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LETTERS FROM ROME, BY JOHN FRANCIS MAGUIRE, M.P. FOR DUNGARVAN.

[An interesting series of letters from the Eternal City has appeared in the Cork Examiner from the pen of the hon. member for Dungarvan. We give the following]:—

CRIMINAL STATISTICS—POLITICAL OFFENDERS.

In forming a fair estimate of the state of crime in the Papal States, as represented by the numbers now actually suffering punishment for their offences, under process, or awaiting their trial, one consideration should be held distinctly in view—that Rome has no penal settlements, such as England and France possess, to which she could deport the worst portion, or, indeed, any portion of her criminals. Thus, if it be said that Rome has so many prisoners in the various prisons of the Papal States, the number so stated represents the entire, whereas, if the same be said of France or England it would not represent anything like the truth, for France has her Cayenne and England her Bermuda and her Australian settlements for the detention of a large class of offenders. The Pope's possessions are limited to his own states, and beyond their boundary it is impossible for him to establish a prison or penal colony. The statistics now before me, and upon the exactness of which it is impossible to entertain the smallest doubt, exhibit a steady decrease in crime, so far as that can be evidenced by the number in prison; and in all countries this is the test and criterion by which the state of a country in this particular respect is judged of. In December, 1854, the number of prisoners—those awaiting their trial, under process, or actually condemned and suffering punishment—was 12,140. The next year showed a lesser amount of crime, the number for December, 1855, being 11,656. In this year the diminution is even still more perceptible. I take two months of the present year, August and September, and not only do I find that there is a less number in August, 1856, than in December, but I perceive that there is a favorable difference between the two months of the same year. In August, the number was 10,885; and in September, 10,777. I can only state, what I have reason to know to be the fact, that the returns for the months of October and November exhibit a still more satisfactory diminution in their numbers. These are distributed throughout the Pontifical States, the proportion in some of the chief places having been as follows in September last:—Rome, 1,185; Bologna, 1,338; Ancona, 787; Civita Vecchia, 1,591; Ferrara, 299. The returns quoted embrace all kinds of crimes and all kinds of accusations, and, amongst the rest, they comprehend a class of offenders who in some countries, for instance in France, are under the control as well as sanctioned by the police authorities, and in others defy almost all authority or restraint whatsoever. I allude to women of depraved character, one of whom is not to be met in the streets of Rome, which may accordingly be traversed with impunity at any hour of the evening or night by a modest female, without the risk of having her eyes and ears offended, as they are in too many cities of our highly-civilized empire. Offenders of this class are at once made amenable to the law, and committed either to the Termini, or to the institution of the Good Shepherd, where every means of reformation is adopted, and in very many instances with great success—both institutions being specially under the care and control of religious communities.—In the returns are also necessarily included all those who, having been sentenced to imprisonment for life, or for a term of fifteen or twenty years, since the accession of Pius the Ninth, have not as yet been the objects of his clemency. So that the 10,777 prisoners who in September last were lying in the prisons of the Pontifical States, in September of this year give an exaggerated idea of the actual state of crime, it is really representing the crime, not of one year, but of several years.

There has been a notion industriously propagated, for obvious reasons, that the prisons of the Papal States were filled with political offenders, the victims of arbitrary power and remorseless tyranny. That there are persons confined for political offences there can be no question whatever; I myself saw prisoners of this class in the prison of San Michele; but that their number has been immensely exaggerated, the real state of the case distinctly demonstrates. Of "purely political offenders" there were 99 about two months since; and since that time that number has been reduced to 70—that is, 29 additional pardons have since been granted through the clemency of the Pope, in many instances excited by the appeals of those who have since been his objects. In the early part of October the number of persons confined for political offences, and offences which are described or classified as those "arising out of party spirit"—meaning thereby injury to the persons, acts of violence, frequently stabbing, the result of quarrels arising from party hate or political disputes

