

Current Topics

The Pope and the War

It was not to be expected that the exciting times which preceded the actual declaration of war by Italy would be allowed to pass without the Pope being dragged in in some way; and the cable-rigger would have doubtless felt that he had quite failed in his duty if he had not managed to concoct some message from his Holiness. Accordingly, in our dailies of September 30, we got it in these terms: 'The Pope has expressed his sympathy with the Italian plans for the occupation of Tripoli, which he says constitutes a triumph for the progress of civilisation.' And commentators on the message in this country have freely paraphrased it into a statement that the Pope had expressly and formally given his 'blessing' to the war.

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It may be taken as certain, of course, that the Holy Father takes the keenest interest in the present position and in the prospects of the six thousand Catholics of Tripoli; and that he entirely assented to the message which was sent to the missionaries from their headquarters in Rome enjoining them not to leave their posts, however great the danger. But his Holiness has uttered not one word or syllable in approval of the war. The *Osservatore Romano*, which may be regarded as the official organ of the Vatican, is frankly opposed to the Italian expedition. And the true attitude of the Holy Father may be gathered from the following remarks which our careful and reliable contemporary, *Rome*, has on the subject. 'It is hardly necessary to say that the supposed utterances of the Holy Father on this Tripoli expedition are sheer fables. His Holiness has made no pronouncement, either publicly or privately, on the matter; but he has solemnly blessed and encouraged the efforts made recently on behalf of international peace.' Our English Catholic contemporaries, without exception, while recognising that under Italian control of Tripoli the Church will enjoy opportunities for carrying on religious work which have been denied her under the state of things in which Moslem influence has predominated, are strong in their denunciation of Italy's action in declaring war.

'The Dawn of All'

In its review of the *Dawn of All*, after expressing itself as being in entire disagreement with the whole picture presented by Father Benson, the *London Tablet* remarks: 'Far be it from us to take such dreaming *au grand sérieux*, or to forget that the prophet must have the privilege of telling his vision in his own way. Our only misgiving is that amongst his readers—and possibly amongst his reviewers—there may be some sufficiently obtuse to imagine that some of these repulsively repressive methods and obsolete theocratic theories which so strangely enter into the author's forecast of the future represent the ideals and principles which are in the minds of good Catholics of to-day, and that such would gladly be put into force by them, if they only had the power and the opportunity of doing so.' As our readers are aware, there have been reviewers 'sufficiently obtuse' to imagine that very thing. We have already shown with sufficient clearness, we think, by an appeal to Father Benson's own words in the book in question, that the *Outlook's* statement that Father Benson advocated 'the death penalty as punishment for heresy' was a grave and utterly inexcusable misrepresentation of the author's position—'inexcusable,' because a reasonably careful reading of Father Benson's words was all that was necessary to make such a misunderstanding impossible.

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The question as to Father Benson's attitude in regard to religious persecution and his precise purpose in writing *The Dawn of All*, have now been set finally at rest by a letter from the author himself. In the *London Tablet* of October 7, referring to the review of his book which had appeared in the previous issue of the paper, Mgr. Benson writes: 'The writer [of the

review] seems to suggest that my book might be misunderstood to mean that religious persecution might become, under certain circumstances, the future policy of the Church, and to express approval of such policy. May I then, as emphatically as possible, disavow any such meaning? And may I, very briefly, indicate what my meaning really was. (1) I attempted, implicitly, to deal with such unhappy incidents as the Marian burnings and the Spanish Inquisition, by pointing out that religious persecution is always the act of the State, never of the Church. (2) I attempted to show that when opinions are punished by the State as subversive of her own stability, they are punished, not *as* political or *as* religious (as the case may be), but *as* subversive. (3) I attempted to show that the Church, when she cannot actually condemn such penalties as unjust, always indicates her own attitude towards them by strongly urging leniency, active as well as officially. This she did, for instance, in the case of the friar di Castro who deplored the Marian burnings in the presence of Mary's Court, as alien to the spirit of Christ; and as in the person of Alexander VI., who almost certainly excommunicated Torquemada, and quite certainly protected Spanish refugees from the cruelties of the secular arm. Not only am I naturally in the deepest personal sympathy with such a point of view—it is even rather impertinent to say so—but I attempted to manifest that fact by making my phantom Pope devise every possible loophole for my "heretic's" escape, and then, the instant that he had personal control of affairs, abolish the penalty altogether. It was probably indiscreet of me, as well as apparently beyond my power, to deal with such matters at all. My only excuse is that I am rather weary of repudiating the statement that "Rome always persecutes, and always will, whenever she is able to do so." I thought, however, that I was helping to make the opposite almost offensively clear. I am, Sir, etc.,

ROBERT HUGH BENSON.'

Hare-street House, Buntingford, October 1.

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In these words Father Benson expressly and explicitly disavows the sentiments mistakenly attributed to him by the *Outlook*, and shows, on the contrary, that his views are entirely in the opposite direction. The *Outlook* article was probably written hastily and lightly; but amongst its readers, some, at least, will be found 'sufficiently obtuse' to take its statements in grim earnest. No high-principled journalist, with a sense of responsibility, would wish to deal in conscious misrepresentation; and our contemporary can reasonably be expected, as an act of simple justice, to give space to Father Benson's disclaimer in the columns in which he was aspersed.

The Assembly and 'Ne Temere'

We print elsewhere a report of the discussion on the *Ne Temere* decree which took place at the Presbyterian Assembly on Thursday last. In connection therewith the following letter appeared in Tuesday's *Otago Daily Times*:—

'Sir,—It would, perhaps, be misconstrued if one were altogether to ignore the utterances of the brace of speakers who conducted the Assembly's debate on *Ne Temere*: though—taken on its merits—the discussion can hardly be regarded as calling for any very serious notice. Out of a very large Assembly only two members spoke at all on the subject; and in all the gathering it would have been difficult to get two men who were less representative of the cultured and broad-minded Presbyterianism of these latter days. To the Rev. R. Wood the name of 'Rome' has long been as the proverbial rag to a bull; and with the coming on of age the obsession becomes more and more complete. In the notorious articles signed 'R.W.'—the authorship of which Dr. Gibb has now openly divulged—in which some three years ago Mr. Wood made a masked attack on the Catholic Church, he showed that he is congenitally unable to be other than bitter and unfair where things Catholic are concerned. He is a fit subject for pity. The Rev. Dr. Gibb is the apostle of bluster and swagger—a sort of theological swash-buckler. An