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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE following message relative to the Parnell THE HONESTY OF Commission, was received in Dunedin on December THE CABLE. 14, at 9.30 p.m.:—"A Fenian named Buckley, gave evidence before the Commission to-day. He deposed that he had been ordered to shoot an expelled Land Leaguer, Roche, by name. The attempt failed, and the League gave him 50s to facilitate his escape to America." This message conveys to its readers, as no doubt it was intended that it should, the impression that this Fenian, (Buckley not Buckle) was a reliable witness, and that his evidence had been conclusive. We have now, however, before us the report given by the *Times* of this man's examination and cross-examination, and we see the matter in a somewhat different light. Buckley stated that in November 1880, he had been sworn in as a member of the Fenian Brotherhood, at Causeway in Kerry, and that subsequently he had attended a meeting of the Association at the Land League rooms in the village, admitting afterwards, on cross-examination, that the room was the only public room there, and that it had been used indifferently as Land League room, band room, and Fenian room. His attack upon Roche was made, according to his statement, as follows: Roche was a neighbour of his, lived in fact, in a house adjoining his, and was not on bad terms with him, although they were very cool. He agreed, nevertheless, to shoot him on the proposal of the Land League, to whom he was obnoxious on account of information he had given to the police, and by whom he had been expelled. Buckley, as he alleged, was promised that if he would shoot Roche, he would get costs to America from the funds of the League. He undertook the job, therefore, and this is how he set about it. He had, he said, been given a revolver, with which he was told to practise, and with which he did practise at a stone about the size of a man's head. But previous to his attempt on Roche, and although from having been in the militia he was well acquainted with the proper use of fire-arms, he hid this revolver, ready loaded, in a ditch, for fear it might be discovered by the police in his possession. Armed with this revolver, unexamined from the damp ditch, one evening in June, at half past seven o'clock, when it was broad day light, he met Roche on a road at about five or six hundred yards from the police barrack, and when his head was turned away took aim at him and pulled the trigger, but without effect, as the pistol misfired. Roche heard the click, and turning round asked Buckley to go and help him at some job a little way off. Buckley, however, seized him by the collar of his coat, and tried to fire the three or four other barrels at him, each in turn missing. He then ran away, as it had been arranged, to a house in the village, and Roche went and told the police. In the trial that followed in due course, Roche stated that he had seen neither smoke nor fire, and had only heard the click of the trigger. Buckley, said, that for his part, he produced two witnesses, as had also been arranged, who swore that he had been in their company at the house to which he had escaped after his attempt was made. The consequence was that this man who in the broad daylight had attempted to murder a man who knew him perfectly well, and could swear without faltering to his identity, was only bound over to keep the peace. And it may be especially remarked that the attempt had been made by a known Fenian and an associate of Land Leaguers on a man who stood well with the police, and was at the time under their protection. Sir James Hannen indeed, expressed himself puzzled as to how Buckley had been so dealt with. Another curious circumstance about this bold attempt was that it was in striking contrast with another attempt at murder in which Buckley stated that he had been engaged, and when he had gone with a body of men at night wearing over his clothes a white shirt and with his face blackened. If Sir Charles Russell asked him whether there had been any collusion between him and Roche, the question, under the circumstances, seems natural enough. Sir Charles, nevertheless, hardly expected an answer in the affirmative. Nor is it to be supposed that Buckley was an unsophisticated young countryman who might rationally be excused for talking in a contradictory sort of a manner, and for acting at random. He had, on the contrary, had some very knowing experiences. On one occasion, for example, and before he made the attempt on Roche's life, he had

taken part with that individual in some doubtful transaction relating to a field, concerning which there was a dispute between Roche and a man named Byle, and which Buckley was employed in watching for Ryle. He had again a few years afterwards on visiting London committed an assault on a policeman in rather a peculiar manner. He was told by some Irish people in Marylebone that he was taken for an Irish detective, and that his life was consequently in danger. He, therefore, attacked a policeman and knocked him down, just to give a proof that there was no truth in the rumour. And for this he was sent to Holloway gaol. He had, besides, previously been in gaol for an assault of a somewhat similar kind, and, either before or afterwards, was sent there for drunkenness. Sir Charles Russell, moreover, asked several questions that showed a great many evil reports were in circulation concerning the witness—although, as a matter of course, he denied their truth. As to the money which Buckley had been promised out of the funds of the League for shooting Roche, on applying to the men who had promised it to him he was given fifty shillings with the assurance that the treasurer of the League had no more in hand. On remonstrating, however, he was given a letter to the President of the League who went round with him for the purpose of making a collection, so that enough might be subscribed to take him to America. But a few additional shillings only were the result. Considering, meantime, that Buckley had been merely bound over to keep the peace for a year, and that there was no further danger of ill consequences from the attempt made by him, it is difficult to see the wisdom of his risking the publicity likely to arise in this way, or why, in fact he wanted to go to America at all. It is also difficult to understand how the League which had placed themselves in his power would venture to keep him against his will in the country, where he might be considered likely, in revenge, to turn informer. But for a murder committed in the broad day-light on a public road close to a police barrack, and on the person of a man under the protection of the police as Roche was at the time;—committed moreover with a revolver kept loaded in a damp ditch and not previously examined by a man understanding the care of firearms, a revolver besides not one of whose barrels would go off, fifty shillings was probably a sufficient price if not positively a generous one. Had the magistrates not had some suspicion of Roche's honesty they would certainly never have let Buckley off so easily, for the oath of any witness he, a known Fenian and in intimate relation with Land Leaguers, could bring forward would not have stood for one moment against that of the man expelled from the Land League and under police protection. Buckley's explanation, again, as to the magistrates distrusting Roche because he spoke of hearing a bullet whiz past his ear without seeing smoke or hearing a shot, was not sufficient to account for the leniency shown. A man so attacked must necessarily be excused for showing some confusion—and would have been so excused by magistrates favourable towards him as without stronger reasons the bench must have been. As exposed therefore by his cross-examination alone, Buckley was evidently a wholly untrustworthy witness. The cable, nevertheless, conveyed to its readers the impression that the evidence had been unexceptionable, and that he had been conclusively proved a bravo hired by the League to commit murder and helped by it in escaping from the penalty of his attempt. So much, in this instance also, for the cable's honesty.

HOPEFUL PERCEPTIONS.

A HOPEFUL sign of the times is the perception that begins to be shown even in Tory quarters that the interests of the empire are not altogether bound up with the determination to preserve the existing condition of things between Great Britain and Ireland. Mr. Greenwood, for example, the late editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, a Tory of the Tories, who contributes an article on the prospects of peace to one of the reviews, lets it be plainly seen that such is the case. Mr. Greenwood is not over confident as to what the immediate future may bring forth. He has no admiration for the Emperor of Germany, and is of the opinion that his Majesty's late tour of visits was rather mischievous than otherwise in its effects. He, however, gives some particulars of an alliance some time ago proposed to Lord Salisbury, which, he says, must have preserved the peace for an indefinite number of years, and made a European war impossible. The alliance was that of England with Germany, Austria, and Italy, on certain conditions. Your fleet, it was said, is only sufficient for your own needs. You have your boundless seaboard, and your commerce to protect,