
**Letter ... to M. Minghetti ... On the Spoliation of the
Church at Rome and Throughout Italy**

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PREFACE OF TRANSLATOR.

THE English press in general has represented the following Letter as only a fresh outburst of an eminent member of the Roman Catholic Church in favour of the Temporal Power, in order 'to keep alive the grievances of their chief in Italy;' which grievances they represent as purely imaginary.

A portion of the French press, on the other hand, considers that the Bishop's language is that of resignation to an accomplished fact—an impression which he himself indignantly denies.

We can only implore our readers not to be misled by these equally false though opposite statements, and not to trust to the garbled extracts from the Letter put forward in the newspapers; but to read, if possible without any preconceived prejudice, this plain and unvarnished statement of facts.

We believe that, with the strong sense of honesty and fair-play which is the inherent characteristic of all Englishmen, they will be startled beyond measure

at the revelations it contains, and which we defy them to disprove; and that they will feel that the 'solution of the Roman Question' can never be arrived at by injustice and wrong, or by a direct violation of the Divine commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal.'

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LETTER TO M. MINGHETTI.

Sir,—In 1848 you were the Minister of Pius IX. ; I find you in 1874 the Minister of Victor Emmanuel.

You coöperated with the Holy Father in a great, fruitful, and glorious undertaking ; and although to-day you lend your aid to, alas, a very different work, I know that you have retained a grateful recollection of the generous Sovereign who gave you such a proof of his esteem. Therefore it is that with a certain degree of confidence I take the liberty of addressing you this Letter.

I am just come back from Rome. I have seen with my own eyes all that is passing there. Nothing can be more sad ; and I like to think that it is not without bitter regret that you are taking part in such proceedings. Everything is done with consummate skill, and with a deep meaning. There is no noise, no outward violence ; everything is concealed under an apparent legality ; but nevertheless, what is being done is the greatest disaster that could befall the Church, and, if she could be destroyed by the hand of man, would be her ruin.

But Europe, indifferent or distracted by other interests, appears to see nothing and to know nothing ; and France, still bleeding from her late reverses, and trembling on the edge of an abyss, can do naught but mourn. The Catholic world is deceived. They even boast of the liberty which the noble Prisoner of the Vatican enjoys under your protection !

I will say more : you are deceived yourselves. You do not know all that is being done in your name ; your agents (I

cannot think otherwise) go beyond your instructions ; and allow me to say that they do not do you credit.

I have taken it upon myself, therefore, to let you know yourself the real state of things.

Do not, however, be afraid. I do not ignore the delicacy of such a subject, and I shall respect it ; I do not, in this Letter, make an appeal to the sword, but to justice and good faith ; I do not, either, intend to make this a party question. The subjects on which I shall touch are outside and above the arena of parties. You have solemnly declared yourselves that you would not wound the consciences of Christians, nor attempt to solve alone, but in accordance with the States possessing Catholic subjects, questions which affect the interests of the whole Catholic body. Would it be an offence to the Italian Government to remind her of her engagements and of her promises ? And is it not doing a useful as well as a loyal act to warn those who need the warning ?

Besides, if it be true, as I believe, that the actual position of things creates, not only for Catholics and for Italy, but for the whole world, a state of peril from which one may turn away for a moment in the midst of the pressing difficulties of the hour, but which we shall have to face some day or other, is it not the interest of every one, in so grave a matter, not to persevere in dangerous illusions ?

For us, Catholics of all nations, it is a duty not to conceal, by our silence, that which, under no pretext and by no country on earth, could be excused or passed over.

And for the Government of which you are the head, is it not of vital importance to take account of such things and to foresee, so as to avoid them, the disastrous complications of the future ?

I.

The Promises of the Italian Government.

Before giving an opinion on what is passing at this moment in Rome, it is important to recall the promises which the Italian Government made, and the engagements into which she entered, to respect the Church and her rights, and at the same time the rights of conscience of the Catholic world.

When, during the late war, fortune deserted our troops and betrayed our hopes, the very day when the soldiers who had the honour of guarding Rome against you were recalled, your Government understood that, having nothing more to fear from us, her hour was come; and with a resolution which did not require much courage, she made her plans. But before executing them, she felt the need of dissipating the alarms of the Catholic body on the consequences of the attack which was about to be made; and also to reassure the Powers whose subjects, being Catholics, had consequently vital interests at Rome.

Therefore, on the 29th August 1870, M. Visconti-Venosta, your Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed a *memorandum* or circular to all Italian agents at foreign Courts, of which we give the textual conclusions:

‘The Government PROMISES to preserve ALL THE INSTITUTIONS, offices, and ecclesiastical bodies existing at Rome, as well as those employed therein.

‘The Government PROMISES to *preserve intact*, and without submitting them to special taxation, ALL ECCLESIASTICAL PROPERTIES, of which the revenues belong to offices, CORPORATIONS, institutions, and ecclesiastical bodies having their seat in Rome and in the Leonine city.’

Thus everything was to be respected by you and preserved—*entirely* preserved—both the possession of property and the position of persons. Such were your engagements and your promises. Nothing could be more formal or more solemn; for these words were addressed to all the Courts of Europe.

The memorandum went on to say:

‘The Government will not meddle with the internal discipline of the *ecclesiastical corporations in Rome*. The bishops and priests of the kingdom are free, in their respective dioceses and parishes, of *all interference from the Government* in the exercise of their spiritual functions.’

But this is not all. To give a more emphatic guarantee to the Catholic world, the memorandum made the following declaration:

‘These articles shall be considered as A PUBLIC AND BILATERAL CONTRACT, AND THE POINT OF UNION WITH THE POWERS HAVING CATHOLIC SUBJECTS.’

