

Current Topics

The 'Asino'

It is with sincere satisfaction that we are able to announce that that vilest of all gutter-journals, the *Asino* (published by the enemies of religion in Rome, and constantly hurling all sorts of indecent insults at the Holy Father) is now banned by the postal authorities in New Zealand, in the Australian Commonwealth, and in the United States. New Zealand is the latest to fall into line. A number of copies of that coarse rag were collected in the Dominion and submitted to the postal authorities—nothing could surpass the coarseness, vileness, and obscenity of those numbers, even our Lord and Saviour being introduced in a blasphemously indecent connection. The result was as stated: the *Asino* is barred from New Zealand as an obscene and indecent publication. Carlyle once advised that certain raw sceptics should be covered under a glass bell, declaring that the atmosphere there would cause them to perish in their own corruption. If the editors of filthy publications such as the *Asino* were treated in the same fashion their dissolution would be accomplished even more speedily, and in a very brief space all that would be left would be an odor of brimstone. While heartily rejoicing that this leprous production—this moral cancer-planter—is prohibited from entering New Zealand, we cannot refrain from pointing out that the verdict of so many nations on the *Asino* ought to open the eyes of the Italian Government to the shame of their allowing such a filthy rag to be published, when they have laws against such productions, and when the Law of the Papal Guarantees is supposed to protect the Pope, as it would the King, from such coarse infamy and insult. Of what are the Government afraid? The supporters and disseminators of the immoral press represent neither the sense nor the sentiment of the Italian people; and as regards weight and influence in the community Podrecca and his party are absolutely insignificant. A little firm dealing with the motley crowd, and this plague spot and reproach to Italian journalism would be once and for ever removed. To apply the words of Shakespeare, in 'King Henry V.:—

'Do but behold yon poor and starved band,
And your fair show shall suck away their souls,
Leaving them but husks and shales of men.
There is not work enough for all our hands;
Scarce blood enough in all their sickly veins
To give our naked curtle-axes stain.'

A Southland Ebullition

A Southland paper—the *Southland Times* of February 10, to wit—has quite needlessly and gratuitously butted into the now somewhat played-out discussion on that very mixed marriage in far-away Belfast. Our contemporary has really nothing to say; and in his leading article of nearly a column he just about succeeds in saying it. He admits that 'as no change has been noted' in Mr Devlin's electorate—the electorate in which the facts were best known—'the effect the case had politically could not have been very great, and it also may be quite true that Presbyterian ministers were less interested in the woman than in using the case as an example of what would happen when Ireland secured Home Rule.' He further states that 'in most countries, including all English-speaking countries, the State absolutely ignores the decree, and the question merely resolves itself into one of conscience among Roman Catholics themselves.' That being so, what in the name of all that is sensible has this southern Solomon to do with the matter; and why does he waste his wisdom at all on a question that is 'merely one of conscience among Roman Catholics themselves.' When he does attempt to deal in facts—as distinguished from prejudices—he blunders every time. 'It may be mentioned,' he says, writing out of the fulness of his ignorance, 'that the German Kaiser objected to the decree, and as a result it does not apply in Germany.' What authority he has for the first of these statements we know not—perhaps the Kaiser sent our southern luminary a private wire—but we do know that the exemption of Germany has nothing to do with any protest from the Kaiser or from anyone else. As explained by the Rev. Father Coffey, in the columns of the *Dunedin Evening Star* the other day, Pope Benedict XIV., in 1741, and Pope Pius VI., in 1785, exempted certain countries from the laws of the Council of Trent in regard to clandestine

marriages; and most of Germany was exempted as the Council of Trent decrees were never promulgated in the Protestant States. The present Pope extended the exemption to the whole of Germany by a constitution, in January, 1906—i.e., more than a year before the decree *Ne Temere*—which simply embodies a decree of the Council of Trent—which was issued, and more than a year, therefore, before the Kaiser could have had any chance of protesting. The extent of this Invercargill innocent's knowledge of the whole question may be gauged from the following sentence:—'The whole thing,' he sapiently remarks, 'is evidently an attempt by the Roman Catholic Church to override State law, and it has been seriously questioned, even by prominent Roman Catholics, if the Church possesses the constitutional power to proclaim mixed marriages, no matter where celebrated, as being illegal.' The Church has, of course, never proclaimed that the marriages under discussion are illegal; she has simply laid it down that, unless certain conditions are complied with, they are, from her point of view, invalid. If the *Southland Times* writer does not know the important distinction between the two terms, he ought to be sent promptly back to school.

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As we have said, the Southland leader-writer had really nothing to say, and no light whatever to throw on the mixed marriage question; and it is obvious that his motive in dealing with the subject was one of wanton and wilful bigotry. To bigotry, our journalistic Chadband adds a nauseating hypocrisy. 'The McCann case,' he says, 'will no doubt be used to promote discord among religious sections of communities, and for that reason it is unfortunate that it should have occurred.' The hypocrisy which can pretend to shed tears over the prospect of religious discord while it is itself engaged in the very act of promoting such discord, is beneath contempt. We have read a story of a certain Bishop of London who, travelling on one occasion in a third-class carriage with a number of workmen, was pained at hearing the volleys of oaths and curses that came from the mouth of one of the grimy sons of toil. Determined to inflict upon the sinner a dignified rebuke, his Lordship said: 'My friend, you possess a very lurid vocabulary of oaths; may I ask where you learned it?' The workman, looking at him with unaffected surprise, said: 'Learned it? Sir, it's a gift!' The bigotry of the Southland *Times* writer is probably a 'gift'; but it is a gift that constitutes a very poor asset for a working journalist. Leaders such as that on 'Clerical influence' may tickle the ears of the Orange groundlings, but assuredly they will make the judicious and fair-minded members of the community grieve. Sooner or later, both the paper and the individual responsible for such writing find their level—and it is never a lofty level.

A Notable Protest

We conclude this week our publication of the very striking and notable protest issued by the Very Rev. Father Luiz Gonzaga Cabral, Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Portugal, against the exceptional and outrageous treatment of which the religious committed to his charge have been the victims at the hands of the Portuguese Revolutionary Government. It is, perhaps, not so much a protest as a vindication; and the document is remarkable not less for its clearness and succinctness, than for the weight and effectiveness of the considerations advanced. A moving picture is given of the sufferings and insults endured by the religious, and their cup of bitterness must surely have been full when, as Father Cabral puts it, 'Venerable elders, distinguished men of science, held in repute at home and abroad, religious venerated for their virtue, youth still almost boys, with innocence stamped on their features—all had to go to an anthropometric station, and to be treated like notorious criminals, being described, photographed, and measured in every detail, down to the joints of their fingers. The photographs then appeared in the newspapers, with the number assigned to each as to a convict.' Commenting on this fact, the Rev. Father C. Torrend—himself one of the victims—records the interesting and noteworthy fact that President Taft interfered, and with some effect, on behalf of the persecuted Jesuits. 'Thanks are due,' says Father Torrend, 'to the benevolence manifested by the English press on occasion of these cruel trials, and especially that here spoken of in these anthropometric measurements. In particular may be mentioned *The Saturday Review* and a strong protest of *The Bystander*, November 16, p. 329. As to the United States, we can hardly find words to express our gratitude for their intervention on our behalf. *The Echo de Paris* (December 19) and the *Memento* of Turin (December 18), verify the report that President Taft himself expressed by wire to his Minister at Lisbon the painful impression which had been produced in the United States by the knowledge that the Jesuits had been imprisoned. Moreover, the new Portuguese Government was warned that it would never be recognised if it did not put an end to such treatment, which was