

penalty. Again, by section 31, even if a letter contains a defaced stamp which has been used fraudulently, there is no power to open that letter, but it must be handed to the addressee to open, and the only power the Post Office has is to hold it until the addressee ascertains the name of the sender and hands over the envelope. Now, where a postal packet is opened—and, as I said, not any Postmaster or even the Postmaster-General has any power to open a letter—it must be done by two officers specially nominated, or by one in the presence of another Post officer, under certain conditions to ensure that the policy of secrecy under which every officer is shall not be broken. Section 91 provides that two years' imprisonment is the penalty for wilfully opening or detaining any postal packet; and the Postmaster who is merely negligent in delivering or retards the delivery is liable to a fine of £100. Now, these examples are sufficient to show the vital importance which is attached by law to the secrecy of the Post Office and the quick despatch of mails. And so important is the secrecy and despatch of the Post Office to the community that the Department in this should be like Cæsar's wife—above any suspicion whatever; and I am bound to say that in the past this great service has been such as to win the confidence of the whole community, as is shown by its universal use by the community. Consequently a charge like this must be of great public interest, and it is imperative in that interest that all the light possible should be let in to see whether there is any ground for the charges made. For this reason I am particularly pleased to see my friend Mr. Gray representing the Department, he being known not only to myself but far and wide as a fair-minded and just man, and just as anxious as your Worship and myself to let in the light into the charges. Now, in reference to these charges it will be my duty to mention the Roman Catholic Church. I want to make it quite clear at the start that neither I nor the party I have the honour to represent desire to attack either the dogma or the religious observances of Catholics. After bitter struggles and the shedding of much blood, which is a matter of history now, we have long since reached this position—that every one in this country is entitled to liberty of conscience as well as liberty of action, and all think as we like and do as we like, subject to this restriction only: that neither in speech nor in deed shall we overstep the rights of others. Now, the limits of our rights are well established by law; and there exists complete machinery in our law-courts—not, indeed, perfect, for no human institution is perfect, but commanding the confidence of the community—for the protection and vindication of those rights; and I, for one, will resent any dictation as to the religious beliefs of others, and will say not one word in this inquiry against the religion of Catholics. What I may say I wish to be made perfectly clear is not dictated in any way by religious prejudice. It is not in any way the Catholic religion of which I desire to speak. It is not, indeed, so I am instructed, that which has been the cause of the formation of the association which I represent: what they claim is that it is the pernicious political influence of the organization controlled by the Roman Catholic Church they are fighting. The issue, they say, is purely political and not religious in any sense, and I do hope anything I say here may be taken to be a political matter, not a religious matter. Now I want to deal with three charges in my letter to the Premier—first, that is to say, with charge numbered 3 on the second page of the letter: “That the Loyal Orange Lodge and the Protestant Political Association had for some time past been renting a private letter-box (912) from the Post Office, and that a military censorship had been established over correspondence addressed to this box in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church. Almost all letters received by the lodge and the association addressed to this box have borne the superscription ‘Passed by Military Censor,’ and many letters addressed to the association containing the address of this box have been improperly retained and not delivered at all, although these letters had no connection with military matters or the war and dealt exclusively with the subject of Roman Catholicism.” I want to deal with that charge first for these reasons: (1) It is the most important; (2) it is the first in order of date—chronologically it comes first; (3) it throws the strongest light on the other two charges. I want to say just a few words very briefly on the history of this charge. First of all I will remind your Worship of this fact—a fact, I submit, nobody in this room is disposed to dispute and all Catholics are proud of—that is to say, the Church of Rome is one Church and one organization throughout the world. It is probably the biggest vested interest in the world and the best organized. Its aims in one Protestant country are similar to its aims in another Protestant country, because it acts with the same objects and from the same impulses. No one in this room, I think, could dispute that proposition. Therefore its activities in one Protestant country will be similar to its activities in another. Now I want, first, for a moment to touch on recent history in America, just to show that exactly the same thing has happened there as we say has happened here; and, indeed, this trouble in New Zealand first started through an attempt—a wholly illegal and improper attempt—in our Post Office this year to prevent newspapers dealing with the subject in America being circulated in New Zealand. In America statistics show—Whitaker's Almanac, for instance—that there are sixteen million Catholics, and it has been officially stated by the heads of the Church in America that it was the aim of the Church to make America Catholic.

*His Worship:* You are mixing up the terms “Catholic” and “Roman Catholic.” I take exception to the exclusive right of the Roman Catholic Church to be called “Catholic.”

*Mr. Ostler:* Very well, sir; I will stick to the term “Roman Catholic.” I quote one example of the sayings of the leading Church dignitaries in America as to their aim. Archbishop Ireland said only two years ago, “Our work is to make America Catholic. As a religious system Protestantism is in hopeless dissolution in the United States—utterly valueless as a doctrinal and moral power, and no longer to be considered a foe with which we must count.” And the Rev. Father Stafford said, “Energetic work will place this country under Roman Catholic control inside fifty years.” And right through the sayings of the leaders of the Church the means by which this is to be done is discussed openly, and therefore any one who reads current literature will see. I do not want to take up the time of the Commission by referring to those means beyond