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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

A NON-CATHOLIC correspondent has been 'worried' over us. He is of opinion that the great principle of the 'freedom of the Press' is sufficient justification for the publication of vile abuse of any body of people—especially of 'Romanists.' Well, we are satisfied to believe in and act upon the Golden Rule. As regards the 'freedom of the Press' in the right understanding of the word 'freedom' we shall ever defend the proper freedom of the Press as of the subject. But we are not in favour of free lying, free slander-mongering, nor free literary filth from the shambles or the sty. Freedom is one thing. License is another. The honest man seeks the one; the other kind the other.

WHEN one takes a stand on a question of principle it is pleasant to see men who differ with him in creed and politics range themselves like brothers-in-arms by his side. Some time ago we had to take such a stand on behalf of the Catholic body of New Zealand. We have already quoted extracts to show that all the great Australian dailies—even those that are habitually hostile to us—endorsed our action to the fullest extent. The latest echo of approval comes from a source which adds a special value to its words. The Melbourne *Southern Cross* is the organ of the Presbyterian body in Victoria. In one of its recent numbers it states decisively that the Catholic body in New Zealand have solid grounds for complaint against Lord Ranfurly. 'Lord Ranfurly,' says the *Southern Cross*, 'is her Majesty's representative in New Zealand, and the head of a community which includes all varieties of religious belief. He plainly ought not officially to say a word which would declare his bias against or for anyone of them. The Roman Catholic papers are screaming angrily against Lord Ranfurly on account of his recent utterance, and while we cannot approve of much of the language they employ, yet we think they have reasonable cause for complaint. Lord Gormanston, the Governor of Tasmania, is an earnest Roman Catholic. Suppose he received a deputation from, say, the members of the Society of Jesus, and expressed officially his disapproval of "the errors introduced into the Christian religion by Luther at the Reformation!" All good Protestants would be justly indignant at such an utterance by her Majesty's representative. And on the authority of the Golden Rule, we must wish for our Roman Catholic friends the same consideration we demand for ourselves. Lord Ranfurly, however, is still young as a Governor; he will, no doubt, learn his lesson.'

THE LATEST SHERLOCK HOLMES. THE following good story is told by 'Flaneur' in the Sydney *Freeman*. It will be perused with amused interest by our readers:— Connected with the '98 Celebration in Ireland a story is told which shows that the smart English police officials are still as eager to jump at any tales of treason told against Irishmen as a gudgeon is to spring at a fly. A post-card was sent from Ireland to Mr. William O'Brien, ex-M.P., a week before the eventful day, and on it was written the suspicious line—'The pikes are ready.'

Some keen-nosed official in the London post office scented danger to the Empire at once on seeing this card, and, with joyful visions of future honours and reward, he hurried it off to the great Detective Department in Scotland Yard, the result being that the whole establishment was set in motion, and the cleverest men it contained were told off to seize the pikes and all connected with them. The result of their investigation was a considerable 'take-down' for the Sherlock Holmes party, for it turned out that Mr. O'Brien had merely given a Dublin jeweller an order for a large number of appropriate '98 brooches; the central idea of the trinkets being a re-

presentation of a pike. When the jeweller had finished the order he sent his terse post-card along, and now, instead of reaping his anticipated rich reward, the patriotic party who sented danger has to keep clear of the detectives for fear they might football him round Hyde Park, or duck him in the dirtiest portion of the Thames.

PUT TO THE TEST. THERE are two difficulties ahead of the Catholic journalist who is placed face to face with what is, happily, unknown in New Zealand outside of Dunedin—systematic vilification of the Catholic Church and body. Occasional controversy, conducted in gentlemanly fashion, is a great means of good. Perpetual controversy—even in the face of perpetual vilification—has the same exasperating effect as long-drawn guerrilla warfare. It defeats its chief purpose. The other difficulty is this: that the 'lewd fellows of the baser sort' who furnish this sort of garbage are just the kind that a respectable journalist could not cross swords with without losing his self-respect and social status, and inviting a fresh outpouring of no-Popery sewage. Hence the undesirability of dealing in the secular Press with the rag-tag-and-bobtail of controversialists. And hence, too, no answer has ever been made through the secular organs to many of the wild statements of the creature who runs the no-Popery columns in the Dunedin *Evening Star*.

Attacks on the consoling practice of confession were sure to come, sooner or later. We are told—on the authority of nobody knows who and of a book that nobody can find, that that sacred practice is corrupting. The slanderer is wise as the serpent. Were he to make the same charge against an individual Catholic as he does against the whole 250,000,000, he would speedily find himself in the dock and under lock and key in gaol. If such were the tendency of that sacred rite, those who practised it most would be the most degraded wretches that crawl upon this planet; namely, the Pope; the clergy; the orders of men and women who sold themselves into slavery to redeem the slave; the millions of religious of both sexes who gave their lives without fee or reward to the service of the sick, the orphans, the foundlings, the stricken old—to every form of human ill; the Sisters of Charity who died upon the battle-field; and the nuns and brothers who have banished themselves for ever from civilised life and comforts to nurse the lepers and die with them, as Father Damien and so many others did. On the principles enunciated by the literary scavenger of the *Evening Star*, these would be the very scum of creation. We need not ask which have displayed the true spirit of Christianity: the Church's long bead-roll of spotless purity and heroic charity, or the nameless scribe who yells foul epithets upon them and forgets that the God of Truth ever forbade people to bear false witness against their neighbour.

Happily, we are able to put the foul insinuation to the test. There is probably no country in the world where more frequent use is made of the confessional than in Ireland. On the scavenger's theory, there should be no country in the world where the majority of the people are more morally degraded. This question has been forced upon our notice. We will take, for instance, the statistics of illegitimacy. They are, according to Leffingwell, a good test of the morality of people living in the same country, under the same laws and customs, and with the same methods of collecting statistics. He gives us the following figures regarding the people who go and those who do not go to confession in Ireland:—

Province.	Non-Catholic Population. Census 1880.	Rate of Illegitimacy per 1000 births. 10 years—1871-1880.
Connaught	... 5 per cent.	... 7
Munster	... 6 "	... 17
Leinster	... 11 "	... 22
Ulster	... 52 "	... 40

The following figures for the counties of Ulster are more instructive still. They are compiled from the statistics of 1891 and the Registrar-General's report:—

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