendencies of the group as a whole which were really important. Acton

⁶¹Ibid., col. 2.

⁶²Ibid., col. 3.

was captivated by their glorification of the Middle Ages, by their apparently dispassionate criticisms of the Reformation, and especially by the extremely positive view which they took of Catholicism's influence on civil society. He himself developed the idea--almost certainly under Döllinger's influence--that in Catholic political tradition there lay the seed of a doctrine of liberty which, if cultivated in the nineteenth century, would vastly improve the condition of politics in Europe. That doctrine rested on the principle that the power of the State must be limited to a narrowly defined sphere, so that the area in which a person would be responsible only to his conscience would be as large as possible.⁶³ Acton believed that it was the medieval Church which, by its resistance to the civil authority, had first put this doctrine into practice;⁶⁴ and he could therefore comfortably assert--or follow Döllinger in asserting--that "all liberty began with the Church."⁶⁵

It did not especially disturb Acton that the Romantic historians who had pointed the way to views such as this were themselves inclined to glorify the Middle Ages while doing less than justice to both antiquity and modernity. When he examined their views against the background of

⁶³ C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 245.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Acton is again very possibly recording here comments made to him by Döllinger. The possibility that he at least took the main ideas involved from Döllinger is suggested by Döllinger's statement in The First Age of Christianity, trans. by Henry Nutcombe Oxenham (4th ed.; London: Gibbings and Co., 1906), p. 390: ". . . the only true liberty, in the Apostolic sense, and the condition of every other, was the right and capacity of following no will but that of God in matters of conscience." See also C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 259: "Liberty, restriction of state power, was his [Döllinger's] object."

eighteenth-century prejudices, or when he compared their warm sympathy for Catholic times to the earlier exaggerations of Protestant polemics, it was their apparent fairness that impressed him. It did not occur to him at first that they, too, might be biased; for what they seemed to be doing was acknowledging the justice of their opponents' cause. It was a natural enough reaction under the circumstances. But there was nevertheless a one-sidedness to Acton's education; and the blame for that one-sidedness must be laid primarily at the door of Döllinger. Döllinger was a man who, as Acton himself later explained, had become an historian chiefly because he recognised the advantages which might be gained for the Church through historical research.⁶⁶ Impressed especially by the works of Johannes Müller,⁶⁷ and convinced in any case that the traditional theology was obsolete,⁶⁸ he had conceived the plan of re-modelling ecclesiastical scholarship in such a way as to substitute the historian for the metaphysician as the defender of the faith.⁶⁹ Even his peculiar approach to Church history had been shaped by this idea. He was not deeply interested in the history of dogma,⁷⁰ for, unlike others, he did not see history as a chance to demonstrate the identity of modern Catholic teachings with apostolic doctrine. Instead, he seized on what seemed to him an opportunity to show that the Catholic Church had exercised a salutary influence

⁶⁶C.U.L. Add. 5669, f. 47b; C.U.L. Add. 4912, card 17; C.U.L. Add. 4906, card 306.

⁶⁷C.U.L. Add. 4912, card 152.

⁶⁸C.U.L. Add. 5515, card 15; C.U.L. Add. 4910, card 20.

⁶⁹C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 84; C.U.L. Add. 5515, card 75.

⁷⁰"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 385; C.U.L. Add. 4906, card 15; C.U.L. Add. 4907, card 175.

on European society.⁷¹ "As an historian," Acton wrote, "Döllinger regarded Christianity as a force more than as a doctrine, and displayed it as it expanded and became the soul of later history."⁷² But, unfortunately, the apologetical motives which inspired this approach had at least some unhappy consequences for Acton. Döllinger was inclined to prejudice him against important historians whose views, perhaps, seemed less convenient for Catholic purposes. While he held up Müller, Luden, and Leo as leaders in scientific history, he treated Macaulay, Ranke, and Mommsen with suspicion and even hostility.⁷³ It was many years before Acton achieved a more balanced view.

Yet there is a danger in exaggeration. If Döllinger long prevented Acton from properly appreciating the merits of historians such as Ranke, then he also taught him much that was valuable about the historical relationship between Church and society, especially as this related to the rise of liberty. If he grossly overestimated the objectivity of Müller or Luden or Leo, then he nevertheless embraced with perfect sincerity the ethical ideal of honesty in the writing of history. Acton was taught that if Protestants were willing to praise the popes, then Catholics must likewise be prepared to criticise them, according as the evidence demanded. He himself said years later that devotion to truth-

⁷¹C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 205; C.U.L. Add. 4906, card 55.

⁷²"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 383.

⁷³On Macaulay, see Acton to Döllinger, n.d., quoted in Friedrich, Ignaz von Döllinger, III, p. 72. On Ranke, see C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 218; C.U.L. Add. 5527, f. 67b and f. 84b; and C.U.L. Add. 5528, f. 193a. On Mommsen, see C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 130; and C.U.L. Add. 5527, f. 26a.

fulness was the chief thing he had learned from Döllinger;⁷⁴ and there is every reason to agree with him. The principal mistake that must be avoided is simply the mistake of seeing Acton's career in reverse order. A commitment to disinterested scholarship would eventually lead both him and his teacher into a pitched battle with ecclesiastical authority. In the midst of bitter controversy, he would also discover that the convictions of his early years would not withstand the test of science. But both experiences lay yet in the future. Although it is possible to say that when Acton left Munich he was already aware that his novel ideas were fraught with controversial implications, it is even more important to add that nothing had actually taken place yet to upset his confidence and optimism.⁷⁵ His foremost thought was that Catholicism had recovered the initiative in intellectual affairs. If other Catholics had to overcome a certain narrow-mindedness before the advantage could be fully

⁷⁴ Acton to Döllinger, [?] January 1872, DB, III, p. 46.

⁷⁵ In C.U.L. Add. 4863, f. 159, there is an undated excerpt from a letter which Acton had written to Döllinger: "Um diese Zeite, Ende 1854, war es mir schon klar dass Sie anders dachten als andere Katholiken. Aber ich wusste es nicht aus den Resultaten, sondern aus der Methode, und der ganzen Art der Auffassung. Ich brachte die Ueberzeugung nach England zurück dass die Katholische Lehre mit der göttlichen Wahrheiten, die Kirchlichen Interessen mit dem Recht, zusammenfallen. Ich glaubte man brauche ebensowenig Priviligien als Sophismen. Weder das oesterreichische Concordat noch das neue Dogma [Immaculate Conception] brachte eine Störung in diesen naiven glauben. Ich glaubte das Princip der wahrheit und der Freiheit in religiösen Dingen, der wahrhaftigkeit und Liberalität in Katholiken, würde zur Rettung und zur Rechtfertigung der bestehenden Dinge führen."

realised, then to persuade them to do so would be part of his mission.

Acton's formal education was brought to a close at the end of 1854. By that time his twenty-first birthday was approaching, and it seems that Lord Granville, who had never really favoured the idea of his studying in Germany, insisted that he should return to England in order to begin a suitable career. Acton does not seem to have protested too vigorously against his stepfather's instructions, for he had already had to argue desperately to prolong his studies thus far. Granville had originally wanted to terminate Acton's studies several months earlier, but he had been successfully thwarted by an elaborate appeal from Acton, in which the latter had reminded him sharply that he had not been studying as a dilettante, nor simply preparing for public life.⁷⁶ But this time Acton seems to have known that his arguments would be of no avail. He had resisted Granville on too many occasions and now had no choice but to comply, more or less, with his wishes.

Yet even now Acton did not capitulate entirely. Although he returned to England in late November and took up residence at Aldenham, he soon made clear that he would not be content to remain there without interruption or to concern himself, as Granville wished, with forging a

⁷⁶ Acton to Lord Granville, 6 May 1854, Correspondence, pp. 23-28.

career in public life.⁷⁷ His intention was rather to make the best of Aldenham by using it as a quiet place to study and write and to organise his schedule so as to allow for frequent trips to the continent.⁷⁸ By adhering doggedly to this plan, he managed to arrange the next few years so that they became in effect an extension of his education. They were devoted to intense private study, punctuated by frequent journeys to Europe. During these trips, he was able not only to consult "the Professor" on many points of interest, but also to call upon and interview a number of distinguished scholars. In Berlin, he met Savigny;⁷⁹ in Leipzig, Wilhelm Roscher;⁸⁰ in Freiburg, Gfrörer;⁸¹ and so on.

The general effect of the conversations which Acton had with these men was to extend still further the wide range of interests which he had already acquired under Döllinger. In this sense, at least, his experiences during these years can be said to have broadened his mind. Some of the men whom he met, moreover, made a long-lasting impression on him, as was the case with Wilhelm Roscher.⁸² But still--and this is perhaps the most important point--none of the views which Acton encour-

⁷⁷In fact, when he was introduced to Lord John Russell and other prominent Whigs he wrote to Döllinger: "Es ist mir so leicht geworden einen gewissen Eindruck auf diese Männer zu machen und eine gute Stellen und vortheilhaften Ruf zu begründen dass ich überzeugt bin zu jeder Zeit das fortsetzen zu können." (Acton to Döllinger, 18 January 1855, DB, I, p. 51.)

⁷⁸Ibid.; and Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1854, DB, I, pp. 42-44.

⁷⁹Acton to Döllinger, 14 March 1855, DB, I, p. 56.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁸¹Acton to Döllinger, 8 April 1856, DB, I, pp. 89-90.

⁸²See Acton to Lady Acton, 7 July 1877, DB, III, pp. 176-177.

tered in the course of his travels did anything to undermine Döllinger's influence over him. Wherever he went, he clung tenaciously to the Professor's ideas, using them as his chief standard by which to judge the opinions of others. When he met Heinrich Leo, for instance, whom Döllinger had taught him to admire, he was perfectly delighted. "He was exceedingly friendly," he reported to Döllinger, "and he has made the most favourable impression on me. I was astonished by the agreement between his views and judgements and yours."⁸³ But when he met Ranke, Leo's opponent, he reacted with near contempt. "His views seem to me thoroughly superficial. . . . It is not worth the trouble to hear him."⁸⁴

Of the many people whom Acton came to know during these years, one group stands out from the rest in the sense that it was composed of men who actively worked together for the achievement of common goals. This was the Liberal Catholic circle of France, with whose views Acton's own ideas were often to be associated in later years. Acton's personal acquaintance with the Liberal Catholics began in 1853 when he first met the Count de Montalembert. The occasion was an extremely pleasant one for Acton, because of the cordial manner in which Montalembert received him. He not only showed a keen interest in Acton's Munich teachers, whom he already knew well, but also treated Acton himself as though he were a long-standing and trusted friend. "Although I am accustomed," Acton wrote, "to listen to praise with the same indifference as I listen to blame, I must nevertheless take the greatest pleasure in the entirely

⁸³ Acton to Döllinger, 14 March 1855, DE, I, p. 55.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

flattering way in which he spoke to me and of me to the Marchese Brignoli."⁸⁵ Acton saw Montalembert on numerous occasions thereafter, sometimes in England and sometimes in France; and by 1856 he had been introduced to the entire Liberal Catholic circle. He quickly learned to distinguish their views from those of other French Catholics and to regard with general approval the work which they were doing through their journal, Le Correspondant. During one visit to Paris, in the course of which he met a whole range of leading French Catholics, including the notorious Louis Veuillot, he identified the Liberal Catholics as the men with whom he most agreed.⁸⁶

But there was one member of the Liberal Catholic circle who, in Acton's estimation, stood well above the rest. This was the mysterious Baron d'Eckstein, a Danish Jew by birth, who had been converted to Catholicism in Rome, and who had made his way to France by a long and circuitous route.⁸⁷ Eckstein had been involved in the Liberal Catholic movement from its inception. In 1827, he had founded the periodical, Le Catholique, and later he had contributed to both L'Avenir and Le Correspondant. But by the time that Acton met him, in the mid-1850s, he had fallen out of sympathy with his colleagues. The reasons for this seem to have been partly personal. He told Acton on one occasion that the

⁸⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 18 March 1853, DB, I, pp. 13-14.

⁸⁶ Acton to Lady Granville, [1856?], Correspondence, p. 18.

⁸⁷ On Eckstein, see Nicolas Burtin, Un semeur d'idées au temps de la Restauration: le Baron d'Eckstein (Paris: Librairie des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1931). See also C.U.L. Add. 4971, cards 247 and 250; and Acton to Simpson, 1 April 1859, ASC, I, p. 165.

others did not understand him and that they shunned him because he was a foreigner.⁸⁸ He also described the Count de Falloux, who had recently played a leading part in the struggle over Catholic education, as ambitious and power-hungry.⁸⁹ Yet no matter how strongly these personal considerations operated, it is clear that Eckstein also had intellectual grounds for his dissatisfaction. He himself was first and foremost a scholar. In his early days, he had studied at Heidelberg with the Romantics Wilken and Creuzer and had been deeply influenced by Schlegel as well. He had thereafter devoted much of his career to the study of history and to the exploration of Oriental literature. For many years, while contributing to Liberal Catholic periodicals in France, he had also written for German publications, such as the Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung. And he had never got over his preference for German habits of thought. Even the most eminent French Catholics seemed to him to lack both the rigour and the learning that were necessary for sound thinking. When Acton asked him, in 1861, to survey the career of Lamennais he wrote in part as follows:

I almost blush for Lamennais, when I see him hashing up the emptiest and tritest declamations on the centuries between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Revolution of 1789, worthy only of the most trivial liberalism of the school of the Siècle and other journals of that class, and without the slightest trace of gravity of thought, or power of philosophical or historical reasoning.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 8 April 1856, DB, I, p. 92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

⁹⁰ Baron d'Eckstein, "The Abbé de Lamennais," Rambler, vol. I, 3rd ser., no. 1 (May 1859), 67.

The one Liberal Catholic leader of whom Eckstein made a partial exception was Montalembert.⁹¹ He exempted him, at least, from the harsh personal criticisms which he inflicted on others. Nevertheless, when Eckstein died in 1861, Acton was able to report to Döllinger that even Montalembert "was not in his opinion entirely right."⁹²

Acton certainly accepted the view that Eckstein had valid grounds for complaint. Indeed, he was so impressed by his new friend's intellectual superiority that he declared abruptly that all the other French Liberal Catholics were like "pygmies" compared to him.⁹³ He even argued on occasion that Eckstein, and not Lamennais, was the true founder of Liberal Catholicism. Eckstein was the first Catholic, he said, to try to "reconcile the Church to the political and intellectual progress of the nineteenth century."⁹⁴ He was the "real discoverer" and more original than any other.⁹⁵ What appealed to Acton in particular, of course, was Eckstein's attachment to German scholarship and his consistently scientific approach to the problems of the day.⁹⁶ But behind this there lay also a deep personal affection, which seems often to have taken on a rather sentimental colouring. In the course of one of their many conversations, Eckstein opened his heart to Acton and told him with tears

⁹¹ Acton to Döllinger, 8 April 1856, DB, I, p. 92.

⁹² Acton to Döllinger, 15 December 1861, DB, I, p. 234.

⁹³ Acton to Lady Granville, [1856?], Correspondence, p. 19.

⁹⁴ Review of J. J. Thomissen, Vie de Comte Félix de Mérode, in Home and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), 268.

⁹⁵ C.U.L. Add. 5640, f. 14b.

⁹⁶ C.U.L. Add. 4961, card 288.

in his eyes the "sad story of his life," as Acton himself expressed it.⁹⁷ Apparently, Eckstein had been brought to Paris by a love affair which had ended unhappily. He had remained there for forty years, devoting himself to various worthy projects. Yet now, in his old age, he was living almost in poverty and had fallen into despair. "He says," Acton wrote to his aunt, "that he sometimes wants to wrap himself in his dressing gown and fall asleep, for he has little more to hope for from life. But for all that, his is still the greatest and richest intellect that I have encountered in France."⁹⁸

In the six or seven years that remained between Acton's first meeting with Eckstein and Eckstein's death in 1861, the two men not only met frequently but also carried on what was undoubtedly a rich correspondence. Unfortunately, only a few of Eckstein's letters to Acton appear to have survived, and most of these are in the form either of brief excerpts in Acton's notes or of transcripts made by Lady Blennerhasset. There is one fragment, for instance, in which Eckstein describes to Acton the cultivation of what he calls the Respublica Christiana of the Middle Ages by the intermingling of Teutonic culture and Christian social principles.⁹⁹ There is another in which he speaks of the need for a new political ideal in the nineteenth century--one which would transcend alike the decrepit old régime, the sterile individualism promoted by

⁹⁷ Acton to Countess Arco, [Spring 1856], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Eckstein to Acton, 17 December 1856, transcript in Blennerhasset Papers, C.U.L. Add. 7486, A41, [folios not numbered].

revolutionary abstractions, and the imperial system of government which (he says) combines the worst features of both.¹⁰⁰ The fragmentary nature of the manuscripts, together with the variety of topics touched on, make it difficult to achieve a coherent picture. But nevertheless, when one combines the remnants of Eckstein's letters with other sources, such as the few articles which Eckstein wrote for the Rambler and Acton's notes from later years, it is possible at least to identify some of the main ideas which he impressed on Acton. Eckstein seems, for example, to have been animated by the idea, also evident in Döllinger's work, that a cluster of circumstances in the nineteenth century had provided Catholicism with a momentous opportunity to recover its influence in political and intellectual affairs. He liked especially to dwell on the fact that the rationalistic optimism of the preceding century had entirely collapsed, partly by the force of scientific criticism and partly under the pressure of events.¹⁰¹ No one believed any longer, he said, in the doctrine of natural goodness, or in the possibility of political Utopias.¹⁰² The field was thus open for Christian teachings to re-assert themselves. Just as the old régime had brought about the temporary ruin of religion, so the success of the new order would be seen to depend on its influence. But the difficulty was, as Eckstein himself expressed it, that the Church "though everywhere recovering from the ruin of the eighteenth century,

¹⁰⁰ Eckstein to Acton, [?] May 1860, transcript in Blennerhassett Papers, C.U.L. Add. 7486, A41 [folios not numbered].

¹⁰¹ Baron d'Eckstein, "The Political System of the Bonapartes," Rambler, I, 3rd ser. (September 1859), 297.

¹⁰² Ibid.

does not yet know how to make the most of that fact."¹⁰³ The clergy, largely for want of learning,¹⁰⁴ lacked that "high spirit" which was capable of grasping the mood of the times.¹⁰⁵ They could not distinguish effectively between what was necessary, on the one hand, and what was impossible, on the other.¹⁰⁶ "Where," Eckstein asked Acton, "are the priests of heart and courage who have great insight into these things?"¹⁰⁷ Germany at least had its Möhlers and its Döllingers, but in France, as in Italy, the clergy could think only of Bossuet or of obsolete Jesuit scholarship.¹⁰⁸

There was a note of antagonism in Eckstein's remarks that was for the most part still absent from Döllinger's attitude. It may well be the case, therefore, that he deserves the credit for first encouraging Acton in his habit of provoking quarrels with his fellow Catholics. Eckstein was bitter and resentful, and he no doubt communicated to Acton his contempt for the clergy outside England. Döllinger, on the other hand, was still, in these early days, at pains to admonish Acton against assuming an air of superiority.¹⁰⁹ Yet the point is a very general one. If there

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ C.U.L. Add. 4914, card 9; C.U.L. Add. 4971, cards 245 and 282.

¹⁰⁵ Eckstein to Acton, [?] September 1859, excerpt in C.U.L. Add. 4915, card 182.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eckstein to Acton, 28 July [1859], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. See excerpt in C.U.L. Add. 4971, card 265.

¹⁰⁹ See C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 156.

was a more substantial way in which Eckstein's influence ran counter to Döllinger's, then Acton himself appears to have been unaware of it. As long as Eckstein was still alive, Acton did everything that he could to bring him into closer contact with Döllinger. His efforts seem to have been successful, moreover, for he wrote to Countess Arco in 1856 that he was "so proud of having brought about a friendship between the two men I most venerate."¹¹⁰ There is no trace whatever of conflicting loyalties on Acton's part and no indication that he felt drawn in opposite directions. On the contrary, after Eckstein died Acton told Döllinger that "it was always astonishing to me how very much his ideas corresponded to yours."¹¹¹ This remark is especially striking since Eckstein's political opinions were almost certainly more liberal than Döllinger's and since Acton was troubled by precisely this difference between Döllinger and the other Liberal Catholics. After three years of friendship with Montalembert, for instance, he wrote to Döllinger as follows:

I hope that you will speak to me of Montalembert. His position and reputation in England are of great interest to me and I shall watch them very anxiously. I cannot escape the opinion that a gap which he cannot fill exists between his Catholicism and his decided, paraisen Liberalism.¹¹²

But in Eckstein's case, the matter simply did not present itself in this light. Eckstein, unlike Montalembert, was a scholar. His political views seem to have taken on for Acton a secondary importance. "They were," he once wrote, "the exuberance [sic] of his thought. The best part of his

¹¹⁰ Acton to Countess Arco, 4 November [1856], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

¹¹¹ Acton to Döllinger, 15 December 1861, DB, I, p. 235.

¹¹² Acton to Döllinger, 25 April 1856, DB, I, p. 103.

mind was far away, learning by heart the unprinted Vedas, and studying universal history . . .".¹¹³ The fact is that Acton saw between Eckstein and the other Liberal Catholics the same contrast that he saw between Döllinger and these men. Eckstein differed from the rest by solid learning.¹¹⁴

Travel had always played an important part in Acton's education. Even before 1854, when he had begun his series of visits to European scholars and continental Catholic leaders, he had already been taken as Döllinger's companion on a number of interesting journeys. They had gone together to Italy, Switzerland, and even to England. Lord Granville had also arranged two important trips for Acton--one to America in 1853 and the other to Russia in 1856. These had offered not only an opportunity to meet literary figures and scholars, but also a chance to study at first hand the politics of two very different countries. But of all the trips on which Acton embarked in the course of his education, none was so important to him as the journey which he made with Döllinger to Rome in 1857. Not only did this trip possess a greater intrinsic inter-

¹¹³C.U.L. Add. 4971, card 288.

¹¹⁴Ibid. See also, for Acton's comparison of Döllinger with the Liberal Catholics, "Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 385, and pp. 399-400.

est than any other, but it also marked the real transition between Acton's student days and the beginning of his own career.

Döllinger's purpose in travelling to Rome was to engage in historical research. For some time now, he had been interested in the history of medieval heresies, and he hoped that he would find materials in Rome which would shed light on this subject.¹¹⁵ In this precise sense the trip proved something of a disappointment, for he discovered that the Vatican Archives were not so rich in medieval documents as he had anticipated.¹¹⁶ In another sense, however, the journey took on an importance for his development as an historian which was greater than it would have been had he successfully carried out his original intention. If the Vatican Library was not well supplied with material on the Middle Ages, then it did contain an abundance of sources relating to modern history. The consequence of this for Döllinger was that it encouraged him to focus his attention more sharply than before on the history of the Church in the centuries following the Renaissance. The Vatican archivist at the time of his visit was an Austrian ex-Jesuit named Augustin Theiner, who had very recently obtained permission to publish the Acts of the Council of Trent.¹¹⁷ Döllinger took a keen interest in Theiner's work, and Theiner reciprocated by commending Döllinger to the Pope¹¹⁸ and by

¹¹⁵ Friedrich, Ignaz von Döllinger, III, p. 178; cited by H. Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton: Rome 1857," Cambridge Historical Journal, VIII, no. 3 (1946), 188, n. 9. See also C.U.L. Add. 5663, f. 45a.

¹¹⁶ C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 173.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 133

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

providing him with access to whatever documents he wanted to see. Döllinger did not use these documents in an exhaustive or systematic way, for he had still not learned to appreciate fully the importance of unpublished sources for the study of modern history. That was something that would come later.¹¹⁹ But the documents did awaken his interest in topics which he had hitherto neglected. Acton tells us that even the city of Rome itself, with its monuments to recent times, made him more alive to issues in modern Church history. "[It] reminded him," Acton says, "of the scenes from the lives of the popes and prelates since the Renaissance. He began to study this for the first time."¹²⁰

Acton himself had to be content with the status of observer in these matters, since he was not deemed worthy of the same degree of trust as Döllinger was. When he somewhat boldly asked if he might see the records of Galileo's trial, Theiner refused, although he did agree to let Döllinger examine them and describe their contents to Acton.¹²¹ Yet even if Acton was prevented for the moment from exploring the Vatican Archives for himself, he nevertheless took a very keen interest in the general significance of Theiner's work and in the results to which it might lead. He was especially excited by the news that the Acts of Trent were to be published, for both Theiner and Döllinger assured him that they would end the long-standing dispute about the regularity and

¹¹⁹ On this point, see Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton," CHJ, VIII, no. 3, (1946), 188, n. 9.

¹²⁰ C.U.L. Add. 4905 [no number given], quoted by Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton," CHJ, VIII, no. 3, (1946), 188, n. 9.

¹²¹ C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 207.

fairness of the Council's proceedings in a manner decisively favourable to Catholics. Pallavicini's version of events would be proved essentially correct, and the bitter accusations of Paolo Sarpi would be shown to be false.¹²² But only the original documents would suffice.

It is with extreme joy [Acton wrote in his diary] that I learn that the acts and deliberations of the Council of Trent are finally to be published. Up until now, one has been forced to rely on the history of Pallavicini, a work of incontestable merit, but which falls far short of satisfying the demands of ecclesiastical science, and which very often only serves to excite the desire and to make felt the necessity of being able to call up the sources, that is to say, the original acts. . . . The work of Sarpi, the great arsenal for all the enemies of the Church, continues to exercise great influence . . . The refined art with which he is able to infiltrate the venom of his hatred against the Church even in the details of a dogmatic discussion can only be uncovered by the publication of the complete acts. Pallavicini does not suffice . . . All this goes to show how the publication of the acts will be opportune, and how the fruits which the Church will draw from it will be precious.¹²³

Even if Acton is here recording Döllinger's opinion rather than his own thoughts, the passage is nevertheless significant; for Acton clearly made Döllinger's judgement his own. In subsequent years, he would come to regard the opening of the archives of Europe as a step almost wholly detrimental to the reputations of Catholic heroes and to the prestige of Catholicism generally; but his first important encounter with manuscript sources gave him quite a different view. He went away convinced that, in one decisive matter at least, the revelation of original documents would vindicate the Catholic point of view.

Unhappily, not everything in Rome inspired the same degree of

¹²²Ibid., p. 134 and p. 211. (Cf. C.U.L. Add. 4911, card 286.)

¹²³Ibid., pp. 191-192.

optimism. While Dollinger and Acton were pursuing their interest in historical matters, they could not help being made aware at the same time of current circumstances in the papal states, where the clerical government had been for some time maintaining itself on a rather uneasy footing. The turning point in the recent history of the papal states had come in 1848. In that year, notwithstanding the recent introduction of moderate reforms, the Pope's refusal to take up arms against Austria in the cause of Italian nationalism had sparked a revolution which had driven him temporarily out of his own territories. The result of this was that he had completely divested himself of whatever liberal sentiment he might once have possessed, while the position of the papal administration in general had been allowed to grow increasingly rigid--and increasingly unpopular. Acton noticed that the Pope himself seemed to have abdicated all political responsibility. He recorded in his diary the observation that all such matters had been left in the hands of Cardinal Antonelli, the Secretary of State.¹²⁴ But Antonelli and the other officials of the papal government seemed to him unfit to govern. They were so inept, he noted, that they did not even recognise the seriousness of the situation in which they found themselves.¹²⁵ If anybody of real ability appeared to be gaining influence in the College of Cardinals, then Antonelli got rid of him.¹²⁶

But one must guard against the danger of taking an exaggerated or

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 132. (Again, Acton may actually be recording Dollinger's remarks.)

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 135.

¹²⁶Ibid.

one-sided view of the impression which conditions in the papal states made on Acton. If his stay in Rome made him aware, as it certainly did, that the papal government was in an unhealthy and precarious position, that does not necessarily mean that the spectacle of clerical misgovernment filled him with indignation, or even that he came away convinced that responsibility for the current situation belonged entirely to the Pope and his officials. On the one hand, Acton's impression, like Dollinger's,¹²⁷ seems to have been that the existing régime suffered more from incompetence and inefficiency than from deliberate and callous abuses. What was everywhere evident was mismanagement and short-sightedness, not cruelty and corruption.¹²⁸ On the other hand, the evidence that Acton saw relating to the roots of the present predicament tended, not to incriminate the Pope, but rather to deflect blame away from him and to place it on the shoulders of his enemies. While he was in Rome, Acton made the acquaintance of a certain Mr. Spada, a man who had in his possession an "extremely rich and precious collection" of papers concerning the Roman revolution of 1848.¹²⁹ Acton took notes from this collection and also discussed the events of 1848 with Spada. The clear impression that he gained as a result was that the uprising had not been the fault of the Pope, nor even the result of genuine disaffection on the part of the Roman populace, but that it had been brought about

¹²⁷C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 149.

¹²⁸See C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], pp. 49-50, where Acton records what seems to have been a conversation with Carlo Bevilacqua concerning conditions in the papal states.

¹²⁹Acton to Lady Granville, [May] 1857, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

through the agency of outside agitators. In his diary he wrote: "Pius IX and the people both committed faults, but [they were] of no consequence. The consequences were brought on by the secret societies . . . Nearly all was done by Italians and foreigners, not by Romans, as far as the initiative was concerned."¹³⁰

Even the difficult question of the future of the Temporal Power was one on which Acton took a very moderate position. Although one gains the definite impression that the institution as such seemed to him in many ways anachronistic, he did not at this time reach the conclusion that it ought to be abolished. Instead he relied on Döllinger's advice, the substance of which was that the Temporal Power ought to be retained for the present.¹³¹ That Döllinger himself should have taken this position is remarkable for a couple of reasons. Not only did he insist at the same time that the Church could get along without territorial possessions if it had to,¹³² but he also admitted quite candidly that the papal states were not well governed. Indeed, he told Acton that they could never be well governed in the modern sense.¹³³ But in order to under-

¹³⁰C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], pp. 179-180.

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 135-136. (That this passage is a record of Döllinger's remarks is clear from C.U.L. Add. 4911, card 357. See also Acton to Döllinger, 29 September 1859, DB, I, p. 164, where Acton is very possibly referring to this passage. He is describing the observations on the Temporal Power contained in his Roman Diary and says: "Das Beste dabei bleibt freilich eine Reihe von Bemerkungen die Sie eines Morgens früh im Forum Romanum mir mittheilten.")

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

stand Döllinger's point of view, one has to be mindful of the criteria by which he judged. In the first place, he was not a Liberal. He had no real desire to see a thoroughly progressive régime established in central Italy, and, in fact, he had not even supported the reforms introduced by Pius IX at the beginning of his pontificate. "He felt like an Austrian," Acton tells us of that period, "and his friend, Jarcke, said: What are we to do when the Pope is a Jacobin?"¹³⁴ In the second place, Döllinger understood the Temporal Power chiefly as a guarantee of the Pope's spiritual independence rather than in terms of its political consequences. His perspective on the matter had been determined, not so much by the events of Pius IX's pontificate, as by the sufferings of Pius VII, who had been dethroned and dragged into captivity by Napoléon.¹³⁵ The merits or shortcomings of the papal administration were not to him the main point. His attention was fixed rather on the supposed benefits of the Temporal Power to the Church.¹³⁶ When Acton asked him, therefore, "How long will all this last?", Döllinger replied: "As long as it is felt to be beneficial to religion and no longer."¹³⁷ There, for the moment, the matter rested.

The attitude which Döllinger and Acton adopted toward the question of the Temporal Power is of considerable significance, not only in its own right, but also because it draws attention to the fact that the

¹³⁴C.U.L. Add. 5515, card 75.

¹³⁵"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 402; and C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 146.

¹³⁶C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 146.

¹³⁷C.U.L. Add. 5001, card 188.

points of contention which would later separate them from the Roman authorities had not yet clearly emerged. This point needs especially to be stressed, since Acton's biographer, Dr. Himmelfarb, has given a very false impression of the matter. To speak, as she has done, of the visit to Rome serving to "document the case against the Vatican"¹³⁸ is not merely to ignore the evidence but actually to fly in the face of it. The testimony of the participants points strongly in a different direction. Even in later years, after much troubled water had passed under the bridge, Döllinger declared quite unequivocally that when he was in Rome in 1857 he "had still not the remotest presentiment" of the things that were to come, and that he had therefore been able to give himself up to historical studies and artistic enjoyment "with an untroubled mind."¹³⁹ During the visit itself, he told Acton that he "would have come to Rome long ago if he had foreseen that he would be received with so much kindness and liberality."¹⁴⁰ His reception, he said, had surpassed his hopes and surprised him very much.¹⁴¹ If anything at all bothered Döllinger deeply about Rome it was the ignorance of foreign scholarship which prevailed there and the suspicions that were entertained regarding German theologians in particular. At the time of his visit, the condemnation of the works of Anton von Günther and Jakob Frohschammer was the subject of much discussion, and Döllinger tried

¹³⁸Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 29.

¹³⁹Döllinger to Lady Blennerhassett, 22 January 1870, transcribed in C.U.L. Add. 4911 and quoted in Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton," CHJ, VIII, no. 3, (1846), 187.

¹⁴⁰C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 174.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

unsuccessfully to intervene on behalf of these men.¹⁴² He also had a very unpleasant encounter with a Roman cardinal, supposedly the best theologian in the Sacred College, who treated him with utter disdain. "He regarded me from on high," Döllinger later recounted, "gestured with his head and dismissed me. He seemed quite astonished at the insolence of this theological insect who dared to intrude on the presence of a cardinal."¹⁴³ But even incidents such as these did not spoil the generally agreeable nature of his personal experiences. His own testimony, again, was that his reception in Rome was for the most part cordial: "I have on the whole been well received here, and in respect of the use of manuscripts I have been afforded great facilities, beyond my expectations."¹⁴⁴

Acton, for his part, tells us more about Döllinger's final impressions than he does about his own; but what he does have to say tends to confirm the general impression that the trip was not an occasion for arousing great hostility. Although in one place he records that "Döllinger used to commemorate his visit to Rome in 1857 as an epoch of emancipation,"¹⁴ he almost immediately qualifies this by adding that his teacher "did not come away charged with visions of scandal in the spiritual order, of

¹⁴²"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 411. (Cf. C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 141.)

¹⁴³Döllinger to Montalembert, 23 November 1869, in Stefan Lösch, Döllinger und Frankreich: Eine Geistige Allianz, 1823-1871 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1955), p. 478.

¹⁴⁴Döllinger to Jörg, 22 May 1857, in Friedrich, Ignas von Döllinger, III, p. 178, quoted by Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton," CHJ, VIII, no. 3, (1946), 187, n. 8.

¹⁴⁵"Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 410.

suffering in the temporal, or of tyranny in either."¹⁴⁶

His impression of Rome was of incapacity, inefficiency--He came away despondent, without confidence and without respect, but also without horror or indignation.¹⁴⁷

In fact, the only substantial respect in which Acton seems to have considered that the trip to Rome marked a turning-point in Döllinger's career had to do with its bearing on his historical studies. It had drawn his attention to the modern history of the Church, where there were facts to discover which were very unfavourable to Rome. In 1890, when Johann Friedrich was preparing his biography of Döllinger, Acton warned him not to exaggerate the importance of the Roman journey.

Friedrich replied that he had found a notice written by Döllinger in which the latter seemed to indicate that the trip to Rome had set off the train of thought which had eventually led to his condemnation. But Acton held to his position. What Döllinger had had in mind, he believed, were the avenues of research that had opened up to him after his return from Rome, and not the things that he had witnessed while he was there.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 411.

¹⁴⁷ C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 149.

¹⁴⁸ The exchange is reported in Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, 19 September 1900, Correspondence, p. 83. See also C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 77: ". . . He devoted his time to study rather than politics--Came away depressed and disheartened, but neither shocked nor indignant at what he had observed."

Chapter II

EDUCATING THE ENGLISH CATHOLICS

When Acton returned from Rome to England in the latter part of 1857, it was with the deliberate intention of at last launching a separate career for himself. Even though he had hesitated for some time to take this step, he now approached the prospect of working on his own with confidence and optimism, for not only did he consider himself ready to assume a greater measure of independence, but he also felt assured that he had a unique and important contribution to make to the progress of English Catholicism. Acton knew that his familiarity with foreign scholarship was an advantage that very few of his fellow English Catholics enjoyed. At the same time, he believed that the greatest need of the English Catholic community at present was to develop and extend its intellectual resources. It seemed obvious to him, therefore, that he could apply the knowledge that he had acquired abroad in a way that would prove beneficial to English Catholics at large, while at the same time earning for himself a position of respect and influence.

That Acton should have taken so optimistic a view of his prospects was in one sense entirely natural. The English Catholics did, after all, urgently require competent scholars, and he was the protégé of the greatest Catholic historian in Europe. Yet in order to achieve the positive attitude which he displayed in 1857, Acton had been required

first to overcome the effects of some relatively minor incidents which had taken place earlier and which had greatly upset him at the time. He had been in England at least occasionally between 1854 and 1857. During that period, he had made a few tentative gestures in the direction of introducing his ideas to other English Catholics, and the results had been very far from encouraging. Instead of finding that he was regarded as a welcome addition to the ranks of educated English Catholics, he had encountered resistance, hostility, and suspicion. The effect of this experience had been to throw him temporarily into a mood of considerable disillusionment.

Acton's troubles had begun with an article in the Dublin Review, written by a man named William Finlayson and published early in 1855.¹ The essay had appeared under the heading of "Bad Popes," but this title had been chosen purely for the sake of irony. Finlayson's real intention had been to attack certain Catholic historians, and especially Dollinger, precisely for their willingness to acknowledge the faults of various popes. His argument, in the main, was absurd; but his accusations--which included the charge that Dollinger perpetrated calumnies for fear of not seeming sufficiently candid--had left Acton so completely indignant that he had rushed into print with a strong letter of protest.

Now this manner of viewing the history of the Church [he had written] is in the highest degree unhistorical, erroneous and dangerous. It has often been tried, for it is popular among a certain class; but it has often proved injurious to the cause it was intended to defend. It gives an advantage to those who are glad of an opportunity of attacking Catholics, and it deceives those who sincerely wish to become acquainted with the spirit of

¹William Finlayson, "Bad Popes," Dublin Review, XXXVIII, (March 1855), 1-72.

the Catholic religion. Indeed, we owe more to those writers who in their hostility to the Church have contributed to elucidate her history than to those among her apologists who imagine that faith and good intentions suffice for an historian, and that critical research is of but secondary importance.²

With this terse statement, Acton had succeeded not only in drawing attention to his own views but also in provoking a considerable controversy. This had given him the opportunity, at least, to state his position even more clearly. "Truth," he had written in yet another letter, "cannot injure the cause of the Church, nor serve the cause of her enemies."³ But the argument with Finlayson had dragged on, reaching no satisfactory conclusion, and it had merely left Acton despondent at the thought that such narrow opinions could be read in a journal which was the semi-official organ of English Catholics. Thereafter he had tried writing a few short pieces for the Weekly Register,⁴ a successful Catholic newspaper; but this experience had likewise proved unsatisfactory.⁵ By early 1857, Acton had been writing to Döllinger in despair. "There is no one here," he had declared, "with whom I can communicate."⁶

² Catholic Standard (1 May 1855); reprinted in DB, III, p. 422.

³ Weekly Register (9 June 1855); reprinted in DB, III, p. 429.

⁴ "Wolfgang Menzel's Geschichte der Deutschen," Weekly Register, XV (17 May 1856), p. 5, cols. 2-4; "Auszüge aus den Schriften der Reformatoren über den Einfluss der Reformation auf die Sittlichkeit," Weekly Register, XV (29 November 1856), p. 6, cols. 3-4; "Political Workings of the Austrian Concordat," Weekly Register, XV (6 December 1856), p. 8, col. 4, - p. 9, col. 1; and "Constitutional Government," Weekly Register, XV (31 January 1857), p. 5, cols. 3-4.

⁵ See Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1856 and 29 January 1857, DB, I, p. 117 and p. 124 respectively.

⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 29 January 1857, DB, I, p. 124.

The event which had enabled Acton to overcome this despondent mood and to free himself from this incapacitating sense of isolation was his trip to Rome in the spring of 1857. The Roman journey had had the salutary effect of removing him temporarily from the immediate source of his discontent. It had allowed him to examine the difficulties which he had encountered in a more objective light, and it had also provided him with an opportunity to listen for several weeks to the calm advice of Döllinger. One of Döllinger's chief concerns for his student at this stage was to persuade him to write something substantial soon, for already Acton was showing signs of an exaggerated care in setting down his ideas. Döllinger had urged him, therefore, to put doubts and reservations aside and to devote himself freely to the task of composition. "Write away," he had told him, "and go on writing even if what you have done does not satisfy you."⁷ At the same time, however, Döllinger had made a conscious effort to steer Acton away from controversy and to channel his energies in a direction which he would find more rewarding. A passage in Acton's Roman Diary, which is almost certainly a record of Döllinger's advice, contains a clear warning against approaching discussions in a manner calculated to arouse resentment.

It is not necessary [it runs] to force others to share your opinions, nor even desirable. I have often myself been too spirited and hasty when trying to convince people. It is enough to say decidedly what we are persuaded is true--and in time it will bear fruit of itself. The absence of any prejudice or object in view must remove the chief objection to the opinions of such a person. In historical matters it is hard, because 99/100 of mankind know history only by party statements--wait to influence them till you have the authority which learning gives. To hear a view

⁷C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 244.

calmly but decidedly stated must make some impression. As to discussing German works, it must not be done so as to show the intention of accusing people of neglect and ignorance. That indisposes them at once.⁸

One does not gain the impression that these remarks had been intended as a sharp reprimand. Döllinger had merely told Acton that he need not be so precipitate and assured him that in the long run the authority of learning would be on his side. His remarks had contained a clear promise of eventual success which seems to have dispelled Acton's depression entirely and to have instilled in him instead a buoyant confidence. Even before Acton left Rome, he had been turning over in his mind the prevailing circumstances among English Catholics and devising optimistic plans for the organisation of their intellectual resources.

Acton's estimate of the situation of English Catholicism at this time⁹ is worth close consideration, for it not only sheds light on the precise nature of his own ambitions but also reveals certain weaknesses in his grasp of the problems which he was setting out to confront. On the one hand, he was utterly determined that English Catholics should emerge completely from their long and debilitating obscurity, so that they might at last begin to exercise a real influence on English life. He was conscious of the gains which had already been made in the course of the Catholic revival; but he wanted to carry this progress even further, especially as it related to intellectual matters. It seemed to him that, in spiritual terms, the English Catholics were exemplary. He

⁸ Ibid., pp. 155-156.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 267-271. (See also C.U.L. Add. 3528, ff. 43b-53a, which was probably written at a slightly later date.)

also thought it important that they had finally achieved civil liberty and had begun to assume a measure of political importance. But the failure so far of English Catholics to develop a strong intellectual position appeared to him to have prevented them from yet acquiring a degree of general influence and importance which was commensurate with their numbers and abilities. "We have not the weight we deserve," he noted, "because we have so little literature, or at least so few contributions to the national literature."¹⁰ It was this situation which he himself hoped to remedy, or at least help to remedy.

On the other hand, Acton clearly did not appreciate yet the exact nature of the difficulties which were besetting English Catholics in the late 1850s. Although he was conscious that the progress of the past few decades had not been made without also giving rise to new problems, he had a rather outdated understanding of just what those problems were. When he considered the crucial question of disunity within the English Catholic community, for instance, his attention focussed on the problem of effectively assimilating the new Oxford converts and of making full use of their intellectual abilities.¹¹ What he did not see clearly yet was that there were great tensions among the converts themselves and that these tensions did as much to impede the development of English Catholic literature and scholarship as did friction between Oxford men and "old" Catholics. Even though he himself had already found reason to be dissatisfied with certain converts, such as

¹⁰Ibid., p. 270.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 269-271.

Faber and Dalgairns,¹² he still did not understand the general significance of the narrowness which he had detected in them. His long periods abroad had prevented him from keeping fully abreast of important new developments.

Acton began to gain a more accurate understanding of the situation in England only when he actually tried to carry out specific plans aimed at the upgrading of Catholic intellectual life. His first concrete project began while he was still in Rome, where he conceived the rather grandiose idea of trying to persuade John Henry Newman to found a Catholic university in England.¹³ This project never came to anything, largely because of the very unhappy experience which Newman had had in Dublin, where he had already tried to establish such an institution; but in its stead Acton embraced a less ambitious plan, which had arisen among a group of converts, to have Newman and the other members of the Birmingham Oratory open a new Catholic secondary school, to be modelled on the great public schools of England.¹⁴ Acton expected at the outset that the proposal for a new school would encounter stiff opposition from the "old" Catholics, who, he reckoned, would regard the very idea as an unwelcome criticism of the existing colleges, such as Ushaw and Oscott. Indeed, he believed that his own participation in the project would, for this reason, prove to be a valuable asset, in the sense that it would help to dispel the idea that the plan for a school was exclusively the

¹² Acton to Döllinger, 29 January 1857, DB, I, pp. 120-121.

¹³ C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], pp. 269-272.

¹⁴ For a description of this project, including an account of the part which Acton played in it, see MacDougall, Acton-Newman Relations, pp. 17-20.

work of dissatisfied converts.¹⁵ But the opposition which Acton did not foresee, and which left him both shocked and irritated, actually came from the ranks of the converts themselves.

His first inkling that such difficulties existed came in February 1858, when he attended a meeting in London which had been called specifically to discuss plans for the school. All those present were previously committed to the idea that a school should actually be established; but several now argued that the plan ought to be carried out quite independently of the Birmingham Oratory.¹⁶ This in itself annoyed Acton greatly, for he saw the change of opinion, and the reasons that were offered for it, as a deliberate snub to Newman. "I certainly did not know," he wrote to Döllinger, "that converts as well would think of Newman in such a stupid and despicable manner."¹⁷ Yet even when the problem was overcome--according to Acton, because he defended Newman so energetically and effectively¹⁸--another, more serious threat arose. Father Faber, whose position as head of the London Oratory gave his opinion a real importance in the matter, and whose relationship with Newman was already strained, made clear that he could not acquiesce in any plan for an Oratory School.¹⁹ The reason he gave was that such an

¹⁵ See Acton to Döllinger, 20 March 1858, DB, I, p. 134; and Acton to Simpson, [?] March 1858, ASC, I, p. 17. See also Acton to Döllinger, 17 February 1858, DB, I, p. 126.

¹⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 17 February 1858, DB, I, pp. 125-126.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Newman's memorandum of 9 February 1858 in L&D, XVIII, p. 250, n. 2.

undertaking was inconsistent with the Oratorian rule;²⁰ but Acton, rightly or wrongly, thought that Faber was trying out of sheer jealousy to stand in the way of anything which might mean a success for Newman. His suspicions were amply confirmed when he discovered that even some of the "old" Catholics who were opposing the school were doing so under the direct influence of Faber. "The Duke of Norfolk," he reported to Döllinger on one occasion, "who is weak and completely lacking in will, is displeased with us and an enemy of the scheme---and that is because of the influence of Faber, who plays a role in this which I have been able to uncover and which does him no honour."²¹

Even in the light of disquieting circumstances such as this, Acton was not always quick to discern the hidden tensions and conflicting loyalties which would very soon rise sharply to the surface of English Catholicism and which would, in the process, exert an important influence on his own career. He still spoke freely of "the excellent Manning,"²² who seems to have impressed him favourably by supporting the proposal for a new school; and he still thought it natural to regard the notorious William George Ward as a probable ally.²³ But at least he was more

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Acton to Döllinger, 20 March 1858, DB, I, p. 134.

²² Acton to Döllinger, 17 February 1858, DB, I, p. 130.

²³ In early 1858, when Acton was beginning his association with the Rambler magazine, he and Richard Simpson required an additional colleague. Ward was their first choice. When Ward responded by saying that, although he was flattered by their offer, he thought that it was the spiritual rather than the intellectual development of English Catholics which required the most urgent attention, Acton declared that he was a "dangerous firebrand" who was "not so wise as spirited in his criticisms." Still, he added: "But he is a good fellow and might still be made to render good service." (Acton to Simpson, 16 February 1858, ASC, I, pp. 5-6.)

aware than he had been before that the Oxford converts could not be regarded as a uniform group, with whom he could automatically identify his own interests. The school project--aside from the fact that it eventually proved successful--had served as an introduction to the real situation of Catholicism in England. It had also brought Acton forward somewhat in English Catholic life and allowed him to make contact with men who really did hold opinions which were generally compatible with his own. He was now ready to embark on more substantial enterprises and, in particular, to find a direct outlet for the many ideas which he was anxious to communicate. The next important decision that he had to make was which sort of outlet would best suit his purposes.

On the surface at least, Acton had a broad range of choices when it came to selecting a place where he might publish his writings. One of the consequences of the Catholic revival in England was that it had produced a flourishing periodical press, and by 1858 no less than five publications were appearing on a regular basis. Three of these were reviews (the Dublin Review, the Rambler, and the Atlantis), and two were newspapers (the Tablet and the Weekly Register). Each of these publications was open to new contributors, and in some cases the editors had already shown an interest in receiving articles from Acton in particular. It appeared that all he had to do was prepare an essay on a suitable

topic and submit it to whichever periodical he wished.

But Acton's choice was in reality more limited than it appeared at first sight. The reason for this was simply that he himself had already decided, partly on the basis of past experience, that some of the publications in question did not suit his taste or requirements. In 1856 and 1857, for example, he had published a few short pieces in the Weekly Register, and he had found that its editor, Henry Wilberforce, had an irritating habit of making changes in the articles which were submitted to him.²⁴ This had especially annoyed Acton when the changes that were made seemed to reflect either timidity on Wilberforce's part or a reluctance to publish anything which was remotely scholarly in nature.²⁵ The fact was that a weekly newspaper was not the proper place for Acton to attempt to develop his ideas in depth; and this objection applied equally to the Tablet, which he did not even consider.

The Dublin Review, on the other hand, although it provided scope for longer and more serious articles, suffered from objections of a different kind. It was the organ of Cardinal Wiseman's increasingly conservative policies, to which Acton would never be able to reconcile himself. It was also the journal which had carried Finlayson's attack on Döllinger. In 1857, after being urged to do so by Döllinger himself, Acton had agreed to submit two essays to the Dublin, one of which was later published;²⁶ but even then he had been so uncomfortable with the whole idea that he had sent the first of his articles with a covering

²⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1856, DB, I, p. 117.

²⁵ Ibid.; and Acton to Döllinger, 29 January 1857, DB, I, p. 124.

²⁶ "Henri IV," Dublin Review, XLIV (March 1858), 1-31.

letter to Cardinal Wiseman in which he drew attention to the incompatibility between his own ideas and those generally advocated in the review. "Your Eminence is aware," he had written, "of the historical school in which I have studied. As it differs from that which is often pursued in the Dublin Review, I do not know whether that might not be enough to exclude my article."²⁷ It is worth noting that this suggestion of possible conflict came from Acton himself and not from Wiseman, who, on the contrary, had gone out of his way to treat Acton in a friendly and even flattering manner.²⁸ But the fact remained that the Dublin Review lay outside the range of Acton's choices by virtue of the policies to which it was committed.

Of the remaining periodicals--the Rambler and the Atlantis--it appeared very likely at first that both circumstance and his own preference would lead Acton to choose the latter as the place to publish his work. The Atlantis was, as its masthead declared, a "half-yearly register of literature and science," which had recently been founded by Newman and Professor W. K. Sullivan, in connection with the Dublin University. The chief intention in establishing it had been to provide the faculty of the new and struggling university with a place to publish the results of their research, while at the same time using the journal

²⁷ Acton to Wiseman, 17 February 1857, Westminster Archives; as quoted by Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, p. 61.

²⁸ Besides Wiseman's comment when he learned that Acton was involved in the plan for an Oratory School, which is mentioned above but which occurred later than this, see Acton to Döllinger, 6 June 1856, DB, I, p. 111. Even later, when Acton joined the Rambler, he was able to report that Wiseman had "taken up the announcement that I have entered into the editing very warmly" (Acton to Döllinger, 20 March 1858, DB, I, p. 136) and that he "was as gracious as possible" about it. (Acton to Simpson, [?] March 1858, ASC, I, p. 17.)

as an advertisement for the university itself; but provision had also been made to accept contributions from outside authors. Within a month of the first number appearing, Newman had asked Acton to submit an essay, and Acton had agreed.²⁹ The entire prospect of writing for the Atlantis was thoroughly attractive to him, for it alone was a truly scholarly publication in which he could develop his favourite themes in a thorough-going fashion and write with perfect freedom of his German ideas. Indeed, it was precisely his knowledge of German scholarship which had prompted Newman to invite him to contribute.³⁰ Acton had even chosen a topic-- modern German historiography--and had begun to make notes on the subject. But before the essay was actually written, an unexpected development intervened and distracted him from his task. He was asked if he would join the staff of the Rambler magazine.

There were a number of considerations which might have convinced Acton that the best course would be to decline this new invitation and adhere instead to his original plan. Not least of these was the nature of the Rambler. For one thing, it was a monthly publication, and, as its name amply indicates, its articles and reviews were often much lighter in character than the serious papers which were published in the Atlantis. Although it was a good deal more substantial than the Weekly Register, it would nevertheless involve Acton once again in religious journalism, rather than in serious scholarship. For another thing, the

²⁹ See Newman to Acton, 26 March 1858 and 5 April 1858, L&D, XVIII, pp. 303-304 and p. 311 respectively.

³⁰ See Newman to W. K. Sullivan, 5 February 1858, L&D, XVIII, p. 249; and Newman to Acton, 26 March 1858, L&D, XVIII, pp. 303-304.

Rambler had already come to be regarded by the majority of English Catholics with an attitude which varied from caution and discomfort to suspicion and outright hostility. It had been founded in 1848 by John Moore Capes, chiefly to provide lay converts with a forum for literary and philosophical discussion. At first, it had aroused resentment mainly among "old" Catholics, who viewed it as a somewhat exclusive organ of converts and who resented especially its frequent criticisms of their own intellectual standards. Later, as circumstances changed, it had alienated many converts as well by advocating opinions which seemed to them dangerously liberal. This had been especially true after Richard Simpson, a convert of 1846, had joined the staff. Simpson was a sparkling and witty writer, with a gift for satire and gentle ridicule, who used the Rambler to attack the narrow-mindedness and obscurantism which he detected in many of his fellow Catholics. He had by now inherited virtual control of the magazine from Capes, who was in ill-health and suffering as well from financial losses. It was he who invited Acton to accept a part ownership in the Rambler and a position as its associate editor.

Undoubtedly, it was Simpson's personality and convictions which played a crucial rôle in persuading Acton in the end that he should accept this new opportunity. This was true not only in the sense that Acton felt an instinctive sympathy for Simpson's views, but also insofar as he sensed--quite correctly--that a partnership with Simpson would allow him to exercise a large measure of control over the policy of the Rambler. Although Simpson was much older than Acton, and also far more experienced as an essayist, it was evident from the start that he would prove to be a

rather malleable colleague, especially since he stood somewhat in awe of Acton's learning. That is not to say that Acton's feelings toward Simpson were not genuinely warm or approving; nor is it to argue that his confidence that the direction of the review, in important matters, would be chiefly in his own hands was the only consideration which influenced him. He himself drew attention to other advantages, such as the fact that involvement with the Rambler would force him to produce finished articles on a regular basis.³¹ But it was the prospect of having a journal which he could conduct along lines of his own choosing that Acton found irresistible. What he saw was not merely a chance to obtain a regular outlet for his views, but more precisely an opportunity to acquire an organ of his own--or rather, as he put it, an organ in England for Döllinger's ideas and opinions.³²

Implicit in all of this, of course, was a determination on Acton's part to change the Rambler's approach in important ways. The really great objection to his accepting a position on its staff had been its highly controversial character. He had already had his fingers burnt over the Finlayson affair, and Döllinger had afterwards warned him to keep clear of unnecessary arguments. But Acton's take-charge attitude now allowed him to dismiss this difficulty as it applied to the Rambler simply by declaring that his intention was "very materially to modify its tone on some points."³³ It was a naive declaration indeed! But at this point Acton was so far blinded by enthusiasm that he simply did not

³¹ Acton to Döllinger, 17 February 1858, DE, I, pp. 128-129.

³² Ibid., p. 128.

³³ Ibid.

foresee what the real consequences of his decision to join the Rambler would be. In the first instance, he hoped that his connection with the Rambler would actually alleviate some of the ill-will which it had attracted, since his name did not yet excite great animosity among English Catholics.³⁴ In the second instance, he intended to convert the Rambler into a more scientific journal and thus lift it entirely above the realm of public controversy.³⁵ In the midst of all this, Acton was vaguely conscious of the possibility that his German ideas, especially if proclaimed too boldly, would involve the Rambler in new hazards. Even he could not miss the obvious point that they could easily cause even greater offence than the views of liberal-minded converts had done. Yet this important consideration did not disturb him unduly. His opinions, he said rather glibly, were very unpopular in England at the moment, and they would inevitably give rise to a certain amount of argument; but such protests as did arise would always be met with dignity and forbearance.³⁶

Acton's naive optimism serves at least to place in the proper perspective his own attitude at this crucial stage in his career. It is all too easy, in the light of subsequent developments, to see his decision to join the Rambler as a deliberate attempt to take sides in a quarrel which had already greatly disturbed the English Catholic community; but this is not at all how he himself saw it. Although he was generally

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See C.U.L. Add. 5752, pp. 223-224.

³⁶ Acton to Simpson, 16 February 1858, ASC, I, p. 8.

in sympathy with the position which the Rambler had adopted in the past,³⁷ and although he had already made clear his opposition to the very different policies which were advocated in the Dublin Review and elsewhere, his conscious intention at this time was by no means to conduct himself in such a way as to exacerbate an already divisive conflict. Instead, he imagined that he could actually use the Rambler as a means of healing divisions within the English Catholic community.³⁸ The way in which to do this, he thought, was first to infuse the Rambler with genuinely scientific spirit, for true science was above partisan feeling; but it would be necessary at the same time to direct the attention of Catholics away from petty internal disputes and to focus their attention on more important matters.³⁹ Acton was especially anxious to ensure that the Rambler should serve as an example of mature Catholic literature-- literature that was neither contentious nor self-effacing, but which addressed itself confidently to the questions of the day and which brought to bear on these problems a distinctively Catholic point of view. "The chief object and requirement," he said, "is serious and scientific treatment of subjects, carrying out the Catholic idea into all branches. This is what is most done by the leaders of the Church abroad, what is most forgotten among ourselves, and at the same time most required in the contest with our present and future adversaries."⁴⁰

In his earliest contributions to the Rambler, Acton himself tried

³⁷ See Acton to Döllinger, 29 January 1857, DB, I, p. 119.

³⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 20 March 1858, DB, I, p. 135.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ C.U.L. Add. 5752, pp. 223-224.

to set the example of how this was to be accomplished. His writings possessed a quality which displayed not only confidence, but also frequent flashes of aggressiveness, and above all a determination to meet the ideas current among non-Catholic Englishmen with either penetrating criticism or alternative views and conceptions. The notion of "carrying out the Catholic idea into all branches," although in one sense distressingly vague, in another sense described his ambitions perfectly. In politics, for instance, he proposed to Simpson⁴¹ that he should write a series of articles in which he would gradually develop a complete Catholic political philosophy. This philosophy, he said, would be for the most part both original and independent. It would owe little, if anything, to the more famous Catholic political writers, and it would be very far from agreeing with any of the political parties then current in England. But its purpose would be to show that there was an essential harmony between Catholic political principles and the "true, latent notion of the English Constitution." In this way, it would be possible to provide English Catholics with definite criteria for judging both domestic and foreign events, while at the same time restoring the "Catholic elements" of the constitution to their proper importance. The long-term objective would be to restore Catholics themselves to a position of real importance in English political life. The time had passed when it was necessary for them to conduct themselves with a view only to expediency, or to humiliate themselves in order to obtain the support of liberals and rad-

⁴¹ Acton to Simpson, 16 February 1858, ASC, I, pp. 6-8.

icals.⁴²

Acton's plan was a highly audacious one, which would require not least the upsetting of a number of conventional assumptions. What he was proposing to do was, in a sense, to demonstrate that English Catholics, so far from being alien to British political tradition as was commonly assumed, actually enjoyed a special place in it. But such grandiose schemes were quite characteristic of his approach at this time. Indeed, in matters of English history, he entertained even bolder ideas than he did in politics, for there he wanted to show that only Catholic authors could be truly impartial, on the grounds that they alone could treat every period of the nation's past with equal warmth and sympathy.⁴³ Acton's entire attitude was coloured by a determination to seize the initiative and to secure for Catholics a place in English intellectual life which was more than purely defensive. Fresh from Germany, where Catholics had (so he believed) virtually gained intellectual

⁴²In addition to Acton's letter to Simpson, see C.U.L. Add. 5751, p. 291: "In England the Catholics could not be an element of stability and constitutional security so long as they were in so unfortunate a position that they must set relief above every other consideration. Now I think we are in a position to exhibit the true political effects of Catholic principles, and can render to the constitution the benefits we receive from it. We must maintain the high parts of the constitution and its christian character in spite of their abandoning it themselves. We cannot do evil that good may come. We are the only permanently conservative element in the state, and in this and in the religious character, the heirs of the establishment."

⁴³See C.U.L. Add. 5528, ff. 49a-50a: "The learned, scientific, impartial, uncompromising treatment of our history, a thing yet unknown, might be our work. A Catholic only can write it with the same warmth of enthusiasm, of interest and sympathy in every part, without national exclusiveness, as we are constantly led, by the bond of ecclesiastical union, to consider the influence and similar position of other nations."

ascendancy over the finest Protestant scholars in Europe,⁴⁴ he found it simply intolerable that in England they should still appear as a band of half-literate men, trying in vain to defend the indefensible. He was, as he once put it, "impatient of the reproach of inferiority,"⁴⁵ all the more so because he believed it entirely unnecessary. And against the complacent assumption of many English Protestants that Catholics were virtually incapable of serious thought, he wanted to oppose the full weight of his German learning. In one especially pugnacious moment, he declared that the great object of the literary efforts of English Catholics ought to be to "break down that Protestant tradition which pervades all the literature, serious as well as popular, and enchains all the intellect of the country."⁴⁶

Besides the positive attempt to work out a distinctively Catholic view of English politics and history, Acton himself often directed scathing criticisms at the ideas of his non-Catholic countrymen. Within a few months of joining the Rambler, he had denounced Carlyle for

⁴⁴See C.U.L. Add. 5528, loose sheet: "If we look to Germany the process has been this. For a long time in German literature rationalism or pantheism prevailed. It is chiefly by that school that German influence extends abroad--to other countries. Then came, partly provoked by the excess of infidelity, a more believing sort of protestantism to which Schleiermacher and Steffens had led the way. It was the time of the predominance of Leo, Rothe, Stahl, an intellectual predominance as complete as that of Schelling, Hegel had been. Very lately, profiting by both schools, catholic literature has reached the ascendant, and may be said to be in several departments supreme--or to share it with the believing portion of the protestants."

⁴⁵"The Catholic Press," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (February 1859), 73-90; reprinted in ECS, p. 267.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 263.

engaging in idle hero-worship,⁴⁷ had dismissed Macaulay as a brilliant essayist,⁴⁸ and had accused Gladstone, whose study of Homer had recently appeared, of dragging the reputation of English scholarship through the mire.⁴⁹ Sometimes, as in these cases, his criticisms were restricted to particular authors; but on other occasions his targets were instead certain widespread assumptions—or national prejudices, as he called them—which had been allowed to flourish by the prevalence of an uncritical spirit. In the Rambler for July 1858, he wrote an especially astute criticism of the idea of progress,⁵⁰ the misconception which he said most frequently distorted the Englishman's self-understanding. It grew out of a harmful tendency to indulge in self-congratulation, he argued, and led people either to ignore or to forget the ways in which former ages were superior to the present. It also encouraged an exaggerated emphasis on material and scientific gains, at the expense of moral and religious considerations. The partisans of the theory of indefinite progress therefore forfeited all the true benefits which were to be gained through the study of history. They used history to confirm rather than to challenge their own assumptions. The true view of history held that its chief purpose was to break down the idolatry of a particular age, not to celebrate the present at the expense of the past.

⁴⁷ Review of Thomas Carlyle, History of Frederick II of Prussia, in Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 429.

⁴⁸ Review of John O'Hagan, "Joan of Arc," in Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (August 1858), 138.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 137.

⁵⁰ Review of R. K. Philp, A History of Progress in Great Britain, Part I, in Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (July 1858), 63-65.

The confidence and zeal with which Acton put his case, both here and elsewhere, soon communicated itself to his colleague Simpson, and before long he too had turned his critical powers against the most important systems of thought current in England. At Acton's instigation, he prepared for the Rambler an essay attacking H. T. Buckle's recently published History of Civilisation in England.⁵¹ This time the object of criticism was not the doctrine of progress, but rather the increasingly influential and even more pernicious system of positivism which had been imported from France. Buckle was the self-confessed disciple of Comte and Quételet, and he had written his history with the express intention of showing that "the actions of men, and therefore of societies, are governed by fixed laws, and not by free-will." His book, therefore, though professing to set aside the question of religious and moral influences in history, was taken by both Acton and Simpson as a frontal attack on the Christian doctrine of man. Since it was thoroughly deterministic in outlook, it aimed at degrading the human personality to the level of machinery; and in order to support his fundamental proposition, Buckle would be obliged not only to bracket the question of moral influences in history, but openly to deny their importance. This latter fact was made only too clear by his definition of "civilisation" as the cumulative benefits of scientific discoveries, the progressive "triumph of mind over external agents."

In his critique, Simpson struck directly at the basis of Buckle's hypothesis—that is, at the opposition which he assumed between "fixed

⁵¹[Richard Simpson], "Mr. Buckle's Thesis and Method," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (July 1858), 27-42; reprinted mistakenly as Acton's work in NES, pp. 305-323.

laws" and "free will." In this antithesis, Simpson said, lay the fundamental weakness of Buckle's entire theory. For by "fixed laws," Buckle meant statistical norms, the sort of norms which made the number of crimes in a certain city, or the increase in population in a given year, predictable. But freedom, Simpson argued, was not synonymous with instability. Nor was it the opposite of consistent behaviour. Thus, to say as Buckle did that human activity, viewed collectively and taken over an extended period of time, could be expressed in statistical formulas was to say nothing one way or the other about the efficacy of free will. Fixed laws, in the sense of numerical averages, had nothing whatever to do with necessity; and Buckle had been guilty, right from the start, of a crude philosophical error.

When Acton read the draft of Simpson's article, he was beside himself with delight. Since Simpson had sent it to him with the request that he draw up a suitable conclusion, the first thing he did was carry out this task with great enthusiasm.

The whole system of positive philosophy [he wrote] is the work of under-educated or half-educated men, adepts in physical science, but ignorant of the principles of any other, who insist that all sciences must have the same method as theirs, and that meta-physical realities must be measured and explained by physical laws.⁵²

Then, he wrote to Simpson in exuberant terms:

Nothing has been written on this book nearly so good as your paper. I wish you would follow up this style of writing. There are half a dozen systems prevailing in the country, one worse than the other, and if each of them received such elucidatory treatment as you have bestowed on this Positivist, the result would be a complete diagnosis of the state of the English

⁵²"Mr. Buckle's Thesis and Method," HES, pp. 322-323.

intellect.⁵³

Simpson, as requested, followed up with a very able essay on Bentham;⁵⁴ and Acton himself, considering the attack on Buckle so worthwhile, wrote a second article dealing with the same book.⁵⁵ Since Simpson had already discredited Buckle's philosophical assumptions, Acton put such questions aside. He challenged instead Buckle's claim to the title of scholar, and he took special care to compare him to his German counterparts. Buckle, Acton said, had chosen to address himself to the problem of civilisation without reading Vollgraff's Anthropognosie, Ethnognosie, and Polinognosie; he had written a chapter dealing with the influence of geography on the history of man without consulting the seminal work of Ritter; and perhaps worst of all, he had pretended to be a competent philosopher of history in spite of the fact that he had not even heard of Acton's teacher, Ernst von Lasaulx. Indeed, Acton scoffed: "So far as we have observed, the standard work which is the real and acknowledged authority on each particular subject is never by any chance or oversight consulted for the purpose";⁵⁶ and the sad result was that Catholics, who could usually profit from an evil book insofar as it contained some genuine learning, were left with no compensation whatever for Buckle's

⁵³ Acton to Simpson, 6 June 1858, ASC, I, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁴ [Richard Simpson], "Jeremy Bentham's Greatest Happiness Principle," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (October 1858), 229-250.

⁵⁵ "Mr. Buckle's Philosophy of History," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (August 1858), 88-104; reprinted HES, pp. 324-343.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 333.

impieties.

Had Acton restricted himself entirely to this style of writing, in which he argued strenuously against Protestants and unbelievers alike, the English Catholics might well have recognised him for the determined Catholic advocate that he was. The claims which he made on behalf of Catholic scholarship were certainly substantial enough to establish him firmly in this rôle. Besides all that is mentioned above, Acton declared categorically in the Rambler for February 1859 that with respect to the crucial question of the nineteenth century--that is, the question of how to integrate age-old beliefs with new-found knowledge--Catholics enjoyed a decided advantage. For while Protestants, he explained, were "obliged to cling to a mendacious tradition on matters of fact" in order to compensate for the extreme divergence on matters of faith, Catholics, secure in their attachment to essential dogmas, had no special interest in maintaining a particular view of history or of natural science.⁵⁷ Hence, only Catholics could adjust fully to the scientific revolution which characterised the modern era.

Yet, as confidently (or complacently) as Acton developed this line of reasoning, and as grand as were the claims which it led him to make,

⁵⁷"The Catholic Press," ECS, p. 260.

he was equally anxious that the English Catholics should know that the arguments which he advanced in support of Catholicism were guided by certain very exacting principles, principles which few among them yet understood and which fewer still were in the habit of practising. Science, he said, was the greatest ally for which Catholicism could ever hope. The German experience had shown this to be so, and there was no reason why, allowing for different conditions, Catholics in England could not eventually reproduce the pattern of success which distinguished the efforts of Catholics in Germany. But if English Catholics were to emulate their German co-religionists, they would first have to learn, as Catholics in Germany had already learned, that the essential condition of an alliance between science and faith was a willingness to accept without reservation all the ramifications of the scientific method. They would have to learn that in scholarship, as indeed in civil society, there existed an authority quite distinct from that of the Church; and they would have to be prepared to place principle above interest, to put aside all unfair advantage to religion, and to follow the procedure of scientific thinking to whatever conclusions it inexorably led. "We must not seek in science," Acton wrote in his notes, "things independent of science. It must be pursued for its own ends and must lead to its own results."⁵⁸ That these results would prove in the end completely compatible with essential Catholic beliefs Acton had not the slightest doubt. But conscious that the principle of scientific disinterestedness was by no means established among Catholics in England, he set out to teach by

⁵⁸C.U.L. Add. 5528, f. 61.

example. The Rambler's job, he once told Simpson, was to "give the example of candour and veracity."⁵⁹

Even so, Acton's determination to exhibit the principle of scientific detachment did not at first always give rise to difficulties. His early contributions to the Rambler contain at least a few examples of his having insisted on openness and honesty without thereby arousing comment. In one case, he even accused papal officials of having tried to prevent the truth from coming to light by impeding the publication of important documents,⁶⁰ and still no protest followed. But it was almost as though Acton himself wanted his readers to take exception to the things that he wrote. He seemed to long for English Catholics to challenge his right to absolute candour, in the hope that the ensuing controversy would provide him with an opportunity to state his scientific standards with still greater force. If he did not actually try to provoke arguments, he at least went out of his way to shock his readers. On 6 June 1858, when the Rambler for July was being prepared, he told Simpson that he would "take care to say a few startling things in the Short Notices."⁶¹

It was shortly afterwards that Acton actually did manage to embroil the Rambler in a major controversy. It was the first since he had joined the staff, and the story of Acton's part in it sheds important light on the way in which he was inclined to conduct himself under such circum-

⁵⁹ Acton to Simpson, 30 April 1862, ASC, II, p. 293.

⁶⁰ "Father Theiner's Publications," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (October 1858), 265-267.

⁶¹ Acton to Simpson, 6 June 1858, ASC, I, p. 31.

stances. The affair began, properly speaking, with an article on Bossuet by J. M. Capes in the Rambler for June 1858,⁶² in which Bossuet was described as a Jansenist on the question of grace, chiefly on the grounds that he himself had considered that he was a thorough Augustinian in this respect. This apparent equation of Augustinianism with Jansenism provoked no reaction at first; but in the following month the point was taken up by Acton, who repeated it in a more provocative context. In a review of a work dealing with Mary Stuart and Catherine de Medici,⁶³ he launched an attack on those Catholics who confused the defence of their religion with the defence of unworthy personages. Their attitude, he said, betrayed not only an imperfect understanding of history but also an imperfect faith. They could not distinguish properly between that which was essential and that which was merely accidental. What they ought to recognise was that no Catholic was as good as his religion and that there was therefore no reason to conceal the weaknesses of even great historical figures. "Because St. Thomas died a martyr, we are not tempted to deny that he wavered at Clarendon; nor because Saint Augustine is the greatest doctor of the West, need we conceal that he was also the father of Jansenism."⁶⁴

Such remarks, as Acton certainly knew, were guaranteed to cause alarm. In the English Catholic community, which despite its new-found

⁶²[J. M. Capes], "Bossuet," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (June 1858), 373-390. This article was for a long time thought to be Acton's work, and it was reprinted as his in ECS, pp. 230-245. The mistake is corrected in ASC, I, p. 74, n. 1.

⁶³Review of A. Chéruel, Marie Stuart et Catherine de Medici, in Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (August 1858), 134-136.

⁶⁴Ibid., 135.

maturity was not yet free from the nervousness and uncertainty which naturally attended rapid growth, the outright admission on the part of a Catholic that the greatest theologian of antiquity had inspired the greatest heresy of modern times was bound to appear, at the very least, a gross impiety. But that a man should contrive to make the point when he was not even called upon to do so by the subject at hand--this would seem tantamount to treason.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, therefore, the ensuing protests were numerous. W. G. Ward was the first from whom Acton heard a complaint, although with characteristic idiosyncrasy Ward objected not so much to the identification of Jansenism with Augustine as to Acton's reference in the same review to Petavius and Bossuet as great divines.⁶⁶ Later, Simpson was told that another English Catholic had expressed the opinion that the "impudence" of the Rambler had become "screaming" since Acton joined it.⁶⁷ Most important of all, however, was the official reaction to Acton's remarks. Sometime in August, a friendly correspondent wrote to Simpson to warn him that the description of Augustine as the father of Jansenism had raised doubts about the Rambler's orthodoxy and that, as a result, Cardinal Wiseman had placed the offending passage before an investigating committee of ten theologians.⁶⁸

Even at this stage, an opportunity existed to defuse the controversy and to save the Rambler embarrassment and trouble. Wiseman, who had

⁶⁵On the gratuitous and unnecessarily provocative nature of Acton's remark, see Butterfield, Lord Acton, p. 9.

⁶⁶See Acton to Simpson, 25 August 1858, ASC, I, p. 73.

⁶⁷Simpson to Acton, 18 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 91.

⁶⁸See ASC, I, p. 74, n. 2.

already found abundant reason to disapprove Simpson's behaviour, apparently assumed that the review now in question (which had appeared unsigned) had also been written by him.⁶⁹ This was an impression which Simpson himself rather generously chose not to correct, in the hope that he could thereby safeguard Acton's position.⁷⁰ But since he thought it wise at the same time to smother the controversy as quickly as possible, he also inserted in the September Rambler a note disavowing any intention on the part of the editors to identify views condemned by the Church with the teaching of St. Augustine.⁷¹ Afterwards he wrote to Acton to explain what he had done, and it is clear from his letter that he took for granted that Acton would endorse his gesture of peace.⁷² But Acton, as Simpson soon discovered, was adamant. When he had read the exact text of Simpson's insertion, he wrote immediately to make clear that the matter "must not be allowed to drop."

I could not [he insisted] subscribe what you have written under "correspondence" and propose to show why I do most deliberately hold that errors condemned by the Church are to be found in the works of the Doctor Gratiae. I think it is worth following up in order that men may learn that we do not choose even our illustrations without deliberation, and are ready to justify everything we write. There could be no better opportunity than this, as it will break down that narrow and invincible ignorance with which our theologians judge the writings of other people.⁷³

⁶⁹ Simpson to Acton, 25 August 1858, ASC, I, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (September 1858), 216.

⁷² Simpson to Acton, 25 August 1858, ASC, I, p. 74.

⁷³ Acton to Simpson, 2 September 1858, ASC, I, p. 75.

To this he added that the defence of his position "must not be done in my name but in the name of the R[ambler] . . .".⁷⁴

Acton's pugnacious mood would have been dangerous enough had not Döllinger happened to be in England just at that time. Döllinger's visit, in fact, was destined to cause a certain amount of consternation for reasons quite unrelated to the controversy over St. Augustine. Acton had arranged that a meeting should take place at Aldenham between Döllinger, Simpson, and several other Oxford converts, including J. M. Capes. Capes, the founder of the Rambler, was just then experiencing grave doubts about his commitment to Catholicism, and Acton hoped that a theological discussion with Döllinger might resolve his difficulties. The plan was to keep the meeting secret; but news of its having taken place leaked out and gave rise to what Acton described as "the strangest rumours." "The popular view," he was later to report to Döllinger, "is that a group of converts have conspired together, half to apostatise, the rest to remain in the hope that, as ostensible Catholics, they can do still more harm through the Rambler."⁷⁵ So much the worse then that Simpson--in a second, albeit misguided, attempt to forestall a major controversy--suggested that Döllinger should be called upon to dispel the opposition aroused by Acton's remarks on Saint Augustine. "What we want," he wrote to Acton, "is a name . . . Would Dr. Döllinger write a letter to the R[ambler] on the question? His name would save a row which otherwise the discussion will occasion if carried on in our own."⁷⁶ The

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1858, DB, I, pp. 156-157.

⁷⁶ Simpson to Acton, 3 September 1858, ASC, I, p. 76.

idea of having his claims supported by an authoritative word from Döllinger could not have appealed to Acton more. He secured from Döllinger the suggested letter, which really amounted to a lengthy paper, translated it himself, and published it in the Rambler for December 1858 under the title "The Paternity of Jansenism."⁷⁷ Although the letter appeared without Döllinger's signature, Acton made certain that his authorship was widely known.⁷⁸

The argument of Döllinger's letter was straightforward and uncompromising. Although Augustine, he said, could not be accused of fathering Jansenism in the same sense that Luther had fathered Lutheranism, there could be no doubt among those who had studied the question in the original sources that he had held doctrines which exceeded the universal teaching of the Church and which Jansenius had later taken up. Therefore, when the Jansenists called themselves disciples of Augustine, as they had, they had not been altogether wrong; and when the Rambler referred to Augustine as the "father of Jansenism" it did so with ample justification. Indeed, the author of the offending passage was, according to Döllinger, in "very good, I may say, in the most select company. I know none better in the Church."⁷⁹

This, of course, was exactly what Acton had expected Döllinger to say, and from the time that he first saw the draft of the letter it inspired him with a still more defiant confidence. On November 13, he

⁷⁷"The Paternity of Jansenism," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 361-373.

⁷⁸See Acton to Simpson, 30 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 100.

⁷⁹"The Paternity of Jansenism," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 373.

reported having warned Wiseman, in a letter dealing primarily with another matter, that a "stunning reply" to the charges against the Rambler could be expected in the next number. His account of his letter was obviously embellished, but it testifies accurately to his sense of triumph.

I have heard [he reported having said] no end of misquotations as well as misrepresentations of what I, lamblike, have innocently said, and that things [written] without guile had been denounced to him by those who know nothing about the matter--but that he--who knows all things--should attend to such bosh comes only from his foolish misgivings about the R[ambler].⁸⁰

In very much the same spirit, Acton had Simpson draw up a prefix⁸¹ and publish it above Döllinger's letter.⁸² This declared that the contribution which followed was by a divine of European reputation, both as a theologian and as an historian, and that it was being published not with "any great expectation of reconciling our censurers to the expression which it defends," but because "it would be a crying shame to permit so finished a piece of critical learning to be lost," and because "we are loth to allow the unfounded accusations made against us to delude those who have hitherto borne us no ill-will, or to undermine our credit and cramp our independence by sowing suspicions of our orthodoxy." Then, with a great flourish, it added: "It is our right, as well as our duty towards ourselves and those who think with us, to prove that the denunciations made against us spring rather from the timidity of ignorance,

⁸⁰ Acton to Simpson, 13 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 83.

⁸¹ See Acton to Simpson, 15 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 85.

⁸² Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 361.

the dogmatism of party views, or a ceremonious reverence to great names, than from such a knowledge of the subject in dispute as could give those who accuse us any right to sit in judgement on our opinions."⁸³

Acton honestly believed that Döllinger's letter would put an end to the controversy. He told Simpson that it would not make a single convert to their point of view,⁸⁴ but that neither would it cause further offence. It would "astonish rather than offend"⁸⁵---and, presumably, leave the Rambler's opponents too dazzled to continue the quarrel. But here Acton miscalculated badly. So far from being frightened into submission by Döllinger's authority, those English Catholics who had already expressed their displeasure at the Rambler's position merely stiffened in their opposition. Others, who had hitherto not been involved in the dispute, joined in the chorus of protest. Among the latter were Acton's bishop, Brown of Shrewsbury, and Father Faber. Brown wrote to Acton warning him of the dangers of converts,⁸⁶ while Faber submitted not only a protest but specific arguments designed to refute Döllinger's claims.⁸⁷ In both cases, Acton felt that he was able to deal easily with the objections raised,⁸⁸ and so to that extent he remained undaunted. But his reply to Faber opened yet another round of recriminations and counter-

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Acton to Simpson, 15 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 85.

⁸⁵See Acton to Simpson, 13 November 1858, ASC, I, p. 83.

⁸⁶See Acton to Simpson, 19 December 1858, ASC, I, p. 108.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

recriminations.⁸⁹ Each blow that was struck served to escalate the battle still further, until finally, with the combatants no closer to agreement than they had been at the beginning, a crisis was reached. On 23 December 1858, Simpson received a letter from Cardinal Wiseman, who regretted to inform him that "the letter in defence of St. Augustine's 'paternity of Jansenism' is exciting considerable uneasiness, likely to lead to its being referred to an authority superior to mine."⁹⁰ In other words, Döllinger's letter would be delated to Rome.

It was at this stage that Acton finally decided that a change of approach was needed. He was by no means disposed to admit that he had been wrong in the position that he had adopted--on the contrary, the news that Döllinger might suffer condemnation had increased his indignation at the narrowness of English Catholics;⁹¹ but at the same time he had suddenly grown weary of a controversy which, though at first exhilarating, had led at best to an impasse. Not only did Acton feel frustrated and annoyed at the outcome of this particular dispute, but his latent dissatisfaction with religious journalism was also rising to the surface, and it was this that convinced him that a change was necessary. Already he had told Döllinger that the obstacles he encountered among English Catholics made him long sometimes to devote himself exclusively to serious scholarship.⁹² He had also complained to Newman that he would never obtain any

⁸⁹ See Simpson to Acton, 21 January 1859, ASC, I, pp. 139-140; and Acton to Simpson, 22 January 1859, ASC, I, p. 140.

⁹⁰ Wiseman to Simpson, 22 December 1858, Downside MSS; as quoted by Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, p. 80.

⁹¹ See Acton to Simpson, 11 January 1859, ASC, I, p. 127.

⁹² Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1858, DB, I, p. 158.

real influence by writing in a monthly review, because it did not allow him to make use of the knowledge which he had acquired as a student.⁹³ Now, with Döllinger--and possibly the Rambler as well⁹⁴--threatened with condemnation, these thoughts pressed themselves on him even more forcefully. Without actually admitting that his original decision to join the Rambler had been a mistake, he became convinced that the journal's problems, as well as his own, were due to its position as a monthly magazine. The entire situation, he believed, could be drastically improved if the Rambler were replaced by a quarterly. A quarterly, having greater scope for explanation, would simply not be open to the same sort of misrepresentations.

The idea that a quarterly would be preferable to a monthly review was itself by no means new to Acton. On the contrary, he had by this time already considered three separate plans for acquiring a quarterly. The first of these had been to convert the Rambler itself into a quarterly publication; the second had been to persuade Newman to publish the Atlantis on this basis; the third had been to have himself installed as editor of the Dublin Review. The last plan, though surely the most unusual of the three, had come much closer to succeeding than one might have thought. It had arisen in the summer of 1858, when Henry Bagshawe, the previous editor of the Dublin, had announced his retirement.⁹⁵ Since Acton's reputation at that time had still been undamaged in official

⁹³ Acton to Newman, 20 December 1858, L&D, XVIII, p. 551.

⁹⁴ See Acton to Simpson, 11 January 1859, ASC, I, p. 127.

⁹⁵ The story is told in some detail in Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, pp. 72-73.

circles, Cardinal Wiseman had been prepared to consider him as Bagshawe's successor. Acton himself had been very enthusiastic about the whole idea, for he had seen the appealing possibility that with Simpson as editor of the Rambler, Newman in charge of the Atlantis, and the Dublin Review under his own control, a situation would have been achieved whereby the three chief English Catholic periodicals would inculcate essentially the same point of view. His way of expressing this was to say that the new arrangement would "ensure harmony of view and tone in our principal periodicals."⁹⁶ But the whole scheme had eventually collapsed when Acton demanded that Simpson should be given a position on the Dublin as well and that he himself, as editor, should enjoy absolute freedom from Wiseman's control. Acton had ended by declaring that he did not, in any case, want a position that would be surrounded by mistrust and intrigue.⁹⁷

The plan which had perhaps appealed to Acton even more, and to which he returned in the present crisis with increased alacrity, was the scheme which involved persuading Newman to publish the Atlantis as a quarterly. What Acton had in mind was not merely that the Atlantis should be published more frequently, but also that its scope should be widened to include many more contributions dealing with historical, political, and philosophical topics. If this could be done, he believed, then all the Rambler's trials and tribulations would be rewarded by a literary development of the utmost importance; for the Atlantis, under Newman's direction, benefiting from all the learning and ability of the

⁹⁶ Acton to Newman, 6 July 1858, L&D, XVIII, p. 402, n. 3.

⁹⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1858, DB, I, p. 157.

Dublin University faculty, and touching on matters which concerned all English Catholics, could accomplish almost instantly what the Rambler could not hope to achieve in several years of publication. The only difficulty, however, was that here, too, Acton had already encountered obstacles which, though entirely different from those connected with the Dublin Review, were no less perplexing. In the course of earlier discussions, Newman had proved very reluctant to introduce a change in the format of the Atlantis, chiefly because he did not want to run the risk of involving it in controversy. It had been projected, he had argued, primarily as an outlet for the research of the university faculty, and not at all as a forum for the discussion of topics which might touch on current ecclesiastical issues.⁹⁸ Acton had tried to meet this objection by insisting that there was no less room for detachment and objectivity in history, politics, and philosophy than in other sciences.⁹⁹ He had also pointed out that in these fields there was an especially urgent need for reliable guidance, which the professors of the Dublin University (together with a few others such as himself) were the obvious men to provide.¹⁰⁰ He had even appealed to the memory of the British Critic in a shrewd effort to tempt Newman into recognising the value of arranging for a review to be produced by a close circle of like-minded men.¹⁰¹ One can be sure that at this point the Historisch-Politische Blätter was not very far from his own mind, for he would have liked nothing better than

⁹⁸ Newman to Acton, 2 December 1858, L&D, XVIII, pp. 524-525.

⁹⁹ Acton to Newman, 10 December 1858, L&D, XVIII, p. 545.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

to establish in Britain an élite nucleus of Catholic thinkers such as had once existed in Munich. But Newman had long remained impervious to such suggestions. Even now, Acton would not have thought it worthwhile to broach the subject again if Newman himself had not given a sudden indication that he was on the verge of changing his mind.¹⁰²

The motive for Newman's abrupt reversal of position was by no means clear, but instead of concerning himself with the reason for it, Acton decided simply to respond as promptly and as enthusiastically as he could. On 30 December 1858, he travelled to Birmingham to talk with Newman in person; and when he arrived, he found "old Noggs," as he called him, not only willing to discuss the quartering of the Atlantis but also displaying a lively support for the position which the Rambler had taken up. Up until this point, Newman had, much to Acton's chagrin, been cool and even critical in his attitude toward the Rambler, whose difficulties he seemed to think were incurred largely through the poor judgement and unnecessary outspokenness of the editors themselves. Now that he appeared to have altered his stance on this issue as well, Acton was delighted. "I did not think," he wrote jubilantly to Simpson, "that he could ever cast aside his diplomacy and buttonment so entirely . . .".¹⁰³ Acton was especially anxious to ensure that the plan for the new Atlantis should not be allowed to lose momentum, and accordingly he wrote to Newman himself, almost as soon as he had returned home, offering to prepare two major articles for publication. Here, too, his almost uncontrolled enthusiasm was evident. One of his articles, he said, would give an

¹⁰²Newman to Acton, 21 December 1858, L&D, XVIII, p. 551.

¹⁰³Acton to Simpson, 1 January 1859, ASC, I, p. 116.

account of Paolo Sarpi from sources which had escaped even the notice of Ranke; the other would be on the Spanish monarchy under the Hapsburgs and would "include some new and startling things on the political character of the Inquisition."¹⁰⁴

Then, as suddenly as before, Newman changed his mind again. Whatever cause had inspired him to encourage Acton's schemes seemed to vanish into thin air. He wrote saying that he did not see how either the financial or the practical difficulties involved in converting the Atlantis could possibly be overcome and that therefore, although the papers which Acton proposed to write would be of undoubted value, it would not be in order to discuss them at present.¹⁰⁵ Acton, understandably, was shocked. He responded at first by intensifying his campaign. Newman's strange letter was followed shortly by the news that henceforth the Dublin Review would be placed in the hands of Edward Healy Thompson. Acton used the fact that Thompson was likely to prove a puppet of Wiseman to try to re-awaken Newman's momentary willingness to co-operate. "I need not point out," he wrote to him, "the spirit that will preside over the new Dublin Review. May I write to one or two friends to ask them to join Lord Dunraven and myself in making a fund for the purpose of converting the Atlantis into a quarterly?"¹⁰⁶ But such tactics were of no avail. Newman merely replied with a list of practical objections with

¹⁰⁴ Acton to Newman, 4 January 1859, L&D, XVIII, p. 562, n. 1, and XIX, p. 14, n. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Newman to Acton, 13 January 1859, L&D, XIX, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁶ Acton to Newman, 17 January 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 25.

which Acton was already familiar,¹⁰⁷ and Acton was bound to admit defeat.

With this new set-back, the disillusionment and sense of frustration which Acton had experienced when he first heard of the delation of Döllinger's letter reached new proportions. There seemed to be no way out of his dilemma, for he was deprived for the moment of all hope of obtaining a quarterly review, while at the same time nothing had happened to dismiss his feeling that a monthly periodical was after all ill-suited to his purposes. It would do no good at this stage to consider converting the Rambler itself, for it was already under too much suspicion for the change to be worthwhile. And what made the situation still worse was the inexplicable inconsistency which Newman had displayed. Not only had he reneged on his agreement to turn the Atlantis into a quarterly, but he had simultaneously withdrawn to his former position of only very guarded sympathy for the Rambler. Although he acknowledged that he was in broad agreement with its aims, he would offer no more concrete assistance than the repeated advice to exclude all theological discussion from its pages. Newman believed that if the Rambler was conducted more along the lines of a literary magazine, providing examples of intelligent and clever writing without infringing on sensitive religious questions, it would yet prove successful.¹⁰⁸ But Acton himself had lost all confidence in the efficacy of such an approach. Despite the optimism that he had felt at first, his year of writing for the Rambler had convinced him not only that English Catholics were ignorant (he had fully expected that) but also that

¹⁰⁷Newman to Acton, 21 January 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸See, for example, Newman to Acton, 31 December 1858, L&D, XVIII, pp. 559-562.

their ignorance made them as intolerant in subjects such as history and politics as they were in theology.¹⁰⁹ He was utterly discouraged, and he saw no alternative but to withdraw from a situation which he found totally unrewarding. Sometime late in January, he informed Simpson that their joint labours must be interrupted and that his own intention was to retire for a time to Bavaria.¹¹⁰ Apparently he did not mean to break off all connection with the Fambler, for he spoke of doing what he could by way of contributions;¹¹¹ but all traces of his once-sanguine notion that he could use the journal as an easy way of gaining influence and of moulding English Catholic opinion had disappeared. "I am sure you have since confessed to yourself," he told Simpson, "that periodical writing is in truth inconsistent with the sort of studies I have pursued, and with my slow and pacific habits of thought. I once imagined it would help me to overcome my natural aversion to rapid and spiderlike production. As to the use I might otherwise be to you, I deceived myself from my ignorance of the real character of our public."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Acton to Newman, 4 January 1859, L&D, XVIII, p. 562, n. 1.

¹¹⁰ See Acton to Simpson, 31 January 1859, ASC, I, p. 145, from which it is clear that the matter had been discussed in the last few days.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Chapter III

THE SOCIAL POWER OF CATHOLICISM

When Acton left England for Bavaria, early in 1859, it was undoubtedly with the expectation that he would be able to return to the serious scholarship which his association with the Rambler had forced him to put aside. Even if he did intend to make occasional contributions to the Rambler, as he had promised Simpson, it nevertheless appeared certain that he could count on being free from the difficulties and responsibilities of editorship, and thus able to devote himself again to detailed historical research. Yet no sooner had Acton reached Bavaria than a chain of events was set in motion which completely upset his plans. On 12 February 1859, a meeting took place in London between Cardinal Wiseman and three other English bishops, at which it was decided that the time had come to take definite action against the Rambler.¹ This decision resulted first in Simpson's removal from the post of editor, then (rather surprisingly) in his replacement by Newman, and finally in Newman's own resignation.² The entire series of events took only four months to run its course; and at the end of that period Acton found himself in a quite unexpected and very difficult position. He had already reluctantly agreed to return temporarily to England in

¹See Simpson to Acton, 20 February 1859, ASC, I, pp. 151-155.

²These events are related in detail in Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, pp. 88-104.

order to stand for Parliament,³ and it now appeared that the only way to save the Rambler from total destruction was for him to reverse his earlier decision and assume the duties of editor-in-chief. On 31 May 1859, he wrote to Newman, indicating his intention to pursue this course.⁴ In a subsequent statement, he made clear that he had taken his decision without optimism or enthusiasm, but that he felt at the same time confronted with a responsibility which he could not avoid. "I can hardly see," he said, "how the Rambler can survive unless I undertake the editing of it. There is very little encouragement to do so, but if you advise me I am ready to try."⁵

Acton's editorship--or at least nominal editorship, for Simpson continued to do much of the editor's work--lasted from August 1859 to May 1862, when the Rambler itself was brought to a close and replaced by the Home and Foreign Review. During that period, the Rambler suffered from the same sort of disputes and controversies as had disturbed its earlier history; but it can be said at least that, until the spring of 1861, these were rather less frequent and also a bit less serious than they had been before. This was due mainly to a decision which had been taken at the outset of Acton's tenure as editor to limit the Rambler more closely to topics of a purely secular nature, thus avoiding sensitive religious and ecclesiastical questions. The principal credit for this wise decision does not belong to Acton himself, for he

³ See Acton to Simpson, 5 April 1859, ASC, I, p. 166.

⁴ Acton to Newman, 31 May 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 155.

⁵ Acton to Newman, 23 June 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 156.

had been led to it only by the persistent advice of those around him. Whereas Newman had been urging such a course for several months,⁶ and Simpson had come, in the wake of recent events, to consider it not only expedient but even desirable,⁷ Acton had at first wavered and hesitated, partly because he feared that the Rambler might be deprived of its position as an organ of Catholic thought.⁸ Once he had come to see, however, that he must accept the change in order to have any hope of obtaining Newman's support, he had embraced the new scheme in earnest. Not only did he acknowledge the necessity of adopting such a policy in principle,⁹ but he also remained for the most part faithful to it in practice. He encouraged Simpson to do the same,¹⁰ and he gladly accepted as well the assistance of T. F. Wetherell,¹¹ who had been recommended to him by Newman as an able writer on political topics.¹²

Acton's own essays on political topics were his most substantial contribution to the Rambler, and they are worthy of close attention. They were not all written during his period as editor-in-chief, since even at the outset of his association with the Rambler he had been

⁶ See above, p. 87.

⁷ Simpson to Acton, 25 May 1859, ASC, I, p. 183. See also Simpson to Newman, 25 May 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 147, n. 3.

⁸ Acton to Newman, 1 July 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 166, n. 1.

⁹ Acton to Newman, 29 July 1859 and 15 August 1859, L&D, p. 184 and p. 196 respectively.

¹⁰ See Acton to Newman, 29 July 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 184.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Newman to Acton, 17 July 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 177.

chiefly responsible for its political department; but the most important among them can nevertheless be examined together here, because they are so closely connected in content. Not only do they have certain key themes in common, but they also testify to the same essential characteristic of Acton's early thought: that is, the degree to which it was shaped by a desire to recover for Catholicism the influence and prestige of which it had been deprived by the progress of modern ideas. What distinguished Acton from his Catholic contemporaries as much as anything else was his keen awareness of the threat posed to the Church in the nineteenth century by the forces of secularization. He saw clearly that there existed a widespread aversion to Catholicism that sprang not from doctrinal motives but from political, social, and ethical convictions; and in order to meet this difficulty, he tried constantly in his own writings to broaden the defence of religion to include topics which, by themselves, were not in the strictest sense religious. It was this determination to meet a new enemy on new ground which characterised so much of his political writing. In one of the most revealing and significant of all his manuscript notes, he wrote: "The contest which was so long and violent on the field of theology when religion had so much power over men has been transferred to the domain of secular thought, and it is here that the great action of religion has to display itself."¹³

In an article entitled "Political Thoughts on the Church,"¹⁴ Acton

¹³C.U.L. Add. 5528, f. 39a.

¹⁴"Political Thoughts on the Church," Rambler, XI, 2nd ser. (January 1859), 30-49; reprinted in NOF, pp. 188-211.

had already warned English Catholics of the necessity of defending the Church against attacks made on it from political motives. Of all the disadvantages from which Catholicism suffered in the modern era, he had said, none was greater than its alleged inferiority or incapacity in political matters. In every country in Europe, there were those who loudly assailed it as a dire threat to the welfare of the State; and since the enemies of the Church came from every conceivable party, the charges made against Catholicism were not limited to one particular kind of political error, but differed widely according to the convictions of its various assailants. In Belgium, for instance, the Liberals opposed the Church as a menace to liberty; but the conservative German statesman, Stahl, reproached it for being the sole support of Belgium's liberal constitution. In England, where matters were still worse, Tory writers affirmed that the Catholic religion was the enemy of all conservatism and stability, while the Liberals argued that it was radically opposed to all true freedom. To a certain extent, of course, the very inconsistency of the charges which were brought against the Church tended to discredit them; but this consideration alone was not enough to allay the fears of Catholics who wanted to protect their religion against such allegations. If Catholicism was indicted one minute as the friend of absolutism and the next as the accomplice of revolution, this only served as a reminder of the depth of the prejudice against it. Catholic writers, therefore, must not shrink from the challenge which this situation presented, but must instead defend their religion against political antagonism as steadfastly as they would against doctrinal error.

The defence which Acton himself constructed for Catholic political traditions did not rely merely on a denial of the accusations made against the Church, but rather on a positive account of the rôle which it had played in shaping European society. This point is an important one, for it sheds light on his approach to this entire question. What Acton feared most, perhaps, was that even when faced with the fact that much of the hostility toward the Church in the modern era arose from political considerations, the majority of Catholics would respond simply by insisting that religion and politics ought to be kept separate. In other words, he feared that they would argue that it was irrelevant to criticise the Church on political grounds, since its activity belonged to another sphere. But his own opinion was quite different. He believed that it was as much a part of the Church's mission to act on and transform society as it was to propagate religious truth. He regarded Catholicism not least of all as a "civilising influence," which had exercised its power through the ages to the benefit of mankind, and which could be shown to be capable, even in the nineteenth century, of exerting a salutary influence on European politics. He wanted, therefore, to meet the accusations of Catholicism's critics head on and to prove that, so far from having been a pernicious influence on society, it had actually been a decidedly constructive force.

The general outline of Acton's argument was developed in "Political Thoughts on the Church,"¹⁵ where he made clear that his intention was to appeal primarily to the testimony of history. He began by insisting

¹⁵Ibid. What follows, until the end of this section, is a paraphrase of this essay, unless otherwise indicated.

that the capacity of Catholicism to mould society--what he sometimes called its "social power"¹⁶--had been present from the very beginning. But so long as the Church had been confined to the Roman Empire, he said, this power had not been able to exert itself. The action of the early Church had been restricted to the intellectual sphere because the hostility of the secular authorities had prevented it from extending to the political order. This in itself was testimony to its obvious social implications, for the politically sagacious Romans had correctly recognised that the new religion could not be allowed to influence the State without risk of revolutionary consequences; but the persecutions and intolerance from which the Church had suffered had nonetheless prevented it from realising an essential part of its mission. Even the conversion of Constantine had not solved the difficulty. By reversing the policy of their predecessors and employing the secular arm to promote Christianity, the Christian Emperors had merely shown that they had not really accepted the basic principles of their adopted faith. In fact, it was the events of the fourth century which had made clear beyond doubt that the ancient state, with its essentially pagan character, was utterly incapable of regeneration. In order for the social doctrines implicit in Christianity to take root and flourish virgin soil was required. That was provided only when the Western Empire was swept away by the great migrations of Teutonic peoples.

The arrival of the northern barbarians, according to Acton, marked the beginning of an entirely new chapter in the history of the Church's

¹⁶ See "The Count de Montalembert," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 424.

relationship to society. Although the Catholics themselves did not at first recognise the fact, the Teutonic peoples, unlike the Romans, were predisposed to accept not only the Christian faith but also the social teachings implicit in it. On the one hand, their higher moral standards and even their own religious traditions had prepared them to accept Christian doctrine. On the other, their political system, since it was still in its infancy, was open to the formative influence of the Church. The result was that a complete alliance was eventually achieved between the Christian religion and the Teutonic race. The new society which grew up from the ruins of the Roman Empire reflected the influence of Christianity in every aspect of its life. For the first time, a respublica christiana was established, relying on Teutonic notions of government, but only insofar as these had been shaped and adapted under the guidance of the Church. The union between Teutonic political ideas, on the one hand, and the Catholic religion, on the other, was so complete that countries which thereafter adopted the Roman faith--Hungary, for example--also adopted the institutions of the German Empire.

Acton was as emphatic as he possibly could be, not only in stressing the natural affinity between Teutonic political customs and Catholic social principles, but also in describing the benefits which had resulted from the fusion of the two. Here his argument had a double thrust, for he insisted on the one hand that the Church had never really enjoyed real security except in countries of Teutonic origin, while he claimed on the other that only States which had been directly influenced by the Church had known genuine freedom. The underlying theme of his account was that the political system of the northern

barbarians had been almost providentially suited to a unique idea of liberty which had lain concealed within the Christian faith.

But at the same time Acton was at pains to make clear that he did not mean by this that the Church was compatible with only one particular set of political institutions. In politics, he said, the Church attended not to form but to content, not to external structures but to the inner spirit which animated them. The nature of her influence on society was not of a kind which introduced new forms of government; its effect was rather to transform institutions which she found already in existence. The Christian doctrine of liberty, however, rested on the inviolable rights of conscience. It required that a Christian should be free to act in sole obedience to the Word of God, unhampered by State interference. The Church, therefore, was the implacable enemy of all despotism, in whatever form it might appear. By successfully demanding immunity from the interference of the State, it served to restrain the power of the civil authority and thus safeguard freedom.

It was the process of securing true freedom under the auspices of the Church that Acton considered to be the great accomplishment of the medieval era. "The history of the Middle Ages," he declared, "is the history of the gradual emancipation of man from every species of servitude, in proportion as the influence of religion became more penetrating and more universal."¹⁷ But in the modern period, this accomplishment had been reversed. The tendency had been to abandon

¹⁷"Political Thoughts on the Church," HOF, p. 203.

medieval notions in favour of new forms of oppression. This process of degeneration had not been a uniform one, which had proceeded at the same pace in every country, for some nations retained a greater measure of their medieval heritage than others. Nor was it a process which was necessarily most advanced in countries which had abandoned the Catholic faith. On the contrary, Protestant countries such as England and Prussia were manifestly better governed than were Catholic countries such as Naples and Spain. Despite their religious apostasy, they had remained at least partly faithful to Catholic political traditions. But the fact remained that modern political developments had tended generally to undermine medieval liberty. Just as the history of the Middle Ages had been a history of gradual emancipation, the history of the last three centuries had been one of increasing tyranny and despotism. Faced with this situation, the Church must not fall into the trap of identifying itself with a political party, or of resigning itself to the necessity of accepting modern political doctrines. Instead, it must work for an improvement by recalling the spirit of former times and by seeking to extend once again the influence of her own ideas in the political order. This was the only means by which the political regeneration of Europe was possible.

Acton was not very explicit about the precise manner in which

Catholics ought to make their influence felt in political affairs. Although he clearly wanted them to assume a position of leadership, it was moral leadership that he had in mind, rather than the mundane business of achieving practical power. His own immediate task, as he conceived it, was to expound Catholic political doctrines, partly for the edification of Catholics themselves, and partly for the purpose of defending the Church against the false accusations of its enemies. He restricted himself almost entirely to the level of theory, where he thought it possible to justify Catholic political traditions in defiance of popular prejudices.

But on this purely theoretical level at least, Acton's arguments possessed a certain internal harmony. They were not always completely consistent, and they were certainly not always convincing, but they were part of an overall scheme, the outlines of which he had learned at the feet of Döllinger. In "Political Thoughts on the Church," a main part of his purpose had been to evaluate--or extol--the contribution which Catholicism had made to the development of European society. In a second important essay, "The Protestant Theory of Persecution,"¹⁸ he set out to compare this contribution to the political consequences of the Reformation.

"The Protestant Theory of Persecution" was the most ingenious of all Acton's early writings. In a very real sense, the argument it set forth was the corollary of that already developed in "Political Thoughts on the Church," for whereas he had at first claimed that true liberty

¹⁸"The Protestant Theory of Persecution," *Rambler*, VI, 3rd ser. (March 1862), 318-351; reprinted in *HOF*, pp. 150-187.

had been introduced to Europe through the agency of the medieval Church, he now challenged the more widely held assumption that real progress toward freedom had not begun until the Reformation. Again his argument hinged on the relationship between the rights of conscience and the authority of the State. In the early stages of the Reformation, he said, Martin Luther had given the impression of great liberality by appealing to the principle of freedom of conscience. Taking his stand on the correct interpretation of Scripture, he had denied the right of the civil authorities to interfere with religious belief. But the truth was that this position did not accurately reflect Luther's real opinions. It was merely an expedient, forced upon him by the fact that the civil government still supported the authority of Rome. Luther's true views became known only after the Zwinglian schism, the rise of the Anabaptists, and the Peasants' War. In these developments, he recognised the fruits of his own theory of private judgement, and he recoiled in horror. Fearing the excesses of popular revolt, and wishing to safeguard the purity of his doctrine, he instantly turned to the princes, some of whom were by this time disposed to support him.

By taking this step, Acton explained, Luther had sacrificed the essential condition of religious liberty, for he had transferred to the State control over ecclesiastical affairs. But this new policy, unlike his earlier position, was quite in keeping with his authentic convictions. In the first place, Luther could not tolerate a popular uprising, for as early as 1519 he had made clear his belief that a properly constituted civil authority could never legitimately be resisted, however unjust its measures. In the second place, he gladly invoked the secular

arm against the rising tide of sectarianism, for according to his theory it was not only the duty of the State, but the very reason for its existence, to enforce religious conformity. This latter idea was one which he subsequently applied with especially ruthless logic. When the question arose whether heretics could be punished even if innocent of civil offences, some Protestant divines cautiously advised that although they ought to be condemned, their sentences should be given under the pretence that they were guilty of murder and sedition; but Luther himself had no patience with such timidity. Having cast off all reserve, he ardently proclaimed that the State was under an obligation to coerce those who refused to accept the true faith, and that in accordance with Mosaic law false prophets ought to be put to death. "The notion of liberty, whether civil or religious," Acton tells us, "was hateful to his despotic nature, and contrary to his interpretation of Scripture."¹⁹

Even so, Luther himself had not hardened his persecuting principles into a definite and rigorous system. That task had had to await the "colder genius" of his assistant, Melanchthon. One of the most difficult problems which Melanchthon faced was the question whether Catholics as well as Protestants had the right to persecute in order to promote the cause of their religion. The answer he gave was a clear affirmative; but even more important were the strict conditions under which he made his answer apply. Like the Lutherans, he insisted, the Catholics could justify their intolerance only in cases of religious dissent. That is

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 156.

to say, the members of a religious minority could be put to death for what were deemed to be their religious errors, but not because they posed a threat to the security or unity of the State. This was the reasoning of Luther, Acton implied, carried to its logical conclusion. It was also the key to the Protestant theory of persecution, and the essential difference which separated it from the Catholic policy of the Middle Ages. For the fact was that all the leading reformers--not only Luther and Melancthon, but Bucer, Zwingli, Calvin, and Beza as well--held that persecution could be justified on religious grounds alone: whereas Catholic intolerance, though far more sanguinary in its results, had been forced upon the Church by political necessity. In the Middle Ages, the Catholics had exterminated sects such as the Albigenses because they threatened to destroy the fabric of Christian society; they had also proscribed non-Christian religions because the State was founded on religious unity: and they had even punished those whom the Church condemned as heretics on the grounds that the authority of the Church and the purity of her teaching had to be maintained as the pillars on which the social order rested. But the Protestants, by basing persecution solely and exclusively on the desire to impose doctrinal uniformity, had introduced a pernicious idea quite unknown in the Middle Ages. Catholics had punished criminals; Protestants put sinners to the sword.

Acton's reasoning here is so convoluted and strained, and it stands in such sharp contrast to the views for which he later became famous, that some historians have wondered whether he was in earnest when he wrote this essay. Indeed, at least one student of his career doubted whether he wrote it at all. G. G. Coulton found it so difficult

to believe that Acton could ever have taken so indulgent a view of Catholic persecution that he suggested that the article must have been written by one of his colleagues--probably Simpson--and later mistakenly ascribed to him by his Cambridge editors, Figgis and Laurence.²⁰ Doubts of this nature, at least, have subsequently been shown to be groundless by Acton's biographer, Gertrude Himmelfarb, who rightly draws attention to the close similarity between the argument of "The Protestant Theory of Persecution" and that contained in a book which Döllinger had published shortly before.²¹ Yet Dr. Himmelfarb is not without reservations of her own. Even though she admits that Acton's reasoning was based on ideas which are to be found in still more explicit form elsewhere in his writings, she assures us that he composed the essay as "a tract against persecution in general, rather than as an apology for Catholic persecution in particular,"²² and that his argument, despite its ingenuity, was "often failing in conviction."²³ This approach is consistent with Himmelfarb's interpretation of the whole of Acton's early political ideas, at least so far as they bear on the position of the Church toward civil society. Commenting on "Political Thoughts on the Church," she explains that its real object was to attack Ultramontanism, but that "in order not to leave himself exposed to the charge of heresy

²⁰G. G. Coulton, "Mistaken Ascription to Acton?", English Historical Review, XLVI (July 1931), 460.

²¹Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 48. (Döllinger's book was Kirche und Kirchen. See also Acton's report of Döllinger's position on toleration in his letter to Simpson of 5 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 33.)

²²Ibid., p. 50.

²³Ibid., p. 49.

and infidelity, he had first to engage in a rear-guard action against the combined forces of secular Liberalism and religious quietism."²⁴

Such explanations as these tend to soften the contrast between Acton's early and later views and also to gloss over the differences which separated his views from the assumptions of contemporary Liberalism; but they do not accurately reflect his frame of mind in the early stages of his career. When Acton attacked secular Liberalism, as he frequently did during this period, it was not at all by way of a rear-guard action, still less in the interests of tact and diplomacy! He did so openly and with full conviction. Furthermore, "Political Thoughts on the Church" was written largely for the sake of demonstrating that a greater appreciation of Catholic traditions would yield the means by which to salvage what Acton called "the political shipwreck of modern Europe."²⁵ It made no mention of Ultramontaniam. And to the extent that it had a polemical thrust, this was directed not against conservative Catholics, but against any Catholic who imagined that the Church could realise its mission in the modern world without taking an interest in political questions. These timid souls, Acton wrote, "shut their eyes to the only means by which the political regeneration of the modern world is a possibility. For the Catholic religion alone will not suffice to save it, as it was insufficient to save the ancient world, unless the Catholic idea equally manifests itself in the political order."²⁶ By the same token, there is no reason to take "The Protestant

²⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

²⁵ "Political Thoughts on the Church," HOF, p. 210.

²⁶ Ibid.

Theory of Persecution" at anything other than its face value. The only qualifications that legitimately may be applied to it are those which Acton himself allowed. At the end of the article, he did confess that the principle of freedom of conscience ultimately demanded the condemnation of all intolerance.²⁷ But that still did not prevent him from distinguishing clearly between Catholic and Protestant persecution and from arguing that the latter was more deserving of condemnation than the former. The Catholic Church, Acton said, had begun by adhering strictly to the principle of liberty, and later had had intolerance forced upon it by its position in society; Protestantism had at first set up persecution as an absolute rule, and had abandoned it only when it was seen to be ineffective.²⁸ The two traditions were so separate that not even the argument tu quoque applied.²⁹

Yet the really decisive point, perhaps, is that "The Protestant Theory of Persecution" does not stand alone among Acton's early writings. It is perfectly consistent with what he said in a number of other places--including private letters and unpublished notes, in which he could have had no inducement to conceal his real opinions. In 1861, for instance, when Henry Oxenham, another of Döllinger's English students, published a notice in the Rambler in which he condemned intolerance without qualification, Acton wrote to Simpson in protest:

To say that persecution is wrong--nakedly, seems to me first of all untrue, but at the same time, it is in contradiction with

²⁷"The Protestant Theory of Persecution," HOF, p. 186.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 186-187.

²⁹Ibid., p. 169.

solemn decrees, with Leo X's Bull ag[ains]t Luther, with a Breve of Benedict XIV of 1748, and with one of Pius VI of 1791.³⁰

On the other hand, when Acton was keeping notes for the article which he had promised Newman on the Spanish Inquisition--the one which he had said would reveal 'new and startling things about the political character of the Inquisition'³¹--he mapped out an argument to show that the Inquisition had never really been the work of the Church at all, but an instrument of the Spanish Crown.

The political tendency of the Inquisition existed from the first--It was developed gradually--It was always a bastard, not a really ecclesiastical institution--It cannot be identified with the Church for it did not exist for 1300 years, and after declining and dying out, without anybody regretting it, it must not be made so much of.³²

But more instructive still was what Acton wrote, as late as January 1863, in a biography of the great Jesuit missionary, St. Francis Xavier. Here he argued that religion was so closely bound up with the fabric of any society that Xavier had been fully justified in relying on the secular arm to support his missionary efforts in primitive countries. Since he was in any case limited by the ideas of his time, he said, he could not have thought of doing otherwise: but the crucial point was that he could not have brought the religion of Europe to the people of Asia without also converting them to European civilisation.

When Xavier, therefore, trusted, for the support of the faith, to the extension of the Christian power in Asia, he did, under the inspiration of his own wisdom, what the whole history of

³⁰ Acton to Simpson, 13 December 1861, ASC, II, pp. 227-228.

³¹ See above, p. 86.

³² C.U.L. Add. 5527, f. 33a.

the Church had taught him to do; and later ages have not discovered an expedient which can effectually supersede the one he adopted, or a principle which can legitimately condemn it. Compulsory conformity is contrary to the notion of liberty, but liberty is not essential to every actual state. It is the highest fruit of political cultivation, and the rare reward of political virtue. But it requires innumerable conditions which did not exist in Xavier's time. Its characteristic sign and manifestation is self-government; and it is only as a fruit and result of self-government that religious liberty naturally follows. Lower down the scale of progress, liberty is impossible and toleration ruinous; and when this is the case, religious compulsion is entirely natural and unavoidable.³³

The plain fact is that Acton's early position on persecution was very far removed from the simple denunciations of his later years. Even if his arguments contained, as Dr. Himmelfarb suggests, more liberal elements than at first appear,³⁴ what is really worth noting is that they make so many concessions to a point of view which Acton would later find totally abhorrent.

One extremely important and valid point which Dr. Himmelfarb does make with respect to "The Protestant Theory of Persecution" is that the

³³"Venn's Life of St. Francis Xavier," Home and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), pp. 188-189. (The greater part of this article was written by Thomas Arnold, Jr., but Acton added the last three pages. See Walter E. Houghton, ed., The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals: 1824-1900, I, p. 551.)

³⁴Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 50.

essay was concerned almost exclusively with historical matters, and not with the proper attitude for Catholics to adopt in the present.³⁵ No matter how lenient a view Acton took of Catholic intolerance in the past, and no matter how sharply he distinguished his ideas from the prevailing notions of the age, he had no desire whatsoever to identify Catholicism with the forces of reaction. No Catholic of his time understood more clearly than Acton did that the only intelligent policy for Catholicism to pursue in the nineteenth century was one of active co-operation in the promotion of freedom. Not only was he convinced that such an alliance with liberty would best serve the practical interests of the Church, but he also believed, on grounds of principle alone, that such a policy was imperative. He once declared that a person who imagined that he could advocate the cause of religion without also advocating the cause of freedom was no better than a hypocrite and a traitor.³⁶

Even here, however, it is necessary to proceed with considerable caution, for this genuine element of liberality in Acton's attitude must not be confused with an adherence to conventional Liberalism. Acton himself believed that there was an important distinction between the two, and the distinction played a crucial part in his early political writings. In all of these writings, what he tried to inculcate, in one way or another, was a peculiarly Catholic doctrine of liberty—a doctrine which not only harked back to the Middle Ages for its inspiration, but

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "The Count de Montalembert," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 422.

which Acton also very deliberately distinguished from the precepts of contemporary Liberalism. The medieval doctrine of liberty, according to him, had been founded on the inviolable rights of conscience.³⁷ It had consisted, not in the power to do what one pleased, but rather in the freedom to do what one ought.³⁸ It had been achieved through the agency of the Church, for the Church had acted as an effective barrier against the power of the State, and by so doing it had preserved a large area where a man was responsible only to the law of God.³⁹ The modern notion of liberty, however, had an entirely different basis. It pretended to protect the rights of the individual, but it did so without any regard for the independence of the various corporations within the State. Its real effect, therefore, was to promote collectivism, and to elevate the State into an all-encompassing authority, the powers of which knew no limit.⁴⁰ The only possible conclusion to draw from this, according to Acton, was that an irresolvable tension existed between liberty and Liberalism.⁴¹ Whereas true liberty guaranteed the independence of institutions such as the Church, Liberalism insisted instead on the omnicompetence of the State, which was seen simply as the organ of the popular will.⁴²

³⁷ See C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 245; and "Political Thoughts on the Church," HOF, p. 203.

