

Current Topics

The Irish Envoys

A well-known Australian Prelate writes informing us that arrangements are now being made for the visit of the Irish envoys (Messrs. Devlin and Donovan) to New Zealand. On or about the 25th inst. they were to have gone from New South Wales to Queensland. They remain there till October, when they return to complete their tour of the Mother State. This will carry them far into November, and possibly into December. They will then proceed to New Zealand. 'Their mission here', says our Right Reverend correspondent, 'has been taken up most cordially by bishops, clergy, and laity. You will', he adds, 'be intensely pleased with the matter and the forceful eloquence of the envoys' speeches. They have done much good, and have everywhere won hosts of friends to the cause'. We urge friends in every centre of population likely to be visited by the envoys to take time by the forelock and prepare to give them a hearty welcome. Auckland and Wellington are, we understand, already moving in the matter.

Parliamentary Prolixity

Our law-makers have once more begun to exhibit their wind-power in the House, and to address their constituents, as usual, through the pages of 'Hansard'. The notorious and mostly vapid garrulity of our Parliament swells inordinately the bulk of 'Hansard', and makes it as dull, flat, and stale as the pages of a 'Ready Reckoner'—without the 'Ready Reckoner's' saving quality of usefulness. To many of the members, we might say what the Countess of Pembroke addressed to Chaucer of the halting tongue and fluent pen: that their silence pleases infinitely better than their speech. 'This diffuseness and incontinence of speech', says Lecky, in his 'Democracy and Liberty', 'has not been the characteristic of the deliberative assemblies that have left the greatest mark on the history of the world'. Washington and Benjamin Franklin seldom spoke for ten minutes at a time. The Duke of Wellington, Russell, Palmerston, and Disraeli were usually direct, terse, and pointed. The British and the New Zealand Parliaments have found it necessary to protect themselves by time-limits from the dreary volubility of members whose clacking and too frequently irrelevant garrulity recalls Mackworth Praed's Vicar,

'Whose talk was like a stream which runs
With rapid change from rocks to roses,
It slipped from politics to puns;
It passed from Mahomet to Moses;
Beginning with the laws which keep
The planets in their radiant courses,
And ending with some precept deep
For dressing cels or shoeing horses'.

But despite time-limits the stream of talk goes on hum-hum-humming like the river that babbles idly to the rocks and strands. There is, however, an element of good in all things that are not in their nature evil. 'Much talking' says Bagehot, 'prevents much action, and if it does little to enlighten the subject, it at least greatly checks the progress of hasty and revolutionary legislation'. Let us therefore suffer the loquacious and be thankful for the small and uncovenanted mercies of their ball-jointed tongues. Besides, when a member has an insecure hold upon his electorate, or is a mere delegate to Parliament, his lot, like the comic-opera policeman's, is not a happy one. To please, he must be heard. Moreover he must (to use Billings's phrase) be buttered on both sides—and then keep away from the fire. Democracy has

many crowning advantages. One of its drawbacks is a tendency to parliamentary prolixity. 'Study to be brief', said an esteemed Australian clerical friend of ours to a candidate for Shire Council honors; 'I listened to that speech of yours last night, and I thought you'd never, never stop'. 'Yer reverence', replied the candidate, 'many an' many's the time I said the same thing about yerself'. 'Chi parla troppo,' says Goldoni in one of his comedies, 'non puo parlar sempre bene'—'the man that talks too much cannot always talk well'. The kernel of the art of oratory—whether sacred or profane—is to know when to stop.

Eating the Leek

In the course of a controversy on missionary looting in the Boxer troubles, Mark Twain administered a nasty jab to his opponent, the Rev. Dr. Smith. 'I make the proper allowances,' said the great humorist. 'He has not been a journalist, as I have been—a trade wherein a person is brought to book by the rest of his brothers so often for divergences that by and by he gets to be almost morbidly afraid to indulge in them. It is so with me. I always have the disposition to tell what is not so; I was born with it; we all have it. But I try not to do it now, because I have found out that it is unsafe. But with the Doctor, of course, it is different'.

And so it was with the reverend enthusiast who sent delightful shocks of horror down the spines of the Brethren in Sydney last month by his fairy tale about a Presbyterian girl who was (he alleged) employed in the Bathurst Catholic Presbytery, and afterwards robbed, imprisoned, and forced to work like a galley-slave by the Good Samaritan nuns at Tempe. The Indians credit a squaw's tongue with being able to run faster than the legs of the wind. The undisciplined tongue of the reverend narrator of this painful yarn went fast enough to outrun both his wit and his discretion. He spoke in his haste. He is now eating humble-pie at his leisure. And he finds the taste thereof as the taste of gall and quassia-chips and rue. The 'Watchman' (the Orange organ of New South Wales) found it desirable to swallow the calumny—moved thereto, perhaps, by the persistent demands of Catholics for a criminal prosecution. Here again the medicine was bitter, and the 'Watchman' swallowed it with a very wry face. Its grief was comically crowned by one small wisp of consolation—the 'happy thought' that the gaol-bird author of the calumny 'is a product of Rome'! As a common criminal, she may in a loose way be described as a joint product of her own unresisted vicious propensities and of her surroundings. As a fraudulent and perjured agent of No-Popery, she may in the same way be regarded as a product of the Orange lodge. Without the constant market which it offers for No-Popery fiction, and the encouragement that it gives to gaol-bird 'witnesses' against 'Rome', she would have had no object in inventing the story of the Bathurst Presbytery and of the Magdalen Retreat at Tempe. The Sydney 'Bulletin' has a bit of sarcasm in this connection which is worth quoting: 'The parsons who run the "Watchman" kind of literature don't blush worth a cent when their tale bursts, and their injured heroine proves to be a very ordinary kind of gaol-bird. A spieker or a bottle-oh may object to being proved a foolish liar, but a certain variety of parson only looks the more virtuous when he is shown up. Anyhow, why was this uninteresting female dragged into publicity? Apparently she was a dreadfully commonplace person with a bad habit of getting into gaol, and why there should be columns of shriek on the "Watchman's" part because she was a renegade Protestant, and then more columns because she wasn't, passes comprehension.'

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