

PAPAL TERRITORY.

None the Most Salubrious Memo of the Pope.

Once more the mighty question, "Ought the Pope to be temporal sovereign of Rome?" not only agitates all Italy, but forces itself on the attention of the Old World and the New. It must be considered a mighty question, because it intimately concerns the two hundred and twenty millions of human beings who revere in the Bishop of Rome the Vicar of Christ, and look up to him as their divinely appointed teacher and guide in all things spiritual. A question which so nearly touches their convictions and their conscience as the perfect independence and freedom of the Head of the Church in the fulfillment of his high office as Bishop of Rome and pastor of Christ's entire flock must, by its very nature, agitate the whole Catholic world, the whole civilized world, in fact, so long as it is left undecided.

There are two very distinct aspects of this Roman question. The first is, "Should the Pope, being what he assumes to be, and what his immense flock believe him to be—the Vicar of Christ on earth, the supreme visible Head of the Christian Church—be made, for the free discharge of the mission imposed on him, absolutely independent of the sway, the domination, and dictation of any one sovereign or people?" And, secondly, since he is, and has been so long acknowledged to be, the Bishop of Rome, "Should the Pope not enjoy this absolute freedom and independence in Rome itself?"

Catholics maintain in substance that the head of the Church should, in the present as in the past, be in possession of a territorial sovereignty placed under the protection of international law with its rights and limits guaranteed by the nations of both hemispheres.

Looking at this side of the question as two hundred and twenty millions of Catholics look at it, and viewing the dependent and precarious situation imposed on the Pope by his not being a territorial sovereign, or by his being, as was Pius IX., and as Leo XIII., a mere nominal sovereign, or rather a prisoner in the Vatican, it is manifest that such a position of dependence is repugnant to the idea of the Pope's office as ruler of the Universal Church.

The Pope, as Christ's Vicar and Pastor of the whole Flock, belongs to all humanity. As Pope, the Bishop of Rome, belongs to no one nation; he is the minister and servant of all. His mission, divine, universal, perpetual and unending, embraces all peoples and all time. The spiritual authority which he wields is and ought surely to be superior to the revolutions and contingencies of civil states and governments. His ministrations are superior in their object and nature to those of all earthly societies. Being in favor of all mankind, and ordained by God as such, all nations, rulers and governments should encourage, protect, promote, these ministrations and labors.

It should be the supreme interest of all mankind, of all, at least, who believe in the divine mission of the Church and the authority of her visible head, to remove all obstacles to that mission, to render these ministrations and the exercise of that authority absolutely free.

International law, during a period of twelve hundred years, had sanctioned an arrangement by which the Bishop of Rome, held to be the common parent of the entire Christian family, was given in his Episcopal city a territorial sovereignty which made him independent of any one people or power. Catholic nations, like individual Catholics, were greatly jealous, during the middle ages, as they are jealous at this day, of any interference with the freedom of the Bishops of Rome in governing the Church Universal. Nations and individuals had then a right, as they

have now, as they must ever have, to see that the Pope was free in his own city, and have it manifest to the eyes of the whole world that he was perfectly free. There must be no superior authority in Rome which the Pope and his counsellors have to consult, to yield and defer to before issuing instructions destined for the entire Church, before laying down the law of life and morality for Catholics when error is abroad and corruption is overflowing every floodgate. The civil principality of the Popes must be a neutralized principality, when none may make war and which should ever be at peace with all; because the divine mission of the Church and her Pontiffs is a mission to souls which neither war nor pestilence should ever interrupt, trammel, or delay.

Every Christian people has a right to know and to feel that its relations with the Holy See are not influenced by the interference or dictation of a hostile, an unfriendly, or even a friendly nation. The moment, for instance, that our government at Washington had good reason to believe that the ministers of King Umberto in the Quirinal were exercising on Leo XIII. or his Secretary of State, or his Prefect of the Propaganda, a pressure in any way hostile or adverse to our country or its interests, it would be brought home to American Protestants why the Pope should be free, independent, sovereign in Rome, and master in his own house.

During the last few years—especially since Leo XIII. inaugurated his new and liberal policy in France—the influence of the Roman Pontiffs in European affairs, and their interference, at a critical hour, with the interior policy of a great country like France, have been passionately discussed by the public press in every civilized country. In this discussion both Catholic and non-Catholic writers have, with a few exceptions, entirely ignored or lost sight of the grounds for such interference, and the lofty principles guiding the action of the Pontiffs, so often solemnly asserted and explained by Leo XIII. himself long before the memorable discourse of Cardinal Lavignerie, proclaiming the new policy recommended by the Vatican to the Catholics of France.

Whenever, in any Catholic country, it happens that the majority of the Catholic citizens or their leaders contract such an alliance with one or the other dominant parties in that country as to threaten the most sacred interests of religion or to imperil the independence, the very existence, of the nation itself, it becomes the imperative duty of the Vicar of Christ to interfere.

If such be the necessity for the Popes, of the freedom which can alone spring from territorial sovereignty, when one considers the mediatorial office of the Head of the Church in international complications, how much more is that necessity increased when there is question of the Pope's uninterrupted, essential, and most sacred spiritual relations with every portion of his flock, and with the individual consciences which invoke his aid? Free intercourse with Rome was one of the inviolable privileges guaranteed to all peoples and to all individuals in past ages, not only by the universal consent of nations, but by the express and solemn dispositions of the Pontifical Decrees. Feudal despotism often interposed barriers and obstacles to this free communication with Rome. But the Popes fought energetically and consistently for their freedom of intercourse. Nor, whatever prejudice may have said and written to the contrary, were their motives inconsistent with the highest spiritual interests of the faithful flock.

