

3. In spite of the wholesale confiscation of church property perpetrated by the Government, not a single Catholic enterprise has been abandoned, and considerable extensions have already been undertaken. More has, in fact, been done to widen out the field of Church activity in the last two years of freedom, if of poverty, than stood to the credit of twenty years under the previous regime. The Bishop received me, not in the time-honored palace of his predecessors—that has been confiscated, and he was turned out of it; but, as he smilingly remarked, he is now, at all events, 'at home.' Apostolic poverty, but apostolic freedom, without loss of dignity. Well, all this shows that there are Catholics enough of the true stamp left in this country to support the burdens of a Catholic revival. And the Bishop firmly believes in that revival.

4. On the sore point of politics—which I dealt with in yesterday's letter—let me sum up the views of this eminent and commanding member of the French Hierarchy:—

The past is done for good and all. Only a political cataclysm could restore the old order of things, and even then could probably not bring about any improvement. As sane men the Catholics must not attend to an hypothesis so improbable. The Republic came in without violence, and was established in quite a legitimate way. Like any form of government, it is good or bad just as the men who hold the helm are good or bad. After a spell of thirty-seven years it has displaced the memory of former regimes in the minds of the immense majority of the people. To them any previous form sounds remote to-day. Nine-tenths of the people probably desire no constitutional change. On the other hand, it is premature in all probability for the clergy to take even that legitimate part in public life which is the right and even the duty of the ordinary citizen—that is to say, to speak openly in the common haunts of men regarding the choice of candidates for Parliament. Of course, politics must be excluded from the Church; but at least for a while it seems necessary to forego the exercise of even the right of free speech; for the French clergy have been bred for ages to quite a different order of ideas. But another sphere lies open to them, and they are busying themselves in it with manifest results. Bishops and priests hold meetings and attend gatherings, the objects of which lie at the root of the social and economic welfare of the people. This is bringing both sides—clergy and people—to study serious problems of the hour together. The patent effect is a broadening out of view in priests and people and a growing sympathy and heartfulness. The politician is gradually being supplanted by the local mind. The Bishop did not, of course, instance his own signal efforts within the last three years; but these were well known to me already from what I had been told at Rome and elsewhere. His principle is this: Let us go to the people; let us sincerely help the people. If we do, the people will not fail to recognise our deserts, and they will hearken to our advice as their fathers did in their day to the clergy who worked for their welfare. And such a people may be trusted to solve the political troubles of their own selves. In face of the discouragement one meets with at older hands, this is refreshing, and the intelligence, the sincerity and the high standing of the young Bishop of Dijon warrant me in accepting his views as more in consonance with reality than the more sombre presentation of older and feebler men.

## CATHOLICS AND PRISON STATISTICS

By the Rev. Charles J. Venning, S.M. (Catholic Chaplain to the Wellington Prison).

In a leading article in the *New Zealand Tablet* of December 10, 1908, appeared the following statement: 'It is, we believe, the experience of every priest who has been engaged in prison work in these countries—as we were for a time in three separate places—that many non-Catholic criminals have the habit of giving themselves Irish "aliases" and falsely designating themselves as Catholic. As for the rest, a very large percentage of them can lay claim to the name of Catholic solely by the fact of their Baptism. They live defiant to the laws of the Church; they assume a sham Catholicism when they find themselves within prison walls, only to shed it at the moment that they sniff again the air of freedom; and, so far as their lives go, their proper designation is not Catholics, but practical pagans. Is it not high time for sane people to abandon the controversial trick of making the Catholic Church, and her alone, responsible for the sins and follies of those who never acknowledged her authority, or who, having once acknowledged it, decline her guidance, reject her ministrations, and snap defiant fingers at her laws? Our prison statistics furnish no reliable evidence even as

to the number of "drunks" or other offenders for which the Dominion, or any given religious denomination in it, is responsible.'

