

LECTURE ON NAPOLEON BONAPARTE AND THE POPE.

BY REV. FATHER MERRICK, S.J.

The following lecture, which we clip from our respected contemporary, the Catholic Reflector, was delivered at Martin Hall, Albany, N.Y., on Sunday evening, 20th December last.

He spoke as follows:— A few years ago there died in a little village in England a man who for a long time appeared to rule the destinies of Europe. The name of the place in which he died most of us had never heard of before his appearance there, and he himself is now forgotten. This man was Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Emperor of the French. The causes which in him led to the obscure termination of a remarkably varied and extraordinary career, are, to the minds of Roman Catholics, so like to, or rather identically the same with, those which hurried his more wonderful uncle from the top of his power to the lone rock on which he ended his restless existence, that the consideration of the vicissitudes and fate of the nephew recalls the memory of the uncle; we admire with wonder the justice of that Providence which, sometimes even in this world, visibly and signally punishes those whom it has raised to power when they are unfaithful to the weighty responsibilities of their trust. Every Roman Catholic recognizes that the reason for which God struck Napoleon Bonaparte and sent him from his palace in Fontainebleau a prisoner first to Elba and then to St. Helena, was his misconduct towards the venerable head of the Christian Church; and every Roman Catholic believes that the reason for which Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was carried a prisoner from the fated city of Sedan to the fortress of Wilhelmshöhe and then went into banishment to die at Chislehurst, was because he had been unfaithful to his obligations as the head of a Catholic nation, and had betrayed the Father of the faithful into the hands of his enemies. The history of Napoleon I. thus throws light on the history of Napoleon III.— It accordingly appeared to me that no more interesting subject could be chosen to treat before you at the present moment, in view of those still recent events in Europe, the consequences of which, as they are daily developing, we now witness, than the story of the relations which existed between the first French Emperor and the Holy Father, between Napoleon Bonaparte, legislator and conqueror of Europe, and Pius VII. the successor of St. Peter and Pope of Rome.

How the French revolution was brought about, how it developed its satanic character of hostility to religion would require more time for explanation than the space of an introduction to a single lecture. What the world knows is that the first French Republic met the late which always attends anarchy combined with immorality. When the Greek Republic had degenerated, were politically divided and became effete in their civilization, there appeared Alexander the Great, who subjected them to his sway. When the Roman Republic was divided and had degenerated from its primitive austerity into the corruption of morals which follows the accumulation of wealth, then appeared Caesar and he subjected it to his omnipotence. The French Republic was an anarchy, the result of the troubled fermentation of men who had denied all religions; it formed a Caesar in Napoleon Bonaparte. This is a law of history, and we can well ask with anxiety of our own Republic, not yet a hundred years old, what can await it, if it does not stop in its downward course, if God in his merciful providence does not really unite its sections, if He does not give it truly wise rulers, and above all by the spread and influence of the true faith preserve its citizens from losing all care for the laws of justice and morality—we may ask what can await it but new civil war and an Alexander or a Bonaparte to be its Caesar.

Pius VII. was elected Pope on the 14th of March, 1800. His predecessor Pius VI. had died an exile at Valence, in France, in the month of August of the preceding year. At that time, says the Protestant historian Ranke, it seemed as if the Papal powers were forever at an end. Indeed it did; the French republicans had swept through Italy; they first robbed the Pope of all his money; then they seized on his possessions, depriving him of temporal power, but declaring, like Victor Emmanuel to our present holy and beloved Pius IX., that he should remain a spiritual prince; then they carried him away a prisoner to die in exile. But after the death of the Sovereign Pontiff, Providence, which rules all things, caused the French arms to meet with reverses in Italy, so that the Cardinals were able to meet in Conclave, and the Cardinal Chiaramonti, Bishop of Imola, was elected Pope, under the title of Pius VII. The circumstances which caused the French to meet with defeat in Italy, and so gave the Catholic Church liberty to elect a new pontiff, was the recall of the general who had gained those victories by which the French army had become master of the Italian peninsula. Thus it is that many a time over and over again in ecclesiastical history we find that in days of distress and persecution for the Church, Almighty God interposes at the most critical moment and evidently so directs the course of events as to prevent the bark of Peter from being shipwrecked in the storm. Thus should our present beloved pontiff die while he is still a prisoner in the hands of his enemies, we need not fear that they who already triumph over the destruction of the Papacy in their hearts will have just cause to rejoice; God will watch over His Church, He will provide another pastor for His fold, and He will make all things conduce to the greater glory of His holy name.

