

From the London Tablet.

FREEMASONRY IN MALTA.

The *Times* of Thursday week published a letter signed "S.," and dated "Malta, October 26," and along with it an abridged and garbled version of the Pastoral against Freemasonry, of which we published an accurate translation a fortnight ago. The letter is an abusive one against the Archbishop for daring to issue such a document. "You cannot be surprised by any act of bigotry, folly, or craft that may emanate from the Romish Church;" "an instrument of malice;" "not impotent;" "the precious letter;" "the slanders contained in the intemperate letter of this ill-advised old man;" such is the tone and a great part of the substance of "S.'s" letter. Along with this sort of jargon, however, by the aid of two or three statements, we get at one or two facts which are not unimportant. The writer's endeavour is to make it appear that the Freemasons are English Protestants, and that a denunciation of Freemasonry is an act of *lese majeste* against English respectability. Thus we are told that "nearly all the members are English of great respectability," "either residents or military officers" long stationed in Malta; the lodge "has been established for nearly thirty years;"—and such like excuses. On the other hand, we are told that very few Maltese are Masons; "I cannot hear of more than four or five." But then "I am not a Mason myself," and, being an Englishman to boot, "S." is not much of an authority on the subject as regards the Maltese. The main point here is, that several Maltese—that is, Catholic subjects of the Archbishop—are Freemasons. But, more; "some few Italian refugees have at times attended the lodge." Now, every one knows that all through the Continent, at least, the Freemasons are a most dangerous secret society, engaged in a standing conspiracy against all law and all religion. Of this class of conspirators the Italian refugees in Malta are, if the opinions of well-informed persons may be taken on the subject, more debased and immoral than even the average of their associates. They, it is admitted, are in the habit of frequenting these secret societies, and are joined in them by—most likely have lured into them—several, or many of the Maltese. So the case stands with regard to the Archbishop's spiritual subjects. As to the English who belong to them, it is enough to say that societies bound together by an oath of secrecy are illegal by the law of this country, and that their members are, therefore, entitled to no favour from our courts and tribunals.

This brings us to the *Morning Herald* of last Monday, which gives our translation of the Pastoral, and prefixes to it a notice from the *Malta Times*, in which the attention of "the British press" is called to the subject; the aid of Parliament is invoked, for an inquiry "as to how the local Government ever permitted such an unlawful assumption of authority; and, finally, an action for libel" is requested on the part of the Crown lawyers." An action for libel by the Crown lawyers against a Catholic Archbishop for aiding

the Crown to put down societies which the law denounces and condemns, would be a novel sort of proceeding indeed! However, this is the demand, though it is not very likely to be acceded to.

The fact is, the Archbishop—or, as the *Malta Times* will have it, "the Jesuitical clique about him"—has rendered a real service to society by the issuing of this Pastoral. In these sleepy days, when every one does that which is right in his own eyes, there is a very refreshing music in the sound of a public denunciation of excommunication. When it salutes our ears, we involuntarily exclaim with the Duke, in *Shakspeare's Twelfth Night*—

That strain again! * *
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet South
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour!"

and we find it impossible to join with the same Duke in the continuation of his rhapsody, where he goes on to say—

* * * Enough! no more.
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before."

On the contrary, in these days, it is sweeter than ever; and as to having "enough," why, with the world full of unchecked disorders, as it is at present; Vice rampant in high places; Atheism lording it over God's Heritage; and the Powers of Darkness riding almost supreme over the means and instruments of good, we shall not soon have "enough" of excommunication; and assuredly it is out of all compass to guess when we shall get a surfeit. No, indeed; excommunications are not out of place (as the *Times* correspondent says) "even in this age of information and enlightenment," nor even "in a British possession." Just the reverse. It is in this age, and in British possessions above all possessions in the world, that excommunications smack the most of business, and look most real and earnest. We like to see, under the very nose of Mammon, the Apostle furbishing up his keys that have got all high rusty, pressing close the lock, and warning all men (Atheists and others) that he has thunder in his storehouse, as well as keys at his girdle. Positively, we are delighted with this Avatar; this descent of a heavenly message from the higher powers; and if there is one thing in the affair that pleases us more than another, it is the fact that it comes jump down into "a British possession," among an awkward squad of soldiers and sailors, and newspaper scribes—all of them true Britons to the backbone. We wouldn't for the world have had the honour light elsewhere than in "a British possession." Malta is a small colony, it is true, and we should have liked a taste of ecclesiastical brimstone nearer home; but, after all, the Celestial Visitant has lighted within the empire, and we will answer for it even Malta will find enough for him to do before all is over. Long life, then, to the Excommunication! It reminds us of better times and other days, when the Church, not merely in theory, but in actual practice, with stern language, but most mercifully towards its subjects, pointed out to them the dangers they were running by their crimes, and roused them from their sleep of death by a rattling peal of thunder that at least left them no ex-

