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Current Topics.

AT HOME & ABROAD.



SOME fourteen years ago it happened to us to be present in a Parisian salon into which there entered a lady, whom circumstances had rendered an authority on matters then passing at the Tuileries. She came in smiling and said she, "I have heard the most ridiculous story. Some one or another has invented a tale about the Empress, and reported that she appeared at the ball last night in a tunic of peacock's feathers that hardly reached lower than her knees. Her Majesty's dress really was a more than ordinarily plain one of black velvet, but you'll find that she'll figure as emulating Juno in every one of the English papers." It turned out exactly as this lady said, and in about six months after we heard the *canard* advanced to the prejudice of her Imperial Majesty in a remote village of an English northern county. The staid folk in whose house we then were uplifted hands and eyes in reprobation of the dreadful woman who appeared publicly in the scant attire of a goddess, and all stuck over with the feathers of a most gaudy and conceited bird. They would not be persuaded that the thing was a mere invention, and, for aught we know to the contrary, may to this day believe that the catastrophe of Sedan was the reward righteously bestowed on such goings on. We, however, have been admonished by this little episode of the trust that it is often fit to place in the facts chronicled by the foreign correspondents of the English Press. A story somewhat of the same nature we take it is that said now to be related by the Count de Pallikao, who, they say, affirms that the Empress took a dislike to him because of a disappointment caused to her from a report which arose that he was bringing to her from China a chaplet of black pearls of untold value, but which proved to be a mere curiosity, and of no intrinsic worth. Does Pallikao hold that his presence must of necessity be delightful to all those who have experience of it? We, indeed, think it plain that if under existing circumstances he has written this tale attributed to him there must certainly be something dislikable about him, even independent of black pearls. We think, moreover, that it is excessively unlikely a high and noble lady, such as the Empress Eugénie, could be influenced in likings or dislikings by such paltry considerations as this. We think it especially unlikely because she is known to have sold jewels to the value of £25,000, and which were otherwise precious through association, in order that she might obtain money to found a charitable institution, and likewise because, taken all in all, a nobler Queen or Empress there never sat upon the throne of France, with the exception alone it may be of one or two who were saints or very nearly so.

WHO says that we are not prepared to fight the Russians? It is to be hoped they have not got their spies at work here, for if they only hear of the valour that is brimming over amongst us and oozing out in all directions—not through the "tops of our fingers," but in regular down-right hard knocks, they'll be very sure to steer clear, at least of Dunedin,—and, in fact, it would be a perfect relief to us to get a lick at them. The echoes of the whacks so valorously bestowed by Mr. Logan, Junr. have hardly died away amongst us, when we have another member of our upper ten thousand making the welkin ring with the sound of his fisticuffs, and doing his very best to "punch the head," of a stalwart foe. It makes one feel quite comfortable in these threatening times to know that we are surrounded by a whole brood of game-cocks that are only longing for an opportunity to show fight. Those of us who are peaceably disposed, if indeed there be any such amongst us, which we now incline to doubt, will have nothing to do by-and-by but hide their heads in the blankets and leave our fiery Hectors to battle it out on their behalf. The very lawyers themselves throw down their briefs and their umbrellas in the mud, in order to have a round at the noble art; and, if we may judge by the signs of the times, it will not be long ere our magistrates join in the *mêlée*. It evidently has a powerful, and perhaps even an irresistible, attraction for the Bench. Meantime our vocabulary has received a most valuable addition, "Thorough Blackguard," and "Insolent Scoundrel," are most choice expressions, and we may frequently

have occasion to employ them. We, of course, had been for some time acquainted with them, and even with the characters described by them; it is impossible to go through life without acquiring a good deal of knowledge which it might perhaps be bliss not to possess. But, the fact is, we did not until now know that these were terms fit for polished lips to utter; it seems, however, that they are so. A learned member of the Bar of New Zealand has not scrupled to employ them, and, what is more, the Magisterial Bench has pronounced him perfectly excusable in having done so. "For such conduct," said J. N. Watt, Esq., R.M., referring to Mr. Millar's having stopped Mr. Denniston in the street and complaining of his action in a certain case, "Mr. Denniston had no means of obtaining legal redress, and could be pardoned for using the language he had done." His Worship added, indeed, that "the defendant might have laid an information against Mr. Denniston for insulting language, but he had taken the law into his own hands." Still it may not unreasonably be asked what would have been the use of Mr. Millar's laying this information if the Resident Magistrate were prepared to consider the language complained of excusable? This, however, is beside the question; what we are concerned with is that we have gained two strong expressions which it may be convenient for us by-and-by to use. "Thorough blackguard," and "insolent scoundrel," are parliamentary. Will our readers remember this, so that hereafter, if we come to use either the one or the other, or it may be both together, they shall not consider themselves entitled to say we speak scurrilously or express ourselves by any means in an ungentlemanly manner. And, moreover, we have to inform any one towards whom it may seem fit to us to employ these terms, that in return they must not attempt to lay a finger on us, otherwise they will subject themselves to having their heads punched "as severely as possible," and to being fined into the bargain. Truly our education is being perfected by the Bar of New Zealand, and as we learned from Mr. Haggitt's defence that "personal violence," on one attacking by word only, is occasionally commendable, so now we learn from Mr. Denniston's example that disgraceful language is excusable, and the seal is set upon our knowledge by the approbation of the Bench.

THE Lenten Pastoral addressed last year to the clergy and people of Perugia by their Cardinal Archbishop, the present Pope, has recently excited a considerable degree of attention everywhere. It is indeed a remarkable utterance, distinguished alike for learning, thought, and piety, and is most deserving of study. It is very desirable that it should be read in its entirety by readers of all classes, but, as we know that many persons are deterred from reading grave documents when they appear of any length, we have undertaken to give an abstract of it, in order to bring its principal points within the easy reach of all who peruse our columns. The subject then chosen by His Eminence was "Civilization, and the relation borne by it to the Church." Civilization, in whose interests it is said that churches and ministers must be limited, and places of sin multiplied; that demands tasteless and shameless plays; in whose name are practised shameful usury and dishonest games. In whose name also a filthy Press debases the mind, and prostituted art defiles the eye and corrupts the heart. Society progresses, and tends towards perfection. Man in society goes on towards perfection in three points of view—his physical well-being, his moral relations with his fellows, and his political conditions. The different degrees of this successive development to which men united in society attain are *civilization*. But is it true that civilization cannot bear its fruits in a society which lives in the spirit of Jesus Christ, and in the midst of which the Catholic Church speaks with the voice of a mother and mistress? Will a man be condemned not to mix in the society of those who rejoice in civilization in the physical, moral, and religious orders, unless he is rebellious to the Church, and if he does not repudiate her? It is easy for men of good-will if they reflect calmly, and make an impartial research into facts to answer this question triumphantly for the Church. The subject, however, is too extensive to be treated of in a pastoral letter. Part of it only can be taken up, and that part is a view of civilization in respect to the manner in which it realizes the conditions by which man is perfectionated under the physical and moral relation. This point of view is the most important, because of the disordered tendency of our epoch, which is chiefly pre-occupied with things that regard merely temporal science and results. Would it, then, be possible for a man, while following the teaching of the Church, to attain to that degree of civilization he might attain to were he independent of the Church? Montesquieu gives the answer. ("Esprit des Loix," 24, III.) "Admirable thing! The Christian Religion, which, seeming to have at heart only our hap-