

Messenger and Visitor.

THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER,
VOLUME LX.

{ THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR,
VOLUME XLIX.

Vol. XIV.

ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 1898.

No. 9.

The United States and Spain. An investigation into the cause of the destruction of the battleship *Maine*, in the harbor of Havana, is being held by the United States naval authorities. The facts elicited, it is understood, will not be given to the public until the work of investigation shall be completed. So far as is ascertainable from trustworthy external sources, there appears to be nothing to warrant the belief that the disaster was not due to an accident on board the ship. The dignified attitude of the Government and the calmness and patience shown by the people of the United States, as expressed by the more prudent and self-respecting class of the public men and newspapers of the country, are worthy of all praise. Unfortunately the United States possesses a very considerable number of men in public life and of newspapers which are neither prudent nor self-respecting. There is an army of newspaper men whose grand purpose is to produce and publish despatches and articles of a sensational character, which will cause their papers to sell. To them a war-cloud the size of a man's hand is a god-send. It is at once magnified into a gathering tempest, big and black with impending wrath. The talk of war, however baseless it may be, is always sure of catching the ear of the crowd, the bogus despatches alleging proofs of Spanish treachery and the inflammatory articles declaring that war is inevitable are always sure to sell papers. So the despatches and the articles are manufactured according to the demand. There is a large class of politicians too who never lose an opportunity which may be afforded in the course of events to achieve notoriety and to commend themselves to the unthinking by making sensational speeches. There is always a large jingo element in the country capable of being strongly wrought upon by demagogue orators and unscrupulous newspaper writers. The worst of it is that these reckless and self-appointed instructors of the public do to a considerable extent persuade others to believe what they themselves know to be untrue. Thus the ideas of a large proportion of the people on questions of international relations become distorted, an unfriendly and belligerent spirit is developed toward nations with whom it is to the highest interest of the United States to remain at peace, and a public sentiment is created which unscrupulous leaders may for their own petty interests take advantage of to plunge the country into a cruel and disastrous war. There are now apparently a good many men of more or less influence in the United States who have determined to do all they can to bring on a war with Spain. They much prefer, it would seem, to have the Cuban question settled by such means than by any other. Just what influence this jingo spirit will have in the counsels of the nation it is impossible to say. No doubt President McKinley desires to preserve peace. But if the investigation into the *Maine* disaster should show reasonable grounds for the belief that it was not due to an accident—even though the Spanish authorities were not at all directly concerned in the affair—it is doubtful if war could be avoided. There is no doubt that the United States Government contemplates the possibility of war with Spain at no distant day, and is taking active measures to prepare for it.

Dangerous Conditions. The erratic movements of French troops—or rather of bands of native soldiers officered by Frenchmen—in West Africa, continue to be a menace to the friendly relations of the two nations. That the matter is regarded by the British Government as a somewhat serious one seems evident from the fact that in both branches of Parliament it has received attention during the past week. On a question put by Sir Charles

Dilke to the Secretary of State for the Colonies as to whether a British force in the Lagos Hinterland had been ordered by a French force to haul down its flag, Mr. Chamberlain replied, "with a portentous air" by reading two despatches received a few hours previously from West Africa and declining to comment upon them. One of these despatches confirmed the report that a small British force at Borrea had been ordered by thirty Senegalese to lower its flag, but had refused to do so; the other declared that protests had been exchanged between the rival outposts on the edge of the British settlement of the Gold Coast, and that a French station had been established in a district which had been proclaimed as lying within the sphere of British influence. Mr. Chamberlain is believed to take a more serious view of these West African complications than does Lord Salisbury and other members of the Government, and the reading of these despatches in Parliament is interpreted as an effort to arouse public sentiment on the subject and nerve up Lord Salisbury to adopt a more vigorous policy. The next day the Premier in his place in the House of Lords read a despatch from the British Ambassador, denying on behalf of the French Government any unfriendly intention or the possession of any information as to facts alleged in the despatches presented to Parliament by Mr. Chamberlain. But at all events the French authorities do not appear to have taken any pains to prevent these incidents which are causing irritation. It must be admitted that an element of very considerable danger inheres in the present disturbed condition of affairs within the French republic. The popular mind in France has been worked up to such a pitch of excitement by anti-semitic passion on the one hand and anger at the Government on the other for its bungling, mysterious and arbitrary course in connection with the Drefus affair and the Zola trial, that predictions of a revolution are rife, and it is within the bounds of possibility that the French leaders may conclude that a foreign war offers the only hope of saving the republic from ruin.