The Italian Government went still further; and some days before the invasion, the 6th of September, you put forward a manifesto, in which you stated that you had at last decided to enter Rome. But why? '*Not to abandon the fate of the Head of the Church to the chapter of accidents.*' Such was your solicitude.

It was in analogous terms, and with equal sincerity (how can we evade the comparison?), that M. de Cavour, on the eve of Castelfidardo, proclaimed to Europe, in another famous memorandum, that he only wished to '*cross the Pontifical territory TO DEFEND IT FROM THE REVOLUTION* against which he was about to fight on Neapolitan soil.'

It was thus again that, in concluding the convention of the 15th of September, to remove your capital to Florence, you proclaimed that you would not enter Rome save by '*moral influences.*' Doubtless they were such as were used by your generals on the 20th of September to throw down the walls of Rome and to force the Porta Pia.

It was thus, in fact, that at the very beginning of this war in Italy, the object from the first hour of such well-founded alarm in all Catholic hearts, the Emperor himself declared solemnly, and reiterated the declaration by the mouth of his Ministers to the episcopate and the deputies, that this war was not undertaken 'to shake the Pontifical throne, which we ourselves have reëstablished; and that ALL THE RIGHTS OF THE TEMPORAL SOVEREIGNTY OF THE POPE would be respected.'

But the Italian Government felt herself the more stringently bound to reiterate these assurances to the Powers and the Catholic body, which had been so often deceived, from the fact that her precedents, her principles, her laws, her acts, all this war which since 1848 she had not ceased to direct against the clergy and the Church, had only too naturally excited the most violent suspicions of her intentions. M. de Cavour, in derision, had adopted this maxim: 'A free Church in a free State.' Now this is what he had already done with the Church and its liberty:

All Church property had been confiscated; all religious orders suppressed; thousands of religious despoiled and hunted down; the nuns turned out of their convents night after night by the carabinieri, and left in the street—'I

thank God,' writes one superior, 'that none of my sisters perished in the high-road;' bishops and archbishops, including the Archbishops of Turin and Cagliari and many others, thrown into prison.

Bishoprics left vacant by the hundred; the concordat with the Holy See violated; all ecclesiastical immunities, stipulated in a treaty with Rome, abolished.

The Siccardi law voted, to the cry of 'Down with the priests!'

The marriage law voted on the 5th of June 1852, in spite of the Pope, in spite of the concordat, in spite of the bishops.

The law of the 25th November 1854, formally violating against the Church the 29th art. of the national statute: 'All property, WITHOUT ANY EXCEPTION, is inviolable.'

In vain from the tribune a former Minister of the King, Charles Albert reminded the Government that these words, 'WITHOUT ANY EXCEPTION,' which are not to be found in any other Constitution, were added to the statute by the King himself, and precisely with the object of protecting ecclesiastical property. In vain, pointing to the statue of Charles Albert, he exclaimed: 'Certainly, gentlemen, if the King Charles Albert, whose statue is before your eyes, could have foreseen how to-day you dare to interpret his intentions and his acts, he would have drawn back that hand stretched out to swear to the Constitution. Yes, gentlemen, he would indignantly have withdrawn it!' Noble but fruitless words. The law was voted.

And what you did in Piedmont, you hastened to do in all the provinces violently annexed. And all this work of spoliation was crowned and consummated by the following four laws:

7th July 1866. Law regarding religious corporations and on the conversion of real property belonging to ecclesiastical institutions.

15th August 1867. Law on the liquidation of the dominions of the Church.

27th July 1868. Law as to the pensions to be granted to the members of suppressed religious corporations.

Lastly, *11th August 1870.* Law on the conversion of the property of the parishes and ecclesiastical fabrics.

I must not omit, either, the law which subjects the clergy to military conscription, and renders recruiting for the priesthood almost impossible.

I am assured, sir, that as deputy you have not voted for all these measures. But still, as Minister and President of the Council, you enforce them. And this is what makes me, in this Letter, appeal to your honour and good faith.

Such, then, were your laws, your acts, your precedents, and your fidelity to your promises. That is why, before the invasion of Rome, to prevent the stupor into which the whole Catholic world was about to be thrown by this last act of aggression, you hastened to make the solemn declarations which I have quoted above. And after the invasion, you again renewed your promises.

Thus, when the plébiscite took place as usual under the pressure of your arms, the King solemnly accepted this plébiscite ; but in accepting it, what does he do ? He declares that ' the firm resolution of the Government is to *guarantee, by efficacious and lasting means*, the liberty and spiritual independence of the Holy See.'*

Very soon came the question of elections and the proposal to remove the Italian Parliament to Rome. In proposing to the King the convocation of the new Chamber, the Government reminded him of the promise we have just read, and added themselves :

' This ROYAL PROMISE was a confirmation of the votes of the Italian Parliament and of the declarations made, both before and after the entry of the Italian troops into Rome, by your Majesty's Government to the Sovereign Pontiff and to THE CATHOLIC POWERS.'

' The Italian Government,' they continue, ' wished to justify the expectation of Europe AND THE CONFIDENCE OF THE CATHOLIC WORLD.'†

One reproach especially, which wounds them to the quick, and which they are determined to clear themselves from at

* Words quoted in setting forth the motion of the ' *Project*' of extending to Rome the laws cited above, *presented to the Chamber of Deputies in the sitting of the 20th November 1872, by the Minister De Falco, together with the rest of the Ministry.*

† ' *Rispondere alla fiducia d' Europa e all' aspettazione del mondo Cattolico.*' *Ibid.* p. 2.