

In the Catholic countries of Spain and Belgium there have recently been enacted scenes of grave disturbance and disorder, not arising indeed directly from any conflict with the Church, but a disorder nevertheless in which the interests of the Church were seriously threatened. So far as Belgium is concerned, the crisis has, as we explained last week, for a time at least, been happily averted, and the Clerical or Church Party have now a tighter grasp than ever on the reins of power. In Spain the discontent is of a very dangerous and far-reaching character, and the recent efforts of the Government have only temporarily allayed it. Industrially and economically, Spain is in a very bad way, and there are indications that in the general discontent the question of the power and property of the religious Orders will be certainly and vehemently raised. There is a great deal of chronic poverty and ground for legitimate grievance in the industrial condition of the people, and the monarchy will find itself in serious danger unless important political and social reforms are promptly taken in hand. In Italy also the present situation is by no means promising. The Zanardelli Ministry have not hesitated to interfere directly with the Church even in the matter of dogma. *The Eco d' Italia* of Genoa, quoted by our contemporary the *Liverpool Catholic Times*, says that at Naples in some of the churches which are frequented by large congregations, servants of the State stand on guard and listen carefully to the sermons. They have informed the clergy that they have orders not to permit them to speak from the pulpit on the question of divorce. In case the command of the civil authorities is disregarded, it becomes their duty to stop the preacher and bring him before the law courts. The decree has aroused, of course, a storm of indignant protest and opposition, but it is nevertheless being persistently forced upon the country, and more than one congregation has been dismissed and the doors of the church closed because a priest has thought it his duty to warn his flock against the evils of divorce.

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Probably in no country in the world is the present position of the Church so extremely grave and critical as in unhappy France. As our readers know the Church's enemies in France have already succeeded, by means of a tyrannical Associations Bill, in driving the religious Orders from that country, and their latest move is to make education in France absolutely and completely secular, so as to still further crush and cripple Catholicity in the country. This they propose to accomplish by repealing what is known as the Falloux Law, granting freedom to teach in France. The Falloux Law was passed in 1850, and by it any French person is permitted to open a secondary school on fulfilling certain conditions as to moral and intellectual fitness. The real object of the proposal for repeal is to prevent the religious congregations from setting up secondary schools, and thus compelling French parents to send their children to the Government lycées, where the teachers and the teaching are both anti-Catholic. The gravity of the situation was fully realised last September by the Holy Father, who, in addressing a group of representative French Catholics who had an audience with him in that month, uttered these impressive words: 'There is still, however, one hope. *The last plank of salvation* is the elections of next year. Everything depends on them. Catholics must work for them, must make a supreme effort: it is to conquer or die.' Those elections are proceeding as we write, and there are indications that the Catholic electors are making a gallant fight. The latest cable message to hand intimates that since the first ballot was declared M. WALDECK-ROUSSEAU has protested against clerical interference in the election, a step which we interpret as an unmistakable flag of distress and as an indication that priests and people are making a firm and unflinching stand for faith and freedom.

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In America the Church is, as recent statistics show, progressing by leaps and bounds, but the present attitude of the United States Government towards the Church in the Philippines is anything but satisfactory, and may yet lead to serious difficulty and complications. The United States Government appointed a Commission, under the presidency of Judge Taft, to report on the religious question in the Philippines and as the outcome of his report two recommendations were made: (1). That the Spanish Friars should be withdrawn from the Islands; and (2) that a system

of absolutely secular education be introduced. These are recommendations of course which the Vatican could not do otherwise than oppose. The issues involved in the question and the attitude of the Holy Father on these proposals are very well and fairly described in an article in the *Protestant Independent*, from which we make the following extract:—

'What the Vatican, without distinction of parties or opinions, will fight against is the loss of the 6,559,900 Catholics, which, according to the Church register of 1898, exist in the Philippines. This is almost the entire population, and after the expulsion of the Spanish Friars they think over 5,000,000 Filipinos would be left for more than a generation without priests, sacraments or the blessedness of religion. The native priests amount altogether to about 650, and have been trained in the seminaries established by the Friars and formed on the experience of ten generations. But they are insufficient in numbers to the needs of the large population of Asiatic Christians. Out of the 967 parishes and missions 767 are in the hands of the Friars, 158 in those of secular priests and 42 only in those of Jesuits.'

Negotiations and discussion on the matter are still proceeding, but it is obvious that the Church can never give her consent to proposals that are at once so entirely anti-Catholic, unreasonable, and tyrannical.

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In Germany the present position of the Church is highly satisfactory and the outlook was never so promising. One by one the hostile discriminations against the Church are disappearing in the various German States in which they have hitherto prevailed, and there is every indication that the Jesuit Exclusion Act—the last vestige of the anti-Catholic crusade of twenty years ago—will also soon disappear. In answering a question in the Reichstag recently as to the probable repeal of the Anti-Jesuit law Count POSADOWSKY, Secretary of State for the Interior, said:

'Although the intervention of the Imperial Legislature in favor of the constitutional status of the Catholic Church in the different States must be considered out of the question, it is highly desirable that there should be as much agreement as possible in the laws of the various States on the subject of the Church. The Imperial Chancellor is accordingly endeavoring by means of friendly pourparlers with the different Federal Governments to remove existing disabilities of Catholic subjects of the Empire. He has conducted successful negotiations with the Government of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.'

According to the *New York Freeman*, after Count POSADOWSKY had made this statement the Plenipotentiary of Mecklenburg informed the Reichstag, that an ordinance granting Catholic liberty of public worship was to be introduced in Mecklenburg; and the Plenipotentiary of Brunswick supplemented this statement with the announcement that the Provincial Diet of Brunswick would shortly adopt a Bill placing the Catholic and Evangelical Churches on an equal footing. For this great advance in the land of Luther and 'cradle of the Reformation,' there is every reason to be deeply thankful.

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From this hurried survey it will be seen that there is, as might be expected, considerable ebb and flow, rise and fall, in the fortunes of the Church. Loss here is retrieved by gain there, and misfortune and defeat in one place are balanced by progress and prosperity in another. But whatever passing trials and vicissitudes the Church may have to go through in her struggle with the world her final triumph is, as we know, absolutely assured. Every century and every generation sees some new assault, but the waves of human prejudice and passion dash against her in vain. 'On this rock I will build my Church,' said her Divine Founder, and no matter how great the storm, no matter how fierce the attack, 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

For the conveyance of fruit and vegetables on the Government railways the following charges have been gazetted:—The maximum charges for fruit and vegetables, free in New Zealand grown, packed, will be as follows for any distance.—Not exceeding 56lb, 6d; over 56lb but not exceeding 112lb, 1s; for every additional 56lb or fraction thereof, 6d. In addition a charge of 3d for each cwt or part of a cwt will be made for fruit and vegetables charged at these maximum rates, consigned to Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, or Invercargill. Returned empty fruit and vegetable packages will be carried free.

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