

LEO XIII. AND HIS PROBABLE POLICY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649423460

Leo XIII. And His Probable Policy by Bernard O'Reilly

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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BERNARD O'REILLY

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BY REV. BERNARD O'REILLY, L.D.
(LAVAL.)

WITH PORTRAIT.

NEW YORK:
PETER F. COLLIER, PUBLISHER,
38 PARK PLACE,
1878.

Harvard College Library
 Gift of
 Mass. Hist. Society
 June 24, 1901.

C. 4621. 7, 9

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LEO XIII.,

AND

HIS PROBABLE POLICY.

THE protracted and eventful pontificate of Pius IX. is ended, and that of Leo XIII. has begun. The dead Pope has been for thirty-two years the most conspicuous personage of the civilized world; his name revered by the great body of Christians, who acknowledged him as their religious guide, and his person rendered doubly dear and sacred to them by the unparalleled misfortunes that befel his later years, while even Protestants were drawn to him by his gentle virtues, and feel a touch of reverence and pity for one whose charity embraced not only those who differed from him in belief, but the very men who despoiled him of his temporal sovereignty and daily assailed with new limitations his freedom in the discharge of his high spiritual office.

With the memory of a life of blameless purity, unwearied self-sacrifice and invincible constancy in vindicating the sacred rights of his Church and his own essential independence, he has bequeathed to his successor political and religious difficulties such as no one of his predecessors ever had to face.

The question is uppermost in the minds of the two hundred millions who owe him allegiance in things spiritual, as well as in the minds of those who differ most widely from them in belief—Who is the new Pope? What are his antecedents? And what is likely to be

his policy toward the revolutionary government of the kingdom of Italy, and toward the statesmen outside of Italy who have resolved to abridge to the utmost within their respective countries the ancient claims of the Roman See and the liberties of the Roman Catholic Church ?

Let us answer these queries as best we can, while the public interest in the new Pope and his probable policy is so keen.

I.

And, in the first place, who is Leo XIII. ?

If to be born amid the most sublime mountain scenery, and the stupendous ruins of the most ancient European civilization, be conducive to health of body and mind, then the subject of this sketch was singularly privileged ; and if to be descended of noble men, whose blood from time immemorial was acknowledged to be derived from the best in the old Latin land, then was he doubly privileged.

Very many of those who will read these pages will remember that beautiful line of railway, "the Pia Latina," one of the many substantial boons which the constantly disturbing action of the Revolution allowed Pius IX. to bestow upon his beloved people. Thousands of our American travelers have journeyed with intense delight in early springtide or in the late lovely autumn weather of Rome along this great Italian pathway, passing, it may be, on an early May morning beneath and around the volcanic masses crowned by Monte Albano with its lakes ; gazing, entranced, as they passed by, now on the luxuriantly wooded slopes that rose up from the plain on their left, and now as their eyes rested to the right on the vast plain of the Campagna and the

marshes which stretched westward and southward to the sea, they beheld the whole earth covered with a wild and marvelous profusion of flowers of every hue.

Gradually ascending the lower slopes of the foothills, the railway winds around the towering, verdure-clad mountain mass, with olive groves and vineyards on either side, till the town of Velletri (the ancient Velitræ) is reached, embowered as in a paradise, and we are in the *Ager Volscorum*, the territory of the Volscian league, so familiar to us in our school-days, when we plodded through the toilsome pages of Livy, or delighted in the classic narratives of Rollin or Fergusson. If from Velletri one looks eastward across the world of olive and vine-clad hills, and deep green ravines that descend to the valley of the Tebbia, the view is arrested by the majestic wall of the Volscian Mountains rising nearly five thousand feet from the level of the surrounding plain. The entire western crests are studded here and there with modern towns or villages, nestling among the ruins of cities and strongholds famed in early Roman history, or clinging amid inaccessible precipices to other gigantic ruins left by the first Pelasgic colonists of Italy. The broad top of this mountain chain, of that portion, especially, which is nearest to Velletri, and which bears the name of Monte Lepini, is covered with a dense growth of oaks and chestnuts, the immemorial haunt of brigands, and from the crag on which the modern Cori (the ancient Cora) stands with its cluster of ruined pagan temples, a beautiful (but not very secure) road leads through the intervening forest to the little town of Carpineto, situated near the eastern brow of the broad ridge. A mountain torrent, Il Rio, runs beneath it where it clings to the declivity, and falls into the Sacco on the eastward of the Volscian chain. The town is one of a

group of strongholds famous since the remotest historical times. To the north and west of it lies Segni (the ancient Signia), founded by the last of the Tarquins; on the site of an old Pelasgian fortress and across the rich and beautiful valley of the Sacco lie perched Anagni and Ferentino and Alatri, every one of them founded many ages before Rome itself existed.

Those only who have tarried for weeks on this classic soil, among these castellated heights, around which so many civilizations have ebbed and flowed, know how entrancing is the interest which attaches to every one of these venerable cities, and how surpassingly grand and picturesque is the nature which displays its powers and its charms on every side.

They are a noble and a kindly race who have held these flowery crags for three thousand years and more, it may be. The waters of the Rio seem to impart a gentle spirit of courtesy and hospitality to all those who dwell along its turbulent course. The fierce animosities which before the Christian era armed Roman against Volscian and the Volscians against the neighboring Hernici, and which, during the middle ages so often broke out in sanguinary and ruinous feuds, slumber at present as profoundly as the fires beneath the lovely lakes of Albano and Nemi. But they are a proud and an intellectual race, clinging as tenaciously to the glorious memories of their past, as the Pelasgian and Cyclopean walls still cling immovably to the crests of the surrounding precipices.

From the noblest and best of that ancient and gentle race, sprang Gioachimo Pecci, on whom has descended with the mantle of Pius IX. the name so dear to Pius himself of Leo. Strange that the man so loved by both should have been taken by the one as his model in all