

## The Priest in Politics in Italy.

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For the Review.

No explanation need be given of the well-known phrase the "priest in politics." Its meaning is perfectly understood, for its terms explain themselves. As they show it does not concern itself with the priest as professing the Roman Catholic faith, nor as exercising the rights and duties of a subject and a citizen, but it deals with him solely in that politico-ecclesiastical character he so often assumes, and by virtue of which he introduces into the sphere of politics, priestly authority, priestly influence, and priestly aims.

In Italy the priestly aim is the restoration of the Temporal Power, through the breaking up of the unity and integrity of the kingdom, and the means the "priest in politics" takes to secure it are, uniting himself with disaffection and disloyalty wherever they are to be found, fanning and adding fuel to these passions, and inciting them when he can where they do not exist.

In regard to the aim, the restoration of the Temporal Power, I quote a sentence from an article in the *Nuova Antologia*, for January 25th, entitled *Sursum Corda*, and written by Signor Ruggero Bonghi. In this article he says, "The war is conducted by the Papacy, and since its commencement twenty three years ago, it does not seem to decrease in vigor and in precision of aim, on the contrary it even increases, being guided to day by a Pope of an elevated mind, but in the highest degree political. The Pope continues to fight fiercely to recover the Temporal Power. Throughout all the country the priests either follow the Pope, or remain inactive and silent, even when in their hearts they dissent from him." Signor Bonghi, who uses these words, is one of the few statesmen in Italy, almost, I may say, the only one, who adheres to the Papal party. His adherence is such that in obedience to orders from the Vatican he cancelled an engagement he made to lecture in the Athenæum in Venice on the "Life of Jesus" shortly after the publication of his book bearing that title, which has since been put in the *Index Expurgatorius*. In obedience to similar orders he opposed the erection of the public monument to Giordani Bruno in Rome, even though his conduct cost him his chair of Literature in the University of the capital. He has to thank, too, his Papal partisanship that he is now outside the House of Deputies, his constituency having thrown him over on that account at the last election. Although therefore the aim of the Papacy in seeking to re-establish the Temporal Power is known to all, still it is well to have it stated in plain terms by such a man as Bonghi for it is often denied by the Pope, who poses as the friend of the country, by the Church that talks of its patriotism and by the priests in general who, when taxed with disloyalty to the King and constitution, stoutly and vehemently deny it. A *sine qua non* of the re-establishment of the Temporal Power is the disintegration of the Kingdom. By combination and union Italy won her independence, only by revolving her once more into separate, and if possible, hostile parts, can it be taken from her. "Unite and conquer" was the watchword of the Italians in 1870, "divide and conquer" is the watchword of the priests to-day. A policy of division and disintegration has ever been characteristic of the Papacy. In the twelfth century it encouraged the jealous independence of the towns of northern Italy in order to weaken its enemy, the Emperor Barbarossa. In succeeding centuries it fostered an interminable war between Genoa, Venice, Pisa, Milan and the city-states, that it might more easily dominate all. It was so in more recent times when it promoted jealousies, rivalries and feuds between the petty tyrants of Italy to secure the same end. Dispeace, disunion, disintegration of Kingdoms means weakness, and weakness affords an opportunity to the Papacy to grasp and hold. The disintegration of Italy, then, is being sought by the Papacy to-day in order to secure the return of the Temporal power. Priests when taxed with this do not usually deny it, whilst holding that it is not incompatible with their loyalty. What they say is, "Italy is composed of so many diverse peoples, speaking different dialects, having different customs, and habituated during long centuries to different laws, that there ought not to be a fusion of these parts, but a confederacy."

