

Current Topics

The Greatest Linguist

Cardinal Mezzofanti is known to all the world as the man who could speak and understand more languages than any other linguist, before or since. Prof. Umberto Benigni, in his interesting article 'Mezzofanti,' in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, gives the following particulars regarding this remarkable man. He was a carpenter's son, of Bologna, thus proving that linguistics are not exclusively a royal or aristocratic accomplishment. He had a prodigious memory; he picked up Spanish, German, Mexican, and several South American Indian languages from some ex-Jesuits. He next studied Oriental languages, and was appointed to the Chair of Hebrew at Bologna University at the age of twenty-three. In the Napoleonic wars the hospitals were crowded with foreigners, and Mezzofanti while ministering to them picked up several new languages. The extraordinary thing about him was that he was never out of Italy, yet he could speak perfectly thirty-eight languages, including such remote tongues as Arabic, Persian, Chinese, Hindustani, Guzerati, Basque, and Californian; he spoke thirty other languages less perfectly, and fifty dialects of the above. He also could detect the particular county from which an Englishman came by his accent. Little wonder that he was commonly known as the 'confessor of foreigners.'

The Delegates at Christchurch

As we anticipated, the somewhat venomous opposition to the envoys' mission which sputtered out for several days in the correspondence columns of the *Christchurch Press* only had the effect of giving a fillip to the local movement; and the Christchurch meeting, by common consent, is voted to have been a magnificent and unprecedented success. The committee were fortunate in having the services, as secretary, of that splendid Irishman and veteran worker and organiser, Mr. E. O'Connor; and we cordially congratulate him and his co-workers on what we may fittingly term their triumph. The delegates, on their part, appear to have excelled themselves, and to have won golden opinions on every hand. His Lordship Bishop Grimes—who himself made a very happy and persuasive speech—referring to Mr. Hazleton's address, said that 'he thought the audience had heard one of the most eloquent and logical addresses ever heard in Christchurch, and he desired to congratulate Mr. Hazleton on the speech he had made.' And his Worship the Mayor, at the conclusion of the address, said 'he felt impelled to say, though as chairman he should hardly do so, that he would have been very sorry indeed if any political bias of his had prevented his hearing one of the most lucid and logical speeches he had ever heard from any public man.' A tribute such as this—coming from so keen a critic and so capable a judge as Mr. T. E. Taylor—is praise indeed.

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The *Lyttelton Times*, in a cordially sympathetic leader on the morning after the meeting, also bore ready testimony to the delegates' success. 'No one,' it said, 'who listened to the eloquent speeches delivered by the Irish delegates to the great audience in the Theatre Royal last night can doubt the frankness or the loyalty of the men the Irish people have sent to this country to plead their cause. The only serious objection that has ever been urged in New Zealand against Home Rule is that the concession of internal self-government to Ireland would lead inevitably to the disruption of the Empire and the establishment of a foreign power at the very doors of Great Britain. This is the objection that was urged forty years ago; it is the objection that is being urged now, and Mr. Hazleton and his colleagues, without holding it up to ridicule, as well they might have done, set themselves to expose the flimsy foundation on which it rests. The reports of their speeches, though but poorly reflecting the burning earnestness of their words, show how well they succeeded.' Altogether, Christchurch has done itself proud over its Home Rule meeting; and all concerned will be able to look back on the envoys' visit with unalloyed satisfaction.

Honoring the Blessed Virgin

A short time ago we commented on a somewhat unusual incident which took place at a Presbyterian Church service in New South Wales, in the course of which the preacher—who happened to be no other than the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia—protested against the singing of one of Piccolomini's well-known compositions, in which the Blessed Virgin is referred to as 'Queen of Angels.' 'We esteem Mary as a good woman and mother,' he said, 'but we have not yet raised her to nobility among the angels, nor given her queenship over them, and I hope

we never shall.' This low view of the Blessed Virgin—'a good woman and mother,' but not a whit better or higher than any other good woman and mother—is the true average Presbyterian view; the truth being that our Presbyterian friends do not realise, and never have fully realised, the fact of the Incarnation, and all that it implies. Until they do that, the honor shown by Catholics to the Blessed Virgin—the glories of Mary for the sake of her Son,' as Newman happily phrased it—will always be to them 'a stumbling-stone and a rock of scandal.'