The general who, by defeating the Austrians, had conquered Italy, was Napoleon Bonaparte, the man destined to re-establish order in France and keep all Europe in constant war for half a generation. Hardly had the new Pope been elected when Bonaparte was sent back to Italy and drove again the Austrians from the peninsula, another manifest indication that he had been withdrawn by divine Providence only in order that the Catholic Church might have a moment's pause and liberty to elect another head to fill the place of its departed pontiff. The conqueror of Italy and Egypt was soon declared first consul or sovereign ruler of France and he at once set about re-establishing order and good government in that distracted country. He framed a perfect code of laws and recognized all the branches of government. But his great intellect understood that he could not regenerate a nation unless he established in it a religion; for without religion no society is possible; no society has ever actually existed without religion, and it is too late in the world's history for even our modern theorists and reformers to expect with any assurance of success without its powerful control to be able to keep men together in any kind of social union. But Bonaparte wished to establish the true religion in that land from which it had been violently expelled or driven to be practiced in covert retreats, and this for several good reasons; first, he was himself a true believer, he had been taught the Catholic doctrine, and he admitted to one of his marshals that the happiest day of his life was not when he had won a great victory, but the day of his first communion; secondly, he knew that the majority of the French people were still attached to their ancient faith and would change it for no other; and thirdly, he was aware that no form of worship has more power in subjecting men's hearts to true obedience to all legitimate laws, as that ancient and Catholic religion severely inflexible in its principles, and so sweetly gentle in the method of inculcating and enforcing its precepts. At this time Bonaparte

showed his strong sense in opposition to the suggestions of those around him, and proved that he was not a bad man when his own ambition was not interested. He would not make himself the head of a new church, he knew better. "Do you wish me to be crucified?" he said to those who urged him to found a religion of his own. He believed it was the unity of the Catholic faith which made France strong, and he knew without the true faith that unity could not exist. Protestantism, therefore, with all its divisions had no charm for him, and great as was his confidence in himself, he did not think that he could unite Frenchmen in believing in a religion of his own creation, unless, like our Divine Lord, he died in proof of its divinity, a thing which he was not prepared to do. But here his wisdom ended. He knew that he could not make the State a religion, but he did not know that he could not subordinate religion to the State. He did not wish to call Caesar God, but he thought that he could cause to be given to Caesar the things which belonged to God. Accordingly, one of the first acts of the young Corsican general after assuming power in France, was to open negotiations with the Holy See for the restoration of divine worship in that country. The negotiations led to the famous concordat or agreement between the French government and the Pope, by which ecclesiastical discipline was regulated in the French Republic in such a way as to assure harmony between the spiritual and the temporal powers. On Easter Sunday, 1802, the solemn sacrifice of mass was offered up, for the first time in ten years, in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, at Paris, by the Cardinal-legate of the Holy See, in the presence of the First Consul and all the French officials. The French revolution was at an end; a new order of things was established; the church came out from the crucible of persecution through which she had passed, pure, unalloyed, vigorous, and that church of France, which since that time has had to battle against many elements of infidelity and hostility, has proved by the conduct and integrity of its clergy that the trials of persecution did it no harm. We must not suppose, however, that the First Consul in this matter, was all that could be desired by fervent Catholics. Farly on account of the circumstances of the time, and the necessity of yielding to the wishes of others perhaps in some points; partly in great measure, no doubt, on account of his own looseness of religious principles, shaken as it was by his education in the midst of infidel and revolutionists, and his indisposition to grant too much power to a church which he wished to control while leaving it what he considered sufficient liberty the young ruler hampered the concordat with conditions which entailed great sacrifices on the part of the Holy See. In the first place, all the confiscated church property was to be left in the hands of its purchasers. The Church never haggle on account of this world's goods, she belongs to another world, and knows that the Lord who chose poverty for his own bride will always provide sufficiently for her sustenance, and that He often allows her to be despoiled of her earthly goods in order to enrich her more with spiritual treasures; this point offered no difficulty. Then it was required that new limits should be appointed in all the dioceses in France, and that all the ancient and exiled bishops should give their resignations in order that new ones might be named in their places. This, too, the church submitted to; even the Holy Father appointed to the new bishoprics, to please the French government, several schismatical and excommunicated prelates, after, however, they had made their submission, asked forgiveness, and obtained absolution from their censures. There was nothing to which the Catholic Church would not stoop to save thirty millions of souls, except that which was wrong in itself; in all this negotiation, whenever anything was proposed by the French government which was contrary to Catholic principle and the duty of the head of the Christian Church it was inflexibly refused. The Consul or his ministers appended to the text of the concordat a series of organic articles, as they were called, which never had been agreed to by the Papal envoy, and which were intended to subject absolutely the clergy to the civil government. These articles the Pope never accepted, and though the government of Napoleon III. had tried to resuscitate them, they have never had in France any effect.

