

THE CONVERSAZIONE.

(By Telegraph)

February 12.

On Monday afternoon the prelates and visiting clergy proceeded to St. Mary's Convent of Mercy, Colombo street, where a song of welcome was sung by the children of the school and an interesting programme of physical drill and violin and piano selections was performed. Thanks were returned to the children and the Sisters by the prelates in complimentary terms.

The Art Gallery was crowded to excess on Monday evening on the occasion of the conversazione tendered by the Catholics of Christchurch to the visiting prelates and priests, all of whom were present. The fine decorations of the building, with the permanent paintings adorning the walls, were still further enhanced by the addition of palms, pot plants, ferns, foliage, and flowers, whilst the reflections from numerous mirrors, placed at intervals, gave a tone of animation to the scene which was most effective. The main part of the building was laid out as a drawing-room and magnificently furnished by the firm of Messrs. A. J. White and Co. The following programme was given:—Part 1: Piano solo, 'Rigolotto,' Miss Kate Young; song, 'Rocked in the cradle of the deep,' Mr. E. McNamara (encored); song, 'The carnival,' Miss Moir; song, 'By the blue sea,' (Smart), Mrs. Pidgeon; song, 'Coming of the king,' Mr. C. Read; violin solo, Miss L. Cook (encored); song, 'Joyous life,' Miss Pender (encored); song, 'Come back to Erin,' Miss Pidgeon; recitation, 'The lesson of the water-mill,' Mr. H. Hayward (encored); piano solo, 'Miss McGuinness'; song, 'Only a rosebud,' Miss Moir (encored); song, 'The miner,' Mr. E. McNamara (encored). During an interval in the programme refreshments were handed round. At the close of the conversazione his Lordship Bishop Grimes addressed the audience, and the Archbishops of Melbourne and Wellington and the Bishop of Dunedin thanked all most heartily for the way they had been received and entertained.

On Tuesday afternoon the visiting ecclesiastics were entertained at the Sacred Heart Convent, Barbadoes street, at an excellent and well-rendered musical programme. On the same afternoon they proceeded to Mount Magdala, where they were present at a genuine treat in the shape of a musical and dramatic performance given by the 'children,' a drama entitled 'The human soul' being rendered in first-class style, the whole performances reflecting much credit on the devoted nuns and those under their care.

PRAISE FOR A CATHOLIC PRIEST

WE quote the following interesting remarks from Governor Roosevelt's article on 'Civic Helpfulness' in a recent *Century*. We do not doubt that it could be corroborated in other places than New York.

'Perhaps there is no harm in my referring to one man who is dead. Very early in my career as a police commissioner of the city of New York, I was brought in contact with Father Casserly of the Paulist Fathers. After he had made up his mind that I was really trying to get things decent in the department, and to see that law and order prevailed, and that crime and vice were warred against in practical fashion, he became very intimate with me, helping me in every way, and unconsciously giving me an insight into his own work and his own character. Continually, at one point and another, I came across what Father Casserly was doing, always in the way of showing the intense human sympathy and interest he was taking in the lives about him. If one of the boys of a family was wild, it was Father Casserly who planned methods of steadying him. If, on the other hand, a steady boy met with some misfortune—lost his place, or something of the kind,—it was Father Casserly who went and stated the facts to his employer. The Paulist Fathers had always been among the most efficient foes of the abuses to the liquor trade. They never hesitated to interfere with saloons, dance-houses, and the like. One secret of their influence with our Police Board was that, as they continually went about among their people and knew them all, and as they were entirely disinterested, they could be trusted to tell who did right and who did wrong among the instruments of the law. One of the perplexing matters in dealing with policemen is that, as they are always in hostile contact with criminals and would-be criminals, who are sure to lie about them, it is next to impossible to tell when accusations against them are false and when they are true; for the good man who does his duty is sure to have scoundrelly foes, and the bad man who blackmails these same scoundrels usually has nothing but the same evidence against him. But Father Casserly and the rest of his order knew the policemen personally, and we found we could trust them implicitly to tell exactly who was good and who was not. Whether the man were Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, if he was a faithful public servant they would so report him; and if he was unfaithful he would be reported as such, wholly without regard to his creed.'

In the same article, honorable mention is also made of a certain Brother A—, who was doing very effective work for Italian children.

