

The True Witness.

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MONTREAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 29.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

Europe should breathe freely again. New Year's Day has come and past without any bellicose demonstration from Jupiter Tonans of the Tuileries; he did not so much as shake his fist in the face of an Austrian Ambassador...

Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales gave birth to a son on the 8th instant, and by last accounts "was going on as well as could be expected."

It seems that there has been another plot against the Emperor's life detected in Paris. The agents in this criminal enterprise, of whom three are Italians, came across from England...

There is nothing new to report from the United States. The siege of Charleston lingers on, and the City is represented as suffering greatly from the effects of the continued bombardment.

THE CATASTROPHE AT SANTIAGO.—The papers are full of details of the dreadful calamity to which we alluded in our last, as having occurred in the capital of Chili, and by which upwards of Two Thousand persons, mostly women and children, perished by the most dreadful of deaths.

It was on the evening of the 8th ult., Festival of the Immaculate Conception, that this deplorable tragedy took place, in a church formerly belonging to the Jesuits, but which it is now stated was the property of the State.

The church was a building of the latter half of the seventeenth century, but the roof was quite modern and composed of painted timber. There was but one door, that in the centre, easy of access to the congregation—(we are not told whether this door opened inwards or outwards); the doors in the aisles being closed up. There was also another door opening into the sacristy, near the high altar.

About 7 P.M. then on Tuesday the 8th ult., the Church was filled with an immense crowd—it is calculated that it contained about 3,000 persons. In honor of the occasion, the building

was splendidly, but most dangerously illuminated, chiefly with paraffine, or liquid gas as it is called. Along the entire roof were suspended lamps filled with this abominably dangerous fluid; and the transparencies, of which there were apparently a large number, were also lighted up with the same substance.

The church was filled with the devout all day, and towards nightfall, a continuous stream of human beings, almost exclusively women, poured into the church, until every avenue was densely packed, and the steps of the church and far out into the piazza were filled with a hushed and kneeling crowd.

The doors were then all closed, save the main entrance, for the double purpose of preventing the confusion occasioned by late comers, and of making the voice of the preacher more distinctly heard. At a little before seven, the assistants began lighting up the church and were just finishing the grand altar, the rest of the building being fully illuminated with thousands of lamps, most of them of paraffine oil, when, from a transparent crescent, at the foot of the statue of the Virgin, burst forth a jet of flame. The attendant endeavored to extinguish it with his poncho, but the inflammable liquid penetrated the fabric and only increased the danger.

The news spread rapidly through the city, and in an incredibly short space of time Mr. Nelson, Dr. Silvey, American Consul at Valpo, Henry Meiggs, and his nephew, Henry M. Keith, W. Bacon, George Colton, C. T. Pearce, and a number of other Americans, were upon the spot, hewing down doors and rushing into the flames to drag out the few whose proximity to the doors rendered it possible to reach them.

Of the Three Thousand persons within the church when the fire broke out, only about five or six hundred escaped. The defective construction of the building, the absence of suitable vomitories, with which all public edifices should be abundantly supplied, completed what the imprudent use of paraffine or liquid gas had begun. In vain did the sufferers within struggle desperately to escape; in vain were the frantic efforts of husbands, and fathers, of brothers and sons without, to come to the aid of the loved ones burning inside the doomed church.

The fire, imprisoned by the immense thickness of the walls, had devoured everything combustible by ten o'clock. Then, defying the sickening stench, people came to look for their lost ones.

Oh, what a sight the fair placid moon look down upon! Close-packed crowds of calcined, distorted forms, wearing the fearful expression of the last pang, whose smiles was once a heaven; the ghastly pliancy of black statues, twisted in every variety of agony, stretching out their arms in imploring mercy; and then of that heap that had choked up the door, multitudes with the lower parts perfectly unscathed and some all shapeless mass, with but one arm or foot unscathed.

The silence, after those piercing screams were hushed in death, was horrible. It was the silence of the grave, unbroken but by the bitter wail or fainting cry.

The scene without the church was heart-rending. The streets were filled with the dead and dying, and hundreds rushed frantically to and fro, calling upon the names of loved ones; some knelt in the streets to pray, some were carried off by their friends, raving in their grief, while some, distracted at the thought of wife or child perishing, rushed frantically into the church and were seen no more. Hundreds were taken to the hospitals and to the neighboring private houses. All the physicians of the city were upon the spot, ministering to the injured. At midnight the flames, spent for want of material to feed upon, had lowered, and by morning had entirely ceased. The spectacle, by the glaring light of day, was indescribably horrible. Two thousand corpses, in every stage of carbonization, from blackened cinder to the slightest scorch, lay in heaps around the several exit doors, the last struggle painfully visible in the eager position, the outstretched hands, the starting eye ball. The upper portions of the bodies were, with few exceptions, disfigured beyond recognition—the lower extremities were scarcely touched by the flames.