In the year 1804, Bonaparte changed his title of Consul to the higher one to which, since his return from Egypt, he had aspired, and was henceforth known as Napoleon I. Emperor of the French. On the 14th of September of that year, he wrote to Pope Pius an autograph letter, asking him to come to Paris to perform the ceremony of his coronation.—Pius VII. was a gentle and benign Pontiff. With all Europe, he admired the wonderful young man, this genius, created by Providence for the purpose of establishing order of the chaos which two centuries of infidelity and heresy had brought about in Europe, and which had reached its climax in the horrors and wars of the French Revolution. But Pius VII. was, moreover, a father, he was the father of the whole Catholic Christian Church, and he had the heart of a father for all his children. There can be no doubt that, strange as their relations became, there always existed to the end a great affection in his heart for this wayward child of nature, who, after receiving his first education from a Christian mother, was sent at the early age of ten to a military school, there to be surrounded in his youth by an atmosphere impregnated with all kinds of evil principles, and who now in his early manhood, notwithstanding his strength of intellect, was already intoxicated by the glory of unprecedented military success. With cheerfulness, therefore, the Holy Pontiff yielded to the invitation to crown the young conqueror, with the hope, no doubt, that his very presence would exercise a beneficial influence on one who had not naturally a bad heart and still possessed the Catholic faith. The two monarchs, the spiritual ruler and the temporal ruler, met at Fontainebleau, on the 25th November, 1804, and on the 2d of the following month the ceremony of coronation took place.

What a terrible thing it is to become the slave of any passion! Napoleon was then in his zenith. Could he be content with enough, were he prudent enough to put a limit to his ambition, he might have founded the most powerful dynasty which has ever yet ruled in Europe. The limits of France had been pushed to their furthest extent, the influence of the young French Emperor was all powerful over the continent; with his intellect and genius, with his talent for organization and his military prestige to be called upon to back and enforce his wishes in case of need, the new ruler might have managed and governed by wise policy and discretion a subservient Europe; and had he given himself up wholly, like St. Louis and Charlemagne, to the cause of the Christian Church, had he undertaken in the proper way to oppose and stem the Revolutionary tide which was then and is to-day threatening to engulf the world in the waters of a new deluge—had he opposed it and checked it and dried it up in its source, by devoting all his energies and all his influence to the religious education of his people, so as by enlightening them on their duties towards God, and on God's providence over them, to make them at the same time good citizens and happy subjects, he could have ruled like Constantine and Charlemagne over the whole of United Christendom. But Napoleon Bonaparte was the slave of personal ambition. That ambition had grown with his growth. To it he had sacrificed everything. Already he had imbued his hands with the blood of the innocent Duke D'Enghien, a provoked but still an unjustifiable crime, which made the author of it feared and detested by every nation. To this ambition he sacrificed his first wife, Josephine, after

