

The True Witness.

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NEWS OF THE WEEK.

THE great event of the past week, great because of its bearings upon the future of the neighboring Republic, has been the hanging of John Brown by the State Government of Virginia for the Harper's Ferry insurrection.

From the Old World we have rumors of wars. The British and French press seem to take a pleasure in mutually exasperating one another; and though at the present moment it is not easy to indicate a casus belli betwixt their respective governments, some pretence or another for war might no doubt be found at a moment's notice.

Little change has occurred in the state of the Italian Question. We hear that the Pope is not only willing, but anxious to make all necessary reforms in the civil government of his States, but he does not wish to appear to the world as acting under compulsion.

WHAT LOWER CANADA HAS GAINED BY THE UNION.—The Quebec Mercury in an article, an extract from which we laid before our readers in last week's TRUE WITNESS, gave a vivid and correct description of the advantages, moral and material, which Lower Canada has derived from its political connection with its Protestant neighbor.

There can be but one reason indeed, why the Catholics of Lower Canada should not agitate for that dissolution, pur et simpliciter, and hail its arrival as an unmixt boon; and that reason is that dissolution would be deeply injurious to the interests of the Catholics in the Western section of the Province.

For what would be the fate of the latter, what the condition of their schools, colleges, religious and charitable institutions, were the policy of the Toronto Convention triumphant, and if the Repeal of the Legislative Union betwixt the two Canadas were un fait accompli?

There can be no doubt that the first, the chief, indeed the only sufferers by a repeal of the Legislative Union, would be the Catholics of Upper Canada; and so conscious of this are they themselves, that no one amongst them has ever yet attempted to show, or had the impudence even to insinuate, that any advantage to the interests of Catholicity in Upper Canada would, or by any possibility could, accrue from the adoption of the political programme laid down by the Toronto Convention.

Our readers may remember how, some few years ago, a movement which resulted in a "botte of smoke," led to the assembling at Buffalo of

a number of Catholics from all parts of the country to deliberate on the best means to be taken to ameliorate the condition of Irish Catholics in America. The tyranny to which they were exposed in the United States; the utter disregard which a Protestant majority manifested for the rights of a Catholic minority; the scorn, indignities, and brute violence with which Irish Papists were treated, whilst their children were decoyed, or torn from them to be brought up apostates to the religion for which their fathers had suffered—all these things, of public notoriety, moved the sympathies of the more fortunately situated Catholics of Canada; and prompted them to take counsel together to see if there were no means of helping their afflicted brethren—afflicted politically, and socially degraded, because an unrepresented minority amongst an essentially Protestant and democratic community, governed strictly in accordance with the principles of the "Protestant Reformers" of Upper Canada; and as that section of the Province will be governed when the policy of "our natural allies" shall have been matured.

Anything more grossly inconsistent with their Catholic professions than the political conduct of our co-religionists who are parties to the "Clear Grit," or Protestant Reform alliance, it would be impossible to imagine. To qualify their policy as simply suicidal would be to condemn it too mildly; for suicide generally implies a mental aberration, and in their case the sin is committed with premeditation, and a perfect knowledge of its inevitable results.

This then is the result of our examination of the policy of Repeal of the Union. In so far as Lower Canada is concerned there is every reason why we Catholics should strenuously support every movement having that Repeal as its end. But inasmuch as Repeal, whether with or without Federation, would be deeply injurious to Catholic interests in Upper Canada; as it would leave our co-religionists of the West at the mercy of a political set to whom mercy, and justice to Papists, are unknown; and as it would inevitably entail the overthrow of Catholic separate schools and inaugurate the era of "Protestant Ascendancy," we cannot, as yet at all events, adopt Repeal of the Legislative Union as a plank of our political platform.

We have no objection to the Montreal Witness denouncing the Catholic Church as "that masterpiece of Satanic ingenuity,"—or to his representing it as "compounded of idolatry, superstition, deceit, and oppression." To these little douceurs we are well accustomed; and if the utterance of them affords solace to the bruised spirit of our cotemporary, he is heartily welcome to employ them.

But we have the right to complain, and it is our duty to remonstrate, when, not content with heaping abuse upon us, our Church, and our religion, the Montreal Witness essays to make us responsible for the sayings and doings of its own coreligionists.

So when, as in its issue of the 3d inst., in an article headed, "Irish Roman Catholic Ideas of Liberty"—the Montreal Witness cites the well-known saying of Mr. Mitchell with reference to slavery in the United States, we feel it our duty to remind the Witness that Mr. Mitchell is a Protestant, and not a Catholic; and that, therefore, it is most dishonest to hold the Catholic Church responsible for the sayings and opinions of one who is an alien to her fold, and a contemner of her authority, as is Mr. Mitchell.

Yet lest the Witness should accuse us of shirking the question of slavery, or as ashamed of avowing our sentiments thereupon, we will admit that it is true that few, if any, Catholics in the United States are to be found amongst the ranks of the Abolitionists; and this, not so much because of any ill will on their part towards the end which the latter profess to have in view, as because they detest the means which the Abolitionists avow themselves ready to employ to attain their ends; because, as Catholics, they utterly repudiate as false, the arguments with which the said Abolitionists defend their cause.

But, though holding themselves aloof from the Abolitionists, and repudiating their logic, the Catholics of the United States are guilty of no inconsistency, or dereliction of principle; for it is not a dogma of their Church that it is a sin, or malum per se, to hold or own a slave. The laws of right and wrong are universal, immutable; and as in the early days of Christianity, as we may see from the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon, slave-holding did not necessarily exclude from Church-membership, and as no one could be admitted to Church-membership who was habitually a violator of the moral law—so we conclude that there was then, and that there is, therefore, now also, nothing essentially evil, or morally wrong in merely holding or owning a slave. This is but a derangement, the symptom of an abnormal condition, of the labor market; an infraction, not of the moral code, but of those laws which the political economist tells us should regulate the terms of the contract betwixt the buyer and the seller of labor.

