



CURRENT COMMENT

On New Year's Day the Free Press headed a despatch from New York in this way: "Campania's voyage unusually rough—Nearly eight days." In point of fact the voyage lasted only seven days, eight hours and thirty-one minutes. But any transatlantic trip on a first-class liner looks long now when it extends over seven days. And yet, barely thirty years ago transatlantic travellers were looking forward eagerly to the time when the "pond" might be crossed in eight days. And as late as 1883 the American Cyclopaedia said that the most successful transoceanic steamships took from eight to ten days to make the passage. To-day we are hoping for the four-day liner.

On the fourteenth of last January the Northwest Review had the following:

Madame de Thebes, a Paris clairvoyante, whose predictions have hitherto been vouched for after the fact, now makes bold to prophesy publicly before the events. She says the year 1905 will be a disastrous one, the most striking events of which will be the death of King Edward VII., and a great revolution that will overturn the throne of Germany. Nous verrons.

We have seen nothing of the kind. 1905 has not been a disastrous year for France, except in the continued persecution of Catholics, which people of Madame de Thebes' stamp consider a very auspicious proceeding; nor has it been particularly disastrous for any part of the world except Russia. The King is happily very much alive and has clasped hands with France during this very year. No revolution even threatens to overturn the throne of Germany.

These are plain facts contradicting the prophecies of this bold humbug. How is it, then, that she still holds the floor and is out with a new prediction for 1906, which most of the papers publish without any reference to so obvious and recent a failure? One of the many reasons that might be given for this gullibility of the public is that the ordinary editor does not take the trouble to remember the predictions and then see if they square with the facts. Take, for instance, a much more easily verifiable case, and one which professes to be a deduction from scientific data—Foster's weekly weather forecasts. We have repeatedly proved in these columns that his forecasts either are so indefinite as to be practically useless or that they are rarely verified when they are definite. One of these rare exceptions was Christmas week at the end of 1905. He prophesied that it would be mild and it was. But follow him closely during the rest of the year and we shall be agreeably disappointed if his definite, clear forecasts come true once in five times. When he happens to be right he never fails to do a gloat, and says nothing of his wrong forecasts. Yet his predictions may easily be tested from week to week and need not be so speedily forgotten, whereas the Paris clairvoyante gets general notice only about once a year, creates a momentary sensation and is soon out of the public mind.

She is careful, however, to remind her dupes that she predicted—it is she who gets the papers to say this—the Paris charity bazaar fire and President Carnot's assassination. Of course she did not do anything of the kind. After these two tragic events her admirers, no doubt at her suggestion, industriously spread the report that she had predicted the holocaust of the Rue Jean Goujon and the violent end of the French President. But when a diligent search was made of her utterances reported in the papers previous to these two events, all that was found was, in one case, the prediction of a disaster with great loss of life, and the other, the violent death of a ruler. Such predictions are too indefinite and

too much within the range of probability to be anything more than coincidences. Hardly a year passes in a country of forty million inhabitants without some such disaster as a fire attended with great loss of life, and when we remember that in the last forty years more than one ruler a year, on an average, has been done to death somewhere in the world, the announcement that one such tragedy would occur in a given year is a tolerably safe prediction that anyone might risk.

It is well for Catholics to bear in mind that no created being, angelic or human can make a definite prediction of a future fact that depends upon the play of freewill, without special inspiration from God, who alone can foretell what free agents will do in future circumstances. The reason why God alone can foretell future free acts is that the practically infinite contingencies that may arise from the clash and interplay of created wills cannot be foreseen with certainty by any intelligence that is not infinite. What depends entirely upon necessary causes may, of course, be foreseen even by human intelligence. Thus astronomers can announce long beforehand an eclipse or the future return of a comet, though in this latter case always with the proviso that the comet has not worn itself out or been interfered with by some other heavenly body. Physicians may, from their profound knowledge of diseases, predict, with tolerable accuracy, the hour of death a few hours ahead, or the day a few days ahead, or even the year some years ahead, but there is no certainty in these predictions, especially when they cover a long period, because unforeseen accidents may hasten the fatal issue, or miraculous intervention may restore health to the dying. And yet we have in such cases, the necessary development of an incurable disease, upon which free will has no influence at all. But when we come to political events, which depend chiefly upon the conflicting wills of men, the impossibility of a definite and detailed forecast by mere human intelligence is almost a truism. Shrewd guesses, and very lucky ones sometimes, are quite possible, but nothing that deserves the name of prophecy.