many years of union; for this ambition he obliged his brother to annul his marriage with an American lady in order that he might espouse a European princess. It was this ambition which brought on his quarrel with the Holy Father, and, by leading him into a constant series of unnecessary wars, finally hurled him from his throne and sent him to die a prisoner and an exile on a barren rock.

In 1805 war broke out between England, Austria and Russia on the one side, and the Emperor of the French on the other. Napoleon ordered his general St. Cyr, to occupy Ancona in the Papal States. This was the first positive step which the new despot had taken to show his intention of ruling over the Papal States as temporal master, and all the remonstrances of the Holy Father had no effect on inducing him to go back upon the deed. His final answer to the head of the Church was insolent in the extreme. It was followed by a demand that all the subjects of governments hostile to the Emperor, English, Russians and Swedes, should be expelled from the Pontifical territory. At the very epoch when Pius VII. was crowning Napoleon in Paris as first Emperor of the French, and their mutual good understanding appeared to be greatest, the Holy Father gave a proof of how well he knew with what kind of a man he was dealing. It was secretly intimated to him that if he would remain in Paris instead of returning to Rome, the Emperor would give him a palace three times as large as the Quirinal, and they could both rule the universe together. But Pius VII. was prepared for this scheme of making him the mere tool of a temporal prince, with the empty title of Head of the Church, like the archbishop of Canterbury in England, or the Synod of the Russian Church in St. Petersburg answered that they might keep him a prisoner in France if they liked, but in doing so they would have no longer the Pope, they would only have the simple priest Barnaby Chiaromonte, for he had left his abdication signed in the hands of one of his Cardinals, before leaving Rome, to be made immediate use of in case he were not allowed to return to his people by the man who had received him as a pretended guest. Pius VII. as Pope was not, consequently, the man to yield to the fear of an earthly monarch however great he might be. All Europe might crouch before the conqueror, emperors might change their titles and kings might resign their thrones at his pleasure, he might be allowed to place crowns and coronets on the heads of all his relations and favorites, there was one old man, the ruler of an insignificantly small territory, who could not and would not yield, to please the unjust wish of any powerful personage, one jot of what he knew it to be his duty to maintain. Thus wrote Napoleon on February 13th, 1806, to the Pope: "All Italy must be subject to my law. I will not touch the independence of the Holy See, but on the condition that your Holiness will have for me in the temporal order, the same deference that I bear towards you in spiritual matters. You are Sovereign at Rome, but I am also Emperor there. My enemies must be yours. It is not, therefore, proper that you should receive any envoy from the King of Sardinia, nor allow to reside in your States any British, Russian or Swedish subject, nor consent that the vessels of those nations should enter your ports." And thus wrote the Pope to Napoleon, the Emperor in answer: "You ask us to banish from our States Russian, English and Swedish subjects, and to close our ports to the vessels of those three nations! You wish to place us in an open state of hostility against them! We will answer you with clearness and precision, that not for our temporal interests, but on account of the essential duties which are inseparable from our pacific character, we cannot consent to your demand."

