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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE YORUBAS of West Africa are described as an intelligent race. At any rate, their language contains some rare gems of practical wisdom. Archbishop Trench gives one which runs as follows: 'Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them.' It is an African variant of the Turkish proverb: 'Curses, like chickens, always come home to roost.' In our issue of last week we gave what was tantamount to a local application to these wise old saws when we pointed out that the violent and rampant political dust-throwing bouts of the Opposition organs injured nobody but the party whom they were intended to benefit. We are all the more strongly convinced of this now, since we find our opinion confirmed on independent grounds by the scholarly and judicious editor of the *Outlook*, the Presbyterian organ of New Zealand. In the last issue of his admirably conducted weekly—which, by the way, is attached to no political party—the editor passes judgment as follows on the gospel of political billingsgate:—

In our judgment not a little of their (the Government) success is due to the virulence of the Opposition Press. Day after day a relentless, and, in many cases, an unscrupulous warfare was waged against the members of the Ministry. There might have been some force in it if it had shown any sense of proportion. But it did not. The Opposition, with scarcely one exception, transformed its editorial pens into tar-brushes and painted the Government absolutely and unreservedly black. This was neither art nor ethics, and in not a few quarters it produced an effect the exact opposite of what was desired. We do not say that the Opposition were the only sinners in this respect. It is quite possible the Government organs, had they been in the same position, would have done the same thing. But it is bad policy, to put it on the lowest ground. The great bulk of the citizens simply refuse to believe that men who give themselves to serve the country—be they Liberal or Conservative—are hopelessly and irredeemably base, and if they are constantly told so day after day in their newspapers they resent it, and take the first opportunity of showing that they do. Mr. Seddon's Government, no doubt, has its faults; but to say that it is evil and only evil, and to keep on saying this continually, surely betrays a distorted vision. It is much to be desired that the malignant bitterness which characterises a great deal of the Press of this Colony on both sides might be softened and abated. We are convinced that a good deal of Mr. Seddon's success is due to the sympathy excited for him because of the acerbity with which the Opposition newspapers assailed him. And the lesson is one which both sides of the Press should take to heart. In this, as in everything else, it should be remembered that the wrath of man, even of editors, worketh not the righteousness of God.'

The opinion expressed by us finds fresh support in a letter addressed to the *Christchurch Press* by a strong supporter of the Opposition, the Hon. Lancelot Walker, M.L.C. He has the following warning words on the defeat of his party at the recent elections:—

'And how to account for this disaster? Mismanagement and over-confidence. And of all the agencies that have worked against us, none, in my estimation, has been more potent than the *Press* newspaper of Christchurch. For months and months your columns have been choked with vituperations against the other side, and vainglorious boastings as to what we are going to do; prophecies of certain success on our part—not one of which came off—and contemptuous reckonings as to faraway chances on the other side. Can you not understand that this sort of continual abuse must stimulate the enemy to their utmost exertions, and that they will give back a Roland for our every Oliver? In every altercation between two

washerwomen, the one who keeps her temper always wins. But can you not also understand that this tirade of abuse of the other side may, after a time, pall on even our own supporters? Only about ten days ago I met a neighbouring farmer, staunchly on the right side so far, and I said to him: "Well, I suppose you are going to vote for —?" "No," he said, "I think not; Seddon has had enough bully-ragging from the Press, and I'm something if I don't go for the Government man." And if he, why not scores of others? I am sure that in all election work it is better to go silently than blatantly.'

The lesson is soon and easily read. The old Latin proverb runs: *Discipulus est prioris posterior dies*. This being interpreted means: 'To-day is the scholar of yesterday.' The Opposition organs of 'to-day' have, we trust, learned a lesson from their blunders of yesterday, and the lesson, which we trust they will take to heart, was set forth in our leading article of last week, where we said that 'political abuse is, like the boomerang, a dangerous weapon that may come whirling back and wound its thrower.' If so much is learned, the experience has not been altogether in vain; it may make for cleaner and more temperate political campaigning in the future—a consummation devoutly to be wished for.

THE CROSS IN PEACE AND WAR.

RELIGIOUS prejudice, like any other form of lunacy, breaks out into a thousand strange and wondrous freaks and pranks. But not the least strange of them is that of positive hatred of the cross, the sign of man's redemption. St. Paul said: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The passion and death of his Saviour was more than all the world to him. From the earliest days of the Church the mere emblem of the cross was dear to Christians for the sake of all that it spoke to them. To this day it stands aloft on the summit of the churches of nearly every Christian creed. But in Ireland, especially in Ulster, there are many who hate the sign of redemption for the chief reason that their Catholic neighbours love it. Hence the cross-smashing that takes place from time to time in Catholic cemeteries and churchyards in the north-east corner of Ireland. It is not quite unknown even in the south, for the writer of these lines knows of an old churchyard where—happily many years ago—every headstone that bore the sacred sign was ruthlessly defaced or broken. This curious—and to Catholics inexplicable—hostility of feeling found voice in an unexpected way and quarter in Dublin recently. The occasion was the annual Diocesan Synod of the Anglican Church. The Synod was much exercised over the discovery that a cross was cut upon the marble representation of a stole upon the monument erected in Christ Church Cathedral to the memory of the late Protestant primate, Dr. Plunkett. The Dean and Chapter had examined and approved of the design for the monument. Their eyes, however, were not keen enough to discover the little cross upon the stole. One Rev. Mr. Hunt had a pair of optics keener than them all. He was the Columbus of the little emblem. And the Dean and Chapter expressed their profound regret at its presence and promised the removal of the 'offensive representation.' There were some, even in St. Paul's day, to whom 'the word of the cross' was 'foolishness.' But in the goodly company that assembled at the Anglican Synod in Dublin one hardly expected the cross to be referred to as an 'offensive representation.'

One of Dickens's characters contrived to veer conversation on every topic under the sun around to the severed head of Charles I. Just now every interchange of ideas gets sooner or later—generally sooner—to war. Even the emblem of the cross may be easily associated with the din of arms and the noise of martial strife. Dr. Talmage, for instance, tells us that 'when the old Scottish chieftains wanted to raise an army, they would make a wooden cross, and then set it on fire and carry it with other crosses they had through the mountains, through the highlands, and among the people, and as they

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