Let us now ask what are the means used by the Papacy in order to break up Italy with a view to the restoration of the Temporal Power? How are the priests working for Italian disintegration at the present moment? In several ways, first they unite themselves with all elements of discontent and disloyalty they find around them. At the present moment the country is passing through a serious commercial and financial crisis. Work is scarce, food is

dear, taxes are high. There are many who have a hard struggle to earn a livelihood and there are many who are idle, and therefore there are not wanting elements of discontent and disaffection. I have sometimes heard Venetians say, "We were better off under Austrian rule than we are now. Then Austrian princes and Austrian nobles came to Venice with their retinues and spent their money freely—things cost less than they do now, and we had more means wherewith to buy them." At the bottom of such talk there is usually no real lack of patriotism. It is only prompted by a temporary looking back to the bondage and the flesh-pots of Egypt. But wherever the Papacy finds such a state of matters, there it finds congenial soil for its insidious workings. It instantly unites itself with that spirit of dissatisfaction. The priest grasps the hands of such malcontents and says: "We are one with you. We think as you do and sympathize with you. Let us be friends." But worse still socialism and anarchism are in many places rampant. To the promoters of these revolutionary forces the priest is never hostile. On the contrary he is more openly, or more covertly their friend. It becomes a very serious matter for a nation when the ministers of its Church associate themselves with the elements of disorder and sedition. Secondly the Papacy not only unites itself with discontent and disaffection, it blows on such a spirit wherever it finds it, and fans it into a flame, and heaps fuel on it. For illustration of this we have only to look at the late insurrections in Sicily, at Carrara, at Brescia and at other places. The part the Papacy played in these fatal uprisings is as notorious as it is infamous. In Sicily, more perhaps than in any part of Italy, the priest unfortunately, has still some authority founded on the ignorance and superstition of the people. That authority could have been exercised on the side of law and order. But such was not the case. On the contrary in private and in public the priests discoursed on the wrongs of the people, exaggerated them, inveighed against the Government, and incited the people to resist the police and the military, and led them to commit acts of anarchy and crime which they had to expiate with their lives.

The action of the parish priest at Bovafanica is a case in point. Seeing the representatives of law and order coming, he ran into the church-tower, and violently rang the bells to call the people to arms. Riot and bloodshed was only prevented by the action of the President of the *Fascio* (the people's club), rushing into the building and cutting the bell ropes. More than that the clericals financed the revolutionaries. Money for the purchase of arms and ammunition was supplied by the monasteries and the convents. The Government has, I believe, documents proving these facts up to the hilt, and, it is said, even incriminating high personages in the Vatican itself. Thirdly, the Papacy not only unites itself with disaffection, not only fans it into fiercer flame, it kindles it where it does not exist. The priests are missionaries of sedition they are at the present moment planting and setting in motion, throughout Italy, machinery for the creation of socialism, anarchism and rebellion. Let me illustrate how this is being done. They are establishing what are called Workmen's and Laborers Catholic Societies. In these societies the priest tells the people that Jesus Christ was a socialist, that He aimed at the destruction of the rich, and the giving of their wealth to the poor, that He aimed to put all upon a social equality by means of the Church, the "supremo magistracy" of which He has given to the Pope. In cities and towns where the influence of the priest is *null*, such societies are not succeeding but in country districts, where he has still a certain amount of influence, and where the people are ignorant of political matters, they are prospering. Peasants in considerable numbers are enrolling themselves. Any who have socialist or anarchical tendencies are doubly welcome. But not only does the membership include men, but women and children even are enrolled. The words "workmen's" and "laborers" incorporated with the name of the society is thus only a blind to attract members, and to hide its real character and aims. The priest promises to lead its members to victory, and they on their part promise obedience. The Church, they are taught, will become the redresser of all their wrongs, "able to render prosperous," as the Pope said the other day, "even this our mortal existence." The poor people—unacquainted with the history of their land under Papal rule, when it was sunk in ignorance, superstition and vice, when there were no pavements, no lighting, no sanitation even in Rome, when life and property were insecure everywhere, when brigands came down from the mountains at Easter to share their spoils of robbery and murder with the Pope, and getting his absolution, returned fortified to their nefarious practices—believe the falsehoods of their priests: When the priest has a club strong enough he tells its members