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CURRENT COMMENT

The newspaper cablegrams told us so little about the recent Congress of Freethinkers in Rome that we began to suspect it could hardly have been a success. We were informed, it is true, that the Holy Father had protested against this blasphemous convention, but not a word was said about the active members present or the resolutions passed. This silence led us to infer that something had gone wrong in the Freethinkers' camp. Our forecast has been, happily, more than realized. We learn from "La Croix" of Paris, and "Le Courrier Belge" of Brussels, that this "Council of Reason and Civilization," as it pompously styled itself, was a complete fiasco. In the first place, very few prominent men were present. Perhaps the only one of world-wide notoriety was Haeckel, the noisy but illogical atheist of Iena. But even he, as the "Giornale d'Italian" bitterly complains, could not make himself heard amid the pandemonium of talking, shouting and wrangling that prevailed in that serio-comic assembly.

The second curious feature of the congress was the predominance and tyrannical conduct of Italian Freemasonry, which not only flaunted its red, blue, black and green banners of the Grand Orient of Italy, the Grand Symbolical Lodge, the Conclaves of the 30th degree, the Rosicrucian Chapters, the Secret Majesty of Arno, but strove to silence all dissentient speakers. At this strange exhibition of "free" thought some young men revolted. They were socialists, anarchists, or merely republicans, and they claimed the right to speak. But the chairman declared that the meeting was adjourned. Thereupon one of the young bloods jumped on a chair and protested vehemently against the intolerance of the managing committee. His protest was cheered to the echo. So, with a few kindred spirits he rushed to the platform, where the two parties met and threatened each other with shrieks and closed fists. Above the din were heard these memorable words: "You want us to fight the clericals, and you make us slaves of the Freemasons, who are worse!" The following day the opposition succeeded in getting this motion passed:

Establishing the principle that sincere action in favor of Freethought cannot logically be separated from respect of that same freedom, which is an inviolable right of all and the bounden duty in particular of those who wish to do battle in the name of freedom, the International Congress of Freethought resolves to exclude from its discussions and decisions all motions, affirmations or manifestations tending to outrage or wound in any way whatever freedom of thought or action in others. This was the only sensible motion carried by the Congress of Freethinkers.

A third feature which turned the Italian Government against the Congress was the motion proclaiming the necessity of the Republican form of government for all nations. A certain Mr. Hubbard went so far as to say that "he only who has the courage to unmake a king can make a nation." Small wonder, then, that the Prime Minister of Italy forbade the proposed public demonstration before the statues of Giordano Bruno and Garibaldi.

Another disappointment for the fanatic element was the attitude of several Belgian and French delegates who, when Mr. Sergi proposed the abolition of all religious teachings, opposed this motion, maintaining that, even after the suppression of the religious orders, personal liberty must be guaranteed to everybody. This provoked a stormy discussion. The debate closed amidst violent altercations, and as the vote was taken by ballot according to nationalities, the

result is as yet uncertain. The whole thing ended in a veritable Babel of tongues.

What completed the humiliation of the enemies of all religion was the vigorous action of some young Catholics. The Rome correspondent of "Le Courrier Belge" writes, under date of September 22, that at one of the first meetings of the Congress several fearless Catholics protested so loudly and so energetically that the president, vice-presidents, secretaries and all the managing committee withdrew. The chairman's frantic ringing of his bell was useless, the meeting had to adjourn.

Besides Haeckel, whose lack of real science we exposed the other day (September 24) in a review of Father Muckermann's article in the "Messenger" on the Origin of Man, the only other pseudo-scientific celebrity that figured in that Congress, not bodily, but merely by a paper sent and read by somebody else, was the greatly overestimated French chemist, Marcelin Berthelot, whom, curiously enough, just a few days before, "Le Gaulois" and "La Verite Francaise," two well known Paris journals, proved to be a rank plagiarist. The old fraud boasted 49 years ago that he was the first to realize the synthesis of alcohol; but in 1902 Fritzsche proved that an English chemist, Hennel, had made this very discovery in 1829, 26 years before Berthelot, who also borrowed without acknowledgment and proclaimed as his own various chemical discoveries due to Faraday, Reboul, Pelouse, Galis, Julius Thompson, Faure, Silbermann, Nernst, Abbe Nollet, George Ville, Thenard and Jodin. France had long been deceived by the self-advertising methods of Marcelin Berthelot; but when his name was trumpeted abroad as "the greatest scientist of the entire world," about to officiate at the International Congress of Freethought, patient bookworms ferreted out his record and proved that he was admitted to the "Academie des Sciences" only by a trick, viz., by presenting himself, not in the chemistry section, where nobody would acknowledge him, but in the physics section, where his colleagues tolerated him because they knew nothing about him in that line. Having got wind of these awful disclosures in time, the hoary plagiarist trumped up a convenient illness to excuse his not going to Rome, and got his paper read by Mr. Buisson. The Freethinkers are welcome to such a celebrity as Berthelot.

"La Croix" thus sums up the solemn farce of this three days' Congress: "First day, opening speech; second day, rest from labor; third day, closing. 'We shall worthily respond,' said the programme, 'to the expectations of the civilized world.'"

