

## Current Topics

### Why have Protestants been Silent?

To those who have followed with any care the course of events and the utterances of politicians in France during the past few years it will long ago have been apparent that the campaign of spoliation and oppression, which has been carried out recently with such virulence and brutality, is a deliberate attack, not on the Catholic Church alone, but on Christianity itself—is, in a word, as the 'Tablet' has already expressed it, 'Christ-hunting' pure and simple. It is, and it is meant to be, an assertion of the absolute supremacy of the civil power over all spiritual rights and interests, and this being so, it is an astonishing thing that not one of the Protestant churches has been found to raise its voice in protest against the French infamy or in approbation of the firm and heroic stand taken by the Vicar of Christ on the question. This is all the more remarkable when it is remembered that some at least of the Protestant bodies have gone through a very similar experience to that which the Catholic Church is now undergoing in France and, to their credit be it said, their resistance to the aggression of the civil power was as strenuous as it was successful. To take but one instance: If there is one episode in their history of which Presbyterians are proud—and of which they have just reason to be proud—it is what is known as the Disruption of 1843, and yet the men who 'came out' on that historic occasion and formed the 'Free Church of Scotland' were merely asserting the identical principle for which the Pope is contending to-day. For many years the intrusion of unacceptable and undesirable ministers, under the Patronage Law of 1711, had been regarded as a grievance by the Scottish people, and in 1834 the General Assembly of the Church passed a Veto Act, which gave a majority of the male heads of families in a congregation the right to reject a minister presented by the patron, on a solemn declaration that they could receive no spiritual benefit from his ministrations. Almost immediately this Act brought the Scottish Church and the Civil Power into collision. A few months after its passing, a minister presented by the Earl of Kinmoul to the parish of Auchterarder, was 'vetoed' by almost the whole people; and the local Presbytery refused to proceed to his induction. The case was brought before the Court of Session, and thence was taken by appeal to the House of Lords. Both of these high tribunals affirmed their jurisdiction in the matter, found that the Veto Act was 'ultra vires' on the part of the Scottish Church, and declared that the Presbytery of Auchterarder had acted illegally. Various other cases of a similar kind occurred, and affairs grew more and more complicated. The Civil Courts interfered with the Church, and the Church broke the orders of the Civil Courts. At last, in 1842, the General Assembly of the Scottish Church laid at the foot of the throne its 'Claim of Right.' That Claim met with an unfavorable answer. The House of Commons, also, by a large majority, supported the views of the Government. Then the crisis came. Two hundred members of the Assembly of the Scottish Church which met at Edinburgh in May, 1843, laid upon its table, on the first day of its sitting, a Protest against what they conceived to be a series of unconstitutional invasions of the Church's rights, and proceeded, under the presidency of Thomas Chalmers, to form themselves into a separate Communion, to which they gave the name of the 'Free Church of Scotland.' A few days later they executed an 'Act of Separation and Deed of Demission,' by which, refusing to acknowledge 'the Ecclesiastical Judicatories established by law in Scotland,' they declared their separation from the Establishment and their rejection of all the rights and emoluments they derived from the

State, giving up churches, schools, and manse rather than submit to dictation and interference in spiritual matters from the civil power. The position is almost precisely parallel to that in which the Head of the Catholic Church is placed to-day, yet the descendants of the Disruption are as dumb as an ox or even openly rejoice at his discomfiture.

Nor is it owing to lack of opportunity that there has been no public expression of Protestant sympathy with the French Catholics in the glaring injustice that has been inflicted on them and in the diabolic attack that has been made on the freedom of religious worship. In England and America many meetings of protest—open to non-Catholics—have been held; and a masterly paper on the situation by Cardinal Gibbons, published in all the American journals, concluded with the following touching appeal:—

I am getting to be an old man, and I think I know my countrymen. They love fair play, they love liberty; they love to see humane dealings of man with man. And the late years have shown how cordially they hate injustice, tyranny, and inhumanity: and yet France had treated her noblest citizens with injustice and inhumanity; America, which has sympathy for the oppressed of all nations, has raised no protest nor uttered a word of sympathy. If I believed that my countrymen would knowingly see a great and beneficent organisation unjustly deprived of its property and the means of continued usefulness; would knowingly see tens of thousands of honest men and noble women robbed of their just income and means of support; would knowingly see hundreds of thousands and even several millions of people brutally wounded in what they hold dearest and most sacred; would knowingly see a majority in the French Chamber utterly disregard and trample upon the rights of the minority, and the rights of millions of their countrymen, in the name of liberty; would knowingly see tens of thousands of men and women, who happen to be priests and nuns, turned out of their homes for no crime but that of loving God and serving their neighbors—I say, if my countrymen can see and recognise all this injustice and tyranny and cruelty, and refuse genuine sympathy to those who suffer by them because of their religious belief, then I will leave life without that faith in American love of justice and liberty and humanity which has been my comfort and support and hope during a long career.

There is a note of deep pathos in this plea of America's venerable prelate, but, with only the most insignificant exceptions, press and pulpit have been completely silent. In this matter Protestantism has missed a high and noble opportunity, and has been palpably and glaringly false to the Christian principles it professes to uphold.

### The 'Devil's Own'

In one way and another the gentlemen of the wig and gown have bulked somewhat largely in the public eye during the past few weeks. To begin with, interest was aroused by the announcement made some time ago that the Government were seriously considering the question of creating King's Counsel in this Colony, and now it is intimated that the innovation has been finally decided on and that regulations will shortly be gazetted in connection with the proposal. The Chief Justice must concur in all the appointments, and it is provided that, except when acting for the Crown, his Majesty's Counsel shall not appear in the Supreme Court or the Court of Appeal, unless a junior from outside his own office should appear with him; nor in any inferior court, unless upon special retainer, and a fee of at least ten guineas. The fee for the patent of appointment is five guineas. Counsel are allowed to appear against the Crown in a case in which his Majesty's Counsel has been dispensed with, but in all such cases a special license must be obtained the fee for which is one guinea, which will of course be charged to the client. The appointment is for life, but in case of disgraceful conduct the letters patent may be revoked. In England—and the same arrangement will presumably obtain in New Zea-

**The Dunedin & Suburban Coal Co.**

TELEPHONE 401

are still at 29 CASTLE STREET, and will supply you with any kind of Coal or Firewood you want at LOWEST TARIFF RATES Smithy Coals supplied.