³⁸ "The Roman Question," Rambler, II, 3rd ser. (January 1861), 146.

³⁹ C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 178.

⁴⁰ C.U.L. Add. 5528, f. 176a.

⁴¹ Ibid., f. 174b.

⁴² "Cavour," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (July 1861), 141-165; reprinted in HES, p. 185.

Because Acton took this point of view, moreover, the general policy which he recommended to his fellow Catholics was much more cautious and conservative than is often assumed. It is not really accurate to say, for instance, that he simply tried to persuade them to reconcile themselves to the political progress of the age. On the contrary, there was at least one important occasion on which he specifically urged them to resist this temptation. In "Political Thoughts on the Church," he exhorted his co-religionists to maintain a highly sceptical attitude toward current political theories and to concentrate instead on breathing new life into medieval ideas. "It is common," he said, "to advise Catholics to make up their minds to accept the political doctrines of the day; but it would be more to the purpose to recall the ideas of Catholic times. It is not in the results of the political developments of the last three centuries that the Church can place her trust; neither in absolute monarchy, nor in revolutionary liberalism, nor in the infallible constitutional scheme."⁴³

Even if this passage is taken to be an exceptionally strong statement of Acton's position, there can be no question here of his not being in earnest, for the basic point which he meant to make followed naturally from his entire line of reasoning, and it was also one from which he was able to draw perfectly logical conclusions. In spite of his generally progressive tendencies, the truth is that what he wanted was not for the Church to be the unconditional ally of modern political ideas, but rather for it to apply its own traditional principles as a corrective to

⁴³"Political Thoughts on the Church," HOF, p. 210.

these ideas. Again and again, he insisted on the dangers inherent in the exaggerated powers of the modern State, and on the need for the Church to exert once more a restraining influence on the civil authorities. Occasionally, he even managed to identify practical ways in which this might be accomplished, in spite of his habitual reluctance to bring his theories down to the level of practical politics. In one case, for instance, he urged Catholics in England to resist the interference of the government in public education, not only because the issue was worth contesting in its own right, but also because it provided an opportunity effectively to check the tyranny of the State.⁴⁴ The basic idea behind such proposals was that, mutatis mutandis, the Church should resume the rôle that it had played in the Middle Ages. By successfully resisting the encroachments of governments, it could not only achieve liberty for itself, but also safeguard freedom in general.

One point on which Acton was especially insistent, and which must also be taken into account, was that in attempting to apply its political principles, Catholicism might find itself in conflict with any form of modern government. Although he himself displayed a clear preference for constitutional systems, and never tired of extolling the virtues of the British constitution in particular, he objected very strenuously indeed to the idea that the Church was always better off under constitutional régimes than under more absolutist governments.⁴⁵

⁴⁴"The Catholic Press," Rambler, XI, 2nd ser. (February 1859), 73-90; reprinted in ECS, p. 270.

⁴⁵See "Political Thoughts on the Church," HOF, pp. 207-208.

This point is one of even broader significance than at first appears, for besides emphasising still further Acton's general scepticism about the benefits of Liberalism, it was also an issue which he believed separated him sharply from the Liberal Catholics of France. In spite of the fact that it is with the ideas of these men that his own opinions have usually been broadly identified, Acton himself was not at all disposed to accept this notion, partly because he suspected the Liberal Catholics--and Montalembert in particular--of placing too much confidence in Liberal forms of government, without inquiring deeply into the spirit by which these forms were actually animated. We have already seen how Acton had begun to express doubts about Montalembert's views even as a student. In those early days, he had related to Döllinger his impression that there was an inconsistency between Montalembert's commitment to Catholicism and his "partisan Liberalism," as Acton called it.⁴⁶ But in subsequent years, when Acton tried to work out on his own a satisfactory Catholic philosophy of politics, his differences with Montalembert and his circle became still more pronounced.

That this would be the case was evident from the first weeks of Acton's association with the Rambler. It was then that he announced his plan for developing a complete system of political principles for Catholics and gave the first indications of the lines which this system would follow. He was especially insistent that the philosophy which he meant to develop would be independent, not only of the major parties in England, but also of the more famous Catholic political writers. It

⁴⁶ See above, p. 35.

would, he said even then, be as remote from the "doctrinaire Constitutionalism" of Le Correspondant as from the absolutist principles of its opponents.⁴⁷ But not long after this, in one of his first contributions to the Rambler, Acton carried this point still further by defining and criticising the positions of both parties among French Catholics. One group (i.e. the party of Louis Veuillot), he said, was distinguished by its determination to reject all modern ideas out of hand; it was therefore at fault for "covering good and evil with the same anathema." But the other group (i.e. the circle of Le Correspondant) was guilty of the opposite error; it acquiesced too readily in the doctrines of the day, and thus tried to "cast out devils by Beelzebub."⁴⁸

For the next few years, until more serious matters intervened, most of Acton's criticisms of the French Liberal Catholics revolved around this same fundamental point, for the chief fault that he found with them was that they lacked an independent point of view, which might otherwise have given them greater powers of discrimination. Although he expressed this conviction in a variety of ways, the burden of his remarks was always essentially the same. When Simpson complained to him, for instance, that the men of Le Correspondant were far too embittered against the Ultramontanes and that they indulged too freely in arguments ad hominem,⁴⁹ he replied by agreeing that this was indeed the case and then went on to explain that, since they had no clear ideas

⁴⁷ Acton to Simpson, 16 February 1858, ASC, I, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Review of R. P. Félix, Le Progrès par le Christianisme: Conférences de Notre Dame de Paris, in Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (July 1858), 70-71.

⁴⁹ Simpson to Acton, 3 July 1858, ASC, I, p. 46.

of their own, they were forced to live by contradicting others. "No mind of equal power," he said, "is less constructive than Montalembert's. None of them have [sic] anything new to say."⁵⁰ The point was not simply that Acton found the Liberal Catholics unoriginal, but, more precisely, that he believed they suffered greatly from a want of positive doctrines. Even though he was prepared to admit that they were right to remain open to modern political ideas, he still insisted that they were wrong to accept them quite so uncritically.

Whether Acton was entirely fair in his criticisms of the Liberal Catholics is, of course, another question. Even if they often did display a lack of discrimination, it is hard to accept the view that a man such as Montalembert was so partisan a Liberal as Acton was inclined to think. Many of Montalembert's views were, in fact, strikingly similar to Acton's own opinions, for he not only believed that Liberalism needed to be purified by the influence of religion, but he also looked to the political customs of the Middle Ages for much of his inspiration. The point at issue here, however, is not whether Acton's criticisms were just, but whether they contain anything of significance for an understanding of his development. The truth is that Acton himself was so far convinced of the differences which divided him from the French Liberal Catholics, that even when he defended Montalembert--as he did when the latter was being persecuted by the French government--he did so in carefully qualified terms, and tempered his praise with complaints

⁵⁰ Acton to Simpson, 4 July 1858, ASC, I, p. 48.

about Montalembert's naive faith in the benefits of liberal institutions.⁵¹ One of the central characteristics of Acton's early thought was that he felt himself separated even from those among his fellow Catholics whose views seemed most to resemble his own. This was an aspect of his attitude which became even more pronounced with time, as issues came to the fore which were both more concrete and more divisive than those that had confronted him so far.

⁵¹"The Count de Montalembert," Rambler, X, 2nd ser. (December 1858), 421-428.

Chapter IV

CHANGE AND CONFLICT

The one issue which more than any other demanded the attention of Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century was the question of the Temporal Power. Ever since 1848, when Pío Nono had begun his long and bitter struggle to maintain his hold over the Papal States, this problem had been central to the development of ecclesiastical policy. It was not only an urgently practical matter, which determined the attitude of Rome in international politics, but it also had broader ramifications, which touched on the entire question of Catholicism's relationship to the modern world. On the one hand, the vast majority of Catholics believed that the Temporal Power was a necessary guarantee of papal independence and that it had therefore to be maintained; on the other, the Pope's resolute refusal to relinquish his temporal dominions brought the whole Church into a face to face conflict with the forces of liberalism and nationalism. The dilemma which this created was especially difficult for men such as Acton, who knew that if Catholics were to adhere to their unpopular position, they would have to do so, not only against immense practical odds, but also at the risk of appearing to retreat into a wholly defensive and reactionary posture.

Although the difficulties of this situation had been apparent to Acton ever since his trip to Rome in 1857, it was not really until 1859 that he was forced to deal with them on a practical level. In the period

immediately preceding that, the problem of the Temporal Power had been somewhat less acute than at other times, because Pío Nono, who had earlier been driven into exile by a revolution, had managed to recover at least a precarious hold over the Papal States. The Pope had succeeded in doing this only by relying on the simultaneous support of France and Austria, and it had been apparent all along that his security could not last. The difficulty was that his two protectors were also each other's natural enemies. But the situation did not actually erupt again until 1859, when Napoleon III, in pursuit of a characteristically devious policy, joined forces with Sardinia in an attempt to drive the Austrians from Italy.

The subsequent defeat of the Austrians in Lombardy altered the situation entirely. Not only did it place the Pope in a position of undue dependence on France, but furthermore, as both the Emperor and Cavour had foreseen, it resulted in the seizure of the Romagna (hitherto papal territory) by men sympathetic to the nationalist cause. This prepared the way for the eventual annexation of the Romagna by the Kingdom of Sardinia. Suddenly the entire question of the Temporal Power was once more rendered urgent, and Catholics throughout Europe reacted with alarm and indignation.

The curious thing, however, was that even then Acton made no definite statement on the Roman question. Although he followed events very closely, and took full advantage of the many sources of information available to him, his only comments at first were of an indirect kind, and most of these were made in private. In some measure, this can be explained by the fact that when the crisis first arose, Newman was still

editor of the Rambler. This meant that Acton did not have the usual incentive for publishing a statement of policy. But even when this consideration is taken into account, Acton still seems to have been strangely reluctant to make known his sentiments, at least so far as these concerned the precise question of how far the Temporal Power could be defended. Rather than addressing himself directly to this problem, he concerned himself instead with the general course of events in Italy, and in particular with the weaknesses of the comments made upon them by other people. The first person whom he criticised was Newman himself, who had taken a line in the Rambler which Acton thought not only incorrect but also thoroughly naive.

Acton's dispute with Newman is especially interesting in this context, for, at least in negative terms, it provides the first indication of what his position would be. The starting point here is really Newman's own position, because, virtually alone among Catholics, he was disposed to consider the loss of part of the Papal States as a hidden blessing. In the Rambler for May 1859, he published two pseudonymous letters,¹ in which he said in effect that the policy of Napoleon III (for whom he felt a certain admiration) would eventually prove beneficial to the Church. Acton sharply disagreed with this view, and shortly afterwards he entered into what he described as a "polemische Briefwechsel" with Newman.² The special target of his objections was Newman's

¹"Temporal Prosperity a Note of the Church" and "The Prospect of War," Rambler, I, 3rd ser. (May 1859), 102-105 and 109-113.

²Acton to Döllinger, 24 August 1859, DB, I, p. 160.

sympathy for the Emperor Napoleon. Acton felt nothing but contempt for Napoleon, and so he began by insisting to Newman that the cause of religion could never be served by such a man, even indirectly. To support this contention he alluded to the Emperor's personal life, which he described as notoriously immoral, and also mentioned his grossly inadequate understanding of the Church, which he said was limited to an appreciation of its political importance.³ But when these arguments failed, Acton readily shifted his attention to the dangers associated with the influence of France in Italy. His aversion to the Emperor, he explained, stemmed chiefly from the fact that he was an entirely natural product of the nation which he governed. What really aroused his hostility, therefore, was the thought that Napoleon might succeed in carrying into Italy the deplorable spirit which already animated French politics.⁴

This exchange made clear at least that, unlike Newman, Acton was not prepared simply to regard the sudden change that had taken place in Italy as a felix culpa. The fact remained, however, that in spite of his vitriolic attack on Napoleon III, he had still said nothing definite on the Temporal Power. His failure to declare himself on this issue became even more conspicuous in the autumn of 1859, when Newman stepped down as editor of the Rambler and Acton succeeded him. For several months, Acton wrote nothing on the Roman question except a few brief entries under the heading of "Contemporary Events." In one of these, he bitterly attacked

³ Acton to Newman, 24 August 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 199.

⁴ Acton to Newman, 28 August 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 200.

the pro-Italian policy of the Whig government in England,⁵ and the direction of his comments made plain that he regarded the seizure of the Romagna as an indefensible violation of the Pope's sovereignty. Yet he was prevented from developing the point further by the anxiety which he experienced over the extreme religious views that the controversy was evoking. He abhorred the fanatical element which frequently appeared in attempts to defend the Pope's position, and he greatly feared that Catholics would commit themselves irrevocably to a position which the course of events would later render untenable.⁶ Only when Simpson pressed him on the need for the new Rambler to take a definite stand,⁷ did he finally consent to subject the whole question of the Temporal Power to an exact analysis.⁸ The essay which he finally produced, though subtle and at times difficult to follow, at least compensated for his previous hesitations by its totally uncompromising nature.

The first thing that Acton made clear in "The Roman Question"⁹ was his determination to deal with the topic primarily as a question of politics. Although he himself believed that the Temporal Power could be defended on religious as well as on political grounds,¹⁰ he was clearly uncomfortable with the religious argument, if for no other reason than

⁵"Home Affairs," Rambler, I, 3rd ser. (September 1859), 401-403.

⁶See, for instance, Acton to Simpson, 7 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 37.

⁷Simpson to Acton, 6 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 34.

⁸Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 36.

⁹"The Roman Question," Rambler, II, 3rd ser. (January 1860), 137-154.

¹⁰See Acton to Simpson, 7 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 37.

that, when used by itself, it could be construed as an attempt to subordinate the affairs of state to religious interests. It would be a great injustice, Acton declared, to deny to the subjects of the Pope rights which were accorded to the rest of mankind, simply because it was convenient for the Church. On no account could a spiritual necessity justify a political wrong. Moreover, to treat the question of the Temporal Power as a matter solely affecting religion was not only false; it was also eminently injudicious: "It narrows the ground on which the cause can be defended, and necessarily increases the number and zeal of its opponents."¹¹ In order to place the question of the Temporal Power on the proper footing, it was necessary to see that its cause was also the cause of other states, in whose interest it was to preserve it. Although the Temporal Power did indeed serve a special purpose, which was determined by the needs of the Church, it was nevertheless founded on the same basis—and therefore had the same rights—as any secular government. "A religious interest is at stake," Acton reminded his readers, "but also a political principle."¹²

There was an almost paradoxical quality to Acton's argument at this point, for although he refused to defend the Temporal Power solely on religious grounds, he was determined at the same time to show that many of the attacks against it were motivated precisely by spiritual antipathy to the head of the Church. It would be idle, he said, to imagine that the introduction of further reforms in the Papal States

¹¹"The Roman Question," 140.

¹²Ibid., 141.

would diminish the hostility which was felt toward the Temporal Power. The Roman administration was attacked not so much because it was bad as because it was ecclesiastical. Many of the charges brought against it were no more than pretences to conceal anti-Catholic or irreligious sentiments. It was this element of religious animosity, in fact, which was the distinguishing feature of the present crisis. "Every argument is in vain which does not recognise that it is the divine institution, not the human defect, which men assail in Rome."¹³

But on the other hand, Acton still disavowed any intention of pretending that the papal régime was a model of good government. What distinguished his argument from that of other Catholics, especially in his own mind, was that it was based simply but squarely on the premise that the papal government had the same rights as all other temporal authority. He had no wish to deny its defects; on the contrary, although he was privately convinced that conditions in the papal states were not so bad as the Liberals would have one believe, he deliberately excluded this line of argument for the moment on the grounds that it implied an acceptance of the enemies terms of reference. The crux of Acton's argument was that the Roman question was not a dispute concerning the good or bad government of Rome, but a contest "affecting the very foundation of all government."¹⁴ The revolutionary system by which the Temporal Power was assailed, he said, was based on the premise that all power derived from the people and was deposited ultimately in their

¹³ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴ Ibid., 143.

hands. It assumed, therefore, that if the people were discontented, they had the right to dismiss their ruler. But this doctrine of popular sovereignty was wholly inconsistent with Catholic political ideas, which were founded instead on "the divine origin and nature of authority."¹⁵ The present crisis was not in reality a conflict between different estimates of the Pope's competence as a ruler; it was rather a war between incompatible theories of government. The forces of revolution attacked the Temporal Power, the "foremost bulwark of the Church,"¹⁶ because they recognised in the Church itself, and in the political doctrines which it inspired, their most implacable foe. In the face of this situation, the clear duty of Catholics, especially in England, was to pledge themselves unanimously to the maintenance of the Pope's legitimate sovereignty.

No one was more conscious than Acton himself that the argument of "The Roman Question" was very conservative. The essay had not even been completed when he wrote to Simpson: "I am afraid that the politics of my article are very old fashioned. I have never come out so antiquatedly conservative, so Burkian as here."¹⁷ It is also quite certain that Acton knew that he was espousing a cause which was not likely to succeed, for he immediately described himself as a "partisan of sinking ships," and added that he knew "none more ostensibly sinking just now than St. Peter's."¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is important not to infer from

¹⁵ Ibid., 146.

¹⁶ Ibid., 153.

¹⁷ Acton to Simpson, 7 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 37.

¹⁸ Ibid.

either of these comments that Acton thought his position mistaken or his arguments inappropriate.¹⁹ Though the urgency of the Roman question had induced him, as indeed it had induced most English Catholics, to assume a more conservative vantage point than usual, the theories which he invoked to defend the Temporal Power were essentially consistent with the political philosophy that he had been expounding ever since he joined the Rambler. He had always insisted that modern political notions were opposed to what he called the "Catholic system"; he had consistently rejected the "revolutionary" idea that the final appeal in political questions ought to be to the will of the people; and, so far as the Burkian character of his argument was concerned, it must not be forgotten that less than a year before he wrote "The Roman Question," he had proclaimed that Burke's later speeches were the "law and the prophets."²⁰ It may well have been that when Acton saw his favourite ideas applied to what was surely a difficult case, the result caused him more than a little discomfort. All other arguments notwithstanding, the spectacle of

¹⁹ Any thought that the argument of "The Roman Question" was insincere, or that the essay was intended merely to prevent a conflict between the Rambler and the majority of English Catholics must be dismissed in the light of Acton's own comments. When he was preparing the article, he wrote to Simpson: ". . . I will write candidly, but not indiscreetly, saying nothing but what I really believe." (Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1859, ASC, II, p. 36.) Equally instructive are his recollections years later. In C.U.L. Add. 4988, he writes: "Newman's influence made the Rambler anti-Roman. My defence of the Temporal Power. Wetherell on the French Empire. impious apostolate . . ." (card 212); and again: "Did not Newman turn the Rambler against Rome? His writing in the Rambler. His letters to me on the subject." (card 217). The point at issue here is not whether Newman influenced Acton's own position on the Temporal Power—there is no reason to believe that he did—but rather Acton's acknowledgement that when Newman first recommended the abandonment of the Temporal Power, he himself had still been defending it.

²⁰ Acton to Simpson, 4 February 1859, ASC, I, p. 149.

an inept clerical government in Central Italy was a distinct embarrassment to one who had vigorously affirmed the capacity of Catholicism to exercise a constructive influence on modern political life. Yet, in another sense, which by no means escaped Acton, the situation in Italy tended to support much of what he had previously said. In Sardinia, the recent abolition of the Church Courts and the suppression of the religious orders²¹ seemed compelling testimony to his belief that modern Liberalism was subversive of true Christian liberty; likewise, there could have been no better confirmation of his view that Napoleon III was an unscrupulous despot, determined to use the Church for his own ends, than the policy which the Emperor pursued in Italy; while Austria, for which Acton had always felt a profound admiration, was not only the Pope's ally, but also the only power involved in the Italian conflict that had in recent years materially increased the liberties of the Church.²² In the last analysis, perhaps, it was precisely Acton's sympathy for Austria that determined his attitude toward the Italian question. For the fact is that he not only defended the Temporal Power; he identified himself with the conservative cause in Italy generally. "I have tried all in my power in vain," he told Newman, "to discover a flaw in the Austrian case, or any moral justification for the Italian war."²³

²¹On the ecclesiastical policies carried out in the Kingdom of Sardinia from 1848 to 1856, see E. E. Y. Hales, Pio Nono: A Study in European Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth Century (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1954), pp. 171-184.

²²That is, by the Austrian Concordat of 1855. See [Acton] "Political Workings of the Austrian Concordat," Weekly Register, 6 December 1856, pp. 8-9.

²³Acton to Newman, 20 August 1859, L&D, XIX, p. 198.

The ironic aspect of all this, however, was that even after the publication of "The Roman Question," Acton remained as far removed from his fellow Catholics as he would have been had he disagreed with them totally about the Temporal Power. The reason for this was not, as has been commonly assumed, that his essay met with disfavour among the Ultramontanes, who were interested in hearing only the most extreme religious views.²⁴ It was rather that Acton himself refused for the most part to be identified with the feelings which prevailed among the majority of Catholics. In theory at least, he believed that it was possible for English Catholics to seize upon the controversy over Italy as an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for moderation and their fidelity to political principle. He continued to speak with utter contempt of the policy of the Whigs, chiding them for being deceived by the notion that the cause of good government in Italy depended on the extension of the Sardinian constitution;²⁵ and he proclaimed in particular that by uncovering the false assumptions which lay beneath the Liberal attitude, Catholics might place themselves "at the head of the political thought of the country."²⁶ In reality, however, their approach seemed to him unscrupulous, fanatical, and likely to do little more than confirm existing anti-Catholic prejudices. "I find everyone saying," he complained

²⁴There is no evidence to support Gertrude Himmelfarb's statement that the Ultramontanes "took the article to be a weasel-mouthed attack on the temporal power." (Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 53.) Nor does Josef Altholz document his claim that the English Catholics "had no patience with a complex argument which treated the Temporal Power as a political necessity rather than as a religious essential . . .". (Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, p. 126.)

²⁵"Home Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 126-127.

²⁶Ibid., 126.

to Simpson on one occasion, "that the interests of religion must override the precepts of politics, which seems to me a contradiction."²⁷

Later, and with still greater indignation, he declared that the behaviour of his Catholic colleagues in the House of Commons had persuaded many that "they really are hostile to liberty, and alien to our institutions."²⁸

None of this induced Acton to alter his own position, but as the controversy continued, he became increasingly concerned to correct the bad impression which he believed his fellow Catholics had created, especially in Parliament. At one point he decided that against his wishes he would have to make a speech in the Commons, in order to "save us, as far as I can, from a no-popery excitement."²⁹ What concerned Acton in particular at this stage was the refusal of Catholic spokesmen, when confronted with criticisms of the papal government, to acknowledge that it had any defects at all. To the exaggerated accusations of the Whigs, they opposed an exaggerated defence, which everybody knew not to be credible, and which therefore gave the appearance of deliberate dishonesty. His own intention, as a sort of antidote to this, appears to have been to confess that the government of Rome was indeed deficient in some respects, while calmly maintaining at the same time that "many things are better than is supposed."³⁰

Evident [he wrote in what appears to be a draft for this speech] that it is [in] the interest of many to believe things as bad

²⁷ Acton to Simpson, 7 May 1860, ASC, II, p. 59.

²⁸ Acton to Simpson, 30 April 1862, ASC, II, p. 292.

²⁹ Acton to Simpson, 13 February 1861, ASC, II, p. 119.

³⁰ C.U.L. Add. 4862, f. 5.

as possible. Certainly nowhere can there be a greater probability of falsehood, since [there is] unavoidable exaggeration. Ten times as many reasons for blindness and error respecting Rome than there are against England.³¹

This speech was never delivered--according to Acton, because a man who seldom spoke in Parliament could not speak with effect on an unpopular question.³² But in the spring of 1860, he did make a very timely intervention, which was designed to achieve the same result, and which proved in the end far more effective.

Acton had reason to believe, partly because of the published remarks of the former French ambassador to Rome (Count de Rayneval),³³ that an accurate account of conditions in the Papal States could be found in the despatches of Lord Lyons, diplomatic agent in Rome from 1853 to 1858. Accordingly, he determined to seek their publication, and on 4 May 1860 he rose in the House of Commons and asked the Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell, to make them available immediately. In a carefully calculated address, he explained that his sole motive in making the request was the desire to see authentic evidence provided in a matter about which there had been so many conflicting opinions and testimonies. He had every reason to believe, he said, that the documents might contain information not entirely favourable to the papal government; but that was not the point.

All Catholics are, or ought to be, anxious to know all the truth concerning the accusations brought against the Roman

³¹ Ibid.

³² Acton to Simpson, 7 March 1861, ASC, II, p. 129.

³³ See Acton to Döllinger, 14 May 1860, DB, I, p. 177.

Government. We do not wish to be open to the accusation that we are arguing from imperfect knowledge, or defending what does not deserve to be defended.³⁴

Acton no doubt intended this remark partly as a jibe against his Catholic colleagues--later, in a letter to Simpson, he expressed his pleasure at the alarm that had been shown by Sir George Bowyer, Cardinal Wiseman's spokesman in Parliament.³⁵ His purpose was twofold, however, and before he had finished speaking, he had turned the edge of his comments against the government spokesmen as well. Catholics were also concerned, he explained, that there should be no possibility of doubt concerning the good faith of leading English politicians.

. . . we are all of us interested in the good name of our public men, and it can be a matter of indifference to nobody to know whether the information which is in the possession of the Government bears out the statements which have been made by men in high and respectable positions, undefended by argument, and unsupported by evidence.³⁶

In other words, Acton's intention in asking for the Lyons papers was to discredit the positions taken by both the Catholics and their Liberal opponents.

When the documents were eventually made available, Acton was jubilant, for it seemed to him that not only his intervention in Parliament, but also one entire aspect of his attitude toward the Roman question had been vindicated. Although there was nothing involved here

³⁴Hansard, 3rd ser., CLVIII (4 May 1860), 680.

³⁵Acton to Simpson, 12 May 1860, ASC, II, p. 62.

³⁶Hansard, 3rd ser., CLVIII (4 May 1860), 680-681.

that could touch directly on his arguments concerning the legitimacy of the Pope's rule, the evidence that emerged did confirm him in the view that there were faults on both sides of the dispute, while at the same time giving him still stronger reasons for condemning the nationalist party. Acton readily accepted Lord Lyons' criticisms of the papal government. Indeed, he welcomed them, since he believed they meant that Catholics would at last have to face certain disagreeable facts.³⁷ But he was even more gratified to find Lyons acknowledging that, while the Pope was sincere in promising reforms, the dissidents had refused to accept them.³⁸ The policy of the latter, Acton said, was criminal; for they resisted all attempts at genuine improvement out of fear that the government might thus be strengthened. Some of the Italian Liberals, such as the Marchese Bevilacqua, acted in good faith; but they were "baffled by their unscrupulous allies," whose ambition was to make matters worse rather than better.³⁹ In fact, Acton went so far as to draw the conclusion that further reforms, which Antonelli had had in mind, would do nothing to improve the situation: "A people thirsting after the Piedmontese system can certainly not be conciliated by really good government."⁴⁰ Later, when the Italian Liberals themselves published documents relating to the administration of the Papal States, he commented: "It cuts away entirely and irrevocably the ground on which the

³⁷ Acton to Döllinger, late January 1860, DB, I, p. 178.

³⁸ Acton to Simpson, 9 July 1860, ASC, II, p. 78.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Roman Government has been commonly defended, so far as that was not already done by the Lyons papers; but it affords no more than they did a defence of the revolutionary party."⁴¹

Throughout the latter half of 1859 and the early months of 1860, the prospects of the papal government rose and fell with the vicissitudes of Napoleon's policy. For a time it appeared that its situation had improved immensely, for the Emperor had grown disillusioned with the Piedmontese and had taken up the old idea of forming an Italian Confederation under the presidency of the Pope. This plan was supported by the Austrians, and it was incorporated in the Armistice of Villafranca, which was concluded on 11 July 1859. But by the autumn, when the plenipotentiaries assembled to sign the Treaty of Zurich (intended, ostensibly at least, as a ratification of Villafranca) Napoleon had already begun to alter course. His chief object now was to obtain Savoy and Nice for France, and he recognised that in order to accomplish this end he would be compelled to allow greater scope to Piedmontese ambitions. Thus, without actually renouncing the terms of Villafranca, he began to take steps to render them superfluous. First he proposed that the Italian question should be referred to a European Congress; then, by insisting

⁴¹"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 129.

that the cession of the Romagna must be a pre-condition of negotiations, he made certain that it would be virtually impossible for the Pope to participate; and when this resulted in the failure of the Congress to meet, he complained of Pio Nono's intransigence and entered once more into secret undertakings with Sardinia. The decisive moment for the Papal States came on 28 August 1860, when the Emperor met Sardinian emissaries at Chambéry and privately assured them that he would do nothing to prevent an invasion of the Pope's territory. Cavour seized his opportunity immediately and within a fortnight Piedmontese troops had crossed the frontier. At Castelfidardo, they encountered the volunteer papal army, easily dispersed it, and proceeded to overrun the Marches and Umbria. The French garrison under Goyon, which had all the while remained in Rome, at least prevented them from advancing further. But so half-hearted an effort was small consolation to Pio Nono. A few days earlier he had still been in control of three-fourths of his temporal possessions. He was now left with no more than the Patrimony of Saint Peter—that is, Rome and its immediate environs.

The battle of Castelfidardo also marked the first turning point in Acton's attitude toward the Temporal Power. Up until that time, he had been able to believe that the Pope was engaged in a meaningful (even if hopeless) struggle to maintain his position as a legitimate sovereign and to safeguard the basis of his spiritual freedom. The possession of a territory stretching from Rome to Ancona had provided at least the semblance of independence; and the hope of recovering even the Romagna had not yet been given up. But as soon as the Sardinians seized the Marches and Umbria, it was clear that the situation had been altered

decisively. Even Naples, previously outside the sphere of hostilities, had now been overrun by Garibaldi; and thus the tiny remnant of the Papal States was completely surrounded by the forces of nationalism and revolution. The fact that the Patrimony had been retained offered no comfort whatever, for it could be held only on the sufferance of the French; and it was the prospect of seeing the Pope more than ever dependent on Napoleon III that disturbed Acton most. Immediately upon hearing of the Piedmontese victory, he remarked ominously: "If Italy is one day united, leaving only a French-occupied Rome, then the freedom of the Church will be at an end."⁴²

But even this recognition of the dangers inherent in the altered situation in Italy marked for Acton only a first step in a new direction. It had changed his perspective substantially, in the sense that he was now convinced that there was no point in the Pope continuing his struggle; but, on the other hand, he could not yet see a definite way out of the present dilemma. If the Pope were simply to surrender, would he not be delivering himself directly into the hands of the enemy? The only suggestion that Acton could make was that Pio Nono should appeal to Spain or to a German state for protection, so that he might safely go into exile again.⁴³

It was not until a few months later, when Acton travelled to Munich to discuss the problem with Döllinger, that his attention was

⁴² Acton to Döllinger, [?] September 1860, DB, I, p. 186. The original German reads: "Ist Italien einmal einig, und nur Franzosen in Rom, so ist es doch mit der Freiheit der Kirche zu Ende."

⁴³ Ibid.

drawn to the exciting possibility which lay concealed within this idea. The Professor, he found, agreed with him that the Pope's position was at present intolerable, and that the only course for him to follow was to seek refuge abroad. In addition to that, however, he had also reached the conclusion--one which Acton eagerly accepted--that the flight of the Pope might lead to consequences of inestimable value. The scenario which he apparently envisaged, or at least hoped for, was that the Pope would leave Rome for Germany, and that having taken up residence there, he would begin to revise many of his own policies, while at the same time exerting an irresistible influence on German Protestants. This, in any case, was the way in which Acton interpreted Döllinger's remarks, for in a pitch of excitement he wrote hurriedly to Simpson:

We must certainly be prepared to see the pope leave Rome and take refuge in Spain or Germany. If in Germany (at Wursburg, where there is a splendid palace of the old prince bishops and a faculty of theology particularly Roman), the reaction upon German Protestantism will be immense. I had the luck to hear a long conversation on this point the other night between Döllinger and the ablest of the Bavarian Protestants. Their mutual confidence was astonishing to a beholder. Döllinger said that one thing at least was certain, that the Romanism of the Church was destroyed for good, and the other was convinced that the presence of the Holy See in Germany, on the border land of the two religions, must lead to the reunion of the German Protestants with the Church.⁴⁴

Even if Acton was exaggerating Döllinger's opinions here, it was clear

⁴⁴ Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1860, ASC, II, p. 97. See also the undated notes in C.U.L. Add. 5663, f. 77: "I said, I could not think that the enemies of the Church were really her best friends and that she ought to consult Mazzini--D[öllinger] answered: That is not so clear."; and C.U.L. Add. 5009, card 294: "Can you imagine that the enemies of religion are the people who best understand its interests? Yes. I think that they may practically serve it best."

at least that the Professor was committed to the view that an interruption in the Pope's reign as a temporal sovereign was not only inevitable but also desirable.

Several months elapsed before Döllinger declared his sentiments publicly, but when he finally did his behaviour caused a sensation in the Catholic and non-Catholic worlds alike. Speaking at the Royal Odeon in Munich in April 1861, in a series of lectures which were ostensibly concerned with the general condition of religion in the modern world, he boldly announced to a mixed audience that the position of the Temporal Power had been so drastically weakened by recent events that a great change was all but inevitable.⁴⁵ The picture that he painted of political degeneration in the Papal States must not be seen apart from his careful account of its origins and causes; for he emphatically absolved Pius IX from all blame for the feeble condition of his government. The current difficulties, Döllinger said, stemmed from the administrative changes that had been carried out in imitation of the system of Napoleon I. They could not be attributed to the policies of Pio Nono, whose reign had been in fact "one continuous chain of useful and beneficent reforms." Yet it was nonetheless true that even the modifications which the Pope had introduced had failed to conciliate the people. The inhabitants of the Papal States remained averse to living under clerical rule; they continued to regard the Temporal Power as an obstacle to the accomplishment of the Italian ideal; and consequently papal sovereignty

⁴⁵ Döllinger's lectures were reprinted in Kirche und Kirchen: Papatum und Kirchenstaat (Munich, 1861). The relevant passages are translated and quoted by Acton in "Döllinger on the Temporal Power," HOF, p. 307 and pp. 365-366.

could at present be preserved only by reliance on a foreign protector--a circumstance which was clearly intolerable. So far as a solution to the problem was concerned, it was possible to speak only of probabilities, for no one could see into the future. Yet one thing at least was certain: although the Papacy itself could never be destroyed, it would be folly to persist in seeking its support in a system of government which was not more than forty-five years old; which even the Pope agreed was deficient; and which had, in its short history, generated nothing but discontent and revolution.

When Acton reported Döllinger's remarks in the Rambler for May 1861,⁴⁶ he anxiously urged his readers to see that the candour with which his teacher had spoken was in no sense a sign of disloyalty to the Church. So long as events had not forced the loss of the Temporal Power, he explained, it had indeed been inconceivable that any Catholic should play a part in its downfall: "Nobody could presume to speak with confidence whilst the will of God, expressed in the facts of history, was not made manifest. No man could say that what had been lawfully acquired, and what God had permitted to be retained, ought to be given up."⁴⁷ At the same time, however, it was true that there were eminent Catholics in every country who had wisely foreseen that eventually the spiritual power would be delivered from the burden of secular rule by a crisis such as had at last arrived. Previously, reverence for the Pope in the midst of his trials had imposed a discreet silence on most of

⁴⁶"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 136-140.

⁴⁷Ibid., 136.

these men: but the time for speech had now arrived, and it was entirely natural that leadership should come from one who stood at the head of German ecclesiastical science. The inescapable fact was that the Temporal Power had been lost at Castelfidardo. If Catholics failed to deny now that the Papal States were essential to the Church--if instead they waited until the Pope had actually been driven from Rome--then whatever they said would take on the appearance of a weak rationalisation.

As Acton's account accurately reflected, Döllinger had not meant to question the principle on which the Temporal Power was based. His chief concern had been rather to prepare Catholics for what was now inevitable and at the same time to dismiss from the minds of those outside the Church the mistaken idea that the entire cause of Catholicism depended on that of the Papal States. Nevertheless, his views were so widely misinterpreted, and his initiative provoked so much hostility, that he eventually found it necessary to publish the exact text of the lectures, together with a vastly expanded statement of his position. The volume entitled Kirche und Kirchen: Papsttum und Kirchenstaat appeared at the end of 1861. Once again, Acton felt called upon to explain and justify the Professor's views;⁴⁸ and this time he was still more insistent that a great service had been rendered to religion. The most comprehensive chapter of Döllinger's book, he carefully pointed out, was devoted to an apology for the papacy. He had clearly demonstrated that it was of paramount importance to the Church to have a visible head in whom the principle of authority resided; and he had done

⁴⁸"Döllinger on the Temporal Power," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (November 1861), 1-62; reprinted HOF, pp. 301-374.

this by the supremely effective method of exposing the weakness and confusion which abounded within the Protestant churches. Yet the point was that just as Döllinger had wanted to promote a profound appreciation of the value of the papacy as a spiritual power, he had also been anxious to persuade Catholics not to exaggerate the danger to religion posed by recent events in Italy. The Church had existed for seven hundred years without the Papal States; it might very well do so again. The important consideration was whether they served their purpose or not. Although the Temporal Power had at one time been a real advantage to the Church, it was now manifestly a source of discredit and an impediment to its legitimate influence. The best plan, therefore, was for the Pope to abdicate his throne and depart from Rome. After a suitable interval, when the deficiencies of the old system had been cast aside, his sovereignty could be restored in a more satisfactory form.

The future restoration of the Temporal Power was a question on which Acton and Döllinger privately disagreed.⁴⁹ Döllinger's view, quite simply, was that political sovereignty was the only adequate guarantee of papal independence, and that therefore the ecclesiastical territories would eventually have to be recovered.⁵⁰ Acton began with the same premise but concluded that a return to the "position of the

⁴⁹ See Acton to Simpson, 6 October 1861 and 8 December 1861, ASC, II, p. 180 and p. 221.

⁵⁰ Thirty years later, Acton described Döllinger's position thus: "His object was not materially different from that of Antonelli and Márode, but he sought it by exposing the faults of the papal government during several centuries, and the hopelessness of all efforts to save it from the Revolution unless reformed." ("Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, pp. 414-415.)

pope as a ruler of millions" would be a great mistake, and that a much smaller dominion would suffice.⁵¹ In immediate terms, however, their divergence on this point had no practical importance. The only question that mattered for the moment was what course the Pope ought to follow after his abdication, and in this respect Acton was only too happy to accept Döllinger's view that refuge should be sought in Germany. To others, no doubt, this idea would have seemed no more than wishful thinking; but in Acton's mind it had become in a sense the key to the whole situation. He had long been persuaded that many German Protestants were prevented only by circumstances from embracing the Catholic faith;⁵² and a conversation with Heinrich Leo in 1861 made him more certain of this than ever.⁵³ In an ironic fashion, too, his distrust of Napoleon encouraged his hopes, for he was convinced that at the first opportunity the Emperor would betray the Pope and withdraw his garrison from Rome.⁵⁴ That the Pontiff would then turn to Germany for assistance might not have been the most probable course. Döllinger himself had apparently mentioned Spain, which was after all an exclusively Catholic country. But the more Acton contemplated the prospect of the Roman Court exposed to the influence of German Catholicism, the more logic gave way to enthusiasm. By the time that Kirche und Kirchen appeared, he had already

⁵¹ Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1860, ASC, II, p. 98.

⁵² See C.U.L. Add. 5751, p. 200; and also C.U.L. Add. 5528, f. 177b.

⁵³ Acton to Döllinger, 19/20 October 1861, DB, I, pp. 222-224.

⁵⁴ Acton to Simpson, 8 October 1861, ASC, II, pp. 183-184. See also "Döllinger on the Temporal Power," HOF, p. 374 and pp. 367-368.

declared that the flight of the Pope to Bavaria "could become the true Hegira, and gather in the fruits of this catastrophe."⁵⁵

It is vitally important to understand the precise nature of Acton's new position on the Temporal Power and above all to recognise that by abandoning the predominant Catholic view he did not mean to embrace any of the conventional alternatives. This applies especially to the various solutions to the Roman question which were thought possible at the time, for although Acton would henceforth insist categorically on the futility of clinging to the Papal States, his determination to see the Pope take up residence in Germany ensured that he would at the same time oppose every attempt at a reconciliation between Rome and Turin. Almost as soon as the Marches and Umbria were in the hands of the Piedmontese, Carlo Passaglia, one of Pio Nono's chief theological advisers, had begun to search for a way out of the impasse which would be satisfactory to both the Catholics and the nationalists. For a time at least, he had managed to secure the Pope's permission to carry on unofficial negotiations; and assisted by his friend, Diomede Pantaleoni, he had brought forward a detailed plan calling on Pius to renounce the Temporal Power in return for guarantees of his independence. This scheme, in fact, was remarkable

⁵⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1861, DB, I, p. 207.

for its similarity to the Law of Guarantees, which eventually came to govern Church-State relations in Italy.⁵⁶ But from the outset Acton not only steadfastly opposed Passaglia's ideas, but also encouraged Simpson to do the same.⁵⁷ At Acton's instigation, Simpson poured scorn on Passaglia in the Rambler for November 1861. He was, he said, no more than an enthusiastic theologian who had been carried away by his patriotism. While men far better acquainted with the realities of the situation still thought the accomplishment of the nationalists' goals impossible, he was already dreaming of an independent papacy preserved in the midst of a united Italy. Such simplicity was to be found only in the childish fantasies of a professor recently turned politician!⁵⁸

There were, indeed, occasions on which Acton himself did not treat Passaglia with quite so much contempt and when he appeared to believe that an internal settlement of the Roman question was actually within reach. It is even possible that at one stage he attached too much importance to information provided by Odo Russell, Lord Lyons' successor in Rome, and consequently exaggerated the likelihood of an accommodation.⁵⁹ But occasional fears that Passaglia would succeed did nothing to alter his basic attitude. At such times, he merely abandoned the derisory tone which Simpson had adopted and concentrated instead on enumerating the dire consequences which would follow if the Pope allowed

⁵⁶ See Hales, Pio Nono, pp. 221-226.

⁵⁷ Acton to Simpson, 3 October 1861, ASC, II, p. 174.

⁵⁸ [Simpson], "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (November 1861), 144.

⁵⁹ See Acton to Döllinger, 25 February 1861, DB, I, p. 196.

himself to be swayed by the patriots among the Italian clergy. The most injurious effect of the Temporal Power, he declared on one occasion, was that over the past three hundred years it had imposed an exclusively Italian character on the Roman Court. If it were simply restored, without an intervening period, nothing would have happened to break down this narrow spirit; but if it were lost, only to be followed by a reconciliation between the Pope and the Italian nation, then the remedy would be worse than the malady. "The Church could better see him an exile," Acton wrote, "than realising the ideals of 1846."⁶⁰

Almost every time Acton attacked Passaglia, he added still more bitter invectives against the Piedmontese. Since he had always maintained that the liberality of the Sardinian government was a mere pretence, it was in no way inconsistent that under present circumstances he should continue to question their designs and intentions; but as his purpose became more and more to show that engagements entered into by Turin could never be relied upon, his denunciations tended to grow more frequent as well as more vehement. When Cavour, in a now famous speech, proclaimed his devotion to the principle chiesa libera in stato libero, Acton promptly retorted that this was indeed a sound doctrine, but that unfortunately the Piedmontese conception of "a free Church in a free State" seemed to mean "the secularisation of education, the suppression of the religious orders, the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, the exile or imprisonment of Bishops and priests who protest against this new liberty, and the total suppression of all ecclesiastical immunities

⁶⁰"Foreign Affairs," Home and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), 314.

and privileges."⁶¹ Likewise, when Pio Nono answered overtures from Turin with the bull Jamdudum cernimus, in which he refused to make any concessions, Acton hastened to his defence. It was little wonder, he said, that the Pontiff should declare himself unable to come to terms with "modern civilisation" when he saw it in its Piedmontese manifestation. It might well be the case that the interests of the Church would best be served if the Italian clergy, like the English and the American, had exactly those rights which the laity enjoyed and no more. But it would be utterly absurd to expect that such liberties would be accorded by a government which, in the past thirteen years, had deprived the Church of every basic freedom.⁶² On the contrary, Acton declared: "The tyrannical character of the Piedmontese government, its contempt for the sanctity of public law, the principles on which it treats the clergy at home, and the manner in which it has trampled on the rights of the Pope and the interests of religion, the perfidy and despotism it exhibits, render it impossible that any securities it may offer the Pope can possess a real value . . . It is a system without liberty and without stability; and the Pope can never be reconciled to it, or become a dweller in the new Italian kingdom."⁶³

Although Acton's arguments were very far from disinterested, the hostility which he displayed toward the Piedmontese calls attention to

⁶¹"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 135.

⁶²Ibid. It is interesting to note that the passage of Jamdudum cernimus to which Acton refers here later became the famous eightieth proposition of the Syllabus of Errors. (Denzinger-Schönmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 2980).

⁶³"Döllinger on the Temporal Power," HOF, pp. 369-370.

another important feature of his new position on the Temporal Power-- namely, that it as yet implied no concessions to the Liberal point of view. He was now disposed, through Döllinger's influence, to regard the loss of the Papal States as a merciful release from an intolerable burden. He believed, as well, that the present crisis held out an opportunity to effect a vast internal reformation of Catholicism. And so long as he considered only the ecclesiastical aspects of the question, he could speak freely and even exuberantly of the "blessing of the revolution."⁶⁴ Yet, as he made abundantly clear, the satisfaction with which he regarded the practical outcome of the events of 1860 did not indicate an immediate change in his political opinions. The Italian question remained in his eyes the focal point of a great struggle between opposing doctrines of the nature of authority. He continued to insist that the Liberal view was totally revolutionary, because it was founded on the notion that "the people are the supreme arbiters of their own destinies."⁶⁵ And by the same token he persisted in denouncing as criminal the idea that a neutral country could be invaded by its neighbours, simply on the presumption that its inhabitants desired a change in government.⁶⁶ It is also true that Acton refused to share the sentiments of the extreme Legitimists:⁶⁷ he had never really believed that the prerogatives of authority were unconditional. But his own position remained that sovereignty was as sacred a right as freedom, and that

⁶⁴ Acton to Simpson, 2 May 1861, ASC, II, p. 145.

⁶⁵ "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 128.

⁶⁶ Acton to Simpson, 20 December 1861, ASC, II, p. 241.

⁶⁷ "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 128.

therefore a ruler could not be dismissed merely at the whim of his subjects.⁶⁸ Before Acton could concede that the papal government was indefensible on political grounds, he had to be convinced that its defects outweighed its claim to authority. That was a conclusion that he did not reach until more than a year after Döllinger encouraged him to welcome the loss of the Papal States. Even when he did at last admit that the administration in Rome had failed to fulfil "the legal conditions of a good government," he still remained adamant that its faults disappeared by comparison to "the iniquity of the Piedmontese intrigue."⁶⁹

For the development of his political ideas, the initial importance of Acton's change of position on the Temporal Power was not that it signified a ready acceptance of Liberal theories, but rather that in practical terms it removed one of the chief barriers which had been separating him from the Whig party and especially from William Ewart Gladstone. By the mid-1860s, Gladstone would exercise an influence over Acton which was comparable only to Döllinger's; and that influence would be founded above all on the fact that he displayed in politics the same disinterested devotion to truth that Döllinger exhibited in historical research. Yet, up until 1861, Acton had seen Gladstone primarily as a violently partisan critic of the papal cause--as a man whose "excessive

⁶⁸ See Acton's statement in Rome and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), 318: "The true doctrine of divine right condemns arbitrary power as absolutely as wanton rebellion. It is vain to say that a state must be preserved for the sake of religion, or that it must be destroyed to serve some great national end. A legitimate government cannot justly be destroyed for one purpose, or an arbitrary government preserved for the other."

⁶⁹ "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (May 1862), 550.

earnestness of conviction" accounted for much of his force, but whose very ardour allowed him to persuade himself of whatever it was he wished to believe.⁷⁰ Italy was not the only issue on which Acton opposed Gladstone. He also believed, for instance, that Gladstone's refusal as Chancellor of the Exchequer to allot more funds for national defence was based on a foolish misinterpretation of Napoleon's intentions.⁷¹ But undoubtedly it was hearing Gladstone denounce the papal government in language as strong as he had previously applied to Neapolitan prisons that brought Acton's displeasure to a peak. In the Rambler for September 1859,⁷² after launching a general attack on the foreign policy of the Whigs, he singled out a speech in which Gladstone had characterised the Pope as a ruler so unloved that he was obliged to rely on foreign bayonets in order to hold his subjects in shackles. Such a portrayal, Acton said, was a "stupid and impudent calumny," rendered all the more invidious by the fact that Gladstone himself did not believe it. And indeed, Gladstone's "vituperation against the papacy," like his recent transition from Peelite to Whig, indicated how far ambition had induced him to sacrifice principle in the hope of advancing his career. Engaging in a little vituperation of his own, Acton wrote:

He has been respectable too long and it has not answered. He has resolved to turn over a new leaf, and to try whether he will not be more acceptable to the country by borrowing something of Lord Palmerston's contempt for right, some of the claptrap of Lord John, and some of the bitterness of Mr. Newdegate.

⁷⁰"National Defence," Rambler, III, 3rd ser. (September 1860), 291.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²"Home Affairs," Rambler, I, 3rd ser. (September 1859), 402-407.

But in sacrificing his old friends, he will not be sure of the new. It is easy to lose respectability; it is not easy to obtain popularity. His new allies will never forget his past career, they will never think him one of themselves. And they will be right; for in his assumed bigotry and his radical politics he has neither the merit of sincerity nor the excuse of blindness.⁷³

The influence of anti-Catholic sentiment was a theme to which Acton returned almost every time he discussed the Whig attitude toward the Italian conflict. Even when he was prepared to concede that their policy was founded in part on a "disinterested desire to see representative government triumphant in Italy," he qualified his remarks by saying that behind the public statements of ministers lay a secret wish to destroy "the hierarchical organisation, which renders Catholicism so formidable to statesmen."⁷⁴ But in the case of Gladstone, whose Puseyite sympathies were well known, he applied this criticism in a special way. The desire to see the divine character of the Church subjected to a critical test, he said, was felt "not only by those who hated her, but still more by those who feared her because they had felt her influence."⁷⁵

Although the diminishing importance of the Italian question certainly did not mean that Acton instantly embraced Gladstone's views, other issues were coming to the fore just then on which they could far more readily agree. In the same number of the Rambler that contained Acton's report of the Odeon Lectures, he published a long essay on the

⁷³Ibid., 407.

⁷⁴"Home Affairs," Rambler, IV, 3rd ser. (March 1861), 426-427; quoted by MacDougall, Acton-Newman Relations, p. 71.

⁷⁵Ibid. That Acton was referring to Gladstone here is clear from his letter to Döllinger of 4/5 June 1861, DB, I, p. 213.

American Civil War.⁷⁶ His sympathies were entirely on the side of the Confederates; and, in fact, he defended them by invoking the same principle as he had previously applied to the situation in Italy. Once more, in Acton's opinion, the real issue was whether tradition and law would reign supreme, or whether they would be subverted by an omnipotent State which based its claims on the will of the people. This time, however, he found that his ideas coincided exactly with Gladstone's. On 2 May 1861 he delivered an abstract of his article to a small group which included, besides Gladstone, Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford. When he first realised that his remarks had been well received, he reacted with characteristic arrogance, telling Simpson that his views had been presented "to the astonishment of the ignorant audience, especially of the ignorant Gladstone."⁷⁷ But a few days later he received a note which completely altered his attitude.

I have read your valuable and remarkable paper [Gladstone wrote to him]. Its principles of politics I embrace: its research and wealth of knowledge I admire: and its whole atmosphere, if I may so speak, is that which I desire to breathe. It is a truly English paper.⁷⁸

That Gladstone should have approved Acton's sentiments was not in itself surprising. Support for the South was very common indeed among well-informed Englishmen, and Lord Granville also was sufficiently impressed with Acton's essay to recommend that he publish it as a pamphlet.⁷⁹ But

⁷⁶"Political Causes of the American Revolution," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 17-61: reprinted ECS, pp. 291-338.

⁷⁷Acton to Simpson, 2 May 1861, ASC, II, p. 146.

⁷⁸Gladstone to Acton, 8 May 1861, Correspondence, p. 158.

⁷⁹See Acton to Döllinger, 4/5 June 1861, DE, I, p. 213.

Gladstone's lavish praise, coming as it did at a time when Acton was in danger of becoming more isolated than ever from his fellow Catholics, must have been irresistible.

From the beginning of 1861 onwards, the relationship between Acton and Gladstone was based on ever-increasing mutual admiration. Since Gladstone had been for many years a friend of Döllinger, there existed from the start a natural bond between them: it seems likely, in fact, that Gladstone's interest in Acton was at first aroused by the expectation that he would find in Döllinger's protégé a congenial companion with whom he could discuss questions of scholarship.⁸⁰ Acton certainly derived great satisfaction from the manner in which Gladstone consulted him, and he eagerly supplied information on ancient history and classical philosophy.⁸¹ In the meantime, he found more and more reason to be assured that in political matters Gladstone was not, as he had previously feared, drifting in the direction of radical policies.⁸² It was perhaps typical of Acton that, as he came to understand Gladstone's opinions with greater accuracy, he sometimes spoke as if Gladstone were actually being converted to his ideas. (On one occasion, after Gladstone delivered a speech on qualifications for office, Acton announced with

⁸⁰It is interesting to note that of the correspondence between Acton and Gladstone which has survived, the earliest letter, dated 1860, is one in which Acton responds to a request from Gladstone to provide him with a list of the best German authorities on primitive religions. (Gladstone Papers, VIII, B.M. Add. MSS. 44,093, ff. 1-5.)

⁸¹See Acton's letters to Döllinger of late July 1860, 13 August 1861, and 30 June 1863, in DB, I, p. 179, p. 217, and p. 316 respectively.

⁸²See Acton to Döllinger, 4 May 1861, DB, I, p. 204.

great pleasure that "He has jumped with both feet into Home & Foreign-
dom."⁸³) In reality, however, the transformation that was taking place
had far more to do with Acton's growing awareness that policies which
he himself regarded as touchstones of good statesmanship had long been
part of Gladstone's programme.⁸⁴ This was especially true at first in
matters of political economy, and in this respect Gladstone's budget of
1861 may be said to have marked an important stage in Acton's progressive
conversion. "Gladstone," Acton wrote to Simpson at the time, "has
brought forward his budget in a very tame, straightforward speech . . .
I rejoice at the confirmation it contains of my view that he is not
inclined to Democracy, or to class legislation, but tries to carry out
true principles of economy. He spoke very well on direct & indirect
taxation, and balanced different interests by remitting a penny of direct
taxation, and removing at the same time the paper duty."⁸⁵

To this it must be added immediately that the considerable
enthusiasm with which Acton greeted most of Gladstone's financial
measures did not signal a change in his attitude toward the Whig party
in general. Even though his approval of Gladstone's work as Chancellor
increased steadily, he by no means felt a sudden admiration for other
members of the Cabinet, nor did he display a new willingness to support

⁸³ Acton to Simpson, 5 March 1863, ASC, III, p. 91.

⁸⁴ On 3 September 1862, for instance, Acton wrote to Gladstone: "I did not know before that you had formerly spoken in favour of the utmost attainable simplicity of taxation and the least possible number of taxes." (Gladstone Papers, VIII, B.M. Add. MSS. 44, 093, f. 15.)

⁸⁵ See Acton to Simpson, 15 April 1861, ASC, II, p. 143.

the Whigs on every issue. On the contrary, he was still insisting, as late as 1863, that there were some issues on which he differed from them as much as he did from the Tories.⁸⁶ The point was, however, that his growing admiration for Gladstone allowed him to envisage a new future for the party. With astonishing speed, he not only reached the conclusion that Gladstone was certain to emerge one day as the leader of the Liberals,⁸⁷ but he also came to see in him a fundamental alternative to the complacent pragmatism of men such as Palmerston. In 1859, when Gladstone had joined the Whig government, Acton had accused him of duplicity and place-hunting;⁸⁸ but early in 1864, he wrote to him as follows: "There can be nobody who would not consider it a great calamity if your misgivings had been allowed to prevail at the formation of the government or at any subsequent period, not so much for the sake of the present ministry as for that of a future ministry [through] which I hope that you will succeed in carrying out in other departments of state the same scientific consistency which you have already imparted to the financial system of the country."⁸⁹

What set the seal on Acton's conversion was the expectation that, under Gladstone's leadership, the Whig party would once more hold out

⁸⁶ Acton to Granville, [1863]; quoted by Conzanius, DB, I, p. 318, n. 2.

⁸⁷ See Acton's letters to Döllinger of 4 May 1861, 26 May 1862, 5 March 1863, and 21 April 1863, in DB, I, p. 204, p. 265, p. 296, and p. 302 respectively.

⁸⁸ See above pp. 146-147.

⁸⁹ Acton to Gladstone, 9 January 1864, Gladstone Papers, VIII, B.M. Add. MSS. 44, 093, ff. 41-42.

the prospect of a meaningful alliance for Catholics. At the beginning of his association with the Rambler, one of the points on which he had been most insistent was that Catholics no longer had anything to gain by identifying themselves with the Liberals. "We have got," he had said, "about as much as we shall get from them."⁹⁰ And nothing had happened in the course of the third Palmerston government to alter his attitude in this respect. If anything, Acton's disenchantment with the conventional policies of the Whigs had deepened, for he had found that in domestic as well as in foreign affairs, they did little to satisfy Catholic demands.⁹¹ Yet, as his friendship with Gladstone grew, he began to detect encouraging signs that his ascendancy would bring an improvement. At first Acton's hopes had been focussed on the possibility of overcoming the minor but insulting disabilities which Emancipation had failed to remove. He had been utterly delighted, for instance, when Gladstone had spoken against the oath of allegiance which was still required of Catholic M. P.'s;⁹² and he had confidently asserted that this statement could be taken as Gladstone's "self-declaration as future head of the Whig party."⁹³ But it was Gladstone's attitude toward Ireland, and toward the Irish Church in particular, that eventually proved decisive. Despite the casual indifference with which Acton treated his

⁹⁰ Acton to Simpson, 16 February 1858, ASC, I, pp. 6-7.

⁹¹ See the report of Acton's speech at Dudley reprinted from The Birmingham Daily Post in DB, III, p. 437.

⁹² Acton to Simpson, 5 March 1863, ASC, III, p. 91.