Your Majesty establishes as a principle that he is the Emperor of Rome. We answer with apostolic frankness that the Pontiff does not recognize, and has never recognized in his States any power superior to his own. You are immensely great, but you have been elected and crowned Emperor of the French, but not of Rome. We cannot admit this other proposition: that we ought to have for you, in the temporal order, the same deference which you have for us in spiritual matters. A Catholic Sovereign is such only because he bows before the definitions of the visible Head of the Church, and regards the Pontiff as the teacher of truth, as the only Vicar of God on earth. Such feelings cannot be those of a sovereign towards another sovereign. The Sovereign Pontiff did not admit that the Supreme Head of the Christian Church could descend to an equality with any temporal monarch, and he denied (which was the truth), that Napoleon had ever been crowned Emperor of all Christendom like Charlemagne, but only Emperor of the French. As in every man who wavers between right and wrong, two spirits moved and alternately ruled the wonderful young conqueror, endowed as he was with the gift of faith, but at the same time impelled by an extravagant ambition.—When he was sane, the good spirit moved him and he did great and wise things; but when under the influence of the spirit of evil he appeared to be the incarnation itself of pride and conceit. He wrote to the Holy Father that he (Napoleon) was "not only the greatest warrior of the age, but if he were a little more master of the world he would show what a Sovereign Pontiff he would make, he would show himself more wise and pious than Pius himself, he would take better care of souls, and generally attend better to the interests of religion." In fact, Bonaparte, who could do what he pleased in the temporal world, and had his ambition already sated in that respect, aspired to rule over souls as well as bodies; what did it profit him that men should bow their necks to his yoke, if they would not also submit their consciences to his will? "Who are these priests," he exclaimed, "who keep men's souls and throw me only their carcasses."—"I was not born at the right time," he said to a courtier, "Alexander the Great called himself the son of Jupiter, and no one dared to contradict him! I find in my time a man stronger than myself, and he is a priest; for he reigns over spirits and I govern mere matter." What a commentary on the vanity of human pride and ambition! Here is a man who wished to be excelled by no one man that ever lived, and because he cannot obtain the impossible he is unhappy. It ought not to have been difficult to forecast what would be the conduct of a man who could so speak towards that other man whose superior powers he envied, of the soldier towards the priest. He began by withdrawing his ambassador from Rome and replacing him by one more fitted for the execution of violent measures. He next takes military possession of a great part of the Pontifical territory. When Cardinal Fesch, the uncle of the Emperor, was leaving Rome, where he had filled the office of French Ambassador, the Pope thus addressed him: "Go, tell the Emperor, that in spite of his ill-treatment, we preserve a deep feeling of attachment to the French nation. But repeat to him that we will not listen to his proposals; we are Sovereign, we shall remain independent; if he uses violence, we will protest in the face of Europe. If necessary, we will use the temporal and spiritual means which God has placed in our hands."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF O'CONNELL.

(From Delgravia for December.)

At the time I made his acquaintance, the political fortunes of O'Connell were on the decline, and that formidable agitation which for so many years convulsed Ireland had received its quietus by the State trials of 1846. Sir Robert Peel, who hated the agitator with all the bitter animosity of a cold nature, was at the head of affairs; and under the

