

Current Topics

A Slanderer Brought to Book

In one respect, at least, and that a by no means unimportant one, we are free to maintain that 'the law is a hass.' In the present state of the law as to slander and defamation, while a foul-mouthed libeller may be mulcted in substantial damages for assailing the fair name of John Doe or Richard Roe, he may serenely and with perfect impunity, and even under the aegis of the law, make and publish the most abominable calumnies against a creed or community, and may even excite public odium against them to the very verge of endangering the public peace and arousing the passions of the mob with his harangues. The long-eared folly of this lop-sided legislation is frequently brought home to the Catholic body what time 'expriests' and sham nuns rage and rave upon the stage, or low-minded pamphleteers send out their noisome wares. The bigoted No-Popery journals who make a regular trade of attacking and abusing the Catholic Church are usually cunning enough and cowardly enough to give their scurrilous statements a perfectly general application so that, in the present state of the law, there is no one particular individual who has the right to bring the libellers to book and claim redress. Occasionally, however, their zeal outruns their discretion, or rather, it would be more correct to say, their malice gets the better of their cunning; they fix upon some one individual the stigma of the calumny they wish to circulate, and then—they very quickly strike trouble.

*

That is what has happened in the case of one Mr. John Frederick Leaworthy, who, on Sunday, September 23, told a gathering of people in Finsbury Park, London, that Monsignor Grosch, the Catholic rector of Islington, had undertaken to obtain the release of a lady's husband from Purgatory if she paid him the sum of £5 5s. Monsignor Grosch at once took legal action; but generously stayed proceedings on receiving a humble, not to say abject, apology. The following is a copy of the apology made by this 'public lecturer,' as published in all our English exchanges:—

(Copy of apology.)

To the Very Rev. Mgr. Henry J. Grosch,
Rector of St. John's,
Duncan Terrace,
Islington.

On Sunday, the 23rd of September, 1912, in Finsbury Park, in the hearing of a number of persons who were gathered together, I made the statement that you had undertaken to obtain the release of the husband of a Mrs. Davis from purgatory if she paid the sum of £5 5s.

Such statement was absolutely false, and without any foundation whatsoever.

The statement was made by me in the heat of the moment, but on consideration I realise that it is not only untrue, but one calculated to affect all members of the Catholic Faith, and you in particular as a Priest.

Under these circumstances, I unreservedly withdraw the statement, admitting that it is untrue, and I express my sorrow and humbly apologise for having made such a statement.

You may publish this apology if you think fit to do so.

Dated this 5th day of October, 1912.

(Signed) John Frederick Leaworthy,
34 London Street,
Caledonian Road, N.

Witness to the signature of
John F. Leaworthy.

(Signed) H. H. Turner, Managing Clerk, Messrs.
J. Deacon Newton and Co., 16 Finsbury Circus, E.C.
Solicitors.

This old calumny about priests undertaking to take souls out of purgatory for a given sum has seen

long service in no-Popery campaigns; and it is well that it should be thus definitely and effectively sent into retirement.

Prohibition and the Celebration of Mass

New Zealand is not the only country where hot-heads and extremists in the Prohibition party are making their presence felt, and where Catholics are faced with a more or less serious risk of legislative barriers being placed in the way of the celebration of Holy Mass if the movement is allowed to develop along existing lines. In parts of the United States the Catholics are 'up against' precisely the same difficulty as New Zealand Catholics encountered at the last election, and, in consequence, Catholic bishops—including some who were prominent workers in the temperance cause—have had to declare themselves definitely and emphatically against the Prohibition proposal. This is what has recently occurred, for example, in Los Angeles. A proposal for the adoption of prohibition, framed in such a way as to bar the celebration of Holy Mass if the proposal were carried, was submitted to the people, and was defeated by a majority of 14,000 votes. At first it was thought that this result was due to the operation of woman's suffrage; and a prominent prohibition advocate went so far as to declare that 'no State has adopted woman suffrage without setting back the temperance cause twenty-five years.' The true facts of the case, however, are given by the correspondent of the *Sacred Heart Review* who writes to explain that the defeat of the prohibition movement in Los Angeles was due to the Catholic voters of that city who had nothing against prohibition as such but who objected to a law which was drawn up by a set of non-Catholic fanatics who made the provisions of the proposed amendment to the city charter so narrow that it would have been impossible to offer the sacrifice of the Mass without violating them. The correspondent writes: 'Bishop Conaty, whose work in the temperance cause is too well known to need any words from me, threw the full force of his very forceful pen against the amendment, and the *Tidings* (official organ of the diocese) came out strong urging all Catholic men and women to vote against the amendment, and told them the reason why. The defeat of that proposed amendment to our charter was due more to the Catholic vote than to anything else, for the reason I have stated. It was a law that would not have stood the test of the constitution, and would have caused endless trouble and law suits and conflicting decisions, and would have been simply the means of defeating any definite action in the future, because people would have been thoroughly disgusted with the results.'

*

It is greatly to be regretted that the more rabid spirits in the movement take such a fanatical attitude; and their action makes it difficult for Catholic priest or paper to take that strong stand against the drink evil which both would wish to take. It is coming to this in this country—that Catholic priest or press can hardly expound, especially about election time, the Church's recognised teaching regarding the virtue of temperance without the liability of having their words distorted and misconstrued, or without having the uncomfortable feeling that by indirectly helping the prohibition movement they may be preparing serious trouble for the Catholic body later on. Under the circumstances, if the extremists persist in their narrowness Catholics have only one alternative—and that is to stand firm for freedom of conscience and of religious worship. This much is fully acknowledged by the *Sacred Heart Review*, which is itself one of the staunchest and most thorough-going advocates of temperance. 'The *Review* is very glad,' says our contemporary, 'to present the facts in this case. We are long enough acquainted with prohibition and prohibitionists to be aware that fanaticism, and anti-Catholicism even, are all too often ear-marks of the movement and its supporters. In such a case there is nothing else for Catholics to do but to rebuke the narrowness that would discriminate against them.'

Better Teeth AT HOWEY WALKER'S,

QUEEN STREET, AUCKLAND.

Less Pain. Less Expense.