Our intelligent readers will doubtless have corrected in their minds the absurd misprint in our last issue (page 2, column 2) to the effect that the French Government "expects," instead of "expels" its best children; but they may have been more effectually puzzled at page 3, col. 2, by the name of Rev. Lord Archibald "Dugas," which should be "Douglas."

Occasionally our secular contemporaries afford us a good laugh. Last week an evening paper, after chronicling the fact that "Archbishop Orth, of Victoria, B.C., arrived in the city to-day from the west, and is a guest at the Mariaggi," volunteered the curious information that "His Grace is archbishop of the Catholic College of Vancouver Island, which is part of the ecclesiastical province of Oregon." To be archbishop of a college is like being the general of a corporal's guard, and how an archiepiscopal see in one place can be part of an ecclesiastical province in another is a canonical puzzle. "Archbishop" means the head of an ecclesiastical province. Archbishop Orth is the head of the ecclesiastical province of Vancouver.

And yet it is easy to trace the cause of the mistake. For nearly fifty years the Vancouver diocese, being then only a bishopric, not an archbishopric, was part of the ecclesiastical province of Oregon City. That a diocese in Canada should form part of an ecclesiastical province in the United States was an anomaly that arose from the fact that, before the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, communication with Portland, Oregon, the residence of the Archbishop of Oregon City, was much easier than communication with St. Boniface. That anomaly was done away with on the 19th of June, 1903, when Vancouver was made an archiepiscopal see. The ecclesiastical province of Vancouver now comprises the archdiocese of Vancouver, the diocese of New Westminster and the vicariate apostolic of Mackenzie, together with the Yukon district. A further change in the name of the archdiocese has just been announced; it appears it is henceforth to be called the Archdiocese of Victoria in Vancouver's Island.

A Catholic, who had recently come to Manitoba, having perused last Monday's "Tribune," asked us quite innocently if it was a Catholic paper; it contained so much interesting and accurate information on Catholic matters. While answering in the negative and explaining the character of the news by the presence of Catholic reporters on its staff, we could not help contrasting the present fairmindedness of its administration with the bigoted tone of its early days, and welcoming the happy transformation. On Friday of last week, for example, the Winnipeg "Tribune" had the following in its local items:

To-day being the first Friday of the month special services in the Roman Catholic churches, both in the city and St. Boniface, mark the occasion. At St. Mary's Church this morning great numbers of the faithful received holy communion both at the half-past six and eight o'clock services. The Blessed Sacrament remains exposed on the altar all day. At half-past seven in the evening the service of vespers and benediction brings the religious features that mark the day to a close. The first Friday of every month in the year has been the occasion for special religious services in the Catholic Church from time immemorial.

The last three words are, of course, a manifest exaggeration, pardonable, however, even in a Catholic reporter, who is not expected to be posted on the history of a devotional practice. The earliest mention of this one occurs near the end of the seventeenth century, when the Lord, appearing to Blessed Margaret Mary, exhorted her to recommend Holy Communion in honor of His Sacred Heart on the first Friday of each month. She and her novices in the Visitation convent at Paray le Monial, in France, were the first to practise this devotion. Thence, through the instrumentality of the Society of Jesus, especially mentioned by our Lord as the chosen channel for this great work, the devotion spread gradually through the Catholic world. But it did not become at all common till the second half of the nineteenth century. In Winnipeg, in particular, it was not introduced till 1886. Seeing how firmly it has since taken root, and how faithfully the first Friday devotions to the Sacred Heart are kept, it is no wonder that a young reporter, who has been used to it all his life, should date it "from time immemorial."

On the eve of the same day a gentleman on the staff of another paper asked us what was the cause of the unusual concourse of people at the Cathedral on that week day. Somebody had been over at St. Boniface and had noticed many persons entering the church. Now that there is a regular car service to the town across the river, many Winnipeggers are rediscovering that venerable town which has been of late years a "terra incognita" to them, although it flourished

before Winnipeg was born, and although every house in it is nearer to the centre of the city than most of the houses in Winnipeg. We might have answered the query by saying that crowds in the Cathedral on week days are no unusual sight, the citizens of St. Boniface not limiting their worship to Sundays; but we merely told the unvarnished tale, that this was the Thursday before the first Friday of the month and that the people were no doubt going to confession. This he found so uninteresting that he did not even mention it in his paper.

One of our readers who sympathizes with the Russians in the present war, asks if we can name some life of the saintly convert, the venerable Father, formerly known as Prince Gallitzin. We know of one charmingly penned sketch of this noble missionary, "the pioneer priest of the Alleghenies," under the title, "A Royal Son and Mother," by the Baroness Pauline von Hugel. It is a little book in green and gold, published in 1902 by the "Ave Maria," Notre Dame, Ind., and costs 75 cents; but, small as it is, brief as is its story, it contains a mine of beautiful thoughts and high lessons indirectly borne in upon the reader: how the Princess Gallitzin was converted to Catholicism and then became a fervent Christian, how her zeal prompted her to preach the judgment day to Goethe; how her son Demetrius, from having been an irreligious dreamer, became a zealous priest and died poor for the love of Christ, mourned by all his Catholic flock.

