

hidden secret. On the verge of the precipice to which she had marched, Rome halted, recoiled. There were the Joint Letter, and the brief of Pope Pius IX. approving of that episcopal mandate; there were pastorals from more than one bishop identifying the approval of the Pope with the action of the priests. Retreat seemed cut off. The Joint Letter, the brief, and the separate pastorals could not be withdrawn or repudiated. But they could be explained in a way that would leave a loop-hole of escape from the difficulty. So the bishops met in Consistory, and in a joint pastoral, dated October 11, 1877, let the world know that they had never intended to authorize the priests to descend to the battle-ground of political parties and get into direct antagonism with individuals. The Joint Letter had been misunderstood; and strange as it may seem, the bishops had misunderstood themselves. But we are still to find in the Joint Letter 'the true doctrine on the constitution and rights of the Church;' that is, we are there to learn that the State is in the Church, and that the Church is superior to the State. The Pope's brief addressed to the Bishop of Three Rivers is not to be regarded as condemning any political party whatever, but as having reference solely to Liberal Catholics and their principles, wherever they may be found. The bishops leave each one of the faithful to judge 'who are the men to whom these condemnations apply, whatever the political party to which they belong.'

This retreat is only made at one point of the line; every where else the old attitude is preserved. Besides, liberal Catholics are under the same condemnation as before; the new difficulty will be to affix that stigma to any candidate; if once made to adhere, it will not be less fatal in the future than it has been in the past. If this halt at one point of the line, this recoil before the menaced pen-