

THE POPE IN FICTION.

WHEN political fictions are going the round of the Press, and when hasty forecasts of the future are being hinted on all sides, it is quite natural that a large share of the fictions and the forecasts should centre round the most exalted and most important personage in Europe; and by all evidence that personage is no other than the Pontiff at the Vatican—the one man whose words and acts are watched by the unbelieving world, as if they were the words of an oracle and the acts of some superhuman power that can afford to appear weak while it is biding its time. Among all the crooked views and false reports with which the special correspondents are wont to create for their readers a fictional Leo XIII., there is one view, says the *London Register*, which deserves special notice because it is being put forward in our own daily Press in a most plausible manner; and by constant repetition, as we all know, the most glaringly false theory begins to insinuate itself as a truth. We are not going to dwell upon the fallacy—long ago acknowledged as such even by the enemies of the Church—that Leo the Thirteenth does not follow in the footsteps of Pius the Ninth. When the fury of the storm has exhausted itself in some of the countries of Europe, the present Pontiff makes use of diplomatic means to bring about peace, just as Pius the Ninth did before the persecution had risen to its height, rendering negotiation impossible; but had there been for one moment or in one word a change of front towards the Quirinal there would be no need to seek for the act of surrender; it would have been the byword of the world long ago. The friends of Italian Unity know but too well that "*Non Possumus*" was not the word of one man, but of an immortal dynasty. They may reason plausibly to prove that but for the ever meddling Intransigenti Cardinals, Rome would have ere now sought conciliation in every quarter at all costs; but in the same breath the truth leaks out, and they acknowledge that the Papacy is the most permanently important element to be reckoned with in forecasting the future of Italy, perhaps of Europe.

But the grand fiction of the day does not regard the policy of the Popes. It is the old fiction brought to light first in the Turin Parliament years before the taking of Rome—the fiction that the spiritual power of the Pope would be greater if his temporal power were swept away.avour himself made use of this falsehood; it was the argument of the men who wanted Rome for the capital of the new kingdom, and yet know that Italy had a conscience that might rebel against the sacrilegio. Again and again it is repeated, and in the English Press it is brought forward from time to time, and every possible change is rung upon the unsound theory. There was never any thing more obviously untrue, or more clearly framed to suit a purpose. But this constant reiteration may possibly at last imperil the common sense of some amongst us. A man may deceive himself, and, by persistent repetition, come to believe that his own fancies are facts, just as old George the Fourth came at last to believe that he had been at Waterloo and led a cavalry charge. Much more may the bold assertions of other men delude us unless we assume the attitude of perpetually being on our guard against believing because the multitude speak. It is our fate to be always told that the world knows more of the affairs of the Church than does the Church herself; yet the multitude are but the outside strangers, and we, the few, are of the household knowing alone its secrets and its needs.

We are told, then, that the spiritual power of the Pope was never so great, and that the reason is because his influence over souls is not hampered and debased by the cares of a temporal kingdom. There is some truth here as well as the falsehood. The fact is true; the reason given is false. Never, indeed, was the empire over souls so wide; never, perhaps, in all the history of the nineteen centuries was the loyalty to Rome so close, or, as one might say, so individual, an allegiance. The well-known prophecy regarding Pius the Ninth was undoubtedly fulfilled—he lived to see the exaltation of the Church. But, let it be remembered, it is the exaltation of suffering; it is the loyalty of martyrdom; it is the strength that has risen to endure persecution