cuse of ignorance if they choose, brutal, to lie down and die in the lap of Perdition. Such was the old plan; and it was a plan charitable for all eternity. The modern way of sparing a sinner's ears during Time, and making him pay up a terrible footing in the next world, seems to us a very questionable form of politeness. And when all is said, what has this poor Archbishop done that should bring upon him the wrath of "S." and the *Malta Times*, and the Malta officials? He has not done anything whatever besides stating a fact. He has told his spiritual subjects a circumstance which it concerns them to know. He has not himself excommunicated anybody; nor been guilty of any unhandsome or officious behaviour. His proceeding has been purely ministerial. He has not subjected the Maltese Masons to spiritual censures. He has merely been kind enough to tell them how they stand in that respect, and serve a sort of ecclesiastical notice upon them that they may be not without excuse when they come to join issue with the Public Prosecutor (or Accuser) before the Judgement Seat of God. Whether his Grace issues his Pastoral or not, these delinquent utterers of unlawful oaths are excommunicated. They are thrust out of communion with the faithful, *ipse facto*; and the Archbishop, by issuing this document, has done them a great kindness in letting them know the fact—a kindness for which they ought to return a unanimous vote of thanks and a piece of plate, instead of blustering about actions for libel.

What the Archbishop has published in Malta is no especial law for that island, but is the general rule of Christendom, extending wherever there are to be found any "Christifideles," "of whatever state, degree, condition, order, dignity, and pre-eminence, lay or clerical, secular or regular." All are under the same law, and obnoxious to the same penalty. Malta differs from the rest of the empire, not in the excommunication, but in the knowledge of it. We envy the Maltese. They have a privilege which we have not, inasmuch as their Archbishop declares to them the whole counsel of God in their regard. Our home-bred Freemasons are every one of them obnoxious to these penalties of excommunication just as much as those of Colonial breed. That law shows no unjust preferences. It touches and singles every one alike. Here, in England, whatever son of the Church may have taken an oath of secrecy as a Freemason, whether he be a lord, a merchant, or a beggar, is placed under the ban of the Church's greatest curse. He cannot receive absolution from his confessor, except in his last agony; but, in all time of health, must apply to his Holiness Pope Gregory the Sixteenth before he can be re-admitted to the privileges of his faith, and to the Sacrament of the altar.

It is not the Archbishop of Malta who denounces these penalties in his own diocese. Pope Leo XII., and his predecessors, established them for the whole Church, and for all time to come. The

Archbishop has done no more than, like a kind and faithful shepherd, give notice to his flock of the dangers they were most certainly incurring. Pope Leo XII.—not Archbishop Curuana—denounced the secret societies then existing, and all others that should hereafter exist—without reference to time or climate—in England as well as in Italy, in Malta as well as in Siberia. His present Holiness it is, speaking by Pope Leo XII.—not Archbishop Curuana—who, "under the penalty of the same excommunication, commands all persons to denounce to their Bishops, or to any other persons to whom it may belong, all those whom they know to be members of these societies, or to be polluted with these crimes." There is one law in this matter for England as for Malta, and every letter that the Archbishop has written applies to us as well as to them. It concerns us as much as the Maltese. It concerns us as much as if it had affixed to it the signature of any, or of all, of our own Vicars Apostolic. We are under excommunication, if we become Freemasons, or if, knowing a Freemason, we do not denounce him to his spiritual superior; and from that excommunication no priest or Bishop in England can free us—no one but the Pope himself. These things are really worth attending to for their own intrinsic importance; and, as a matter of curiosity, it is worth while to examine some of the reasons given by that great Pope, Benedict XIV., for the imposition of these severe penalties.

"Moreover," he says "one of the gravest causes of the aforesaid prohibition and condemnation is, that in societies and conventicles of this kind men of every religion and sect associate together; from which thing it is sufficiently clear how great detriment may arise to the purity of the Catholic Religion." On comparing this sentence with the passage in the Constitution of Pope Clement XII., to which it refers, it is probable that in strictness this principle is not meant to be applied in that particular instance, further than to the junction of men of different religions in secret societies. But yet the universality of the expression, as used by Pope Benedict, sufficiently shows how jealous the Church is of the junction of persons of different religions in any enterprise by which religion may be even remotely affected. For, be it observed, that his Holiness does not say that it is objectionable for men of every sect, &c., to unite in these secret societies; but that these secret societies, independently of their other objectionable characteristics, are also objectionable because in them men of different religions are associated together. This is the first objection. The second (as we shall presently see) is that they are secret societies. Perhaps this principle may have a wider application than we are in the habit of imagining. We could mention another society in which "men of every sect and religion" are united together in matters touching faith, morals, and heresy. This too, would seem to be included in the principle laid down by his Holiness. At least we submit this reflection to those whom it concerns.

"Another cause," he continues, "is the strict and impervious bond of secrecy by which are hidden the things that take