At Santiago, as elsewhere, there is a powerful anti-Catholic party, which takes occasion of every calamity to abuse the Church, and to endeavor to impose upon her the degrading yoke of the State. In this instance, it is we think clear that the clergymen especially charged with the

service of the burnt church, were highly imprudent; and that their excessive attempts at decorations which are an adjunct to, but by no means an essential of, Catholic worship were the immediate cause of the calamity. So far then therefore the conduct of those clergymen is justly open to censure, to severe censure; and if the Liberals of Chili were content with condemning the almost criminal imprudence of the excessive use of illuminations in churches, no impartial person could blame them.

But they are not content with this; but by way of exciting a strong prejudice against them amongst the ignorant and unreflecting, they falsely accuse the clergy of the most heinous, indeed diabolical conduct, after the flames broke out. Happily, we say, the malice of the Liberals has in this instance carried them too far; and enables us to convict them of deliberate falsehood. We will enumerate the chief articles of accusation against the clergy.

First it is urged against them that, heedless of the dangers of their flock, they managed to save themselves, "though as heavily encumbered as the women with clothing." Hence the selfishness and cowardice of the said clergy are immediately concluded to.

But the safety of the priests is easily explained without attributing to them either selfishness or cowardice. They were not in the church when the fire broke out, and were therefore never exposed to any danger. This is apparent from the fact that the flames broke out when, in the words of one of our informants, "the assistants were just finishing the grand altar;" and therefore before its decorations were quite completed. Now every one who has ever attended service in a Catholic Church knows that the clergy never enter the building before the work of decoration and illumination is entirely completed. Therefore in the case of the church at Santiago, it is evident that the clergy had not entered it, when the fire broke out. This satisfactorily accounts for their safety.

In the second place it is urged against the clergy that, after the fire broke out, they gave no heed to the rescuing of the congregation, but applied themselves to securing the plate, and ornaments—amongst which carpets, and a "sacred sofa or two," are enumerated. But we are also told that "in less than two minutes" from the time when the fire first showed itself, "the altar about twenty-three yards high, and ten broad was an unextinguishable bonfire." It is evident, therefore, that the ornaments and plate saved, were not those of the altar; but those merely that were in the sacristy when the fire broke out. Indeed this is confirmed by what one of the most bitter revilers of the clergy expressly says; for he tells us that the priests blocked up the door of the sacristy in order to "devote themselves the more undisturbedly to saving their grim-cracks." This shows that the articles saved, were those, not in the church, but in the sacristy, to which the fire did not extend.

The third and most serious charge against the clergy is this; that, to secure their "grim-cracks," they blocked up the doors of the sacristy, and thereby prevented people from escaping through that channel. But this statement is explicitly contradicted in another place, where we are told that, "others and particularly the men gained the little door out of the sacristy," and thus escaped—which they could not have done if access to the sacristy had been blocked up. Liberals and another class of men specified by the proverb, should have good memories, otherwise they are apt to betray themselves, as have the Santiago slanderers of the priests.

Nor is this all. Not only would the Liberals vainly avenge the calamity upon the clergy, but they seek to wreak their spite upon the very stones of the building that was the scene of the tragedy. Like petted children who kick and break the toy that has offended them, they clamor for the destruction of the inanimate walls of the church in which the accident occurred; and threaten violence against the clergy because the latter will not consent to an act of deliberate and purposeless sacrilege. Men, not Liberals, would rather profit by the lesson to build their churches and public edifices for the future upon sounder architectural principles; avoiding the employment of wood work as much as possible in the interior, and providing abundant and facile means of egress for the congregations within. Our fathers in the faith knew how to do this; and in spite of time, and wars, and Reformation their churches stand to the present day; but how many of them would be standing in the nineteenth century had they been so foolish, and so shortsighted as to build of wood, of lath and plaster? The Romans too knew how to build, both for durability and safety. Man, more than the action of the elements during ages, has destroyed the beauty of the Colosseum; and of that stupendous edifice so perfect were the arrangements, so admirably constructed were the vomitories that the thousands and tens of thousands of spectators whom it was vast enough to con-

* Sophas, sacred or profane, are not customary decorations of a Catholic Church.

tain, could all find easy egress in about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. Why should we not build as did our Christian ancestors?—Why should we not imitate the excellent architectural devices of the heathen Romans?

