

Current Topics

A Fabrication 'Made in Germany'

In Kipling's 'A Day's Work', a philosophising bit of chalk maintained that 'there is no sense in telling too much truth'. A somewhat similar motto seems to inspire sundry Continental newspapers and news agencies when it is a question of dealing with Catholic ecclesiastical persons, proceedings, or institutions. On December 13, for instance, the following cable message appeared in the daily papers of Australia and New Zealand:—

'After discussing in conference at Cologne the recent papal anti-Modernist Encyclical, the majority of the bishops, headed by Dr. Kopp, Archbishop of Breslau, maintained that the Vatican must be given to understand that it must first take soundings in Germany before issuing an Encyclical affecting Germany'.

In our issue of December 19, we pointed out that this story had a fish-like smell. It now turns out that it is a fabrication. It was first set afloat by the 'Koelnische Zeitung', a paper whose hatred of the Catholic Church and of the Holy See is alone sufficient to render its testimony suspect on a-priori grounds. The story was besides, on the face of it, so intrinsically incredible that it carried its own refutation. It has, moreover, been contradicted by the 'Schlesische Volkszeitung' and by the whole Catholic press of Germany, and our European files by this week's mails state that the Cardinal-Archbishop of Cologne has 'given an official denial of the whole statement, which he affirms to be a pure invention'. Unfortunately, the curious code of 'honor' and of commercial probity that prevails in the offices of some of the European cable agencies seems to demand that, where the Catholic Church is concerned, no contradiction of a calumnious tale shall be permitted to pass through the wires that transmitted the original falsehood.

Drinking, Then and Now

Someone—we think it was in the days of Steele—prophesied that, as civilisation advanced drinking, hard drinking, and swearing would gradually die out among the human race. The first prophecy has long been fulfilled as regards English-speaking people. The second seems to be moving, though slowly, to the same consummation so devoutly to be wished. We still have among us the sodden toppers and swillers of 'lickwid linen' whose thirsty wish is that of the Maltworm's Madrigal:—

'Would that I were fish, perdy, and all the sea were ale!'

But we have happily moved far afield from the days of the Cal's Head Club and the profane revelry that its members carried on under the guidance of Cromwell's ex-chaplain. 'We drink,' said an English writer of 1657, 'as if we were nothing but sponges' (we modernise the spelling). We have left behind for ever the spirit of the time when 'gentlemen' might, without remark, be 'as drunk as lords' at social functions; when (as Connor Sydney says) 'hard drinking was quite the fashion,' and when 'even members of Parliament found it difficult to keep sober.' We are still far, very far, from the things that the true temperance reformer hopes for. But we are on the way. We should, however, dearly like a little more pressure in the steam-chest, and a better pace. For the road is long and the grade is steep.

The Anonymous Assailant

There's a chiel amang 'em down in Bruce County who has lately taken to the ungentle art and craft of writing letters to the local council casting reflections

upon people that have a local habitation and a name. But the Bruce County councillors very properly refused to allow the varlet's communication to be read. 'If,' said the chairman, 'a ratepayer is not man enough to put his signature to a document, the Bruce County councillors are men enough to leave such a communication severely alone'. 'And so say all of us', quoth the councillors, in effect.

The persecuting pagan Roman Emperor Trajan fed the Christians to wild beasts, by whose teeth they were ground—noble wheat of God!—and had them slowly roasted to death in the Coliseum—beautiful glow-worms of the Most High! He ordered torture and death upon a large scale, but even his pagan heart refused to tolerate the slings and arrows of the anonymous accuser. He drew the line there. In our own time, 'literary roughs' is the epithet flung by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, the genial Poet of the Breakfast Table, at the ill-conditioned masked men who hurl anonymous accusations at people through the columns of the newspaper press or the pages of the lampoon. 'It is understood in good society', says Dr. Maurice Francis Egan, 'that a man who writes a letter which he is afraid to sign with his own name, would lie or steal. And I believe he would'. Disraeli had also a fine contempt for anonymous assailants whose lubrications appear so often in the daily press. 'An anonymous writer', said he in his denunciation of the 'Globe' in 1836, 'should at least display power; but we can only view with contemptuous levity the mischievous varlet who pelts us with mud as we are riding along, and then hides behind a dust-bin'. 'Anonymity', said Dr. Parker, of the City Temple (London) a few years ago, 'is not modesty, though it may easily be either impudence or cowardice'. And even that gentle soul, Cardinal Manning, granted that it is extremely difficult for a man to avoid saying under a mask of anonymity what he would not say with an open face.

In June, 1906, at the meeting of the Waikouaiti Licensing Committee, the chairman (Major Keddell) denounced, on behalf of the Committee, the practice of anonymous accusations and described it as 'cowardly' and 'contemptible'. And four months later the present Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, from his place in Parliament, described as 'cowards', 'worse than assassins', 'villains and reptiles' the many 'who endeavor to shield themselves in writing anonymous letters to public men', 'reflecting on officers in different parts of the Colony'. And we are told that 'his remarks were greeted with general expressions of approval from members'. The anonymous accuser has been here and there a social bane. Perhaps, after all, there may be a substratum of justification for the verdict of an American alienist, that this peculiarly cowardly form of attack is an evidence of partial insanity. In any case, the best treatment for the disorder is apparently that which was adopted by the Bruce County council and the New Zealand Parliament.

Newman and Rome

Falsehoods—old Satan's thistle-down—are carried about by every wind of heaven. It was inevitable that a foolish tale about the late Cardinal Newman—first set afloat by some Modernist writer—should in due course be wafted over the seas to New Zealand. Last week it lit upon a column in a Wellington contemporary. 'Nobody' the story ran, 'is harder hit by the Encyclical (on Modernist errors) than Newman'. Two correspondents promptly brushed the fairy tale aside. One of them quoted the following words of the great Oratorian in regard to the Holy See:—

'It is the decision of the Holy See, St. Peter has spoken; it is he who has enjoined that which seems to us so unpromising. He has spoken, and has a claim on us to trust him. He is no recluse, no solitary student,

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