But, in that slavery in Non-Catholic communities by the immense and irresponsible power it places in the hands of the slave owner, is often the instrument of crime; inasmuch as the slave in a Protestant country has no protection against the master's lust or cruelty; and that the "family" with all its sanctities cannot exist amongst a slave population, there, where amongst the owners of the slaves the precepts of the Catholic Church with regard to the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage are treated with contempt—we can readily believe that the slave system of the Southern States is the source of innumerable evils.

In practice their errors are still more serious; for they preach, if they do not themselves set an example of, the duty of insurrection, and armed resistance. These are weapons which the conscientious Catholic cannot avail himself of. Not by such weapons, not by such allies, was European society of the Middle Ages purged of the taint of slavery. For this great deliverance from what at one time threatened to become a great social evil, Europe is indebted to the Catholic Church alone—and when we say Catholic Church we mean, of course, the Papal Church. The countries wherein the influence of the Papacy was weak or unfelt, retained longer than others—some as Russia have retained to the present day—the system from whence those communities which were most docile to, and most under the control of, the Holy See, were at an early period, and entirely delivered.

No argument therefore against the consistency of Irish Catholics can be found in the fact that whilst insisting upon their own rights, they are not to be found amongst the ranks of the "Abolitionists;" for this proceeds not from any good will towards slavery, but from their aversion to the principles of the "Abolitionists," and the means which the latter advocate to carry out their policy.

With strange inconsistency these clamors for liberty and nationality (Irish Catholics) are ready to fly to aid the Pope to keep his subjects in the most abject condition of any people in Europe.

To this silly tirade are added some equally sagacious remarks respecting M. About's very witty, but more mendacious than witty, work on the Roman States, to which the Witness appeals in support of the thesis that the condition of the people of the Roman States "is the most abject of any people in Europe."

We meet our cotemporary therefore with the simple denial of the "abject condition" of the people of the Roman States; though, since the Pope in his temporal capacity is fallible, we do not pretend that the Civil Government of the Pontifical States is perfect, or free from blemishes.

which however at its worst will contrast most favorably with the Government of Catholic Ireland by Protestant Great Britain.

But it is not to prevent the adoption of necessary reforms; it is not to perpetuate the abuses which may exist in the civil Government of the Roman States, that the Catholics of Ireland offer their sympathy, and if needs be, the aid of their stout arms and brave hearts, to the head of their Church; but because, as Catholics, it is their duty to assert, and if needs be to defend with their lives, the independence of their Church and its Sovereign Pontiff.

BLUE LAWS.—Let no man think that we have outgrown the absurdities of the past, or that we have the right to laugh at the follies of the "Praise-God-Barebones" of former days. The breed of Barebones is certainly not extinct in Canada; neither are our modern County Solons one whit more enlightened than were the notorious framers of the Blue Laws of Connecticut.

The Act 22d Vic., c. 99, gives to the Councils of the several Counties, Cities and Towns in Upper Canada, authority to enact By-Laws for enforcing Sabbath observances; for regulating the traffic in intoxicating liquors; for preventing vice and horse-racing; for suppressing tipping houses, houses of ill-fame, and places of amusement; and for preventing indecency and restraining vagrants.

Thus the Puritans of England, with their arbitrary and ridiculous Sumptuary Laws, were but the logical precursors of the general infidelity and licentiousness of the Restoration.

It is in this light, and with these anticipations which the records of the past confirm, that we look upon the "By-Laws" published in the Montreal Witness; and of which, no doubt, that journal, and the narrow-minded clique which it represents, heartily approve, and hold up as an example to be imitated.

By these laws are prohibited, not only all blasphemy, and obscenity, all sale and purchases of goods of every description on Sunday—but it is declared unlawful to fish or shoot, to play at marbles or ball, to dance or to play profane music, on Sunday.

But it may be asked—by what right, or by whose authority do these Simcoe Municipals do these things? It may well be asked—what music is "profane?" and who is to be judge of the sanctity or the profanity of a piece of music played on Sunday?

This holds true even of France, though France is but just recovering from its Protestantism of last century.

and prohibits things so innocent as balls and marbles, we contend that the State is exceeding its just limits, and that beyond those limits we are not bound to obey it.

And what is "profane music?" by what rule are men to judge betwixt what music is prohibited and what is to be tolerated on Sundays?—Where is the line between sacred, and "profane music" to be drawn? and is the County of Simcoe Municipality a body qualified for the task of drawing such a line?

The attempt to impose restrictions upon innocent amusements on Sundays is not only absurd, but it is most tyrannical. That no man should be allowed to annoy, or disturb the devoutness of his neighbors on Sunday by his noisy sports, we freely admit; but why should the Catholic, who can see no moral wrong in ball or marbles, whose religion does not teach him to look upon innocent amusements or good music as more offensive to God upon Sunday, than upon Monday or Tuesday, provided that they be not allowed to encroach upon the hours due to divine worship—why should the Catholic be compelled to submit himself to the fantastic and grovelling superstitions of his Non-Catholic neighbors?

We are not arguing, be it remembered, against the duty of the State to prohibit all amusements, however innocent in themselves, which necessarily interfere with or obstruct the devotions of those who decline joining therein.

At the first glance we see always the worst of a Catholic society; but upon closer examination we find that it is invariably better than it appears to be. With Protestant society it is the very reverse. It is as the sepulchre, often whitened, and fair to look at without, but within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.