

## NOTES

### "On the Index"

A letter from a correspondent who asks if Marie Corelli's novels are on the Index suggests a note on that beneficial and much abused institution. As we all know the fact that certain books are forbidden by the Church has constantly been used as an argument to show that Rome is the enemy of progress and liberty, and all the rest of the thesis of the common or garden Baptist ranter. Protestants accuse Rome of intolerance and tyranny, while there is no more intolerant and more tyrannous body in the world than the *mixtum gatherum* called the Protestant Church. Protestants had not much to say when Protestant politicians declared during the war that it was a crime to read certain books that told the truth; Protestants did not protest when the liberty of the press and freedom of speech were attacked by Protestant Britain and by P.P.Ass.-ridden New Zealand; nor did they say a word about tyranny and intolerance when even clergymen were sent to gaol because they were not prepared to believe that a British patriot must also be a liar. Protestant protests are kept for the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*—the Index of Forbidden Books—which, unlike the British Governmental Index, is intended solely for the safeguarding of truth and for the suppression of indecency. The Roman Index says: "You must remember to honor God; we shall not tolerate blasphemy. You must remember that your bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost; we shall not tolerate lewdness." The British and Protestant Index says: "Import and spread, if you please, the vile ravings of the street-walker, Maria Monk; hire a horse-whipped parson to go round the country accusing Catholics of crimes that exist only in the imagination of a Baptist parson; propagate atheism and do as much blaspheming as you will, but do not tell the truth about those things which we think patriotic persons ought to tell lies about." There, exactly is the difference between the two: the Roman Index is to protect truth and virtue; the Protestant Index to suppress the truth and to encourage hypocrisy.

### General Rules

Now when a person asks you if this or that English book is "on the Index," as a general rule, you would be safe in saying no. There are comparatively few books written in English on the list; and those that are included are not the books that fall into the hands of the ordinary reader as a rule. From time to time we hear it said that Ouida (whom people do not read now), Marie Corelli (who is not worth reading), Hall Caine (who is more or less innocuous), and similar romancers are prohibited. They are not named between the covers of the book, or if they are they must have been included recently, which is not likely. Moreover, although there might be some indiscretion in putting all the novels by such writers into the hands of young readers, we do not believe there is any reason for saying that their works ought to be on the Index; for as things go nowadays they are rather harmless—a young girl of to-day might have scruples about letting her mother read Ouida but we are certain that few flappers would find anything they did not know of old between the covers of the luridest romance of Louise de la Ramée. Besides the books named expressly, whole classes of books are condemned by the Index; but the condemnation in such cases is really only an application of the Natural Law. Thus, books that treat professedly of obscene things are forbidden by one rule, while a second forbids the reading and publication of books that are against faith. It goes without saying that works that come under these two heads ought not to be read, even if there were no such thing as an Index. If there is a special reason, a dispensation may be obtained enabling those whose duty calls on them to do so to read certain books.

### The Puritanical Pest

Father Faber said that the essence of sanctity consists in calling things by their right names. If that is the case, the British people are an unholy and ungodly lot indeed. Their lot is like that of the Pharisees. In fact they are in worse condition. The Pharisees were quite satisfied to be whitened sepulchres, broods of vipers, filthy, unclean things that were as unsanitary as a grave full of rotten corpses, so long as they were not found out, but they did not get as far as the British did. They did not tell Christ that he was a very uncouth and ungentlemanly man for saying such true things as He said about them. They were wild, but in their wildness they were decent compared with the British, who are the highest development of Pharisaism. Nowadays, among British gentlemen, it does not matter at all that a Prime Minister is a trickster, or that he is known all over the world as a man to whom truth and honor mean nothing; it does not matter that English statesmen have almost made the British Cabinet a synonym for a den of schemers. Uncleanliness, race-suicide, even forgery when it is hushed up, do not worry British gentlemen who would become almost frantic if one dared call some criminals by the names which they would have got in more candid days when men spoke as Christ did when He denounced the Pharisees. Now we have changed all that: the editor of a morning paper publishes forgery; he tells the public that Sinn Fein committed crimes done by Orangemen; he suppresses and mutilates letters which do not suit his views. Everybody says in his or her mind what describes such a man; but only say it out as Christ would have done, as He did in the case of the Pharisees, and British gentlemen at once accuse you of an offence far worse than those committed by the editor. It may be Christian to call things by their names; it may be even a step towards holiness, as Father Faber says; but it is not British; the clean outside and the whitened sepulchre are.

### Harding's English

The Americans do not admire Mr. Harding's English. The *Nation* gives us an idea of what it is like in the following passage:

"In the first sentence of his historic address from the east front of the Capitol, glowing there like a gem, was that piquant miscegenation of pronouns the *one-he* combination, for years a favorite of bad newspaper reporters and inferior clergy. In the fourth sentence of the first message to Congress is *illey*, the passion of rural grammar-teachers and professors of rhetoric in one-building universities. We are, as they say, getting warm. The next great state paper—who knows?—may caress and enchant us with 'Whom can deny?' and with 'I would have had to have had.' And the next with 'between you and I.' And the next, going the whole hog, with *alright*, to date, the gaudiest, loveliest, darndest flower of the American language, which God preserve."

According to the *Fortnightly Review*, the secret of the President's style is to be found in his rustic stump experiences, in his Chautauqua activities, and in his daily work on a daily paper, when he had to cater for an audience incapable of appreciating well-knit and succinct argument. His audience (like the public for which our own day-lies cater) was suspicious of ideas, fond of platitudes, and inclined to regard clearness as dangerous. However, the President is not driven, like our day-lie men, to employ a thousand words to say what could be better said in a hundred; unlike them, he has something to say, and he is able to think for himself. No doubt, as time goes on, he will drop journalese and begin to talk and write English.

Putting a hand to the plough is easy. The difficult thing is to keep from looking back and then letting go. Beginnings may be hard, but the unbroken, relentless continuing at it is harder. The grind of eternal vigilance is wearing on soul and body, yet that is the price, not alone of liberty, but of everything great that man attempts.