

CONVENT OF THE SACRED HEART,
TIMARU.

THE ANNUAL SPIRITUAL RETREAT FOR LADIES
preached by the Rev. Father J. COLGAN, S.J., will begin
on the Evening of MONDAY, January 8, and end on SATURDAY,
January 13.

Ladies who wish to attend should apply as soon as possible to
the Reverend Mother.

J.M.J.

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DRAWING, PAINTING, and SHORTHAND are not Extras.

Further information may be obtained by writing to the
Director,

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JANUARY 1 and 2, 1900.

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For details see Programme.]

ENTRIES for Running and Walking CLOSE at the Society's
Office, 27 Rattray street, at 8 p.m. on SATURDAY, 16th December.
Cycling on WEDNESDAY, 27th December, at 5 p.m. Entries for
all other events close on THURSDAY, 28th December, at 8 p.m.
Entry money for Dunedin and Caledonian Handicaps, 3s 6d each
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WILLIAM REID,

Secretary,

27 Rattray street.

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS.

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All Communications with the Commercial Department
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John Murray, Secretary, to whom all Post Office Orders
and Cheques are in all instances to be made payable.

Annual Subscription, 25s. booked; 22s. 6d. if paid in
advance; shorter periods at proportional rates.

NOTICE.

All communications connected with the literary depart-
ment, reports, correspondence, newspaper cuttings, etc., should
be addressed to the Editor.

Correspondents forwarding obituary and marriage notices
are particularly requested to be as concise as possible.

The New Zealand Tablet.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1899.

A FLAW IN THE BALLOT ACT.



THE system of voting by ballot is no novelty.
Long before the birth of CHRIST it had an
even wider application in the public life of
pagan Greece and Rome than it has in any
part of the British Empire to-day. For
centuries after its eclipse as a political resort,
it was used in the Catholic Church, as it is to
this day, in sundry elections, such as those of
bishops, abbots, popes, etc. It was first introduced into
English political life by the Act of 1872, and in one shape
or other has been adopted by practically every civilised
nation on the earth. It has tended to remove the idea that
a vote is an article of commerce, made intimidation
immeasurably more difficult than under the old 'open'
system, and so softened the asperities of electoral contests
that they are no longer associated with the broken heads
and the scenes of noisy merriment and violence immortalised
in the vigorous, if not over-delicate, caricatures of GILLRAY
and ROWLANDSON. The old open-voting system is gone
with 'HANS BREITMAN'S party' 'afay in the ewigkeit.'
The ballot fits the political conditions of our day so neatly
and naturally and comfortably that public opinion would be
as averse to falling back again on open-voting as flour
manufacturers would be to substitute the quern for the
roller-mill or military men to replace the Lee-Metford rifle
with that weapon of the war correspondent—the long-bow.
In the circumstances it will probably come as a surprise to
many of our readers to learn that the days of academic
discussions on the merits of voting by ballot are by no
means past. Even in the present year so distinguished a
writer as the historian LECKY has denounced it in his
Democracy and Liberty as 'essentially an evil' 'in any
country where politics rest on a really sound and independ-
ent basis.' That country is probably the one which
CARLYLE, in his *Sartor Resartus*, calls Weissnichtwo (the
land of 'I-know-not-where'). It lies three and a half
leagues beyond Amauros or the Vanishing Point. We can
resign ourselves with a tolerably good grace to so much of
'essential evil' as the ballot may inflict on the land of
Weissnichtwo.

The chief obstacles to free and conscientious voting are
bribery and intimidation. These, in turn, depend for their
success on the possibility, or public belief in the possibility,
of interested parties acquiring a knowledge of the manner in
which particular votes are cast. The chief value of the
ballot lies, then, in its secrecy. And the more thorough the
secrecy the more effective is the protection it affords the
voter against intimidation by employer or by mob, and the
greater the difficulties it throws in the way of the tempter
who would purchase the elector's independence with gifts.
It is, or ought to be, evident that the State, which confers the
right of voting, should make the protection of the voter from
undue influence as complete and thorough-going as it could
be reasonably made. In other words, the secrecy of the
ballot should be safe-guarded to the farthest limit that is
consistent with the prevention of personation and double-
voting and such-like offences against honest electioneering.
Now this is precisely what our Ballot Act does not. It
affords a ground of fact for one of the stock objections to
the ballot: namely, the conviction that its imagined secrecy
is to a great extent a delusion and a snare. By some strange
fiction or legend what is known as the 'Australian ballot'
is supposed to be the model of all the rest—Heaven knows
why. In the recent work quoted above, LECKY roundly
declares that it 'secures to the voter absolute secrecy.'
'In five years,' says he, 'the Australian ballot has been
adopted in thirty-five States, and it appears to have done
something to diminish the power of the caucus organisation
and to check the various fraudulent practices which had

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