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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

AN ILLUSTRIOUS EXAMPLE.

It is a very remarkable circumstance in relation to the charges brought against the Irish Bishops of conniving at rebellion and crime that such a charge was brought very strongly against Pope Leo XIII. himself during an early portion of his career, and brought, moreover, for similar reasons, because he was engaged in taking the part of an oppressed peasantry. The following passage from a Life of the Pope, recently published by Mr. John Oldcastle, will fully explain the nature of the case to our readers. It relates to the governorship of the Province of Benevento conferred by Pope Gregory XVI. on the present Pope, who was then Monsignor Pecci :—"Class was divided against class. The tillers of the soil, subject to cruel exactions, were yet unable to form combinations for their mutual protection and support. Such was the account of things sent by agents of the peasantry to the Pope King—an account which was of course impugned by the nobles, who retorted by vaguely but vehemently charging the people with laziness and a love of impracticable politics. The Delegate began his work of pacification in his own way. 'He went amongst the peasantry,' says a careful writer; 'he visited them in their own homes; he questioned them and cross-questioned them about their affairs, and all this with such gentleness of manner and such deep sympathy for their hard lot that they took courage, whereas before they had been full of fears, and boldly told the history of their sufferings and wrongs. The nobles and officials next came under the Delegate's notice, their accounts were overhauled, and their administration subjected to a searching examination. They were compelled to meet every precise charge that any of the peasantry chose to make against them. The accuser and the accused were brought face to face and their evidence taken by the Delegate in person. He could afford to show himself rigidly impartial, for he had under his immediate jurisdiction all the military and police forces of the district. Besides, he was too alert to be hoodwinked and too firm to be terrified. In a short time it became easy to see in what direction the judgment and sympathies of the Delegate were tending. The officials and nobles began to grow alarmed. Recourse was had to intrigue. An impeachment was carried to Rome of the Delegate's manner of procedure. 'He was undermining the legitimate authority of the lords of the soil; he was openly siding with the peasantry; he was inciting them to disrespect and disaffection towards their superiors; he slighted the aristocracy, and, indeed, snubbed them; he would not listen to the advice of the friends of good government who had a stake in the country; and, in short, he was interfering with the influence of property and position on the masses of the people. He was, in other words, a revolutionary ruler; and if he were permitted to remain in the province, Benevento would be for ever lost to the Patrimony of Peter.' These were very grave charges. But Pope Gregory refused to move or interfere in any way. He had deliberately and with open eyes chosen his man and was determined to trust him. Any faltering or hesitation would have been a confession of weakness, and of all things weakness would have been just at that time the most fatal. Consequently the Delegate was left with a free hand to work out the problem in his own way." The Pope, therefore, may not only be looked upon as qualified by his sympathy for the people of Ireland and his knowledge of their disposition as a faithful Catholic people to understand their cause, but as exceptionally capable of doing so by means of his own personal experiences. He knows by personal experience the nature of their oppressors and accusers, and the firmness with which he acted in Benevento is still a chief feature in his character.

A HERO OF '98.

Mr. Lecky in a recently published volume of his History of England in the Eighteenth Century speaks thus of Lord Edward Fitzgerald :—Only a single discordant note on foreign politics was this session heard in Parliament, and it proceeded from a young man of thirty who had no political weight or ability, though the charm of his character and the deep tragedy of his early death have given him an enduring place in the hearts of his countrymen. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the younger brother of the Duke of Leinster, had, through the influence of his brother, been elected for the county of Kildare during his absence, and contrary to his wish, in 1790. His life had hitherto been purely military. When a very young man, he had served with distinction at the close of the American War, under Lord Rawdon, and was afterwards for some time quartered in British America. His artless and touching correspondence with his mother has been preserved, and it enables us to trace very clearly the outlines of his character. Warm-hearted, tender, pure-minded, and social to an unusual degree, he endeared himself to a wide circle, and his keen devotion to his profession gave promise of a distinguished military c[illegible]; but he was not a man of serious or well-reasoned convictions, [illegible]e had all the temperament of a sentimentalist and an enthusiast [illegible]such men the new lights which had arisen in France were as [illegible]ttractive as the candle to the moth. Already in Canada the philosophy of Rousseau had obtained an empire over his mind, and on his return to Europe he plunged wildly into revolutionary politics. In the Autumn of 1792 he was staying at Paris with Paine, and he took part in a banquet to celebrate the victory of the Republic over the invaders, at which toasts were drunk to the universal triumph of the principles of the Revolution and the abolition of all hereditary titles and feudal distinctions. Such a proceeding on the part of an English officer could hardly be passed over, and Lord Edward was summarily dismissed from the army. In Parliament he appears to have been a silent member till an address to the Lord Lieutenant was moved, thanking him for having suppressed the National Guard which had been enrolled in imitation of the French, and pledging the House to concur in all measures that were necessary for the suppression of sedition and disaffection. Fitzgerald, starting from his seat, vehemently expressed his disapprobation of the address, and pronounced the Lord Lieutenant and the majority of the House the worst subjects the King had. The House was cleared, and a scene of confusion followed which has not been reported. Lord Edward's explanation of his words was of such a nature that it was unanimously voted by the House 'unsatisfactory and insufficient.' On the following day some kind of apology was at last extorted, but it was so imperfect that a large minority voted against receiving it. The incident would be hardly worth recording but for the subsequent career of Lord Edward, and it is also remarkable because he alone in the Irish Parliament represented sentiments which were spreading widely through the country."

DISPLEASING AND IMPRACTICABLE.

"I do not see how any Irishman can be drawn into the McGlynn and George movement by a contemplation of Mr. George's theories," said Joseph Medill of the Chicago *Tribune* the other day. "Indeed, and in fact, I should think that a careful scrutiny of the George theories would have the contrary tendency. That is, that it would repel Irishmen. In Ireland the controversy that has been going on for twenty years past with such intensity that it has finally convulsed two continents has been one long struggle for a reduction of rents and their final abolition. The Irish agitators have been aiming at a condition of things where there should be no rents—where there should be small landed proprietors. Every concession made by the English Government has been in the direction of reduced rents. The English statesmen have thought that a reduction of rents would at least be palliative. Now the George theories, if I know anything about it, would make all the taxes payable from the land. What is that but a great rental? It would be the aggregation of all the evils that the Irish claim they have been suffering under in Ireland and from which they have been demanding relief. How can they possibly support a movement for the establishment of such a principle in their free country is more than I can see. I don't believe they can do it." Another point made by Mr. Medill was called out by an allusion to the recent visit of Dr. McGlynn to Chicago. "While Dr. McGlynn was with us," said Mr. Medill, "I repeatedly asked him how he was going to reconcile the farmers of the country to the George theory of raising all the public revenue by a tax on the land. He never deigned to answer the inquiries. I told him that I knew he never could convert the farmers of Illinois, but that it would be sufficient for him to explain how he could make the theory acceptable to the three hundred odd thousand of farmers in the state of New York, who have forty-seven thousand square miles of farming land. He did not reply even then, and I