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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THEY BANISHED THE SHAM NUN. THEY do some things better in America—at least in Richmond, Pa. And the *Ave Maria* explains the reason why. 'Women,' says the *Ave*, 'are better than men, which nobody can deny; but the women of Richmond are better than most other women, which everybody must admit.' The editor of our American contemporary is referring to the Protestant ladies of the Virginian capital. Their action will be, at the present moment, of interest to their New Zealand sisters. 'A notorious creature,' says the *Ave Maria*, 'who has travelled all over the country and lectured in many places against the sisterhoods of the Church, lately made her appearance in the capital of Virginia and announced a series of revelations of convent life "for women only." The ladies of Richmond are not that kind of women. They would not listen to her, and took steps to rid the city of her unwelcome presence. The newspapers refused to insert advertisements of her lectures, as they were called; but the announcement that the chief of police had warned the creature to take her departure was published as a prominent news item. We reiterate our praise of the ladies of Richmond. On the principle that "handsome is as handsome does," they deserve to be ranked among the best and fairest in all this broad land.' And so say all of us. Here is an example for the Protestant ladies of New Zealand.

A WORD TO THE WISE IS, OR OUGHT TO BE, SUFFICIENT. If all the proprietors or lessors of public halls were as careful as the respectable secular Press, public nuisances like the Slatterys would soon find their occupation gone. The point of view taken up by respectable papers everywhere with regard to the Slatterys found vigorous editorial expression in the Hull *Eastern Morning News* when it said: 'We shall defend free speech and free controversy, but we will not open our columns to free lying, free slander, and free obscenity.' This was the view taken by the Town Councils of Hawthorne, Brunswick, Oakleigh, etc., by the Y.M.C.A. of Auckland, by the proprietors of the Theatre Royal, Napier, of the Opera House, Wellington, and by many others in Australia, England, Scotland, and the United States. We have been assured that the proprietors of the Foresters' Hall in Auckland and of the Gaiety Theatre, Napier, would have likewise refused the use of their buildings to the dismissed inebriate and the sham nun had they known the disgraceful character of the lectures that were to be delivered by this wretched pair of roving slander-mongers. Well, for the comfort of hall-proprietors generally throughout the Colony, we can assure them that the law of the land will support them in acting upon such change of heart as may come to them with fuller knowledge of the antics which this low 'combination' play before high heaven. Contracts for the letting of halls to lecturers of the Slattery class may be cancelled at any time. At least two judicial decisions on the subject have been recorded in England. The latest ruling was given by Judge Wilmot under the following circumstances: On September 4 of last year (1899) the Oddfellows' Hall at Gorleston (England) was let by Mr. A. W. Riches for an anti-Catholic lecture which was to have been delivered on the third following day (September 7) by the notorious convict and sham monk, Nobbs, *alias* Widdows. The hiring fee was duly paid in full and a receipt obtained in due form. Like Slattery, Nobbs has had a bountiful acquaintance with the prison cell, he lectures in priest's vestments, and pours out a tide of venomous and malignant falsehood against the Catholic Church, her ministers, and her practices. At Gorleston the sham monk had his tickets out, his handbills posted, and his cheap show duly advertised. Things were moving gaily for the ex-convict when his true history and the nature of his crusade at Gorleston dawned upon the trustees of the local Oddfellows,

Hall. Then—at the dinner hour on September 7—the bogus 'ex-monk' received a brief and peremptory written notification that he could not have the hall. Knots of the usual class that favour such degrading exhibitions gathered around the hall between 7.30 and 8 o'clock. But the doors remained locked and barred; there was none to pronounce an effective 'open sesame'; the groups dispersed; and the announced lecture never came off.

The next and final act in the little drama took place in the Yarmouth County Court on Friday, November 10. His Honour Judge Wilmot presided, and Francis George Widdows (*alias* Nobbs) sued Alfred William Riches, of Gorleston, to recover £5 5s for breach of contract by refusing to allow plaintiff possession of the Oddfellows' Hall, Gorleston, which had been hired for a lecture. The proceedings were reported in full in the *Eastern Daily Press*, of November 11, and in the *London Tablet* of November 18. The contention of defendants was that they had let the hall in ignorance of the lecturer's antecedents and of the nature of his discourses, and that they cancelled the agreement as soon as they became acquainted with these. Nobbs contended that the engagement once entered into could not be broken. Judge Wilmot held that certain matters referred to above, which were 'elicited in cross-examination,' 'quite justified the cancelling of the contract.' He, moreover, held that there had been no unusual delay in doing so. 'Defendant,' said he, again, 'rightly cancelled the contract, believing that the lecture might lead to very unpleasant discussion, and probably a breach of the peace.' Judge Wilmot went even farther than this. 'If you take a hall,' he said, 'and the letter of the hall does not know the nature or character of the lecture you are going to give, he is justified in cancelling the contract, and you have no remedy against him for breach of contract. If the letter of the hall thinks the lecture will lead to a breach of the peace, he is justified in breaking the contract.' And again: 'If this lecture was likely to lead to an acrimonious controversy, defendant was within his rights in cancelling the contract.' Nothing could be plainer than Judge Wilmot's decision. He gave judgment against Nobbs, with costs. And Nobbs did not appeal. A New Zealand solicitor of long experience has assured us that the law is the same in this Colony. In the course of a trenchant comment on the Gorleston case and a further exposure of Nobbs's disreputable character, *Truth* lays down two useful principles which hall-proprietors and newspaper men and decent Protestants of every position and calling would do well to paste in their hats: (1) that 'free speech in public must be subject to the restriction that public decency shall be observed'; and (2) that 'it is as much in the interest of Protestantism as of Roman Catholicism that such performances should be curtailed.' The notorious gaol-bird and sham ex-priest Riordan (*alias* Ruthven) secured the use of the Derry Guildhall (Ireland) for his scurrilous lectures in January, 1899. The facts of his infamous career and the offensive character of his handbills were thereupon placed before the Mayor by Mr. W. O'Doherty, Town Councillor, in a letter dated January 7, 1899, which was published, together with a report of the subsequent proceedings, in the *Dublin Freeman's Journal* and in the *Edinburgh Catholic Herald* of January 13 of the same year. The Mayor and the Councillors—the majority of these are Protestants—decided, after consultation, to cancel the contract for the use of the Guildhall. This was accordingly done, and the wrathful adventurer and impostor speedily rid the Maiden City of his unsavoury presence. The examples of Gorleston and Derry well deserve the flattery of imitation in New Zealand.

THEY CANNOT CENSURE 'SCAPE.

THE South African campaign has wrought red ruin with the scarlet tunics and the gold lace and the brass buttons and the milk-white steeds and the flashing steel that have hitherto added such an external glory to the trappings of war. Such bright objects offered too good a mark to the Boer riflemen. Therefore were they discarded. And now horse and foot and royal artillery court the chances

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