No title among those of the potentates and governments of Europe could be compared in antiquity and universally admitted righteousness to that of

the pontiff kings. The territory thus guaranteed to them by the gratitude and the reverence of peoples and princes was the pledge and security of their independence of all foreign domination or dictation. That territorial and sovereign independence meant for the common Father of Christendom—as he was regarded during all these centuries—absolute freedom in the discharge of his ministerial office.

Few peoples can claim that they were the first to hold what constitutes their national domain, and they did not dispossess some prior occupant. So it is in the Old World, the right of conquest, or superior might, is the title deed on which they hold their birthright. The feudalism on which was built the whole of the Christendom of our Fathers owed its birth, growth, and long reign to the sword. Whatever it came, in the course of af ages, to boast of in civilization, refinement, and morality, was due to the religion of Christ and the beneficent influence of its ministers.

As to the Papacy and the Papal States, they can fairly challenge the attention of the historian, the jurist to the legitimacy of their origin and long admitted validity of their rights. More than one Protestant writer has triumphantly vindicated the right of the Popes to the States of the Church as well to the gratitude of all Christian peoples.

As the empire fell into dissolution, the Papacy became more and more the great conservative and creative power. Witness the action of St. Gregory the Great (590-604). He was the living Providence of Italy, the true Father of all Christendom, the Apostle of England and Germany, and the Saviour of Spain from the terrible oppression of the Arian Visigoths. Read his vast correspondence, and you will be convinced that God never bestowed on the nations an institution more powerfully and peacefully beneficent than the Papacy. It was to save and to perpetuate in Papacy, the foster-parent of Christendom and of the civilization which began to flourish amid the ruins of the Roman Empire, that Popin and Charlemagne sent their armies into Italy and won for the Popes that civil principality which secured at once both their independence as Bishops of Rome and their freedom in the exercise of their pastorate as Vicars of Christ.

Compare with the rise and growth of this peaceful sovereignty of the Bishops of Rome the origin of all, or nearly all, the States of America, North and South. Beginning either in sheer violence, the brute force of the stronger, or in fraudulent compacts with the natives, never honestly kept, if ever intended, to be so kept, time alone has sanctioned our possession of the land. But the length of this possession, which might constitute a proprietorship by prescription—what is it in comparison to the prescriptive right of the Papacy over the Patrimony of the Church? American nationalities are as of yesterday, compared to a civil principality dating from the middle of the eighth century of our era—and whose universally acknowledged titles were the very centre of international jurisprudence and Christian order.

This liberty at bottom is the very same cause for which Leo XIII. is contending at this moment. But here comes in the supposition that the right of the Popes to any kind of territorial sovereignty has been set aside once and forever by the establishment of the present Kingdom of Italy, and by its recognition by all the powers. Certain it is that the civil principality of the Pope has not been in the past detrimental to the prosperity, the greatness and the glory of Italy. No less certain is that the policy of the Pontiffs, century after century, tended to foster the best interests of Italy, to

establish, promote, and defend its independence against foreign dominancy. And it is equally certain that Leo XIII., like Pius IX. and Pius VI., has ever been in favor of a confederated Italy.

The Neo-Guelph party had planned for Italy neither a centralized monarchy nor a centralized democracy, but the perfected deal of the Lombard League of Free States—a confederation like our own, in which all the power and influence of the Papacy would be used to secure the independence of the country against foreign domination, to promote and develop its internal prosperity, and to keep it at peace with all nations. This form of Italian unity is the very thing which Leo XIII. alluded to, as to his own cherished ideal, in the much-talked-of letter to Cardinal Rampolla, detailing his plan of conciliation with the Italian Government.

"It is usually put forward as an objection," the Pope writes, "that in order to restore the Pontifical Sovereignty, Italy must give up the great advantages she has already obtained; that no account must be had of modern progress, and that Italy must go back to the Middle Ages.

"But these are reasons which have no real weight.

"What is the advantage, true and substantial, to which the Pontifical Sovereignty would be opposed? It is most certain that the cities and territories formerly subject to the Civil Sovereignty of the Popes have ever been, in their character and manners, most distinctively Italian, and they have been preserved so, and kept from oftentimes falling beneath a foreign yoke, by the very fact of their belonging to the Popes. Nor could it be otherwise to-day. For if, by reason of its lofty, universal, and perpetual mission, the Papacy belongs to all nations, on the other hand, because of the seat here assigned it by Providence, it is in a special manner one of the glories of Italy.

"Should such a restoration injure the oneness of the political state, we should, without entering on considerations touching the intrinsic merit of the case, and by simply placing ourselves on the standpoint of our adversaries, ask them whether or no this condition of unity constitutes, in itself, for nations a good so absolute that without it they can neither attain to prosperity nor greatness? Or is it a good of so transcendent a nature that it must be preferred to any other?

"We are answered in this by the fact that there exist most prosperous, powerful, and glorious nations who have not, and never have had, the king of unity put forward here. Then national reason furnishes a further answer, that in the conflict of pretensions it must give the preference to the rights of justice, which is the foundation of the happiness and stability of the States, and this preference must be still more emphasized when justice is inseparably conjoined with the highest interest of religion and of the universal church. In presence of this reason no hesitation is possible." (Acta Sanctæ Sedis, Vol. xx.)

Of course the reasons which most powerfully militate in favor of the restoration to the Pope of his territorial sovereignty, plead with equal force in favor of making Rome the seat of that sovereignty. Diplomats, politicians, sovereigns even may talk of giving the Sovereign Pontiff a slice of territory in the Tyrol, some island in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. But all such expedients are but wretched shifts. No civilized nation in our times is willing to part forever with a single foot of its soil, even to secure a home for the Pope. And no matter where the nations of both hemispheres might agree to create a civil principality for him; to "neutralize" it, and take it under protection of international law, would this changeable agency we call diplomacy, or international law and