However, may not pure spirits predict the free future? This question is perfectly allowable in the case of clairvoyancy which often professes to be due to communication with spirits. We reply that pure spirits cannot predict with certainty future events that depend upon the play of free will. Their intelligence, albeit vastly greater than that of the greatest human genius and aided by world-wide accumulations of forgotten past events, is still finite and cannot therefore decide which one of a thousand million free contingencies will infallibly occur. To be sure, they may be enlightened by God Himself and then predict with certainty future free events. But the infinite wisdom and majesty of God would never so demean itself as to communicate such purely divine knowledge to professional exploiters of the public purse who aim at nothing but pecuniary profit and worldly fame. It would be preposterous to suppose that good angels could be employed as the bearers of such messages to such persons. God may indeed, as in the case of Balaam, bestow the gift of prophecy for the furtherance of truth, upon evil men, or even, as in several well authenticated cases of diabolical possession, upon evil spirits. But this hypothesis cannot apply to Madame de Thebes, first, because her predictions do not contribute to the spread of the true religion, and secondly, because, if she had been in communication with evil spirits, they could have informed her that the scene of a great revolution in 1905 would be not Germany but Russia. Satan and his host of fallen spirits, being scattered all over the world and knowing in particular the dispositions of every Russian in the empire of the Tsar and the most secret plots of the revolutionists, could easily have conjectured the probable date of the great explosion. For this no infinite knowledge, no grasp of the future in the Everlasting Now, is needed. A mere man, with the knowledge undoubtedly possessed by evil spirits,

could have guessed the extremely probable result. And yet Madame de Thebes saw nothing of this in her forecast for 1905.

Let us wait and see if she will be more fortunate in her forecast for 1906. As one of our American contemporaries puts it, "she predicts that Germany will be threatened with general smash early in the year; that South America is to be torn with upheavals; that an unconquerable epidemic is to sweep the United States; that Belgium will play a curious part in the transformation of Europe; that the attention of the world will be centred on Turkey and the near east, and that there will be serious losses to the art world." Barring the "unconquerable epidemic" and the "serious losses to the art world," there is really nothing here that requires preternatural foresight. Germany has been for some time threatened with war. South America, at least in some of its parts, is subject to chronic upheavals. Belgium, as is well known, is preparing for a great electoral contest this year with the vital issue of Catholic education opposed by Masonic irreligion, an issue which is sure to greatly influence the rest of Europe. The attention of the world was, long before Madame de Thebes opened her mouth, centred on Turkey and the near east. So there is not very much that we need remember in order to check this mild attack of clairvoyance.

There is one thing, however, in it that would almost suggest the inspiration of those evil spirits who carry with them their eternal woe. We mean the complete absence in Madame de Thebes' forecasts of any pleasing event, such as a bountiful harvest, the peaceful solution of some national difficulty, or the advent of some great and good ruler of men. The lurid and the tragic, horror and terror, the marks of the Evil One, are more in her line.

The completion of 1905 without any marked relief to Catholics in France disposes of another alleged prophecy which has been going the rounds of the Catholic papers during the last two or three years. The story was substantially this: A nun who is now over seventy years of age went to Ars, when she was a young girl, to consult the Blessed John Vianney, then parish priest of that village, about her vocation. The venerable saint, about whom many authentic prophecies are recorded, told her that she would become a nun and that she would serve as a nursing sister in the hospitals of the Crimea and of Italy during Napoleon III.'s campaign there. The saintly priest went on to say: "You will see the new century" (the twentieth); "the first years, one, two, three, four, will be disastrous to the Church in France, but after that God will take a hand in events (Dieu y mettra la main)." One year having now elapsed since that extreme limit, the correctness of the prediction seems, to say the least, very doubtful. Besides, the fact that the public did not hear of this prediction till more than fifty years after it was supposed to have been made gives it the appearance of a story concocted after most of the events mentioned in it. But what makes it utterly unreliable is the absence of all proper names and all reference to living authorities who might be consulted for purposes of verification. No doubt such a prophecy as this stands on a very different footing from the vapourings of a professional clairvoyante. It is antecedently quite probable that the saintly pastor of Ars may have been inspired by God to make such a prophecy, because he made other predictions which were afterwards fully verified. But we have no proof that he did make this one, or that if he did utter some such prediction, it has not been distorted in the lapse of half a century.

Last Monday morning the Free Press had a thoughtful leader on the New Year. It is a healthy sign that the most widely circulated paper in the centre and west of Canada should be able to count upon a sufficient number of responsive readers to justify its editor in expressing such sentiments as this:

At such a time the thoughtful must muse on those old Mysteries of Time and Space and Existence—Mysteries no nearer solution than when the epic of the beginnings of earthly things was written down so many ages ago by some man or men with eyes as clear seeing as those of any man since, and with a far diviner gift of poetic narrative.

Rightly interpreted this constitutes a refreshing relief from the current platitudes about indefinite human progress. Progress merely onward among stubbornly material forces is but sorry comfort for an immortal soul. True progress, which means a heavenward uplift, is clearly hinted at in the following passage from the same editorial:

A thousand years add something to human knowledge, something to the ameliorations of life, but little to our conceptions of truth itself; and in the multitude of our thoughts, we take what comfort we can in this, that a thousand years are but as yesterday or a watch in the night. They are carried away as with a flood, by the Source of Truth, and are as a sleep. Man's thirst for truth will not be slaked until he reach its Source.

