

## OUR ROMAN LETTER

By "SCOTTUS."

It is no exaggeration to say that for many years no private member of parliament has attracted so much attention in this country as did and does Mr. McKean, by his able and persistent efforts to unmask the hypocrisy with which statesmen had made preparations for excluding the Pope from the coming Peace Conference by means of secret treaties.

On December 6, as will be remembered, Mr. McKean first drew the attention of the House of Commons to the existence of a secret clause in a treaty between England, France, Russia, and Italy, the object of which it was alleged was the elimination of the Pope from having anything to do with any of the questions connected with the war. In his answer, the responsible Minister (Lord R. Cecil) at first denied there was any such clause, but on being closely pressed by Mr. McKean, made a statement tantamount to an admission that some such clause did exist. Shortly before that, the responsible Minister in the Italian Parliament, in answer to a similar question put by one of the Deputies, flatly denied the existence of any such clause; the denial was accepted without demur, was published broadcast, was translated into every tongue, and appeared in nearly every newspaper in the world.

All this was interesting so far. But the interest did not end there. Mr. McKean's question and the answers thereto did not appear at all in the English newspapers, not even in the *London Times*, and, if wired out here by the press agencies, was carefully unpressed. Fortunately, however, it appeared in full in the *Freeman's Journal*, a copy of which reached the hands of those concerned. The question was at once translated into Italian, and officially communicated to the two Catholic organs in this city. But no censor refused to let it pass, and a blank space in both journals was the only indication of what had been done. About a week later Mr. McKean returned to the charge, pressing home his question, and driving the responsible Minister into a still tighter corner. The answers on this occasion, as will be remembered, went still farther in the direction of admissions, enabled everyone to see that a blank denial was no longer feasible, and practically admitted that the clause complained of did really exist, though not quite in the sense alleged.

This time the authorities, English or Italian as the case may be, took good care that no account of the question and answer should reach this country, and accordingly all English and Irish newspapers, and all letters of the next day (December 11) were held up somewhere along the way, and only reached their destination one month later. The precaution was a waste of time. The truth can be hidden for a day or two, but it will out somehow; and so it happened in the present case—an account of the question and answer again reached the hands of those concerned; and once again the fat was in the fire. Needless to say, this did not appear in the Italian newspapers; but one may assume it was brought under the notice of a certain Ambassador in temporary mission, whose attention was doubtless directed to the query put by Mr. McKean as to whether the existence of such an embassy was compatible with a clause of the kind.

For the third time Mr. McKean returned to the

charge a couple of weeks later, eliciting still more precious admissions; but just as before these were not allowed to see the light here.

The next act in the comedy was reserved till the reassembling of the English and Italian Parliaments. The first or second day after the opening of the Italian Parliament, one of the Deputies (Bevioni) read out a copy of the whole Secret Treaty comprising some sixteen articles, the fifteenth of which contained the famous clause regarding the exclusion of the Pope, the sixteenth curiously enough being to the effect that the whole treaty was to be kept a secret!

The next day the front page of one of the Catholic organs contained a whole blank column, which, as those in the know were aware, represented Mr. McKean's questions on the existence and purport of that clause. Clearly the Italian authorities had their minds made up to suppress Mr. McKean, however much the English Ministers might fail in doing so. In the English Parliament, as will be remembered, Mr. McKean returned to the charge in a full dress debate, and in a speech which deserves to be reprinted and widely circulated, exposed the whole miserable system of hypocrisy, trickery, and subterfuge. Lord Robert Cecil, in his reply, or defence, was driven back on the not very manly or straightforward plea that though there was some such clause, no insult was intended by it, that the Pope was not prevented from entering upon negotiations in connection with the war, and that the only thing the clause did say was that "if Italy objects to the Pope sending a representative to the Peace Conference, England will support that objection." Naturally Mr. McKean seemed unconvinced; but Lord R. Cecil hastened to assure him that his objection was based on "a misapprehension of what the clause really provides; and (he added) "if I were to quote its exact terms, I am convinced he will see that I have quoted it correctly." One wonders, or rather perhaps, one does not wonder, why he did not quote its exact terms. No harm could be done by so doing, and some such step was rendered necessary by the publication of versions of the clause which were alleged to be inaccurate. "No one commented the *Osservatore Romano* denies the other articles of the treaty, and Lord Robert Cecil (in his previous replies) has admitted what in substance is contained in the fifteenth clause: the secret is therefore no longer a secret; why not publish the exact text of this unfortunate clause then? The refusal to do so increases the distrust that already exists."

The Italian Foreign Secretary (Baron Sonnino) made a more or less similar statement a day or two later, echoing Lord Cecil's assertion that the clause meant no more than this that only the belligerents could have a look in at the Peace Conference. To this the *Osservatore* replied that no one could object to a general stipulation between the belligerents that they and they only were to be represented at the Peace Conference; but the gravamen of the clause was that the Holy See alone was singled out for exception without any mention of the Governments of such countries as those of Spain and the United States. "It is not the affirmation of that general right (said the *Osservatore*) but its restriction to the Holy See that is offensive and injurious—that is the question."

In the course of his address or defence on the subject, Baron Sonnino went out of his way to compliment the Holy See and the Catholics of Italy on their conduct during the war—an attitude quite differ-

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