

administration of justice, even if it would not absolutely make it what it has long been in Ireland—that home of jury-packing—‘a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.’ Rumor hath it that a little knot of hard-headed, strong-jawed Orange jurors, who ‘sat out’ for a disagreement, were responsible for the lame and impotent ending of a recent case from which Catholic jurymen were strictly excluded. The rumor may be quite groundless. But plentiful instances of the marvellous capabilities of Orange jurymen are scattered in rank abundance over the judicial annals of Ireland during the past hundred years. The following instance, which we select out of many, will, perhaps, scarcely find a parallel in the whole history of the jury system. It is given in the Third Report of the Irish Parliamentary Committee of 1835 on Orange Lodges. It occurred in the case of the King v. Hall, who was charged with having entered a Catholic church and stolen therefrom vestments, etc. The case was tried at Enniskillen before Judge Fletcher and an Orange jury—‘good men in bad times.’ The prisoner was an Orangeman, and in the dock ‘wore an Orange ribbon on his breast.’ He pleaded guilty to the charge. Judge Fletcher thereupon told the jury that they had nothing to try, as the prisoner’s admission was, in point of law, sufficient for his conviction. The jury immediately returned a verdict of *not guilty*! Judge Fletcher knew the ways of Orange juries tolerably well. But he was not prepared for this. ‘Thank God, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘that is your verdict, not mine. ‘Gentlemen,’ he continued, ‘I will not treat you in this case as my highly esteemed departed friend, Judge Fox, treated a jury of this country. I will not placard your names on the session-house or grand-jury room door. You shall not have an opportunity of dragging me before Parliament. But I will immediately order the sheriff to discharge you from doing any further duty at these assizes.’ The jury was accordingly discharged. So was the self-convicted thief. As soon as he reached the street he was hoisted on the shoulders of the brethren and carried through Enniskillen in triumph.

Within more recent years the conduct of Orange jurors has time and again been made the subject of scathing condemnation from the judicial bench. A sound principle, which we in these colonies seem to be in some danger of forgetting just now, was enunciated by the Attorney-General for Ireland in the blistering comments made by him in Parliament on the scandalous conduct of the packed jury who tried their brethren, the Orange rioters of 1869. ‘It is,’ said he, ‘the greatest misfortune that could befall the administration of the law, that religious considerations should enter into the selection of juries.’

THE unreliability of newspaper news has been the theme of perennial complaint ever since the days of the first gazette. Some 240 years ago Samuel Butler, in the second part of his *Hudibras*, flailed those

Diurnals writ for regulation
Of lying to inform the nation.

And twenty years before the publication of his splendid satire, the author of the *Sacra Nemesis, or Levites’ Scourge*, ‘defined’ the journalists of his day as ‘base spies, hired to invent and vent base lies through the whole kingdom.’

The art of newspaper falsehood has been developed along many and various lines since the days of Samuel Butler. According to Mark Twain, there are now 869 different forms of lying. There are few of these that the modern newspaper has not at least a nodding acquaintance with. A favorite method nowadays is the publication of some injurious report which is subsequently proved to be untrue. Nevertheless, nothing is withdrawn, nothing is qualified, and the slander is left to follow its course. This is especially the case with statements that reflect unfavorably on the Catholic Church or clergy. A recent instance in point is before us at this moment. Father Volponi, an Italian priest, was sometime ago unjustly sentenced by a hostile and a hot-headed tribunal to six months’ imprisonment on a trumped-up charge of having condoned the assassination of the late King Humbert. The London *Daily News*—which the *Giorno* calls ‘the calumniator of Italy’—seized on the item, pulled it about and distorted it till it acquired a forbiddingly sensational look, and sent it abroad to the ends of the earth. Several New Zealand papers echoed the whooping statements of the mail. One of them—which, by the way, is noted for its occasional fits of virulence against Catholics—accompanied the publication with a snuffling pretence of regret which reminds one of the walrus’s address to the oysters in Lewis Carroll’s fairy tale:—

‘I weep for you,’ the walrus said:
‘I deeply sympathise.’
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

No mention was made by the *Daily Mail* or its colonial copyists that Father Volponi promptly appealed against the sentence of the lower court as being contrary to evidence. The Italian papers—including our exchange, the *Vera Roma*—announced so far back as November 25 the fact that Father Volponi had been completely and honorably acquitted by the Court of Appeal on the plea of *inesistenza di reato*—that is, on the question of fact. So far, good. But the discreditable part of the whole business is this: that not one of the newspapers, either in the Home countries or in these colonies, that raised the hullabaloo over the wholly unjustifiable condemnation of Father Volponi by a lower court, has published a line regarding his acquittal by the Court of Appeal.