'He had a large parochial school, originally attended by the children of Irish parents. Gradually the Irish had moved up-town, and had been supplanted by the Italians. It was his life-work to lift these little Italians over the first painful steps on the road to American citizenship.'

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Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

- February 17, Sunday.—Quinquagesima Sunday.
- " 18, Monday.—St. Raymond de Pennafort, Confessor.
- " 19, Tuesday.—St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor.
- " 20, Wednesday.—Ash Wednesday.
- " 21, Thursday.—St. Paul, the first Hermit.
- " 22, Friday.—Feast of the Crown of Thorns.
- " 23, Saturday.—St. Peter Damian, Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor of the Church.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, so called from the Catholic ceremony of blessing ashes and strewing it upon the foreheads of the clergy and laity as a sign of penance. The Fathers of the Church, especially St. Gregory, call the first day of Lent the 'head of the fast,' *caput jejunii*, because it is on this day that the fast of Lent begins. This custom is very ancient, for we know it was observed in the time of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). The covering of the head with ashes has long been a common sign of mourning among Eastern nations, indicative of the deepest sorrow and distress. Instances of this are mentioned in Scripture. Jeremias advises the people of Jerusalem to cover themselves with ashes to escape the wrath of Nabuchodonosor (Jer. xxv. 34). The Ninivites dressed in sackcloth and put ashes upon their heads to avert the heavenly vengeance (Jonas iii. 6). The Christian Church has adopted a symbol so potent to excite in the soul sentiments of humility, compunction, and penance, by reminding us that we are but dust and unto dust shall return. Penitents, in the early Christian Church, testified their sorrow and humiliation at times by standing at the door of the Church in 'sackcloth and ashes.' The ashes are blessed at the altar, immediately before Mass; the celebrant marks on the heads of the clergy and the assembled people, with the blessed ashes, and to each person he thus marks he addresses the words which God announced to the first sinner: 'Remember, O man! that thou art dust and that thou shalt return unto dust' (Gen. iii. 19). The ashes that are used on Ash Wednesday should be dry; this the Sacred Congregation of Rites specifies (May 23, 1693, *apud Gardellini*, vol. I., p. 19). They should be made from the branches blessed on Palm Sunday, the year previous. The Rubric of the Missal is formal on this point. These ashes are indeed the remains of the glory of the God-Man, and as the seed of that which is reserved for us in heaven. Hence we should receive them in accordance with the sentiments of the Church.

LENT.

Anciently in the Latin Church, Lent lasted only 36 days, and commenced only on the Sunday of the sixth week before Easter, which they called Quadragesima Sunday. In the eleventh century, to more closely imitate the fast of 40 days which Jesus Christ suffered in the desert, some added four days before Quadragesima Sunday, and this custom was followed in the West; for, by deducting the six Sundays which are no fast days, there remain exactly 40 days of fast, in imitation of our Saviour. From this rule we have to except the Church of Milan, which commences Lent only on Quadragesima Sunday.

The ancient Latin monks kept three Lents: the great Lent before Easter, the other before Christmas, which they called the Fast of St. Martin, and the other the Fast of St. John the Baptist, after Pentecost, all three of 40 days. The Greeks observed four others besides that of Easter, namely: that of the Apostles, of the Assumption, of Christmas, and of the Transfiguration; but they reduced them to seven days each. The Jacobites have a fifth fast, which they call the Fast of the Penance of Ninive. The Chaldaics and Nestorians do the same. The Maronites have six, by adding that of the Exaltation of the Cross. The 40 days' period, as commemorative of our Lord's 40 days' fast, or of the similar perfunctory fasts of Moses and Elias, commences with Ash Wednesday, between which day and Easter Sunday (omitting the Sundays, on which the fast is not observed), 40 clear days intervene. The rigor of the ancient observance, which excluded all flesh and even the so-called 'white meats,' is now much relaxed; but the principle of permitting but one meal, with a slight refectory or collation, is widely retained. The precept of fast obliges all those who have their twenty-first year completed, if no other cause dispenses them from fast. In Spain, during the Crusades and the wars with the Moors, a practice arose of permitting in certain cases, the substitution of a contribution to the holy war, for the observance of Lenten abstinence; and although the object has long since ceased, the composition is still permitted, under the same title of the 'Crusada.'

Wanted, about 50 clerks to help read testimonials *re* Tussicura. Sole manufacturer, S. J. Evans, 2s 6d.—*.*

An elderly man is required as gardener for the Convent, Nelson.—*.*

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