

while the different parish priests replied to the effect that there was absolutely no justification for the statements made in the letter. The Rev. Father Coffey, also, in regard to the allegations in respect to Dunedin West, at once forwarded an absolute and unqualified denial; and offered to present the 'reliable correspondent' with £10, to be given to the Dunedin Hospital, if he could prove that either he (Father Coffey), or any one of his fellow clergy called upon even one Catholic voter and used any 'influence' either in the Church or out of it.

*

In a further leading article, the *Press*, while accepting the disclaimers so far as the priests were concerned, suggested, in respect to Dunedin West, that the canvassing work referred to had been done by 'lay representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.' Whereupon Father Coffey sent the following communication, in which, after putting a final extinguisher on the 'reliable correspondent,' he lays bare the true inwardness and real significance of this attempt to foist on to the Catholic Church the charge of introducing religion into the recent contests. The letter, addressed to the editor of the *Press*, runs thus:—'SIR,—I have to thank you for having published my letter in your issue of the 28th inst. It would have pleased me more, and have been more generous on your part, had you accepted my unqualified denial of your correspondent's statement. Had you done so, you would have saved me the unpleasant task of having to give a further unqualified denial to your statement, in the foot-note, when trying to bolster up your "reliable correspondent." There is no use at this hour saying that "Neither we nor our correspondent said that the priests canvassed personally for Mr. Millar." The whole tone of your article was in condemnation of priestly influence; and to strengthen your direct attack (an unjustifiable attack as is now proved) on the priests of the West Coast, you introduced your "reliable correspondent's" information from Dunedin. Ninety-nine per-cent. of your readers could take no other meaning from your article; and every journalist I have spoken to, since the article appeared, agrees with me as to its meaning. But let that pass. You now admit that the Catholic clergy did not canvass personally, but you say, "Doubtless the work was done by lay representatives of the Roman Catholic Church." This I now emphatically deny; and I again offer my modest ten pounds if you or your correspondent can prove that the authorities of the Catholic Church authorised any person either lay or clerical to act as representative, or that any so-called representative, authorised or unauthorised, called on or saw "every Catholic in two days, or any number of days, before the election" in Mr. Millar's interests. I have no doubt that Mr. Millar had one or two Catholics on his committee, as he had members of other denominations, and I dare say that these Catholics justified their faith in him by working for him; but that these Catholics were authorised to act as representatives of the Catholic electors, I absolutely deny. Your statement to the contrary is untrue; and your inference is unjustifiable. I now call on you to make the *amende honorable*, without further qualification, by admitting that you were mis-informed by your "reliable correspondent."

*

'In my opinion, and in this opinion I am supported by honorable men of every class and creed, a more serious matter lies at the back of this disgraceful effort to sling mud at the Catholic Church over the recent elections. The present Prime Minister has the misfortune, from a political point of view, to be a member of the Catholic Church. He may have his faults, as who has not; but there is no doubting the fact, that in the minds of many of the electors of this fair Dominion his greatest fault is his creed. Many of his political opponents have not been above using his creed as a means to hound him out of politics. In this effort they have been ably assisted (consciously or unconsciously) by a portion of the Conservative press. This press has not openly condemned Sir J. G. Ward on account of his religion. It has used a baser, but more efficacious means of condemning him, viz., by falsely

accusing the Catholic Church and her priests of using undue influence on behalf of the Government "because the head of the Government was a Catholic." I think this is one of the most discreditable and disgraceful incidents of a disgraceful election.'

*

'It is a peculiar fact and one worthy of special notice that ministers of other denominations may turn their churches and meeting places into political platforms, that they may stand outside polling booths on election days, may even go inside till put out by some one in charge, that they may go from door to door distributing tracts and asking votes for certain candidates telling them "that God will be with them if they vote for Mr. So and So," that they may ride round in motor cars on the day of the election rounding up the faithful, and yet there is not one word in the papers in condemnation of such actions. But if a priest in the remotest corner of New Zealand lifts his voice, or if some "reliable correspondent" assumes that he has lifted his voice, the Press Association is at once informed of the fact or assumed fact, and the public are treated to a howl about the "priest in politics." Is this so because the press recognise that the said ministers wield so little influence that they are unworthy of notice? If so, the Catholic priest may take it as a compliment that he is reckoned worthy of the steel of the "Fourth Estate." Or is it the old story of the mote and the beam, or the gnat and the camel. Influence, be it clerical or otherwise, which influences in the direction we desire, is always welcome, but influence which is directed against us is always undue and tyrannical.'

*

'We have an example given us by the last elections of what may happen in this free and enlightened Dominion of ours—in "God's own country." We have every single Catholic man, with one solitary exception, who stood for Parliament defeated, though if Catholics had their proportion there should be ten Catholic members returned to the House. Did the same thing happen in Ireland, and the Catholics of Ireland refuse to return (by accident or otherwise) non-Catholic representatives, we would be treated to a mighty howl about the intolerance of the Catholic Church, and what may be expected under Home Rule. People who live in glass-houses should not throw stones. The time may not be far distant when the voice of the priest will be raised in earnest, and that not in the interests of any man, but in the interests of Christian principles, and when that time comes you will have your opportunity to cry it down. In the meantime *Medice, cura te ipsum*, and like a chivalrous opponent admit you were deceived by your "reliable correspondent."—Yours, etc.,

JAMES COFFEY,

Administrator, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin.
December 30, 1911.

*

The fact that, with the one exception of the Premier, not a single Catholic candidate was returned at the late election is conclusive evidence as to which side made the religious question a factor in the contest. In drawing public attention to the ignoble tactics adopted, and in making vigorous and emphatic protest against their introduction into the public life of this young country, his Lordship Bishop Grimes and the Rev. Father Coffey have rendered a distinct service, not only to their co-religionists, but to the community at large.

Christmas Day was ushered in by the celebration of midnight Mass at St. Patrick's Basilica, Oamaru, Right Rev. Mgr. Mackay being the celebrant. Monsignor Mackay preached a sermon on the subject of the Nativity. The choir, which had been assiduously practising Farmer's Mass for some time under the conductorship of Mr. Mountfort, were in strong force, and the manner in which the music was sung must have recompensed the conductor for his painstaking efforts in bringing the choir to their present state of efficiency. Miss K. Hannon presided at the organ.