⁹³ Acton to Döllinger, 5 March 1863, DB, I, p. 296.

own constituents in Carlow, this was the issue that he had come to regard as paramount among the political concerns of the English as well as the Irish Catholics. By comparison, he said, all other grievances were "mere paltry vexation."⁹⁴ And nothing had caused him greater displeasure than the Irish policy of the Palmerston Whigs. By 1863, he was citing their refusal to grant a charter to the Dublin University as sufficient cause to vote against them on a motion of confidence,⁹⁵ and it is significant that, at almost the same time, he was eagerly waiting for some definite indication of Gladstone's attitude toward disestablishment.⁹⁶ According to his recollection many years later, the decisive moment came during a conversation at Cliveden in 1864. He told Mary Gladstone in 1888 that her father had expressed himself so candidly on that occasion that, at the end of their talk, he not only knew that he would disestablish but also that "he was going along the path leading to where he stands now."⁹⁷ Presumably Acton meant by this that Gladstone had indicated a desire to carry out a wide-ranging programme of reforms in Ireland, in addition to the specific matter of disestablishment. If he intended to go further and to say that he had heard Gladstone speak of Home Rule at that early date, then it is

⁹⁴Speech at Dudley, 23 January 1863, DB, III, p. 437.

⁹⁵Acton to Döllinger, 23 January 1863, DE, I, p. 294. See also Acton to Döllinger, 30 June 1863, DB, I, p. 316.

⁹⁶Acton to Döllinger, 21 April 1863, DE, I, p. 302.

⁹⁷Acton to Mary Gladstone, 15 August 1888; printed in Herbert Paul, ed., Letters of Lord Acton to Mary, Daughter of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, 2nd ed. revised (London: MacMillan & Co., 1913), p. 187.

virtually certain that hindsight had led him to exaggerate. Yet there can be no question that the conversation to which he referred marked a major turning-point in his own development. "I have always kept that day, March 31, 1864," he said, "as the date of getting the future policy of Liberalism quite clear before me . . .".⁹⁸

It is remarkable, and indeed astonishing, that when Acton first spoke against the Temporal Power, he did not appreciate fully the effect that his behaviour would have on his relationship with his fellow Catholics. On the one hand, he was conscious that the position that he had adopted was highly controversial and that it was likely to give rise to heated disputes; on the other, he was so firmly convinced that his views were correct that he often spoke as though this in itself would dispel opposition. Even after the storm had broken, he was capable of taking at times an exceedingly optimistic view. At one stage he confidently assured Simpson that the time could not be distant when the Roman question would be solved in a manner which would confirm all that they had said. In his present circumstances, he explained, Pio Nono had only two real options before him: either he would have to come to terms with Sardinia, in which case the Rambler would be "more popish than the

⁹⁸Ibid.

popé"; or he would be compelled to withdraw to Bavaria. Acton admitted that the latter course, if chosen, would not provide an immediate solution to the problem of free inquiry, which had compounded the difficulties occasioned by the Rambler's politics. But still, he added hopefully, "a German exile will soon effect a change even in this respect."⁹⁹

The first serious blow to Acton's confidence came less than two months after the Odeon Lectures. In his Whitsun sermon for 1861, Father Faber took the opportunity to warn the faithful against false prophets. He made a point of stressing the need to be on guard even against Catholic publications; and although he mentioned neither Acton nor the Rambler by name, he left little doubt to whom he referred. The value of a man's judgement, he said, depended not on his knowledge but on his piety. In matters affecting the relationship of the Church to the world, the only safe doctors were the saints. If a man tried to persuade others on these subjects, his life rather than his learning must be the test. And Faber continued:

There is something very horrible in a Catholic's disloyalty to the Church, but there is surely a peculiar horror about it in a misbelieving land. Unfortunate and singularly graceless as it is when it comes from the imperfect Catholicism or the reluctant submission of a convert, it is worse when it comes from the ungenerous timidity or the intellectual pride of one who has had the inestimable happiness of being born in the bosom of the Church.¹⁰⁰

Taken by itself, this sly and petty insult might have been dismissed as

⁹⁹ Acton to Simpson, 10 October 1861, ASC, II, p. 187.

¹⁰⁰ Report of Faber's sermon in the Weekly Register for 1 June 1861; quoted by Conzemius, DB, I, p. 212, n. 1.

a minor annoyance. Although Acton was indeed very indignant at the manner in which Faber had chosen to attack him, he conducted himself with dignity and restraint, and he refused to allow Simpson to defend him in print.¹⁰¹ Yet what did trouble him deeply was the eagerness with which others took up Faber's words. The Tablet, for instance, spoke approvingly of Faber's "eloquent condemnation"; and the Weekly Register, which was as a rule moderately Liberal in politics, went so far as to say that Father Faber "expresses, only with his peculiar eloquence, exactly what we have often repeated."¹⁰² It was from remarks such as these that Acton began to develop the feeling that he was the object of unjust personal resentment. In public he gave no sign that he had been shaken in his determination to adhere to his views; but his private correspondence reveals the beginning of a tendency to lapse into periods of extreme despondency. While Faber's attack was still a common topic of conversation among the English Catholics, Acton confided in Newman: "I feel very painfully that I am altogether unworthy to be regarded as the champion in this country of the cause which is yours, and [that] the cause suffers by its identification with me."¹⁰³

Still, the friction between Acton and his fellow English Catholics was almost unimportant compared to the news which he received on 18 June 1861. On that day, Henry Edward Manning, who was by this time unofficial

¹⁰¹ Acton to Simpson, 10 June 1861, ASC, II, p. 150.

¹⁰² The comments of both the Tablet and the Weekly Register are quoted by Dessain, L&D, XIX, p. 503, n. 2 and n. 3.

¹⁰³ Acton to Newman, 4 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 504.

deputy to Wiseman, called upon Acton in London to inform him that the Cardinal had received a letter from Antonelli, in which the latter complained of the failure of Irish Catholic M. P.'s to vote against the Palmerston government. Apparently, Antonelli had drawn a direct connection between the behaviour of these M. P.'s and the policies advocated in the Rambler. He had also written to Wiseman with the cognizance and approval of the Pope. The likelihood, therefore, was that a condemnation of the Rambler was pending in Rome.¹⁰⁴

Even though Manning made clear that the message he bore was of an official character, his ostensible purpose in visiting Acton in person was to help him escape an ecclesiastical censure. To this apparent end, he implored Acton to suppress the Rambler before it was too late, or at least to break off his own connection with it.¹⁰⁵ There is good reason to believe, however, that Manning's intentions were not really quite so straightforward. What he probably hoped to achieve was simply the immediate cessation of the Rambler. Even during his interview with Acton, he expressed the opinion that the journal had been doing great harm of late and that the best course would therefore be to bring it to a close.¹⁰⁶ According to his biographer, he had also told Monsignor Talbot only two weeks earlier that he hoped to be able to report before long that the Rambler had ceased publication.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ See Acton to Newman, 19 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 517.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Manning to Talbot, 4 June 1861, as quoted by Edmund Sheridan Purcell, Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster, (2 vols.: London: MacMillan and Co., 1896), II, p. 384.

Whether Acton detected Manning's real motives at first is not entirely clear. Up until that time, his relations with Manning had been surprisingly good;¹⁰⁸ and even after their interview, Acton said that Manning's "personal kindness was extreme."¹⁰⁹ What cannot be doubted, however, is that Acton was profoundly disturbed by the warning that Manning delivered. It marked the first direct intervention by Rome in the affairs of the Rambler. It also seemed to show that Rome was quite willing to use its spiritual authority in order to defend a secular interest. And perhaps most important, from Acton's point of view, it made clear that the Rambler's political independence had proven decisive against it, despite constant complaints about its transgressions on the field of theology. Even Newman, who had so often argued in the other direction, was quick to acknowledge this point. "It is worth observing," he said, "that the R[ambler] has been untouched, till politics came in."¹¹⁰

To judge from this comment alone, one might have thought that the harassment which the Rambler was suffering might at least produce the beneficial effect of bringing about a welcome change in Newman's attitude. Since he was finally convinced that the Rambler was not safe even when restricting itself to profane subjects, it would have seemed logical to expect that he would at last come out unequivocally in support of its

¹⁰⁸Less than ten days before their meeting concerning Antonelli's letter, Acton had assured Newman that "Manning is on the best terms with me." (Acton to Newman, 9 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 511.)

¹⁰⁹Acton to Newman, 19 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 517.

¹¹⁰Newman to Acton, 20 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 518.

position. Acton seems to have been half counting on this when he first wrote to Newman to explain about Manning's visit and about the threat of proceedings at Rome. He suggested to Newman that the best way out of the difficulty might be to try to evade censure by converting the Rambler to a quarterly.¹¹¹ His reasoning here was that a new review with a new name would be immune from condemnation, while at the same time it would allow the Rambler to survive in a different form. But Newman's response to this suggestion came as a bitter disappointment to Acton. Even though he made clear his indignation at Antonelli's high-handed interference, he still advised that the best course would be simply to bring the Rambler to a close.¹¹² It seemed to him that official disapproval, however unfair, had placed it in an impossible position.¹¹³ This was a view which Acton found startling, and he could only tell Newman for the present that "there is something in your view of the importance belonging to the decrease of authority for which I was not at all prepared . . .".¹¹⁴ In the meantime, he kept the Rambler alive, and in July 1862 he proceeded with its conversion to a quarterly. But he knew that he did so without Newman's full support.

The entire crisis which was brought on by these developments was exacerbated still further for Acton by a profound disturbance that he was suffering at the time in his personal life. Only a matter of days

¹¹¹ Acton to Newman, 19 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 517.

¹¹² Newman to Acton, 20 June 1861, L&D, XIX, pp. 518-519.

¹¹³ Ibid.; and Newman to Acton, 30 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 523.

¹¹⁴ Acton to Newman, 2 July 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 524.

before his interview with Manning he had hinted to Newman that his engagement to Marie Arco had been broken off.¹¹⁵ The details of this story are not clear, even from Acton's personal correspondence; but it appears that he had a rival in his bid for Marie's affections and that Marie actually preferred the attentions of Acton's competitor. Acton did eventually win her hand, of course, but only after a long period of painful uncertainty and upset. The whole affair was especially difficult for him to bear because it interfered with his relationship with the entire Arco family, and especially with Countess Arco, to whom he was so deeply attached. As Marie's attitude toward Acton grew cool, Countess Arco apparently grew distant as well,¹¹⁶ if only because of the awkwardness of the situation. Her refusal to offer Acton advice, or even to discuss the matter with him in detail, made him feel totally rejected and isolated. In an extraordinarily emotional letter, which clearly was written after the death of Acton's own mother, he confessed to the Countess that his sorrow consisted not only in being deprived of her daughter's affection, but also in the loss of "the only home I have ever known."¹¹⁷ For the first time, he said, he felt "what it is to be really an orphan."¹¹⁸

The bearing which this personal trial had on Acton's attitude toward his conflict with the Church authorities was not merely accidental.

¹¹⁵ Acton to Newman, 4 June 1861, L&D, XIX, p. 504.

¹¹⁶ See Acton to Countess Arco, [1861?], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L., (Family Correspondence).

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

If it had simply had the effect of making him more sensitive and irritable, then it would have been harmful enough; but the fact is that Acton himself believed that the two great crises through which he was passing were directly connected. Even though he knew that the basic reasons for his broken engagement were personal, he also came to believe that influential churchmen had interfered in the affair as a way of punishing him. The basic accusation which he made in this respect was directed against Monsignor Nardi, a member of the Roman Curia. On 12 October 1862, Acton complained bitterly to Döllinger that Nardi had written a letter to Marie "which contains all possible detrimental things against me."¹¹⁹ In addition to this charge, however, Acton also made plain that he suspected Manning of having had a hand in the affair. In a letter to Newman, which contained an oblique reference to the same incident, Acton not only said that the Curia had tried to do him a private injury, but he also added that he greatly feared that the attempt had been made "with the concurrence of Manning."¹²⁰ Acton's precise suspicion seems to have been that Manning had supplied information for Nardi's damaging letter to Marie.¹²¹ By this time, Acton had already begun to speak of Manning's "Mephistophelian treachery and craft."¹²²

Virtually the only consolation that Acton enjoyed through this long

¹¹⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 1 November 1862, DB, I, p. 284.

¹²⁰ Acton to Newman, 5 April 1862, L&D, XX, p. 192.

¹²¹ Acton to Döllinger, 1 November 1862, DB, I, p. 284.

¹²² Acton to Simpson, 10 October 1861, ASC, II, p. 186.

period of tribulation arose from the success which his new quarterly, the Home and Foreign Review, enjoyed among non-Catholic readers. The Home and Foreign was introduced in July 1862, as a replacement for the Rambler, and almost immediately it attained widespread recognition among educated readers in England. It was a much more substantial publication than its predecessor, partly because it was a quarterly rather than a monthly, but also partly because of the variety of distinguished writers from whom Acton was able to obtain contributions. Some of these authors were foreign Catholics, others were members of the Dublin University faculty, and still others were English Protestants. Acton was especially glad to accept the contributions of non-Catholic friends, for although he intended the review to maintain its character as primarily a Catholic publication, it had been a main part of his purpose from the outset to reach Protestant readers.¹²³ If the Home and Foreign Review had one supreme function in his eyes, it was to prove by example that not all Catholics were incapable of intelligent discussion. By the time that two numbers had appeared, he was justifiably convinced that it was well on its way to achieving this goal.¹²⁴

But the English Catholics took little notice of the acclaim which the Home and Foreign won in non-Catholic circles. To most of them it was neither more nor less than the Rambler in disguise, and so they continued to regard it with the utmost suspicion. In the eyes of the bishops especially, the continuity between the two reviews was a matter of

¹²³ See Acton to Döllinger, 28 January 1862, DB, I, p. 248.

¹²⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 10 October 1862, DB, I, p. 280.

considerable importance, for in May 1862 they had received from Cardinal Barnabò of Propaganda a circular letter enumerating the Rambler's offences and calling upon them to warn the faithful against it.¹²⁵ This was, of course, precisely the sort of measure that Acton had hoped to avoid when he had originally suggested replacing the Rambler with a new review. He might even have succeeded had he carried out his plan consistently. But at the last minute he committed a serious tactical error by allowing a notice to be published which deliberately encouraged the idea that the Home and Foreign Review was simply an "enlargement of the Rambler."¹²⁶ The consequence of this was that when the first number of the new review appeared, the way was already prepared for its condemnation.¹²⁷ In August 1862, Cardinal Wiseman published a letter to his clergy, in which he complained of a passage that contained (he said) a "covert insinuation" against him. He made a point of commenting that the irreverent attitude of the Home and Foreign was scarcely surprising in view of its antecedents; and he clearly indicated that in rebuking it he was acting on an authority higher than his own. Within a matter of weeks, all the bishops save one had followed his example. Their pastorals were aimed chiefly at the Rambler; but only Brown of Shrewsbury, who had consulted Acton beforehand, refrained from mentioning the Home and Foreign.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ See Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, p. 187.

¹²⁶ "Enlargement of the Rambler," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (May 1862), 429-431.

¹²⁷ On this point, see MacDougall, Acton-Newman Relations, p. 82.

¹²⁸ See Altholz, Liberal Catholic Movement, pp. 188-189.

The result of this new onslaught was that it completely removed any chance that the Home and Foreign might have had of obtaining influence among the majority of Catholics. But a still worse aspect of Acton's situation was that he was also rapidly losing the support even of the few Catholics who had previously been disposed to support him. This tendency increased when he refused to do anything to placate the bishops, and it extended even to some of the contributors to the Home and Foreign. What distinguished the attitude of these men was not hostility toward Acton, but rather a feeling of disappointment with him. Although they remained convinced that he was capable of accomplishing much that was good, they found it increasingly difficult to escape the conclusion that he was placing his own cause in jeopardy. To some of them at least, it appeared that it was not so much his ideas as the manner in which he expressed them that gave rise to so many difficulties. Their greatest fear, perhaps, was that by alienating the majority of English Catholics, he would manage only to leave a clear field for his enemies. This was the chief concern of William Monsell, who wrote to Newman as follows:

I am afraid [that] if Acton does not change--not his principle but his tone he will be set aside by Catholics and the resuscitated Dublin, which, under Ward, will be, I presume, a sort of echo of the Universe [i.e. Univers], will be the only acknowledged Catholic organ. I wrote to Acton to suggest a council of direction, such as the Correspondant is managed by, and the appointment of a theologian to revise articles on subjects such as Reason and Faith--He is so sensitive that I could not say what I wished to him about the affectation of superiority and the lecturing, as if from an eminence, Bishops and priests--He does not see his way to any change. I look on the success of a review conducted on his principles as a matter of the deepest interest to us all--I have been much among the English Catholics in the last month, and they are so furious against the Home and Foreign that it is useless

to argue with them about it.¹²⁹

Others who at various times expressed sentiments similar to those of Monsell were Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, Thomas Arnold Jr., and J. W. Roberts.¹³⁰ These men differed from one another in the degree to which they placed the blame for the problem directly on Acton--some were, of course, alarmed by Simpson's writings; but each of them argued that the Rambler and Home and Foreign suffered chiefly from a want of tact, and from a tendency to present ideas in an unnecessarily provocative form.

If Acton had been willing to acknowledge that there was an element of truth in what people such as Monsell said, then his own view of his worsening relationship with his fellow Catholics might at least have taken on a slightly less bitter quality. Under the circumstances, it was possible for him to continue to believe that he had been treated unfairly by the hierarchy, while at the same time acknowledging that he had often provoked controversy by his haughty tone and unwarranted jibes at the authorities. Unfortunately, however, Acton had by this time already progressed beyond the point where he was prepared to take a conciliatory view of the situation. In October 1862, he had published his reply to the pastoral letters in which the bishops had attacked the Home and Foreign. The article itself, entitled "Cardinal Wiseman and the

¹²⁹ Monsell to Newman, 7 November 1862, L&D, XX, p. 347, n. 2.

¹³⁰ Phillipps de Lisle to Acton, 5 March 1862, C.U.L. Add. 4989, f. 191; Arnold to Newman, 16 October 1862, L&D, XX, p. 297, n. 1; and Roberts to Simpson, n.d., Downside MSS., as quoted in MacDougall, Acton-Newman Relations, pp. 83-84.

Home and Foreign Review,¹³¹ was an eloquent statement of the principle that the demands of truth and justice must never be subordinated to considerations of religious expediency. It made perfectly clear that the intention of the editors was to adhere to this principle in spite of official opposition, and, of course, it contained an implied criticism of all Catholics who took a different view. But even so its full significance for Acton did not emerge until some months later. As Acton reflected upon the events that had taken place since the founding of the Home and Foreign, it seemed more and more apparent to him that animosity toward it was excited, not by anything disrespectful in its tone, nor even by its disregard for the wishes of the authorities, but purely and simply by its insistence that even the interests of religion must bow before the demands of conscience. In "Cardinal Wiseman and the Home and Foreign Review," he solemnly told Döllinger, he had given a complete explanation of the scientific standards which inspired the efforts of the journal. It was impossible to believe, therefore, that further attacks upon it were prompted by anything other than its principles. Additional accusations against himself and Simpson could be regarded only as pretences--pretences by which their opponents sought to conceal their own willingness to defend the Church by immoral means.¹³² At this point, Acton no longer thought reconciliation possible; nor did he really wish for it; his underlying motive became increasingly to

¹³¹"Cardinal Wiseman and the Home and Foreign Review," Home and Foreign Review, I (October 1862), 501-520; reprinted in HOF, pp. 436-460.

¹³²Acton to Döllinger, 7 January 1863, DB, I, p. 288.

force his enemies into the open, to expose to the full light of day the true reason why they attacked him, and, as he himself said, to bring to consciousness everywhere in the Church the same fundamental opposition which separated the Rome and Foreign from the English bishops.¹³³ What disturbed him so profoundly in the attitude of his fellow Catholics was not merely their intolerance or their constant hostility toward him. Far more important by this time was their evident willingness to accept the view that, where the interests of the Church were at stake, moral considerations might be put aside.¹³⁴

The full implications of Acton's new position, however, can only be understood if one recognises that they extended far beyond the boundaries of English Catholicism. The change that had taken place in his attitude consisted primarily in a heightened tendency to stress the ethical elements in his disputes with his co-religionists; but if this was true of his dealings with Catholics in England, it applied equally to his relationship with many of his Catholic acquaintances abroad. The connecting link between these two simultaneous developments in Acton's outlook was the Roman question. On the one hand, he knew that it was his unorthodox position on the Temporal Power which lay at the root of his difficulties in England; this was one issue on which English Catholics were certainly not prepared to sacrifice the interests of the Church for the sake of general principles. On the other hand, the

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. One remark which especially disturbed Acton was Ullathorne's statement, made in the course of a controversy with Simpson, that "souls must be won at all hazards."

approach which many foreign Catholics adopted toward the Roman question caused him to grow increasingly disenchanted with their views as well. The question for Acton was not so much whether these men defended or opposed the Temporal Power--he himself had taken both positions at different times. What concerned him more were the criteria by which they judged the issue, and in particular the extent to which they let religious expediency take precedence over political principle. Again, it was the Liberal Catholics of France whom Acton was especially inclined to criticise.

Acton had begun to express sharp disapproval of Montalembert's position on the Temporal Power as early as 1859, at a time when both men were firmly committed to the defence of the papal cause. Even though he agreed with him at that time about the necessity of preserving the Papal States, he had found Montalembert's way of presenting this case unsatisfactory on a couple of points. In the first place, it bothered him that Montalembert protested against the treatment which the Pope had received, while at the same time seeing nothing outrageous in the attack against Austria.¹³⁵ In the second place, he was annoyed that even as Montalembert deplored the insurrections in Central Italy, he ardently proclaimed his devotion to the twin doctrines of popular rule and national sovereignty.¹³⁶ It was the inconsistency rather than the illiberality of Montalembert's position which had offended Acton, for it seemed to him to betoken a disregard for principle. As his

¹³⁵ Acton to Döllinger, mid-November 1859, DB, I, p. 174.

¹³⁶ "The Roman Question," Rambler, II, 3rd ser. (January 1860), 153.

conviction that this was the case grew in intensity, he attacked the Liberal Catholics in the Rambler in the sharpest possible terms.

Liberalism [he wrote on one occasion] suits them only when it does not clash with religion. By an honourable inconsistency they sacrifice politics to religion, where they feel the antagonism, and do not understand that between political and religious truths antagonism is as impossible as between scientific and religious truths. This party is to blame as much as any other for the calamities which it is the first to deplore, for it hushed the conscience of the Catholic world at the first acts which led to the present disaster. Those who applauded the invasion of Lombardy have no right to lament the annexation of the Romagna, for those events are connected as cause and effect, and if the guilt in both cases is not equal, it was greater in the first.¹³⁷

It is worth repeating here that Acton was not complaining because the Liberal Catholics were not sufficiently liberal. His grievance was rather that they took a liberal view of one aspect of the Italian war and a conservative view of the other, depending on which interests were at stake.

The only occasion on which Acton relented in his criticisms of the Liberal Catholics was when Döllinger's Kirche und Kirchen appeared, and he himself began to advocate the abandonment of the Temporal Power. For a moment, his sympathy seemed to be aroused by the dilemma in which they found themselves, for he acknowledged that if they were to come out in favour of Döllinger's views, they would commit a serious tactical error in their struggle with Napoleon III.¹³⁸ But whatever the motivation for this apparent change of heart, it was short-lived. By March 1862, he was denouncing the French Liberal Catholics in harsher terms than ever.

¹³⁷"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, V, 3rd ser. (May 1861), 128.

¹³⁸"Döllinger on the Temporal Power," HOF, pp. 315-316.

and even comparing them unfavourably to Louis Veuillot, whose fanaticism was consistent and manly, he said, compared to their willingness to abandon principle at the dictation of an interest and to defend a cause in which they did not believe.¹³⁹ Acton's indignation with Montalembert in particular grew even greater after he met him in London in January 1863 and heard him express the view that English Catholics ought to do all they could to disrupt the pro-Italian Whig government. "In that attitude," Acton wrote to Döllinger, "the entire immoral theory is contained."¹⁴⁰ It is perhaps significant that twenty years later Acton recalled that it was in 1863 that he had lost his last trace of sympathy for Montalembert; he could still remember the day, he said, on which he had "abandoned" him.¹⁴¹

It is necessary to add even to this that the way in which the question of the Temporal Power had brought into focus for Acton the problem of principle versus religious interests caused him by 1862 to show the first faint indications--but only faint indications--of his eventual break with Döllinger. Acton himself had begun by defending the Temporal Power; he had then followed Döllinger in the view that a temporary exile for the Pope would prove beneficial to the Church; and he had eventually reached the conclusion that the deficiencies of the papal government were so great that it had actually forfeited its claim to legitimate authority. He was painfully aware, however, that although

¹³⁹"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (March 1862), 424.

¹⁴⁰Acton to Döllinger, 7 January 1863, DB, I, pp. 288-289.

¹⁴¹Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, pp. 260-261.

Döllinger had played an important part in calling attention to these deficiencies, he still advocated the eventual restoration of the Temporal Power. Because of this, he could not avoid the suspicion that his teacher, like other Catholics, ultimately judged the Roman question only in terms of its importance to religion; and in a single, startling passage in the Rambler he actually accused Döllinger of inconsistency and of evading the real issue.¹⁴² The advantages of the Temporal Power to the Church, he said, could not be used as an argument unless the charge of misgovernment was entirely refuted.

We cannot hold that religion may be served by doing wrong; or that its interests suspend the obligations which in other cases are supreme . . .¹⁴³

This passage stands alone among Acton's writings from this period. He did not develop it further, and in fact he seems to have suppressed in his own mind the conclusion to which it might have led. Even though he continued silently to disagree with Döllinger over the future of the Temporal Power, he remained in all other respects a totally faithful disciple, whose devotion to his master seemed to increase in direct proportion to his disenchantment with other Catholics. But the mere fact that he had ventured even this far was testimony to the magnitude of the change through which he was beginning to pass.

¹⁴² "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (May 1862), 549-551.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 550.

Chapter V

NEW DIRECTIONS

Because the transition through which Acton's views were passing was both subtle and complex, it is necessary to exercise considerable caution in describing his development. It is especially important not to draw too definite a line between his "early" and "late" views, for his progress was not always steady and his attitude was not always free from an element of ambiguity. On the one hand, the controversy over the Temporal Power of the Pope had already brought about a significant change in his outlook. It had focussed his attention on what he considered to be important ethical issues, and, indeed, it had convinced him of the fundamental insincerity of many of his fellow Catholics. On the other hand, he would yet prove capable of reverting to an optimistic and even expansive mood. In the immediate future, he would find it possible not only to co-operate happily with a small circle of friends but also to believe that a great change in the direction of Catholic thought could still be achieved.

The two-sided nature of Acton's attitude at this stage of his career is evident from many incidents, but nothing calls attention to it more effectively than the events surrounding the cessation of the Home and Foreign Review. The immediate cause which led Acton to bring the Home and Foreign to a close was the condemnation, in the papal rescript Tuas libenter, of a speech delivered by Döllinger at the

famous Munich Congress of Catholic scholars in 1863. Since Döllinger's speech had been a call for a complete renovation of Catholic theology, and since it had appealed in particular to the idea that the traditional methods of scholasticism must be complemented and even replaced by free historical inquiry, Acton was not surprised that it should meet with displeasure in Rome. The fact that an official condemnation had been prepared, however, seemed to him to signal a heightened determination on the part of the authorities actually to enforce conformity to their views. The incident seemed to him so important that he decided to bring the Home and Foreign to a close.¹ It was a decision which he took with at least a certain amount of reluctance, for the Home and Foreign had proved a genuinely successful venture which had done much to improve the reputation of Catholic scholarship in England.

At the same time, however, it cannot be said that Acton's sense of loss was by any means unqualified. The truth is that the cessation of the Home and Foreign actually brought about a marked improvement in his disposition. The most obvious reason for this was simply that it freed him from the often burdensome responsibilities of editing a controversial review. No matter how much success the Home and Foreign had enjoyed in non-Catholic circles, it had still been a constant source of anxiety because of the ever-present danger that the opinions which it contained would offend its Catholic readers. By bringing it to an end, therefore, Acton was able to escape temporarily from the pressure of public controversy. Still more important, the cessation

¹See "Conflicts with Rome," Home and Foreign Review, IV (April 1864), 667-690; reprinted HOF, pp. 461-491.

of the review opened up for him the prospect of undertaking new projects--projects which might prove even more rewarding than the Home and Foreign without giving rise to the same sort of difficulties. The situation in which he found himself was similar to that which he had enjoyed all too briefly early in 1859, when he had retired temporarily from the Rambler. The difference this time was that he intended firmly to adhere to his decision to return to serious scholarship. When he was in fact invited to co-operate in the founding of a new Catholic journal, he politely but firmly refused.²

The reason why Acton was so determined at this stage to devote himself exclusively to scholarly endeavours was closely related to a change that had taken place in his estimate of the needs of English Catholics. He was still greatly concerned, as he had been at the outset of his career, to raise the intellectual standards of Catholics in England;³ but one effect of his experiences with the Rambler and the Home and Foreign had been to convince him that religious journalism was not, after all, the best method of achieving this goal. Originally, he had hoped that the influence of ably-written reviews might gradually bring about an improvement in English Catholic thought. In this sense, his ambition had been to use the reviews partly to prepare the way for more substantial literary ventures. But now, after several years of fruitless controversy, he was convinced that this had been the wrong approach. It seemed to him in the present circumstances that it would

²See Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1864 and 17 May 1864, DB, I, p. 352 and pp. 355-356.

³Acton to Döllinger, 4 April 1864, DB, I, p. 343.

be far better if he and his most capable colleagues refrained from journalistic activity in order to concentrate instead on the immediate production of serious and scholarly books.⁴ The advantages of the latter, as he saw it, would be three-fold: in the first place, they would possess an intrinsic and permanent merit; in the second, they would teach by direct example; in the third, they would not be so likely to provoke harmful controversies.⁵

Consequently, as Acton's attention turned to the new projects which he might undertake now that he was free from the responsibilities of editorship, it was with the idea firmly fixed in his mind that good would come of evil. The Home and Foreign had had to be sacrificed, partly because of the narrow-mindedness and intolerance of the English Catholics and, still more, because of the increasing intransigence of the Roman authorities; but on the other hand, its disappearance would make possible literary achievements of the greatest importance. These literary achievements, in turn, might serve to off-set, at least partially, the obscurantism which was encouraged by Rome. With these thoughts in mind, Acton began almost at once to urge his friends to devote their efforts to serious writing. Throughout the spring of 1864, he kept Döllinger informed of the various projects which were being entertained, often at his suggestion. Simpson, he reported, was working on Shakespeare; Renouf he had encouraged to write a History of Christian Literature; another colleague, whom he did not name, had been inspired

⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 9 March 1864, DE, I, p. 336.

⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 4 April 1864, DE, I, p. 343.

by his conversation to study medieval English history; and so on.⁶ Many of these books were never actually completed,⁷ but so long as the prospect that they would be written remained, it was a source of deep satisfaction to Acton. Not least of all, it restored his sense of accomplishment. He had set himself up as a sort of literary director among English Catholics, and from his new rôle he derived the feeling that he was once more making an important contribution to the cause of the Church. The frustrations of the past seemed for the moment to have given way to new successes.

Even Acton's private affairs soon took a sudden turn for the better. In November 1864, he was engaged (for the second time) to Marie Arco. The effect of this reconciliation with Marie was to enhance still further his feeling of well-being, not only in the sense that it brought him great personal happiness, but also in the sense that it tended to lend support to the new hopes and expectations which he entertained with respect to his career. It promised him, as he said, someone with whom he could "share the joys and sorrows of life."⁸ In the exuberant letters

⁶See Acton to Döllinger, mid-March 1864 and 4 May 1864, DB, I, p. 338 and p. 351. Besides the works mentioned above, Acton also reported that he was urging a man named Doyle to produce a revised edition of Lingard, that Wetherell was considering a work on Ireland, that Thomas Arnold Jr. might write something on Anglo-Saxon history, and that Henry Oxenham had a book on the Catholic doctrine of the atonement nearly ready.

⁷Only Simpson's work was published: Richard Simpson, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Shakespeare's Sonnets (London, 1868). Simpson also published Edmund Campion: A Biography in 1867. Henry Oxenham's book (see n. 6 above) appeared under the title The Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement (London, 1865).

⁸Acton to Döllinger, 23 November 1864, DB, I, p. 373.

which Acton wrote to his fiancée, he soon made clear that he would look to her to encourage especially his aspirations as a religious reformer. "You will learn in time," he told her on one occasion, "what it is to be so mixed up with the cause of the Church in this country that one's heart throbs with sympathy at every event that affects it. It is a position of life that greatly multiplies anxieties but increases also one's consolations."⁹

It is perhaps significant that Acton should have used the word "consolation" in this context, for, along with his belief that he now had the prospect of engaging in more fruitful endeavours, he appears to have felt at this time that his ability and insight were receiving a greater degree of recognition than they had previously. Partly, this was due to the sincere expressions of regret offered by many friends when he terminated the Home and Foreign;¹⁰ and partly it was a consequence of the care with which the same people now listened to his advice and suggestions.¹¹ But it was also partly due to the fact that Acton believed that some of his former enemies had modified their attitudes toward him. By 1865 at least, it was possible for him to say that many of those from

⁹ Acton to Marie, [June 1865]; printed in Damian McElrath et al., Lord Acton: The Decisive Decade, 1864-1874: Essays and Documents (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1970), p. 66.

¹⁰ See Acton to Döllinger, 27 March 1864, DB, I, p. 339.

¹¹ Besides the attention which Acton believed Simpson, Renouf, and others paid to his advice about writing serious books, he appears also to have been flattered by the attitude displayed towards him by those with whom he discussed the plan for a new review. This was especially true in the case of Moriarity. (See Acton to Döllinger, 17 May 1864, DB, I, p. 355).

whom he had hitherto expected only hostility were now showing him much good will.¹² In May of that year, for instance, he called upon Manning, who had recently been named Archbishop of Westminster, and found that he was received with the greatest cordiality. He suspected, it is true, that this show of friendship was in large part tactical; but that increased rather than diminished his pleasure, for it led him to the conclusion that Manning, fearing that he would be a formidable foe, was taking care to remain on his good side.¹³ It was the general sense that his importance was acknowledged that brought Acton such satisfaction. And in political as well as in ecclesiastical circles he soon discovered ample reason to feel flattered. As the General Election of 1865 approached, he made up his mind not to stand for Parliament again, and he arranged accordingly for a man named Dease to take his place at Carlow.¹⁴ The chief reason that he gave for his decision was that he could do more good by devoting his energy to scholarship--where, he said, he had "greater resources than any other person."¹⁵ Doubtless he was sincere in announcing his intention to withdraw from political life; but still he could scarcely resist

¹²Acton to Döllinger, 23 June 1865, DE, I, p. 413.

¹³Acton to Marie, [May 1865], Decisive Decade, p. 63. This experience seems to have been repeated nine months later. In a diary which Acton kept for part of 1866, he made the following entry for Feb. 5: "Manning received us with all the civility usual with him." (C.U.L. Add. 7726, p. 16).

¹⁴See Acton to Marie, 28 April 1865, Decisive Decade, p. 62.

¹⁵Acton to Marie, [May 1865], Decisive Decade, p. 64.

expressing his delight after a meeting with Gladstone during which the latter spoke of his decision not to run for Parliament as a "matter of national importance."¹⁶ Subsequently, when Acton was in fact prevailed upon to stand for a seat at Bridgnorth, the events of his campaign likewise proved a source of great encouragement: for, though he did not expect to succeed in the normal sense, he was nonetheless convinced that a great triumph could be justly claimed in that a Catholic candidate had been respectfully received by the electors of a Protestant town.¹⁷ Even when he first learned that he was likely to be declared the loser in the election as the result of a second scrutiny of the ballots, he still maintained his optimistic attitude toward the whole affair. If he were turned out of Parliament, he said, it would be to the great advantage of his studies.¹⁸

The particular topic to which Acton intended to devote his energy at first was in itself indicative of both the nature and the scale of the ambitions which he entertained at this time. The project upon which he decided was no less than to write a complete history of the Roman Index, which he intended to examine in relation to the Spanish Index and to the Sorbonne,¹⁹ and which, it also seems clear, he hoped to set

¹⁶ Acton to Marie, as quoted by McElrath, Decisive Decade, p. 16. McElrath dates this letter as approximately 6 July 1865; but he is wrong either here or with respect to the letter printed on pp. 66-67 of the same volume, which he has dated June 1865. In the latter, Acton says: "They have persuaded me to offer myself at the Election at Bridgenorth." The most likely date of the letter quoted here is early June 1865.

¹⁷ Acton to Marie, [June 1865], Decisive Decade, p. 68.

¹⁸ Acton to Döllinger, [?] Nov. 1865, DB, I, p. 421.

¹⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 18 April 1864, DB, I, p. 349.

in the context of the development of the modern papacy.²⁰ The idea for a book of this kind, as one might have expected, came first from Döllinger;²¹ and it is by no means difficult to understand the inherent attractions which it would have held for Acton. A topic such as this would not only have provided him with his first opportunity to investigate thoroughly a matter of considerable historical importance; it would also have allowed him to keep his mind focussed clearly on what was for him the crucial issue of the day--namely, the relationship between Catholicism and modern learning. But if these considerations alone were sufficient to justify his interest, then even as he turned the matter over in his mind, another literary event occurred which threw the matter into still bolder relief for him. It was at just about this time that Kingsley and Newman engaged one another in the famous controversy over intellectual integrity among Catholics which led eventually to the composition of the Apologia. Acton was very quick to grasp the importance of what was taking place--indeed, he tried to point out that it was more important than it might at first appear--and the controversy came in time to exercise a considerable influence on his conception of his own work.

²⁰In notes which Acton kept on this project, he wrote: "In the chapter on Politics, show how the temporal power guided the censures of Rome, and describe the system of government and the manner in which it was regarded." (C.U.L. Add. 5765, f. 2a). And again: "Full information exists in print, as to the opposition to historical truth from the time when the extreme Infallibility theory was set up." (C.U.L. Add. 5765, f. 3a).

²¹See Acton to Döllinger, mid-March 1864, DB, I, p. 338.

Acton's only attempt actually to influence the course of the dispute between Newman and Kingsley came in the form of a brief but earnest appeal which he addressed to Newman on 10 April 1864.²² By that time, the first round in the argument was complete, and he was convinced, on the basis of the many conversations he had heard, that Newman's initial reply to Kingsley was universally acknowledged to have been successful. This by itself pleased him, of course; but he had also noticed, in those same conversations, how many people remarked that Newman had restricted himself to self-defense, and had thus avoided the wider issue of the veracity of Catholics in general. Acton himself did not share the implied suspicion that Newman was deliberately being evasive. He knew that Kingsley's precise accusation had been that Newman taught that the Catholic clergy need not normally be devoted to truth, and that therefore Newman was required by the strict terms of the controversy to answer only for himself. But Acton feared nonetheless that if Newman did not take the opportunity to speak on behalf of his co-religionists, it would be assumed by many people that he had wisely avoided an attempt to defend the indefensible. He urged Newman, therefore, to see the danger of his own success becoming at the same time a defeat for the Catholic body; and he added, characteristically, that if on the other hand the discussion were broadened, it might be as instructive for Catholics as it would be for Protestants. Newman replied a few days later with a promise to "go as far as ever I can"

²² Acton to Newman, 10 April 1864, L&D, XXI, p. 94.

in the direction which Acton desired.²³ Acton, satisfied for the moment that his advice had been heeded, eagerly awaited the finished work.²⁴

Since the Apologia actually came out in seven separate instalments, Acton's judgements on it were delivered piecemeal, and this circumstance, combined with a certain ambiguity in his remarks, makes it difficult to define precisely his final verdict. From one point of view, it is clear that he was profoundly impressed by the sincerity with which the book was written. He praised Newman for his "high moral courage," spoke with admiration of the manner in which he had gained the trust of his readers, and even said that the candour with which he had discussed his personal history would earn for his work a place alongside Augustine's Confessions.²⁵ From another point of view, however, it can be said that the very fact that the Apologia was autobiographical in nature came as a disappointment to him. The point of his appeal had been precisely to persuade Newman to go beyond a personal account--to speak, as he had later said, pro ecclesia as well as pro domo;²⁶ and although the seventh section of the work, which he described as the most skillful,²⁷ might have been an honest attempt to satisfy his request,²⁸ he appears not to

²³Newman to Acton, 15 April 1864, L&D, XXI, p. 94.

²⁴Acton to Döllinger, 18 April 1864, DB, I, p. 349.

²⁵Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1864, DB, I, p. 352.

²⁶Acton to Newman, 16 April 1864, L&D, XXI, p. 95.

²⁷Acton to Döllinger, 3 June 1864, DB, I, p. 361.

²⁸This view is taken by Dessain (L&D, XXI, Introductory Note, xiv) and MacDougall (Acton-Newman Relations, p. 92).

have considered it entirely adequate. The urgent need that Acton felt was for a work which would serve, on the one hand, to repudiate the charge that Catholics in general were afraid of the truth, and which would function, on the other, to enlighten those Catholics whose misguided piety lent credence to this notion. At a time when he had still hoped that Newman would fulfil this double requirement, he had been able to speak of how he himself might augment his efforts, by bringing out his own book in a manner that would make plain that it was intended as a contribution to essentially the same discussion.²⁹ But by the time he made a draft of his projected History of the Index, he was speaking instead as though it would be the sole means of meeting the need. He began his notes, in fact, with a reference to the controversy between Kingsley and Newman, which, he pointed out, had brought forward "the question of the veracity of Catholics"; and then, significantly, he went on to record his judgement that Newman had dealt with the matter only "as a personal question" and that he had thereby "left the general question untouched."³⁰ It was chiefly in this sense that the publication of the Apologia was important to him, for what he conceived as its shortcomings led him to the conclusion that his immediate mission was to complete the work that it had left undone.³¹

²⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 10 April 1864 and 18 April 1864, DB, I, pp. 346-347 and p. 349.

³⁰ C.U.L. Add. 5765, f. 1b.

³¹ In this respect, Acton seems to have reverted to his first impression. After he had read the preliminary sections of the Apologia, he had written to Döllinger on 4 May 1864: "He will justify only himself and his intellectual course publicly, and leaves it to me to broaden the scope." (DB, I, p. 351).

In the last analysis, all of Acton's reflections in this respect were without practical importance, since the History of the Index, like the many other books which he planned, was never written. It is worthwhile, nevertheless, to examine the argument which he meant to develop, so far as this can be known, if only because it provides the most concrete indication of the direction which his thoughts were taking at this time. Many of the points that emerge from his notes, especially those which concern the more didactic aspect of his plan, are pretty well consistent with what one would expect. It is not surprising, for instance, to find him meditating on the habitual defects of Catholic controversialists and pointing out the need to profit even from hostile criticism.³² He had always believed that as a good Catholic historian he ought to function in the manner of a surgeon, cutting away sores from an otherwise healthy body; and, to extend the metaphor, he had shown a consistent readiness to accept the help of Protestants in making his diagnosis. The important point, however, is not to assume that, merely because Acton wished to raise so sensitive a question as that of the Index, his intention was to write a wholly polemical work, directed against his enemies within the Church. On the contrary, he explained quite clearly elsewhere that he did not mean to compose an "indictment"--the word is his--but that he planned instead to write a double-edged history, in which the facts could speak for themselves.³³ The truth is that the real significance of his notes on the Index, as

³²C.U.L. Add. 5765, f. 1b.

³³Acton to Döllinger, 18 April 1864, DB, I, p. 349.

a guide to the course of his development, is partly that they testify to an enduring belief that Catholic history could be seen in a more favourable light than was often the case, and partly that they reveal a calm, though not complacent, confidence that a suitable degree of historical-mindedness would help Catholics to divest themselves of practices and attitudes that were long outmoded. In specific terms, these two points show themselves in what he says about the place of the Index in the nineteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively. In the first case, he asserts firmly that the circumstances of the modern world render secrecy and censures totally inappropriate;³⁴ in the second, he lists a variety of reasons why the conditions prevailing at the time of the Counter-Reformation help to explain and even to justify the practice of proscription.³⁵ Even Acton's choice of the Index as

³⁴C.U.L. Add. 5765, f. 2a: "Conclusion, on the altered times that make secrecy impossible by the progress of science, and censures inapplicable by reason of the mixture of religions, the multiplicity of books, and the increase in the number of those who read."

³⁵C.U.L. Add. 5765:

"Duty of parent to child, of teacher to pupil, of priest to his flock, of the learned to the ignorant, of rulers to subjects, all supported the practice." (f. 2a)

"Show that under the Renaissance the supreme care for souls was neglected at Rome for the love of literature, and a change was required." (f. 2a)

"Only priests and scholars read books in the M.A. Afterwards it became common, and the people had to be warned and protected." (f. 2a)

"It [suppression of books] belongs to that system of opposition, when the faith required every safeguard, when the poison of heresy had a strange power, and the lines were not yet drawn between the two religions." (f. 2b)

"Protestants did the same thing--See what passed in England and the Swedish Index." (f. 2b)

"The system is conceivable in an age of that sort. But when the condition of the world is changed, it remains a solitary relic of a buried age." (f. 2b)

the symbol of what most needed reform within the Church provides an insight into his frame of mind, in the sense that it shows how far he had yet to go before arriving at the severe judgements of his later years; for, in one passage of his notes, he states explicitly that intellectual timidity, and not the stigma of persecution, is the main obstacle remaining to prevent Catholicism from taking its rightful place in the contemporary world. "The Index," he wrote, "is the one chief barrier to the conciliation of modern society and the recovery by the Church of authority and reverence. The reproach of immorality is gone. The fear of persecution is gone. Nothing remains but the resistance to the progress of knowledge."³⁶

Acton's determination to focus not only his own attention but also the attention of his friends and colleagues on the task of producing serious and scholarly books was evident primarily in his dealings with his English acquaintances. A large part of his purpose was to reduce the likelihood of further harmful controversies arising, and since the controversies in which he had been embroiled over the past few years had occurred chiefly in England, it was in England that he felt the greatest need to channel energy away from popular journalism and toward

³⁶C.U.L. 5765, f. 2b.

scholarly research. His concern, however, was not limited entirely to the work of English associates. He also displayed at this time an extraordinary solicitude with respect to the future course of Döllinger's career. In the wake of the furor caused by the Odeon lectures and the papal protest against Döllinger's speech at the Munich Congress, Acton seems to have feared greatly that his teacher was in danger of being drawn into pointless disputes, and he appears, in addition, to have concluded that Döllinger was personally ill-suited for controversy and that he therefore needed to be shielded from its effects. It was almost as though Acton believed that his teacher was too naive to judge correctly the motives of his enemies. This would explain, in any case, why he warned him not to trust in the sincerity of those who attacked him, and also why he sought to convince him that he, like Newman, was the victim of fear and jealousy.³⁷ More important, however, Acton wanted to ensure that Döllinger did not lose sight of his main purpose. While public activity would give rise only to conflict, he told him, great books were the means by which he could exercise an influence for all time.³⁸ In scholarship, he was more powerful than Pope or Emperor.³⁹

Döllinger may well have taken Acton's advice seriously. Whether or not he conceived of his scientific mission in terms so exalted as his student did, he had by this time arrived at a crossroads in his career, and he was no doubt conscious of the need to choose carefully

³⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 4 April 1864, DB, I, p. 342.

³⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 9 March 1864, DB, I, p. 335.

³⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 5 August 1866, DB, I, p. 438.

between public debate and scholarly endeavour. In this respect, Acton's advice was very much to the point, even if it betrayed an unusually protective attitude for a student to adopt with respect to his teacher. But what must not be ignored is that there was another dimension to the choice that confronted Döllinger. Quite apart from Acton's solicitous advice, Döllinger was going through a period of re-orientation as an historian--and he was, in fact, leading Acton in new directions. In 1857, he had begun to write a multi-volume history of the Church, a work which promised to be his magnum opus. The chief purpose of the work had been to re-interpret the whole of ecclesiastical history in the light of the theory of development; and, by 1860, he had already completed the prelude (Heidenthum und Judenthum) and the first volume (Christenthum und Kirche in der Zeit der Grundlagen). The consequence of his work being interrupted by the debate over the Temporal Power, however, was not merely that controversy temporarily took the place of scholarship, but, more important, that new concerns, especially those arising from questions of Church government, were brought to the forefront of his mind. By the time that he was able to return to his work, his pre-occupations had altered so much that he decided to abandon his original project in favour of a more strictly limited and also more topical History of the Papacy. The preliminary investigations which he conducted for this had the effect, in turn, of bringing about the first step in what can be justly described as a revolution in his historical methods. As Acton himself has explained, Döllinger began with an effort to "secure his foundations"--that is, with an attempt to eliminate from his material the fictions which had

survived from the Middle Ages; and the result of his inquiries was that he found so much spurious material relating to the papacy that he ended by writing an entire volume on this topic alone. Papstfabeln des Mittelalters marked the first occasion on which Döllinger applied the new and stricter methods of textual criticism to his sources. It also signalled the beginning of a new interest in ecclesiastical forgeries, and in this sense it can be described as a crucial turning-point in his career.⁴⁰

The second big change in Döllinger's methods came a year after the publication of the Papstfabeln, when he suggested to Acton that they spend the summer of 1864 in Italy in search of new and unpublished sources. This was a step which was, in fact, at least as decisive for Acton himself as it was for his teacher, since, like Döllinger, he had not before that time made more than an occasional use of manuscript materials or, indeed, even recognised the importance of unprinted documents for the study of modern history.⁴¹ What interest he had shown in the archives had always been related to definite objects. In 1857, when he was in Rome, he had made the acquaintance of Augustin Theiner, keeper of the Secret Archives, who was just then seeking permission to publish the acts of the Council of Trent. He had been delighted by the news of this project, especially since he had been assured that the result would be a complete vindication of the official Catholic version

⁴⁰ Following Acton, "Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, pp. 418-420.

⁴¹ On Döllinger's use of manuscripts, see C.U.L. Add. 4905, cards 101, 74, 87, and 90.

of the story, as told by Pallavicini.⁴² He had also learned at that time that Theiner had in his possession important documents relating to English history and in particular to the reign of James II;⁴³ and later, when he formulated a plan for a Lingard Society in order to publish documents in recusant history, he had tried with extraordinary persistence to obtain some of this material from him.⁴⁴ In both these cases, however, as in others of a more incidental nature, Acton's attitude had been that access to manuscript sources would serve to throw additional light on a specific topic. Totally absent had been that feeling, so strong in later years, that familiarity with the archives would necessitate a fundamental revision of the history of the last four centuries. What he said of his teacher in retrospect was equally true of himself at this time: he had "not perceived that, in modern times, the age of histories has gone, and the age of documents has come."⁴⁵ Until the journey of 1864, both for Acton and Döllinger, printed sources still formed the backbone of history.⁴⁶

Nothing illustrates more clearly Acton's prolonged failure to

⁴²See above, pp. 38-39.

⁴³See C.U.L. Add. 5751 [Roman Diary], p. 207; printed by Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton: Rome 1857," Cambridge Historical Journal, VIII, no. 3 (1946), p. 198.

⁴⁴See Acton to Döllinger, 19 March 1862, 26 Aug. 1862, and 25 April 1863, DB, I, p. 253, p. 276, and pp. 304-305 respectively. See also Acton to Simpson, 9 May 1863, ASC, III, p. 106.

⁴⁵C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 74.

⁴⁶See Acton's own testimony in his address to the Eranus (c. 1900) as printed in Decisive Decade, p. 127.

recognise the importance of manuscript sources than the tenacity with which he clung to the prejudices against Ranke that he had acquired as a student in Munich. In the latter half of his career, he would not only refer explicitly to Ranke as his "master", describe him as "the real emancipator", and acknowledge that it was he who had led him to maturity as an historian,⁴⁷ but he would also be especially fond of citing, as a turning-point in modern historiography, the statement which Ranke had made around 1840 to the effect that it was impossible to understand events since 1514 without recourse to the archives.⁴⁸ Well into the 1860s, however, Acton both failed to grasp the full significance of this remark and continued to regard Ranke with a mixture of scepticism and hostility--the latter being sustained perhaps by a curious urge he had to try to compete with and outdo him. If there was one occasion during the whole period of the Rambler and the Home and Foreign on which he had tried to formulate an historical argument primarily on the basis of unprinted documents, it was his essay on "The Secret History of Charles II," which he published in 1862.⁴⁹ Even this article, it must be stressed, belongs to the pre-history of Acton's work as a documentary historian,

⁴⁷"The Study of History," LMH, p. 7, as quoted by Herbert Butterfield, Man on His Past (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 86; C.U.L. Add. 4997, card 206; and Acton to Marie, 10 July 1877, DB, III, p. 179.

⁴⁸In varying forms, Acton quoted this statement in "Mr. Bergonroth's Introduction," Chronicle, I, 25, (14 Sept. 1867) 587; "Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, p. 421; "German Schools of History," HES, pp. 355-356; and C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 83.

⁴⁹"The Secret History of Charles II," Home and Foreign Review, I (July 1862) 146-174; reprinted HES, pp. 85-122.

for it was concerned only with a very narrow problem and was based on a few letters which he had obtained by accident rather than by means of purposeful research; but it is interesting if only for the way in which it brought him into direct disagreement with Ranke. Believing that he had stumbled on proof that Charles II had fathered an illegitimate son on the island of Jersey in 1646 and that this son had later become a Jesuit and played a secret part in a plan for the King to embrace Catholicism, Acton had written to break the news to Ranke, who was then working on the Stuarts. No doubt he had looked forward to the pleasure of revealing to the Berlin historian an astonishing fact of which he was unaware; but when the reply came, indicating that Ranke believed (correctly as it turned out)⁵⁰ that Acton had been led astray, he was not in the least deterred. He merely told Simpson--indeed, told him almost triumphantly--that Ranke was "not at all prepared for the discovery";⁵¹ and he added later, in a letter to Döllinger, that he was convinced that it was a matter in which Ranke would "make a fool of himself."⁵²

Still more striking was the case of the document known as Les Matinées Royales, a version of which Acton had printed in 1863,⁵³ in the

⁵⁰ See Hester W. Chapman, The Tragedy of Charles II (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 87.

⁵¹ Acton to Simpson, 28 April 1862, ASC, II, p. 289.

⁵² Acton to Döllinger, 14 October 1864, DB, I, p. 367.

⁵³ Acton, ed. Les Matinées Royales, ou l'art de régner: opuscule inédit de Frédéric II, dit le Grand, Roi de Prusse (London and Edinburgh, 1863).

belief that it was an authentic work of Frederick the Great which did much to damage the King's reputation.⁵⁴ This time he found that he was contradicted not only by Ranke but also by Dr. Preuss, the official Prussian historiographer; yet he refused for some weeks to be convinced of his mistake and, in fact, accused his opponents of allowing themselves to be blinded by patriotism. Part of the controversy was conducted in the Times, and it was there that he wrote in a letter dated 31 January 1863:

Professor Ranke speaks with far graver authority [than does Preuss]; but his testimony is not entirely independent or unprejudiced . . . He is as strongly pledged as Mr. Carlyle to a view of the character of Frederick which does not quite consist with the authenticity of the Matinées.⁵⁵

Not until Ranke had set out in irresistible detail his reasons for thinking the document spurious⁵⁶ did Acton finally concede the point; and even then he was not prepared to accept full responsibility for the error. He would never have made it in the first place, he said, except for the "very odd manner" in which Preuss had dealt with copies of the manuscript that had been made known earlier.⁵⁷

Yet, the rather begrudging nature of Acton's apology notwithstanding.

⁵⁴ See Acton, "The Confessions of Frederick the Great," Home and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), pp. 152-171; reprinted ECS, pp. 353-373.

⁵⁵ Letter to the Editor, Times, 3 Feb. 1863, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Ranke to Acton, 10 Feb. 1863, printed in Bernhard Hoefft and Hans Herzfeld. Leopold von Ranke: Neue Briefe (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1949) pp. 426-429.

⁵⁷ Acton to Ranke, 14 Feb. 1863, quoted in Hoefft and Herzfeld, Neue Briefe, p. 429, n. 1. Attention has been drawn to this correspondence by Conzenius, DB, I, p. 286, n. 4.

it is possible that the embarrassing incident of Las Matineas Royales had a chastening effect upon him; for it was in the following year that he gave the first important sign of an increased respect for Ranke. As Professor Butterfield has explained, the change in his attitude began with the publication of the fourth volume of Ranke's History of England. Acton did not praise this book without also expressing reservations; but he did make the highly significant comment that it was "a model of the art of using authorities"; and, as further instalments of the same work appeared, his qualified admiration rose steadily until in 1867 it had reached the level of positive enthusiasm.⁵⁸ Even Acton's gradual conversion to Ranke and his methods, however, did not deprive him of his independence or reduce him to the position of an unimaginative imitator. In August 1864, when he began his tour of archives—a trip which was, incidentally, in many ways similar to a journey that Ranke had made nearly forty years earlier⁵⁹—he had at least arrived at the stage where he regarded the work of the German historian as the norm in terms of which to define the advances that might be made in the future; but he was still determined to see further than Ranke, if only by standing on his shoulders. He followed his predecessor to Vienna and Venice, for instance, in the knowledge that his peculiar grasp of European political history owed much to the Venetian diplomatic records that were available there; yet, since he was also conscious that Ranke had restricted himself

⁵⁸ See Butterfield, Man on his Past, pp. 88-91.

⁵⁹ For a description of Ranke's trip, see G. P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920) pp. 80-83.

to the use of the Relazioni, or final reports, which the envoys had submitted when they returned from their missions, he resolved that for his own part he would work from the actual correspondence.⁶⁰ This determination to look where Ranke and others had neglected to look was one of the most characteristic features of the manner in which Acton conducted his research. Once he had recognised the importance of manuscript sources, his progress was very rapid; and he soon came to think of himself as belonging to an entirely new generation of documentary historians, whose task it was not merely to use but also to exhaust the archives. Partly for this reason, he tended during these years to identify himself most closely with certain laborious scholars, such as Joseph Stevenson, John Sherren Brewer, and Gustave Bergenroth, who seldom if ever produced finished works of history, but who instead spent great parts of their careers as employees of the British government, preparing complete calendars of state papers from both domestic and foreign archives. Although Acton did not intend that he himself should become a mere compiler of documents, it is worth noting that his association with these men was beginning at about the same time as Döllinger was suggesting new research projects and as his own attitude toward Ranke was changing. On the one hand, he saw in their work the fulfilment of Ranke's implied prophecy that the day would come when printed books would leave one only on the threshold of history;⁶¹ on the other, the treasures which they unearthed,

⁶⁰ See "Ranke", Chronicle, I, 17, (20 July 1867) 393-395; reprinted in Butterfield, Man on his Past, Appendix VII, p. 227. See also Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, p. 129; C.U.L. Add. 4908, card 88; and C.U.L. Add. 4931, card 91.

