

and public libraries, and all general humanitarian and reform movements should not have a fair share of the wholesome leaven of Catholic citizenship. The pointed words of Archbishop Ireland are as applicable to the Catholics of New Zealand as they were to the American laymen to whom they were addressed:—

'You must be public spirited, you must do your best, first of all, to show yourselves the most ardent Americans, the most devoted citizens, and you should be ready, if the opportunity offers, to put yourselves forward in public life, so as to be able to serve your country and to serve it honestly; and there should be no intellectual movement, there should be no literary club, there should be no moral reform movement going on in the country without Catholics being largely representative in the membership. I am discouraged whenever I find in any place a good movement for the betterment of humanity, for the elevation of citizens in general, when I discover one without Catholic names in the membership.'

Spurious Relics and Devotions.

An anonymous correspondent in one of our daily papers has been trying to throw ridicule on the Catholic practice of venerating relics by sending a clipping to the paper in question in which the statement is made on the authority of 'an Italian Protestant pastor,' that the tail of Balaam's ass is exhibited at the Cathedral of Verona for the veneration of the multitude. We are at one with this correspondent in condemning overcredulity in such matters, but the only credulity that we see in the case is the credulity of the people who can swallow without a gulp the fairy tale of this guileless 'pastor.' They are the real lineal descendants of Balaam's historic animal, and they should be the last in the world to say anything about 'credulity.'

The authorised teaching and practice of the Church with regard to relics is eminently simple, reasonable, and Scriptural. It is based on the principle that Matter is capable of being used as a channel or medium of grace and is susceptible of a union with a Divine Presence and influence. Thus, the Church specially venerates the bodies of the martyrs and other saints, because while they were on earth their bodies were the temple of the Holy Ghost and were the receptacle of countless graces. The graces and virtues of the saints were not virtues of the soul only: they belonged to the whole man, body and soul, which worked and suffered together. Next, Catholics believe that God is sometimes pleased to honor the relics of the saints by making them instruments of healing and other miracles, and also by bestowing spiritual graces on those who, for His sake, honor those whom He Himself has honored so greatly. In proof of this we appeal to the Old Testament, in which is recorded the resurrection of a dead body which touched the bones of Eliseus (2 Kings, XIII., 21), and to the New, which tells of grace and healing being imparted by the hem of Christ's own garment (Matt. IX., 22), by the shadow of St. Peter (Acts V., 15), and by towels which had touched the living body of St. Paul (Acts XIX., 12). To the teaching of reason and of sacred Scripture may be added the testimony of the Fathers, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries generally, being witnesses to this belief in the Apostolic Church.

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No doubt in all ages abuses have occurred with regard to relics, but the Church cannot, with any truth or fairness, be held responsible for these. As a writer in a recent number of the *Month* remarks: 'Spurious relics and legends are no more part of the revelation guarded by the Church than the barnacles are part of the ship to which they adhere so tenaciously, nor has the Church ever really sanctioned them with her authority.' On the contrary, she has, so far as was possible, made express provision for the prevention of such abuses. So long ago as 1215, Canon 62 of the Fourth Lateran Council, inserted in the 'Corpus Juris,' forbade relics to be sold or to be exposed outside of their cases or shrines, and prohibited the public veneration of new relics till their authenticity had been approved by the Pope (Mansi, 'Concil.' tom. xxii. 1049-50). The Council of Trent (Sess. XXV. De Invoe. Sanct.) renews these prohibitions and requires bishops to decide on the authenticity of new relics after careful consultation with theologians, or, if necessary, with the metropolitan and other bishops of the province assembled in Council. It will thus be seen that the Church has taken every possible precaution to secure that only genuine relics shall be honored by the faithful, and if well-meaning but insufficiently instructed Catholics are occasionally found who accept as genuine anything and everything that is offered to them as a 'relic,' the Church certainly cannot, under the circumstances, be held responsible.

