

The Health of Pope Leo.

The Rome correspondent of the Standard and Times, Philadelphia, wrote to his paper on March 23 the following interesting letter:

Two facts oblige me to go back on a determination which I formed last week, to the effect that it was not necessary to speak any further on the condition of the health of Pope Leo XIII. In view of a telegram sent out by the Central News Association on the very day that I wrote my letter, it is necessary to give a denial of the contents of the telegram, and to afford an explanation of its impossibility. The telegram ran as follows:

"Home, Tuesday morning. The Pope is again ill. He has had a renewal of his fainting fits. No immediate serious importance is, however, attached to his illness."

It was dated on Tuesday last, March 14. Now, the Pope was not "again ill." He did not have "a renewal of his fainting fits." It would, furthermore, be curious if, given his advanced age, some, just a little, "immediate serious importance" was not attached to his indisposition. The telegram and its meaning are two facts which compel attention.

These "fainting fits," the phrase, and the idea are always identical to a lot—a lot designed to reproduce themselves in those who hear of them. It is not the Pope who has the condition of the Pontiff, that is part of their reality and importance. Except just of late years, when London newspapers have at last learned the extent of his vitality, the Pope could do nothing without having fainting fits. As far as the United States is concerned, all news is either made or cooked in London. If it does not grow there, it is prepared, seasoned, culminated among English people without a fainting fit. Then it was a most likely thing for a septuagenarian and octogenarian Pope, whose frame was slender and delicate-looking, to have fainting fits. So whether he assailed at a beatification or said Mass in St. Peter's or received pilgrims or gave audience to Bishop Freppel or didn't care much about an interview from Zola, the accounts given of everything ended with the phrase: "His Holiness was then seized with a fainting fit," or "The Pope then fell into protracted fainting fits," or "Leo XIII. was then discovered senseless in a fainting fit," etc., etc.

Now, the most interesting thing about this long system of veracious accounts is that the Pope has never had a fainting fit in his life. As one of his attendants recently said, His Holiness has never even shown the disposition to any weakness of that kind. Of course, he has a fainting fit in the telegram, which is mentioned in the telegram. But the London journalists are as veracious as in the past. There has been a fit, a bad and prolonged fit, to which "no immediate serious importance is, however, attached." The description is not only veracious, but exact to a minutia. The fit is described as it occurred, though under a form of metaphor, and the Pope is not the man who had the fit. Moreover, it has been a fainting fit only by courtesy, as it were. Strictly and literally speaking, it has been a convulsive fit. The telegram is its faithful echo.

Everybody knows what the situation at Rome is. It is a conflict between two powers, neither of which will surrender or migrate. In its universal significance it is a conflict between the metaphysical Catholic Church and the Italian monarchy; in its daily, ordinary and practical significance, it is a conflict between the Italian Church and the Italian State. Since the time of Adrian VI. (1522-1523) there has been no foreign Pontiff, and it is pretty generally allowed that the conflict in question makes it more surely advisable, if not imperative, that an Italian Cardinal should succeed the Pope. A subject, then, of the King of Italy will, the Liberals think, since the Papey is an autocracy, have in his hands the direction of the conflict in the future, if he will not ever have in his power the right of extinguishing it altogether. Each of the conflicting parties uttered its inopportunities and made its last concession about three decades of years ago.

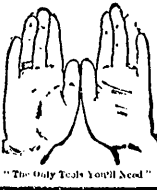
While it is quite credible that an adjustment of the difficulty could be made with an effort and in consequence of a show of good will on the part of the more successful combatant, it is certain that from the continuance of the condition of things which has been maintained since 1870 no platform or conciliation will emerge unless by miracle. In itself the present political order is unchanging. The Italian politicians are in general indifferent as to the situation partly because they consider it hopeless and partly because they are so avaricious as to have an inadequate realization of the importance of peace between Church and State. It would be wonderful, however, if the ministry which is in power when a convulsion occurs, or when a convulsion is likely to occur, did not use every means within its reach to lessen the evil of the situation by helping on the election of a Cardinal who would be the one who might seem to be the most liberal of the effectively eligible members of the Sacred College.

But, the American reader objects, this is a snare and delusion for the Italian Government. It may be so, but I think its reasoning is about as follows. Much evil will always be avoided and some good will always be attained by the election of the most conciliatory Cardinal. However irrevocably a convulsion may be, it will always

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