⁶¹ See "Mr. Bergenroth's Introduction," Chronicle, I, 25 (14 September 1867) 587.

and especially the researches which Bergenroth conducted at Simencas, seem to have strengthened his conviction that Ranke's work could be superseded and even substantially revised. Acton saw a great deal of Bergenroth in England in 1866; and after one of their conversations, during which his friend had described the material he had seen concerning the Emperor Charles V, he wrote in his diary as follows:

Ranke [was] the first who really studied modern history, after the loose writing of men like Robertson. But he has never exhausted materials. Thus for the XVI century he used the Berlin archives, [which were] not important at that time, and a few papers from Brussels. The whole history of Europe during Charles V's reign is entirely different from Ranke's account. The men he describes as friends were in truth enemies, the motives were not those he describes, and Charles himself he quite misunderstood.⁶²

So far as Acton's research was concerned, the single greatest advantage which he had over Ranke--and indeed over all other historians working at that time, with the partial exception of Döllinger--was ready access to the documents kept at the Vatican. In the early stages of his trip, when he was just preparing to depart from Venice for Rome, he was, it seems, still expecting to experience difficulty in obtaining what he wanted there. In the belief that obstacles might be placed in his way if it were known that he was working on the Index, he begged his friend Wetherell to answer any inquiries about his activities as vaguely as he could.⁶³ At the same time, he said that he was considering publishing an innocuous volume of Cardinal Pole's correspondence in order to allay suspicions concerning his work. He even declared that he intended to

⁶²C.U.L. Add. 7726, p. 28.

⁶³Acton to Wetherell, 25 October 1864, Decisive Decade, pp. 52-53.

place his notebooks in safe-keeping before crossing the papal frontier, presumably because he feared that they might be confiscated by the authorities.⁶⁴ The remarkable circumstance is, however, that when Acton actually arrived in Rome, seventeen years before the Archives were officially opened to scholars, he found almost immediately that he had not one, but two, extremely convenient avenues by which he could gain access to them. In the first place, there was Theiner, a man whose motives Acton never entirely trusted,⁶⁵ but whom he was nevertheless able to induce (partly, it seems, with the promise of financial reward)⁶⁶ to assist him in his researches. Theiner gave him a large collection of documents on various aspects of the age of the Stuarts which he himself had prepared for publication, supplied him with additional Pole papers, and, most important, introduced him to the despatches of the papal legates and nuncios, which amounted to nearly 8,000 volumes.⁶⁷ Quite apart from Theiner's co-operation, however, Acton discovered that the man from whom he might have expected the

⁶⁴Ibid. See also Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1864, DB, I, pp. 379-380.

⁶⁵On Theiner's character and motives, see Acton to Döllinger, 5 Feb. 1865, DB, I, pp. 406-407; Acton to Döllinger, 27 April 1867, DB, I, p. 485; Kranus Address, Decisive Decade, pp. 134-135; C.U.L. Add. 5528, loose sheet; and C.U.L. Add. 4908, card 332.

⁶⁶See Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865 and 27 April 1867, DB, I, p. 407 and p. 485.

⁶⁷See Acton to Döllinger, 7 December 1866, DB, I, p. 453; Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1866, ASC, III, pp. 226-227; Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, pp. 406-407; Acton to Lord Romilly, 2 October 1866, Decisive Decade, pp. 68-70; and Kranus Address, Decisive Decade, pp. 134-135.

least assistance and encouragement--namely, Cardinal Antonelli--was likewise disposed to facilitate his studies. When he met the Cardinal at dinner shortly after his arrival in Rome, he explained to him that, although he had come to do research, he had not yet used the Vatican because he was uncertain whether it would be allowed; but Antonelli declared at once that he should have whatever he desired.

"I know," Acton said to him tentatively, "that many things are reserved . . ."

"Indeed!," Antonelli replied. "For you nothing is reserved; you shall get everything."⁶⁸

A few days later Acton wrote to Antonelli to ask for his written permission, and Antonelli replied as follows:

I have received your courteous note of the 20th, in which you ask me for permission to consult the manuscripts of the Vatican Library in order to complete your worthy studies.

Accordingly, I have gladly given the necessary dispositions to Monseigneur de San Marzano so that he may try to fulfil your wishes in every way possible. You have only to present yourself to this prelate, by whom, I am sure, you will be favourably received.⁶⁹

This most extraordinary encounter was, in fact, typical of Acton's experience in Rome. The only occasion on which he reported difficulties was when he wrote to Simpson that Manning had learned of some of his activities and discussed them with various people, who had in turn expressed misgivings.⁷⁰ But even to this it must be added that Manning

⁶⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, pp. 390-391.

⁶⁹ Antonelli to Acton, 23 January 1865, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (General Correspondence). See also C.U.L. Add. 4992, card 32: "In 1864 [i.e. early 1865] when I applied to be admitted to the Library, Antonelli sent me permission to use the secret archives. I obtained copies of some thousands of documents." Again, see Döllinger's remarks on this subject, as quoted by Consensus in DB, I, p. 409, n. 3.

⁷⁰ Acton to Simpson, 6 December 1866, ASC, III, p. 226.

himself had said that he hoped Acton would publish the documents which he had obtained as soon as possible.⁷¹ Although Acton witnessed a great deal while he was in Rome that he considered profoundly disedifying, it is nonetheless true that he was given the utmost freedom for his work and was treated with almost uninterrupted cordiality by the dignitaries and officials there, not only through the winter of 1864-1865 but also when he returned two years later. It was during his second visit that he wrote to T. F. Wetherell as follows: "My success in libraries and archives surpasses all expectation and Cardinals frequent us as if we were an embassy from a new Catholic power."⁷²

The Vatican Archives, along with those of Venice, were the most important for the research which Acton conducted during these years; but the easy access which he found to the documents there was repeated in a number of other places. In Rome alone, aside from the Secret Archives, he was readily admitted to the private collections of the Corsini, Doria, Barberini, and Caetani families, as well as to the records of the Augustinian order which were kept in the Angelica.⁷³ Elsewhere in Italy, he found that the recent overthrow of the old dynasties had resulted in the opening of their archives as well.⁷⁴

⁷¹Acton to Döllinger, 6 December 1865, DB, I, p. 426.

⁷²Acton to Wetherell, 10 December 1866, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); printed accurately in Abbot Gasquet, ed., Lord Acton and His Circle (London: George Allen, Burns & Oates, 1906), p. 330.

⁷³Acton to Döllinger, 5 Feb. 1865 and 7 Dec. 1866, DB, I, pp. 404-406 and p. 453.

⁷⁴C.U.L. Add. 5002, card 265; quoted in Butterfield, Man on his Past, p. 79, n. 1.

Since the new Italian government had no desire to safeguard the secrets of the fallen régimes, Acton was able to pursue researches at Florence, Modena, Naples, and Milan--researches which often proved fruitful for the history of the Council of Trent.⁷⁵ He also enjoyed the assistance of a variety of friends who were anxious to encourage him in his work. This sometimes meant that documents were brought to his attention in unexpected and unusual ways, as was the case in Bologna when Marco Minghetti, the Italian minister and Acton's relative by marriage, showed him an interesting collection of letters written by Benedict XIV.⁷⁶ In many other and more important cases, he found experienced archivists and historians who were willing to help him. Tomasseo Gar assisted him in Naples; Rawdon Brown in Venice; Mignet in Paris; and Arneth in Vienna.⁷⁷ Even from archives which he himself did not visit, he obtained important documents. Bergenroth and his student, Friedmann, for example, supplied him with material from Simancas, which he then supplemented by consulting Froude's transcripts in the British Museum;⁷⁸ and later he received certain items from Berlin through the good will of Droysen and other acquaintances.⁷⁹ In most of the places where Acton did his own

⁷⁵ Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, pp. 135-136.

⁷⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 14 October 1864, DB, I, p. 368.

⁷⁷ Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, pp. 129-131 and p. 135. See also Acton to Döllinger, 27 April 1867, DB, I, p. 485; and Acton to Wetherell, [before 6 October 1869], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence).

⁷⁸ C.U.L. Add. 4931, card 204; quoted in Butterfield, Man on his Past, p. 81, n. 1. See also Acton to Döllinger, 23 September 1866, DB, I, p. 447; and Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, p. 139.

⁷⁹ Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, p. 131.

research, moreover, his working conditions were next to ideal. At the end of his career, he recalled that in these early days one "had the secrets of the archives without the trouble--the regulations, the difficult admission &c . . .";⁸⁰ and no doubt one of the special advantages which he remembered was that he had often enjoyed the services of reliable copyists, such as Corvisieri, his assiduous assistant in Rome, who not only prepared many transcripts for him but who also drew up a complete catalogue of the Vatican manuscripts relating to modern history.⁸¹ There were a few cases, of course, in which Acton's work did not proceed so smoothly; he was turned away from some of the religious houses in Rome, including the Gesù.⁸² But such incidents were exceptions that proved the rule. For the most part, Acton was not only given whatever he desired; he was given it in the most convenient way possible. Certainly not many historians could have reported, as he did to Simpson on 6 December 1866, that he had the correspondence between England and Rome under James II, all the Pole papers that remained in the Vatican, and all the despatches of the papal envoys Panzani and Correo on the table in his private apartment!⁸³

In fact, Acton's difficulties arose not from a shortage but from an excess of valuable material. Ironic though it seems, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was precisely the success of Acton's search

⁸⁰ C.U.L. Add. 4931, card 206.

⁸¹ Acton to Döllinger, [?] Nov. 1865 and 13 Dec. 1866, DB, I, p. 419 and 454.

⁸² Acton to Döllinger, 5 Feb. 1865, DB, I, p. 405.

⁸³ Acton to Simpson, 6 Dec. 1866, ASC, III, p. 227.

for manuscript sources which led in the long term to failure, in the sense that he allowed himself to be overwhelmed by the abundance of information which he saw. When he began his tour of archives, he was still firmly intending to write a History of the Index.⁸⁴ In one form or another, this plan remained in his mind until 1866 or even later.⁸⁵ But from very early on it was sharing his attention with a variety of other projects which were suggested to him by the material which he found, especially on English Catholic history. One of the first signs that he was being distracted from his original course was the suggestion, made in October 1864, that he might take time out to prepare an edition of Cardinal Pole's letters.⁸⁶ To this, a proposed volume of Epistolae Historicae was soon added.⁸⁷ Next came a work on the negotiations for the marriage of Charles I to a Spanish bride; then a study of the time of James I; after that, three volumes of sources relating to James II; until eventually Acton was saying that he would be able to present the history of the English Catholics without the Lingard society which he had previously proposed and that he already had enough material for six to eight volumes de rebus Catholicis in Anglia.⁸⁸ As a result, not only was the History of the Index left unwritten, but none of the other projects was ever completed either.

⁸⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1864, DB, I, p. 353.

⁸⁵ See Acton to Döllinger, 10 August 1866, DB, I, p. 441.

⁸⁶ Acton to Wetherell, 25 October 1864, Decisive Decade, p. 53.

⁸⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 23 Nov. 1864, DB, I, p. 373.

⁸⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 5 Feb. 1865, DB, I, pp. 406-407; Acton to Döllinger, 29 Nov. 1865, DB, I, p. 423; Acton to Döllinger, 6 Dec. 1865, DB, I, p. 426; and Acton to Döllinger, 7 Dec. 1866, DB, I, pp. 452-453.

For this reason, the significance of Acton's work during these years arises chiefly from the influence which it exercised on his personal development, rather than from the contribution that it enabled him to make to historical knowledge. Only a fraction of his conclusions were ever made known to the world; but at the same time his researches opened up for him a broad range of ideas, the final effect of which was to alter his outlook decisively. It was not merely that Acton felt, at the end of his tour of archives, that he now had much information which he had previously lacked. It was rather that the vast discrepancy which he detected between history as it had been received in printed books and history as it emerged from the manuscript sources brought about a fundamental change in the structure of his thinking, first in relation to history itself, and eventually with respect to wider questions of religion and society.

One example in particular--namely, the opinions which he formed at this time concerning the historiography of the Council of Trent--serves well to illustrate part of the change which occurred in his thought, especially since this specific issue was bound up in a unique way with his overall development as an historian. In 1857, as has been said, Acton had gone away from his first discussions with Augustin Theiner utterly convinced that the chief result of the publication of the acts of Trent would be to settle once and for all the controversy raised by the works of Sarpi and Pallavicini. Probably encouraged in this direction by Döllinger, he had written in one part of his diary that "the documents of the Council of Trent prove that Pallavicini was perfectly honest . . ."; and in another he had added a record of his

pleasure at the news that the means to refute Sarpi would soon be at hand.⁸⁹ But when he returned to Rome in the 1860s, he not only sought and found documents that altered his judgements on this topic: he also arrived quickly at the conclusion that the question had been posed incorrectly in the first place. For while he confirmed and even deepened his distrust of Sarpi, he discovered that Pallavicini as well had misrepresented the facts.⁹⁰ The point is that Acton no longer thought it appropriate to choose between Sarpi and Pallavicini, as though one or the other would provide the true story of the Council of Trent. He had found that neither historian could be trusted and that the only hope of discovering the truth lay in the prospect of going beyond both of them to the original sources. In this sense, Sarpi and Pallavicini became for Acton almost symbols of the change which would have to take place in historical scholarship as a result of the opening of the archives. "They are leading historians," he later reflected. "In examining them we examine all the modern history."⁹¹

Another circumstance which made the years 1864-1867 an important

⁸⁹ [Roman Diary] C.U.L. Add. 5751, p. 134 and pp. 191-192; printed in Butterfield, "Journal of Lord Acton," p. 191 and p. 195 respectively.

⁹⁰ On Sarpi, see Acton to Döllinger, 25 October 1865, DB, I, p. 370; "Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 14-17, partially reprinted in ECS, pp. 251-259; and Eranus Address, Decisive Decade, p. 130. On Pallavicini, see Acton to Döllinger, 1 January 1873, DB, III, p. 102.

⁹¹ C.U.L. Add. 5599, f. 22a. See also C.U.L. Add. 4997, card 33.

stage in Acton's career was that his presence in Italy for large parts of that time enabled him to observe at close range the developments that were taking place with respect to the Roman question. Although he had come to Italy for the purpose of conducting historical researches, and although he may have had no other goal in mind at first, he could hardly resist, once he was there, taking a keen interest in political events. Since he first arrived in Italy shortly after the signing of the September Convention, his visits coincided with the gradual withdrawal of French troops from Italy, with the subsequent re-orientation of the policy of the Italian government, and with the final introduction in Rome of a reaction so definite as scarcely to allow for compromise. Acton's own attitude toward the assertions of the Papal Court and towards the contradictory claims of the new Italian kingdom altered, as they had altered before, with the changing situation. Cautious and hesitant at first, he eventually found himself assuming the rôle of a partisan and even an accomplice in the liberal cause.

In order to understand Acton's gradual change of position properly, it is necessary to go back for a moment to May of 1862. It was at that time that he had first taken the important step of speaking of the Temporal Power as a government whose continued existence was not only inexpedient for the Church but also intolerable on grounds of political morality. Several considerations had led him to this new point of view, and it is difficult to say whether one was more decisive than the others. One thing that does seem certain, however, is that he had been influenced considerably by the behaviour of the Roman authorities after the crisis of 1859-1860. With Austria defeated in Italy and thus

unable to assist in the defence of the Papal States, there had been a tendency in Rome to look increasingly to the deposed King of Naples as a natural ally. Acton had been offended by this not only because he regarded Francis II as an infamous tyrant, but also because he suspected, at least for a time, that funds obtained through Peter's Pence had been used to pay the bands of brigands who operated on his behalf.⁹²

At the same time, Acton had slowly adopted a more critical view of the conditions which had prevailed in the Papal States even before 1859. The chief sources on which he had relied for information in this respect were the Lyons despatches and the collection of documents which had been edited by the Italian patriot Gennarelli. In both cases, his initial reaction had been to say that these papers did at least as much to discredit the nationalist party as they did to condemn the papal régime.⁹³ In other words, he had seen them as proof of the very real faults on both sides of the dispute rather than as decisive evidence against the government of the Papal States. Eventually, however,—yet without actually contradicting his original judgement—he had grown inclined to place more emphasis on the testimony which they contained regarding the serious deficiencies of the papal administration. These deficiencies themselves seemed to grow in importance as he considered them, until finally they appeared grave enough to disqualify the Roman government from its claim to legitimate authority. "Every successive

⁹² Acton to Simpson, 3 October 1861, ASC, II, pp. 173-174. See also Acton to Simpson, 8 October 1861, ASC, II, p. 183; and Acton to Döllinger, late July 1864, DB, I, p. 364.

⁹³ See above, pp. 129-131.

publication of documents and of conversations," he had written in one of the last issues of the Rambler, "showed that, if it [the Roman government] were judged by its merits, it could not endure any of the tests which are admitted by free nations."⁹⁴

But if considerations such as these had confirmed Acton in his belief that it was now a matter of obligation to oppose the maintenance of the Temporal Power, they had done little or nothing to diminish his hostility toward the government of the new Italian kingdom or to make him more favourably disposed to the idea of a reconciliation between Rome and Turin. On the one hand, he remained resolutely opposed to plans for a settlement at least so long as he continued to hope that the Pope might flee to Bavaria (or even to England); indeed, even as this imaginary prospect faded, he was still left with the fear that a rapprochement might result in a strengthening of the Italian character of the papacy.⁹⁵ On the other hand, he persisted, well into the 1860s, in regarding with profound scepticism the intentions of Italian liberals. It was Cavour in particular whom Acton had distrusted, and the suspicious attitude which he had adopted toward him is especially interesting because it endured so long. Apparently, the idea that Cavour was insincere when he professed his devotion to religious liberty—that is, to the principle of the separation of Church and State—had been planted in Acton's mind by Döllinger. We are told in Acton's notes that Döllinger had declined an invitation to meet Cavour in Turin, that he had thought

⁹⁴ "Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (May 1862), 549.

⁹⁵ See Acton to Döllinger, 25 December 1866, DB, I, p. 457.

him "not only unscrupulous but perfidious," and that his general estimate of him had been that he was a man "playing fast and loose, saying one thing and meaning another."⁹⁶ But there can be no question that Acton himself had accepted this judgement without reservation, and that he clung to it until long after Cavour's death. When, late in his career, he recalled Cavour's attempt to negotiate with Rome in 1861, he was still convinced that it had been no more than a ploy, designed chiefly to influence Napoleon III.

At Plombieres [he noted] Napoleon agreed to give the Legations . . .
 In Le Pape et le Congrès he gave up still more. Cavour knew that he wished for excuses to surrender . . . The negotiation with Rome was a card in that game--to win Napoleon's assent.⁹⁷

In fact, it was not until 1892, when Acton was confronted with the personal testimony of Cavour's secretary (which seemed to him incontrovertible) that he at last admitted that Cavour had actually acted in good faith.⁹⁸ In the 1860s, like Döllinger and also like Montalembert,⁹⁹ he remained convinced that Cavour had merely tried to use the doctrine of a "free Church in a free State" as a means of obtaining his nationalist goals. The prospect of truly genuine efforts at conciliation did not arise for Acton at all until power had passed to Cavour's successor; and even then he was not easily convinced. Early in 1862,

⁹⁶ C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 138.

⁹⁷ C.U.L. Add. 5001, card 79.

⁹⁸ Acton to Gladstone, 9 February 1892, Correspondence, pp. 75-76.

⁹⁹ On Montalembert's attitude toward Cavour, see Hales, Pio Nono, p. 267.

when Ricasoli brought forward a set of twelve proposals in the hope of achieving a settlement of the Roman question, Acton had admitted that the terms offered were generous and that a solution to the problem was so urgently desired at Turin that the suggestions were probably made in earnest; but he had insisted nonetheless that the very nature of the Italian government made it impossible for one to place trust in the promises made by its leaders. A government that recognised no law other than the sovereign will of the people, he had declared uncompromisingly, could have no reverence for the sanctity of engagements.¹⁰⁰

If Acton's position with respect to the government at Turin had remained essentially the same, however, then his attitude toward the liberal-minded portion of the Italian clergy was changing more rapidly, at least in the sense that he was meeting new men whose opinions seemed to him to hold out a real possibility of progress. Even before he had left on his trip to Italy, he had made the acquaintance of Alfonso Capecelatro, an Oratorian from Naples, who had come to England in search of Catholic support for the cause of reform in Italy. When Acton had met this man, he had, by his own account, warned him not to hope for much in this respect;¹⁰¹ but at the same time he had been sufficiently impressed by Capecelatro's personal piety and intelligence to see in his views the prospect of a reform movement growing up among the Italian clergy which would be at once more able and more judicious than that which was led by Father Passaglia. Capecelatro had told him,

¹⁰⁰"Foreign Affairs," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (January 1862), 277-280.

¹⁰¹Acton to Döllinger, 30 June 1863, DB, I, p. 314.

in fact, that he believed that it was Passaglia more than any other man who prevented sound opinions from gaining the upper hand, especially since many of his followers were bad and demoralised priests;¹⁰² and Acton, encouraged by this statement, had begun to hope that the inevitable collapse of Passaglia's party would open the way for better men. At first, it had seemed as though he expected a great crisis to bring about the transition. Not long after his conversations with Capececiattolo, he had declared that Passaglia, with "his ignorance of the history of the Church and his singular incapacity to understand the conditions of her relation towards the State," would sooner or later yield to the pressure of the government and to the growing ardour of his allies; and that only when he was thus discredited would the tide of genuine reform rise.¹⁰³ But when Acton actually arrived in Italy, he found that the way was already prepared by less sensational means. Early in his journey he had an interview with Passaglia himself, who promptly told him that he felt compelled, partly by urgent financial need, to retire from politics and to accept a professorship at Turin.¹⁰⁴ Acton was able, therefore, to express sympathy for Passaglia in his dire circumstances and at the same time to assure him that it would indeed be best if he henceforth devoted himself exclusively to scholarship.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Acton travelled to Naples where he met

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Review of C. Nitzsch, Die Evangelische Bewegung in Italien, in Home and Foreign Review, III (October 1863), 726.

¹⁰⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, pp. 384-385.

¹⁰⁵ Acton to Döllinger, [?] November 1865, DB, I, pp. 417-418.

not only Capecelatro but a whole circle of priests and laymen who had been drawn together by a common desire to see the overthrow of the Bourbon régime and who now wished to seize the opportunity to promote further reforms.

The success of Acton's encounter with Capecelatro and his associates was guaranteed from the outset, not only by the sympathy which he at once felt for their ideas, but also by the close attention which they were prepared to pay to his advice. He spent several days in Naples consulting with various representatives of the group, and after each meeting he remarked, with obvious pleasure as well as with some justification, that they placed great store in what he said.¹⁰⁶

One of the first men whom he met, for instance, was Giacomo de Martino, the former Neapolitan Foreign Minister and current leader of the Catholic party, who delighted him by coming to consult him on the political situation in Italy. After their conversation, Acton said that he thought he had never been shown so much flattering confidence; and he added, perhaps understandably, that De Martino seemed to him a man of very sound judgement.¹⁰⁷

Aside from the personal satisfaction which Acton derived from the interest shown in his views, however, his contact with the leaders of this burgeoning liberal Catholic movement had the effect of drawing his attention to what seemed to be fresh possibilities in Italy. As he

¹⁰⁶ See Acton's letters to Marie of 31 January 1865, 1 February 1865, and 2 February 1865, in Decisive Decade, pp. 53-55, pp. 57-58, and pp. 58-59 respectively.

¹⁰⁷ Acton to Marie, 31 January 1865, Decisive Decade, p. 54.

listened to them describe their ambitions, it seemed increasingly clear to him that in the context of the newly-formed Italian kingdom the most appropriate policy was to seek the greatest possible representation of enlightened Catholic opinion. Up until then, he said, the Catholic voice had been virtually unheard at Turin; but since an election was approaching, and since De Martino and his followers could win by an immense majority in Naples, the opportunity to alter the balance was now at hand.¹⁰⁸ Acton's only fear was that his new friends would prove too timid to defy Rome and its prohibitions against active participation in Italian politics. Consequently, he spent a great part of his time urging them, as he said, "not to abandon their country, but to do good while they may, even in spite of Rome."¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, Acton's fears proved for the most part to be justified. When the elections took place in the autumn, the only place at which a significant number of Catholic deputies was returned was Bologna.¹¹⁰ In Naples, as elsewhere in Italy, the Catholic party, or what passed for a Catholic party, remained almost totally inactive; while the general result of the election was to strengthen the hand of the Left. In the light of these results, Acton was no longer able to place any real confidence in Italian liberal Catholics. Although he retained his profound respect for De Martino (who did stand at the election and who was successfully returned), he tended by and large to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Acton to Döllinger, [?] November 1865, DB, I, p. 416.

revert to his original view--a view which had never in any case entirely left him¹¹¹--that liberal Catholics in Italy could not be relied upon to improve the situation greatly. In this sense, his encounter with Capececiatro and his friends became a mere episode in the development of his thinking with respect to Italy.

Yet, in another sense, this same episode did have important consequences for him. Acton's central idea had been that the existence of a substantial Catholic minority in the Chamber would have a moderating influence on Italian politics; and, if he blamed the vast number of sincere Catholics for apathy and timidity, then still more emphatically he blamed the authorities in Rome for pursuing a policy which made it impossible--indeed, which sought to make it impossible--for such a development to occur. Acton himself first arrived in Rome on 9 December 1864--that is, one day after the publication of the notorious Syllabus of Errors; and, though his reaction to this latest manifestation of Roman intransigence was by itself remarkably restrained, he observed with rising indignation the general posture to which the Syllabus testified so dramatically. If the Syllabus of Errors, the doctrinal import of which was much debated, made one thing clear, it was that Rome had no intention of making concessions to liberal sentiment, in Italy or elsewhere. Indeed, it seemed almost as though the conflict with "the spirit of the times" was being deliberately prolonged and even exacerbated. Acton, at any rate, was convinced that the Pope's advisers, especially Mérode and Antonelli, took pleasure not only in the reaction which prevailed at Rome but also in the anti-clerical feeling which it encouraged in Italy.

¹¹¹ See Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, p. 401-402.

The Pope himself he found almost childish in his attitude and behaviour--he occupies himself, he said, with "paltry amusements and good-humoured, inconsequential chatter";¹¹² but Antonelli appeared to him to be trying to take the utmost advantage of the excesses of the Italian government. "He has said to me," Acton reported to Döllinger with understandable indignation, "[that] . . . it is a good thing for us that the Piedmontese persecute religion. Without that, our affairs would be going badly."¹¹³

What made the position doubly difficult for Acton--that is, what made it as yet impossible for him to see any real solution to the problem which thus engulfed the Church in Italy--was his conviction that an attitude very similar to the one which he had witnessed at Rome prevailed among Italian politicians, including those of the Right. During the autumn of 1864, when he was making his initial tour of archives, he spent a considerable part of his time in the north of Italy, where he spoke with various deputies of the Chamber at Turin; and his conversations with them convinced him that, with the single exception of Giuseppe Massari (a man of relatively little influence), they were as determined as were the authorities in Rome to use the struggle between Church and State as a means of accomplishing their political goals.¹¹⁴ A visit with Marco Minghetti appears to have been especially influential in encouraging him in this view; for Minghetti, who had recently served

¹¹²Ibid., p. 395.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 394. For Acton's comments on M^{ar}ode, see ibid., pp. 394-396.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 385.

a short term as Prime Minister of Italy, assured him that without the intransigence of the Pope the cause of unity could never have advanced so rapidly.¹¹⁵ Acton concluded from this remark that Italian leaders acted in the belief that an enlightened and patriotic Pope would be irresistible and, further, that they actually made it "part of their policy to aggravate and insult the clergy."¹¹⁶ Whether he was, in fact, reading too much into a shrewd observation on Minghetti's part is really beside the point. The important consideration is that he left Italy in the spring of 1865 convinced that both parties in the dispute were guilty of deliberate provocation, and that he therefore remained unable to envisage any way out of the dilemma except that which rested on the die-hard hope that the Pope would go into temporary exile. Even when he returned to Rome in November 1866, the notion that a papal exile would cut the Gordian knot was still exercising a strong influence on his thinking.¹¹⁷ Not until it became apparent to him (c. December 1866)¹¹⁸ that the Pope was fully determined to remain where he was, did he begin to consider seriously giving his support to more realistic solutions. By happy coincidence, it was at about the same time that he noticed signs of what he believed was a new attitude

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Acton to Wetherell, [between 22 November and 3 December 1866], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. See also Acton to Döllinger, 13 December 1866, DB, I, pp. 455-456.

¹¹⁸ See Acton to Döllinger, 25 December 1866, DB, I, p. 457.

in Florence (which had replaced Turin as the capital of Italy).

"Catholic, truly liberal, ideas," he said, were less rare there than they had been two years earlier.¹¹⁹

Although Acton was probably mistaken in the degree to which he attributed new developments to a change of heart among leading politicians, it is undoubtedly true that from the summer of 1866 the policy of the Italian government took a markedly different direction. The immediate cause of the change was the return to power of Baron Ricasoli, the man who more than any other carried on the tradition of Cavour; and the first issue around which it centered was the question of the one hundred or more sees left vacant in Italy as a result of the prolonged dispute between the government and Rome. Eager to demonstrate his wholly conciliatory intentions, Ricasoli began by issuing a circular in which he invited all those bishops who were absent because they had been exiled to return to their dioceses. It seems that this gesture was received with a certain amount of scepticism in Rome.¹²⁰ But the Pope, who was equally anxious that questions of this nature should be settled, nevertheless responded by indicating that he was willing to enter once more into negotiations.

This favourable, even if cautious, response enabled Ricasoli to carry his programme of rapprochement one step further. In December, the Italian emissary Tonello arrived at the Vatican bearing instructions which, for Acton, confirmed the notion that an entirely new position

¹¹⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 7 December 1866, DB, I, p. 451.

¹²⁰ Acton to Wetherell [between 22 November and 3 December, 1866], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

had been adopted at Florence. According to Acton's own account of the affair, Tonello, whose mission was to deal primarily with the regulations affecting the appointment and investiture of bishops, offered on behalf of the Italian government to waive the oath of allegiance which had hitherto been required; to provide for the nomination of candidates by agreement between Rome and the government, without the latter retaining the right of veto; to surrender the placet for purely spiritual acts; and to retain the exequatur for temporalities only in principle. In return, all that was demanded was that the number of bishoprics be reduced.¹²¹ The curious thing was that Acton himself did not regard the negotiations without a certain feeling of ambivalence. It was thought by many people at the time that a successful settlement of ecclesiastical questions might open the way to political reconciliation; and about that he was still, at the very least, reticent.¹²² But he could not help but be impressed by the generosity of the terms offered.¹²³ Moreover, he had already learned that an additional and still more liberal plan was being considered at Florence to compensate the Church for the forced sale of its lands by granting it complete freedom in religious affairs.¹²⁴ In January, when this scheme took

¹²¹ Acton to Döllinger, 14 January 1867, DB, I, p. 463. Versions of the discussions which differ from Acton's account slightly and also from each other are given in Bolton King, A History of Italian Unity, II (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1899), p. 330; and R. de Cesare, The Last Days of Papal Rome: 1850-1870, trans. by Helen Zimmern (London: Archibald Constable and Co., Ltd., 1909), pp. 362-363.

¹²² See Acton to Döllinger, 25 December 1866, DB, I, p. 457.

¹²³ Acton to Döllinger, 14 January 1867, DB, I, p. 463.

¹²⁴ Acton to Wetherell [between 22 November and 3 December, 1866], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

shape in Ricasoli's "Free Church Bill," Acton found himself not only supporting it, but actively contributing to the effort to steer it past the violent opposition which it encountered.

Since Acton believed that the "Free Church Bill" was partly the result of the influence which his friend from Naples, De Martino, had gained over Ricasoli in recent times,¹²⁵ it is possible that it was also through De Martino that he himself became involved in the matter, although this is very far from clear. What does appear to be certain is that his rôle was limited to suggesting certain important changes in the bill after it had already been brought forward. The main purpose of the measure was to provide for the relief of Italy's monumental financial difficulties by funds obtained through the forced sale of Church property, while at the same time rewarding the Church for this spoliation by freeing it from State control. On the one hand, the Church would forfeit the right to hold immovable property. It would be compelled to sell all of its inherited estates and to surrender a portion of the proceeds of the sale to the State. On the other hand, the Church was to be granted in return complete freedom in the management of its own affairs. The difficulty, however, was that the bill was greeted not only with stiff opposition from Rome but also by cries of outrage from the anti-clericals in the Italian chamber, who considered it tantamount to surrender to the Church. In the face of this situation, Ricasoli was forced to call an election in the hope that new deputies would be returned who would be more amenable to his proposal. Acton, in

¹²⁵Ibid.

the meantime, helped to draw up a list of revisions to the bill which were sent to Florence for consideration and which he hoped might make it more acceptable, especially to Rome.¹²⁶

Acton's own attitude toward the Free Church Bill, though definitely enthusiastic, was by no means totally uncritical or naive. Under ordinary circumstances, he would not have approved of the forced sale of Church property. It was simply that, in light of the particular conditions which prevailed in Italy, he believed that some form of spoliation was inevitable anyway, and that therefore the best that could be hoped for was that the Church's possessions should be used to purchase religious liberty.¹²⁷ By the same token, he believed that if financial stability could be achieved in Italy through the sale of Church lands, then this would greatly increase the likelihood that moderate policies would prevail in the new kingdom, not least with respect to Church-State relations. What he wanted for the Church was to emancipate it from the control of the Italian state; what he desired for the Italian state was to save it from the counsels of the Left. He believed that it was in the best interests of the Church to co-operate in her own liberation, even if this meant surrendering part of her wealth.

But one partially unforeseen consequence of Acton's having adopted this position was that it suddenly brought him into conflict with

¹²⁶ See Acton to Döllinger, 15 February 1867, DB, I, p. 475; and Acton to Wetherell [mid-February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹²⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 15 February 1867, DB, I, p. 475. See also Acton to Wetherell, Monday [c. 10 February 1867] and [late February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

Döllinger, who took quite a different view of the probable consequences of the Free Church Bill. To him, it seemed that the chief result of freeing the Church in Italy from State control would be to remove the only effective restraint on the power of the bishops and the Pope and thus to place the lower clergy at the mercy of their ecclesiastical superiors. If the Free Church Bill should pass, he wrote to Acton on 10 February 1867, would it not lead to the erection of a "more complete papal-episcopal despotism?"¹²⁸ In any case, he did not see why, in a country where there was basically only one religion, the civil power should not retain certain prerogatives, such as the nomination of bishops. If any other system were to be substituted for this, it should not be one of direct and unrestricted appointment by Rome but rather one of episcopal elections. On the other hand, if Rome refused to accept such a system, then the government should insist on nomination by the king. The main thing was to avoid placing too much power in the hands of Rome. Otherwise, the bishops would become completely dependent on the Pope and the Curia, while the parish priests would become little more than slaves.¹²⁹

Another point on which Döllinger disagreed with the Free Church Bill had to do with the general manner in which it dealt with Church property. One of the fundamental provisions of the bill was that only a portion of the Church's wealth would have to be surrendered to the State, while the balance would thereafter be administered by the bishops

¹²⁸ Döllinger to Acton, 10 February 1867, DB, I, p. 471.

¹²⁹ Döllinger to Acton, 6 March 1867, DB, I, pp. 477-478.

without the interference of the government.¹³⁰ But Döllinger feared that this too would serve only to increase the power of the bishops. If the State really wanted to act as the benefactor of the Church, he said, it should use the proceeds from the monastic property which it had already confiscated to improve the lot of the very poor curates who lived in the outlying regions of the country.¹³¹ A measure of this sort, he added, had been enacted in Austria under Joseph II and later in Bavaria as well.¹³²

Döllinger's hostility toward the Free Church Bill was so great that there seemed for a time to be a real danger that it would cause the first major rift between him and Acton. That it did not was due partly to the fact that Acton acknowledged that Döllinger's fears about the likelihood of increasing the power of the bishops and the Pope were in some measure justified¹³³ and that he also promised to do all he could to obtain a hearing for Döllinger's views at Florence.¹³⁴ He himself was by no means prepared to give up his support for the Free Church Bill; but he appears to have hoped that some provision might be made to protect the position of the lower clergy. Aside from the

¹³⁰ See A. C. Jamolo, Church and State in Italy: 1850-1950, trans. by David Moore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 35.

¹³¹ Döllinger to Acton, 6 March 1867, DB, I, p. 478.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See Acton to Wetherell, 14 March [1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹³⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 15 February 1867, DB, I, p. 475. See also Acton to Wetherell, 14 March [1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

possibility of increasing the endowments of the poorer parishes (which he knew was not a realistic plan)¹³⁵, what he apparently had in mind was that the State should ensure that the clergy had ample opportunities for education.¹³⁶ This was a solution to the problem which was very different from the arrangement that Döllinger had in mind; but as Acton wrote to Wetherell: "The legitimate bulwark against hierarchical absolutism is religious science, not state influence. An ignorant clergy can be more easily tyrannized over than a learned clergy. It is acted on by fear, by interest, by credulity [Therefore] Liberty within the Church, security from the abuse of authority, can be given not by politics, but by science; not by the state, but by the University."¹³⁷

In the last analysis, Acton's disagreement with Döllinger on this important point was reduced to the purely academic level, for the simple reason that the Free Church Bill had to be abandoned in the face of insuperable opposition. The contrast between their approaches, however, is still of the greatest significance for an understanding of Acton's development. Even if Acton himself tried to gloss over the distinction, the plain fact is that he had by this time progressed to a truly and thoroughly Liberal understanding of the proper relationship between Church and State, whereas his teacher displayed a definite

¹³⁵ Acton to Wetherell, 14 March [1867], Woodruff Papers; C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹³⁶ See Acton to Döllinger, 15 February 1867, DE, I, p. 475.

¹³⁷ Acton to Wetherell, [mid-February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence).

tendency to revert to an almost Febronian or Josephist outlook, according to which it was the responsibility of the State to exercise a reforming, or at least a moderating, influence over the Church. Between those two points of view, no real reconciliation was possible.

In a broader sense, too, the entire question of the Free Church Bill marked an important stage in Acton's development. On the one hand, it had drawn him closer to the moderate party among Italian nationalists. On the other, it had set him even more definitely at odds with the policy of intransigence that had been adopted by Rome. Acton had believed wholeheartedly in the sincerity of Ricasoli's scheme, and the fact that Rome had done nothing to expedite so worthwhile a measure greatly annoyed him. In one of his letters to T. F. Wetherell, he remarked bluntly: "The truth is, Rome shrinks from the régime of liberty."¹³⁸ In fact, the question of Rome's share of the blame for the failure of the Free Church Bill was one which would continue to pre-occupy Acton for some time yet. In the aftermath of the affair, he would be confronted with evidence that suggested that this share was even greater than he had thought at first.

¹³⁸ Acton to Wetherell, [c. 10 February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence).

Chapter VI

ROMAN INTRIGUE AND THE QUESTION OF PERSECUTION

Through the rest of the winter months and the early spring of 1867, Acton remained in Italy and continued to reside for the most part in Rome. Since his attention was still focussed chiefly on historical research and on developments in Italian politics, his activities during this period were much the same as they had been before. Yet they differed in the sense that, especially so far as political matters were concerned, he now had an added incentive to seek out accurate information and to shape his impressions into more and more definite views. Plans were being laid at this time for the publication in England of a new Catholic weekly, which appeared eventually under the title of the Chronicle; and though Acton was content to leave the responsibilities of editorship entirely in the hands of his former colleague, T. F. Wetherell, he had recovered sufficiently from his disappointing experience with the Rambler and the Home and Foreign Review to welcome the opportunity to have once again a regular outlet for his opinions. Using to full advantage his familiarity with continental scholars, he did all that he could to ensure the success of the venture; and, besides agreeing to contribute essays of his own on historical topics, he accepted what was in effect a position as the paper's "Rome Correspondent." Even these duties he shared with

William Cartwright, an Englishman also resident in Rome;¹ but several numbers of the Chronicle (the first of which appeared on 30 March 1867) contained reports by Acton which, together with his letters to Wetherell, provide an excellent indication of the issues which seemed to him of greatest importance at this time.

In the latter respect, what is most evident from Acton's reports is that the topic which still appeared to him more crucial than any other was the Church property question, which had been brought to the foreground by Ricasoli's attempt to link financial policy to reforms in Church-State relations. By the time the Chronicle began, the controversial Free Church Bill had already been rejected by the Chamber once, and it was becoming increasingly clear that there was no real prospect of successfully re-introducing it. What concerned Acton now, however, was partly the reasons for its failure and partly the consequences which were likely to follow if a satisfactory substitute could not be found. He knew as well as did any observer that the Italian exchequer was so seriously depleted that financial stability could be purchased only by the forced sale of ecclesiastical property. Some form of spoliation seemed to him, therefore, inevitable; and the only real question was whether the Church would gain in freedom what it

¹It has long been thought that Acton was the author of all the reports from Italy that appeared in the Chronicle, but it is clear from his letters to Wetherell, most of which are now housed in the Cambridge University Library, that some were written by Cartwright. See, for example, Acton to Wetherell, 17 December 1866 and [mid-April 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence). The first of these letters is printed accurately by Gasquet, pp. 330-331; the second is omitted by him.

lost in property, or whether, as the Radicals wished, Church lands would be confiscated without reward.² That the conservative ministry of Ricasoli had staked its very existence on the success of its ecclesiastical policy made the matter still more momentous. And Acton was convinced that if the government failed in the end to find some way of applying its principles, the Catholics would be placed in a position which would be in many respects worse than any they had hitherto known.³

What made this situation seem to him all the more regrettable, and indeed deplorable, was that it had been brought about largely through the fault of the Catholics themselves. The crucial moment for the Free Church Bill had come when Ricasoli decided to appeal to the country against the verdict of a hostile Chamber. He had adopted this strategy in the hope that new deputies would be returned who would be willing to accept his policy with respect to the Church; and to that extent he had—at least according to Acton's interpretation—relied implicitly on the assistance of the clerical party.⁴ Unless Catholics were willing to take an active part in the election, there had been no real prospect of altering the parliamentary balance significantly. But in the event they had refused their co-operation entirely, either by following the advice given in the organs of the Holy See and abstaining

² Acton to Wetherell, [late February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Acton to Wetherell, [? February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); printed by Gasquet, pp. 340-342, with minor omissions, under the date 25 February 1867.

from voting, or, as at Bologna, by casting protest ballots for the Radical candidate.⁵ The actual outcome of the election, therefore, meant that in order to stay in power Ricasoli might be forced to abandon the substance of his programme. The only other alternative, short of simply resigning, was to allow for the suspension of the Constitution by the King and the implementation of the Free Church Bill by a dictatorial government.

Although this latter course could have been adopted only at the risk of a major crisis, it seems that it actually was contemplated for a time. Ricasoli apparently agreed to acquiesce in the coup,⁶ and the decision was taken to place the new government in the hands of General Menebrea.⁷ Rather uncharacteristically, Acton was at first inclined to sympathise with those who accepted this extraordinary scheme and to acknowledge that there was at least some merit in the argument that the temporary suspension of the Constitution would save the country from a far graver peril.⁸ Still more, however, he was indignant that the irresponsible behaviour of Catholics had rendered it necessary to consider

⁵[Acton], "Current Events," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 2. See also Acton to Wetherell, [after 10 March 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

⁶Acton to Wetherell, [? February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); printed by Gasquet, pp. 340-342, with minor omissions, under the date 25 February 1867. See also Acton to Wetherell, 14 March [1867]; not printed by Gasquet.

⁷Acton to Wetherell, [late February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

⁸See [Acton], "Current Events," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 2-3; and Acton to Wetherell, [late February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence), not printed by Gasquet.

so extreme a measure.⁹ It seemed to him that Church officials in particular based all their calculations on the vain hope that confusion and disorder in the Italian state would lead eventually to its destruction and to the restoration of the old order.¹⁰ In his eyes, their obstinate refusal to co-operate with the conservatives made them as responsible for the present crisis as were the Radicals who had blocked Ricasoli's programme in the Chamber.¹¹

That a coup d'etat was in the last analysis averted, only to see Ricasoli's government replaced by an administration under Urbano Rattazzi, did little to diminish the anger which Acton felt towards the clericalists. In the first place, although the new Prime Minister was himself essentially a man of the Centre, his position, precarious from the start, rendered him vulnerable to pressures from the Left,¹² into whose hands the Catholics had thus quite foolishly played. In the second place, Acton's fellow "correspondent," Cartwright, discovered certain circumstances shortly after the formation of the new government which seemed to implicate the Court of Rome still more deeply in

⁹ See Acton to Wetherell, [? February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence), printed by Gasquet, pp. 340-342, with minor omissions, under the date 25 February 1867; and Acton to Wetherell, [February or March 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence), not printed by Gasquet.

¹⁰ Acton to Wetherell, [? February 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); printed by Gasquet, pp. 340-342, with minor omissions, under the date 25 February 1867.

¹¹ Acton to Wetherell, [? March 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹² Following Bolton King, A History of Italian Unity, II, pp. 335-337. Acton described Rattazzi himself as "an enemy of the Church." (Acton to Wetherell, 6 April 1867, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. [Wetherell Correspondence]; printed by Gasquet, p. 348, with minor inaccuracies.)

Ricasoli's fall. Acton already believed that Catholic officials had incurred great blame by the position they had adopted at the time of the election; but Cartwright focussed his attention on the earlier period, when the Free Church Bill had been before the Chamber, and concluded that the obstacles which Ricasoli and his colleagues had encountered were also due in part to Rome. Specifically, he inferred that it was partly the rôle which Rome had played in the financial negotiations connected with the Free Church Bill--and thus not merely the instinctive hostility of the Radicals--which had accounted for the opposition which it had encountered in the Chamber.

Cartwright was sufficiently confident that he had hit upon the truth of this matter to publish his conclusions in the Chronicle.¹³ And although his article was in many respects obscure and imprecise--as though the author himself were unsure of certain details and yet eager to heighten the atmosphere of conspiracy--its essential points were clear enough. The exact financial terms to be applied upon the sale of Church lands, he said, had been negotiated between Florence and Rome through the agency of a man named Castellani, a Venetian who had considerable influence over Victor Emmanuel. Castellani had played an important part in the drafting of the Free Church Bill; and he had subsequently introduced at Rome a banker named Langrand-Dumonceau--a Belgian whose good standing as a Catholic, it was said, would recommend

¹³"The Secret History of the Italian Crisis," Chronicle, I (27 April 1867), 102-103. This article has previously been attributed to Acton; but that Cartwright was its author is clear from Acton to Wetherall, [mid-April 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherall Correspondence), not printed by Gasquet.

him to the Pope. Langrand-Dumonceau was to act as banker for the sale of the property in question and to receive in return for his services a commission of six per cent, or sixty million francs. Such a payment, however, was thought by many in Florence to be disproportionately large, and its size gave the first impulse to suspicions concerning the whole negotiation. Furthermore, it was known that Castellani was holding secret talks with the King; rumours that a coup d'etat was contemplated were, even at that early date, already circulating; Langrand-Dumonceau was believed to have had previous connections not only with Castellani but also with certain people in Rome; and in the midst of the negotiations, a man named Alberi, whom Cartwright described as a well-known enemy of the Italian revolution, began a series of journeys between Florence and the papal capital. These circumstances, each of them in its own right suspicious, combined to promote the belief that the Langrand-Dumonceau contract was not at all what it purported to be, but rather part of a grand conspiracy against Italian liberties, to which both the King and the Pope were party. Cartwright himself explained that this notion was ill-founded in the limited sense that the Pope had not, in fact, given his personal approval to the scheme. The Roman participants in the plot, he said, were certain influential men who acted without the Pope's consent. But this consideration did not significantly alter his conclusion. The main point which he meant to prove was that the opposition that had originally forced Ricasoli into an election had been due not only, or even chiefly, to the principles which the Free Church Bill embodied, but rather to the intrigues with which it had become associated.

Cartwright's account, therefore, raised the spectre of something rather more sinister than Acton had previously allowed for. And although it is clear that he did not accept it without reservations, he does appear to have believed that it was substantially correct. The points on which he disagreed with Cartwright concerned chiefly the characters of some of the alleged conspirators. He declared, for instance, that there was no reason to denigrate Castellani, who was in reality a "very able man";¹⁴ and he disassociated himself from the aspersions cast upon Alberi, with whom he was on friendly terms.¹⁵ He did not take issue, however, with the more fundamental aspects of Cartwright's case. He acknowledged that there had indeed been an intrigue, rumours of which had influenced the vote in the Chamber; he conceded somewhat reluctantly that Castellani had played a part in it; and he seems to have accepted that certain high officials in Rome had tried to take advantage of the crisis at Florence.¹⁶ It was this last point which was, perhaps, most significant. For the full implications of the conspiracy, as Cartwright explained it, did not become apparent until a distinction was drawn between what had been suspected at Florence and what had actually transpired. Cartwright, in other words, did not believe that the matter had ever been limited to a simple question of collusion between the King and the Church with respect to a

¹⁴ Acton to Wetherell, [mid-April 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

¹⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 10 May 1867, DB, I, pp. 486-487.

¹⁶ Acton to Wetherell, [mid-April 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

coup d'état. Instead, he charged that certain (unnamed) personages in Rome had tried to mislead Victor Emmanuel himself by giving him false assurances that, if he overthrew the Italian Constitution, the gates of Rome would thereupon be thrown open to him;¹⁷ and that in the meantime additional tactics had been employed in an attempt to use the Langrand-Dumonceau contract, not for its ostensible purpose, nor even as a prelude to a secretly arranged coup d'état, but rather as a means of restoring financial order in the Roman state itself. In the course of the affair, he pointed out, Langrand-Dumonceau had replaced his original agent with a certain Mr. Standley, an Englishman well-known in Italian financial circles, who had appeared at Rome more than a year earlier in connection with arrangements to bolster the near insolvent Roman Bank. His mission on that occasion had ended in failure, but it bore a relationship to the more recent proceedings which was by no means incidental. In fact, it was certain that while Langrand-Dumonceau had been negotiating a commission of sixty million francs for the sale of Church property, he had also been making secret arrangements with the representatives of the Roman Bank--whose Governor was Cardinal Antonelli's brother--to come to its aid with a substantial sum of money. Even now, Cartwright added, Count Antonelli was still counting on the help of Langrand-Dumonceau; and Langrand-Dumonceau, by threatening certain individuals at Florence with exposure, was attempting to force the Italian government to furnish him with his sixty million francs.

¹⁷[Cartwright], "Secret History of the Italian Crisis," Chronicle, I (27 April 1867), 102-103.

¹⁸Ibid., 103.

The impression which this second aspect of the alleged conspiracy made on Acton is difficult to judge precisely. One important thing that Cartwright had failed to make clear was whether his unnamed Roman conspirators had been prepared to see the sale of Church lands in Italy actually carried out. It seems rather unlikely that they would have been; but, on the other hand, it is difficult to imagine how Langrand-Dumonceau could have obtained his commission of sixty million francs without fulfilling the terms of the contract. Cartwright's dark hints to the effect that Langrand-Dumonceau was blackmailing certain influential people at Florence were too vague to be credited.

Yet the fact is that if this weakness in Cartwright's account bothered Acton, he gave no sign of it. Even though the worst feature of the conspiracy, in his eyes, was the encouragement given at Rome to the plan for a coup d'état--a ploy which he interpreted as an attempt to foster confusion and unrest in Italy--he appears also to have accepted the notion that an effort had been made to dupe the Italian government into providing funds for the rescue of the Roman Bank.¹⁹ He himself had already described the Bank to Wetherell as "a great portent and abomination."²⁰ He had also explained that the discontent which existed among the permanent inhabitants of Rome was due chiefly to its shortcomings. The prevailing attitude toward the Pope, he had said, was merely one of indifference; but the Antonelli family excited active

¹⁹ See Acton to Wetherell, [mid-April 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

²⁰ Acton to Wetherell, 30 January 1867, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

indignation.²¹ Langrand-Dumonceau, moreover, was a man whom Acton already regarded with suspicion on account of the "enormous profits" which he was to make from the sale of ecclesiastical lands.²² Thus, in a sense, the general idea that a degree of financial chicanery was involved might not even have been new to him.

The behaviour of Rome with respect to attempts to solve the Church property question in a responsible way was in any case a matter in which Acton soon had still more grounds for complaint. Shortly after the formation of the Rattazzi government, a substitute for the Free Church Bill was brought forward which, contrary to his worst fears, was relatively generous in its terms. The new Finance Minister was Ferrara, a man whose sincere Catholic beliefs distinguished him from the majority of his colleagues, and he had agreed to accept office only on the understanding that he would be permitted to do justice to the Church. What he proposed, in concrete terms, was to raise the funds so desperately required by the Italian exchequer by means of an extraordinary tax on Church property, but to undertake at the same time to use the income from all ecclesiastical lands already in the hands of the government to pay religious pensions and to defray the cost of public

²¹ Acton to Wetherell, [between 22 November and 3 December 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

²² Acton to Wetherell, 14 March [1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

worship.²³ This was the sort of solution which Acton himself had previously thought unlikely to succeed.²⁴ But now that the Free Church Bill was an irrevocably lost cause, and the government was in the hands of men suspected of anti-clerical motives, he looked upon it almost as a reprieve, the merits of which were obvious. On the one hand, the State would benefit by the proposed exchange because it had been able to realise little profit from previously confiscated ecclesiastical property.²⁵ On the other, the advantages to the Church were manifold. Since Ferrara proposed only to levy a tax, the terms of his bill did not conflict with canon law, as they would have had he simply called upon the Church to submit to spoliation; the actual sum that the Church was to forfeit was considerably less than had been provided for in the Free Church Bill, while the concessions in matters of Church-State relations which the latter had contained were to be acted upon without actually being mentioned; and no steps were to be taken to prevent

²³[Acton], "Rome and Italy," Chronicle, I (11 May 1867), 148. In his letter to Wetherell, on which this report in the Chronicle was based, Acton had stated that previously confiscated Church property was actually to be "restored" to the Church. (Acton to Wetherell, [c. 3 May 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. [Wetherell Correspondence]; not printed by Gasquet.) But he had also mentioned that certain alterations were to be made in the bill before it was actually introduced. Thus it is possible that the provision simply to use the profits from these lands for ecclesiastical purposes was drafted after his letter was posted and that Wetherell altered the description of Ferrara's terms accordingly before publishing the report.

²⁴ Acton to Wetherell, [February or March 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

²⁵ Acton to Wetherell, [c. 3 May 1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

the Church from retaining her old position as a holder of real property.²⁶ Understandably confident that Church officials would find these conditions acceptable, the government had despatched an agent to Rome, whose reception there they had found encouraging; and they had subsequently informed MM. Rothschild and Frémy, who were in this instance to act as bankers, that they had virtually obtained the consent of the Pope.²⁷ It only became apparent that the entire project was doomed to failure when Rothschild and Frémy suddenly withdrew from the agreement--which their representative had already signed. They sought to justify their behaviour by denying that they had ever agreed to be the instruments of the Italian government in persecuting the clergy.²⁸ But Acton somehow discovered a more shocking explanation for their abrupt change of mind, and confidently reported it in the

Chronicle as fact:

The refusal of the capitalists to carry out their agreement [he wrote] . . . was brought about by the Nuncio, the Legitimists, and the Catholic party generally, at Paris. They represented [to Rothschild and Frémy] the dangers of incessant lawsuits with the Italian bishops, and they even threatened that, if the agreement were adhered to, the Jews should suffer for its sake wherever the influence of the clergy could reach them.²⁹

As was often the case, Acton did not provide the source of his information.

²⁶ Ibid.; and [Acton], "Rome and Italy," Chronicle, I (11 May 1867), 148.

²⁷ [Acton], "Italy and Rome," Chronicle, I (15 June 1867), 266.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Yet whether he was correct or not, the important consideration is that he believed he was, and that he therefore felt sure that Rome and its supporters had once more employed dishonourable means to sabotage a project designed partly for the benefit of the Church itself. The failure of Ferrara's bill marked a grim turning point in the policy of the Italian government, for, as Acton had often pointed out, it was absolutely essential that the treasury should be restored with funds obtained in one way or another from the Church; and now that the methods preferred by the conservatives had twice failed, it was almost inevitable that Rattazzi, who had promptly assumed direct charge over financial affairs, should turn to more heavy-handed measures. In the summer of 1867, a Church Lands Act was introduced to the Chamber which provided for the outright seizure and forced sale by the State of a portion of the Church's property. No concessions in matters affecting the relative powers of Church and State were offered in compensation. Instead, to use Acton's words, the Church was henceforth to be regarded simply as "the salaried servant of the civil power."³⁰ This new policy with respect to ecclesiastical property was, moreover, partly the sign and partly the cause of a generally closer relationship between the Government and the Left, the implications of which were very broad indeed. Rattazzi simply could not stay in power without yielding in one direction or the other, and the Church Lands Act itself had made it more difficult, if not impossible, for him to retain the support of the Right;³¹ yet if he was going to rely on the Radicals, then he would

³⁰[Acton], "Italy," Chronicle, I (20 July 1867), 386.

³¹Acton to Simpson, 23 October 1867, ASC, III, p. 232.

also have to change his position on other issues, not least of which was the Roman question. Actually to violate the September Convention and thereby risk a breach with France was a step which he greatly feared. Yet he adopted a posture which was calculated to give the impression at least that under his government nothing would be done to prevent the Party of Action from seizing Rome by force.³² As a result of his own ambiguous behaviour and equivocal statements, the situation eventually became so serious and complex that he was forced to resign. But by then it was too late to suppress the revolutionary expectations that had been excited. On 22 October 1867 an insurrection broke out at Rome, and the following day Garibaldi led a band of volunteers across the papal frontier.

That the papal troops, aided by a French expeditionary force, were able in the end to repulse the invaders and to quell the uprising in Rome was a circumstance which, to Acton's mind, did not alter the lesson to be drawn from these latest developments. Although he appreciated, as did most observers, that the surprisingly successful defence of the Pope's territory meant a moral as well as a military victory for the cause of the Temporal Power, what seemed to him more noteworthy was that an armed clash had taken place when it could have been avoided. In the report of the crisis which he submitted to the Chronicle, the point on which he laid special emphasis was not that Rome had managed to win a momentary advantage, but rather that it was now more evident than ever that a permanent solution to the Roman

³²Ibid.

question could be achieved only by a genuine reconciliation between Church and country.³³ Although he had not yet lost all hope that the Pope and his advisers would change their tactics,³⁴ he was disgusted by their refusal to take advantage of the opportunities which existed for sincere negotiation. Their intransigence had prolonged and exacerbated the financial disorder into which the Italian state had fallen and thus threatened its political stability. At the same time, it had strengthened the hand of the Italian Radicals and placed the security of Rome itself in jeopardy. It seemed pointless, malevolent, and almost certain to result in catastrophe.

At the same time as Acton was observing the machinations surrounding attempts to deal with the Church property question, the historical information which he had gathered during his stay in Italy began to yield definite conclusions--although not quite in the way in which he

³³[Acton], "The Roman Question," Chronicle, I (26 October 1867), 721.

