

OUR ROMAN LETTER

(By "SCOTTUS.")

The march of events has thrown new light on the question of the future relations between Church and State in Italy, which has been attracting keen attention in this country for the past couple of months. In a general way it may be stated that much of the old bitterness has died out, giving way to a more conciliatory spirit. Those who took an active part in the spoliation of the Papal States in the years prior to 1870 have nearly all passed away. The men who were out of their teens in that year have now reached the Davidic age, and not many of them remain. To those who have grown up since, the question presents itself less keenly and more as a matter of history in which a former generation was keenly interested. On the other hand, in the interval a new world has been growing up, in altered conditions, and with new problems of its own. At that date the social question could hardly be said to exist; courts and governments alone counted; and international influence depended largely on territory and all that territorial possession stood for. Few were able to grasp the truth of the dictum quoted with approval by Matthew Arnold in his *Celtic Literature*, "that nations disinherited of political success may yet leave their mark on the world's progress, and contribute powerfully to the civilisation of mankind."

Catholics not only held then as they hold now that the invasion of the Papal States was an act of downright spoliation: but they also held that the possession of these States was the one means of securing necessary Papal independence and of keeping up suitable Papal dignity. Much water has swept by the bridge leading to the Vatican mount since that day: and the events of the past couple of years would lead one to doubt whether rulers have really a bed of roses and whether the headship of a State necessarily implies either personal independence or official dignity. If Papal liberty and dignity can be secured in any other way, or in a better way, no more is required. All that has to be borne in mind is that the one thing necessary, in any solution that may be put forward, is that it will secure the due dignity and real independence of the Pope both in his person and in his intercourse with his flock in every land.

That the Holy See actually enjoys such dignity and independence is very much more than open to question. When all is said and done, and even making all possible allowance for goodwill on the part of the present Italian Government, the fact remains that not only is the Pope at the mercy of that Government, not only has he no legal hold on the Vatican Palace itself, not only can the Government revoke the present system of apparent goodwill, but the insecurity of any such thing as free communication with his flock in other lands has been more than demonstrated in the course of the present war; and under the existing system, a new Government could turn the Pope adrift on the world and reduce him to the position of the humblest subject in the State.

One of the most curious results of the present political outlook has been the eagerness manifested for the past month or two by the Italian press, and even by Ministerial organs hitherto out of all sympathy for the Vatican, to come to a better understanding with the Papacy over what is known as the Roman question, that is to say, the relations between Vatican and Quirinal. It used to be the fashion for all news-

papers of the kind to scout the very idea; and it was a usual manoeuvre in moments of political crisis to rally the supporters of the Italian Government to the tap of the anti-Papal drum. For the moment at least all this is changed; and just now Ministerial anxiety seems to be centred on coming to terms with the Vatican. Naturally no one imagines that the new policy is dictated by special love for the Holy See; and no particular gift of prophecy is required to see that if the Government is now prepared to make advances, it is because a corresponding advantage is expected in return.

The corresponding advantage may be assumed to consist in the support to be derived from the weight the Vatican might be able to lend to the Government in coping with the spirit of unrest with which it is feared the country is likely to be permeated, either presently or in the near future. Ministerial organs or mouth-pieces have hinted at the existence of negotiations towards a Concordat or mutual arrangement between Italy and the Holy See. The Catholic press of the country has declined discussion of the subject or has merely denied that anything in the shape of official negotiations has taken place. But this denial does not mean that there has been no unofficial interchange of views, or that such are altogether out of the question.

At the same time there seems to be little probability of an arrangement of the kind being come to between the Holy See and the Italian Government *alone*. Any such arrangement would leave the independence of the Holy See at the mercy of the goodwill of each and every future Government; and this has been one of the fundamental objections against the guarantees hitherto held out by Italy to the Pope by way of compensation for the spoliation to which he was subjected in 1870. A man or set of men making Concordats or offering Guarantees without some higher sanction than their own word or goodwill may just as easily break them as make them, the moment a purpose is to be served. The present Italian Government may be and doubtless is very well inclined: but who knows what sort of Government may be in power to-morrow or the day after? And who can say that the days of scraps of paper are at an end? In any event the Holy See is not likely to be a party to any scheme that would aim at bolstering up a Government at the expense of the people: and this is probably what the suggested understanding really means. If the Government appears to be friendly disposed to-day, one is inclined to ascribe the changed frame of mind to the fear of democracy not to love of the Papacy. When the Devil was sick the Devil a monk would be.

A Concordat therefore between the Holy See and Italy is improbable; and on the other hand there is no high-grade of probability that the future dignity and independence of the Pope will find their security in territorial readjustments. The setting up of the League of Nations, however, would probably open up a way to solve existing difficulties without unduly wounding susceptibilities. Up to the present, the Holy See has been unable to accept the solution proposed by Italy, because the stability of that solution depended upon the bare word of the Italian Government; and on the other hand, that Government declined to admit an international guarantee of the Powers as a pledge of good behaviour, because this would imply a lowering of national dignity. But this attitude would be meaningless the moment a League of Nations was established. In that event all that would be required to satisfy the Papacy would be a little

HOPE & KINASTON

Undertakers and Embalmers.

FUNERALS CONDUCTED TO SUIT ALL REQUIREMENTS AT SHORTEST NOTICE.

PERSONAL SUPERVISION GUARANTEED.

ALL CATHOLIC REQUISITES SUPPLIED, INCLUDING SROUDS.

'Phone 2602.

RING or WIRE

Mortuary Rooms and Offices:

St. Andrew Street, Dunedin.