Every Catholic chaplain in New Zealand can vouch for the truth of these statements. He knows full well that many of those before him, in the gaol benches, on any given Sunday, are not Catholics, and never were Catholics. Yet the river (or, shall we say, the Black Sea?) of calumny flows on for ever. There is at present no law by which these bogus 'Roman Catholics'—these unscrupulous sons of Ananias—can be punished. They are at liberty to put themselves down in the gaol records as 'Roman Catholics'—you cannot say nay to them! Quite a number take advantage of this easy method of 'receiving themselves into the Church.'

We hear much of the reading test for the admission of Chinese into this Dominion. Why not have some such test before a man could be admitted to the 'Catholic fold' of our prisons? Let the test be ever so simple; I am confident that many would not pass. The sign of the cross is a puzzle to some; the 'Hail Mary' is usually a 'poser,' and the 'Our Father'—well, yes, they often know that, but so many do persist in saying 'Our Father WHICH art in Heaven' (the Protestant form), when we naturally expect them to use the Catholic form, 'WHO art in Heaven.' Moreover, they are not satisfied with the plain Catholic ending, 'But deliver us from evil. Amen.' No. The tongues of these prison 'Roman Catholics' are impatient to tack on to the 'evil,' the familiar Protestant termination of the Lord's prayer: 'For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,' etc.

On a recent Sunday, when addressing this Catholic-Protestant-no-religion-at-all-congregation, in the Wellington Prison, an expression escaped me to this effect: 'Those of you who are Catholics will understand what is meant.' After the Mass, a prisoner (Catholic, I presume) remarked to me: 'Quite right; not a dozen out of the thirty are Catholics at all. I hear them talking about it every day.' Surely, this man's word is just as reliable as the statements made by those who love to style themselves 'Roman Catholic' only for the time they are in gaol.

Every Catholic prison chaplain is familiar with such Protestant expressions on the lips of alleged 'Roman Catholic' prisoners as 'The evening Mass,' or 'The only time I attend a Catholic service is when I am in gaol.' I remember one man, who was very anxious to receive Holy Communion while in gaol, asking me if he might have his breakfast first! Such are some of the 'Roman Catholics' who figure in the Blue Book.

The answer that some have given for turning 'Catholics' in gaol was that our service was not held so frequently as the services of other religious bodies. Hence they preferred the lesser of what appeared to them to be two evils. In Wellington we have increased the 'dose' of religious services to three, and sometimes four, each month—with very fair results so far, we believe.

Now for a few interesting facts. In March of the present year (1908), I went to some trouble to verify statements made by prisoners as to their religious allegiance. At the time I made the inquiry, there were some thirty-six men on the roll as 'Roman Catholics.' Weigh these few figures, then form what opinion you wish as to the genuineness of 'prison statistics' as given in the annual official reports. Of the thirty-six I found that *three* had never been baptised at all by any priest, 'or any lay man or woman.' Yet these three were proud to be 'Catholics'—while in gaol. Two of the three were serving considerable sentences for most serious offences—rape and indecency. Of the thirty-six, I found that only *six* had ever been inside of a Catholic school, and some of them had been there (so they said) only for a short time. These figures will be interesting to Catholic readers. Of the thirty-six, I found that twenty-five had not made their first Communion. It was news to some of them to learn a few facts from the life of Jesus Christ!

Thus you see that three out of thirty-six were not Catholics, and never were, and eight and a third per cent. were set down as 'Roman Catholic' without the least claim to that title! And the far greater number of those who were baptised into the Church were in gaol through the absence of any Catholic influence in their early lives—they had been without a Catholic home, Catholic companions, Catholic teacher, Catholic school.

My latest experience took place on last Saturday afternoon. A 'Roman Catholic' came to see me during my visit to the gaol. He clumsily referred to some Catholic doctrine. My suspicions were at once aroused. On taxing him with deceit, in sailing under false colors, he owned up to the trick. He was not a Catholic—never had been. He then frankly told me that he was an Anglican, although I believe that he knows as much about the Church of England as he does about us. On asking him to make the sign of the cross, he blushed—oh, what a rosy blush! Then he described a circle with his *left* hand, using, I