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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE GREAT SCAPEGOAT.

PERHAPS you have heard of Paddy Miles's Boy? He must have been as ubiquitous as Hobgoblin or as Sir Boyle Roche's bird, which could be in two places at the same time; for he was set down as the author of every practical joke and impish trick that were played over a big slice of the province of Ulster. Now Paddy Miles's Boy represents, after all, nothing more or less than the great institution of the scapegoat as applied to the incidents of social life. Almost every adult individual Tom, Jack, and Harry, Jemima, Theodolinda, and Mary Jane has his or her special human scapegoat on whom they fling the blame of the follies, foibles, vices, or errors of judgment which stand between them and happiness or success. Nations, like individuals, find their scapegoats in due season. England found hers in Admiral Byng. France had her Napoleon III.; she deposed the puny plotter after the boulevards had forced him into a war with Prussia. The Protestant Churches have many scapegoats. But their arch-scapegoat is the Pope. Is there distress and consequent discontent in Ireland? Do labourers dig too much in Lombardy or too little in Naples? Is Belgium too prosperous and perky, and Spain too poor for comfort? Do citizens 'rise' too readily in South America, and submit too tamely to the tyranny of Government and *padroni* in Sardinia and the Abruzzi? It is all 'along of' that plaguy Man of Sin? Is the Catholic Church strong and united? Is it because of the 'spiritual tyranny' of the Pope? Are the Protestant bodies divided into a thousand conflicting sects? Have we not the word of the Anglican Primate of New Zealand that the Pope is 'the direct cause' of this calamitous state of affairs. And if (to use words applied in another sense) anyone were to inquire: 'Who fills the butchers' shops with large blue flies?' there could be only one answer: The Pope, of course.

Some of the secular journals are more or less caught by the endemic of this Protestant tradition. The London *Times* 'has 'em bad' at intervals. It has been chronically afflicted in that way since its present Rome correspondent took up his residence in the Eternal City—probably under the shadow of the Quirinal and in the midst of the enemies of the Holy See. The varlet is no more reliable on matters of fact or on matters of opinion regarding the Vatican than his notorious *confère* of the *Daily Mail*. Since his appointment he has had abundant opportunities of making blunders. And he has profited by these opportunities to the best of his humble abilities. Among his other exploits we may mention the following: He published the foolish and malicious hearsay calumny that Cardinal Rampolla expressed delight at the condemnation of Dreyfus; he quoted a foolish 'letter to the editor' of the *Osservatore Romano* on the Boer war as an extract from an editorial article in the same paper, and endeavoured, by implication, to make it appear that it represented the views of the Holy See; and, if we remember aright, he was the 'discoverer' of the bogus anti-British speech which the Pope is fabled to have delivered to English pilgrims on the South African War. His glowing blunders and his malevolent hostility to the Vatican have been a matter of scandalous notoriety to the Catholic body in England. In fact, the Vatican correspondent of the *Times*, Monsignor Stanley, resigned all connection with the paper, as a protest against the fellow's gross and continuous misrepresentation of the news and views of the Holy See. But the *Times* has its little game to play for politicians in Italy and for a certain class of fanatics in England. And we know of old that it is not squeamish as to the tools that it employs. In its attempts to ruin Parnell it clung to the forger Pigott long after his character was known to the rest of the world, and abandoned him only when he had blown out his worthless brains, a fugitive from justice in Madrid.

The splenetic correspondent of the *Times* is evidently seeking to raise a no-Popery cry in Great Britain by broadly hinting that Leo XIII. and his court, instead of being, as international courtesy and common-sense dictate, neutral, are violent pro-Boer and anti-British partisans in connection with the campaign in South Africa. This view has even found editorial expression in the columns of the *Thunderer* of Printing-House Square. Its ideas on the subject have been reprinted and apparently accepted by the *Dunedin Evening Star*. The expression 'Vatican Press' has been used by both—with special reference to articles on the war in the *Voce della Verità* and the *Osservatore Romano*—in a manner which is calculated to leave the impression that they are through and through the official organs of Vatican news and opinion. As a matter of fact the *Voce della Verità* is in no sense the organ or mouthpiece of the Holy See, whether official or semi-official. Even the *Osservatore* is not an organ of the Vatican or of the Roman Curia in the ordinary acceptance of the term. It is the property of a private company, and has over and over again declared—as, for instance, in its issues of November 14th and 15th, now before us—that the only official or semi-official matter which it publishes regarding the Vatican is that which appears from time to time under the heading *Nostre Informazioni*. Its articles are not in any way dictated, inspired, or suggested by the Vatican, and it has repeatedly announced that the whole and sole responsibility for them rests with the writers individually and the editorial staff. The antecedent improbability of the Holy See taking sides in this war ought to be evident to anybody who knows the mighty intellect of Leo XIII., his mastery of diplomatic usage, and the friendly attitude towards the English nation to which he has time and again given expression both in writing and by word of mouth. At any rate, the Holy See is entitled to be judged by what the Pope or his duly qualified representatives say, and not by the malicious non-sequiturs of the rabid Rome correspondent of the *Times*. Leo XIII. did what lay in his power to avert a war in South Africa. When it broke out, his attitude and that of his court towards the belligerents naturally was, and as naturally remains, one of strict neutrality. The *Osservatore Romano* of November 15th, after challenging the *Times* to show where or when it had hinted that the Holy See favoured the Boers, says: 'In any case let us say that the Holy See sides with neither party, and that what the *Osservatore Romano* has said, it has said *ex se*, taking all the responsibility thereof.' The Pope has limited his 'interference' to imparting his special blessing, through Monsignor Lennon (Protonotary-Apostolic), to the Catholic nuns who, when free to seek safety in flight, decided unanimously and without a moment's hesitation to remain and nurse the sick and wounded British soldiers within the lines of Kimberley and Mafeking.

The implied suggestion of the *Times* that the Vatican 'controls' the political opinions of Catholic papers in Germany and elsewhere is simply rank nonsense. It exercises no more actual control over the politics of the Catholic Press than it does over the politics of the *Dunedin Evening Star* or the *Auckland Herald*. Did the Vatican attempt to direct Catholic papers along such lines, the big London daily that lost whatever reputation it had over Richard Pigott would probably read Leo XIII. a lively homily on the suppression of free speech, the muzzling of the Press, and such-like enormities. Hypercritics, like certain other people, are kittle cattle, and the man—be he Pope, parson, or politician—who tries to please their fastidious fancy is a fool for his pains.

OPINION ON THE WAR.

'A CONFLICT of armed opinions.' Such were the words used by Pitt in reference to the great war between England and France which, in 1803, followed the rupture of the peace of Amiens. The designation might be aptly applied to the fierce struggle that is swaying back and forwards with such strangely varying fortunes along the Modder and the Tugela and the Orange River. The original cause of quarrel resolved itself into a question as to the desirability of one side conceding a little more or the other

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