—or, in fact, offences which bear a strong and remarkable analogy to the outrages and acts of violence that so frequently occur in the north of Ireland, and are directly traceable to sectarian as well as political differences—the entire number so classified under these two heads did not exceed 338; and of that number, those undergoing sentence, or held in detention, for "purely political" offences did not exceed 99; which number, as I have stated, is now reduced to 70, and may be still reduced considerably ere the 1st of January, 1857. The gross number has been reduced from 338 to 292. The Pope has granted 47 pardons to "purely political" offenders from the 1st of January, 1855, to the 15th of May, 1856—that is, either remitted the greater portion of their punishment, or restored them to full liberty; and within the same period he has exhibited similar clemency to 65, whose offences arose out of "party spirit"—making in all no less than 112. From May to October he has granted 83 pardons more, of which 29 have been granted to "purely political" offenders, and the rest to persons coming under the head of offenders from "party motives." When the gross number reached 338, political and party offenders, they were distributed as follows:—Ancona, 54; Fort Urbano, 21; Paliano, 208; San Michele, 43 suffering punishment, and 12 under process. Now that the gross number is reduced to 70 "purely political" offenders, and 222 offenders from "party spirit," somewhat of the same proportions is maintained in the prisons mentioned.

These statistics would not exhibit the whole truth unless they also embraced another class, who are suffering exile in consequence of their connexion with the memorable revolution which compelled his Holiness—himself the first as well as the most illustrious of reformers—to fly to Gaeta. The number of those who were formally excluded from the amnesty of September, 1849, was 253, and of those 200 were members of the Triumvirate, of the Constituent Assembly, and of the Provisional Government, and 83 were chiefs of the different military corps. Of this gross number 21 were strangers, and not subjects of the Pontifical States. Of the 233 mentioned 59 have received pardon—that is, 35 of the Constituent Assembly, and 24 military leaders. Hence the number of the Pope's subjects so exiled at present is 203. Some of those who since died, others would not appeal to the clemency of their Sovereign, and more have exhibited such "perverse conduct" (*perversa condotta*) that it is not thought prudent to extend pardon to them.

There is, lastly, another class, who fled from Rome and the Papal States after the success of the French, and whose return to the States is prohibited. These amount in all to 1,273; but, as there are, or were no less than 629 foreigners among them, not more than 644 are subjects of the Pope. Subtracting from this number those who were then exiled, as a commutation of a heavier sentence, or who demanded and obtained permission to spend the remainder of their lives in foreign countries, in order, amongst other reasons, to be free from all surveillance, and amounting in all to 152, it appears that the total number of the Pope's subjects to whom return, without permission being obtained, is prohibited, is 492. Many of these have fled from punishment for offences not political; but there can be no doubt whatever that an appeal made by most of those now in exile, and who could be proved not to have been leagued in other countries against the throne and authority of the Pope, would not be made in vain. The whole career of Pius IX., including the instances which I have given of his mercy and compassion, is in favor of the belief that could he carry out his own benevolent intentions, and freely obey the promptings of his noble and tender nature, there is not a good or honest subject of his now in exile to whom he would not to-morrow grant permission to return to his home and country. One fact must be mentioned to the honor of Pius IX.—as it contrasts so strongly with the bloody vengeance which other sovereigns wreak on their subjects when once rebellion has been crushed—that there has not been a single person executed for a purely political offence during his reign. Try this fact by the actual conduct of other European monarchs, and by what that of the English government would have been had the affair of 1848 in Ireland been like that of the Hungarians, the Venetians, or the Sicilians, or even had an Irish Secretary of State been shot in the Castle of Dublin, and Lord Clarendon been compelled to fly across the Channel to England for personal safety; and then the clemency of Pius IX. will shine the brighter by the contrast.