Local Government for Ireland. Considerable interest was manifested in connection with the introduction of the Irish Local Government bill in the House of Commons last week. In introducing the bill, Mr. Gerald Balfour, Chief Secretary for Ireland, said that he thought it possible that at first the new order of things might seem to be a failure, but that he believed it would work through such apparent failure to success which would be the beginning of better and brighter days for Ireland. The measure proposes to distribute the local administration between county councils, urban and rural district councils and boards of guardians, the election of which will be by parliamentary franchise, with the addition to the list of electors of Peers and properly qualified women. The qualifications and disqualifications for election as councillors will be the same as in England, except that ministers of religion will be disqualified in the county or district council. The elections for the county and district councillors are to be triennial and all will retire together. The county councils will be the sole rate collecting authority and will control the expenditure. They will also be responsible for dealing with exceptional distress and the county will be responsible for half the extra expenditure. John Morley, Chief Secretary for Ireland in the late Liberal administration, welcomed the bill as being a genuine democratic effort. The Irish leaders Messrs. John Dillon, John Redmond, Timothy Healy and Michael Davitt, spoke in favor of the bill as a whole, but criticised adversely some of its provisions.

The Storm. The severest snow storm of the season, probably the severest for some years, so far as the provinces of Quebec and Ontario are concerned, occurred last week. The storm was also heavy in the northern portions of New Brunswick and Maine. In St. John and eastward the storm was comparatively light, causing little or no delay in the movement of trains. But westward and northward railway travel and traffic has been entirely demoralized. After Monday no mails reached St. John from the Upper Provinces by the way of the C. P. R. until Wednesday night and trains were not able to resume their regular daily service until Friday. On the Intercolonial the condition of things has been no better, and perhaps somewhat worse. The reports from Quebec and Ontario are to the effect that throughout large portions of those provinces the roads are greatly blocked with snow. In Quebec city and neighborhood the storm is reported to have been the most severe experienced in many years. The wind blew at the rate of sixty miles an hour, and while in many places the streets were swept clean of snow, in others the drifts are piled mountains high. On the Lewis side of the river the conditions of things is reported to be worse than in the city, drifts twenty to thirty feet high completely blocking all traffic. A terrible incident of the storm was the avalanche of snow which came crashing down from the cliff near the old Grand Trunk terminus, destroying two houses and killing four of the inmates. Other tenants who had occupied rooms in the house having become alarmed at the prospect of the snowslides, had moved out a few hours before the accident occurred. One of the houses was cut in two by the avalanche above the first flat and the upper storey turned over into the street. Remarkable to relate none of the persons who were in the part of the house thus overturned were seriously injured.

End of the Zola Trial. The trial of M. Zola, who, in conjunction with M. Perriau, of the *Aurore* newspaper, was prosecuted in Paris for alleged defamatory utterances against certain French military officers of high rank, has ended, as it was a foregone conclusion that it would end, in the condemnation of the accused. M. Zola has accordingly been sentenced to a year's imprisonment and to pay a fine of three thousand francs. The statements of M. Zola that Drefus, who was charged with betraying military secrets to a foreign power, was innocent of the crime and was condemned on insufficient evidence, may or may not have been true or capable of proof. But, however that may be, the trial of M. Zola was a wholly farcical business. The whole effort of the court, with the military authorities and the Government at its back, was to prevent any inquiry into the merits of the evidence on which Capt. Drefus was condemned, the presiding judge ruling out any questions which would involve any reconsideration of the matter. Officers of high rank in the army refused, with the approval of the court, to answer the questions of M. Zola's counsel, and instead addressed inflammatory appeals to the jury. There seems to have been a considerable minority of the people who sympathized with Zola's arraignment of the military authorities and strongly resented their despotic assumptions of power, but the large and noisy majority, actuated by anti-Semitic passion, bitterly and incessantly denounced Drefus, not because they had any evidence of his guilt, for they had none, but because he was a Jew. During the trial the life of M. Zola was repeatedly in danger. If he had been acquitted, there would doubtless have been rioting, perhaps revolution in France.