guidance of that consummate lawyer, Sir Edward Sugden, afterwards Lord St. Leonards, who was his Lord Chancellor, criminal proceedings were instituted which, after a long trial, resulted in the conviction of O'Connell—his sentence to two years' imprisonment and to a fine of £500. These famous State trials, memorable in many respects, are chiefly remarkable now as showing the glorious uncertainty of the law. They were conducted at an enormous expense; the keenest intellects in the kingdom were engaged on either side. The Irish judges were unanimous in their opinion that the points of law raised in favor of the defendant were untenable.—The whole of the English judges coincided in the opinion; but a gentleman named Peacock, who afterwards became Sir Barnes Peacock, an Indian judge, at the last moment hit on what he thought a blot, and on writ of error to the supreme tribunal the House of Lords reversed the decision of the court below.—Lord Denman pronouncing his opinion that the whole trial was a mockery, a delusion, and a snare. But the agitation, thus interrupted, was never renewed. O'Connell died shortly afterwards of a broken heart. I saw him on the morning he received his sentence. He came alone into the little robing-room where I used to keep my wig and gown, donned his professional habiliments—his robes and his bar wig. As he exchanged for this the curly nutty-brown "jasey" he usually wore, I observed his head was entirely devoid of hair. He was as bald as the first Caesar. When the Chief Justice Pennefather pronounced sentence—he had been the agitator's personal enemy and professional rival throughout his whole career—I noticed a bitter smile fit over the old man's face. O'Connell then retired through a side door, where Colonel Browne, the Chief Commissioner of Police, was waiting to receive him. Browne, who is alive still, told me that he had his own carriage drawn up close to the outer-door, into which he handed the State prisoner, taking a seat by his side and drawing up the blinds. Crowds of frieze-clad peasants lined the quays, an angry scowl was upon every face, and an infuriated multitude surged through the streets of the metropolis. The morning was gloomy; thick flakes of snow were beginning to fall, deep excretions filled the air, as the popular favorite was borne slowly away, for the coachman was unable to move his horses faster than at a foot-pace. Observing this state of affairs, and the angry mob was pressing close upon the carriage, Colonel Browne, who in his time had led many a forlorn hope, told me that he felt the emergency of the situation. He took out a case of loaded pistols, cocked, and laid them upon his knee. When O'Connell saw this he smiled. "A very precaution," he said, "but useless. If I were only to raise my hand you would be in eternity" and these words which he uttered were full of significant meaning. When his passions are roused, a Dublin mob is very terrible. It took a Chief Justice out of his carriage once and tore him to pieces on the spot. One word from O'Connell on that morning would have caused a revolution. Formidable military precautions had been taken—the troops were under arms, cannons were so placed as to command the thoroughfares—but I do believe that if the signal had been given, the whole country would have arisen; and to annihilate an entire nation by grape-shot would not have been an easy matter. The prisoner was conveyed in safety to Richmond, but for many days after the prison was surrounded by an infuriated throng. There never, I believe, lived in the history of any country a man who had the same extraordinary hold over the affections of an entire nation as O'Connell had over the Irish. He was the greatest popular leader ever known. No one who reads these pages can, I apprehend, form any adequate idea of what those monster meetings were which this man called together and inflamed with his fiery, vigorous eloquence. From the summit of some hill, where the tribune took up a commanding position, you could have seen—thousands deep—the serried and compact ranks of vigorous men (the stature of the Irish peasant usually averages six feet), whose eager upturned faces vibrated with every emotion called forth by the impassioned orator. These were the manner of men this tribune led. They believed every word which fell from his lips, and they would have followed him to the cannon's mouth, or to the gates of a place which is unmentionable. And when I think of this unbounded influence, the formidable organization he had created, with the priest-hood at his back, and through them the entire populace, and remember how he failed in attaining the object of his ambition, and contrast with that organization the puny movement in favor of Home Rule, which is but a Repeal of the Union in another form, led by an unstable Queen's Counsel, then all I can say upon the subject to my countrymen is—Don't they wish they may get it! Notwithstanding Grattan's assertion to the contrary, I believe O'Connell's patriotism was a genuine sentiment. He incurred much obloquy by collecting rent in pence from the people, which amounted often to many thousand a year; but then it must be remembered that he gave up a large professional income in order to be enabled to devote his entire energies to the redress of what he thought their grievance. He was admitted on all hands to be the ablest lawyer of his day. He could drive, as he boasted, a coach and four through any Act of Parliament. No jury could withstand his influence; he played upon their passions, their sympathies, and their prejudices as if they were the chords of some musical instrument.—He was the greatest verdict getter at the Irish Bar; and his subtlety in an argument would baffle the ingenuity of the subtlest judicial intellect. This man had within his grasp the very highest distinctions open to honorable professional ambition—he might have been Lord Chancellor with a peerage—but he threw them all away; and the lesson his career teaches should be laid to heart by any professional agitator who tries to follow his footsteps.—The end of all was that he died at last broken-hearted and worn out in a foreign country. But who shall say he was not sincere? Notwithstanding the enormous sums which passed through his hands in the entire patronage of Ireland, which the Government placed at his disposal, he died not worth one shilling, and was in circumstances of pecuniary embarrassment during the latter part of his life.—I know, upon very good authority, that having occasion once for the sum of £500 he was obliged to borrow it on a mortgage of his law library. The lender afterwards called in the money. O'Connell could not command it; he was obliged to apply to another lender; and this mortgage was transferred time after time, and it was in existence up to the very last day of his life.