But while clemency is a noble virtue, especially in sovereigns, weakness is a folly, and may be as ruinous as a vice; and thus, though one would ardently desire that every native of the Papal States, now in exile on account of the part which he took in the revolution of 1848, should be permitted to return to his home and

kindred, provided he did not come back in the spirit of a revolutionist and an avenger, no rational person could expect that the Pope would be so insensible to the promptings of ordinary caution and foresight as to allow men to return to his States who have been openly declaring their determination to accomplish his overthrow, or have been known to be parties to, and promoters of, conspiracies towards the same end.—If he did so, he would be more or less than mortal, and would act as no other sovereign has acted, or is ever likely to act, under similar circumstances. If the Pope were only allowed to take his own course, and if those who dishonestly excite expectations which they never can and never mean to realise would wisely stop in their treacherous career, matters would soon be arranged on a better and safer basis than they now are. But it is not by keeping the more sanguine minds of the country in a fever of excitement, by delusive hopes and false expectations, that tranquillity can be established, or that great reforms can be promoted; and those who pursue this dishonest course are equally the enemies of the subjects of the Pope as of the Pope himself.

The hon. and learned member writes hopefully of the Roman Prisons. He says:—"The work of reformation has been undertaken in earnestness and sincerity, and already the fruits of a wise and salutary policy are making themselves manifest, wherever it has had a fair opportunity for its practical development. Emphatically, it may be said, that the Prisons of Rome are in a state of transition. The great object of the prisoner's reformation is never abandoned—it is rather the first object held in view; but, in order to bring about that result, the substitution of members of religious orders for the ordinary staff of the Roman prisons, is being steadily and persistently carried on. Jailors and turnkeys, however excellent the best of them may be, are not generally influenced in the discharge of their duties by very pure and lofty motives. It would be expecting too much of human nature to suppose they should. But with persons devoted to a religious life it is far otherwise. Their whole and only interest is to serve God by doing the greatest possible good to their brethren, no matter how degraded they may be, no matter into what depths of physical misery or moral depravity they may have fallen. The different results produced by different systems—the management by mere mercenaries, and the management by religious, Mr. Maguire describes as most striking. He proceeds to give a very interesting account of the Termini, a prison for women, which is under the control of the *Sœurs de Providence*, one of those noble institutions of which Catholic Belgium has been so gloriously fruitful. It is entirely devoted to the care of jails, hospitals and schools, its glorious mission being to reclaim the erring, to succor and console the sick, and enlighten the ignorant. . . . We were shown through the various dormitories, all of which were of immense size, lofty, airy, and well lighted. In one room which was more than 40 feet square, there were but 18 beds, neatly arranged, and cleanly as well as comfortable in their materials; and in another, which was 60 feet in length by 40 in width, there were no more than 25 beds. The infirmary, chapel, and refectory, were large in proportion, and all kept in a condition of perfect cleanliness, the necessary result of such superintendence and such control as the wisdom and humanity of His Holiness had provided for this important institution. When it was first handed over to the Nuns, the prisoners were in a state of great ignorance, very many of them being unable to read. But since then their proficiency in reading and writing, as well as in useful and ornamental needlework, has been great; and their conduct almost uniformly good. The Superior stated that nothing could be more edifying than their pious demeanor when assisting at the death-bed of a dying fellow-prisoner, or their eagerness in sharing in such a solemn office. In fact, a dozen feeble women, acting under a sense of religious obligation, and animated by tender compassion for human misery in its most painful form, have succeeded in acquiring the most salutary control over more than 200 of their ruder fellow-creatures, not a few of whom are expiating offences of great enormity, and who perhaps at the time recognised no law but that of their fierce and untutored natures. It is unnecessary to say that religion is the potent agent by which gentleness and obedience are insured, and amendment is being accomplished.

