

exploiting ground for the recalcitrant clergy. The Widowses, the Slatteys, the Connellans—even the Loysons—would not live for a week if they depended for their support upon such aid as they would receive from Frenchmen. A Frenchman may or may not be disposed to contribute to the maintenance of a priest, but, if he does, he certainly prefers that the priest shall be a good one. For the unfrocked priest and his inevitable female companion he has nothing but contempt. Nobody can more keenly appreciate than Jacques Bonhomme the deadly pungency of Erasmus's saying—which is as true to-day as it was over three hundred years ago—that the adhesion of a priest to the Reformation resembled a comedy, as it always ended in the ding-ding-a-long of wedding bells. 'Duo tantum quaerunt,' said he, 'consum et uxorem'—they are after two things, cash and a wife.' The story of the seven hundred 'seceders' and sudden clerical seceders is, as a matter of fact, nearly five years old. Challenge after challenge has been issued to furnish the names of the 'converts,' but to no avail. Circulars were then sent to every Catholic bishop in France, with the result that the story was dynamited by direct and positive evidence. This missionary 'snake-yarn' has long ago ceased to be a safe one to spin in Great Britain or France. But, on the Connemara 'souper' principle, it has evidently been considered good enough for export to New Zealand and for retailing to audiences with a view to the extraction of 'saxpences' and other current coins of the realm. Any of our readers may safely challenge the truth of this re-vamped old missionary tale about the seven hundred French priests who have 'only recently' 'seceded from the Church of Rome and taken up work as colporteurs.' The story is a fabrication, and a clumsy and inartistic one at that.

Another precious missionary tale told in Invercargill by the same wandering evangelist affirms that there are in China 'only 10,000 professing Christians.' Prodigious! The 'Statesman's Year-Book'—no mean authority, by the way—estimates the number of Catholics alone in the Hwa Kwo or Flowery Kingdom to be 'about 1,000,000. But possibly the imaginative evangelist does not regard these as Christians at all. Our readers are by this time sufficiently aware that our faith in the veracity of the stories of the Bible Society's agents is not an abiding faith. We have to m a good many of them to tatters during the past few years—fairy tales from such far-off lands as the Argentine Republic (El Gran Chaco), Mexico, Bolivia, Italy, and elsewhere. A rose-colored glow pervades their reports: the people are always either 'hearing gladly' or being numerously 'gathered into the fold.' There is no check, no error, no failure, and 'the sun shines always there.' Zimmerman says that optimism arises either from stagnation of intellect or insuperable indolence. In the present instance it would appear to be the creature of external circumstances—partly a question of mere policy, partly a matter of supply and demand. The report of the Established Church of Scotland Missionary Society for 1878 complained that 'missionaries are discouraged by the notion that their friends crave for exciting and novel narrative; that the plain record of daily duties, petty disappointments, and serious hindrances would be unacceptable? A Protestant clergyman, Rev. H. Hensley Henson, writing on the subject of foreign missions in the 'National Review' for December, 1897, thus accounts for the roseate hue of the typical non-Catholic missionary's report: 'He is ignorant almost always, and by necessary consequence he is prejudiced. He is generally in a thoroughly false position—the reporter and judge of his own achievements. He works under thoroughly bad conditions, for his reports are the advertisements of a money-raising society, and they are addressed to constituents—the rank and file of the denominations—who are as greedy of sensation as they are credulous of prodigies.' There

is, then, a market and a market price for pious fiction of a certain kind. This will sufficiently account for the story of the seven hundred French clerical 'seceders'—which has about as much of truth in it as the fairy tale of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

THE NELSON BIGOTS

To the Editor.

Sir,—In your issue of the 6th inst. you refer in remarkably moderate terms to the disgraceful behaviour of a coterie of rabbit-brained bigots who infest the town of Nelson, concerning whom I propose, with your permission, to place a few facts before your readers. That these creatures are in reality a small minority is after all no reason why they should be allowed impunity in making unprovoked onslaughts on their Catholic fellow-citizens, nor does it justify the Catholic laity of this country in allowing your own splendid services in the interests of fair-play to go without that support which anyone can give who watches public affairs as vigilantly as I do. In saying that bigots of the Sandy Row brand are in a minority in this country, I do not wish to imply, that their influence is necessarily limited to themselves. The great majority of the public are apt to believe what they read in the newspapers, and when any journalist is low enough to publish systematically continuous misrepresentations and slanders affecting a section of the community—more especially when the victims take them all 'lying down'—it cannot be surprising if the people as a whole conclude that the attacks are justifiable. The Catholics of Nelson seem able to stand a great deal when they submit meekly to a sustained campaign of vilification and innuendo at the hands of a commonplace scribbler who is the representative of a clique whom nobody outside of Nelson really takes seriously, and whose behaviour in recent years has been worthy rather of the barbarous hooligans of Belfast than of members of a community which prides itself on more than ordinary fair-play.

Let me first briefly recapitulate the conduct of the 'Nelson Evening Mail' during the angry period of the Stoke case: It is unnecessary to premise that no reputable newspaper will ever comment on any case while it is still 'sub judice.' As a strong illustration of the law on this point, I might point out the case of Butler, the Glenbrook murderer, who was executed at Sydney some years ago. Everyone knew that Butler was guilty, but nevertheless, in order to emphasise the great principle that every man is in the eye of the law innocent until proved guilty by the proper legal procedure, both the great Sydney dailies were fined £100 for commenting on the case before the trial had concluded. Now mark the contrast. While the Commission appointed to enquire into the Stoke affair was sitting in Nelson, the 'Mail' not only published extended reports, as well as a plentiful crop of anonymous letters, but it maintained every day a running fire of comment—I cannot call it fair or intelligible criticism—seasoned with virulent innuendo. The inevitable result, of course, was that a storm of the bitterest fury was aroused against the institution and all connected with it; but not only was no protest made, but the coterie, through their official mouthpiece, the 'Mail,' whined piteously when a change of venue was granted on the ground that the feeling which had been stirred up precluded the possibility of a fair trial in Nelson! I question if a more disgraceful instance of sectarian fury was ever afforded anywhere, and yet the authors of it all were gasconading the while about fair-play. This, however, is by no means all. While the Stoke madness was at its height a case of another kind occurred at Nelson. I allude to a revolting abortion case, in the hearing of which some truly awful evidence was given. In that case, however, feeling ran the other way. The report of the proceedings was curtailed as much as possible, names being even deliberately suppressed. A change of venue was applied for in this connection also, and affidavits were filed by reputable citizens of Nelson to the effect that there were many people there who actually regarded abortion—which, by the way, is the most cowardly of all methods of murder—with indifference, if not approval, and for that reason it was impossible to obtain a fair trial in Nelson. The application was refused in accordance with established practice—that where public feeling runs 'against' the accused a change of venue will be granted, but where the reverse is the case, the Court will not reflect on the community to the extent of believing that it will not see justice done. I say nothing against this, which is sound in principle, but I do say that the decision was received in Nelson with a