OUR clever contemporary, the Philadelphia *Catholic Standard*, quotes the following personal note from our columns: ‘Mr. Alfred Austin, the Poet Laureate, is 65. He is so little and slight in figure that he has been nicknamed “The Pocket Edition,” and though a thorough sportsman, he prefers his gardens to almost anything else. Mr. Austin was born in Leeds, his father being a wealthy merchant, and after trying the Bar for a time he became a journalist and poet.’ It then appends the following editorial note: ‘So says a contemporary which has always truly deserved the description of esteemed—the NEW ZEALAND TABLET. Nothing could have caused greater astonishment to its friends than to see such a statement in columns hitherto distinguished for good taste as well as accuracy in statement. No one who is capable of appreciation of poetry would describe Mr. Austin as a poet. Poet and Poet Laureate are two widely different things, as he has convincingly proved. The world used to laugh at Martin F. Tupper’s pretensions to the title, but he was a Horace as compared with Austin. The Poet Close is possibly the only approximate analogy which the list of English bards, real and sham, can furnish.’

Our bright Philadelphia contemporary is right: ‘poet and poet-laureate are two widely different things.’ It is easy to classify Alfred the Third and his ‘splay-foot rhymes.’ But it is by no means so easy to describe by a single word the position that he occupies in the republic of letters. ‘Poetaster’ hits off the situation pretty accurately; but the word is obsolescent. ‘Rhymers’ and ‘rhymesters’ are likewise on their way to the lumber-room of discarded terms. ‘Pote’ would shock our compositors and scandalise our schoolboy readers. Mangan’s term, ‘barding,’ is scarcely down to our laureate’s capacity. And ‘versifier’ is ambiguous. On the whole, we may as well agree to call this ‘tortured torturer of reluctant rhymes’ a poet—by courtesy, just as we agree to designate certain agglomerates of printed paper and binding ‘books.’ We owe some little sympathy to one who is struggling so bravely, though so hopelessly, against the influence of his natal star.

Among the middle age Persians poetry was far too serious an affair for the small fry of the rhyming fraternity to trifle with. The penalty for machine-made rhymes of the Tupper-Austin brand was crucifixion—with the offending verses nailed over the culprit’s head. Or the rhyme-spinner was buried alive in the earth up to the chin, with his manuscript at his feet, and trained elephants were made to walk upon his head until he was killed ‘fatally dead.’ Fortunately for the budding poets, British royalty is not so particular in the matter of rhyme as the Persian. The laureateship, like kissing, goes by favor rather than by merit. England’s crowned heads have had a sort of traditional regard for the small poets. Sir John Denham, for instance, who was a literary ancestor of Mr. Austin, was in high favor with Charles I. In one of the frays with the Roundheads, Withers—a Puritan officer who was the writer of an unconscionable amount of prosy doggerel—was taken prisoner by the Cavaliers. He was condemned to die by the halter. But Sir John successfully besought the King to spare the wretched versifier’s life, ‘because’—as a quaint old history naively puts it—‘so long as Withers lived, Denham could not be accounted the worst poet in England.’

Several sorry versifiers were during the nineteenth century placed—heaven knows why—upon the British Civil List. Among them was one who filled the description given by Reginald Scot in his curious *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: he could ‘rhyme any man or beast to death.’ This was one Robert Young, otherwise ‘Old True Blue.’ He was the ‘laureate’ of the Orange lodges, and published a volume of ‘poems’ for the use of the saffron-scarved brethren in the sixties. Among the gems of his poetic fancy is one in which he tunes his lyre to sing of the great day on the Boyne,

When William’s eighteen thousand men
Crushed James’s five-and-twenty!

Another of his ‘poems’ had at the end of each verse the following soul-stirring refrain:

Tow, row, row, row, row!