

Protestant Defence Association, called mass meetings and made great noise and clamor about the injustice they have suffered, but there is a peaceable constitutional method of bringing that injustice before the public, and it is high time they availed themselves of that method. We earnestly hope that when the new Parliament meets a return will be called for similar to that prepared by the New South Wales statistician, so that this 'stuffing' question may be finally disposed of and the mouths of the bigots, so far as this odious cry is concerned, may be stopped once and for all.

Notes

Electoral Reform.

Independently of this or that issue, it has become evident that the time is ripe for a drastic measure of electoral reform. The very liberality of the law leads to abuses and multiplies the possibility of error. In the first place, the Government in its laudable anxiety that no one shall be denied electoral privileges, spends large sums in enrolling all whose names are not on the roll. Then the candidates and their friends get to work, and enrol them over again, while the various factions also send out their scouts and possibly enrol them the third time. Then the roll is more or less imperfectly purged, and the election proceeds. As if to still further complicate matters, the licensing poll takes place on the same day, but is governed by the Local Elections Act. A public half holiday is proclaimed. The polling booths are congested for several hours in the afternoon and the officials who are responsible for the election invariably commit minor irregularities which may form the subject of an election petition. Such petitions are the order of the day all over the Colony where the figures have been close—in some cases even where the result has been decisive. Again, the method of recording the voter's decision is bad. It has been argued that the striking out of a name or a proposal to which the voter is opposed is a natural process, which causes the elector no difficulty. The large number of informal papers rejected at every election tells a different tale. The South Australian system is much better. There the voter makes a cross against the person or proposal he desires to vote for, and places his mark in a little blank square placed there for that purpose. All these features might be improved upon. The method of enrolment is especially loose. The method should be automatic. Every person on attaining the age of 21 years or on attaining the right to the franchise in any way should be enrolled as a matter of course. The electoral franchise should be the basis of all civil rights. It should be to the citizen what the miner's right is to the miner, and should be the passport to the polling booth for the election of all public bodies. This might involve the creation of an electoral department and so afford a peg to hang a complaint on that the object was to find billets for Government supporters.

The Milling Trust.

The position of matters in connection with the Colony's flour and bread supply has been energetically brought under the notice of Sir Joseph Ward at Christchurch, and a number of allegations have been made which the combined Millers' and Bakers' Associations have found some difficulty in answering. The millers allege that prior to the combination they were suffering from over-competition, owing to the excessive number of mills. This seems a very extraordinary confession for business men to make. In the course of their elaborate defence against a previous attack in Dunedin, they proved that they had gauged the requirements of the Colony to a nicety. Bread does not fluctuate much with respect to the quantity used. The careful housewife does indeed curtail her baker's bill as much as possible in times of high prices. She does so by various domestic devices, but after all the diminution does not amount to much. Nor when bread is cheap is there so very much more consumed. Assuming that the demand is stable and that the wants of the Colony can be accurately gauged, it is surprising that the later entrants to the trade should have embarked in it. Millers are usually grain speculators, and people do not usually associate the calling of a grain merchant with so much simplicity as to build an expensive flour mill in the full knowledge that there were already in existence more than sufficient mills to supply the Colony with flour. The millers have undoubtedly alienated sympathy from themselves by allying themselves with the bakers and jointly boycotting any bakers, as is alleged, who were disposed

to be independent. And though wheat admittedly stands at a high figure, it is shrewdly surmised that the farmers have not got all the benefit, and also that the margin between the cost of wheat and that of flour is too great. This also applies to the margin between the price of flour and that of bread, the suspicion being that both millers and bakers have taken advantage of the high price of wheat, together with the award of the Arbitration Court, to exact undue profit. The matter is one of extreme difficulty to suggest a settlement for. State intervention would mean State farms, and the farmers would not relish that. But it may be desirable to introduce legislation to limit the operations of combines, especially in matters respecting food supply.

Shipwrecked Mariners' Society.

We note with approval that a society for the purpose of affording relief in cases of shipwreck has been formed in Dunedin, and that support has been promised from all the other centres. The main object to be gained in this matter is system. Public sympathy is very fickle. It pours out money like water when some great disaster inflicts a shock, but it allows isolated sufferers to pine in neglect. There is an apt case now in point. Among the crew of the Quiraing, lost somewhere between Australia and this Colony, was a man whose wife and family live near Dunedin. There are five children, one of whom was born since the wreck and will never know its father in this world. After considerable delay a public subscription list was opened, and up to date the amount realised is something like £60. This may possibly swell to £100 or even to £150, but the inadequacy of such a sum to afford permanent relief must be apparent. If there were a fund established, anomalies like this could not arise. The fund might be organised on some such lines as the Coal Mine Accident Fund in New South Wales, whence relief came so promptly and efficiently in the recent Mount Kembla disaster. The contributaries are the mine owners, the miners, and the Government. An analogous system might be arranged here with respect to maritime disasters, and isolated cases would not pass by neglected. In the aggregate there are more of these than of Wairarapas and Elingamites, and the sum of human suffering is consequently greater. The subject is one so much calculated to attract public sympathy that support may be reasonably expected from quarters outside merely maritime circles. We therefore look for the prompt establishment of a large endowment fund, yielding enough to meet the demands of all current cases, and the removal of a reproach that has existed too long.

DIOCESE OF DUNEDIN.

On Sunday, at St. Joseph's Cathedral, the prayers of the congregation were asked for the Very Rev. Dean Mahoney, of Nelson, who lies dangerously ill in Dublin.

On Sunday there was Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Joseph's Cathedral from last Mass until Vespers. In the evening there was a procession, in which the children of the parish schools and the members of the Sacred Heart Society took part.

The Very Rev. Father O'Neill (Milton), and the Rev. H. W. Cleary (Editor of the N.Z. TABLET) arrived in Melbourne on December 3, by the North German steamer, Barbarossa. Father O'Neill intended to come on to New Zealand by the first inter-colonial steamer. Father Cleary cut short his stay in the Old Land in order to visit his brother. Immediately on his arrival at Adelaide the Rev. Father received telegraphic news of the death of his brother. By a singular coincidence, about the same hour and place 14 years ago he received a telegram announcing the death of a sister whom he was likewise hoping to see before her death.

The distribution of prizes to the pupils of the Christian Brothers' school takes place on Thursday evening, the 18th December, in St. Joseph's Hall. His Lordship the Most Rev. Dr. Verdon is announced to preside. As usual, the pupils are providing an excellent entertainment. Included amongst the items we find a parliamentary debate on the momentous question, 'Is it advisable to have lady members of parliament?' Doubtless the young parliamentarians will settle the question finally—to their own satisfaction. The 'members' include six of the successful competitors at the recent Dunedin competitions. There are also musical and elocutionary items on the programme.

On Friday, December 19, the annual entertainment on behalf of that very deserving institution, St. Vincent de Paul's Orphanage, South Dunedin, will be given in the Princess Theatre. The first part of the programme will consist of a concert, to which the following ladies and gentlemen will contribute items:—Misses Ecece Flaney, Fraser, and Leonard, Mesdames Todd and Eger, and Messrs Eger, Brunson, Hall, Wright, Husey, Anthony, McLennon, Stewart, Vallis, and Master Collins. The concert will be followed

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