

Current Topics

The 'Penguin'

It is difficult to peruse with dry eyes the heart-riving narrative of the wreck of the Penguin, the worst shipping disaster that has occurred in New Zealand waters since the Wairarapa smashed on the rocks in 1894. The patience, the heroism, the mutual helpfulness displayed in the long agony of the unequal fight for life against the stormy waters—all this reaches the highest traditions of those that go down to the sea in ships, and makes one thankful for the good that is in human nature in the hour of its bitterest trial. Peace to the souls of the dead, and may Christ the Consoler wipe away the tears of those that mourn dear ones who passed out in this great disaster!

Catholics and Prison Statistics

We direct the attention of our readers to the remarkable and informative article that appears elsewhere under this heading from the pen of the Rev. C. J. Venning, S.M. The time is now opportune for thoroughly investigating, throughout New Zealand, the extent of the prevalent habit of a section of prisoners in our gaols falsely entering themselves as 'Roman Catholics' and contributing, in this way, to the misleading denominational comparisons that appear in the *Official Year Book*. The Catholic chaplains of our various prisons would do an excellent work, and make all the co-religionists their debtors, by a searching investigation, name by name, of the 'Roman Catholicism' of the prisoners under their spiritual care. We throw ourselves upon their kindness and good-will. Materials sent to us, in any shape, in this connection will be greatly welcomed, and will be duly utilised by us.

'Authoritative' Catholic Books

It was, we think, Cardinal Manning who remarked that few men can resist the temptation of saying, behind a mask, what they would not say with open face. This appears to be well illustrated by a writer who, in the *Otago Daily Times*, has been dragging in much virulent bitterness in the course of contributions to the discussion on the educational question—of which a further instalment appears in this issue. These bitter irrelevancies will be dealt with in due course. In the meantime we wish to correct an impression left by him that all Catholic books which have the episcopal *imprimatur* or episcopal 'approbation' are, thereby, through and through 'authoritative' statements of Catholic doctrines and principles. This is, among Protestant controversialists, a very common error, and it is made to do exaggerated duty in connection with more or less bitter quotations (real or bogus) from the writings of sundry Catholic authors. The following are the facts of the matter: (1) The Latin word *imprimatur* means, literally, 'let it be printed.' The bishop's *imprimatur* is merely a license to publish works that require such license—namely, books dealing with Scripture, theology, ecclesiastical history, canon law, natural theology, ethics, and, generally, all writings treating of religious or moral subjects. The *imprimatur* is also an intimation that the requirements of ecclesiastical law have been complied with. One of these requirements is, that the book should be examined by a duly appointed censor, and that it be certified not to teach anything that clashes with faith and morals. In these circumstances the bishop gives the permission for publication, without which the issue of the classes of books referred to above would be a violation of ecclesiastical law.

In *The Law of the Church* (1906, p. 143) Father Taunton points out what is, for Catholic ecclesiastics at least, the well-known principle that 'the censor has nothing whatever to do with the style or the views expressed in the book, or the conclusions arrived at, except in so far as they may antagonise faith and morals.' 'Hence,' adds he, 'the censor is obliged to interpret his functions strictly, and he has no right to refuse his approbation unless there be clear evidence that the book contains certain propositions against faith or morals. The question of opportuneness is not within his province.' In his Constitution, *Sollicita ac provida*, Pope Benedict XIV. (1740-1758) provides for such publication and ventilation of opinions 'which may be attacked and rejected by other Catholics who defend the contrary, with the knowledge and permission of the Holy See, which leaves every opinion of this kind to its own degree of probability.' The censor is not free to withhold his *non obstat* within the limits mentioned above, even though he may differ profoundly from many opinions expressed by the author. And the bishop's *imprimatur* carries with it no sort of approval or recommendation of the work. On the contrary, he may disapprove of the views