³⁴In the midst of the turmoil caused by the invasion of the Pope's territory, Rattazzi's government had been replaced by an administration more conservative--and, therefore, possibly more willing to make concessions--than any the Kingdom of Italy had thus far known. Although Acton had no doubt that the onus once more fell on Rome, he hoped that the way to reconciliation might be re-opened. See "The Roman Question," Chronicle, I (2 November 1867), 745-746; and "Italy and Rome," Chronicle, I (16 November 1867), 793-794.

himself might once have expected. When he began his study of manuscript materials in 1864, he had taken for granted that he would devote himself to the production of large-scale works, such as the one which he had planned to write on the history of the Index; but, as we have seen, his research brought him into contact with so vast a number of documents, touching on so wide a variety of topics, that he was soon unable to organise his material in the manner necessary for the composition of a major study. Although he managed to assemble enormous collections of transcripts on topics as broad as the Council of Trent, the Index, and the relationship between Rome and England under the Stuarts, it was actually with respect to more precise questions--often, it is true, arising from the larger issues--that he succeeded in producing completed articles. Furthermore, the focus of his attention was constantly shifting, albeit sometimes in subtle ways; and by 1867 the question of intellectual freedom within the Catholic community, which had inspired his interest in the history of the Index, had gradually given way to the still more provocative problem of persecution. This transition in Acton's thinking was of the utmost significance, for it marked the beginning of a pre-occupation which was soon to become an obsession and colour his entire outlook. Of the historical articles which he wrote between 1867 and 1870, the three most important dealt with incidents which he believed effectively illustrated the spirit of Roman intolerance.

The first of these essays, entitled "Fra Paolo Sarpi,"³⁵ arose directly from Acton's investigations into the history of the Council of

³⁵"Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 14-17.

Trent--or, to be more accurate, into the historiography of Trent. That is to say, it was concerned in the first instance with stating the conclusion, which he had reached nearly three years earlier, that Sarpi's character was such that his famous account of the events of the Council simply could not be trusted. Sarpi's private notebooks, he declared, revealed that he was grossly insincere, that he was not even a believing Christian let alone an heroic religious reformer, and that his ecclesiastical works had been written solely to serve a political purpose. Although Acton left no room for doubt on this point, however, his accusations were not directed against Sarpi alone. He was also determined to show, by examining the precise nature of Sarpi's political motives, that the original responsibility for the series of events which had led to the composition of the History lay not with him, nor even with the Republic of Venice whose champion he was, but with Rome.

The Venetians, he explained, had been entirely faithful to the papal cause at Trent, and after the Council was over they had unhesitatingly accepted its decrees. Only later in the century, when Rome tried to strengthen its own hand in the struggle against Protestant princes by interfering in the civil affairs of other states, had Venice begun to resist. In the course of the ensuing controversy, hundreds of tracts had been written by Venetians which were deemed heretical at Rome; and after the main points of contention had at last been settled, Paul V had summoned the offenders before the Inquisition. Two men of relatively minor stature had actually been taken into custody. One of them had been found guilty and put to death. But since it was Sarpi himself, the "soul of the Venetian party," whom the Pope

most wished to punish, Rome had demanded of the Venetian government that he too should be handed over. The Venetians, of course, had refused. And after attempts to induce the King of France to persuade them to change their minds had failed, a less regular expedient had been adopted. One evening, in a dark street in Venice, Sarpi had been set upon and stabbed, muttering even as his assailants attacked him: Cognosco stilum curiae Romanae. The attempted assassination had failed. But the would-be murderers had subsequently fled into the Pope's dominions, where they had, in effect, been granted a safe conduct. They had even appeared at Rome and remained there for some time unmolested. Eventually, the Viceroy of Naples had been requested to give them a pension and keep them out of the way.

The part which the Pope himself had played in the attempt to murder Sarpi was a matter to which Acton devoted special attention, not only in the published version of his article but also in the letter which he wrote to Wetherell concerning it. From both these sources, it appeared at first that his intention was to blame the Curia alone, while completely exonerating Paul; for he insisted that there was insufficient evidence to support the charge of papal complicity.³⁶ Indeed, in the essay, he pointed out that when several men had previously approached the Pope with offers to rid him of his notorious Venetian adversary, they had been summarily dismissed³⁷--a point which seemed to argue strongly in Paul's favour. Yet a closer examination of Acton's

³⁶Ibid., 16; and Acton to Wetherell, 18 March [1867], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence), not printed by Gasquet.

³⁷"Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 16.

comments reveals that his desire to defend the Pope was more apparent than real. Although he may have thought it unlikely that Paul V had been an accomplice to the actual attempt at assassination, he was certainly convinced that the Pope was deeply implicated in the general attitude which encouraged such deeds. When the news of the attack reached Rome, he said, the Pontiff had declared that he deplored it, not because he wished Sarpi no harm, but because he considered it an ill-considered action, likely to harm the papal cause.³⁸

Like the essay on Sarpi, the second and third of Acton's articles on persecution--both of which dealt with the infamous Massacre of Saint Bartholomew--were attempts at historical revision which sought not merely to challenge the traditional understanding of events, but also to show that the main protagonists deserved greater blame than they had often been accorded. According to the conventional French interpretation of this occurrence, Charles IX had proposed a marriage between his sister Margaret and the King of Navarre because he sincerely wished to effect a reconciliation between himself and his Protestant subjects. But Catherine de Medici and the Duke of Anjou, fearing that their own policies would be ruined, especially as the influence of the Huguenot leader Coligny increased, had adopted desperate measures and hired an assassin to shoot their competitor. Only when it was discovered that the wound inflicted had not proved fatal, and the King boldly undertook to avenge the deed, had Catherine confessed her guilt to her son and thus obtained his consent to have the Huguenots

³⁸ Ibid.

slaughtered. The spontaneity of the massacre seemed somehow to render it less horrible, inasmuch as it was seen to have been committed by people forced to extreme measures as a last resort. But it was precisely with respect to the unplanned nature of the event that Acton disagreed. Even in the first of his articles on the subject,³⁹ he argued that so far from having been unpremeditated, the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew had been the outcome of a carefully prepared and treacherous plot, of which the proposed marriage between Henry of Navarre and Margaret of Valois had been an essential part. For one thing, he said, when Cardinal Bonelli, the nephew of the Pope, had been sent to Paris for the purpose of persuading the King to cancel the arrangements for the marriage, he had, by his own account, been assured that the match had actually been planned for the benefit of the Church and that the truth of this statement would be proved by the event itself. The Nuncio at Paris had likewise been given dark intimations of what was to come, a fact to which he had later testified; indeed, on the very day that the massacre was raging, he had written to Rome that he had already known that some sort of vengeance had been prepared for Coligny, although he had not anticipated an event of such magnitude. Once the deed had been accomplished, Catherine herself had made certain that the Pope, as well as the King of Spain, understood that it had been planned. Although for reasons of policy the massacre had been publicly justified on the grounds that it had been provoked by the discovery of a political conspiracy among the Huguenots, she had

³⁹"The Massacre of St. Bartholomew," Chronicle, II (15 February 1868), 158-160.

charged both the Papal Nuncio and the French Ambassador at Madrid to contradict this story in private. She had even assured the Pope that a declaration saying that no harm had been intended against the Protestant religion was a mere pretence and soon would be revoked.

So far as the massacre itself was concerned, therefore, the crux of Acton's argument lay in the theory of premeditation: and by 1869, when he published his second essay,⁴⁰ he was prepared to argue his case in far greater detail, adducing proofs which had been unknown to him a year earlier. Perhaps the most important of these was an account of the aforementioned meeting between Cardinal Bonelli and Charles IX written by Pope Clement VIII, who had at the time been Bonelli's chief adviser. Clement's words, or so it seemed, confirmed beyond doubt that as early as February 1572 the King had promised revenge on the Huguenots, for they accorded perfectly with Bonelli's own report of what the King had told him. Acton considered that what Clement had written was compelling enough to quote in the body of his essay; and the most striking passage, which purported to be a record of Charles' own words, reads as follows: "Significate Pontifici illumque certum reddite me totum hoc quod circa id matrimonium feci et facturus sum, nulla alia de causa facere, quam ulciscendi inimicos Dei et hujus regni, et puniendi tam infidos rebelles, ut eventus ipse docebit, nec aliud vobis amplius significare possum."⁴¹

⁴⁰"The Massacre of St. Bartholomew," North British Review, LI (October 1869), 30-70; reprinted in HOF, pp. 101-149.

⁴¹HOF, p. 115.

But the apparent decisiveness of this and similar evidence did not induce Acton simply to bring his comments on the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew to a close. To prove that the mass murder of the Huguenots had been planned was, in reality, only one part of his purpose. Equally important to him was the task of recording the general approbation with which the news of the event had been greeted at Rome; and thus his article of 1869 also contained a long and detailed account of what had taken place in this respect.⁴² Although he denied categorically that either the Pope or his underlings had taken any part in the original plot, he claimed that rejoicing had begun with the arrival of the first despatch in which the Nuncio, Salviati, reported the onslaught at Paris. Indeed, part of what Salviati had written, he said, was that a glorious new era had dawned in French affairs and that he therefore longed to fling himself at the feet of the Pontiff in order to wish him joy; and when his letter was read aloud at the Venetian Palace to the assembled Cardinals, they had responded by attending the Pope to a Te Deum in the nearest Church. On the same evening the guns of St. Angelo had been fired, and for three consecutive nights the city had been illuminated. The Pope himself had exclaimed that the massacre was more agreeable to him than fifty victories of Lepanto. In order to signify his joy, he had chosen a startling variety of means, beginning with a solemn procession to the French Church of S. Louis, where, attended by thirty-three cardinals, he had offered a mass of thanksgiving. Three days later he had proclaimed a Jubilee. He had also ordered that a

⁴²See especially HOF, pp. 133-135.

medal be struck in honour of the great service which had been performed for religion. Before the celebrations had ended, the artist Vasari had been summoned from Florence to decorate the Hall of Kings with a painting of the massacre--a scene which, Acton said, had for three centuries insulted every pontiff who entered the Sistine Chapel.

Acton claimed that his sole purpose in presenting this inventory of the ways in which Rome had manifested delight at the slaughter of the Huguenots was to record the facts. So far as the moral of the story was concerned, he said, he was anxious to let it assert itself.⁴³ But however sincere he may have been in offering this explanation of his motives, the truth is that the lesson which he intended to convey could not have been rendered more conspicuous had he arranged for it to be printed in block capitals. Not only did he make clear by every example he could possibly muster that Rome had wholeheartedly approved the course adopted by the King of France; he also tried to show that they considered it indicative of the policy which ought everywhere to be applied to heretics. Quoting his sources by chapter and verse, he stated that Gregory XIII had informed the Emperor through his ambassador at Rome that deeds similar to those just performed by the King of France were also expected of him; that he had pressed Charles himself not to desist from his violent measures until every Protestant in his realm had been extirpated; and that in the bull proclaiming the Jubilee he had asked Catholics to pray that this intention might be fulfilled.⁴⁴

⁴³ Acton to Wetherell, undated note, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence); not printed by Gasquet.

⁴⁴ HOF, p. 134, p. 137, and pp. 134-135.

The enthusiastic and consistent application of the doctrine of persecution by high Church officials offended Acton far more profoundly than the frenzied zeal of those who had actually struck down the fugitive Protestants.⁴⁵ Yet, in the last analysis, he was prepared to make certain allowances even for some of these men.⁴⁶ What seemed to him most execrable was the doctrine itself, for he believed that it had effected an "incurable perversion of moral sense, wrought by a distorted piety."⁴⁷ Thus, although he would later describe the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew as "the lowest point to which religion fell since the founding of the Church,"⁴⁸ its importance to him always consisted first and foremost in its representative character. The question which was occupying more and more of his intellectual and emotional energy was how the mind of Rome had been penetrated and infected by the insidious idea that, in dealing with heretics, murder was to be preferred to tolerance.⁴⁹

Inseparable from this pernicious doctrine, in Acton's mind, were the subsequent attempts to deny its influence by suppressing or distorting the facts.⁵⁰ And, partly for this reason, he was relentless in exposing every example of Roman intolerance to which the

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁸C.U.L. Add. 5586, [card not numbered].

⁴⁹See HOF, p. 138.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 148-149.

sources at his disposal appeared to testify. In his article on Sarpi, for instance, he inserted, somewhat gratuitously, a story recounting how a decree had been issued in the Republic of Lucca in the sixteenth century offering pardons for past crimes to any citizen who would kill a former compatriot who had fled the country and become a Protestant. The publication of the decree, he said, had been applauded by the reigning Pope as well as by the Archbishop of Milan, who happened to be Saint Charles Borromeo.⁵¹ Similarly, Acton's second essay on the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew contained a reference to events not really pertinent to the question at hand, except in the sense that he believed that they were illustrative of the intolerant and sanguinary spirit which had prevailed at Rome in the age of the Counter-Reformation. The culprit this time was Saint Pius V, a man whom Acton had already described as "the very type of an Inquisitor";⁵² and the crimes of which he was accused were so numerous that it took nearly two pages to list them.⁵³ Acton had not yet developed his case against either Borromeo or Pius V to the same degree that he had worked out his interpretation of the attempted murder of Sarpi and the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew. But their names would re-appear in his subsequent writings, and the deeds of which he thought them guilty would figure prominently not only in his famous encounter with Gladstone in the "Vaticanism" controversy, but also in his remarkable letters to Mary

⁵¹"Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 16.

⁵²Acton to Simpson, 10 April 1861, ASC, II, p. 140.

⁵³HOF, pp. 138-139.

Gladstone and in his painful dispute with Döllinger. It may rightfully be said that what Acton wrote concerning persecution in the years between 1867 and 1869 marked the formal beginning of the intellectual course which led to his eventual isolation.

What must not be doubted for a moment is that the frame of mind which Acton displayed in his articles on persecution represented a new element in his general outlook. At every stage of his career, he had been prepared to admit frankly that Catholics had at times persecuted. On one special occasion in 1864, when he had done so at a Catholic reunion,⁵⁴ he had been rewarded for his candour by several letters of protest and a declaration from the Shropshire clergy deeming his speech heretical.⁵⁵ But in cases such as this, Acton had been primarily concerned to assert his right to state the facts, even if they appeared to be disagreeable.⁵⁶ The significance which he assigned to Catholic persecution was another matter. And what must be remembered in this respect is that he had devoted the most important essay of his youth to

⁵⁴ Acton's address at a reunion of Catholics at Dudley, as reported in the Birmingham Daily Post for 28 January 1864; reprinted in DB, III, Appendix, pp. 437-438.

⁵⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 23 February 1864, DB, I, p. 334.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

proving that Catholic persecution could be justified, inasmuch as it had been an expedient adopted only for the sake of preserving social stability, whereas Protestant persecution could not, because it had been carried out as a matter of principle, with no other motive than the desire to enforce religious conformity.⁵⁷ Even now, as Acton's views were changing, he was not prepared to abandon this idea entirely. He can be found re-stating it in 1869 in terms essentially the same as those which he had used in 1862.⁵⁸ But his "theory of persecution" had depended entirely on the arbitrary decision to restrict his argument in such a way that Protestant persecution was compared only to the medieval Inquisition.⁵⁹ From about 1863 he began to display an increasing awareness that if one concentrated instead on the Roman Inquisition, the issue appeared in an entirely different light.⁶⁰ It was partly this change of focus which prepared the way for the approach which Acton adopted in 1867.

Once Acton had begun to pay closer attention to Catholic persecution in the period after the Reformation, his attitude grew steadily

⁵⁷"The Protestant Theory of Persecution," Rambler, VI, 3rd ser. (March 1862), 318-351; reprinted HOF, pp. 150-187.

⁵⁸Review of Gardiner, Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage, in North British Review, LI (October 1869), 243-245.

⁵⁹In "The Protestant Theory of Persecution," the only reference which Acton made to Catholic persecution after the Reformation read as follows: "The only instance in which the Protestant theory has been adopted by Catholics is the revocation of the Edict of Nantes." (HOF, p. 170).

⁶⁰See Acton's review of H. Foraby, Pictorial Bible and Church-History Stories, vol. III, in Home and Foreign Review, II (January 1863), 218-219.

more severe, and his penchant for condemnation manifested itself with ever increasing intensity. According to his own testimony, the direct cause of this alteration in his tone was the historical evidence which confronted him when he began to investigate manuscript sources. Having recognised the value of unpublished documents, he later said, he had carried his Liberal principles into the study of history; and what he had found in the archives had convinced him that the doctrine that the end justifies the means had fostered a "grievous evil in the Church."⁶¹ This idea, that it was the revolution in his historical methods which led him to revise his former position, must certainly be taken seriously. Not only was it the explanation which he himself offered to account for his intellectual progress, but it also accords with evidence which dates from the time when he was actually immersed in exhaustive manuscript research. On 28 February 1868, for instance, he wrote to Döllinger that, having read the letters of Pius V and studied the documents relating to the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, he was now able to understand why a convert might feel that he had erred by entering the Roman Church.⁶² And in another letter he stated more bluntly that "history is much more abominable than we all imagine."⁶³ Nevertheless, it is clear from the very nature of Acton's essays on persecution that something more than the availability of new evidence is required to

⁶¹ Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, February 1869, Correspondence, p. 54.

⁶² Acton to Döllinger, 28 February 1868, DB, I, p. 501.

⁶³ Acton to Döllinger, 25 July 1869, DB, I, p. 568.

explain the change in outlook to which they testify. Although they were in many respects sound and even brilliant, they also contained certain blunders in the use of evidence which are so striking--especially when committed by an historian of Acton's calibre--that they must be regarded as indications that his historical judgement was at this time affected by powerful external influences.⁶⁴

For example, Acton's attempt to show that the assassination of Paolo Sarpi had been arranged by members of the Roman Curia was based partly on the legend that Sarpi had greeted his assailants with the words "Cognosco sillum curiae Romanae," partly on the protection that the would-be murderers had reputedly been granted in Rome, and partly on the assertion that the principles which had then prevailed in high ecclesiastical circles were consistent with the slaying of a notorious heretic. None of these considerations was really deserving of the name of "evidence," for only one among them--the treatment which the hired killers had received at Rome--was susceptible of

⁶⁴It is worth noting that the interaction of historical and ecclesiastical considerations--of judgements concerning the past and motives relating to the present--was something which Acton himself subsequently detected in this phase of Döllinger's career. In C.U.L. Add. 4909, he writes: "The change of position in religion was exactly the same as the change in his notion of history . . ." (card 77); and "The great change in his ecclesiastical attitude which came to pass between 1861 and 1867 interfered with his historical work, and very seriously influenced his principles of judgement . . ." (card 60); and, again, "The change in his ecclesiastical position between sixty and seventy . . . implied a change of sympathies and judgements, if not in the canons by which he judged the ideas, the actions and the characters of men." (card 82).

concrete proof; and Acton cited not a single source to support the charges which he made. Even if he had, the most he would have been able to demonstrate was that Rome was an accomplice after the fact: he certainly produced no tangible evidence to show that the ruffians had been connected with the Curia before the attempted assassination. But the other two circumstances upon which he drew were more curious still. On the one hand, to use as part of his argument the fact that Sarpi himself had believed that his assailants had been commissioned by the Curia was to engage in virtual self-contradiction: he had just devoted the first part of his essay to proving that Sarpi was an utter scoundrel whose word could never be trusted. On the other hand, to say that the Roman officials of the day were inclined by virtue of their perverse ideas to encourage crimes of this kind was to state his case in reverse. What Acton intended to do was to illustrate the temper of the Roman mind by the concrete example of the attempt on Sarpi's life. What he actually did was to argue, by vague implication, that members of the Curia had no doubt been guilty because of the doctrines which they were known to have espoused.

The particular story which he used to enhance this argument--namely, that which claimed that both Saint Charles Borromeo and the Pope had applauded a decree calling for the murder of Protestants from Lucca--betrayed an even greater carelessness in procedure. In the first place, it was not based on original documents; it was taken directly from the History of the Italians recently published by Cesare Cantù.⁶⁵ This

⁶⁵"Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 16.

circumstance is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that scarcely three weeks after the appearance of his own article, Acton accused Cantù of gross incompetence in the writing of history and complained in particular of his inconsistency in dealing with questions of persecution;⁶⁶ but in the case of the decree which had been issued in Lucca, he justified his reliance on him with the glib declaration that "to quote a passage of that kind from an acknowledged Catholic authority is perfectly lawful"—even though he admitted that he "had never had an opportunity of verifying it."⁶⁷ Acton, in fact, misquoted Cantù; for he said that the Pope who had welcomed the decree was Pius V,⁶⁸ whereas Pius IV had actually been reigning at the time. And although he later avowed that there was no excuse for this blunder,⁶⁹ he was not at first unduly concerned about it, because, as he said, "things equally strong are in the published letters of S. Pius V and

⁶⁶Review of Cesare Cantù, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, in Chronicle, I (20 April 1867), 89-90.

⁶⁷Acton to Wetherell, [c. 11 April 1867] Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence). This letter is reprinted from Gasquet's transcript in Watkin and Butterfield, "Gasquet and the Acton-Simpson Correspondence," Cambridge Historical Journal, vol. X, no. 1 (1950) 102; but since even Gasquet's transcript (which he himself never published) was a falsified version of the original letter, the text which Watkin and Butterfield were able to give is inaccurate.

⁶⁸"Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 16.

⁶⁹Acton to Wetherell, undated letter, Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence). Again the text given by Watkin and Butterfield (p. 19) is based on a false transcription by Gasquet; but the sentence relevant to this point was left intact and is therefore reprinted exactly as it appears in the original manuscript.

because the approbation of the Lucca law is implied in the system of the Inquisition which S. Pius in reality created."⁷⁰ Again, he was arguing backwards and trying to establish guilt by an association of ideas.

What makes the whole matter worse still, however, is that Acton was almost certainly confused about the decree which Pius IV actually did applaud. He assumed that it was a decree issued on 10 January 1562. But Father Herbert Thurston has shown that the measures which the Pope commended were very probably those contained in an earlier decree of 19 December 1561--a decree which made no provision for the assassination of heretics.⁷¹

Similar considerations are decisive even with respect to Acton's accusation against Saint Charles Borromeo. This is an especially important case, it should be noted, because of all the allegations which his article on Sarpi contained, this was the only one (aside from the charges against Sarpi himself) which Acton seemed to be able to support with incontrovertible evidence. Some years after the article on Sarpi was published, he discovered a letter in which Borromeo urged the government of Lucca to renew and enforce decrees which it had previously passed against heretical citizens of the republic who were living abroad. In the light of this apparently crucial piece of evidence, he strengthened his original accusation to say that "S. Charles

⁷⁰ Acton to Wetherell [c. 11 April 1867] Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence). See above, n. 67.

⁷¹ The Rev. Herbert Thurston, S.J., "Was St. Charles Borromeo a Murderer?", The Tablet, LXXIV (29 July 1905), 167-169.

Borromeo, when he was the Pope's nephew and minister, wrote a letter requiring Protestants to be murdered and complaining that no heretical heads were forwarded to Rome, in spite of the reward that was offered for them."⁷² But despite Acton's obvious confidence that he was right this time, the fact is that Father Thurston has been able to show that here too his argument collapses under close scrutiny. In the first place, although the decree that was issued on 10 January 1562 did indeed impose a penalty of death on certain heretical natives of Lucca, this part of the decree applied only to a handful of men, who were named, and it threatened them with death only if they failed to leave certain specified Catholic countries by a fixed date. In the second place, the balance of the decree was concerned with ensuring that other natives of Lucca who were residing in France at the time should lead good Catholic lives, and it accordingly forbade them to hear heretical sermons, read heretical books, or correspond with heretical refugees. Internal evidence, especially the precise wording of Borromeo's letter, strongly suggests that it was this second part of the decree to which he referred—if indeed he referred to this decree at all and not to the earlier proclamation which had been commended by the Pope. In any event, Borromeo cannot be said, on the basis of the evidence which Acton produced, to have exhorted the authorities of Lucca to see that heretics were put to death. His letter simply does not mention such a thing. Instead, it merely asks that steps be taken, in accordance with laws previously passed, to ensure that the citizens

⁷² Acton to Mary Gladstone, 19 June 1884, LMG, p. 186. See also Acton to Mary Gladstone, 21 March 1882, LMG, p. 135.

of Lucca who are residing in France live as good Catholics. The likelihood is that Borromeo was thinking here of measures such as the prohibition against heretical books.⁷³

Partly because he had studied the matter in far greater detail, many of the errors in judgement which led Acton astray in the case of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew were less glaring than those which deceived him with respect to the murder of Sarpi and the Luccan decree. Professor Butterfield has already subjected Acton's interpretation of the events of August 1572 to a minute analysis and shown that his chief mistake was that he allowed himself to be influenced too strongly by evidence which dated from the period after the massacre.⁷⁴ Acton did not consider seriously enough the idea that the dark intimations given before the event had been deliberately misleading hints, supplied in order to evade Rome's protests against the marriage of Margaret to Henry; and he likewise underestimated the possibility that the subsequent claim to have planned the slaughter all along had actually been part of a clever attempt to make the best of a bad situation. These slips were far less clumsy than they might at first appear. Catherine de Medici was masterful in the art of deception, and Acton was fooled by the same ruse which she had used to dupe the Pope and the King of Spain.⁷⁵ But there are never-

⁷³ Herbert Thurston, "Was St. Charles Borromeo a Murderer?," Tablet, LXXIV (29 July 1905), 167-169.

⁷⁴ See H. Butterfield, "Acton and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew," Cambridge Historical Journal, vol. XI, no. 1 (1953) 27-47, especially 39. See also Butterfield, Man on his Past, pp. 171-201.

⁷⁵ See Butterfield, "Acton and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew," CHJ, XI, 1 (1953), 47: ". . . Catherine de Medici was so untruthful that she is not necessarily to be believed even when she is giving evidence against herself."

theless certain aspects of Acton's argument which betray too great an eagerness on his part to convict and condemn. With respect to the question of premeditation, he had before him the conflicting testimony of Michiel and Cavalli, two Venetian diplomats who had been resident in Paris in 1572. Michiel had believed in premeditation, whereas Cavalli had not; and although there were very solid grounds for believing that Cavalli's judgement was sounder, Acton opted to rely on Michiel.⁷⁶ Similarly, he ignored a passage in a printed despatch of the Papal Nuncio, Salviati, where the latter had said that he could not bring himself to believe that the massacre had been anything other than the outcome of a sudden decision; yet he quoted another excerpt from the very same despatch, with which he was therefore obviously familiar.⁷⁷

The allegations that Acton made against Gregory XIII and the Roman Court were, of course, another matter, since all that he said in this respect was factually correct. The only point which might have been raised in Gregory's favour, and which his pre-conceived ideas caused him to overlook, was that the Pope had rejoiced, not because it pleased him to see bloodshed, but because he was gratified by the complete reversal in French policy which the attack on the Huguenots seemed to signal.⁷⁸ Yet the question of an abrupt change in French policy is precisely the point which highlights Acton's greatest blunder of all. The interpretation

⁷⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁸ See Rev. Herbert Thurston, S.J., "The Late Lord Acton and the 'Cambridge Modern History,'" The Tablet, LXXIV (15 July 1905), 89.

of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew that he put forth completely failed to explain why the French Court should have deliberately undermined both the domestic and the foreign policy which it had until then been so carefully pursuing.⁷⁹ At home, Catherine had tried to play off one religious faction against the other; abroad, she had sought to form alliances with Protestant powers. The events of Saint Bartholomew's Day made a shambles of both designs.

When one comes to the question of what caused Acton to overlook considerations of this nature and thus often to exaggerate the sinister aspects of past events, the idea that he was influenced by other men who found persecution and intolerance as distasteful as he did must seriously be considered. His friendship with Gladstone, for instance, had grown steadily since 1864, and it is not at all difficult to imagine that the frequent conversations which the two men had might have encouraged Acton in his tendency toward righteous indignation. But such evidence as is available tends to contradict this otherwise plausible supposition. Acton met Gladstone in Rome in 1866, and, in the course of a general discussion regarding circumstances within the Papal State, he recounted to him how he had visited the prison for priests near Corneto and found conditions there a good deal less than commendable. He also told him that he had written to Antonelli describing what he had seen and imploring him to order improvements, but that for three weeks he had waited in vain for a reply. One might have thought that Acton was soliciting Gladstone's assistance in his

⁷⁹ Butterfield, "Acton and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew," CHJ, XI, 1 (1953), 38-39.

minor campaign for penal reform. Yet the truth is that when the story provoked Gladstone to recall his own observations in Naples some years earlier--observations which had led to the publication of the controversial pamphlet on Neapolitan Prisons--Acton became frightened. It does not appear that he tried then and there to restrain Gladstone. But the very next day he went in person to discuss the issue with Antonelli, partly perhaps in the hope that he would thereby manage to prevent an embarrassing incident.⁸⁰

Another man who might conceivably have influenced Acton at this time was Montalembert, for in the mid-1860s he made two important statements on persecution which were similar both in tone and in purpose to Acton's articles on Sarpi and the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew. The first of these was his famous address to the Malines Congress of 1863, in which he declared indignantly that a Spanish Inquisitor was as odious to him as a French Terrorist;⁸¹ the second, inspired by a visit to Spain in 1865, was his book entitled L'Espagne et la Liberté.⁸² Montalembert had originally wanted to publish the latter as an essay in the Correspondant but had been prevented from doing so by the firm objections of his colleagues; and Acton, who naturally considered the attitude of the Correspondant circle unduly timid, had intervened to recommend that he bring it out in English.⁸³ That Acton thus showed

⁸⁰ Acton to Döllinger, Christmas 1866, DB, I, p. 457.

⁸¹ Lecanuet, Montalembert, III, p. 356.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 285-289.

⁸³ Acton to Döllinger, 20 February 1869, DB, I, p. 546.

himself so concerned to see Montalembert's thoughts made public appears at first to strengthen the possibility that they had affected his own ideas. But, as in the case of Gladstone, there is no real evidence to support such a contention. Although Acton may have sympathised with the particular views expressed in L'Espagne et la Liberté, and although his development at this stage may have been in some respects parallel or analogous to Montalembert's, there is no reason to believe that he was directly influenced by him. On the contrary, his general dissatisfaction with Montalembert, as with other French Liberal Catholics, was deepening during this period.⁸⁴ His new obsession with persecution, though it testified to an increasingly militant spirit, did not in any sense signify that Acton was now more inclined to consider himself a member of a recognised party within the Church. In 1867, he expressed in the strongest terms possible his conviction that nothing existed which could properly be called a Liberal

⁸⁴In 1865, Acton had seen Montalembert in Paris and had been told by him that he would willingly abandon the Temporal Power, if it were not for his fear that its disappearance would result in a great increase in the spiritual authority of the Holy See. Montalembert may have proved by this remark that he was a very astute observer; but Acton was impressed instead by his essentially immoral readiness to subordinate political justice to religious expedience. (Acton to Döllinger, 23 June 1865, DB, I, p. 409).

For evidence of Acton's growing dissatisfaction with other French Liberal Catholics see: Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, p. 389; Acton to Marie, June 1865, Decisive Decade, p. 66; [Acton], "Essays in Academic Literature," Chronicle, I (5 October 1867), 665-666; and [Acton] "Osann on the Fifth Century," Chronicle, II (1 February 1868), 106.

Catholic Party.⁸⁵

The influence which Döllinger exercised on Acton's views at this critical juncture is, as one might expect, another matter entirely. In a certain sense at least, it is ironic to say that Acton was encouraged by his teacher to concentrate more on the question of persecution, since it was precisely this issue which later caused the rift between them, and since even at this early stage Acton clearly believed that Döllinger underestimated the extent of the atrocities which had been committed at Rome under the Inquisition.⁸⁶ But the point which must be stressed is that where Acton and Döllinger disagreed was not in their willingness openly to deplore Catholic persecution at a time when the pronouncements of the Holy See seemed to sanction and exalt it. They differed rather in the separate conclusions to which the consideration of this topic eventually led them and in the relative importance which it possessed for them in the long term. In the 1860s, Döllinger was indeed sensitive to the issue, and, like Acton, he pub-

⁸⁵"Essays in Academic Literature," Chronicle, I (5 October 1867), 665: "There is no party [in the Church at present] but the Roman party. Other opinions, which are discouraged or proscribed at Rome, exist in plenty but not in groups. There is not only neither combination nor coherence, but no substantial agreement among those who are roughly classified as Liberal Catholics . . .".

⁸⁶See Acton to Döllinger, 28 January 1862, DB, I, pp. 246-247; and Fra Paolo Sarpi," Chronicle, I (30 March 1867), 16. See also C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 174; and C.U.L. Add. 5670, f. 19b.

lished three articles dealing with it.⁸⁷ The first of these, "Rom und die Inquisition," was provoked by the canonisation in 1867 of the Inquisitor Peter Arbués. No gesture could have been better calculated to spark a heated debate with respect to Roman intolerance, for it seemed indicative of an almost defiant shamelessness on the part of Church officials. Yet it is interesting to note that it was Döllinger who wrote to Acton deploring the event.⁸⁸ It is true, of course, that by this time Acton's essay on the murder of Sarpi had already appeared, so that Döllinger's indignation cannot be said to have done more than stimulate him to pursue a line of thought which he had already taken up. Nevertheless, there is also some reason to believe that at an earlier time, when Acton first began to abandon less provocative historical interests in order to focus his attention on Roman scandals, he was actually following Döllinger's lead. In 1866, Döllinger appears to have announced his intention of composing a polemical work which would draw on historical information that was detrimental to the Roman cause. Acton, who feared that his teacher's scholarly work would suffer if he were drawn too deeply into controversy, at first implored him to give

⁸⁷"Rom und die Inquisition," Allgemeine Zeitung, no. 126 (1867), reprinted in F. H. Reusch, ed., Kleinere Schriften gedruckte und ungedruckte von Joh. Jos. Ign. v. Döllinger (Stuttgart: J. G. Gotta, 1890) pp. 286-356; "Die spanische Inquisition," Neue Freie Presse, nos. 1391 and 1392 (1868), reprinted in Kleinere Schriften, pp. 357-384; and "Die römische Inquisition, ihre Erneuerung und Erweiterung," Neue Freie Presse, nos. 1400 and 1401 (1868), reprinted in Kleinere Schriften, pp. 384-404.

⁸⁸Döllinger to Acton, 19 February 1867, DB, I, p. 476.

up the idea.⁸⁹ Yet once he was reasonably satisfied that adequate safeguards could be arranged to protect Döllinger's position, he seems not only to have entered into the project with genuine enthusiasm but also to have proposed ways in which he himself might help.⁹⁰ Among the suggestions which he made was that he could supply pertinent evidence from manuscript sources, especially if he managed to complete his researches by the following winter.⁹¹

Perhaps the single most important observation to be made, in light of the obviously close connection between Acton and Döllinger's reflections on persecution, is that the attention of both men had been drawn to questions of this nature largely by what was actually taking place in Rome in the 1860s. Although the particular incident of the canonisation of Arbués may not have affected Acton quite so deeply as it did Döllinger,⁹² what must not be forgotten is that his arrival in Rome in 1864 coincided almost exactly with the publication of the Syllabus of Errors, a document in which Rome seemed to flaunt its illiberality still more brazenly. At the time of the appearance of the Syllabus, Acton had maintained a tactful silence, largely because he wanted to avoid offending his fiancée's family.⁹³ But there can be no

⁸⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 5 August 1866 and 10 August 1866, DB, I, pp. 438-439 and pp. 441-442.

⁹⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 20 August 1866, DB, I, pp. 443-444.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 443.

⁹² On the decisiveness of the Arbués case for Döllinger, see C.U.L. Add. 4909, cards 360, 361, 362, and 84.

⁹³ Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1865, DB, I, p. 390.

doubt that the position which it affirmed was thoroughly obnoxious to him and that it influenced his judgements substantially. The most peculiar and also the most important feature of Acton's evaluation of the Syllabus was his belief that Rome had consciously and deliberately used it to sanction past atrocities. Since the theories and claims on which it insisted could not possibly be put into practice again, he judged that it had been issued solely for the sake of the principles involved; and thus the manner in which it condemned modern notions of tolerance and freedom appeared to him to amount to an expression of moral solidarity with those who had previously carried out actual persecutions.⁹⁴ These two things--the deeds of the past and the attitudes of the present--played upon one another in his mind, until he virtually lost sight of the distinction between history and polemics. Not only official pronouncements such as the Syllabus, but also the practical measures adopted by the government of the Papal State,⁹⁵

⁹⁴"Essays in Academic Literature," Chronicle, I (5 October 1867), 665-666. This was a point which Acton made with extraordinary frequency in later years. See C.U.L. Add. 4992, card 157; C.U.L. Add. 5625, f. 77b; C.U.L. Add. 4909, cards 69 and 86; Acton to Mary Gladstone, 20-22 March 1882, LMG, p. 141; and Acton to Döllinger, 16 June 1882, DB, III, p. 284.

⁹⁵On 6 April 1867, Acton reported in the Chronicle that, by command of the Pope, an edict had been published at Frosinone pertaining to the problem of the suppression of brigandage. The edict offered a financial reward to any man who delivered up a brigand, dead or alive, and stipulated that if the victim should be the leader of a band, the sum would be doubled. Acton judged that this was tantamount to an abdication by the State of its responsibilities, for a thoroughly barbarous measure was substituted for the legal means by which a government normally protected its citizens. Two special circumstances, however, made it seem all the more horrible: first, it was impossible to tell precisely who was or was not a brigand (especially since judicial procedures were to be by-passed) and thus the provisions of

appeared to him to underline the essential continuity between Rome under Pius V and Rome under Pius IX. The Temporal Power itself was central to the entire question; for, on the one hand, what Acton objected to in the past were the activities of the secular arm of the Church, while, on the other, it was the attack on Pio Nonò's sovereignty which had shaped so decisively the policies of contemporary Rome and called close attention to conditions there. On one occasion, Acton even posed the problem by saying that no political changes could render acceptable a government which retained the right to punish and imprison citizens for non-political offences.⁹⁶

But to ask whether he was prompted to examine the issue of persecution more closely by what he himself witnessed in Rome, or whether his researches relating to the Inquisition caused him to judge contemporary events more severely, is to pose the question of the hen

the adict might well be used to conceal ordinary murders; second, the whole matter might have been avoided if the assistance of the Italian army, which the government at Florence had offered, had been accepted. See "Current Events," Chronicle, I (6 April 1867), 27-28.

Acton told Wetherell when he sent him his report that he wanted to cast blame away from the Pope and onto his advisers and that he also wished to make clear that the State rather than the Church was at fault. Then, referring to the affair in general, he said: "It is a dishonour to our own real cause; and I have never written anything with so much trouble of mind." (Acton to Wetherell, Sunday [late March-early April 1867] Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. [Wetherell Correspondence]; not printed by Gasquet.)

⁹⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 15 February 1868, DB, I, p. 494. It is clear from this letter that Acton had originally expressed this view in a report for the Chronicle, but that the terms in which he criticised the papal government were so strong that Wetherell refused to publish it.

and the egg. The point is that he conducted his study of the archives in an atmosphere of what he himself described as 'instability, hypocrisy, and immorality,'⁹⁷ and that his historical judgements thereafter seldom lacked a certain bearing on current controversies.

⁹⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 7 December 1866, DB, I, p. 452.

Chapter VII

THE VATICAN COUNCIL

One circumstance which certainly influenced Acton's historical thinking in the latter part of the 1860s was the knowledge that plans were being laid in Rome for the convocation of an ecumenical Council. Accurate rumours to the effect that a Council would be held had reached him as early as November 1864, when he was just preparing to begin his researches in Italian archives;¹ and even then he had greeted the news with considerable apprehension. Although no definite information had been available concerning the purpose of the Council, Acton had been convinced from the outset that it would deal in some manner with the relationship of ecclesiastical authority to belief and knowledge.² He had also thought it likely that the Council would touch, at least indirectly, on the Roman question, since he had been led to believe that Cardinal Antonelli was behind the scheme.³ But it was not until the summer of 1867, when the project was officially announced, that he defined his fears more precisely. By that time, the idea that Pius IX would seek from the Council a solemn declaration of papal infallibility

¹Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1864, DB, I, p. 378; and C.U.L. Add. MSS. 7727, f. 2.

²Acton to Döllinger, 4 December 1864, DB, I, p. 378.

³C.U.L. Add. MSS. 7727, f. 2; and "Rome," Chronicle, I (6 July 1867), 339.

was circulating freely, and Acton himself was able to present a number of considerations which lent credence to the notion.⁴ His comments took on at this time a note of urgency, for it seemed to him that such a step would sanction the crimes and scandals of the past even more forcefully than the Syllabus had--and, indeed, that it would be the perfect consummation of the Syllabus itself.⁵ He also began to marshal as many arguments as he could against the proposed definition,⁶ although he did not yet imagine that he would play so direct and extensive a rôle in the attempt to prevent it. It was actually Döllinger who first suggested specific steps that might be taken in order to bolster opposition. On 18 September 1867, he informed Acton of his intention to compose a sort of "historical memorandum" on the Council and asked him to help by providing notes and information.⁷ Later, he urged Acton himself to write on the Council of Trent and to demonstrate in particular that its course had been determined by the hegemony of the Papal Legates and by the disproportionate number of Italian bishops who had participated.⁸

Although Acton did not respond to Döllinger's suggestion that he should write on Trent, he did accept readily the general idea that

⁴"The Next General Council," Chronicle, I (13 July 1867), 369.

⁵Ibid., 369-370.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Döllinger to Acton, 18 September 1867, DB, I, p. 491.

⁸Döllinger to Acton, 6 May 1869, DB, I, pp. 557-558; and Döllinger to Acton, 11 May 1869, DB, I, p. 560.

history should be called upon as a witness against the schemes which the Pope and his supporters were apparently determined to execute at the Council. Scholarship seemed to him the only effective weapon against such outrageous proposals; and he did not doubt for a moment that effective weapons would, in fact, be needed. A large part of his alarm at hearing what was planned for the Council was due specifically to his awareness that the existing climate and conditions strongly favoured the passage of extreme measures. Popular credulity had reached such a point, he said, that to the mass of Catholics the proclamation of papal infallibility would scarcely be more than the confirmation of an existing belief. At the same time, the storm which had raged around the throne of Pius IX had earned for him an influence over the bishops greater than that enjoyed by any other modern pontiff. The entire episcopate had identified itself with the cause of the Temporal Power; and the political and spiritual pretensions of the Pope were so closely interwoven that to deny one would seem tantamount to betraying the other. The personal influence of the Pope had also to be taken into account, since he had demonstrated a rare ability to elicit affection and loyalty. He had been rendered venerable by misfortune; and it would be difficult to resist the elevation of a doctrine which was known to be his own cherished conviction. Even the presence of dissidents within the Catholic fold increased the chances that papal infallibility would actually be proclaimed, for it was a foremost concern of the Ultramontanes to suppress divisions of opinion; and this object could not be achieved more effectively than by "converting the Vatican into a sort of Catholic Delphi." Controversial vigour

would willingly be sacrificed for a specious peace.⁹

On the other hand, Acton did not at first see any reason to believe that the potential opposition, such as it was, would be capable of preventing the triumph of the Poman party. Not only was it too weak and too divided, but its leading representatives had already compromised themselves too deeply. In 1854, they had accepted without protest the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception—a step which amounted to a de facto application of papal infallibility. Ten years later, they had bowed before the Syllabus. And again, in 1867, they had subscribed an address in which the Pope had been assured that the episcopate would accept whatever he should teach.¹⁰ The truth was that a general reluctance to oppose the beleaguered Pope affected the bishops from whom some might expect opposition as deeply as it affected others. Thus the Bishop of Orléans, once known as a stern critic of the Roman Government, had come to its aid in the hour of need. Although he had disliked the project of issuing the Syllabus, which was manifestly directed against his opinions and the opinions of his friends, he had defended and justified the published document.¹¹

The knowledge that the initiative rested so decisively with the

⁹"The Next General Council," Chronicle, I (13 July 1867), 369-370.

¹⁰"The Pope and the Council," North British Review, LI (October 1869), 127-135; reprinted in Decisive Decade, p. 222.

¹¹"The Next General Council," Chronicle, I (13 July 1867), 369.

Ultramontanes influenced Acton's entire approach to the Council. He was very slow indeed in coming to believe in the possibility of an effective opposition among the bishops, and, partly for this reason, he tended in the years preceding the Council to place the greatest emphasis on scholarly arguments against infallibility. It is true that these two considerations were not entirely unrelated, for what Acton seemed to consider essential was that there should be a period of education, during which the bishops might be rescued from their own faint-heartedness by the sheer force of science;¹² but he had little doubt that the burden of preparing for the Council fell initially on the shoulders of well-informed laymen and divines. In this respect, one work which undoubtedly pleased him was the pamphlet by Peter le Page Renouf in which the case of Pope Honorius, who had been condemned by the Council of Constantinople because of his monothelite sympathies, was clearly set out.¹³ The pamphlet was scholarly and precise, showing with considerable force that tradition contradicted the doctrine of papal infallibility; and when it was placed on the Index, Acton was provided with an opportunity to point out that the Court of Rome, rather than abandon its system, was prepared to reject incontrovertible evidence.¹⁴

¹² See Acton to Döllinger, c. 10 July 1868 (fragment), DB, I, p. 506.

¹³ Peter le Page Renouf, The Condemnation of Pope Honorius (London, 1868).

¹⁴ Review of Peter le Page Renouf, The Case of Pope Honorius Reconsidered with Reference to Recent Apologies, in North British Review, LI (January 1870), 526.

Still more important, of course, was Döllinger's work, The Pope and the Council.¹⁵ Like Renouf's pamphlet, its basic argument rested on the claim that infallibility was inconsistent with the tradition of the early Church; but instead of trying merely to establish this point, it actually sought to explain, by the examination of medieval forgeries, the precise process by which the ancient constitution of the Church had been overthrown. In the Apostolic age, Döllinger argued, the several churches had managed their own affairs with perfect freedom and independence and had maintained their own traditional usages and discipline without prejudice to the unity of the universal Church. The Bishop of Rome had been accorded a certain primacy, but authority in matters of faith had been reserved for ecumenical councils. Then, in the middle of the ninth century, a change had begun to occur which would be marked off in three main stages. The first was the appearance of the pseudo-Isidorian decretals, a collection of approximately one hundred documents which purported to date from the patristic era and which provided the basis for the idea that the word of the Pope was the final criterion of orthodoxy. The second was the Gregorian reform, during which Hildebrand and his assistants had not only used pseudo-Isidore but also added further fictions in order to impose a new system of government on the Church. The third, and perhaps the most decisive, was the compilation of the Code of Canon Law by Gratian, who incorporated previous forgeries in his work and inserted others of his own making.

¹⁵ Janus [pseud.], The Pope and the Council, trans. from the German (London, Oxford and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1869).

The most potent instrument of the new Papal system [Döllinger wrote] was Gratian's Decretum . . . In this work the Isidorian forgeries were combined with those of the Gregorian writers, Deusdedit, Anselm, Gregory of Pavia, and with Gratian's own additions. . . . No book has ever come near it in its influence in the Church, although there is scarcely another so chokefull of gross errors, both intentional and unintentional.¹⁶

It is worth stressing that, according to Acton, this account of the transformation from the Church of the Fathers to that of the modern Popes was the real achievement of The Pope and the Council. For although he found the book in some respects deficient¹⁷--a point that is significant in the light of his subsequent development--he considered that it had broadened the issue immeasurably and placed the impending Council in an entirely new perspective. After its appearance, the question for him was no longer simply whether papal infallibility would be accepted or rejected. It was, rather, whether a perversion that had weakened the Church for centuries would be confirmed and extended or whether it would at last be remedied.¹⁸

While he was preparing The Pope and the Council, Döllinger also began to receive information which provided the first faint indication that an opposition movement was afoot among the French bishops. The Gallican Archbishop Maret visited Munich in the summer of 1868, in order to discuss a work on the Council which he himself was composing; and, in the course of his meetings there, he not only assured Döllinger that a

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 142-143.

¹⁷"The Pope and the Council," North British Review, LI (October 1869), 127-135; reprinted in Decisive Decade, pp. 226-227.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 225.

substantial portion of the French episcopate were averse from curialist views but also named at least six bishops, beside himself, who were determined to resist.¹⁹ The picture thus presented clearly made some impression on Acton, who had hitherto been entirely sceptical, for when he received Döllinger's first report of Maret's conversation, he declared that the situation was more favourable than he had thought.²⁰ But it would nevertheless be wrong to say that he thereupon began to think seriously of organising a concerted effort against infallibility. On the contrary, he still insisted that the very thought of common action was repugnant to him, since he was "firmly convinced of the untrustworthiness of men."²¹ Only when the Council drew near, and the force of practical necessity bore in upon him, did Acton begin to modify his attitude and to entertain the possibility of co-operation with Maret, Dupanloup, and others; and even then he was extremely reticent and cautious. In September 1869, on the very eve of the Council, he and Döllinger met Dupanloup at Herrnsheim and heard his optimistic estimate that fifty French bishops could be relied upon to vote in the right way;²² but it is obvious that what seemed to him more significant

¹⁹ See Döllinger to Acton, 27 August 1868, 1 September 1868, and 12 September 1868, DB, I, p. 513, p. 516, and p. 522 respectively. The bishops who Maret indicated were reliable opponents of infallibility were Dupanloup, Ginoulhiac, David, Ramadie, Landriot, and Darboy.

²⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 31 August 1868, DB, I, p. 515.

²¹ Ibid.

²² For accounts of Dupanloup's remarks, see Döllinger to Montalembert, 31 October 1869, printed in Lösch, Döllinger und Frankreich, p. 475; and Friedrich, Ignaz von Döllinger, III, p. 494.

was Dupanloup's notion that infallibility could be defeated merely by arguing that its definition would be inopportune.²³ Men who thought in this way, he said with undisguised contempt, "expect to get off on a quibble, like a condemned criminal."²⁴

Acton's estimate of the situation among the German bishops was essentially the same as his attitude toward the French. Occasionally he would strike an optimistic note, especially when certain men, such as Hefele, revealed that they were more resolute than he had expected;²⁵ but, by and large, he considered that the necessary determination and conviction were lacking. Even the pastoral letter which the German bishops issued from Fulda, and which he himself described as a "repudiation of all intention to proclaim the dogma," did not please him entirely. On the one hand, it contained statements which he judged to be virtually self-contradictory;²⁶ on the other, he simply did not trust the sincerity of most of its authors.²⁷ If there was anything that gave Acton genuine hope in the days before the Council, it was not so much the signs of growing opposition as it was the idea that the

²³ See Acton to Renouf, 18 September 1869, Decisive Decade, pp. 74-75.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁵ See Acton to Döllinger, 10 August 1869, DB, I, p. 572.

²⁶ See "The Pope and the Council," North British Review, LI (October 1869), 127-135; reprinted in Decisive Decade, p. 222. See also "The Vatican Council," North British Review, LIII (October 1870), 183-229, reprinted in HOF, pp. 517-518; and Acton to Wetherell, [? September 1869], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Wetherell Correspondence), not printed by Gasquet.

²⁷ See Acton to Renouf, 25 September [1869], Decisive Decade, p. 75.

proposals of the Roman party were too preposterous to be endorsed.²⁸ This is perhaps what he meant when he told his wife that he had succeeded in convincing Döllinger that "the Council will not do all the foolish things that are expected."²⁹ Even so, however, there can be no question that when he himself left for Rome he was still unconvinced that those who had professed themselves opposed to the dogma would remain firm. At the very most, he thought that they would try to evade the issue by arguing on grounds of expediency.³⁰

It is important to stress that Acton did not at first have much confidence in the Minority bishops, because it is only in the light of this circumstance that his diligent activity in Rome can properly be understood. The entire thrust of his work at the Council was aimed at fashioning a more effective Opposition party; and in the early stages especially, he laboured in the knowledge that his task would not be easy. Some of the problems which confronted him were practical in nature, such as that posed by the extreme diversity of the Minority circle. Had

²⁸ See Acton to Döllinger, 11 April 1869, DB, I, p. 553.

²⁹ Acton to Marie, [c. 23 September 1869], Woodruff Papers, C.U.L. (Family Correspondence).

³⁰ "The Pope and the Council," North British Review, LI (October 1869), 127-135; reprinted in Decisive Decade, p. 222.

it not been for his knowledge of languages, his wide range of acquaintances, and his ability to mediate between different national groups, the bishops might never have been able to act together at all.³¹ But still more important, at least in his eyes, was the difficulty of persuading the various opponents of papal infallibility to take their stand on the firm ground of principle. Acton's greatest fear was that the Minority bishops would weaken their own cause by restricting themselves to the so-called "inopportunist" position which Dupanloup, their foremost spokesman, had been advocating. The Court of Rome, he said, could be defeated only by men of science and of principle.³² Unless the Minority bishops could be induced actually to deny the truth of the dogma, there was too great a danger that most of them would eventually accept it in a modified form.³³

It was only as the sequence of events unfolded that Acton came gradually to believe that so disastrous a course might possibly be avoided. The ineptitude of the managers of the Council was the first thing to give him cause for hope, for the heavy-handed measures which they employed tended to provoke a correspondingly strong reaction. When the regulations governing procedure at the Council were distributed, for instance, a number of bishops were alarmed to discover that the

³¹On this point, see Odo Russell to the Earl of Clarendon, 10 April 1870 and 18 June 1870; printed in Noel Blakiston, ed., The Roman Question: Extracts from the Despatches of Odo Russell from Rome, 1858-1870 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1962), p. 419 and p. 446 respectively.

³²Acton to Gladstone, 24 November 1869, Correspondence, pp. 85-86.

³³Acton to Döllinger, 28 November 1869, DE, II, p. 18.

initiative in proposing questions for discussion was reserved solely for the Pope. They resolved, therefore, to insist on the rights of the episcopate; and two written protests, bearing a total of more than forty signatures, were eventually submitted.³⁴ In the meantime, the election of the important Deputation de fide took place, and this, too, aroused considerable resentment, since the manner in which it was conducted was obviously designed to exclude anti-infallibilists.³⁵ Even the arrangement of the aula, where the general congregations were to be held, gave rise to objections. Many bishops complained that they could not hear everything that was said, and there was talk at one stage of removing to the great hall of the Quirinal Palace.³⁶ Acton heartily welcomed disputes of this nature, not only because they increased the feeling of solidarity among the Minority bishops, but also because they caused useful delays in the proceedings and gave the Opposition the chance to make itself felt.³⁷ The real work of the Council did not begin until after Christmas, with the first debates on the Schema de fide. And the strength displayed by the Opposition on that occasion delighted him beyond all expectation. Although he still

³⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 4 January 1870, DB, II, pp. 52-53.

³⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 15/16 December 1869, DB, II, p. 38.

³⁶ Dom Cuthbert Butler, The Vatican Council: the story told from inside in Bishop Ullatorne's Letters (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930), I, pp. 168-170.

³⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 24 December 1869, DB, II, p. 46. See also Acton to Döllinger, 18/19 December 1869 and 6/7 January 1870, DB, II, p. 39 and p. 63.

believed that "Rome must play its cards very badly in order not to win,"³⁸ the speeches delivered by Rauscher, Connolly, Ginoulhiac, and Strossmayer seemed to him to undermine once and for all the pretence of unanimity which the leading infallibilists wished to maintain.³⁹ "The result of the first two days of discussion," he said, "has been to make it certain and notorious that the elements of a real and sincere opposition exist . . ."⁴⁰

What prevented Acton from taking a still more optimistic view was chiefly the knowledge that the really crucial test of Opposition forces was taking place outside the Council hall. Since December 30, a petition calling for the introduction of the question of papal infallibility had been circulating among the bishops. Intended eventually for submission to the Congregation de postulatis, the petition had been drafted secretly by a small committee of zealous infallibilists, among whom were Manning, Dechamps, and Senestr y.⁴¹ Its most notable feature was perhaps the uncompromising language that it employed. Infallibility was not only made to apply to all questions of faith and morals, but also described in a manner which implied that it was inseparable from papal supremacy.⁴² Another

³⁸ Acton to D llinger, 4 January 1870, DB, II, p. 54.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁴⁰ Acton to Gladstone, 1 January 1870, Correspondence, p. 92.

⁴¹ Butler, The Vatican Council, I, p. 203; Roger Aubert, Vatican I (Paris: Editions de l'Orante, 1964), pp. 146-147.

⁴² A translation of the proposed formula is given in Butler, The Vatican Council, I, pp. 203-204: "The undersigned Fathers humbly and earnestly beg the holy ecumenical Council to decree clearly and in words

important consideration, however, was that the petition had not been put into general circulation until fifty signatures had already been obtained.⁴³ Since it was clear from the outset that it would receive widespread support, it became absolutely essential that the Minority should respond in a decisive manner. Like their counterparts within the Majority, they had recently formed a committee--the "International Committee," as it was called. Acton knew that a meeting of this group was scheduled for the evening of January 8 and that their chief topic of discussion would be the petition in favour of Infallibility.⁴⁴ A few hours before the gathering, therefore, he called upon Bishop Strossmayer and urgently recommended to him that a counter-petition should be drafted.⁴⁵

The approval with which Acton's suggestion was received by the International Committee marked the second stage in his gradual conversion to the idea that the anti-infallibilists could triumph at the Council after all. Although his attitude toward the Minority bishops was still not free from a certain scepticism and even cynicism, he welcomed their decision to proceed with a counter-petition because he

that cannot be mistaken that the authority of the Roman Pontiff is supreme, and therefore immune from error, when, in matters of faith and morals, he lays down and enjoins what is to be believed and held, and what is to be rejected and condemned, by all the Faithful."
(Emphasis mine.)

⁴³ Butler, The Vatican Council, I, p. 203.

⁴⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 8 January 1870, DB, II, p. 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

believed that it would sharply diminish the possibility that they could eventually avoid a direct confrontation with the Roman party.⁴⁶ It seemed to him that the value of such declarations was largely that they compromised the Minority bishops, in the sense that they would find it awkward to retract them later, even if they should weaken.⁴⁷ He spoke also of the need to promote an atmosphere of open conflict in order to deepen the feeling of solidarity within the Opposition.⁴⁸ The exact number of bishops who actually signed the petition did not concern him unduly, for he knew perfectly well that there was no prospect of the Minority obtaining as much support as their opponents would.⁴⁹ What he wished to establish was neither more nor less than that there existed within the Council a real and determined, even if small, Opposition, the threat of whose departure might deter the Majority from pressing forward with its claims.⁵⁰ At the very least, he believed that the petition would make clear that infallibility could not be defined without a protracted and acrimonious debate.⁵¹ Thus, while he continued to complain bitterly of the failure of most Minority bishops

⁴⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 9 January 1870, DB, II, p. 76.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The Minority petition was eventually submitted as five separate addresses, signed according to nationality, and the total number of signatures obtained was 136. The petition of the Majority bore 348 signatures. (Aubert, Vatican I, p. 147)

⁵⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 9 January 1870, DB, II, p. 78.

⁵¹ Acton to Döllinger, 16-19 January 1870, DB, II, p. 94.

to grasp the scientific arguments against the dogma,⁵² he eagerly acknowledged that the mood had changed entirely since the beginning of the Council,⁵³ when there had been talk of proclaiming infallibility by acclamation. "No one," he said, "had considered possible what one now sees--I, least of all."⁵⁴

Once the existence of the Opposition had been established beyond doubt, Acton believed that the most urgent task was to strengthen it by purifying it. He never ceased to be disturbed by the knowledge that the Minority was essentially a hybrid group, composed partly of men who objected to infallibility on principle and partly of mere "inopportunist"; and the very fact that so much had been accomplished in the first several weeks of proceedings impelled him to speak increasingly of the need either to convert or eliminate the latter. It is abundantly clear from his letters that what he wished eventually to see was a smaller but sounder Opposition and that he was quite prepared to split the party in order to accomplish this goal.⁵⁵ His contributions to the famous Letters from Rome of Quirinus, which first appeared in the Allgemeine Zeitung, are especially interesting in this respect.⁵⁶

⁵² See Acton to Döllinger, 9 January 1870, 10 January 1870, and 22 January 1870, DB, II, pp. 76-77, p. 80, and p. 106 respectively.

