

THE PRISONS OF ITALY.

(From the *Catholic Times*.)

WHEN, over a quarter of a century ago, Mr. Gladstone visited the prisons and interviewed the prisoners of Naples, the account he gave of the horrors he had seen and heard there raised in this country a storm of righteous anger against King Bomba which still echoes in the memory of many. Allowing for the exaggeration of passion, prejudice and oratory, the picture drawn by Mr. Gladstone was, doubtless, in the main, a true one. Some thirty years ago, Naples was still a long way behind England in the matter of prison reforms; there still flourished there filth, darkness, chains, insolence and cruelty in gaolers and guardians, and other additions to the punishment of crime and vice which should form no legitimate part of it; thieves, robbers and murderers were, in fact, minus the torture, as inhumanly treated in the Neapolitan prisons as political prisoners are in the dungeons of Holy Russia at the present time.

This outcry against the prisons of Naples was followed by a still louder one against the prisons of Rome, which must be, it was confidently asserted, even worse, owing to the traditions of the Inquisition that still survived there—that blessed Inquisition that has served these three hundred years as a rod for Protestants to whip the Church with, the vast majority of those who use it knowing absolutely nothing about the said Inquisition, or confounding it with another institution, about which they know little more, *i.e.*, the Spanish Inquisition, which the Church through succeeding reigns condemned and opposed by word and action. The abominable condition of the Papal prisons was, anyhow, one of those dreadful evils which was to disappear with the collapse of the Temporal Power, and many humane and well-meaning people were eager for the advent of Italian Unity, because to them it meant the abolition of the bigotry, tyranny and cruelty which were the characteristics of the Papal Government. Many of these simple people rejoiced in the spoliation of the Pope, not because they had any particular dislike to the Pope, but because his fall was a deliverance to those poor Romans whom he oppressed; and they have lived in a fool's paradise since the new reign began, fondly believing that it had worked all necessary reforms, and brought light into the dark places, and peace and plenty everywhere. These good people must be painfully surprised by the blow dealt at their delusions in the recent revelations of a French gentleman concerning the prisons, as they are now, under the rule of a Liberal King. Monsieur des Houx, the editor of the *Journal de Rome*, wrote an article in that journal last January, defending the principles of the Temporal Power. He was arrested by the Italian Government, tried and condemned to a month's imprisonment. M. des Houx heard the sentence without dismay. He was proud to be condemned by the enemies of the Church for having upheld her rights, and he and his friends felt there was matter rather for congratulation than condolence in the event. When he reached the prison, however, his feelings underwent a change. Instead of being treated as a political offender, and allowed a separate room, and to provide himself with food and books, etc., he was handed over to the common gaoler, stripped, his clothes searched in every fold, even to the lining of his boots, everything taken out of his pockets; and after these preliminary indignities he was locked up in the common cell with the scum of the city. This prison, the Carceri Nuove, was built by the Popes for the accommodation of one hundred prisoners, but the free and Liberal Government of the King of Italy contrives to cram six hundred into it. Pius IX. added to the original building a certain number of small rooms for young and comparatively innocent convicts, whom it was desirable to withdraw from the companionship of habitual and hardened criminals. These rooms are now hired out at the rate of nine francs a month to any prisoner, thief, forger or assassin who can afford to pay for the luxury of isolation. But then he must also pay for his food—the one meal a day allowed—so that the Government does a good stroke of business by the arrangement. Except for the deliverance from close proximity to the unfortunate inmates of the common room, the change is no great gain for the prisoner. The walls and the floor of the cells literally swarm with vermin, crawling, hopping, sucking, stinging—vermin of every kind and sort. The small mercy of being allowed to use insect powder was denied M. des Houx both in the common cell and the private one, on the plea that he might have used it to poison himself. His friends, amongst whom were some of the most distinguished Conservatives in Rome, were only allowed to see him once a week at the grating of the common room, where the friends of the criminals assembled to see them, the crowd on either side of the grating bawling at the top of their voices to get heard above the general din. The tortures M. des Houx underwent from the vermin that literally devoured him day and night was the worst part of the physical suffering he underwent—cold, hunger, and gloom amounting almost to darkness being as nothing compared to the horror of being thus preyed upon. But there was a moral torture in reserve for him more intolerable still. A poor newspaper clerk, who had been condemned at the same time as the editor, but who was in the madhouse, suffering from insanity, when the sentence was pronounced, was, after some days, removed thence to undergo his term of imprisonment, and placed in the cell next to M. des Houx. The shrieks and ravings of this poor maniac were so terrible, especially during the night, that M. des Houx fancied sometimes that he himself must go mad from the effect of them. Nor were these the only disturbances that made the night horrible. The gaolers came round at stated hours, three times, we think, during the night, and with iron bars tried the doors and the bull's eyes (six feet from the floor of the cells), to ascertain whether the prisoners had been tampering with the locks or the gratings!