At the banquet tendered Sept. 28, in Dubuque, to the Right Rev. M. C. Lenihan, on that day consecrated Bishop of the new diocese of Great Falls, Bishop Shanley, of Fargo, in his usual manly, truly humble way, gave this gentle reminder to his fellow bishops:

"And yet, he declared, the work done by the bishops was really secondary in the upbuilding of the Church in the Northwest. The two important factors were the priests and the laymen. The bishop said it angered him when he read in the history of some parishes how such and such bishops worked like slaves while the poor priest who actually did the sacrificial work, was allowed to rot, his very name forgotten. It was the priest of the Northwest who built the little school house, and paid from his miserable pittance of salary the wages of the teacher. It was he who toiled through sun, snow, rain and cold over miles of barren prairie to say Mass. The bishops did much, but they did not walk miles, and beg money to support the Church. The bishops traveled, but they traveled in carriages. And who are these priests? Their names have in large measure passed from human ken. The Catholic laymen, likewise, came in for a share of credit. It was they who wrote: 'Send us a priest and we will tax ourselves to pay him and see that he does not want.' It was the laymen who put up the sinews of war and whose devotion to the faith makes it possible for the priest to live—in fact it is the laymen, scattered over the face of the earth, that have made the Church the power that it is."

The ordination of Rev. Joseph Prud'homme at St. Boniface Cathedral last Sunday was in many respects unique. The recipient of the holy order of priesthood is the first native of St. Boniface to receive this great honor. Others who, like him, passed from St. Boniface College to the Montreal Seminary, were born elsewhere, mostly in the Province of Quebec; but he is the first priest born in the historic town across the Red River. Then, he is the youngest priest ever ordained in the West or in any part of Canada. He was exactly 22 years and one month old on the 9th of October, the day of his ordination. The canonical age for the priesthood is 24. A dispensation, however, of one

year, or even of 22 months may be obtained for special reasons. But the 23 months' dispensation in this case is so rare that, when Archbishop Langevin spoke of it to Cardinal Merry del Val in his recent visit to Rome, the Cardinal said it could not be done. Nevertheless, the Pope, who is above all canonical regulations, granted our Archbishop's request, though only after much questioning and after receiving the assurance that the young priest was going to study in the Canadian Seminary in Rome and would not have any responsible duties to fulfil for a long time to come. Moreover, the Rev. Joseph Prud'homme belongs to one of the most highly connected families in the country, his father being, though not by any means an old man, a judge of more than 20 years' experience on the bench, and his uncle being Chief Justice of Manitoba. Finally, the Archbishop of St. Boniface, was a classmate of the young priest's father during their long course of studies at the Montreal College. We might also add that few candidates for priestly ordination have the privilege of listening to two such impressive discourses as were delivered on that occasion, the first by bishop. Dom Grea, though enfeebled author of classical works on the constitution of the Church and the highest canonical standard of clerical life, and the second by our eloquent Archbishop. Dom Grea, though enfeebled by suffering, spoke with remarkable ease and fluency on the nature of the priesthood and the sublime functions of the priest. The very highest and deepest thoughts come from him as the overflow of a mind saturated with them. Mgr. Langevin dwelt especially on the fostering of the priestly vocation by pious parents. The young priest ordained that day had been brought up in a fervently Catholic home, his paternal great grandfather was a saintly man of heroic Christian mould. Alas! that there were other parents whose own faults were responsible for the lack of correspondence in their children to the Divine call heard, indeed, but not effectually heeded.

This ordination was remarkable also in the contrast between the youth of the priest and the mature years of Mr. Theophilus Pare, who then received the tonsure, that hall mark of the cleric, at the age of 52. After a long and honorable career as a highly respected notary and farmer at St. Anne, as a member of the Manitoba Legislature, as a devoted husband and father, now that his dear wife is gone to her eternal home and his only daughter is a professed nun, he consecrates his wide experience and his chastened middle age to the exclusive service of his Lord.

A recent cablegram from Rome to the New York "World" hints at the probability of Pius X. having been asked by the Emperor of Germany to tender his good offices to Japan and Russia with a view to ending the war in the Far East. The Vatican has hitherto confined itself to negotiations with Mr. Nagarskino, the Russian accredited agent, but it is said that if Russia consents to the mediation of the Pope, the latter will open direct negotiations with Japan. This news is almost too good to be true; but He who rules men's hearts may bring this happy consummation to pass.

Persons and Facts

Rev. Alfred Meyer, superior of the Benedictines, who settled lately in the Quill Plains, Sask., was here last Sunday and reports that the railway now passes by the headquarters of his order in the west, and that all the new settlers are doing well. It is no longer necessary to go by Regina. The C.N. R. takes you straight via Dauphin line, to the Quill Plains, on its line that is heading for Edmonton.

The Catholics of Aubigny, Man., who obtained a resident priest, Rev. J.