⁵³ Acton to Döllinger, 16-19 January 1870, DB, II, p. 94.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Acton to Döllinger, 8 February 1870 and 10/14 February 1870, DB, II, p. 146 and p. 158.

⁵⁶ For a precise analysis of the authorship and source of the various Quirinus letters, see Victor Conzemius, "Der Verfasser des 'Römischen Briefe vom Konzil' des 'Quirinus,'" Festschrift Hans Foerster, Frieburger Geschichtsblätter, Band 52 (1963/1964), 229-256.

Father Conzemius was the first to point out that it was one of Acton's favourite tactics to use these letters as a means of influencing opinion among the Minority bishops.⁵⁷ It was also Father Conzemius who called attention specifically to the letters of February 9 and February 11, in which Acton discussed the inadequacy of the "inopportunist" position and exaggerated (perhaps deliberately) the extent to which it had caused dissension within the Opposition.⁵⁸ By highlighting the incompatibility between "inopportunism" and more fundamental objections to the dogma, Acton hoped to force the hands of the Minority bishops and to compel each of them to decide exactly where he stood.⁵⁹ Nor did he hesitate to point out that theological arguments against infallibility could not gain ascendancy over simple practical considerations without "an internal conflict and shaking of the party."⁶⁰ He even claimed that a dispute provoked by certain remarks made by Döllinger had already been resolved in a manner decidedly unfavourable to the "inopportunists," although he conceded that no serious breach in the party had resulted.⁶¹

A particular incident which deeply concerned Acton at the time that these Quirinus letters were appearing was the preparation of an

⁵⁷ J. V. Conzemius, "Lord Acton and the First Vatican Council," Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XX (October 1969), 275.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 279-282.

⁵⁹ See Acton to Döllinger, 10/14 February 1870, DB, II, p. 157 and pp. 158-159.

⁶⁰ Quirinus [pseud.], Letters from Rome on the Council (London, Oxford, and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1870), p. 258.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 265.

open letter by Dupanloup, in which the bishop firmly denied that he had ever called into question the truth of the doctrine of papal infallibility. The claim was perfectly true, of course, since it was Dupanloup who had originally formulated the "inopportunist" position; but Acton was profoundly alarmed, and more than a little annoyed, that he should be willing to confirm it in this way after so much had changed in the circumstances of the Opposition. So feeble a statement as Dupanloup intended, he believed, might actually undermine much of the good that had thus far been accomplished, especially insofar as the Majority would eagerly appropriate it as proof that the doctrine had, after all, no real opponents within the Council.⁶² But although he tried everything in his power to persuade Dupanloup either to alter the letter substantially or to refrain from publishing it altogether, he succeeded only in inducing him to delete the most damaging passages.⁶³ When the letter appeared early in March, Acton indignantly complained to Döllinger that "Dupanloup's pamphlet was obsolete before its birth. He still contests the opportuneness [of the decree] It is not a retrogression since November, but a confirmation of the November position after three months experience of the Council. But this is no real progress. It scarcely goes beyond Ketteler."⁶⁴

In sharp contrast to Dupanloup and Ketteler, there were other bishops whose opposition to infallibility was conceived in terms of

⁶² Acton to Döllinger, 8 February 1870, DB, II, p. 146.

⁶³ Acton to Döllinger, 9 March 1870, DB, II, p. 206.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

the doctrine itself and whose courage and resolution were an increasing source of encouragement to Acton. Hefele, the historian of the Councils, was one such man, Darboy, the Archbishop of Paris, was another. The man whom Acton was inclined to place above all others, however, was Strossmayer, the Bishop of Bosnia, who was generally considered to be the finest orator in the Council.⁶⁵ The two men worked so closely and so harmoniously that it was said on one occasion that the Opposition was a sword, with the tip on Strossmayer's lips and the hilt in Acton's hand.⁶⁶ Acton himself described Strossmayer as "the living Janus" and assured Döllinger that if he had created a bishop and prepared and instructed him for the Council, the result could not be better.⁶⁷ The only area in which he allowed that Strossmayer was deficient was scholarship,⁶⁸ but the bishop's forceful speeches seemed to compensate for this shortcoming, especially since he seldom addressed the Council without managing to convert the occasion into a turning-point in the Minority's fortunes. The speech which Strossmayer delivered on January 24 was especially noteworthy in this respect. The debate that was taking place at that time was on the first of the disciplinary schemata, which dealt with the responsibilities of the episcopate. Strossmayer boldly declared that it was unseemly to begin with the obligations of the bishops, because this might give rise to the

⁶⁵ Butler, The Vatican Council, I, p. 135.

⁶⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 11 February 1870, DB, II, p. 156.

⁶⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 4 January 1870, DB, II, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

suspicion that their recent behaviour had been in some way blameworthy. Their duties ought not to be discussed apart from their rights. In fact, the reform of the hierarchy ought to begin at the highest level and only then be carried through to the lowest. The papacy, the college of cardinals, and the Roman congregations must all be altered in composition, so as to include representatives from all Catholic countries in accordance with their relative importance; and the supreme authority in the Church must have its throne where the Lord had had his own--in the hearts and consciences of the people. This could not be the case so long as the papacy remained an exclusively Italian institution.⁶⁹

In addition to his demand for the "universalization" of Church government, Strossmayer insisted that Councils ought to be convoked more frequently, that Provincial Synods ought to be given greater influence over episcopal appointments, and that the Canon Law (which he described as a "Babylonish confusion," made up of unpractical and often spurious canons) ought radically to be reformed. He also called for an end to the spirit of animosity with which the Church regarded modern society and pronounced a glowing panegyric on Dupanloup, without actually naming him.⁷⁰ Acton recognised at once that one important consequence of his sensational remarks was that they immediately enhanced the sense of unity and solidarity within the Minority.⁷¹ Perhaps he

⁶⁹ Following Acton's account of Strossmayer's speech in Quirinus, Letters from Rome, pp. 166-171.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Acton to Döllinger, 26 January 1870, DB, II, p. 114.

also hoped that the audacity and exemplary courage which Strossmayer had displayed would strengthen the resolve of many of his more timid colleagues. "After his speech," Acton reported to Döllinger, "he embraced me with the words: 'My friend, the world belongs to us.' The excitement is overwhelming. Pie congratulates. Ketteler declares himself entirely in agreement. I was with Strossmayer when Dupanloup came to him--a very striking scene. Dupanloup admires the calmness and moderation [sic] as much as the power of his words, and he was very deeply impressed. He believes that, through this speech, the freedom of the Council is redeemed and the suppression of the Minority rendered impossible."⁷²

Acton's excitement over Strossmayer's speech was no doubt heightened by the fact that it coincided almost exactly with the distribution of the Schema de ecclesia. Certainly, the circulation of this document marked yet another important stage in his rising hopes that the Minority could eventually triumph, for once again the Roman party seemed to have endangered its own cause by the use of unnecessarily provocative methods. Although the schema contained no direct reference to papal infallibility (in this respect, it dealt only with primacy), Acton was persuaded that it would bring into focus the whole question of papal authority and that its general tone would call forth "the entire strength of the Opposition."⁷³ Many of the propositions of the schema, moreover, applied to the relationship between Church and State and tended to confirm the attitude and policies which had already been set forth in

⁷² Acton to Döllinger, 23/24 January 1870, DE, II, p. 108.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 107.

the Syllabus of Errors,⁷⁴ so that Acton believed that the perfect opportunity had presented itself for an appeal to the governments of Europe to intervene in the Council. The idea that the powers should come to the aid of the Minority was by no means new to him. Besides the influence which he exercised on the Bavarian and Italian governments,⁷⁵ he had, since the very beginning of the Council, maintained the closest possible contact with Odo Russell, British agent in Rome, as well as with Gladstone. He had sought especially to impress Gladstone with the enormity of the Roman party's goals and methods;⁷⁶ and, as early as 1 January 1870, he had implored him to use his influence to induce the French government--without whose protection the Council could not be held at all--to adopt a more aggressive policy.⁷⁷ But the Schema de ecclesia seemed to Acton, and to others, to provide the States with a far better motive for intervention than they had hitherto possessed. Acton began by despatching to the editor of the

⁷⁴ See Odo Russell to the Earl of Clarendon, 29 January 1870, in Blakiston, ed., The Roman Question, p. 387.

⁷⁵ For Acton's influence on the Bavarian government, and in particular on Prince Hohenlohe, see Aubert, Vatican I, pp. 86-87, and Decisive Decade, p. 145; for his influence on the Italian government, see Acton to Döllinger, 22 January 1870 and 3 March 1870, DB, II, p. 105 and p. 191.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Acton to Gladstone, 1 January 1870, Correspondence, p. 91: "We have to meet an organised conspiracy to establish a power which would be the most formidable enemy of liberty as well as of science throughout the world."

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 96.

Allgemeine Zeitung a list of the anathemas proposed in the schema,⁷⁸ presumably in the hope that their publication would arouse public indignation. Then on 11 February 1870, Dupanloup, perhaps encouraged by signs that the French government was about to abandon its policy of non-intervention,⁷⁹ called upon Acton and asked him urgently to propose to Gladstone the presentation to Rome of a diplomatic note, signed jointly by the powers.⁸⁰ It appears that Dupanloup was in a state of great excitement, being convinced that the Roman Court could now easily be defeated if the governments would help.⁸¹ Acton readily acceded to his request and wrote to Gladstone on February 16, stressing in his letter that what was needed was collective action by the States.⁸² He also forwarded to Count Daru, the French Foreign Minister, a paper which he had drawn up in the presence of Dupanloup and which exposed,

⁷⁸ See Victor Conzemius, "Die 'Römischen Briefe vom Konzil': Eine entstehungsgeschichtliche und quellenkritische Untersuchung zum Konzilsjournalismus Ignaz v. Döllingers und Lord Actons, II Teil: Lord Acton als Mitarbeiter Döllingers," Römische Quartalschrift, Band 60, Heft 1/2 (1965), 119. See also Acton to Granville, 17 February 1870, Decisive Decade, p. 85.

⁷⁹ For the signs which appeared to indicate a change in French policy, see Acton to Döllinger, 28 January 1870, DB, II, pp. 121-122; Odo Russell to the Earl of Clarendon, 30 January 1870, in Blakiston, ed. The Roman Question, p. 387; Acton to Döllinger, 1/2 February 1870, DB, II, pp. 131-132; Acton to Gladstone, 2 February 1870, Correspondence, pp. 100-101; Acton to Döllinger, 5 February 1870, DB, II, p. 137.

⁸⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 11 February 1870, DB, II, pp. 155-156.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Acton to Gladstone, 16 February 1870, Correspondence, pp. 102-105.

as he said, "the anti-social character and the political danger of the Schema de ecclesia."⁸³ Wanting to leave no avenue of approach untried, he wrote to Granville as well. Since he was clearly concerned that the British government would refrain from action for fear of rendering more difficult its future dealings with the Irish episcopate, he assured his step-father that "the Government need hardly stop to compute the momentary antagonism of absent bishops."⁸⁴

The most curious circumstance in all of this was that, although Acton certainly hoped that his appeal to Gladstone would succeed, he did not want, as Dupanloup did, the action of the governments to deter the Court of Rome from pressing forward with its plans. His bid for State intervention was a tactical manoeuvre, designed to influence the Minority rather than the Majority; for he reckoned that a show of support from the powers would give the Opposition the strength and courage to persevere.

Bishops will fear isolation [he told Granville] if they see apathy in the public, and a studied neutrality in the states. If they have nothing to fall back upon out of doors they must give way.

Therefore the greatest force that can be brought to bear upon the Council is the certain and distinct manifestation of European opinion in favour of the minority. It may not, indeed personally I hope it will not, check the court of Rome. But it will add strength and numbers to the opposition, by assuring them that, if at the last moment they are compelled to protest, and to appeal to the nations, the Governments, and the educated laity, will stand by them. That will secure the weak and doubting men.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁴ Acton to Granville, 17 February 1870, Decisive Decade, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 84-85. (Emphasis mine.) See also Acton to Grady, 10 March 1870, Decisive Decade, p. 88; and "The Vatican Council," HOF, p. 528.

With perfect consistency, therefore, Acton insisted that the Church must be saved from within. The distribution of the Schema de ecclesia had given him the opportunity to broaden and intensify the attack on Ultramontane principles; but he wanted--indeed, he insisted--that the Opposition bishops themselves deliver the decisive blow; and the single event which, in his estimation, provided the perfect occasion for them to do so did not occur until February 22, when new rules of procedure for the Council were published.⁸⁶ The "rigged" elections to the Deputation de fide, the imperfect arrangement of the debating chamber, the strong speeches provoked by the Schema de fide, the Minority petition against the introduction of the question of papal infallibility, Strossmayer's speech on the reform of the papal court, the publication of the Schema de ecclesia--all these incidents were stages which for Acton led gradually to the belief that the Opposition might, after all, carry the day. But the alteration of the rules of procedure convinced him that victory was actually within reach.⁸⁷ The offending provisions of the new regulation were two: first, that closure of the debate on any document before the Council could be forced at the request of ten Fathers, confirmed by majority vote; second, that a simple majority would suffice for the passage of a schema.⁸⁸ Acton's idea was that the freedom and legitimacy of the Council could be denied

⁸⁶ Aubert, Vatican I, pp. 140-141; Butler, The Vatican Council, I, pp. 247-248.

⁸⁷ C.U.L. Add. 5542, f. 25: "When did I begin to think victory possible? At the 2[nd] Reglement?"

⁸⁸ "The Vatican Council," HOF, p. 539; and Acton to Döllinger, 24/25 February 1870, DB, II, p. 173.

on the grounds that moral unanimity was required for the promulgation of a dogmatic constitution, and he moved quickly to ensure that the Minority would take full advantage of the opportunity which had thus been handed to them. On February 23 and 24, he called upon Dupanloup, Darboy, Haynald, and Strossmayer, whom he described as "the 4 chiefs" of the Opposition.⁸⁹ From each of them he elicited an assurance that they would not tolerate this most recent Roman subterfuge;⁹⁰ and he reported afterwards that he had reason to hope that they would take a united stand at the meeting of the International Committee which was scheduled for the evening of the 24th.⁹¹ The decision which the Minority bishops would take appeared to him, without exception, the most critical of the entire Council. If they accepted the new rules of procedure, he said, they could neither prevent the definition of papal infallibility nor protest against its legitimacy after it had been promulgated; if they rejected the regulation and refused to acknowledge the right of the Majority to decide dogmatic questions, the battle, and indeed the war, would be won.⁹² "I believe that the ultimate decision is contained in this matter and that our people must treat it as if the last moment had come."⁹³

⁸⁹Acton to Döllinger, 24 February 1870, DB, II, p. 167.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 172.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Acton to Döllinger, 25 February 1870, DB, II, pp. 178-179.

⁹³Ibid., p. 179.

Especially since Acton believed that the dispute over the new regulation was not merely a question of tactics but one of conscience,⁹⁴ the manner in which the Minority bishops actually decided to respond was for him one of the greatest disappointments of the Council. Although three separate written protests, signed by nearly ninety bishops, were eventually submitted,⁹⁵ and although Acton himself acknowledged that this was a significant step,⁹⁶ he was convinced that at least two of the addresses--those bearing by far the greatest number of signatures--were couched in terms too weak to be effective.⁹⁷ He had wanted the Opposition not merely to protest but to refuse to participate in the Council until the new regulation was withdrawn and to threaten to leave Rome altogether if it was left in force.⁹⁸ That the Minority merely objected to the revised rules of procedure, therefore, seemed to him in many ways a set-back, which threatened to undermine the progress of the past three months.⁹⁹ Certainly, he was aware that they had let slip a golden opportunity and, by postponing a conflict which they knew to be inevitable,

⁹⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 24/25 February 1870, 26/27 February 1870, and 27 February 1870, DB, II, p. 173, p. 183, and p. 184 respectively.

⁹⁵ Aubert, Vatican I, pp. 142-143.

⁹⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 5 March 1870, DB, II, p. 194.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 193-194.

⁹⁸ See Acton to Döllinger, 24/25 February 1870, 25 February 1870, 27 February 1870, and 5 March 1870, DB, II, p. 173, p. 179, pp. 183-184, and p. 193 respectively.

⁹⁹ Even before it was entirely clear what course the bishops would adopt, Acton had said that a simple protest would be tantamount to surrender. (Acton to Döllinger, 1 March 1870, DB, II, p. 187.)

had committed a grave strategical blunder.¹⁰⁰

But still he did not give up hope. Instead of simply resigning himself to defeat, he resorted once again to the tactical use of the Quirinus letters. He appears to have hoped that through these letters he would be able to give the Minority protests the appearance of greater strength than they actually possessed and at the same time to prod the less resolute bishops into taking a more decisive stand. In his fourth contribution to Quirinus, he referred to the distribution on March 6 of a proposed formula for the definition of infallibility--an event which was itself of great importance--and declared that the addresses of the Opposition had at least intimated that they would not allow the question to be brought before the Council unless they first received an assurance that no dogma would be proclaimed without moral unanimity.¹⁰¹ In a subsequent letter, he adroitly congratulated the Minority bishops for the amendments which they had proposed to the Schema de ecclesia; in fact, he argued that their proposals amounted to a practical assertion of the principle that dogmatic decisions could not be taken against the will of an important section of the episcopate.¹⁰² He especially commended Strossmayer, who, true to form, had explicitly insisted on moral unanimity in his speech of March 22.¹⁰³ Strossmayer had been speaking on the preamble of the Schema de ecclesia, to which two important amendments had been proposed--the one implicitly affirming

¹⁰⁰ Quirinus, Letters from Rome, pp. 382-383.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 336-338.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 380-382.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 387-389.

the doctrine of infallibility, the other placing the authority to define dogmas in the hands of the bishops; and when the Presidents of the Council resolved to evade the issue by persuading the authors of the amendments to withdraw them, Acton was able to say that the Opposition had at least suffered no loss.¹⁰⁴ Later, he gave a slightly different version of the same story in which he said that the authority of the bishops to define dogmas had been officially recognised by Archbishop Simor, speaking in the name of the Deputation de fide, and that therefore the Minority had actually achieved a victory.¹⁰⁵ The possibility that Acton was deliberately exaggerating the importance of successes such as this must always be borne in mind, for he sometimes gives the impression in his Quirinus letters that he is attempting to stir the Minority to victory by persuading them that they are already winning. Certainly, he never allowed them to forget that the fate of the Council, and consequently of the Church, rested ultimately in their hands and their hands alone. When the question whether France would at last abandon its policy of non-intervention was approaching the critical stage, he reminded them that it was they who must take the initiative. "It is in the nature of things," he wrote, "that the Governments should follow the lead of the Opposition, for to fall short of this would be to sacrifice their Bishops, while to go beyond it would be unjustifiable and dangerous."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 390-392.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 394-396.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 408.

From March 6, when the proposed formula was circulated, until the end of the Council, the issue before the Fathers was the decisive one of papal infallibility, and Acton was not less determined than he had been previously that the Minority bishops should be forced openly to deny the doctrine itself.¹⁰⁷ It was in order to give them the courage and insight to do so that he encouraged Father Gratry to attack it publicly and that he implored Döllinger to write something further on the question.¹⁰⁸ But he nevertheless continued to insist that the matter ought to be approached by the somewhat indirect procedure of challenging the freedom and legitimacy of the Council;¹⁰⁹ that is, he wanted to undermine the proposal of March 6 by focussing on the decree of February 22, in which the new rules of procedure had been set out. One consideration which recommended the question of moral unanimity to him as a suitable rallying point was that it was the one issue on which the various members of the Minority actually did agree,¹¹⁰ even if they differed widely in their readiness to act upon their conviction; another was that to insist on the assent of the entire episcopate as a necessary condition for dogmatic definitions was not only to prevent, by practical means, the passage of infallibility, but also to deny the

¹⁰⁷ See Acton to Döllinger, 18 March 1870, DB, II, p. 238.

¹⁰⁸ Acton to Gratry, 10 March 1870, Decisive Decade, pp. 87-89; Acton to Döllinger, 18 March 1870, DB, II, p. 237.

¹⁰⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 8 March 1870, 17 March 1870, and 30 March 1870, DB, II, p. 199, p. 232, and pp. 271-272 respectively.

¹¹⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 13 March 1870, DB, II, p. 215. See also Acton to Döllinger, 20 May 1870, DB, II, p. 359.

doctrine in theory by the assertion of a contradictory norm.¹¹¹ Sound strategy could be adopted without sacrificing fidelity to principle. Even when the attempt to obtain government intervention in the Council finally proved abortive, Acton seems to have been disappointed, not because the States had failed to prevent the Court of Rome from canonising particular policies, but because they had neglected to support the claim of the Minority that the Council was not truly ecumenical. The diplomatic note presented at Rome by France, and supported either in writing or verbally by six other nations, protested only against certain canons proposed at the Council (specifically, in the Schema de ecclesia); by dealing with the Council in this way, the governments appeared, by implication, actually to recognise its legitimacy.¹¹²

In his attempts to persuade the Minority bishops themselves to insist on moral unanimity, Acton was at first more successful. On March 30, he reported that Hefele and Ginoulhiac had been commissioned to draw up a statement which would prove, presumably by appealing to

¹¹¹ See Acton to Döllinger, 19 April 1870, DB, II, p. 327.

¹¹² It was on Acton's advice that Odo Russell had recommended that the English government refrain from supporting the French note. (Acton to Döllinger, 15 April 1870, DB, II, p. 320.) To justify this view, Russell wrote to Lord Clarendon on 13 April 1870 that "By associating themselves with the public act of the French Government the states of Europe imply their recognition of the Ecumenical character of the Council and deprive the independent bishops of their only basis of action for the future." (Odo Russell to the Earl of Clarendon, 13 April 1870, in Blakiston, ed., The Roman Question, p. 420.) Later, he told Clarendon that "Lord Acton is in despair about it and has written to entreat me 'to telegraph as forcibly as I can the gravity of the mistake Daru's note involves in regard to the Opposition Bishops.'" (Odo Russell to the Earl of Clarendon, 17 April 1870, in Blakiston, ed., The Roman Question, p. 423.)

tradition, that the Pope had no right to make binding decisions in matters of faith and morals if a considerable number of bishops dissented.¹¹³ But here too he soon suffered a serious defeat. A conclusio had been included in the Schema de fide which asserted that the constitutions and decrees of the Holy See must be observed even when they proscribed opinions which were not actually heretical. If the Minority rejected it, they would be placed in the invidious position of appearing to deny that obedience was due to lawful authority; if they accepted it, they would approve a definition of papal prerogatives which was far more extensive than they wished to concede.¹¹⁴ Acton wanted, at the very least, that the Opposition should demand assurances regarding their rights before voting on the schema.¹¹⁵ Yet only Strossmayer accepted his arguments and absented himself from the solemn session at which the constitution (Dei Filius) was officially promulgated.¹¹⁶

In retrospect, Acton believed that the weakness displayed in the vote of April 24 was so serious that he said that it had marked the end of the Opposition.¹¹⁷ But at the time he was not inclined to take quite

¹¹³ Acton to Döllinger, 30 March 1870, DB, II, pp. 273-274.

¹¹⁴ "The Vatican Council," HOF, pp. 543-544. See also Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 439.

¹¹⁵ Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 464. See also Acton to Gratry, 24 May 1870, Decisive Decade, p. 89.

¹¹⁶ Acton to Gratry, 24 May 1870, Decisive Decade, p. 89.

¹¹⁷ "The Vatican Council," HOF, p. 543.

so pessimistic a view. Although he was indeed displeased that the Minority bishops had failed to insist on their rights and had allowed the absolute authority of the Holy See, even in disciplinary matters, to be affirmed, his disappointment was soon mitigated by signs that they were regaining strength. On May 9 the official Schema de Romano Pontifice was distributed, and by May 13, when the debate began, he was speaking of the great deal that had been done "to rehabilitate a force capable of resistance . . .".¹¹⁸ He immediately renewed his call for a declaration on the principle of moral unanimity.¹¹⁹ What is more, he appears to have been at least partially successful in obtaining it. On May 20 he told Döllinger that the desired document would soon appear,¹²⁰ and on May 29 he forwarded to him a copy of a pamphlet entitled De l'unanimité morale nécessaire dans les Conciles pour les définitions dogmatiques,¹²¹ which had been composed from various drafts by Dupanloup's secretary, Lagrange.¹²² The bishops, meanwhile, expressed a desire to bind themselves in a promise not to yield in any event.¹²³ This unprecedented sense of unity, together with the forceful speeches

¹¹⁸ Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 513.

¹¹⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 13 May 1870 and 15 May 1870, DB, II, p. 351 and pp. 354-355.

¹²⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 20 May 1870, DB, II, p. 358.

¹²¹ Acton to Döllinger, 29 May 1870, DB, II, p. 381.

¹²² Acton was at this time under the impression that the author of the pamphlet was Dupanloup himself, but his mistake has been corrected by Conzemius in DB, II, p. 381, n. 3.

¹²³ Acton to Döllinger, 15 May 1870, DB, II, p. 354.

which they delivered in the early stages of the debate, were clearly a source of great satisfaction to Acton, for he freely admitted to Döllinger that the Minority was proving far more powerful than he had expected; and he added that their impressive determination had enticed a number of defectors from the Majority to join them.¹²⁴ They seemed, above all, to have established their intellectual superiority.¹²⁵ The Roman party appeared to be so badly shaken by their tour de force that leading cardinals were contemplating the formation of a mediating party;¹²⁶ and the Pope himself was rumoured to be thinking of proroguing the Council sine die.¹²⁷ In late May, it seems that Cardinal di Pietro actually approached Dupanloup with a proposal for a compromise; but Dupanloup, reflecting the new-found confidence of the Minority, declined even to look at the moderate definition which di Pietro suggested.¹²⁸

Then came the great crisis. On June 3, a motion to close the general debate on the Schema de Romano Pontifice was suddenly introduced to the Council and carried by a large majority, even though more than forty bishops, including several prominent members of the Minority, were yet to speak.¹²⁹ Acton declared immediately that such a step was

¹²⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 21 May 1870, DB, II, p. 372.

¹²⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 22 May 1870, DB, II, pp. 373-374.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 373.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 374.

¹²⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 25 May 1870, DB, II, p. 376; and Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 586.

¹²⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 3 June 1870, DB, II, p. 401.

nothing less than revolution,¹³⁰ for it meant that future discussion would be limited to proposed changes in the text of the decree, thereby preventing the presentation of additional theological arguments against infallibility.¹³¹ It is vitally important to note, however, that, his indignation notwithstanding, he actually welcomed the silencing of the Opposition in this violent manner.¹³² He believed, in fact, that the Roman party had, for the last and most decisive time, played into the hands of the Minority, not only forcing them to be constant and resolute but also providing them with yet another opportunity to deny the freedom and ecumenicity of the Council. "I believe that one can now burst open the Council," he told Döllinger;¹³³ and to his wife also he wrote of the opportunity for certain victory.¹³⁴ In the days that followed, he conferred with many leading opponents of the dogma, not always obtaining what he wanted;¹³⁵ but one of the chief tactics on which he kept his attention fixed was the deliberate prolongation of the remainder of the debate--not least of all because he believed

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 623.

¹³² Acton to Döllinger, 3 June 1870, DB, II, p. 401.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 402.

¹³⁴ Acton to Marie, [? June 1870], Decisive Decade, p. 91. (The editors of the Decisive Decade have incorrectly dated this letter as [May 1870].)

¹³⁵ Acton to Marie, [? June 1870], Decisive Decade, p. 93. (Again, the editors have dated this letter incorrectly as [May-June 1870].)

that a second interruption would serve to make the Opposition still more determined to resist.¹³⁶ At the back of his mind, he kept always the possibility that the less zealous infallibilists, and especially the more flexible members of the Deputation de fide, would decide in the face of an inevitable conflict to revise the schema in a way that would render it innocuous.¹³⁷ Most of all, he desired that the Minority should assert themselves in an absolutely decisive manner on the question of moral unanimity. The very last things which he did at the Council were to submit to Dupanloup a carefully prepared address supporting this principle and to encourage Strossmeyer to work for the adoption by the Minority of a single formula regarding papal authority beyond which they would not go.¹³⁹ Then on 11 June 1870, convinced that he had done his duty,¹⁴⁰ he left Rome.

It is entirely incorrect to imply, as two recent authors have,

¹³⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 6 June 1870 and 7 June 1870, DB, II, p. 413 and p. 417.

¹³⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 6 June 1870, 8 June 1870, and 9 June 1870, DB, II, pp. 412-413, p. 418, and p. 419 respectively.

¹³⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 9 June 1870, DB, II, p. 420.

¹³⁹ See Acton to Döllinger, 7 June 1870, 10 June 1870, and 10 June 1870 [late evening], DB, II, p. 420, p. 421, and p. 422 respectively.

¹⁴⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 9 June 1870, DB, II, p. 420.

that the final direction which the Council would take was clear by June.¹⁴¹ Acton left Rome on June 11 because he was convinced that he had done all that he could to help the Minority achieve victory; but the crucial debate on the fourth chapter of the Schema de Romano Pontifice--that is, on the chapter dealing specifically with papal infallibility--had not yet begun, and he was very far from certain how the Opposition bishops would conduct themselves when the inevitable attempt was made to force an unacceptable definition upon them. What was more or less clear to him was that his renewed attempt to persuade the Minority to boycott the Council unless their rights were recognised was destined to fail. An international meeting of the Opposition on June 4 had produced nothing more than an additional protest against procedural abuses, which, in the light of past experience, seemed certain to be ignored.¹⁴² Yet in his last contribution to Quirinus Acton insisted that all was not lost.¹⁴³ In the first place, since the Opposition had decided to continue to participate in the Council, they could always revert to the policy of deliberately prolonging the debate until either an adjournment of the Council or another motion of closure became necessary;¹⁴⁴ in the second place, if this failed, it was perfectly

¹⁴¹Sue Katzman and James Clarence Holland, "Acton and the Bishops of the Minority," Decisive Decade, p. 196. Acton himself wrote in his last contribution to Quirinus, dated 6 June 1870: "It is impossible to foresee at this moment how the great decision will turn out." (Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 625).

¹⁴²Quirinus, Letters from Rome, pp. 618-619.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 619.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 619-620.

possible that as many as one hundred and twenty bishops would vote non placet to the schema, thus postponing the real crisis until the moment when the Pope determined to proceed against the wishes of so large and conspicuous a section of the episcopate.¹⁴⁵

By July 14 Acton was convinced that the latter course was the most likely,¹⁴⁶ but events soon proved that he had miscalculated slightly. At the solemn session of July 18, only two bishops remained to vote non placet, while the vast majority of the Opposition left the Council altogether after submitting a statement of the reasons which prevented them from approving the definition.¹⁴⁷ In a certain sense, this final declaration annoyed Acton, for he argued that it would not have been necessary if the bishops had acted more decisively earlier in the Council;¹⁴⁸ but he nevertheless greeted it with considerable excitement, since he perceived immediately that it provided an opportunity to keep the struggle alive.¹⁴⁹ Even before July 18, he had been turning over in his mind the possibility of post-conciliar opposition. The suggestion that seventy or eighty bishops would resist after the proclamation of the dogma had not seemed to him an obvious exaggeration.¹⁵⁰ Kenrick had told him personally that he, at least,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 625.

¹⁴⁶ Acton to Döllinger, 14 July 1870, DB, II, p. 428.

¹⁴⁷ Butler, The Vatican Council, II, pp. 157-164; Aubert, Vatican I, pp. 231-232.

¹⁴⁸ Acton to Döllinger, 22 July 1870, DB, II, p. 436.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.; and Acton to Döllinger, 21 July 1870, DB, II, p. 435.

¹⁵⁰ See Acton to Döllinger, 21 May 1870, DB, II, p. 369.

regarded the proceedings as null and void;¹⁵¹ and Archbishop Darboy had assured him that, in the long run, no one would recognise the Council, since it was in reality a "frivolous affair."¹⁵² Moreover, a variety of ways in which the new dogma might yet be discredited had already occurred to him. Through Gladstone, he had tried to obtain the copies of the Council debates which were in the possession of the French government, in order that he might publish them;¹⁵³ he had also decided in advance to make known to the world his own experiences at the Council;¹⁵⁴ he had entertained with enthusiasm the prospect of a declaration of Catholic scholars against the validity of the doctrine;¹⁵⁵ and, of course, he had foreseen the possibility of raising once again the argument concerning the necessity of moral unanimity.¹⁵⁶

Acton did indeed try to continue the struggle against the doctrine of papal infallibility after the Council had ended, even if he found that in order to do so he had to change his tactics somewhat. What he discovered in the wake of the Council was that his most serious problem arose from the need to sustain the will to resist among the Opposition

¹⁵¹ Acton to Döllinger, 10 June 1870, DB, II, p. 422.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Acton to Gladstone, Whitsunday 1870 and 10 July 1870, Correspondence, pp. 113-114 and p. 114; and Acton to Döllinger, 8 June 1870, DB, II, p. 417.

¹⁵⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 7 July 1870, DB, II, p. 423.

¹⁵⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 10 July 1870, DB, II, p. 425.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 425-426. See also Acton to Döllinger, 14 July 1870, DB, II, pp. 428-429.

bishops rather than from the need to marshal further arguments against the legitimacy of the Council or against the truth of the dogma. It is true that he soon published, as he had said that he would, an account of the Council which was based largely on his own experiences;¹⁵⁷ but it is scarcely possible to regard this essay as a polemical tirade, written solely (or even primarily) to undermine the Council's claim to authority.¹⁵⁸ "The Vatican Council" was more an autopsy than an indictment, and in it Acton devoted at least as much space to the blunders of the Minority as he did to the dishonourable methods of the Roman party. The publication in which he sought far more pointedly to impede the confirmation of the new dogma by the Church at large was his Sendschreiben an einen deutschen Bischof.¹⁵⁹ And the obvious intention of this work was to prevent the leading members of the Opposition from promulgating Pastor Aeternus in their dioceses by embarrassing them. Drawing chiefly on material which he had collected during the Council, he cited several statements in which the Minority bishops had predicted that the definition of papal infallibility would have pernicious consequences. He also reminded the Minority bishops themselves that the doctrine was without foundation in the acknowledged sources of

¹⁵⁷"The Vatican Council," North British Review, LIII (October 1870), 183-229; reprinted HOF, pp. 492-550.

¹⁵⁸It was, in fact, a remarkable accomplishment in the writing of contemporary history. It is still of value today, and E. E. Y. Hales is quite unjustified in dismissing it merely as "hostile" to the Council and in saying that it was based only on "outside gossip." (Hales, Pio Nono, p. 341.)

¹⁵⁹Sendschreiben an einen deutschen Bischof des vaticanischen Concils (Nördlingen, 1870); reprinted in Decisive Decade, pp. 228-239.

revelation, and he urged upon them yet again the point that the Council had no claim to ecumenical status since it had not been conducted in accordance with the principle of moral unanimity.

If priests and laymen now reject the decree [he told them], then it is nothing other than the result of your example, the echo of your episcopal words. . . . I believe that you will not forget your words or renounce your work; for I place my trust in those bishops . . . who in the last hour of the Council warned their colleagues "that one must persevere until the end and give the world an example of courage and endurance, which it so badly needs."¹⁶⁰

Even when the Sandschreiben failed to produce the desired effect, Acton did not allow the bishops of the Minority to escape without further admonition. It is now known that he wrote to many of them personally, asking for copies of their speeches and other Council materials with which to show that they had not given up their opposition to the dogma. But their replies gradually proved that each of them, in his own way, had in fact decided to submit.¹⁶¹ It was only then that Acton admitted total defeat.

For Döllinger, as is well known, the final triumph of the doctrine of papal infallibility meant an irreparable breach with the Church. Early in 1871, Archbishop Scherr of Munich asked him directly whether he accepted the dogma; and when he replied that as a Christian, as a theologian, as an historian, and even as a citizen, he felt bound

¹⁶⁰ Decisive Decade, pp. 238-239. (Emphasis Acton's.)

¹⁶¹ A part of Acton's correspondence with Clifford, Hefele, Kenrick, and Connolly has been printed in Decisive Decade, pp. 209-217. Acton explained his motives for writing to them in Acton to Döllinger, 23 December 1870, DB, II, pp. 459-460.

to reject it, he was promptly excommunicated.¹⁶² The test for Acton, however, did not come until more than four years after the prorogation of the Council, and even then it was provoked only by his famous and remarkable controversy with Gladstone over the Vatican decrees. In November 1874, Gladstone published his pamphlet, The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance,¹⁶³ in which he argued that the obedience to the Pope demanded by the definition of infallibility rendered Roman Catholics potentially disloyal subjects of the Crown. Acton had read the pamphlet even before it appeared in print and had tried to dissuade his friend from publishing it;¹⁶⁴ but when his appeal was ignored, he took it upon himself to answer Gladstone's accusations. In his letter to the Times of November 8,¹⁶⁵ he said, in effect, that the fact that the theoretical pretensions of the Pope were outrageous by no means meant that the mass of Catholics would act in accordance with them, and that in any case Gladstone had assailed a decree which paled in comparison to earlier papal claims and deeds. To support this latter assertion, he provided some rather startling examples. Urban II,

¹⁶² Friedrich, Ignas von Döllinger, III, pp. 568-580. The substance of Döllinger's reply is given in translation in Butler, The Vatican Council, II, p. 185.

¹⁶³ Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P., The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: a Political Expostulation (London: John Murray, 1874).

¹⁶⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1874, DB, III, p. 133.

¹⁶⁵ Acton to the Editor of The Times, 8 November 1870; reprinted in Correspondence, pp. 119-124.

he said, had deemed that it was not murder to kill excommunicated persons; Innocent III had laid down that allegiance must not be kept with heretical princes; Pius V, after issuing a bull deposing Queen Elizabeth, had commissioned an assassin to take her life; and Gregory XIII had not only pronounced the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew a glorious and holy deed but had also implored the King of France not to rest until every Huguenot in the country had either recanted or perished. "Your indictment would be more just," he admonished Gladstone, "if it was more complete."¹⁶⁶

It is not surprising that many Catholic readers of the Times believed that their Church was being attacked rather than defended. Acton was challenged by a number of people, both in public and in private, to justify the serious charges which he had made while ostensibly refuting Gladstone's accusations, and he ended by writing three additional letters to the Times in which he presented in great detail the historical evidence to support his claims.¹⁶⁷ But by far the most important reaction which his part in the controversy provoked was that of Archbishop Manning, who demanded of him whether he meant, by what he had written, to repudiate the decrees of the Council, and whether he positively adhered to the doctrines which had been defined there.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁶⁷ Acton to the Editor of The Times, 21 November 1874, 29 November 1874, and 9 December 1874; reprinted in Correspondence, pp. 124-144.

¹⁶⁸ Manning's letter to Acton was written on 12 November 1874, but the original does not appear to have survived. Its approximate contents are clear from Manning's letter to Acton of 16 November 1874, which is printed in Correspondence, pp. 151-152.

In his reply to Manning's letter, Acton succeeded at least in satisfying the Archbishop that nothing in his first letter to the Times actually implied rejection of the Vatican decrees;¹⁶⁹ but his statement did not seem to Manning sufficiently unambiguous, and he was therefore asked a second time whether he did or did not accept the dogma of papal infallibility.¹⁷⁰ Acton considered his answer carefully and finally despatched it on 18 November 1874. It had been impossible for him to answer Manning's question, he explained, without appearing to admit the very thing which he wished to deny--namely, that it had been founded on an accurate understanding of the terms of his controversy with Gladstone. The dispute in the Times, in other words, was not at all concerned with the truth of the doctrines defined at the Council; it touched rather on their political implications and on certain related historical questions. Even a reference which Acton had made--and upon which Manning had seized--to those Catholics who placed a "more conciliatory construction" on the Vatican decrees, did not properly enter into the case. He himself had "no private gloss or favourite interpretation" to apply to them. The acts of the Council alone constituted the law which he recognised. As a layman, he had not felt it his duty to pursue the comments of divines, let alone to explain the decrees himself. He was content simply to rely on God's providence in the government of his Church.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Manning to Acton, 16 November 1874, Correspondence, pp. 151-152.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Acton to Manning, 18 November 1874, Correspondence, p. 153.

It is impossible to deduce from Acton's declaration to Manning anything concerning the position which he took with respect to the dogma of infallibility other than that which is expressly contained in his letter. Although Manning was so little satisfied with his response that he forwarded the case to Rome,¹⁷² and although Acton himself continued for some months to fear excommunication,¹⁷³ nothing came of the matter. It is true that in the meantime Acton corresponded with Newman concerning the extent to which he could honestly claim to accept the decrees and that he raised the particular question whether to adhere to the doctrines of the Council necessarily meant to believe in them;¹⁷⁴ but he was never really required to say whether he acknowledged them to be true. All that is known is that he succeeded in convincing his own bishop and his confessor of his orthodoxy¹⁷⁵ and that in the case of his bishop he did so by professing obedience to the authoritative decisions of the Council. When Brown of Shrewsbury inquired whether he was a "real or pretended Catholic," he replied by comparing his situation to the bishops of the Minority "who opposed the Decrees during the discussion, but accept them now . . ." and by denying that there was a single word in his private or public letters which

¹⁷² Manning to Ullathorne, 2 January 1875, as quoted in Shane Leslie, Henry Edward Manning: His Life and Labours (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1921), p. 292.

¹⁷³ See Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, 13 April 1875, Correspondence, p. 155.

¹⁷⁴ Acton to Newman, 7 December [1874] and 9 December [1874], Decisive Decade, pp. 114-115.

¹⁷⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 28 December 1874, DB, III, p. 136; and Acton to Simpson, 10 December 1874, ASC, III, p. 324.

contradicted the doctrines of the Council.¹⁷⁶

It is perhaps helpful to suggest, as Gertrude Himmelfarb has done, that Acton satisfied his conscience by means of a distinction between obedience and internal assent and that in this respect he was imitating Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis, whom he so deeply admired.¹⁷⁷ But the real point is that to try to determine precisely how far Acton came to believe in the dogma of papal infallibility is to pose the question incorrectly. Although subtle distinctions appear to have taken on a measure of importance for him when he was compelled to answer his ecclesiastical superiors, one can understand his innermost position only by heeding his own testimony, which points almost exclusively to the idea that it was not the theological content of the dogma but its moral implications which concerned him. Even during the Council, he had argued that "the opponents of the decree must know at last that they have to deal with a blind and unscrupulous zeal, not with a theological system carefully thought out and placed on an intellectual level . . .".¹⁷⁸ But in the midst of the troubled waters stirred up by Gladstone in 1874, he made many more statements to the same effect. In a tone indicating frustration and exasperation, he wrote to Gladstone himself that what he wanted people to understand was

¹⁷⁶ Acton to Bishop Brown, 16 December 1874, as quoted in Leslie, Manning, p. 233.

¹⁷⁷ Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 112, n. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Quirinus, Letters from Rome, p. 380. (Conzemius has examined at length Acton's statements during the Council which indicate that his objections to the dogma were ethical rather than theological. See Conzemius, "Lord Acton and the First Vatican Council," JEH, XX [October 1869], 267-294.)

that he was "not really dealing with the Council, but with the deeper seat of evil . . .".¹⁷⁹ He made essentially the same point to Simpson, saying that it was Ultramontaniam which he had meant to attack rather than the Vatican decrees as such and that his orthodoxy had been called into question only because the distinction which he had carefully maintained between the two had been ignored.¹⁸⁰ So far as the Council's definitions were concerned, he told Newman plainly that they had "never been a difficulty to me" because he was confident that no interpretation of them which was inconsistent with tradition would endure.¹⁸¹ Indeed, he admitted that he had not even read the final documents closely!¹⁸² In yet another letter to Gladstone, he affirmed his view that the Ultramontane system must "be attacked in the root and stem, rather than in the flowering top";¹⁸³ and elsewhere he defined Ultramontaniam, not as adherence to the doctrine of papal infallibility, but as "the theory that it is not well to let history speak out or the truth be known."¹⁸⁴ What disturbed Acton was not merely that a dogma had been defined without

¹⁷⁹ Acton to Gladstone, 19/20 December [1874], Correspondence p. 147.

¹⁸⁰ Acton to Simpson, c. 21 December 1874, ASC, III, pp. 328-329.

¹⁸¹ Acton to Newman, 4 December 1874, Decisive Decade, p. 113.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Acton to Gladstone, 16 December 1874, B.M. Add. MSS. 44093, ff. 170-171.

¹⁸⁴ Acton to Simpson, c. 21 December 1874, ASC, III, p. 329.

adequate theological justification. It was rather that papal authority had been raised to the level of absolute power by means of a conscious and deliberate fraud. The chicanery which he had witnessed at Rome seemed to him to be bound by a thread of moral perversion to a tradition of falsehood and deception which wound its way through the history of the Church and which was specially identified with the institution of the papacy.

Chapter VIII

ISOLATION

When they are examined in isolation, Acton's controversy with Gladstone and his subsequent encounter with Manning bring sharply into focus the fundamental point that his objections to the dogma of infallibility were ethical rather than theological in nature. No one has expressed the matter better than Figgis and Laurence, who, drawing upon Acton's own words, said that the Vatican dogma was for him merely the flowering top, whereas the root and stem were a certain corruption of the conscience, brought about by the notion that deeds which were otherwise reprehensible took on a different colour when performed for the sake of religion.¹ In order to understand the full implications of the Vatican Council for Acton, however, it is also necessary to see the crisis of 1874 within the broader context of his development throughout the entire decade. Although his indifference to the theological question enabled him to avoid saying that he rejected the dogma, and although he thus escaped the fate which befell Döllinger, the final outcome of the Council changed his life irrevocably. It caused him to reflect deeply on the real meaning of what had taken place at Rome; it impelled him to return with heightened interest to the historical questions which he had begun to raise in 1864; and it

¹Correspondence, "Introduction," xvii.

led him to compare his own position to that of others who had opposed the dogma. Even before the publication of Gladstone's Vatican Decrees, Acton had embarked on the final stages of his road to isolation.

The departure point for all of Acton's reflections on the Council was the idea that it constituted not merely a major episode in the history of the Church but a moment of crisis in which the development of several centuries became concentrated.² His position could be stated succinctly by saying that he believed the definition of infallibility to have sanctioned, retroactively, all the misdeeds of the medieval and modern papacy; but even here it is necessary to see his attitude within a broader context. In his notes,³ Acton has recorded his view that the Vatican Council took place at a time when external conditions were uniquely favourable to a major reform of the Church. The freedom of science and the liberty of the Church, he said, had been established in virtually every country in Europe. Circumstances were quite unlike those which had prevailed at the time of Trent, when the Church had been forced into a position of jealousy and antagonism. The old enemies could have become new and reliable allies. Since unjust accusations had for the most part been abandoned, the moment had come to relinquish unjust claims. By the same token, those charges which were indeed just could have been admitted. If this course had been adopted, then barriers would have fallen, and the

² See Acton to Döllinger, 9 March 1870, DB, II, p. 204.

³ C.U.L. Add. 5542, ff. 62b-63a.

source of weakness within the Church would have been removed. But the purpose for which the Council had been summoned was the very opposite. "It was intended to ratify, to intensify, to perpetuate those things which have been the crime and the disgrace of Catholicism . . .".⁴

Since Acton admitted, even in retrospect, that there had nevertheless been signs in certain quarters of a genuine movement towards reform,⁵ one question which has a direct bearing on his development after the Council is that concerning the final attitude which he adopted towards the Opposition bishops. The editors of the recently published volume, Lord Acton: the Decisive Decade, have argued that the eventual submission of the Minority was a greater blow to Acton than was the definition of infallibility itself.⁶ This assertion must be regarded with considerable caution, since it is based chiefly on secondary evidence--namely, on a document drawn up by Acton's daughter more than thirty years later.⁷ In fact, Professor Butterfield has added further reason for reticence by recalling that even before the Council began, Acton was deeply conscious of the weakness of the Minority's standpoint.⁸ Yet the truth is that those responsible for

⁴Ibid., f. 63a.

⁵Ibid. See also "The Vatican Council," HOF, pp. 493-494 and p. 536.

⁶Decisive Decade, p. 25 and p. 201.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Herbert Butterfield, Review of Damian McElrath et al., eds. Lord Acton: the Decisive Decade, 1864-1874, in The Historical Journal, XV (December 1972), 824.

Professor Butterfield's criticism is perhaps reinforced by the

the original statement have invited this criticism by ignoring one of the most important points regarding Acton's activity in Rome. Documents which have appeared in recent times have shown beyond doubt that before the Council Acton entertained little hope for the formation of a truly effective Opposition; but, with equal clarity, they have demonstrated that as events unfolded he grew increasingly optimistic, until he actually believed that victory was well within the reach of the Minority.⁹ What must be remembered when analysing Acton's reaction to the final outcome of the Council is that he had been led gradually from his initially pessimistic view to the conviction that a totally unexpected triumph was possible; and that his hopes having been thus excited, he was bitterly disappointed to watch the Opposition let success slip through their fingers. He certainly made clear after the Council that the Minority seemed to him to have failed, not for want of adequate opportunities for success, but rather through indecision, timidity, and a desire to evade the real issue.

confused manner in which the argument is presented in the Decisive Decade itself. The first time that Annie Acton's memoir is mentioned, Damien McElrath acknowledges that "It is difficult to arrive at precisely the conclusion reached by Acton's daughter if one accepts his testimony. Almost from the outset he let it be known that he was not convinced that the bishops concerned would earnestly resist the Ultramontane pressures." (p. 21) But a few pages later he declares that "In a certain sense it was not Papal Infallibility but Episcopal Fallibility that had such an unwholesome effect upon the liberty-loving Acton." (p. 25) Later in the volume, Sue Katzman and James Clarence Holland refer once more to Annie Acton's manuscript and tell us that the validity of her observation is borne out by the course of events in which her father became involved after the Council. (p. 201)

⁹See above, pp. 293-294.

In this regard, one of the things which stood out most clearly in Acton's mind was that the extreme Ultramontanes had nearly ruined their own cause by the use of unnecessarily high-handed methods. Few of those who eventually joined the Minority, he said, had begun by holding the opinions which Rome meant to suppress.¹⁰ The Majority, however, had forced a portion of the episcopate into an attitude of hostility and had thus called into existence an Opposition party which otherwise might never have taken shape.¹¹ In this sense, they had provided the means of their own undoing. Yet even when a recalcitrant party had been formed, it had failed. The reason for this was that it had refused to maintain itself by engaging in an open conflict of principles, but had tried instead to obscure so far as was possible the distance which separated it from the predominant view.¹² If the members of the Opposition could have smothered Infallibility, or even obtained an ambiguous formula, they "would have been glad to cloak over the real antagonism . . .".¹³ They would likewise have been content to let the governments do their work for them.¹⁴ The most imposing act of the Minority had been to present a counter-petition protesting against the introduction of the question of infallibility; yet this petition had obtained a large number of signatures only by omitting all

¹⁰"The Vatican Council," HOF, p. 517.

¹¹Ibid., p. 529 and pp. 531-532.

¹²Ibid., p. 517.

¹³C.U.L. Add. 5542, f. 59a.

¹⁴"The Vatican Council," HOF, p. 528.

reference to the doctrine itself and speaking exclusively of the difficulties and dangers involved in defining it.¹⁵ Their strongest argument—which, again, had been handed to them by the Majority—had been that they would not accept a dogma without unanimous consent; but this point had been advanced only once as a tenet of the party, and it had afterwards been abandoned.¹⁶

It must not be forgotten that there were certain Opposition bishops whom Acton consistently regarded as exceptional. "I still adhere to my earlier view," he had said near the end of the Council, "that Strossmayer, Kenrick, Darboy and Hefele are the best men."¹⁷ But he nevertheless took a very critical view of the Minority as a whole because their behaviour seemed to him to have been faint-hearted and almost cowardly. The point involved here is one of fairly broad significance, moreover, because Acton's disappointment with the Minority bishops tended to deepen still further his already considerable feeling of isolation from nearly all his fellow Catholics. His insistence that the Minority bishops, wanting at all costs to avoid open conflict with Rome, had shirked their responsibility and lost sight of their duty to strive for the renovation of Catholicism¹⁸ testified to a recognition on his part that he was separated not only from the Ultramontane majority among his co-religionists but also from the reforming

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 535-536.

¹⁶ C.U.L. Add. 5542, f. 48b.

¹⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 10 June 1870, DB, II, p. 422.

¹⁸ "The Vatican Council," ROP, p. 536.

party within the Church--if, indeed, he could continue to believe that such a party existed at all.

Even Germany offered Acton no avenue of escape from his increasing sense of isolation. Opposition to the doctrine of papal infallibility survived there, perhaps to a greater degree than in any other country; but the precise form which this opposition took--namely, that of the schismatical Old Catholic movement--was one for which Acton not only lacked sympathy but towards which he felt definite antipathy. The strength of Acton's feelings against Old Catholicism is in some ways surprising, for the men who formed the movement were mainly prominent German laymen and divines, and one of their chief characteristics was a desire to have Döllinger as their leader. One would have thought that this circumstance, combined with the truly uncompromising resistance to the decrees of the Council which distinguished the movement, might prove attractive to Acton; but the fact is that Acton felt himself separated from the leading Old Catholics by a wide chasm and that his hostility towards them arose both from differences in principle and from personal considerations. His resentment towards these men seems first to have been aroused by the collection and publication of the Quirinus letters. Acton felt that certain passages contained in them were unfair and unnecessarily polemical, and, according to his own testimony, he had obtained Döllinger's consent to have them deleted. Yet the plan to edit and revise the letters was somehow obstructed, and they appeared with the offending passages intact.¹⁹ A second and still

¹⁹ See Acton to Döllinger, 15 September 1871, DB, III, p. 34.

more irritating incident occurred with respect to the translation into German of Acton's essay on the Vatican Council. Although he had agreed in advance to the publication of his article in German, he was indignant to discover, when it appeared, that it contained certain alterations in the text which seemed to him to misrepresent his meaning.²⁰ The fact that the translator remained anonymous, thus giving the impression that Acton himself was responsible for the German edition, and the fact that this version of the essay was subsequently placed on the Index, added salt to the wound.²¹ But the episode which contributed more than any other to Acton's alienation from the founders of the Old Catholic Church occurred as a result of the unauthorised use of his name on the well-known "Munich Declaration of Whitsuntide," in which the decrees of the Vatican Council were explicitly repudiated. Acton appears to have attended the early sessions of the assembly which produced this document. He was not present when the final draft of the declaration was decided upon, however, and he did not give--nor, indeed, was he asked for--permission to append his name, which appeared as "Lord Acton-Dalberg."²² At first, Acton was reluctant to make an issue of what seemed to be little more than the consequence of a misunderstanding, and he suggested that a statement should be published in the Allgemeine Zeitung, explaining that the inclusion of his name in the list of those who had signed was due to a mistake on the part of

²⁰ Ibid.; and Acton to Döllinger, 5 March 1871, DB, III, pp. 14-15.

²¹ See DB, III, p. 15, n. 1.

²² Acton to Döllinger, 19 June 1871, DB, III, p. 18.

the secretary.²³ But when this request was denied, only to be followed later by a begrudging and qualified admission that his name had been used without authorisation, he was provoked to ask Döllinger whether he did not perceive a definite similarity between the methods of the men responsible and the customary behaviour of Ultramontanes.²⁴ "I must say," he wrote on 19 August 1871, "that the moral abhorrence which separates me entirely from the Infallibists also divides me from a portion of the men who are near you. In the future, therefore, I want to hold myself aloof from any association with them . . .".²⁵

By the time that the steps were being taken for the actual formation of the Old Catholic Church, Acton was even convinced that a danger existed that Döllinger was being used and misled and that he would be made responsible for a movement over which he would have no control.²⁶ He implored his teacher to separate himself from the group, and he urged him to recognise in particular that he was not really bound to it by common convictions or motives.²⁷ It is clear that one of Acton's concerns was that the movement would be a complete failure: it was impossible, he said, to build up the Church with such material.²⁸ But more important still, it is obvious that he believed that the

²³Ibid., p. 19.

²⁴Acton to Döllinger, 19 August 1871, DB, III, p. 24.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 24-25.

²⁶Acton to Döllinger, 15 September 1871, DB, III, p. 32 and p. 34.

²⁷Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸Ibid.

entire enterprise was in any case based on a gross misunderstanding of the difficulties in which Catholicism found itself. It was wrong, he told Döllinger, to hope for victory in the normal and immediate sense. The most that could be done was to "sow the good seed," in the hope that it would grow and prosper at a later time. The distant future for which one must work could not be served by "transitory public movements." What was really needed was sound intellectual achievements, which could some day form the basis of a genuine reform.²⁹

Since Döllinger refused in the end to join the Old Catholic Church, Acton's wishes in this respect were eventually satisfied. But the arguments which he had used against the movement were significant of something in his attitude which was at once more general and more fundamental and which manifested itself yet again when his friend Michaud, the French historian, who had recently left the Church, published a book accusing Rome of heresy. Acton conceded that Michaud's work, entitled Comment l'Eglise romaine n'est plus l'Eglise catholique, made more clear the reasons for his momentous decision.³⁰ Yet the vehemence with which he himself rejected these reasons illustrates in a striking manner not only the special nature of his own approach but also an increasing awareness that his position was unique. Writing to Sir Rowland Blennerhasset, Acton said that he was now convinced that the

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

³⁰ Acton to Sir Rowland Blennerhasset, Saturday [1872], Correspondence, p. 117.

difference which he had already noticed between his attitude and Michaud's was one of fundamental principle.

Deeming Rome heretical, he did not wait till his archbishop put the knife at his throat, but took the initiative of that operation on himself. So that, in fact, he is renouncing communion with us who wish to remain in communion with Rome. He must mean that there was nothing heretical in the Church before 1870, if the Decrees of July make such a difference-- and that is the most direct contradiction of my theory that the decisive objection to these decrees lies in the previous doctrines which are sanctioned and revived by them. I think very much worse of the Vor Juli Kirche than he does, and better of the Nachjuli Kirche . . .³¹

The point is that Acton was separated from other resolute opponents of the dogma of infallibility not only by the importance which he attached to its ethical implications, but also by his profound sense of history. On the one hand, the very meaning of the dogmatic definition consisted for him in its relationship to past sins and scandals. On the other, he never forgot that the prevailing spirit in the Church could change once again as rapidly and as dramatically as it had changed in the nineteenth century.³²

Because Acton believed that the decrees of the Vatican Council could be understood properly only in historical perspective, and because he was convinced at the same time of the need to lay the intellectual foundations for the ultimate recovery of Catholicism, it was entirely natural that instead of renouncing his membership in the

³¹Ibid.

³²See Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1874, DE, III, pp. 134-135; and Acton to Gladstone, 18 December 1874, B.M. Add. MSS. 44093, ff. 170-171.