The gratuitous vexations and petty cruelties of the authorities were, in fact, ceaseless and beyond counting, and the condition of the premises under the rule of the King is so deplorable that they sigh for the old *regime* as for a reign of clemency and comparative comfort. We learn, by official statistics, that the prisons in United Italy contain one hundred thousand inmates. We can imagine what the effect is likely to be on the

general population, so considerable a portion of whom pass their lives coming and going from outer haunts of vice to these sinks of immorality, and hotbeds of crime and blasphemous impiety. The one redeeming light in M. des Houx's description of the Carceri Nuove is the presence of the poor young convict who is employed to serve the occupants of the solitary cells. Diano was condemned to three years imprisonment for perjury; he declares, and M. des Houx believes him, that he swore according to his conscience. He was locked up with the mob of ruffians at first. One day, a foul blasphemy uttered by one of them fired him to an indignant protest; and another wretch struck him on the mouth. In course of time, his patient courage and dignified submission drew the attention of the turnkeys and overseers, and he was promoted to the place of servant to the cell prisoners. His faith supports him under the heavy trial of his position, that old-fashioned Italian faith that formerly made the worst criminals accept any chastisement in this world as a lucky escape from hell-fire in the next.

EASTERN COMPLICATIONS.

(Bombay *Catholic Examiner*.)

THE conditions of peace do great credit to the ambition of France to raise a mighty colonial empire. She is allowed to establish a protectorate in Annam and Tonquin, thus becoming mistress of two large, populous, and fertile provinces. Besides, she is to have free trade with the three rich provinces of Yunnan, Kwang-si, and Kwang-tung, in which lies the metal-bearing region which France yearns for. France never allows herself to be troubled by false modesty, and has secured the largest concession ever extorted from China. Of course she might have got more if she chose, but then she has business to look after on the Nile, and cannot press matters too far just at present. She generously drops the question of the indemnity and contents herself for the present with what she has actually got—at a very good bargain, it must be confessed. England will have cause to rejoice sincerely that there is no longer fear of trouble in the Eastern Seas, though Frenchmen will hardly credit this. Naturally they think we are filled with jealousy and heart-burning at their splendid triumph, a suspicion which may very possibly produce mischief yet, as the lively French nature is easily intoxicated with success. Apart from the influence it may indirectly exercise upon the discussion of the Egyptian question, there are elements of danger in the French occupation of Annam and Tonquin. There may be no very profound reason in the nature of things that France and England should fall out with each other when they both happen to have interests in the same part of the globe, but, somehow or other, they are never very good friends when they find themselves thus thrown together. In her newly-acquired possessions France will find a wide field for the exercise of her peculiar talent for meddling and interfering. When she feels disposed, she can carve another slice out of China or she may pick a quarrel with Burmah, Siam, or any of the hundred-and-one Sban States. Her neighbours are semi-barbarous and weak, and may easily be absorbed by the same process which has succeeded so well in the case of Annam and Tonquin. It may be taken for granted that trouble will ensue some day between us and the French in connection with the Chinese question. There are now three European-Asiatic Powers, of which two are decidedly aggressive. Both are jealous of England, and both are inclined to prey upon China. France and Russia have both got territories continuous with China and separated from our Indian possessions by weak Oriental states. For the present Afghanistan separates us from the Russians, and Burmah and Siam divide us from the French. Whatever fears may have been hitherto entertained of these two Powers forming an alliance dangerous to the peace of Europe, the danger is greater now from the positions they respectively occupy in Asia. Among the gravest possibilities of the future is an alliance of the two conservative Asiatic Powers, India and China, against the two aggressive ones, France and Russia. Perhaps such an alliance will be necessary for the preservation of our Indian Empire; it is the only means which will save China from ultimate partition.

The Natal *Mercury* lays the whole blame of the present disastrous state of Zululand at the door of political agitators of the Colenso school. These would have Cetewayo restored, though they were told what the consequences would be. It says:—"They sowed the wind and they have reaped the whirlwind. The blood-guiltiness is theirs. They brought ruin on Cetewayo himself, and they were indirectly instrumental in bringing about his death, as it is now fully understood at Etshowe that the late King died, whether by poison or otherwise, by the hands of his own people, and probably by his own relatives. To what extent their subsequent intrigues have conduced to the present crisis we cannot at present say, but there is too much reason to believe that the Usutus have been incited to and encouraged in their attitude of hostility by the representations or suggestions of European agitators. But it is bootless at such a moment to discuss the origin of existing and menacing evils. The evils themselves are absolute facts, and have to be grappled with. Causes and influences can be investigated hereafter. What has to be done; what can be done; what may be done—these are the all-important and paramount considerations."

Sage, that simple little plant, is most valuable, its qualities are universal, and too numerous to mention. It lengthens life, it gives health, strength and beauty. Sage also forms one of the best dentifrices I can mention, and because it is so simple and common very few use it; still I again repeat that sage leaves are the healthiest things possible, and if you will but rub your teeth regularly night and morning with them you will never need a toothbrush, powder, or wash. They will thoroughly cleanse your teeth, and keep them not only healthy but white; for depend upon it sage is invaluable for every purpose, as teeth, eyes, breath and memory all benefit by it, therefore we should never be without it.