The Brothers of Mercy have got the control of a prison for men in the adjoining building but for the last six months; and though some of the officers of the former staff are still retained, the *three* Brothers to whom its care has been entrusted would not, they state, be in the least degree afraid of having it all to themselves. Their influence—the influence of a mild and gentle but firm rule—is already most wonderful, and productive of the best results, in the improved tone and feeling of the prisoners. This prison, at the time I visited it, was undergoing considerable

changes, mainly undertaken for the more easy and speedy adoption of a better system; but so far as it was possible, in the condition of evident transition in which our visit found it, even industrial and literary training was sedulously promoted; while the moral improvement of the prisoner is, of necessity, the first object, and never, under any circumstances, neglected. The Brothers under whose care this prison is placed belong to a Belgian community, established by a distinguished ecclesiastic, Canon Scheepers, of Malins, who, if I mistake not, has been recently appointed one of the Chamberlains of His Holiness; though his sense of duty may render it to a certain extent an honorary distinction.

A number of the same valuable brotherhood preside over an interesting institution intended for the reformation of juvenile offenders, and vagrants of the worst class—the prison of Santa Balbina. I saw several of the boys in the playground, a large open space, in which they roamed about freely, and indulged in harmless sport, but always under the watchful eye of a Brother, whose manner towards them is of that paternal kind which while exciting confidence, also commands respect. The entire number of young prisoners was 97 on the day I visited the institution. But really the term "prisoner" does not exactly describe their condition, save so far as they are under restraint and cannot leave until permitted to do so; for, while they are taught to read and write, many of them are employed in a vineyard and garden belonging to the establishment, and the rest are occupied in various industrial pursuits, suited to their state in life—and the rule, which they cheerfully obey, is that of all others best calculated to effect their reformation. The separate cell system is in a great measure carried out in this prison, the extensive dormitories being divided by rows of small apartments, perhaps about 6 feet by 5, wired in at the top and in front; ventilation and thorough separation being thus obtained at the same time. The same plan has been adopted in the Catholic Reformatory in the operation at Hammersmith. The boys much prefer this separate system to that of open dormitories, the idea of the little room being their own, and the duty of keeping it in order, in some degree exciting a feeling of self-respect. The Brothers say "they can do anything" with the boys; such is the boundless nature of the influence they possess, and, above all, the confidence which their motives inspire, even in the breasts of the most corrupted. The severest punishment, unless for an attempt at escape, is confinement for a short period; and it may be mentioned that there is but one "guardian," and he is at the outer door. The Brothers have been connected with this asylum for three years.

At San Michele, one of the greatest establishments in Rome, embracing within its vast extent a grand college, an hospital, more than one asylum for the poor, and three prisons—there is a prison for males, in which the separate system has been strictly carried out for 50 years, or since the time of Clement the Eleventh. In some respects it is very similar to the modern military prisons of Ireland, one of the most perfect, and indeed best managed of which is in Cork. In all cases that it can be enforced, the silent system is maintained; but there are times when speaking is allowed, and occupations—for instance particular descriptions of work—during which it cannot be judiciously prevented. The cells, as in the military prison to which I have referred, rise tier over tier, or storey over storey—all looking into, and lighted by, the vast hall in which the industrial employment, of various kinds is carried on. The prisoners eat their food in their cells; and as I entered the great hall of the prison, I beheld them walk quietly and silently from their cells to where an officer was serving out to each a fair allowance of a soup that looked well to the eye and that a curious friend assured me was not at all unpalatable to the taste. On Sundays they are allowed to talk to each other for half an hour. They rise every morning at half-past five o'clock, dress, and arrange their cells; at half-past six they attend Mass, and then breakfast; at half-past seven they proceed to their various occupations, always of an industrial kind, at which they continue till half-past eleven; they then get their dinner, and remain in their cells till half-past one, when they resume their work, which lasts till five. At five they sup; after which they immediately attend school, which lasts till half-past seven, when instruction of a religious nature is given, and the night prayers are said. They then return to their cells, in which they are shut up till next morning commences another day of melancholy drudgery, irksome, no doubt, but by no means unimproving. Four brothers are in charge of this prison, in which were several prisoners who had been sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, some even for life; but the greater number, if not all those of the latter, had their sentences commuted to 20 years on the occasion of the last anniversary of the Pope's accession to the throne.