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That individual Protestants, however, do occasionally rise to something of the Catholic sense of the majesty and dignity of the Mother of Our Lord, is shown by the following sympathetic reference made by a Protestant missionary at a 'Mother's Day' meeting held in Wellington the other day. The speaker was Mr. Oliver Burgess, Protestant missionary from China, and we take our citation from the *N.Z. Times* report. 'The difference between the mothers of the West and South and mothers of the East,' was the title of Mr. Burgess's address. It was a very striking thing, and it had been said that we owed a great deal of the sin, sorrow, suffering, and death that are in the world to Eve, but it was also true that we owed our salvation to Mary. What Eve had brought on the race Mary had also practically removed in giving birth to the Saviour of the world. Then there was the idea that woman was a very inferior article to man, but right down the line of time they found that God had continually shown to them some of the most wonderful heroines of the world in the mothers of history and Scripture. They blamed their Catholic friends for worshipping Mary, but he doubted if the Protestants gave her the place they should. Could they imagine what she suffered when her Son was hanging on the Cross? This was a fulfilment of Scripture where it said: 'And a sword shall pierce thine own soul.' This is good Catholic doctrine and sound common sense; though when Catholics speak of 'owing our salvation to Mary,' there is at once a howl of 'Mariolatry.'

Cardinal Moran and Empire Day

The *Skibbereen Eagle* had its eye on the Czar of Russia; and at similarly long and futile range the *Inangahua Times* has its eye on Cardinal Moran. His Eminence has incurred the displeasure of this distant and diminutive publication by reason of his attitude towards Empire Day—which attitude the *Inangahua* news-sheet somehow persuades itself is calculated to foster 'those antipathies that disgraced our fathers.' Empire Day is a movement which was inaugurated in the first instance by the Earl of Meath; and which is directed from his town residence in London. In England, at least, it has taken on a distinctly political color. The English Prime Minister has refused to give his official sanction to the celebration; the London County Council, so long as it remained Liberal, refused to have it observed in its schools; and the whole movement is now discredited by the leaders of the Liberal party. The Right Hon. G. W. E. Russell, who is a member of his Majesty's Privy Council, thus describes it: 'Year by year that good citizen Lord Meath tries to kindle our enthusiasm for Empire Day. I forget when it exactly falls, but I know that the school children wave banners, and I think that they are rewarded with buns. Cart-horses are decked with rosettes of red, white, and blue. Turgid harangues are delivered by patriotic orators, and frequent reference is made to an Empire on which the sun never sets. Jingoism in a surplice, and not seldom in lawn sleeves, gives its benison to the observance; and there is a great effusion of that particular type of ecclesiastical pomposity which on a former occasion we have not scrupled to describe as Gas and Gaiters.' From all this it is apparent that Empire Day is an institution which every citizen is free to observe, or not, without laying himself—in the case of non-observance—under any imputation of promoting disloyalty or disunion. As a matter of fact, it is not generally observed in New Zealand. Cardinal Moran, exercising the right freely accorded to every other citizen, refrained from celebrating Empire Day; but instituted in its place an 'Australia Day,' in the observance of which the children would learn to love their own land, His Eminence acting on the principle that patriotic affection, thus nourished at home, would radiate outwards. 'As real patriots,' he said, 'we must attend to things in our midst, and help to develop Australia, for by developing Australia we are really preparing a new phase of splendour for the Empire, which will surpass even its former greatness.' The Australia Day celebrations were an unqualified success; and there is every indication that the movement initiated by his Eminence will become a general and permanent institution.

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As to the suggestion of disloyalty or disunion in connection with the Cardinal's attitude, it is fully and unanswerably refuted by the fact that, during the week in which the Australia Day celebrations were held, the fol-