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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THERE is a literary scavenger on the staff of the *Dunedin Evening Star*. His special function is to burrow and snuffle—like an unclean animal—among the street-sweepings of no-Popery literature and serve up therefrom a few malodorous dishes every week to its readers, instead of interesting news-items—which cost “moneysh.” No-Popery clippings are got without much expenditure of either money or brains. And the creature who burrows after them need not wear clean linen. They may be interesting to some, but we venture to think that they stink in the nostrils of the vast majority of the non-Catholics, as well as the Catholics, of Dunedin. It would be a libel on our Protestant fellow-townsmen to think otherwise. We do not know who this literary scavenger may be—perhaps one of those whose Christianity consists in hating those who choose to worship God at a different altar, and in serenely forgetting that there is, or ever was, any commandment forbidding one to bear false witness against one's neighbour. Three things, however, are certain: (1) That the *Dunedin Evening Star* is, and has long been, disgracing honourable journalism by making this no-Popery business one of its constant features; (2) that the only purpose or effect of its policy can be to arouse mutual misunderstanding, ill-feeling, and strife between various bodies of Christians that have hitherto lived happily together in Dunedin; (3) that the *Dunedin Evening Star* is unfit reading for any Catholic individual or any Catholic home. We do not propose to attempt solving the riddle as to why the *Dunedin Star* should adopt a no-Popery programme in Dunedin. We shall, however, in the interests of fair-play and common decency return to this subject at an early date.

OUR readers will recollect the strictures which we passed some time ago on the doings and sayings of a gaol-bird who has been roaming England and Scotland in company with a female companion, delivering screaming harangues on the “abominations of Popery.” People are evidently getting tired of the foul crusade of calumny. At York, the precious pair “retired” in the Festival Concert Rooms to very scanty audiences. The Anglican Dean of York took occasion of their presence to address the following letter to the local Press:—

“As chairman of the trustees of the Festival Concert Rooms, I was not a little vexed to find that the hall had been let, through the inadvertence of a subordinate, for what seems to me an unprovoked and offensive attack upon a large and influential body of our fellow-Christians. As my position in relation to these rooms is probably well known, it may be assumed that the hall was let for this purpose with my cognisance and sanction, and I should be very sorry to appear capable of any such proceeding, which is specially distasteful to myself. There are differences between all sections of Christians which probably have their blemishes likewise, and there are times and methods by which these may be reasonably and profitably discussed, but in the present instance the attack is made by unknown assailants, whose only credentials would, of themselves, give a special and offensive animus to their action, and their method adopted is to suggest insinuations which must be repugnant to many devout minds. I see nothing at the present moment to justify an attack so made, to which all Christian communities are equally exposed. Such meetings as those which are taking place to-day I regard as singularly at variance with the history and purpose of the building, and, therefore, I cannot but regret that it should be employed in an unjustifiable effort to wound the most tender susceptibilities of a large number of our fellow-Christians, and to disturb the peace and harmony which, happily, prevail amongst us.—I remain, yours faithfully, ARTHUR P. PUREY-CUST.”

IS THE END COMING? A GRAVE situation has arisen in Italy. It has been coming for a long time, and the widespread and fierce character of the present outbreak only serves to show that the throne which the Savoy dynasty placed by fraud and force in Rome is set upon a mine-field. Bread riots on a vast scale are taking place all over Italy. To speak more correctly, the price of bread was made the pretext for rioting which continued in full swing after the alleged cause had been removed. It is the old trouble that crops up year after year in the pleasant springtime, and is suppressed as promptly as may be. The present outbreak is of a far more serious nature—so serious, indeed, that the Government exercises a severe censorship over telegrams for the purpose of preventing the public both at home and abroad from getting an adequate idea of the grave character of the outbreak. But the news that has leaked through shows that the outbreaks are of a most serious nature; that they are taking place all over the country from Sicily almost to the Alps; that women take part in them; that the military have been in many places put to flight by the rioters; that at Milan hundreds, if not thousands, of people (as stated) have been shot down by the troops; and that there is no immediate prospect of law, order, or prosperity returning to the unfortunate country which has been the butt of every curse that military despotism and political knavery could inflict upon it since the day when the Sardinian troops battered the walls of the Porta Pia, Rome, on the 20th of September, 1870.

Is there no hope? No, so long as the present régime lasts. There are land evils under which Italy is groaning which might be removed by an enlightened system of law-making. This would palliate, but not remove, the deep curse under which Italy is fast drifting to ruin. Absenteeism and the land-agent (or *gabellotto*) are as great a curse in Sicily and other parts of Italy as they have been in Ireland. The land-tenure system makes it difficult, and often impossible, to break up large estates. There is no encouragement for scientific cultivation. New Italy has scourged the farmer with whips and scorpions, and if they and the labouring classes are still tranquil, it is largely owing to the happily growing influence of the Catholic clergy. The Italian Government has banished God from their schools. It has swallowed up some £30,000,000 of property which was chiefly devoted to charity. It has forced upon the people a military conscription which they hate; and financial burdens which are so inequitably balanced as to fall most heavily upon the humble cultivators of the soil.

Above the peasant there stands a military tyranny, a corrupt Parliament; around him, ruin; and in the future utter hopelessness. Four years ago the Left issued a manifesto, every word of which is doubly true to-day:—

“Commerce is stagnant, bankruptcy general, savings are seized, small properties succumb under fiscal exactions, agriculture languishes, stifled under taxation, emigration is increasing in an alarming proportion to the population, the municipalities squander and become penniless; the country, in taxes of various kinds, pays no less than seventy per cent, *at least*, four or five times as much as is paid by rich natives. The material taxable diminishes every day, because production is paralysed in its most vital parts, and misery has shrunken consumption; in a word the whole land is devoured by military exactions and the criminal folly of a policy given over to interests and ambitions which totally ignore the true necessities of the people.”

Had Italy united in a confederacy—as Pius IX. hoped and desired—and remained strictly neutral, like Belgium, instead of aping the costly ways of a great military power, the country would have been happy and prosperous. Italy's ruin began with the fall of the temporal power. The day may yet come which was predicted by a well-informed writer in the *Fortnightly Review* some four years ago “that German troops will be asked to preserve social order in the cities and provinces of Italy.”

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