We hope, we say, that the late catastrophe may be made useful as a lesson. The defective internal arrangements of our modern buildings need be so apparent to every body, that they must be insisted upon. The employment of camphene, paraffine, liquid gas or any of those abominations so much in vogue at present, should be discarded as much as possible in all public buildings, or places where great masses do congregate. And this also is certain; that if we continue piling up large masses of dry wood in our churches, and that above all, if we will persist in making the doors of those lath and plaster buildings, open inwards, instead of outwards, ere very long the calamity which we now deplore in Chili, must be repeated at our own doors. Stone and iron are the materials with which nowadays our architects should chiefly work. With such materials, and suitable vomitories, no accidents would ever be likely to occur in our public buildings; as it is, too many of them, with their piles of inflammable materials, their lath and plaster, and with their doors all opening inwards, seem only destined for human slaughter houses.

We cannot, and we will not pollute our columns, or insult our readers by publishing the foul details of a recent divorce case in London to which a correspondent calls our attention. To those who like to know what is going on in the Divorce Court—we can only say that they must look elsewhere than to the columns of the TRUE WITNESS for information upon the filthy subject.

We can however, not only with a safe conscience, but with much pleasure, notice the comments which the trial alluded to has provoked from the British press; for therein we find a Protestant condemnation of that Protestant abomination with which of late years Protestant legislation has enriched the British Statute Book. A very short trial of the Divorce Court has it seems convinced the most intelligent spirits of the age, that in sanctioning Divorce the Legislature has committed a great error, and has perpetrated a grievous moral and social wrong. The Herald for instance says:—

Let us hope the day is very far off indeed when the progress of 'Liberal' ideas will conduct the mass of our British population to the conclusion that the marriage bond is a mere civil contract; that the taking of a wife is no more a religious act than the renting of a house, and that wedlock is hedged round by no more divinity than the apprenticeship of a parish boy to the village shoemaker. We would ask our readers if anything can do more to unsettle the sacredness of the married state than the current proceedings of our Divorce Court? Not merely does the law provide for a ready separation where some amount of grievance actually exists, but it holds out a fearful temptation to the commission of perjury, or the actual perpetration of adultery, in order to sever an unhappy union. The door thus opened tends to encourage ill-assorted marriages, seeing that the couple who come before the altar are conscious that the State has provided for their separation, if one or the other is only ingenious or ingenious enough to set the machinery of the Divorce Court in motion. The complication of evils thus brought about calls for serious attention.

This is the very argument that we have often urged against the principle of the modern Protestant Divorce laws: contending that if Divorce be granted at all, it should be granted for any, and every cause, except only that of adultery; seeing that the law, as it now stands, offers a premium to unchastity, and holds out an inducement to the violation of God's holy precepts. To require, in short, the formality of an act of adultery—as the condition upon which an unhappy marriage may be legally set aside, is to invite to the perpetration of crime, as the Herald with the experience of the actual working of the Divorce Court to guide it now admits—thus justifying the action of Catholics, and their opposition to recent Protestant legislation.

In like manner, the Star, the Telegraph and the Standard all dilate upon the injury which the Divorce Court has inflicted, and is constantly inflicting, upon public morals and domestic happiness. Let us hope that the eyes of the British Protestant public being opened, they will, even now retrace their steps, and return to the old foundation upon which alone the edifice of the Christian Family and of Christian Society; can be permanently established. "One with one, and for ever, till death do them part."

Nor is it only in the British Protestant press that we find strong condemnation of the Divorce Courts, and the evils which modern Protestant legislation has inflicted upon society, depicted in vivid colors. The Australasian Colonies, unfortunately for their future prosperity, have adopted the same vicious code as that to which the Court of the late Sir Cresswell Cresswell owed its origin: and already its effects upon Australian morality and domestic happiness are such as to call forth the subjoined remonstrance from the Melbourne Punch:—