of the author and regret the publication of the work. But, except in the cases mentioned, this does not justify him in withholding the permission for publication. The bishop has not the wide and irresponsible powers, in this matter, formerly granted to the Anglican archbishops of Canterbury, nor to the present censor of plays in England. Our bishops act upon the counsel of St. Paul, and bear with the unwise, in as well as out of print. And their *imprimatur* no more means approval of the contents of a book than the *imprimatur* of the editor of one of our daily papers implies agreement with the clashing views expressed in his free-discussion columns. In regard to the 'approbation' of a book given by Popes or bishops: This is only a general approval; it does not by any means imply approval of every paragraph or proposition in the book. A notable case in point is furnished by a decree of the Congregation of Rites, passed in 1803, confirmed by the Pope, and declaring that the works of St. Alphonsus Liguori contained 'nothing deserving of censure.' Hellig, one of St. Alphonsus' spiritual children, explains that this by no means implies that each separate statement and opinion of the Saint is true; nay, more, that it does not exclude the possibility of some or other of his opinions being condemned; but that it means just this and nothing more—that his works are free from any error recognised as such by the Church.' All this is well understood in the Roman Curia and by Catholic theologians. In fact, when the Sacred Penitentiary, in 1831, declared that a confessor might with a safe conscience follow all St. Alphonsus' opinions, it did not by any means declare them on all points the best possible and only safe opinions. On the contrary, it stated that confessors were free to follow the opinions given by other approved authors, even where they differed from those of the sainted founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Nay, more: The bishop's *imprimatur* and 'approbation' may be, and often are, attached to books that contain bitter attacks upon the Catholic faith or upon revealed religion. Take, for instance, the numerous apologetic works in which specific false theories are stated, sometimes at great length and in close detail, with a view to their refutation. Among these are works by Catholic authors of such note as Newman and hundreds of others whose names will readily occur to the mind of the reader.

3. The Church is not a society of the perfect, but of the imperfect whom she tries to lead to perfection. And the imperfect are naturally represented in due force among the makers of books, religious as well as secular. Among such writers there will be some who are inexpert in some of the matters on which they write, some given to exaggeration or unwise generalisation, some of untrained mind, of ill-balanced judgment, and of the false fervor that works into fanaticism. Some of these classes of authors indulge in declamation and vituperation, lack the gravity and serenity of truth, exalt opinions (especially their own opinions) into dogmas, push principles (as Devas remarks) to the snapping point, and exaggerate decisions beyond the range of due mercy to the weak. Catholics as well as non-Catholics have their offenders in these matters, but nothing like to the same extent. And this we will say: We will allow harsh critics of Catholic writers, in this connection, the whole range of our controversial literature to select from; but we will defy them to show therein anything that—for sheer and almost incredible coarseness, bitterness, and all uncharity—can for a moment compare with large classes of No-Popery 'religious' and politico-religious 'literature' that is and has long been circulated among men, women, and children throughout Australia and New Zealand and in every part of the English-speaking world. It pours out from presses in London, New York, Chicago, Sydney, Melbourne—there are even dribblers in Dunedin, Wellington, Auckland, and elsewhere—and it includes books, pamphlets (of the Kensington order, and worse), and newspapers of a kind which puts the lay gutter-press to shame. The present writer has found it his nauseous duty to wade through many hundreds-weight of that coarse, violent, and often foetid stuff, and he knows whereof he speaks. In this connection we may state that at the present time, or quite lately, there was in use in a State High School in the South Island an alleged history which, for the fatuity of its legends and its envenomed bitterness towards Catholics is pretty well fit for a place among the pile of printed stuff described above. The book was read in that school despite the protests of Catholic parents and the local clergy—protests which we have seen. We have, too, read the book in question, and are prepared to justify our remarks in regard to it. But we draw no wide conclusions from all this, for we know that such 'literature' is far from being acceptable to decent and respectable Protestants of every social grade. We mention these things to emphasise the old 'wisdom' which puts a discount upon the throwing of stones by persons who live under glass roofs.

The Dunedin & Suburban Coal Co.

TELEPHONE 401

are still at 29 CASTLE STREET, and will supply you with any kind of Coal or Firewood you want at LOWEST TARIFF RATES. Smithy Coals supplied.