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What has been said as to the Church's attitude and the Church's responsibility in regard to spurious relics applies also to unauthorised and purely legendary devotions and prayers. Many Catholics who have a zeal, indeed, but not according to knowledge, rush eagerly after any new-tangled and much-

advertised devotion, and this notwithstanding that there is a superabundance of excellent authorised prayers in all the prayer-books and notwithstanding that by application to their priest they could ascertain at once the precise value of the particular prayer or devotion that is pressed upon them. A recent example of this is furnished by our esteemed contemporary the *Catholic Standard*. A Catholic pastor had sent to our contemporary a prayer which he had found in circulation in three counties of Wisconsin, U.S.A., and desired the *Standard* to call attention to its spurious character. The prayer was entitled 'In the Tomb' and purported to have been found in the tomb of Our Lord in the 83rd year of the Christian era. The most ample promises were attached to its recital. Those who repeat it or keep it about them 'shall never die a sudden death. Reading it over, any woman in labor will deliver in safety and be a glad mother. And when the child is born lay this on the child's right side and he or she will not be troubled with any misfortune. If you see anyone in fits lay this on their side and they shall stand up and thank God. And you who shall repeat it any house shall be blessed by the Lord. And he that will laugh at it will suffer. Believe this for certain, etc.'

The prayer and its descriptive matter, according to the *Standard*, abound in Scriptural and historical errors, and our contemporary very properly rebukes the foolishness of those who could have anything to do with such spurious rubbish. Here was a case in which an undoubtedly spurious prayer, with absurd promises, was being somewhat widely accepted by foolish people, yet no one could with any reasonableness hold the Church responsible, and her attitude on the matter was rightly interpreted by her official representatives when they lost no time in taking steps to suppress the abuse. The true place of spurious relics and devotions is that assigned to them by the Abbé Hemmer when he describes them as instances only of misuse of that liberty which the Church leaves to her children, in her desire not to extend too far the sphere of her authoritative action.

'Ex-Monk' Widdows Up to Date.

The main facts in the career of the loathsome creature Widdows—so-called 'Ex-Monk'—have been already given more than once in the columns of the N.Z. TABLET, and we only refer to the matter again for the purpose of bringing our account of his career up to date, so that our readers may be furnished with a full record of authenticated facts about him if the unsavory wretch should ever attempt to pollute this country with his presence. A week or two ago it was mentioned in these columns that Widdows had been again charged with the abominable crime for which he had received two previous convictions, and Home papers just to hand give the result of his trial on this latest charge. Widdows was charged with 'grossly indecent conduct,' and there was a second count charging him also with soliciting the commission of an offence against public decency. Widdows pleaded not guilty. The jury, after a deliberation of three-quarters of an hour, found the prisoner guilty, and he was sentenced to two years 'hard.' We give below the statement made by the police after his conviction, as reported in the London *Times*, and it will serve as a sort of official nutshell biography of the impostor.

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Inspector Kane said the prisoner had 'been going about the country for nearly thirty years representing himself to be an ex-monk, but at the time he said he was admitted as a monk he was charged at a Police Court in London with robbing his partner. That case, however, was patched up. The prisoner was sentenced to five months' imprisonment at Toronto upon a similar charge to the present. In 1888 he was sentenced at the Old Bailey to ten years' penal servitude for criminal practices. He was again charged in 1896 with an offence similar to the one he was now charged with, but he was acquitted. The prisoner had a hall or church in London and a following of some hundreds of people, who believed him to be a persecuted ex-member of the Roman Catholic Church. The prisoner never was a monk.' A record like this would be sufficient, one would think, to deter most decent-minded people from having anything further to do with such a scoundrel, but it is only too certain that the credulous and ignorant class of Protestants who have supported Widdows in the past will receive him with open arms when he again comes out of jail to resume ministrations at the London conventicle over which he presides. Anti-Catholic writers are fond of descanting on the 'credulity' of Catholics but the credulity and folly of people who will take by the hand, and make a martyr of, a filthy wretch who has been thrice convicted of the vilest crime known to the law, certainly takes some beating.

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