In another department of the same vast building, I visited the prison in which persons convicted

of political offences were confined. In one large room I observed about 10 or 12 men; and in a great hall, which was well lighted, as well as ventilated, from the street, and into which the cells—each fully three times larger in size than the cells for criminals—opened. There were two or three rows, one above the other and only on one side of the hall, the other side consisting of the extensive wall of the building, pierced by several windows. There might have been 20 persons in the hall, either walking up and down, chattering to each other, or engaged, as I could perceive, in a game of dominoes. A glance into the interior of the cells of this prison was sufficient to show that they differed from ordinary cells in many other respects than superior size; for in one into which I looked there were glasses of different kinds, some ornaments, and other articles not usually found in such places. So far as a sense of delicacy would permit me to do so, I saw enough to convince me that at least in this prison there was nothing which in any way realised the descriptions which I had read of "Italian dungeons."

This Prison is entirely in the management of the police. At the time I visited it the number of prisoners was under 50; and of this number but a small proportion were undergoing punishment for what are in Rome known as purely political offences.

One of the best managed and most perfect of the prisons of Rome, is that under the control of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Then the grand new prison near Fossombrone may be also incidentally referred to. It is now ready for 250 persons, and will be rendered capable of containing 500. This will be the Model Prison of the States, in which every improvement that experience has proved to be useful, or that humanity can suggest, will have a fair trial. In the other prisons there is change as well as progress; but in this there will be the most perfect adaptation of the means employed to the object to be accomplished. This is amongst the other monuments of the reformatory zeal of Pius the Ninth.

It would be only tedious if I were to refer to all the other prisons in Rome, especially as I have given sufficient to justify my assertion that they are in a state of transition, and the expression of a confident hope that in the course of a very short time they will be inferior in no respect save in the expense of their construction, alteration, and management, to the boasted prisons of England; and that in many respects they will be vastly superior in their results—above all, in the great work of reformation—in the real improvement, in mind and heart, in intelligence and industry, of their unhappy inmates, whose guilt is, in the Roman as in other States, most frequently caused by poverty and ignorance, and temptation, against which poverty and ignorance are but a poor protection. To no subject has the Pope devoted more attention than to this most important one of the treatment of criminals; and the gradual changes which are being effected, or which are already planned, have been entirely inspired by the zeal and humanity of His Holiness, whose chief as well as most enthusiastic agent in the good work is his principal Chamberlain, Monsignor de Merod, the brother in law of the Count de Montalembert. Monsignor Talbot, who also holds the office of Chamberlain to His Holiness, is the most zealous and earnest in the work of prison reform. So that the Pope has the advantage of the assistance and sympathy of two men who are singularly suited to the promotion of this great and humane object; for while Monsignor de Merod has had extensive experience of the prison system of Belgium, which is perhaps superior to any in the world, Monsignor Talbot is thoroughly acquainted with all those improvements which have been recently adopted in England. The former distinguished person has the official charge of the prisons; while the latter visits them several times in the week, but in a capacity more immediately spiritual. The Pope was not satisfied with hearing of the state of those institutions, he was resolved to see for himself; and about the close of last year he visited all the prisons of Rome—and the reforms which are now being carried out, as well as those which are in contemplation, are in a great measure the fruit of that remarkable visit—entirely one of surprise to the authorities of the prisons, which at the time excited the greatest interest, none such having been made for the previous thirty years. I again repeat that, while the Roman Prisons would certainly bear no comparison to the costly and magnificent establishments of England, they are in a state of the most hopeful transition, not to costliness and munificence, but to practical efficiency and success.

A KEEN REBUKE.—A man who forbade his servant girl (who belonged to the same church with himself) going in and out of the front door of the house, was quietly asked by the girl if he supposed they would enter heaven by separate doors.