Church or helping to organise schismatical movements, he was more concerned, once the outcome of the Council was clear, to return to the study of ecclesiastical history. His sincere intention, no doubt, was to withdraw entirely from the fray, in order to devote himself exclusively to scholarly endeavour; and for a time at least he was successful in doing just that. Yet his historical researches were never really far removed from the questions of the day. They, too, contributed to his progressive alienation from his fellow Catholics, while at the same time stimulating his tendency to condemn, for he conducted them as though their main purpose was to disclose the origins and growth of the immoral spirit which had triumphed at the Vatican Council.³³ The single most important topic on which Acton worked in the early 1870s was the history of the Council of Trent. With the help of colleagues and copyists, he collected countless valuable documents, including unpublished letters of Visconti, Borromeo, and Morone, as well as the Council diaries of Massaralli, Servantio, and Mendoza.³⁴ None of the manuscripts which he saw induced him to revise his earlier judgement that the two famous historians of the Council, Sarpi and Pallavicini, could not be trusted.³⁵ On the contrary, the more he investigated the works of these men, the more

³³See, for instance, Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1872, DB, III, pp. 67-68.

³⁴See especially Acton to Döllinger, 19 June 1872, 5 July 1872, 14 July [1872], and 20 July 1872, DB, III, p. 76, p. 83, pp. 87-89, and p. 91 respectively.

³⁵See Acton to Sir Rowland Blennerhasset, Saturday [1872], Correspondence, p. 117.

deeply convinced he became that each of them had deliberately sought to deceive--a point which he did not hesitate to relate to his general conviction that the struggle for historical truth was a struggle to uncover the lies and secrets of earlier times.³⁶ But a darker and more sinister picture of the Council itself also took shape in his mind. By 1873, he had concluded that the sources which Pallavicini had had at his disposal, but which he had used in a carefully selective manner, revealed that the history of Trent was even more deplorable than Sarpi, with his false accusations, had claimed.³⁷

The fact that the controversy over Gladstone's Vatican Decrees erupted when Acton was immersed in these historical studies makes it easier still to understand why so much of his part in the affair was devoted to the description and interpretation of events which must have seemed to others far removed from the question at hand. He began with the idea that Gladstone's fears concerning the political loyalty of English Catholics could be proven groundless if evidence was provided to show that the system which he assailed had by no means begun with

³⁶ See Acton to Döllinger, 6 May 1872, DB, III, p. 68.

³⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 1 January 1873, DB, III, pp. 102-103.

the Vatican Council:³⁸ but, especially as the dispute dragged on and Acton himself was in turn attacked by indignant Catholic critics, he came more and more to regard it as an opportunity to make known the "facts" which he had unearthed through the study of the archives. Although he refrained from entering into a discussion of the intricacies of the Council of Trent, he paraded before his readers a multitude of revelations, some of which he had discussed previously in scholarly articles and some of which he had mentioned only briefly before. It is obvious that he took considerable pleasure in the occasion thus provided him, for, after the appearance of his second letter to the Times, he wrote to Döllinger of the good use he had made of "the extraordinary opportunity which the stupidity and untruthfulness of my opponents have given me."³⁹ "These truths," he said, "could not have been brought before the world with greater éclat."⁴⁰

But by the same token, it is clear that Acton believed that the steps taken against him at the time were due primarily to alarm at the damaging evidence which he had so candidly published and not to genuine concern over his failure to acknowledge the truth of the dogma of infallibility. Not only did he say that he was as likely to be excommunicated for his historical as for his theological opinions,⁴¹

³⁸ See Acton to the Editor of The Times, 8 November 1874; reprinted in Correspondence, pp. 120-121.

³⁹ Acton to Döllinger, 25 November 1874, DB, III, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

but he also made clear that he thought Manning had forced a crisis in an attempt to silence him. "I have tried to avoid the crisis as long as I could," he told Newman, "and have given every opening that I could find for the Archbishop to content himself. It is quite natural that he, on the other hand, should force on a catastrophe. In the last ten years I have collected a very considerable mass of historical materials, and I must try to avail myself of them. At every step I should be sure to encounter the same difficulties as now, and I cannot make any concession to danger without treason."⁴²

The belief that the Church authorities were trying to suppress the information which he had collected from manuscript sources became a part of Acton's experience and served both to sharpen his antagonism towards them and to strengthen his determination to reveal the truth in all its integrity, no matter how detrimental to the papacy it seemed. The first step that he took in the wake of the Vaticanism controversy was to prepare an article or pamphlet in which he set out at length the evidence to support his claim that Pius V had sought and obtained the co-operation of the Spanish Court in a plot to murder Queen Elizabeth.⁴³ Of all the accusations which his letters to the Times had contained,

⁴² Acton to Newman, 4 December 1874, Decisive Decade, p. 114. Later, when Acton began to realise that proceedings against him had come to a halt, he wrote to Döllinger: "It is possible that Manning has grasped the untenability of his standpoint, that Clifford and my bishop have made representations, and that it is thought that I can be rendered silent by the mere fear of future attack." (Acton to Döllinger, 28 May 1875, DB, III, p. 143.)

⁴³ Acton to Döllinger, 28 May 1875, DB, III, pp. 142-143.

this was the one which he considered most telling:⁴⁴ and although his manuscript was never published and has not yet been recovered, we know at least that his intention was not only to defend himself against criticism but also to illustrate the application of what he called "the papal theory of assassination."⁴⁵ Once his work on this project had been completed, moreover, he announced to Döllinger that he had decided to undertake a major study in which he would be able to use all the material which he had collected to elucidate a single theme. Since he had been presented as a defector from Rome, he said, he was now in an excellent position to express his views on ecclesiastical questions. If he could just remain free from controversies awhile, he could gain the time necessary to reveal all that he knew and thus turn his researches to good use.⁴⁶ He would begin his study with an account of the attempt at Church reform before the Reformation. Then he would describe the system of ideas, including indulgences and dispensations, which had provoked the Protestant revolt. He would carry the story forward to Rome's struggle against the Reformation, treating of the attempt to restore unity and showing how this had miscarried and had been abandoned at the Council of Trent. The Roman Inquisition, the Index, the "system of falsehood," and the "theory and practice of assassination for the glory of God" would likewise be dealt with. There would be a treatment of relations between Rome and England from the

⁴⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 28 December 1874, DB, III, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Acton to Döllinger, 28 May 1875, DB, III, pp. 142-143.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

divorce of Henry VIII until the revolution of 1688. And finally, there would be a discussion of the "Catholic ideal," in which the views of superior men, from More to Döllinger himself, would be contrasted sharply with the actual historical situation.⁴⁷

It is doubtful whether, under any circumstances, Acton would have completed so wide-ranging a work. As Döllinger was quick to point out, he was trying to bring too many topics together at once and his plan therefore lacked the necessary coherence.⁴⁸ But besides the excessively ambitious nature of the project, Acton's work was destined to remain uncompleted because his thoughts and plans were once more running ahead of themselves, as they had when he first began to research the archives. Although he managed in the next few years to publish three collections of documents, including a volume of previously unprinted materials on Trent which he prepared in co-operation with Döllinger,⁴⁹ the greatest enterprise of his career, his proposed

⁴⁷ Acton to Döllinger, 9 June 1875, DB, III, p. 144.

⁴⁸ Döllinger to Acton, 12 June 1875, DB, III, p. 145.

⁴⁹ In 1876, an edition of the Letters of James II to the Abbot of La Trappe was completed. It appeared as vol. XIV in the Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society. Acton composed the introduction and was apparently the chief editor.

In 1877, Acton edited and published the historical portion of Harpfield's Narrative of the Divorce (London: Wittingham and Wilkins).

The collection of documents on Trent, Ungedruckte Urkunden und Tügebücher zur Geschichte des Concils von Trient, was published in Nördlingen in 1876. For reasons which are not entirely clear, Acton preferred that Döllinger alone should be named as editor, although he asked that the introduction should contain an acknowledgement that the documents had been procured by him. (Acton to Döllinger, 3 March 1876, DB, III, p. 162.)

History of Liberty, was already taking shape in his mind. In 1877, he published two addresses--the one on the History of Freedom in Antiquity, the other on the History of Freedom in Christianity⁵⁰--which even then he envisaged as a preliminary sketch of a much larger work.⁵¹

Acton's new pre-occupation with this topic brought about a considerable change in his perspective, one of the results of which was that his concern to explain the deterioration of Catholicism since the late Middle Ages slipped gradually (although never entirely) to the back of his mind. Yet his attempt to trace the history of liberty had, in its own way, a very important bearing on the development of his religious thought. His speech on the History of Freedom in Christianity could rightly be described as a milestone in his career, for it contained the first definite indication of a revolution in his understanding of the role which Christianity had played in fostering civil liberty. The cornerstone of much of his early thought--the myth of primitive Teutonic freedom--was still in evidence, as was the notion that the struggle of Gregorian Catholicism against feudal domination had preserved liberty in the later Middle Ages. But his treatment of both themes was more discriminating and critical than ever before; and, more important still, his explanation of how medieval liberties had been

⁵⁰The History of Freedom in Antiquity (Bridgnorth: C. Edkins [1877]); and The History of Freedom in Christianity (Bridgnorth: C. Edkins, [1877]). These addresses are reprinted in ROF, pp. 1-29 and pp. 30-61.

⁵¹Acton to Döllinger, 30 May 1877, DB, III, p. 172.

submerged by the rise of absolutism in the sixteenth century took on a much more comprehensive quality than it had possessed in early essays, such as "The Protestant Theory of Persecution." Catholics were now made to share fully with Protestants the blame for the transition by which the Church had become a buttress rather than a check to the authority of the State and by which religious expediency had been allowed to serve as an excuse for despotism and tyranny. Moreover, Europe at large was portrayed as having been so deeply in the grip of absolutism that it could be saved only by a radically new understanding of the relationship between civil and religious freedom. The single most important sign of a new element in Acton's thinking was that he gave credit for the discovery that "it is only by abridging the authority of States that the liberty of Churches can be assured" to the English sects of the seventeenth century,⁵² and that he argued further that the principle of ensuring freedom by controlling government had been carried to America, where it had matured and triumphed, by men who sought only the right to act in accordance with their consciences.⁵³ The pre-eminent position in the history of liberty which he henceforth assigned to Independents and Quakers led him to revise his ideas so completely that he eventually declared that it was from the forests of Pennsylvania rather than of Germany that modern freedom had sprung.⁵⁴

⁵²HOF, p. 52.

⁵³HOF, p. 55.

⁵⁴Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, [?] May 1887, Correspondence, p. 277. Professor Butterfield was the first to draw attention to the importance of this idea in Acton's later thought. (Butterfield, Lord Acton, pp. 20-21.) The question has been discussed in the greatest detail by Dr. John Nurser,

Although Acton spent the greater part of the next two years gathering information and soliciting advice for the expansion of his speeches on the history of freedom, his work was suddenly disrupted in 1879 when he found himself entangled in the most painful episode of his life, his great dispute with Döllinger concerning moral judgements in history. The private controversy which he conducted with his teacher lasted for more than five years, during which time he wrote nothing other than occasional—even if interesting—reviews; and we know from his own testimony that his failure to produce even a part of his grand History of Liberty was due in large measure to the anguish and self-doubt which the conflict with Döllinger caused him.⁵⁵ It was not a question of Acton's thought coming to a standstill or even changing direction abruptly, for the broader implications of some of his new insights were evident in the position which he stated with increasing emphasis while he argued with Döllinger. His discovery that it was the religious sects who had contributed most to the growth of freedom, for example, led him towards the more general conclusion that those forms of Christianity which were weakest in dogma nevertheless stood highest in moral terms. From this idea there followed a growing

who argues that between 1877 and 1880 Acton came to see the American Revolution—which he believed to follow in a direct line of descent from the politics of William Penn and the Quakers—as the watershed in the history of liberty. (John Nurser, The Idea of Conscience in the Work of Lord Acton [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1957].)

⁵⁵ Acton to Döllinger, mid-September 1882, DB, III, p. 303.

inclination on his part to acknowledge that right conduct did not always depend upon right belief. And on more than one occasion during his dispute with Döllinger he went so far as to suggest that heretics, sceptics, and unbelievers were often more worthy of respect than were orthodox but unethical Catholics.⁵⁶ But instead of being free simply to develop the ideas which he had first put forth in his addresses of 1877, he was forced to undertake what he described as an "earnest self-examination."⁵⁷ Part of what was involved in his controversy with Döllinger was an attempt to clarify and justify the fundamental assumptions on which his proposed History of Liberty was based. By its very nature, the project took for granted the right of the historian to praise and condemn, and Acton seems to have felt that he could not carry on until he succeeded in persuading Döllinger to admit the validity of this procedure.⁵⁸

As is well known, the immediate occasion for the dispute was provided by an essentially trivial occurrence which Acton somehow insisted on construing as an incident of major proportions. In February 1879, an article by Lady Blennerhassett commemorating the recent death of Félix Dupanloup appeared in The Nineteenth Century beneath a letter from Döllinger recommending it to the editor.⁵⁹ Acton himself had been

⁵⁶ See Acton to Döllinger, c. 1879/1880, c. 1881/1882, and 15 June 1882, DB, III, pp. 212-213, pp. 258-263, and pp. 281-282 respectively.

⁵⁷ Acton to Döllinger, mid-September 1882, DB, III, p. 304.

⁵⁸ Ibid. See also Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, p. 272.

⁵⁹ C. de Warmont [pseud.], "Félix Antoine Dupanloup, Bishop of Orléans," The Nineteenth Century, V (February 1879), 219-246.

consulted about the essay before it was written and had conveyed to Lady Blennerhassett a very critical evaluation of Dupanloup;⁶⁰ but she afterwards wrote to him explaining that she had been unable to use his observations, and he assumed, without actually reading the article, that the reason for this was that she had chosen to portray the late Bishop of Orléans in a favourable light.⁶¹ An element of pique seemed to enter into Acton's reaction to the course of events, for he wrote almost immediately to Lady Blennerhassett, reminding her that she had often accused him of naiveté and declaring that the manner in which she must have spoken of Dupanloup made clear to him that this was indeed her view.⁶² But clearly what disturbed him more was the knowledge that Döllinger had accorded her essay his express approval. He understood, he said with thinly veiled sarcasm, that eulogies composed on the morrow of death must be separated by a wide chasm from

⁶⁰ Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, [January or February 1879], Correspondence, pp. 50-52.

⁶¹ C.U.L. Add. 5403: " . . . 2 Or 3 years later, you [Lady Blennerhassett] pub[lished] your paper on Dupanloup. You asked me for reminiscences and aft[erward] told me that you had made no use of them. I concluded that was because I was hard upon him, and such ^{views} ideas could not be worked into your own--and I im[agined] that your judgement on him was more fav[ourable] treating him perhaps as a man who was mistaken, but not as a common rogue and imposter. (card 29)

"I did not, at the time, read your paper, which was snatched away by everybody. I never made the slightest criticism upon it . . . But I saw that he [Döllinger] gave his Impr[imatur] his general sanction to a paper in which an Ultra[montane] prel[ate] a def[ender] of the Syllabus was treated respectfully." (card 67) See also Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, p. 262.

⁶² Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, 17 February 1879, Correspondence, p. 53.

the less merciful judgements of the distant future. No doubt the Duc d'Audiffret-Pasquier, Dupanloup's successor in the Académie Française, would be as scrupulous as Lady Blennerhassett had been in eschewing harsh words when his turn came to speak. But it was a considerable shock to discover that "the Professor" was willing to regard a defender of the Papacy, of the Syllabus, and of the Temporal Power as a good Christian. This opened "unforeseen horizons" for him and caused him to reflect deeply.⁶³

Unfortunately, the letter in which Acton first revealed his consternation to Döllinger himself has not been recovered, and it is therefore impossible to determine the exact manner in which he chose to call attention to the divergence in their views; but we do know enough about the early stages of the controversy to say that it centered initially around the specific question whether it was correct to condemn a host of their fellow Catholics on the grounds that they had either promoted an immoral system or were implicated in that system by association. In a letter written in 1879 or 1880, Acton told Döllinger that he felt certain that they agreed at least in believing that there existed among Catholics an immoral view of religion, which consisted chiefly in the notion that sin is not sin when committed for the benefit of the Church, and that he was likewise convinced that they were united in acknowledging that such a doctrine was itself sinful and not merely a dangerous error.⁶⁴ He seems to have felt that if he could

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Acton to Döllinger, c. 1879/1880, DB, III, pp. 212-213.

establish these basic points, he would be able to persuade Döllinger that the conclusions which he drew from them were irresistible, for he went on to insist that "we are not dealing with heretics or sceptics, but with liars, robbers and murderers" and that as a matter of historical fact this kind of Catholic had been specially identified with the institution of the papacy, from which it drew its strength.⁶⁵ But Döllinger responded to this line of reasoning by removing the discussion to an entirely different level. In a noticeably mild and conciliatory tone, he tried to convince Acton that the difference in the way they judged historical personages was due partly to the difference in their ages and partly to the contrast between the types of life they had led. He was, he said, forty years older than Acton, and he remembered well that forty years ago he had judged far more severely than he did now. He was conscious as well of how narrow and limited was the life of a Bavarian priest compared to that of an Englishman of high birth, who had been permitted to cultivate his views free from any kind of restraint. His own experience had taught him how overwhelming was the power of prejudice, and, as he later said,⁶⁶ how indelible an impression a clerical education could make. It was his personal awareness of how such influences had affected him which made him slow to condemn, and he believed that with the passage of years Acton would draw nearer and nearer to his way of seeing

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

⁶⁶ Döllinger to Acton, 2 June 1882, DB, III, p. 273.

things.⁶⁷

No doubt it was highly aggravating to Acton to be told, even in a spirit of obvious good will, that his inflexible position was the result of a certain immaturity. He did not consider that he was condemning indiscriminately or simply imputing bad motives to anyone who opposed his views—a procedure which he freely admitted would be the mark of a passionate spirit, not yet tempered by experience.⁶⁸ His view was that he was denouncing men who were manifestly evil. And he even cited the fact that he did so without regard to confessional interests as proof of his detachment and objectivity.⁶⁹ Yet he nevertheless found that no matter how he stated his case, Döllinger calmly but firmly opposed him. He certainly had no success in advancing the notion that present-day Catholics who admired ecclesiastical criminals of the past were as guilty as the men whom they praised; for, when he drew such a comparison between Daniel Haneberg and Pius V, Döllinger answered in a common sense way that he had known Haneberg for years and had found him to be pure, gentle and self-sacrificing in spirit, even if occasionally weak.⁷⁰ Nor did it do any good to point out that the men whom he accused were far too well informed to be excused on the grounds of ignorance. To this line of argument, Döllinger replied that there was a very great difference between knowledge and

⁶⁷ Döllinger to Acton, 11 June 1881, DB, III, pp. 223-224.

⁶⁸ Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, p. 260.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 259.

⁷⁰ Döllinger to Acton, 7 February 1881, DB, III, pp. 229-230.

understanding, as Acton ought to know, and that it was possible to be learned and misguided at the same time.⁷¹

As the argument dragged on without issue, and as Acton found his path blocked in nearly every direction, he grew increasingly concerned to identify the underlying principle which gave rise to the divergence between his opinions and those of Döllinger. On a few occasions at least, he moved away from the discussion of matters connected solely with Church history and attempted to grasp the source of their disagreement by examining the contrast between their attitudes on a wider scale. In order to clarify his own view that Ultramontanes were men who consciously and deliberately approved the use of evil means for good ends, he drew a comparison between ecclesiastical and political life, where, he said, he detected the same ethical polarity.⁷² He regarded the enemies of freedom not as honest opponents, but as champions of political immorality.⁷³ "Not error, but untruthfulness," he told Döllinger, "not the conscience gone astray, but unscrupulousness, are the things for which I dismiss people, as you say . . .".⁷⁴ But Döllinger himself displayed a sense of expediency in his attitude toward specific political issues which Acton found not only wholly unacceptable but also strikingly indicative of the fundamental difference in outlook which separated them on so many decisive questions. Thus

⁷¹Döllinger to Acton, 2 June 1882, DB, III, pp. 273-274.

⁷²Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, p. 258.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 260.

when Döllinger expressed his fear that Gladstone's precarious alliance with Parnell would lead eventually to the separation of Ireland from England, to a religious and civil war, and to the suppression of the Protestant minority by the Catholic majority,⁷⁵ Acton, who was among the most devoted advocates of Home Rule, berated him for missing the point.⁷⁶ He told him, first, that he underestimated the power which principle exercised over those who were earnest party men, and, second, that it was his tendency to assume that people were guided by sympathy, interest, or prejudice which prevented him from seeing that they were men who tried to keep such motives at a distance. Not only the policy of Home Rule, but also the peace terms which Gladstone was prepared to offer the Boers, at a time when the English nation had suffered an embarrassing defeat and both the army and the people were clamouring for revenge, testified to the fact that such an independent and conscientious approach was possible. "How often must my conception of things strike you as alien," he asked with an obvious sense of frustration, "if you do not recognise that to me freedom stands higher than national power, prosperity and honour!"⁷⁷ But once again he failed to gain any ground, for Döllinger replied by conceding simply that there were "some rare men" who placed principle above interest.⁷⁸

Considering the patient but nevertheless unyielding manner in

⁷⁵Döllinger to Acton, 27 February 1881, DB, III, p. 235.

⁷⁶Acton to Döllinger, 27 February 1881, DB, III, pp. 238-239.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 238.

⁷⁸Döllinger to Acton, 4 March 1881, DB, III, p. 241.

which Döllinger responded to one expostulation after another, one cannot avoid being struck by the extraordinary persistence which Acton displayed. He was very loath indeed to admit that the gulf which divided him from his teacher was too wide to be overcome, even though he knew that the evidence pointed in the opposite direction, and thus he clung tenaciously to the slim hope that the problem had arisen because Döllinger did not understand his real meaning. In 1881 or 1882, he wrote a long letter in German, wherein he tried to define his position as precisely as possible.⁷⁹ Although this failed to produce the desired effect, he wrote again on 16 June 1882, this time expressing essentially the same ideas in English, in the hope that he could communicate more effectively in his native language.⁸⁰ He also continued to seize upon every incident or example which he thought might be used to support his point of view. An address by Döllinger on politics in the age of Louis XIV, for instance, allowed him to provoke an argument concerning the great men of the Gallican Church, Arnauld and Bossuet, and to object in particular to Döllinger placing them higher than Italian Ultramontanes, such as Bellarmine and Baronius; they were, Acton said, just as arbitrary and despotic in outlook.⁸¹ Later, he opened a discussion of the character of Luther, whom he

⁷⁹ Acton to Döllinger, c. 1881/1882, DB, III, pp. 257-272.

⁸⁰ Acton to Döllinger, 16 June 1882, DB, III, pp. 283-291.

⁸¹ Acton to Döllinger, 10 June 1882, DB, III, p. 277. See also Döllinger to Acton, 13 June 1882, DB, III, p. 278; Acton to Döllinger, 15 June 1882, DB, III, pp. 280-282; and C.U.L. Add. 4863, ff. 123a-125a.

accused of a variety of crimes, not least of which was that he had approved polygamy among princes.⁸²

but regardless of the details of any given case, there was never a real prospect of Acton and Dollinger reaching an agreement, because, as Acton had always feared, they judged by different criteria. When Dollinger looked back at a persecutor, what he saw was a man who had been deluded by a false conception of religious obligation. Acton, on the other hand, simply saw a murderer. If Dollinger's attention was drawn to a misdeed committed by an otherwise admirable religious leader, he sought to examine the man's mistake within the context of his entire life; Acton rejected outright the idea of balancing faults against virtues and insisted that a person must be judged by the worst of his actions. They were not noticeably divided on questions of fact, even if Acton sometimes seemed to exaggerate, for Dollinger readily admitted that Pius V had planned assassinations, that Arnauld had condoned persecution, and that Luther had advised Philip of Hesse to take a second wife.⁸³ Yet the fundamental point on which they could not agree concerned the extent to which a man was responsible for his attitude and behaviour. Dollinger's favourite argument was that men were the products of their age and environment and could not be blamed

⁸² Acton to Dollinger, mid-September 1882, DB, III, pp. 303-304. See also Dollinger to Acton, 21 September 1882, DB, III, p. 305; Acton to Dollinger, 22 September 1882, DB, III, pp. 307-309; Dollinger to Acton, 27 September 1882, DB, III, pp. 312-313; and Acton to Dollinger, late September 1882, DB, III, p. 315.

⁸³ See Dollinger to Acton, 7 February 1881, 13 June 1882, and 21 September 1882, DB, III, p. 229, p. 278, and p. 305 respectively.

for acting on assumptions which they shared with their contemporaries. Acton, by contrast, insisted relentlessly that it was quite possible for men to rise above the prejudices of their time and to overcome acquired habits of thought through the exercise of conscience. On one occasion he argued that progress itself depended on the fact that there were men who were strong enough "to free their feet from the mire of their age"; and he added that it was precisely for this reason that he judged great men most severely.⁸⁴ The only way in which he would admit considerations of time and place was by completely inverting Döllinger's argument. Arnauld and Bossuet, he said, were more deserving of condemnation than were Bellarmine and Baronius because they had lived at a time when culture was more advanced and yet they had been equally intolerant.⁸⁵ In any case, one could not legitimately argue that they were no worse than their contemporaries. The principle of freedom of conscience had long been recognised in theory and even in law when they preached persecution. It could be found in the writings of Socinians, Arminians, Independents, and Quakers, and it had been enshrined in the statutes of Holland, Brandenburg, and some Swiss cantons. In England during that period, a whole list of statesmen had rejected the Exclusion Bill; and, in France itself, the Edict of Nantes had been in effect when Bossuet and Arnauld were born.⁸⁶

It was Döllinger who finally decided to bring the long and fruitless

⁸⁴ Acton to Döllinger, 15 June 1882, DB, III, p. 282.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 281.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; and C.U.L. Add. 4863, f. 123a.

controversy to a close. It seems that in 1883, by which time he had come to regard the affair with increasing distaste, he simply made clear to Acton that the time had come for their conversations on the topic to cease for this world.⁸⁷ This did not prevent Acton from making one last attempt to reach an accord, for certain remarks which Döllinger afterwards made to Lady Acton and her sister encouraged him to believe that there might yet be hope;⁸⁸ but when he provided still another statement of his position, he received an answer which seemed to him so ambiguous and contradictory⁸⁹ that he at last conceded, in a letter written to Döllinger in the summer of 1884,⁹⁰ that it was pointless to carry on. The extreme reluctance with which even then Acton acknowledged that a reconciliation was impossible is evident from the manner in which he addressed Döllinger. "It would have been immeasurably fortunate," he told him, "if your rejoinders had shaken me in my conviction that ecclesiastical criminals are excused neither by their goals nor by their convictions . . .".⁹¹ But the sad truth was that no common ground could be found. None of the arguments concerning the influence of the times, of education, of ignorance, or of prejudice had persuaded him that an Ultramontane could live and die in a state of grace. So long as he and Döllinger were divided on this point,

⁸⁷ C.U.L. Add. 5403, card 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid., card 24.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Acton to Döllinger, August/September 1884, DB, III, pp. 332-338.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 335.

his conscience compelled him to admit that the breach was irreparable.

Acton did not conceal from Döllinger the profound personal consequences which this unhappy conclusion possessed for him. In fact, he told him quite explicitly that he now felt so isolated that he saw no prospect of achieving anything through the work to which he had devoted his life.⁹² But the sense of loss, sorrow, and despair which he experienced in the wake of the controversy can be discerned still more clearly in the private records which he kept at the time and which he used as the basis for part of his letter. These notes reveal, among other things, that Acton felt hurt, and perhaps harboured a certain resentment, because he believed that Döllinger had never really given his views due consideration. In his attempts to discover whether they differed as widely as it seemed, he said, he had usually been put off with statements or observations which were not to the point--such as that he would see things differently when he was older, or that he must remember the advantages which he had enjoyed as a result of his position.⁹³

Often it appeared that the Prof[essor] did not give me of his best, but rather put me off with imperfect statements of fact. Very often he was disposed to treat my points not as the result of many years incessant study, and varied observation, but as a hasty paradox or prejudice, not worthy of very serious treatment . . .⁹⁴

Acton still seemed a little bewildered by Döllinger's evasiveness

⁹²Ibid., p. 334.

⁹³C.U.L. Add. 5403, card 26.

⁹⁴Ibid., card 25.

and by his apparent failure to grasp the significance of the issues which they had discussed. Although he could point to the weakness of the answers which he had received when he had tried to press his case, describing them as inconsistent and often unclear,⁹⁵ he was obviously not yet confident that he understood why he had met with so unsatisfactory a response. All that he knew for certain was that the last vestige of hope had disappeared and that he had no alternative but to conclude that his position was irreconcilable with that of his teacher. In one place he wrote:

As now advised, I must think either that he does not like me to know his real mind, or that he is really of the opinion which I reject.
For if we really agreed, we should not have taken 5 years to find it out.⁹⁶

In another, he said more starkly:

The difference is fundamental and as wide as the firmament . . .⁹⁷

This conclusion was absolutely shattering to Acton, for it seemed to imply that he had lived the better part of his life under an illusion, thinking of himself as Döllinger's disciple when all along he had thoroughly misunderstood him.⁹⁸ He reasoned that he had not only been "sailing under false colours," but that he had also probably misunderstood other people, whom he had less chance of knowing well.⁹⁹

⁹⁵Ibid., card 26.

⁹⁶Ibid., card 24.

⁹⁷Ibid., card 31.

⁹⁸Ibid., card 21.

⁹⁹Ibid.

His entire career seemed to him to have been so completely misdirected that there was no prospect of recovery, and he ruminated on how he had "renounced public life, and a position favourable to influence in my own country, to pursue an object I cannot attain."¹⁰⁰ Acton clearly felt that his talents had been wasted, and his attitude betrayed at least a hint of bitterness and self-pity. But far more conspicuous was his overwhelming sense of isolation and his morose inclination to regard himself as a total failure.

I am absolutely alone in my essential ethical position [he wrote], and therefore useless. Not because one wants supp[ort] or enc[ouragement] but because anyone who asks who agrees with me, will learn that no one agrees--and that no one disp[utes] my view with anything like the energy with w[hich] the Prof[essor] disp[utes] it.

No other person can ever be so fav[ourably] situated as the Prof[essor]. He seeks nothing, knows more, and had, assuredly, a prej[udice] in my favour. People whose prej[udices] are the other way, who know less, who are less perf[ectly] indep[endent] will certainly not listen to me better than he.

The prob[ability] of doing good by writings so isolated & repulsive . . . is so small that I have no right to sacrifice to it my own tranq[ui]lity and my duty of educ[ating] my children.

My time can be better employed than in waging a hopeless war. And the more my life has been thrown away, the more necessary to turn now, and employ better what remains.¹⁰¹

It is not impossible to understand why a disagreement with his

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., cards 20 and 19.

teacher should have been for Acton so devastating a blow if one calls to mind that he was bound to Döllinger, not only by a strong intellectual attachment, but also by deep emotional ties. Although his reaction to the dispute may well appear exaggerated when judged by conventional standards, it was really no more unusual than the extraordinary dependence on "the Professor" which had governed his life for thirty years. Acton had never quite outgrown that curious personal need which had led him, in the first instance, to adopt Döllinger as a sort of surrogate father. Whatever he might have said to the contrary, he relied on him constantly for advice, encouragement, and support; and when their relationship collapsed, he seemed to lose a large part of his confidence, as well as his sense of purpose.

What is not so easy to explain, however, is why the controversy occurred precisely when it did, and why Acton chose to provoke it over so trivial an incident. If he had really wished to argue with Döllinger, then adequate opportunities had certainly presented themselves in the past, when genuinely important issues had been at stake. In the early 1860s, for instance, they had disagreed about the future of the Temporal Power, and Acton himself had demonstrated that their differences were rooted in important considerations of principle.¹⁰² Again, in 1867, Ricasoli's Free Church Bill had caused a moment of conflict between them, which could easily have developed into a major rift.¹⁰³ But on both these occasions, and especially the latter, Acton had displayed a

¹⁰² See above, pp. 170-171.

¹⁰³ See above, pp. 219-223.

reluctance to quarrel with Döllinger which contrasts sharply with his behaviour in 1879. It was almost as though he preferred not to contemplate the possibility that their views were irreconcilable on certain points, although an objective consideration might well have led him precisely to this conclusion. He tended rather to smooth over difficulties, or at least to let points of contention slip from view, even when this required a certain degree of inconsistency on his part.

That is not to say that Acton always refrained from criticising his teacher's views. At the time of the Vatican Council, he had been partially dissatisfied with Döllinger's attack on the Infallibilists, and he had said so quite openly in his review of Der Papst und das Concil. His complaint, moreover, had centered precisely around Döllinger's tendency to regard Ultramontanism as an honest error, rather than as an immoral system of deception.

After exposing the fraudulent machinations by which the absolutist theory was set up [he had written], he proceeds to assume the sincerity of its advocates. He constantly speaks of the Jesuits, without qualification, as the supporters of the opinions in question. He seems to be utterly unaware that he thereby fixes on the whole Order the stigma of mendacity.¹⁰⁴

But the astonishing thing is not that Acton should have ventured so far. It is rather that, having identified so accurately the basic distinction between his attitude and Döllinger's, he should have neglected to develop the matter further. We know from his own testimony that he did

¹⁰⁴"The Pope and the Council," North British Review, LI (October 1869); reprinted in Decisive Decade, p. 226.

not really sense the extent of his disagreement with Döllinger until sometime during or after his controversy with Gladstone over the Vatican Decrees. One of his notes reads: "When in reply to Gladstone I said [that] there is no indictment short of murder. You must either hang or absolve--I became aware that the Prof[essor] was not in harmony."¹⁰⁵ Yet even then, Acton tells us, it did not make a deep impression on him.¹⁰⁶ Not until Lady Blennerhassett published her essay on Dupanloup, and he saw (to use his own expression) that Döllinger gave his Imprimatur to a paper in which an Ultramontane prelate was treated respectfully,¹⁰⁷ did he begin to perceive that the difference was fundamental.

In light of the fact that Acton had remained so long impervious to the tension between his ideas and those of Döllinger, only to have the problem revealed to him in this curious way, one can scarcely help but wonder whether the explanation for his behaviour is to be sought in circumstances which lie outside the sphere of his intellectual

¹⁰⁵ C.U.L. Add. 5403, card 29. It seems that Acton is referring here to remarks which he had made in 1874, when the Vaticanism controversy was at its height. But the possibility that he has in mind a conversation held somewhat later should also be noted. In this same note, he goes on to say that "2 or 3 years later" Lady Blennerhassett had published her essay. If he means to be at all exact, this would date the incident to which he refers in 1876 or 1877; and it happens that, on 1 November 1876, Gladstone made the following entry in his diary: "Walk and long conversation with Lord Acton, who seems in opinion to go beyond Döllinger, though in certain things he stops short of him." (quoted in Morley, Life of Gladstone, II, p. 558.)

¹⁰⁶ C.U.L. Add. 5403, card 29.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., card 67.

development. The approach which he adopted in the course of the dispute was so astonishingly inflexible, and the language which he used so emphatic and severe, that the question naturally arises whether he was at this time beset by some personal difficulty.¹⁰⁸ We know, moreover, that on at least one previous occasion, when his engagement to Marie Arco had been temporarily broken, he had allowed his emotions to influence his work.¹⁰⁹ The fact that his frame of mind then was in some ways similar to his attitude in 1879 makes it even more tempting to extend the comparison and to think that behind his quarrel with Döllinger there lay some painful problem in his personal life.

The evidence which is now available on this point suggests that there may be at least an element of truth in this line of reasoning. It is clear that during the latter part of his life, Acton suffered from serious financial difficulties and that he experienced as well a considerable degree of unhappiness in his marriage.¹¹⁰ In addition to these circumstances, there is also the fact that in 1881, two years

¹⁰⁸ In a somewhat different context, Professor Butterfield has written: "Concerning the later Acton, it is difficult to resist the feeling that he was like a giant oak, still luxuriant in much of its foliage, but with one branch blasted, as though it had been struck by lightning. Some single spring of emotion had so frozen up inside him that one might wonder whether some fault in family relations or some defect in the more intimate side of his life had not left a part of him lame which had once been whole." (Butterfield, Lord Acton, p. 6.)

¹⁰⁹ See above, pp. 159-161.

¹¹⁰ See the important new evidence on these matters which has recently been presented in Owen Chadwick, Acton and Gladstone (London: The Athlone Press, 1976).

after he began to argue with Döllinger, he lost his beloved daughter Lily. These are precisely the sort of hardships which might be expected to make a man more quarrelsome than usual, and the anguish caused by strain in a marriage might, in particular, be thought to offer a plausible explanation of why a person should feel so profoundly the effects of his own isolation. But it is necessary to exercise extreme caution here. In the first place, both Acton's financial and his personal problems reached the critical stage after his argument with Döllinger had drawn to a close, and it is not at all clear that they influenced him greatly in 1879, when the argument began. In the second place, even if they were troubling him as early as 1879, they are not enough by themselves to explain the position which he took. If too much emphasis is placed on them, one runs the risk of explaining away, rather than explaining, Acton's behaviour. The very last thing that should be ignored is that the position which Acton adopted in disputing with Döllinger was a well worked out and consistent point of view--whether right or wrong--and therefore not at all the sort of thing that could have been conjured up over night under the pressure of even a grave personal trial. The most that can be said is that Acton's personal problems might have acted as a catalyst in his quarrel with Döllinger, making him quicker to argue and even more rigid and severe than he otherwise would have been. The origins of his basic position, however,--including his insistence on the need to condemn--must be sought in his complex intellectual development, and especially in his belief that a direct connection existed between the religious crimes of the past and the duplicity and intolerance of contemporary

Catholic leaders.

Another important consideration which suggests that the basic explanation for Acton's behaviour lies in matters of an intellectual nature is that his own testimony points entirely in this direction. In notes which he kept when he was preparing to write a biography of his teacher (c. 1890), he frequently returned to the question of why they had disagreed; and it is abundantly clear from these records that the key to the problem seemed to him to lie in the momentous changes which both he and Döllinger had undergone in the 1860s. The great transition in Döllinger's thought, he tells us, had occurred in three main stages. The first of these was the publication of Kirche und Kirchen, a book in which he had intended to prove that Catholicism had exercised a more beneficial influence on society than had Protestantism, but which had in fact forced him to recognise that such an argument could scarcely be sustained in view of the conditions which prevailed at the time in the papal states.¹¹¹ The second was the revolution in his historical methods, as a result of which he had developed his special fascination with medieval forgeries and had also radically revised his conception of modern Church history.¹¹² The third, and the one which Acton found somewhat perplexing and frustrating to contemplate, was the shock which he had experienced in 1867, when he had learned of

¹¹¹ C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 196.

¹¹² Ibid., cards 267, 268, 269, 272 and 275. See also C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 85.

plans to canonise Peter Arbués, the notorious Inquisitor.¹¹³ Döllinger had been so outraged by the canonisation, Acton recalled, that he had immediately resolved to make known to the world not only the general character of Roman intolerance but also its particular consequences.¹¹⁴ He had drawn up an account of the workings of the Inquisition and had published it in the newspapers.¹¹⁵ The language that he had used had been sufficiently strong to cause a certain degree of uneasiness among the editors of the papers in which he had written.¹¹⁶ But Döllinger himself, having gone so far, had nevertheless declined to develop his argument to its logical conclusion.¹¹⁷ Although he had clearly wanted men to regard the Catholic Church with whatever censure persecution deserved,¹¹⁸ he had never acknowledged that the question was one of cold-blooded murder.¹¹⁹ He had deplored the attempt to revive and glorify the misguided principles of a bygone age;¹²⁰ but the reaction had seemed to him theological, rather than political or ethical, in character.¹²¹ He had "never felt that an ocean of blood separated him

¹¹³C.U.L. Add. 4909, cards 360, 362, and 84.

¹¹⁴Ibid., card 361.

¹¹⁵Ibid. (For the articles by Döllinger to which Acton refers, see above p. 264, n. 87.)

¹¹⁶C.U.L. Add. 4863, f. 138a.

¹¹⁷C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 318.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., card 84.

¹²⁰C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 47.

¹²¹C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 282.

from the nearest Ultramontane."¹²²

It was precisely Döllinger's blindness to political considerations which Acton thought was largely responsible for his failure to appreciate the ethical implications of contemporary religious controversy. His vision had been obscured, he said, because he had not understood the importance of the change in 1850, when it had become a matter of policy to defend the Temporal Power by spiritual means.¹²³ While dogma had been increasingly used as a means of strengthening and supporting the papal throne, Döllinger had persisted in viewing the entire movement as a genuine theological development.¹²⁴ He would therefore oppose Ultramontanism as he might oppose Gallicanism or Jansenism, seeing it as a misinterpretation of Catholic doctrine, but never considering that it involved a fundamental perversion of conscience. Even when the doctrine of infallibility had been brought forward, and men such as Montalembert and Gratry had feared that it would be used to confirm the principles of the Syllabus, he had thought more of the dogmatic than of the political question.¹²⁵ The contest for him had been between opposing schools of thought, not between "Liberals and men fit for hanging."¹²⁶

¹²²C.U.L. Add. 4914, card 72.

¹²³C.U.L. Add. 4903, card 205.

¹²⁴Ibid., card 282.

¹²⁵C.U.L. Add. 5609, ff. 61b-62a.

¹²⁶C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 254.

By the same token, Döllinger had absolutely refused to acknowledge that there existed any single political principle which was sufficiently compelling and comprehensive to serve as a criterion for judging all situations. His approach to politics had been essentially eclectic,¹²⁷ and he had been guided more by the light of experience than by the demands of a sovereign doctrine.¹²⁸ He had never been a Liberal, nor indeed a Liberal Catholic, although he had sometimes consented to be described as such.¹²⁹ His standards of judgement had been derived rather from the Romantic school, with its keen sense of constantly changing circumstances and its emphasis on the influence of time and place.¹³⁰ The foremost quality of his thought had been historical-mindedness.¹³¹ He had seen nearly everything in relative terms, and he had recoiled from the notion that a man ought to be tried by a code with which he was unfamiliar.¹³² Indeed, he had been attracted to Romanticism in the first place precisely because it encouraged fairness toward all points of view and all phases of thought; it was this feature of Romantic thought which had inspired both the

¹²⁷ C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 269.

¹²⁸ C.U.L. Add. 4908, card 154.

¹²⁹ C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 196; C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 279; Acton to Gladstone, 22 March 1891, Correspondence, pp. 69-70; Acton to Gladstone, 28 January 1895, Correspondence, p. 80; and "Döllinger's Historical Work," HOF, pp. 399-400.

¹³⁰ C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 306; C.U.L. Add. 4905, cards 102 and 200; C.U.L. Add. 5642, f. 15b; and C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 53.

¹³¹ C.U.L. Add. 5520, not numbered.

¹³² C.U.L. Add. 4905, card 200; and C.U.L. Add. 4914, card 51.

medieval and the Catholic revivals.¹³³ A willingness to allow for the diversity of the past had been for Döllinger the very essence of historical thinking, and it had never occurred to him that the whole of history might be measured by a single standard.¹³⁴

In the last analysis, as Gertrude Himmelfarb has already suggested, it was Döllinger's incorrigible Romanticism which Acton rejected, in favour of an uncompromising Liberalism.¹³⁵ Only a system of ideas which allowed for the maintenance of fixed principles, free from the mitigating influence of extenuating circumstances, seemed to him adequate to ensure the reign of conscience; and one cannot help but sense, when examining his attempts to define the essential characteristics of his teacher's thought, that he regarded his own intellectual development as a process of emancipation--not least of all from historicism. He could be sharply critical of Döllinger on occasion, accusing him among other things of clinging to a "resolute charitable illusion"¹³⁶ and of never allowing the real issue to come into view.¹³⁷

¹³³C.U.L. Add. 4912, card 78. Elsewhere, Acton stated the point somewhat differently: "D[öllinger] once proposed Liberty as the unity of History. But he never tried it. It makes the Church not only unsafe, a teacher of error, an enforcer of sin, under the same sanctions as truth, but a teacher of the most dreadful sin--and therefore the worst of all teachers, and the Devil's main instrument on earth for the damnation of man." (C.U.L. Add. 4973, card 277.)

¹³⁴C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 53; and C.U.L. Add. 4912, card 78.

¹³⁵Himmelfarb, Lord Acton, p. 148.

¹³⁶Acton to Gladstone, 18 January 1890, Correspondence, p. 193.

¹³⁷C.U.L. Add. 4908, card 371.

. . . he used to speak [he said] as if he had been raised in twilight at the Collegio Germanico, or S. Sulpice. Not in the full blaze of German universities.¹³⁸

But at the same time it is much to Acton's credit that he seldom exaggerated Döllinger's position, or attributed to him doctrines which he had not held. The real wonder, in fact, is that he could describe Döllinger's arguments so accurately, express them so cogently, and yet remain unconvinced by them. He understood, for example, that although Döllinger abhorred persecution,¹³⁹ he regarded it as the consequence of a dreadful intellectual error rather than as the product of calculated brutality.¹⁴⁰ To this notion he would retort that murder was murder under any circumstances,¹⁴¹ and that therefore the plea of ignorance would not suffice.¹⁴² Yet the point which appeared to escape him entirely was that religious persecution was no more equated with murder in the sixteenth century than was capital punishment in the nineteenth. Even in those cases where the cold force of logic seemed to be on his side,¹⁴³ Acton's common sense appeared to desert him, as it did when

¹³⁸C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 323.

¹³⁹C.U.L. Add. 4906, card 151.

¹⁴⁰C.U.L. Add. 4909, card 133.

¹⁴¹C.U.L. Add. 5478, card 51.

¹⁴²C.U.L. Add. 4965, card 5.

¹⁴³See, for instance, C.U.L. Add. 4963, card 217: "No period in Xn history when religious liberty was an innovation--It was, from early times, a familiar principle. It was deliberately rejected; it was not ignored. Invincible ignorance does not protect persecutors . . .". See also C.U.L. Add. 5007, card 264: "Crimes not justified by the times. Calvin disapproved by many Protestants. St. Bartholomew by many Catholics . . .".

he rejected Döllinger's contention that men who admired St. Dominic or Gregory XIII were not really animated by fanatical zeal or a desire to put heretics to death.¹⁴⁴ He could faithfully explain that Döllinger believed that a plain account of the Holy Office would lead eventually to the repudiation of its principles.¹⁴⁵ But his own convictions had grown so rigid that he insisted that anyone who belonged to the Dominican order—or, for that matter, to the Society of Jesus—must be assumed to be living in sin.¹⁴⁶ Acton was so profoundly concerned to permit no relaxation of the moral code that he mistook subtlety for prevarication and confused charity and humility with a refusal to acknowledge the influence of evil in the human heart.

¹⁴⁴C.U.L. Add. 4905, cards 241, 250, and 254.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., card 254.

¹⁴⁶Acton to Gladstone, 18 January 1890, Correspondence, p. 193.

CONCLUSION

Acton spent his last years at Cambridge, as Regius Professor of Modern History. This final phase of his career was by far the least turbulent that he had ever known, and it was also the period during which he received the greatest degree of public recognition that had ever been accorded him. It is impossible to think that he did not derive at least some satisfaction from this, for to have his abilities acknowledged in this way, after so many years of seemingly fruitless conflict, must have come as a consolation. Consolation, however, is the strongest word that can be used in this context. If the accomplishments of Acton's last years compensated in part for his earlier failures, they still fell far short of ultimate triumph. Even in the midst of apparent success, he could not overcome the profound feeling of isolation which had been the final outcome of his long development. The best that he could do was to resign himself to it.

The element of resignation in Acton's attitude toward the end of his life was the closest he ever came to achieving peace of mind. It was a poor substitute for genuine serenity, but at least it afforded him a final respite from controversy. By the time that Acton went to Cambridge, he seemed less anxious to force others to admit that he was right about the problem of moral judgements in history, if only because he knew that they were not likely to do so. The last occasion on which he allowed this issue to draw him into a major dispute occurred nine

years before his appointment as Regius Professor, when he quarreled with Mandell Creighton. The letters which he wrote to Creighton at the time, together with his earlier letters to Döllinger, provide the classic statement of his position. Although they were written under less personal strain, they reveal the same pervasive sense of evil, the same righteous indignation at the crimes of the past, and the same frustration at the leniency shown by other capable historians.¹ After this last passionate outburst, however, Acton grew more aloof. One suspects that this was not so much because he found no fresh opportunities for controversy as because he knew that further arguments would be pointless.

That is not to say, however, that Acton changed his mind. The position which he had adopted in the course of his dispute with Döllinger remained his position until the end. If he was less inclined to argue about it or even to try to explain to people why he felt as he did, this was chiefly because he knew that such efforts were unlikely to prove successful. He continued to believe that he was right, in spite of his total isolation. In his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor, which is considered by many to be among the best ever given, Acton made a lofty appeal to the notion that the chief concern of historical studies should be the moral dimension of human life. In part he meant by this that ideas must be valued above force and that mind must be placed higher than matter; but he also specifically urged his audience not to shrink from applying the canons of morality to the men and events of the past.

¹The most important of these letters is printed in Himmelfarb, Essays on Freedom and Power, pp. 358-369.

The weight of opinion is against me [he told them] when I exhort you never to debase the moral currency or to lower the standard of rectitude, but to try others by the final maxim that governs your own lives, and to suffer no man and no cause to escape the undying penalty which history has the power to inflict on wrong.²

Acton knew that he stood alone; but he nevertheless stood firm.

The process that had brought Acton to this lonely position was complex and subtle, even if its eventual outcome possesses a stark simplicity. He had begun in the full glow of youthful enthusiasm, convinced that he had an almost missionary purpose to fulfil, and confident especially that he could convert his fellow Catholics to the high-minded principles which he himself had embraced. He had ended as a tragic figure, by no means without lofty ideals, but weighed down by the knowledge of his own isolation. Between these two poles of his development lay a long chain of conflicts and frustrations and an intricate pattern of change. No one element in the pattern had proved decisive by itself; but together they had worked a complete transformation in Acton's thought.

Acton's ideas had originally been formed under the influence of Romanticism, which had still pervaded Munich when he went there as a

²"Inaugural Lecture on the Study of History," LME, p. 24.

student. It was in this environment that his profound sense of history had been nurtured and that he had learned his devotion to the ideal of disinterested scholarship. Acton had come not only to believe in the intrinsic value of this ideal, but also to think that its application tended to work to the benefit of the Church. Among the most crucial ideas that he had taken from his German education was the notion that the rise of historical scholarship, in the sense of an impartial study of the past, was directly connected to the Catholic revival. A just appreciation of the Middle Ages, which had been the chief practical consequence of the historical movement, had led to a corresponding increase in the prestige of Catholicism. Even historical-mindedness as such, because it fostered respect for tradition and continuity, seemed to bolster the cause of the Church.

These ideas had formed the core of the message which Acton had brought back to England. He had urged the English Catholics to accept the principles of the new scientific method, partly because honesty demanded that they do so, and partly because truthfulness and impartiality would eventually allow them to achieve a great intellectual victory. But from the very outset Acton had found himself resisted. His candid treatment of sensitive subjects, instead of setting a valuable example, had aroused alarm and resentment; and this had in turn heightened the element of antagonism in his own attitude. Eventually he had come into conflict with his fellow Catholics over the momentous problem of the Temporal Power. The controversy which had raged around this issue had convinced him that there was a fundamentally unscrupulous element in the attitude of his co-religionists, and this had marked the beginning

for him of a new line of thought. Where he had previously seen invincible ignorance, he now detected deliberate dishonesty; and what he had once ascribed to a lack of consistent political doctrines, he began to interpret as conscious hypocrisy.

Over the next few years, Acton had continued to take an active interest in the Roman question, and he had also begun to pursue new historical researches in the archives of Europe. The secrets which the archives revealed had not only shocked him, but had also encouraged him in the view that the misdeeds of the past had a direct bearing on the controversies of the present. The question of persecution, and of the total immorality of the Roman system, had become his central preoccupation. Especially in the light of the notorious Syllabus of Errors, it had begun to appear to him as though an entire tradition of tyranny and falsehood was enshrined at Rome. At the Vatican Council he had made a last desperate effort to cast off this tradition by preventing the definition of papal infallibility. But the failure of his efforts, and the victory of the Ultramontanes, had brought matters to a climax. With one dramatic gesture, the Church seemed to have sanctioned all the sins of its past. The severity with which Acton afterwards judged these sins--or, to be more precise, the men who had committed or sanctioned them--led eventually to his complete isolation.

It is sometimes tempting to take the view that Acton's development

toward this final position was simply a process of gradual but steady evolution. According to this way of seeing the matter, his progress consisted simply in an ever increasing rift between him and his fellow Catholics, the cause of which was the same from beginning to end. Two considerations make it especially tempting to fall into this trap. The first is that the seeds of many of Acton's later ideas can be detected in his early work. The second is his abiding concern for the ethical dimension of contemporary religious controversy, which runs like a thread through his entire career.

But although there were genuine elements of continuity in Acton's development, it is fundamentally misleading to view his progress in this way. The single most important thing to understand about his development is that it involved a basic re-structuring of his ideas. In some cases, thoughts or opinions which had occupied a minor place in his original view rose to a position of great importance. In other cases, old ideas were completely abandoned in favour of new ones which pointed in an opposite direction. At the beginning of his career, Acton had fervently believed that an objective study of history would vindicate Catholicism and redeem it from much of the obloquy which it had attracted in modern times. He had been especially confident that it could be shown that Catholicism had played a constructive role in shaping European society, in spite of the more conventional view that it had been an obstacle to intellectual and political progress. Even then, he had known that ruthless impartiality would reveal occasional incidents in the history of the Church which were less than edifying; but he had seen this process as an essentially salutary one, since it would allow for the

purification of an otherwise just cause. He had seen the task of the historian as analogous to that of the surgeon, whose duty it was to inflict pain for the sake of restoring health. In later years, however, Acton had revised this analogy. Where he had once seen the surgeon, he now saw the judge. He discovered that he had been far too optimistic in his conception of Catholicism's historical relationship to society and that what impartial investigation revealed was not merely occasional lapses into tyranny and intolerance but an entire tradition founded on immorality. He found (or believed that he had found) that popes and saints were no better than liars and murderers. The fact that they had committed their crimes in favorem fidei made them seem still worse in his eyes. His Catholic contemporaries seemed determined to conceal or excuse these atrocities; but he appointed himself the task of holding them up to public execration.

What many people could not understand was why Acton remained a member of the Catholic Church if he felt as he did. The fact that he was not merely a nominal Catholic, but faithful and even devout, made the matter more astonishing still. But two points are relevant here. In the first place, Acton managed to sustain his conviction that the Church would yet reform itself. In the second, he felt himself divided from his fellow Catholics, not on questions of dogma so much as on questions of ethics. He continued to believe the basic doctrines taught by the Catholic Church and even hoped that the hated dogma of papal infallibility would one day be satisfactorily interpreted in the light of tradition. He was in this sense perfectly orthodox, and therefore saw no reason to cut himself off from communion with Rome.

On the other hand, one of the distinguishing features of Acton's later thought was precisely the distinction which he drew between correct doctrine and sound ethics. The discovery towards which his life's work had pointed, in a sense, was that one must not always expect ethical conduct to follow upon orthodox belief. Not only had he found some of the staunchest defenders of Catholic doctrine to be guilty of heinous crimes, but he had also reached the conclusion that those Christian denominations which were weakest in dogma nevertheless often stood highest in moral terms. It was the Protestant sects, and especially the Quakers and Independents, which seemed to him to have contributed most to the progress of freedom. There was even a tendency during Acton's later years for him to place rationalists and sceptics above believing Christians in some matters of ethics. He developed a profound admiration for George Eliot, a professed atheist, precisely because of the quality of her moral insights, especially in questions affecting society.³ He accepted the sufficiency of Christianity as a basis for private morality, and he also argued that it was capable of providing a sound foundation for political principles; but at the same time he acknowledged that there was a growing and essentially legitimate tendency to construct

³ See "J. W. Cross's 'Life of George Eliot,'" The Nineteenth Century, XVIII (March 1885), 464-485; reprinted as "George Eliot's Life," in HES, pp. 273-304. See also Acton to Döllinger, May/June 1885, DB, III, pp. 346-350.

systems of social ethics which were quite independent of religious belief.⁴

There is no point at which opinions respecting Lord Acton will differ more widely than when it comes to deciding how far his basic views are worthy of admiration and sympathy, or how far they deserve to be resisted and opposed. Since his death in 1902, he has been as controversial a figure as he was when he was alive. Professor Sir Herbert Butterfield has quite rightly said that one of the chief things that sustains interest in Acton is that he raised the sort of issues which still set us arguing among ourselves.⁵

Not only Acton's opinions but his entire character excites debate, for he was a man who had two sides to his personality, both of which must be taken into account. On the one hand, he can be seen as an heroic figure who struggled against overwhelming odds to effect a much-needed reform of the Catholic Church and who suffered unfairly as a result of the ignorance, prejudice, and intellectual timidity of his fellow Catholics. On the other hand, what stands out is his astonishing arrogance and the air of superiority with which he addressed nearly

⁴ See Acton to Mary Gladstone, 16 October 1887, LMG, pp. 181-182.

⁵ Herbert Butterfield, "Lord Acton," Cambridge Journal, VI (May 1953), 475.

everyone who declined to share his views. It is by no means necessary to be an admirer of Acton's Ultramontane opponents in order to see that in his reforming efforts he was often his own worst enemy. Before attempting to convert his fellow Catholics to his way of thinking, he did little to try to win their confidence, although both Döllinger and Newman advised him to do so. When he was trying to demonstrate the need for impartial scholarship, he did not merely exercise a legitimate degree of freedom in expressing his views, but, especially as a young man, he often flung his candid opinions ostentatiously in the faces of his enemies, as though he were deliberately trying to provoke quarrels. That he did not always examine his own motives closely enough is clear from the fact that he would afterwards complain that he had no desire to engage in controversy.

In later years, the central issue changed somewhat, but Acton's outlook and character retained the same two-sided quality. The question now was not whether he had the right to intellectual freedom but whether he was justified in judging and condemning as he did. Acton resisted every point that was advanced in favour of a more lenient view. If his critics claimed that he made insufficient allowance for time and place and that he judged historical figures by standards which were not their own, he retorted that the basic principles of morality did not change from one age to the next and that murder was murder no matter when it had been committed. If they then appealed to the fact that in pronouncing judgement he often allowed a single sin to outweigh a lifetime of virtue, he replied that a chain must be judged by its weakest

link. It was an argument without end. But the consideration which Acton did not take into account, and which none of his disputants really urged upon him, was simply that no man has the right to judge the ultimate worth of another's life. It was at this point that Acton had assumed a prerogative for which he had no warrant, especially by the standards of Christian morality.

Yet there is much in Acton's career that is a continuing source of edification. The plan of reform which he envisaged for the Church towers above the narrow conceptions of his Catholic contemporaries, even if he did not always act in the best interests of his own cause. The moral judgements which he applied in history were the product of genuine high-mindedness and profound sincerity, even if they did exceed acceptable limits. For all the severity of Acton's moral judgements, one is bound to notice that they were completely devoid of malice. Their only conscious purpose was to maintain the highest standards of morality in the face of the corrosive influence of relativism. What Acton took his stand against was not simply the notion that criminals could be excused by appealing to the spirit of their times, but still more against the insidious doctrine that the end justifies the means. In the leniency which was shown by others, he detected a dangerous inclination to gloss over crimes because they had been committed in the name of a just cause. It is difficult not to think that Acton himself suffered from an excess of suspiciousness and from a tendency to detect evil even where it did not exist; but there is still something in his absolute devotion to principle which is ennobling. If in the end he

arrogated to himself a position to which he had no right, it was chiefly because he believed that it was his sacred duty to safeguard the moral code from every violation, regardless of interest, party, or Church.

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