The Divorce Court is going on admirably, and the Argus very soon will have to devote a space to unmarrieds, immediately after the births and deaths. In a few years any woman who has been the wife of only one live husband will be looked upon as a poor spiritless creature, and any child who can comply with the Divine command, and honour both father and mother, will be a curiosity. When you ask a lady after her family, she will naturally inquire to

which of her families you refer; and when you imprudently interrogate a young gentleman as to the health of his father or mother, as the case may be, he will have to tell you, with a frown, that he has not the least idea. Half-brothers and sisters will have to be introduced to each other when they meet in society, and daughters will have their juvenile morals improved by seeing their mammams going home with new husbands, and their papas pairing off with new wives. In cases of reconciliation, the late Mrs. Tomkins will be seen waltzing round the room with her quondam husband, the existing Mrs. Tomkins consoling herself the while by innocently flirting on her part with a prospective spouse. Girls and their unmarried mammams will be making love in competition to the same person, and young men be calling out their divorced fathers for daring to interfere with their pretensions to some maiden hand. A single woman will no longer be describable as an unmarried woman—that title being reserved for ladies who have enjoyed, and resigned or been deprived of, the blessings of matrimonial life. For 'till death' do us part, young couples will have to read 'till divorce,' and there will be no permanent marriage, except for the most common place of people. Naughty wives will provoke their husbands till they get their faces slapped, and then complain of cruelty; naughty husbands will put their wives in equivocal positions, and then complain of something worse. A race of divorce detectives will come into existence, who will prove anything you like about your wife or husband in the case may be; and none of us will need to continue married an hour longer than we please. A charming prospect for all married folk, but a changed state of society for their children, and very confusing as regards pedigrees within!

We attach great, but not undue, importance to the above testimony, coming as it does from Protestants, and from men who know the effects of Divorce laws, by bitter experience. And yet such is the blindness, or perhaps the moral depravity of man, that even here in Canada we find a strong party actually urging upon the Legislature the propriety of assimilating our marriage laws to those of England, to those of Australia! With such an argument is in vain; but they may perhaps condescend to listen to facts, and allow some weight to the sad experience of their fellow-Protestants who have already taken the down hill road which we in Canada are invited to follow.

BROWNSON'S QUARTERLY REVIEW.—Jan. 1864.—National Series, No. 1.—We have received from the Messrs. Sadiers Brownson's Review for the current quarter, being as its title page informs us, the first of the new series. Some years ago the Review was published with the sanction and approbation of the Catholic hierarchy of the United States, and it was then read with delight and profit by the English speaking portion of the Catholic community throughout the world. A kind of change came over the Review, which pained the many friends and ardent admirers of the illustrious Catholic champion, and the names of the Catholic Prelates were withdrawn from its cover. Still the Review continued to be ostensibly Catholic;—and it dealt still with modern politics and modern literature only in so far as they were connected with, and affected the Church; and the cause of Christian civilisation which is the handiwork of that Church. To-day the severance betwixt Brownson's Review and Catholicity is completed. It has, as it announces, ceased to be Catholic, and has become "National" and secular. In the words of the Reviewer—

"With this number we commence a new series of our Review. Henceforth the Review is to be national and secular, devoted to philosophy, science, politics, literature, and the general interests of civilisation, especially American civilisation. It ceases to be a theological Review, and though it will defend Religion in general we suppose the least we may say is, that it will not defend Religion in particular."—and approve itself in the principles which govern it truly Christian, it will defend the special interests of the Catholic Church only as they are implied in the freedom of conscience and the religious and civil liberty of the citizen."

This important change has no doubt been necessitated by—and by the readers of the Review it must have been anticipated from—the political views which of late Dr. Brownson has adopted and advocated—views the very opposite of, and contradictory to those of which some few years ago he was the eloquent exponent. He is now an Abolitionist, and an anti "State Rights" man of the very deepest hue; and of course the politics which he now entertains, cannot be reconciled with his former high Catholic principles. Thus, the Doctor with his keen logical eyes perceives at a glance; and as he cannot reconcile his politics with his Catholicity, he is obliged to abandon the profession of the latter. Dr. Brownson now rows in the same boat with Garibaldi, and his battle-flag is that of the Revolution.

The current number of the Review contains six articles, besides the customary Literary Notices and Criticisms. Of these six articles five are devoted to the discussion of the civil war in its several aspects, to the condition of the negro, and the future organisation of the Southern States when these shall have been conquered by the Northerners. We need not say that the Reviewer upon all these questions pronounces in favor of centralisation and despotism. Whilst therefore we cannot but admire the vigor and dialectic skill which, as of old, characterises the Review, we cannot but deplore the novel political principles which he has now espoused, and which are incompatible with either civil or religious liberty. In the third article the Reviewer treats of the Italian question; and though he mildly censures the means by which the King of Sardinia made himself master of the territories of his weaker neighbors, Dr. Brownson would not disturb un fait accompli; and he seems to hint that he would be well content to see the Sovereign Pontiff degraded to the position of a subject of Victor Emmanuel.