

over many buried ages before we reach the one across which the name of Leo I. stands written in the bold broad type of his immortal deeds. The world and the church were younger by thirteen centuries when St. Leo I. afterwards surnamed the Great, was chosen to fill the high office of Christ's vicar on earth. That the choice of the Christians should have fallen on such a man, at such a time, to guide the helm of the struggling church, is indubitably a striking evidence of Christ's watchful care of her, and a partial fulfilment of His promise that the gates of hell should never prevail against her. In order to form a correct conception of the critical emergencies which Leo I. was called to meet in his new character of Roman Pontiff, and adequately to estimate the splendour of his political genius, and his heroic devotion to the church, it will be necessary to take a brief survey of the world as it unrolled itself before the eyes of the new prelate when he first took his seat in the chair of Peter.

The Roman Empire was on the verge of dissolution. By the foul aid of the assassin's dagger, cruel and incapable men succeeded one another in the imperial throne. The people groaned under the tyranny, the insolence and insatiable greed of the demoralized upper classes. Added to this, the successful irruption of the northern barbarians under Alaric and the fearful devastation committed by them wherever they appeared, had filled the entire south with the utmost consternation. The world was, as it were, only waiting for the crash of falling empires to reconstruct new races and kingdoms out of the mighty ruins of the old. The church, having passed through the crucial trials of bloody persecutions, had, to the discomfiture of her enemies, only drawn fresh vitality from the life-stream of her martyrs. Her triumphs over Paganism had been nothing short of a stupendous miracle. But now other equally threatening dangers surrounded her. Heresies were springing up on every side, creating divisions and dissensions, which the imperfect organization of the hierarchies, and the difficulties in the way of speedy communication rendered it exceedingly hard to settle, before much mischief had been worked among the faithful.