

NOTICE OF A SWORD OF STATE, BEARING THE NAME OF POPE  
SIXTUS V.

By EDMUND WATERTON, F.S.A.

THE large sword which I exhibited at one of our late meetings, I believe to be one of the swords which are blessed on Christmas Eve at the Midnight Mass by the Sovereign Pontiffs. It bears on the blade the arms of Sixtus V., his name, and the date.

SIXTVS . V . PONT . MAX . ANNO . IIII .

The same inscription is repeated on the other side. The blade from the point to the hilt measures 3 ft. 9 in.

I purpose, on another occasion, to read a paper on the history of these swords, a subject of considerable interest ; and to give a list, so far as I can ascertain, of the various swords which were given, and of the recipients. Of our English kings, those who were honoured with this gift were :—

Edward IV. . . . circa 1478.  
By Sixtus IV.

Henry VII. . . . c. 1505.  
By Julius II.

Henry VIII. . . . c. 1517.  
By Leo X.

In 1514, James V. of Scotland received the blessed sword from the same Pontiff ; and again, in 1537, on the 19th February, from Paul III.

Although the Sword and Ducal Cap are blessed every year, they do not form a yearly gift : several years elapse without their being sent to any king, or prince, or distin-

guished personage ; whilst, on the other hand, we have instances of their being given for several years consecutively. We also find the same sovereign receiving the blessed sword from two different Popes, as in the instance of James V. of Scotland already mentioned.

The engraving on the blade proves it to have been a sword of state ; that is, a sword to be presented on a great occasion ; the name SIXTUS V. identifies it with that Pontiff, the date, ANNO III. denotes a year. Hence this sword may indubitably be assigned to the fourth year of the reign of Sixtus V. The suggestion, that it may have been one of the large swords borne on state occasions by the Swiss Guard at the Vatican cannot be held ; for, in the first place, their swords are all plain ones, some are straight, others are wavy, and all of them have much larger cross bars and longer hilts. The hilt on this sword is a clumsy modern addition.

That the Blessed Swords were large, and two-handed, I shall produce two proofs.

1. In the Inventory of the Regalia of King James I. in the Tower, occurs the entry :—" Item one greate twoe handed sworde garnyshed and guylte, presented to King Henry VIII. by the Pope." (Catalogue of the Antiquities and Works of Art exhibited at Ironmongers' Hall : p. 135. In the Catalogue this sword is erroneously stated to have been given by the "warlike Julius II.," whereas it should have been Leo X.).

2. Cartari (p. 22, quoted by Moroni, vol. lxx. p. 52) says that in the Books of the Depositeria Apostolica of the time of Sixtus V. there occurs an entry, that the Golden Rose, and Sword, and Belt, and Cap ornamented with pearls, cost 760 scudi. In this entry the Sword is described as a Great Sword—*Spadone*—and being mentioned in conjunction with the Ducal Cap (the "*Pileum*"), can have reference to no other than the Blessed Sword.

Consequently we have evidence that in the reigns of Leo X. and of Sixtus V., the blessed swords then given were two-handed or great swords.

I shall now endeavour to identify the recipient of this sword.

On the 29th July, 1587, Sixtus V. gave the Blessed Sword and Cap to Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma,

Commander of the Spanish Forces in Flanders. (Tempesti, Storia di Sisto V., lib. 13, No. 29 & 30, and Leti, Vita di Sisto V. scritta dal Signor Geltio Rogeri Losannæ. 1669. Vol. ii., p. 307.)

This sword and cap were conveyed to the Duke by Monsignor Grimani, Private Chamberlain to Sixtus V., and they are described by Moroni as of great value—*d'alto valore*.

In 1588, Sixtus V. sent by a bishop to the Duke of Guise a sword similar to the one which he had presented in the previous year to the Duke of Parma. The date is not mentioned, but it appears to have been within the first half of 1588.

Leti says (vol. ii. p. 307) :—"Quasi nello stesso tempo (*i.e.* the first half of 1588), invigilando il Pontefice sopra gli affari della Francia, haveva spedito al Duca di Guisa Capo della Lega Catolica una spada simile a quella che egli haveva mandato l'anno innanzi al Principe Farnese in Fiandra, ordinando al vescovo che era stato deputato da lui per consegnarla che gli manifestasse il suo affetto paterno e chelo decantasse per uno che teneva il primo luogo nell' animo Pontificio. Questa cerimonia si fece in Parigi con gran trionfo, e così grande che il Re medesimo cominincio ad haverne gelosia nel videre l'acclamationi popolari in favor del Guisa, benchè egli per modestia fugisse ogni honore che accadeva al suo stato."

In 1589, Sixtus V. presented the Blessed Sword and Cap through the nuncio at Florence, by Monsignor Michael Priuli, Bishop of Vicenza, the Papal commissary, to the Grand Duke Ferdinand I. The date is not given by Moroni.

In 1590, on the 25th of July, Sixtus V. sent the Sword and Cap to Sigismond III., King of Poland.

Thus Sixtus V., who reigned five years, four months, and fourteen days, gave only four Swords and Caps : viz., 1587, 29th July, to Alexander Farnese ; 1588 (first half), to the Duke of Guise ; 1589, no date, to the Grand Duke Ferdinand I. ; 1590, 25th July, to Sigismond III. of Poland.

According to Palatius (Gesta Pontificum Romanorum, vol. iv., p. 367. Venetiis, 1688), Sixtus V. was elected on the 12th of April, 1585, and died August 27, 1590.

His regnal years, therefore, are,—

April 12, 1585	}	1.
" 11, 1586	}	
" " 1586	}	2.
" " 1587	}	
" " 1587	}	3.
" " 1588	}	
" " 1588	}	4.
" " 1589	}	
" " 1589	}	5.
" " 1590	}	
" 12, 1590	}	6.
August 27, 1590	}	

The date on the sword ANNO. IIII. refers, therefore, to the year beginning April 12, 1588, and ending April 11, 1589.

If we take ANNO. IIII. to refer to the regnal year, this may apply to the period when the Duke of Guise received the sword, and thus this sword may be the one actually sent to him by Sixtus V. But if we take ANNO. IIII. to designate the Christmas eve of the fourth year, when the sword was blessed, it is probable that this was the sword presented to the Grand Duke Ferdinand I. Consequently, it is in the exact interpretation and application of the date ANNO. IIII. that the solution of the difficulty lies.

I myself am inclined to apply the date as designating the year of the gift, rather than the year of the blessing, for this very cogent reason, that the presentation of the sword was not of fixed annual occurrence, but depended entirely upon the will and pleasure of the sovereign Pontiff; and if the date were held to designate the year of the blessing, it might so happen that a Pope might confer a sword engraved with the name and date of some one of his predecessors.

I hope to ascertain the exact dates as to when the swords of Sixtus were given from the Vatican.

The last sword conferred before 1587 was to Rodolph II. of Germany in 1576, after Gregory XIII. had approved of his election.

Within the last century and a half the swords have been rarely given. The last sword given was by Leo. XII., in 1825, to the Duke of Angoulême, and the Sword which is now annually blessed on Christmas eve, and carried in the procession together with the Cap on Christmas Day, was made in 1826.