IRISH INTELLIGENCE.

THE IRISH PEASANTRY.—A Writer of the Times, in an article on "Ireland and her Scenery" pays the following tribute to the virtues of the Irish peasantry:—"The scenery of Ireland is, of course, the object which will scarcely leave time to observe or study the social phenomena of the land and the people. Yet some of these are upon the surface, and it is unnecessary to say that they suggest problems on which Englishmen may well reflect. The differences of faith and race in the island are striking; yet we are by no means sure they bear out the theories which have been too commonly held on the subject. Certain it is, at least, that Catholic Westford discloses as fair a scene of prosperity, as Protestant Fermanagh or even Down; and Anglicized Tipperary and Westmeath have been far more disturbed and disgraced by crime than Celtic Kerry, Donegal, or Galway. We shall not dogmatize from these facts; but they fairly open a train of enquiry, which may make us sceptical as to what has passed

as current truths of Irish history. A stranger in Ireland cannot fail to note the deep religious tone of the great mass of the people. He will see, too, that this national trait is independent of distinctions of creed; and he will observe with wonder how the Roman Catholic Church stands, thrived in the pomp of the Middle Ages, amid a struggling peasantry. Not less singular is the tone of melancholy which characterizes the popular worship in all Celtic parts of the island, and which seems to pervade the Celtic nature; the ancient temples of the aboriginal race are generally found where nature wears her saddest and most funeral look; and Irish piety and tradition spring, it has been said from a fountain of tears. How far this melancholy tone causes the vague sayings, the imaginative dwelling on an unreal past, which have marked Irish political movements, we shall not seek to guess or determine. The high breeding of the Irish peasantry cannot fail to please even a chance visitor; and the purity of their domestic life, and the lasting strength of their family ties, can never fail to attract attention. The material condition of Ireland, too, presents points of no little interest; her agriculture has a variety of types which are seldom seen in England and Scotland; and if many signs of poverty exist, she is comparatively free from the blot of pauperism. A social enquirer will, moreover, find in the management of many Irish institutions a great deal to admire; and in some department of local affairs Ireland is in advance of the rest of Great Britain.

DUBLIN, Dec. 15.—The action by Father O'Keefe against Mr. Patrick Cody for libel, arising out of a letter sent to the Commissioners of National Education, charging the plaintiff with having forged the signatures appended to the document in virtue of which he was first appointed manager of the schools at Callan, terminated to-day in a verdict for the plaintiff—damages 6d. The Lord Chief Justice certified that the libel was wilful and malicious, and that the case was a proper one for trial by special jury.

HUGGING THEIR CHAINS.—A meeting of the magistrates of Meath have, the papers announce, unanimously decided that the Coercion Act ought to be maintained in full force and sweeping vigor, notwithstanding the long-continued peaceful condition of the country. Of course they have. Power is sweet, and self-exemption is comfortable. The Meath magistracy are a famous class for being able not to express any judgment, or opinion, or sentiment representative of the country. Tried by any test known in Europe these men are as miserably impotent in the public affairs of the community for which they are supposed to speak, unless where coercive authority is at their back, as if they were two any Ashantee Chiefs imported for an hour or two into the Trim Grand Jury room. The parliamentary representative suspected of their favor would be swept from the hustings whether by open or ballot vote. Can we credit, however, that this vote was unanimous? Although the majority of the Catholic magistrates stopped away—adopting a sort of Pontius Pilate policy—there were ten of them present, exclusive of the stipendiary gentleman, whom no one would expect to go against the Castle. Here they are.—Hon. James Preston, John Taaffe, Joseph Sagan, James Cullen, James Mathews, N. Logan, A. Darke, F. Murphy, B. Ennis, Colonel McGuire. Perhaps some of the people of Meath might ask this redoubtable decemvirate for a word of explanation? The following Catholic magistrates absented themselves.—P. Kearney, R. Donaldson, O.C. Murphy, M. Colgan, Fred. Langan, John Rorke, E. McEvoy, N. Boylan, M. Thunder, Thomas Preston, Thomas Barnwell, R. Gradwell, James Delany. This "vote" was taken probably with a view to provide the Government with an excuse for attempting a renewal of the coercion code in the next session of Parliament. For any moral worth or weight attaching to such declarations, the Government might as well have gone to work without them. They might just as well ask a vote of "the yeomen" in old times whether martial law should be discontinued. It is the mournful fact that the Irish magistracy, with exceptions always to be gratefully remembered, are imbued with evil traditions, and intensely convinced that the more power entrusted to themselves, the better for the government and better for the country.

