

# ENCYCICAL LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER ON ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND THE PROPAGATION OF HIS THIRD ORDER.

THE Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII., has addressed a long Encyclical Letter (dated September 17) to all the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops and Bishops of the Catholic World in the grace and communion of the Apostolic See. His Holiness says:—

"A happy circumstance enables the Christian world to celebrate at a not far distant interval, the memory of two men who, having been called to receive in heaven the eternal reward of their holiness, have left on earth a crowd of disciples, the ever-increasing off-spring from their virtues. For, after the centenary solemnities in honour of St. Benedict, the father and law-giver of the monks of the West, the opportunity of paying public honors to St. Francis of Assisi will likewise be furnished by the seventh centenary of his birth. It is not without reason that we see therein a merciful intention of Divine Providence. For, by calling on men to celebrate the birthdays of these illustrious Fathers, God would seem to wish that they should be induced to keep in mind their signal merits, and at the same time to understand that the Religious Orders they founded ought on no account to have been the objects of such unbecoming acts of violence, past of all in those States where the seed of civilization and of fame were cast by their labour, their genius and their zeal."

The Holy Father then expresses his confidence that the celebration of these feasts will be of advantage not only to the birthplace of Francis but to the whole world, and highly approves of them. He also says that from his youth he had been accustomed to admire Francis, and to pay him a particular veneration; he also glories in being a member of the Franciscan family, and having "climbed with eagerness and joy the sacred heights of Alvernia: then the image of the great man presented itself to us wherever we trod, and that solitude teeming with memories held our spirit rapt in silent contemplation."

After suggesting an imitation of the virtues of St. Francis and the advantage to be derived therefrom, the Pope writes that it is his wish "not only that these letters convey to you the public testimony of our devotion to St. Francis, but that they should moreover excite your charity to labour with us for the salvation of men by means of the remedy we have pointed out."

Speaking of the 12th century, when St. Francis appeared, the Sovereign Pontiff says:—

"That period is sufficiently well-known, and its character of mingled virtues and vices. The Catholic faith was deeply rooted in men's souls, and it was a glorious sight to see multitudes inflamed by piety set forth for Palestine, resolved to conquer or die. But licentiousness had greatly impaired popular morality, and nothing was more needed by men than a return to Christian sentiments. Now the perfection of Christian virtues lies in that disposition of soul which dares all that is arduous or difficult; its symbol is the Cross, which those who would follow Jesus Christ must carry on their shoulder. The effects of this disposition are a heart detached from mortal things, complete self-control, and a gentle and resigned endurance of adversity. In fine, the love of God and of one's neighbor is the mistress and sovereign of all other virtues; such is its power that it wipes away all the hardships that accompany the fulfilment of duty, and renders the hardest labours not only bearable, but agreeable. There was a dearth of such virtue in the 12th century; for too many among men, enlaved by the things of this world, either coveted madly honours and wealth, or lived a life of luxury and self-gratification. All power was centred in a few, and had almost become an instrument of oppression to the wretched and despised masses; and those even who ought by their profession to have been an example to others, had not avoided defiling themselves with the prevalent vice. The extinction of charity in divers places was followed by scourges manifold and daily; envy, jealousy, and hatred were rife; and minds were so divided and hostile that on the slightest pretext neighbouring cities waged war among themselves, and individuals armed themselves against one another."

"In this century appeared St. Francis. Yet with wondrous resolution and simplicity he undertook to place before the eyes of the ageing world, in his words and deeds, the complete model of Christian perfection."

After speaking briefly of St. Dominic and his work, the Holy Father proceeds:

"It was certainly no mere chance that brought to the ears of the youth these counsels of the Gospel: Do not possess gold nor silver nor money in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, nor two coats, nor a staff (Matt. x., 9, 10). And again: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come follow me.' (Matt. xix., 21)."

The Pontiff then traces the chief events in the life of St. Francis and the rise of his Order, recounting the names of the principal of the illustrious persons who were enrolled amongst the members entitled by Gregory IX., "*Soldiers of Christ, new Machabees*." The Third Order of St. Francis receives special commendation, the Holy Father saying: "Thus domestic peace, incorrupt morality, gentleness of behaviour, the legitimate use and preservation of private wealth, civilization and social stability, spring as from a root from the Franciscan Third Order; and it is in great measure to St. Francis that Europe owes their preservation."