The Telegram, in one of its editorials last Saturday, quoted the following from the Rev. C. F. Stowe, son of Harriet Beecher Stowe:

"Protestantism," he says, "is a kind of modern Cerberus, with a hundred and twenty-five different sects, exclusive of twelve kinds of Baptists and eighteen kinds of Wesleyan Methodists. This Cerberus has one hundred and twenty-five heads all barking discordantly and is like the mob of Ephesus. Thoughtful Christians looking on and beholding with sadness this confusion worse confounded cannot fail to ask: 'Did our Lord Jesus Christ come to earth to establish this pitiful mob of debating societies, or a Church of the living God, capable of making itself felt as a pillar and a ground of the faith?'"

To be sure the Telegram sugar-coats the pill by saying that Mr. Stowe "is a victim of pessimism," and by reducing the multitude of sects to three great divisions, the united Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist body, the Unitarians, and the Anglicans who cannot abandon the Apostolical succession; but, as the Rev. Dr. Sparling, in his recent commendation of the outward union effected lately between the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, expressly excluded all idea of "ecclesiasticism" (which, we need hardly say, means Church unity), as the Unitarians are known to be rampant individualists, and as the Anglicans are, dogmatically, as comprehensive as the most "pitiful mob of debating societies," Mr. Stowe's words still remain the only convincing feature of that article, and call logically for an affirmative answer to his second alternative: Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ did establish a Church of the living God, capable of making itself felt as the pillar and ground of truth.

Clerical News

Rev. Father Giroux, pastor of St. Anne, Man., dined with the Jesuit Fathers on Wednesday. His sight, we are happy to say, is greatly improved.

Very Rev. A. X. Bernard, formerly Vicar-General of the diocese of St. Hyacinthe, has been appointed Bishop, succeeding the late Bishop Decelles.

Archbishop Duchanel, of Ottawa, was received in private audience by Pope Pius during the holidays.

The Sacred Congregation of Rites in a meeting held at the Vatican Palace in December discussed the following points:

1. The Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Ven. Servant of God, Francois Rudigier, Bishop of Linz.
2. Confirmation of the "Cultus," paid from time immemorial to the Ven. Servants of God, Placidus, Martyr, and

Sigisberto, Abbot of the Order of St. Benedict, with the approbation of officers for their festival, and its insertion in The Martyrology.

3. Confirmation of the "Cultus," paid in like manner to the Ven. Servant of God, Margaret of Louvain, V. M.

4. Concession and approbation of office and Mass in honor of St. David, King and Prophet.

5. Like concession in honor of Blessed Cristoforo da Romandiola—Conf. O. F. M.

6. Concession and approbation of the offices and Masses proper to the Via Dolorosa—and in honor of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin—for the Order of Minors.

7. Confirmation of the election and concession of the B. V. M. or Her Most Holy Name (commonly called Bien Aparacida) as principal Patroness of Santander.

8. Similar confirmation with regard to St. Sebastian, Martyr—as the Patron of the diocese of Pouso Alegre.

9. As to the revision of the writings of the Ven. Jose Maria Diag Sarjago—and Melchiorre Garcia Sampedro—Bishops and Vicars Apostolic in Tonchin, of the Order of Preachers.

10. And lastly as to some liturgical doubts.

Archbishop Quigley will establish a school of music at Chicago, where the Gregorian chant will be taught by professors who have received their training from the most celebrated conservatories in Europe. All organists must attend this school and receive their diplomas therefrom, in order to ensure uniformity.

Right Rev. Efrén Giesen, Vicar Apostolic of Northern Shan Tung, China, has been created a Mandarin by the Chinese government. The honored prelate is a Dutch Franciscan who distinguished himself for bravery in defending his faithful during the Boxer rebellion, for which he carries scars to-day.

At the International Eucharistic Congress of Rome, the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Lugi, Spain, stated that perpetual Exposition has been maintained for centuries at the main altar of his Cathedral.

Rev. Henry Moeller, of St. Louis, has been appointed provincial of the Missouri province of the Society of Jesus.

Persons and Facts

Mr. A. D. C. Crommelin, recently re-elected President of the British Astronomical Association, is a Catholic.

Pope Pius has asked for a translation of President Roosevelt's messages and speeches. The Pope is anxious to study the American President's views before issuing an important Papal document concerning social problems.

The Fathers of the Third Plenary Council held in Australia lately wrote of the Catholic press as follows:

"Towards that section of the press which is Catholic in purpose and management, all Catholics owe a duty to support and encourage. The publication of a newspaper is an undertaking of no small responsibility and expense; and its success depends entirely on the help provided by its readers. It is to be feared that many of our people do not realize their responsibility in this matter. They do not take the interest they should take in the welfare of the Church, and so they are content with the small quantity of news about the Church they get in the secular papers."

Dr. Douglas Hyde, President of the Gaelic League, will give four lectures on Gaelic literature at the Californian State University. Ex-Mayor Phelan of San Francisco will defray the expenses.

Niagara University (Buffalo) will celebrate its golden jubilee this year. (Continued on page 5)