

THE PLACE AND THE POLICY OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY IN ITALY—THE
POPE'S ENCYCLICAL—OBJECTION'S TO THE SOCIETY'S WORK.

To attract the attention of the Italians to the great and momentous question of religion, to offer to them God's revelation of the Way, the Truth, and the Life, such is the great aim our Society has continued to pursue in this country, with unwearied zeal during the year 1894, and, thanks to God's blessing on our efforts, with no small amount of success. It seems strange that there should be Christian people who question the advisability, and even deny the necessity of such a work as ours in what they call a Christian country, under the mistaken impression either that the Italians are not ready to receive and savingly understand the Scriptures, or that their needs in this respect are sufficiently provided for by their own national Church. May I be allowed to say a few words about these two very strange fallacies!

As for the first, although I am an Italian myself, I hope not to be accused of a want of modesty if I say, in favour of my own people, that they are a gifted race, quick of intelligence, warm of heart, and, although trodden down by centuries of internal and foreign oppression, open to new ideas, to everything that is noble and true. Whatever may be their moral degradation, it has not obscured their mind nor lessened their quickness of comprehension. Moral corruption is perhaps greater in Italy than in many another country, but, for that very reason, few countries need the Bible more than Italy does. And it is a remarkable fact that some of the most important Books of the New Testament have been written for natives of Italy. It is very probable that St. Luke wrote his Gospel, and the sequel of it, the Acts of the Apostles, for an Italian gentleman of high degree; and there can be no manner of doubt that the Epistle to the Romans, that most wonderful exposition of the highest and most profound doctrines of Christianity, was addressed to Italian readers. In Italy were most probably written no less than six of St. Paul's Epistles and that to the Hebrews. No country in Europe except Greece, and perhaps not even Greece, has greater claims to consider the New Testament as its own, and yet few countries have been for so many centuries deprived of it.

As to the second objection, I find indeed that there is in Britain a rather prevalent impression that the attitude of the Roman Church on the question of giving the Scriptures to the people in their own tongue has greatly changed of late, and that we may leave now the work of disseminating the Bible in Italy in the hands of the priests. No doubt the remarkable Encyclical of Leo XIII. on the study of Holy Scripture, as it was published on Nov. 18th, 1893, has greatly contributed to widen and deepen such an impression. In my report of last year I have analysed that document, and I think I have shown that it concerns the clergy alone, and even only some amongst the clergy, but that all the old positions and the old prohibitions, as far as the laity are