We (Dublin Freeman) noticed some time since the glaring disproportion between the enormous Catholic preponderance in the population of Meath and the Catholic representation on the Grand Jury and the Magisterial Bench of the county. When we draw attention to what may be termed a scandalous anomaly, the magistrates of Meath, numbered 154 Protestants and 38 Catholics, while the Protestant population of Meath numbered some 7,000 against 120,000 Catholics. Matters have since grown worse. The magisterial body of one of the most Catholic counties in Ireland has increased its Protestant element to 153, while the Catholics have dwindled to 33. The Grand Jury of the county is still more pronounced and uncompromising in its exclusiveness. It permits only one Catholic gentleman to share in deliberations. And this while the Catholics, comprising 93 per cent. of the entire population, also sustain 86 per cent. of the fiscal burdens of the county and a corresponding proportion of all other taxation. The Meath Grand Jury was, we believe, the first body of its kind in Ireland which was unanimous in calling for the application of the Coercion Act. Its members were among those who renewed an invidious distinction on Saturday last, when, led by the County Lord Lieutenant, they demanded the continuance of the brutal and degrading law, and this while only a week before those hotbeds of disorder, the Orange districts of the North, had been relieved from its operation. In face of the shameful and wholly indefensible exclusion of Catholic gentlemen from the Magistracy and Grand Jury of Meath, it redounds to the credit of the few Catholic justices of the peace who attended the meeting of Saturday that they entered their solemn protest against the objects and conclusions of that gathering by taking no part in proceedings which were a gross and unjustifiable slander on the Catholics of the county. The exclusiveness of which we complain has nothing to excuse it. There is no lack of fit candidates for the magistracy among the Catholic gentry and middle-class of Meath, among whom wealth, respectability, and intelligence abound. But their religious and political beliefs seem to be held unfairly to their prejudice. Some time ago the Catholics of the county called upon the Government to appoint James Cullen, Thomas Barnwell, John Muller, the late Edward Cullen, and Patrick Mathews—Catholic gentlemen having no superiors in the county in personal character and social standing—either on the Bench or the Grand Jury. But, up to the present, the only one of their number appointed has been Mr. James Cullen. Other vacancies have been filled as they occurred by militia officers and the sons of magistrates still living. Thus, beardless boys have been thrust upon the Bench and the Grand Jury, while the first Catholic gentleman in the county are excluded. It is at once irritating and melancholy to suspect that the constitution of the Meath Bench and the Meath Grand Jury is so largely due to the animus of creed and the spite of party. The Catholic candidates we have named; gentlemen in all respects eligible, have had the fortune to take conspicuous and patriotic part in the general struggle for the national advancement of Catholic Ireland.

Intending emigrants would do well to look before they leap just now. There never was a time when it was better worth while to compare what the emigrant leaves behind him in Ireland with the chance prize which attracts him from abroad. At all events, he were wise to pause well before adding himself to the multitudes who are at present idle and hungry in some of the great American centers.