A very general interest will be felt in the following sentences of this admirable Encyclical:—

"Italy, however, owes more to Francis than any other nation whatever; which, as it was the principal theatre of his virtues, so also most received his benefits, and, indeed, at a time when many were bent on multiplying the sufferings of mankind, he was always offering the right hand of help to the afflicted and the cast-down; he rich in the greatest poverty never desisted from relieving other's wants, neglectful of his own. In his mouth his native tongue, newborn, sweetly uttered its infant cries; he expressed the power of

charity and of poetry with it in his canticles composed for the common people, and which have proved not unworthy of the admiration of a learned posterity. We owe to the mind of Francis that a certain breath and inspiration nobler than human has stirred up the minds of our countrymen so that, in reproducing his deeds in painting, poetry, and sculpture, emulation has stirred the industry of the greatest artists. Dante even found in Francis matter for his grand and most sweet verse; Cimabue and Giotto drew from his history subjects which they immortalized with the pencil of a Parrhasius; celebrated architects found in him the motive for their magnificent structures, whether at the tomb of the Poor Man himself or at the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, the witness of so many and so great miracles. And to these temples men from all parts are wont to come in veneration for the father of Assisi of the poor, to whom he had utterly despoiled himself, of all human things, so the gifts of the divine bounty largely and copiously flowed. Hence it is clear that from this one man a host of benefits has flowed into the Christian and civil republic. But since that spirit of his is thoroughly and surpassingly Christian, is wonderfully fitted for all times and places, no one can doubt that the Franciscan institution would be specially beneficial in this our age. And especially for this reason, that the tone and temper of our times seem, for many reasons to be similar to those; for as in the twelfth century divine charity had grown cold, so also is it now; nor is the neglect of Christian duties small, whether from ignorance or negligence; and with the same bent and like desires many consume their days in hunting for the conveniences of life, and greedily following after their pleasures. Overflowing with luxury, they waste their own and covet the substance of others; extolling, indeed, the name of human fraternity, they nevertheless speak more fraternally, than they act; for they are carried away by self love, and the genuine charity towards the poorer and the helpless is daily diminished. In the time we are speaking of, the manifold errors of the Albigenes, by stirring up the masses against the power of the Church, had disturbed society and paved the way to a certain kind of Socialism. And in our day, likewise, the favourers and propagators of Materialism have increased, who obstinately deny that submission to the Church is due, and thence proceeding gradually beyond all bounds, do not even spare the civil power; they approve of violence and sedition among the people, they attempt agrarian outbreaks, they flatter the desires of the proletariat, and they weaken the foundations of domestic and public order."

Recommending the institutes of St. Francis as a remedy for these "great miseries," the Holy Father, amongst other advantages obtains, notes the following: "Lastly, the question that politicians so laboriously aim at solving, viz., that poverty is not wanting in dignity; that the rich should be merciful and munificent, and the poor content with their lot and labour; and since neither was born for these changeable goods, the one is to attain heaven by patience the other by liberality."

The Holy Father then mentions the special desire he has to see the spread of the Third Order, and directs the attention of the Bishops to this end. In conclusion, he writes:—

"We ask it above all, and yet with more reason of the Italians, from whom community of country and the particular abundance of benefits received demand a greater devotion to St. Francis, and also a greater gratitude. Thus, at the end of seven centuries, Italy and the entire Christian world would be brought back from disorder to peace, from destruction to safety by the favour of the Saint of Assisi. Let us especially in these days beg this grace, in united prayer to Francis himself; let us implore it of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God who always rewarded the piety and faith of her client by heavenly protection and by particular gifts."

His Holiness then bestows his Apostolic Benediction on all the Bishops and on the flock committed to each of them.

## THE LAND QUESTION IN SKYE.

THE following in reference to the land dispute in Skye appeared in the daily papers of Monday, Nov 20:—

The land agitation in Skye is assuming a serious aspect. The difficulties of the authorities in maintaining order is increasing, and all attempts to put the law in force have failed. At the Braes, the scene of the troubles some months ago, matters are more aggravated than ever. The tenants are defiant, and in view of the threats that have been used the authorities find it impossible with safety to serve the writs upon them. The long delay in this service, which is a practical victory to the crofters, made them more defiant, and now that they have the sympathy of the Glendale crofters and others in the district their determination to resist by force the officers of the law is strengthened. The Invernesshire authorities, upon whom devolves the task of maintaining order and serving the writs upon the recalcitrant tenants, are at their wits end. They applied to the Government to send troops from Fort George to awe the inhabitants of Skye, but this was refused, and now they have issued circulars to the authorities in the various Scotch counties and burghs asking for assistance. This, too, in many of the cases where replies have been received, is refused. Edinburgh gave an emphatic refusal to-day, and Aberdeen has followed the same course. What may now be done it is difficult to say. Meantime the crofters of the Braes are keeping vigilant watch and are prepared to repel the sheriff's officers by force, if any attempt is made to serve writs upon them. Their power has been increased by the arrival of the men from the fishing which just closed. It is feared that there will be riots and bloodshed before the law can be enforced. At Glendale the situation, though less alarming, is strained, and the action of the crofters in beating off the shepherds employed to take charge of the disputed grazing ground has intensified the feeling of the population. It has been decided in the event of the agent for the landlord making his appearance, that the tenants should meet in a body and turn him off the ground. Placards to this effect have been posted. The matter is under the consideration of the Crown authorities.