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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WANTED:
A
SCHEME.

THE synods and assemblies and so forth of our separated brethren are at one in their condemnation of the godless system of public instruction. But they are at sixes and sevens when it comes to a question of finding

the remedy for its rank and evil-smelling godlessness. They have been for a long time searching Jerusalem with lamps for 'a scheme which shall meet with the general approval' of the 'Christian' (that is Protestant) Churches, but thus far the search has been as fruitless as that for the philosopher's stone. The situation has its humorous as well as its serious side. To our mind one of the worst features of the deliberations of those non-Catholic assemblies upon the question of religious instruction in the State schools is their serene and thorough-paced and selfish ignoring of Catholic rights, the Catholic conscience, and the Catholic attitude in the matter. A droll feature in the crusade is alluded to in the synodal address of the Bishop of Nelson, who is evidently calmly unconscious of the humour of the situation: It is the elaborate plans of campaign drawn up by the Anglican synods of Auckland and Waiapu, and added to by the speaker, and bundled up and ticketed and pigeon-holed and ready for that apparently far-off day when the non-Catholic denominations in the Colony shall at last have agreed upon a scheme which is to extract the poison out of the godless system of State instruction. There is one palpable remedy which seems to have quite escaped the notice of synods and assemblies and councils alike: to go and do as the Catholic body has done—to build and equip and maintain their own schools and teach the rising generation, according to their own idea, how to live and how to die. This is what Catholics have been doing for over a quarter of a century in New Zealand, while the synods have been a-synoding and the assemblies assembling and the councils a-councillng, and the net result of all their deliberations has been words, words, words—*vox et prateria nihil*. Let the heavily-endowed Anglican and Presbyterian bodies for just two years make one-half of the relative sacrifice that their far poorer and less numerous Catholic fellow-colonists have done for so long, and the education difficulty will speedily solve itself.

PLAIN
ENGLISH.

MEANTIME we offer for their comfort the following refreshing sample of the philosophy of plain speaking. It is from the columns of a non-Catholic paper, the *Newcastle Herald* (N.S.W.). Referring editorially to a statement of Cardinal Moran's in point, it goes on to say:—

'There is a common lament among Protestant denominations that a religious indifference has sprung up in their ranks. This is the result of the present secular system of education; there is indifference at school, and the indifference is continued into manhood or womanhood. Who will deny the truth of Cardinal Moran's statement, proved as it is by ten thousand evidences everywhere we turn? "Fear God and honour the king" was the old Conservative maxim, but the average Protestant youth fear no one in the sense that is desired, and honour neither their parents, their Queen, nor their country. Of course the youth will deny it, but they are not the best judges; the best are their elders, who have seen the terrible sliding down that has distinguished the moral side since first the Education Act came into force. If children are not to be taught to fear God in childhood, how on earth are they to be taught when men and women? The question is such a facer that it were simply preposterous to attempt to produce an argument against it. Boys and girls go to school, where the name of God is practically tabooed, and the devil given his work to do on every possible occasion, and the result is vicious men and women, steeped in selfishness, narrowness, uncharitableness, and dishonourableness. Fight the question

as we will, it is undeniable that Australians are much worse than they were a generation ago—there is a larger percentage of offences, there is an overwhelming increase in immorality, there is more flippancy, more disregard of the niceness that should distinguish conversation, and more brutality of thought and action. This is noticeable chiefly in the capitals, where the means exist to try and arrest it—the country's legislature. What the people in New South Wales really want to spur them to action is a Royal Commission appointed to examine, say, a thousand scholars or so, drawn at random from the different public schools of the colony. The writer forecasts that when the evidence those children would give under close examination was published to the world, parents generally would be so horrified that the reform of the system would become a primary question.'

THE GAME OF
WAR.

MAN is by natural inclination or cultivated and misdirected heredity a quarrelling and fighting animal. This is, perhaps, the reason why no story has such a fascination for the average ear as one of life-and-death struggles, gaping wounds and flowing blood, and dead men lying stark upon the trampled field. Apart from motives of high patriotism, the popular interest in war is part and parcel of the passion which brought people to the Coliseum long ago to see men 'butchered to make a Roman holiday'; which fills the open squares to-day to see perilous balloon ascents; which crowds the *plaza de toros* at a bull-fight, and strains the ropes at an exhibition of prize-fighting. It is, briefly, the morbid craving to see, or the hope of witnessing, hard blows and bruises or wounds or flowing blood or falls from the clouds or the goring of *picadores* and *chulos* or 'knock-out' blows or at least the complete and satisfactory 'gruelling' of a leaden-headed pugilist. The 'civilisation' of a part of the masses of our population is, apparently, a veneer, more or less thick or thin, which covers over the spirit of the old arena of pagan times. The feeling which still brings men—and used to bring 'ladies'—to encounters of this kind was wrought upon as follows in a hand-bill stuck on a house opposite the scene of the prize-fight between Johnson and Ryan. It ran as follows:—

This is to gif Notes: Man and women may come into this house att 3d a pease too sea the fite betweene the Inglishe Man an Irishe Man whiche accordinge to Accompts is to be a bloody one—there be 3 Winders in three one paire Staires so that you well have a fine sighte of the Comboutants—and I have a ball coney for the Ladies at a shillinge a pease.

That is just it. The combat was to be a 'bloody one.' And therein lay its chief attraction to the mob. The soldier looks to the military results of conflicts of armed men, the civil historian chiefly to their political aspects. But the man in the street and the war-poet twiddling the light guitar upon his cloudy perch have their eyes focussed—for the time at least—chiefly on the more direct and brutal work of bayonet and rifle-bullet and grape-shot and canister and bursting shell. And they like to see it well and thoroughly done. The military importance of the battle of Gettysburg, for instance, did not strike their fancy so forcibly as the fact that 44,000 men were 'laid out' upon the field—including 40 per cent. of all the Confederate troops that went into action. In the same way the decisive series of battles that raged around Gravelotte appealed most forcibly to the public mind through the fact that 62,000 men in the prime of life sprinkled the dust with their blood up and about its woody slopes. The man in the crowd feels a grim satisfaction at the thought that every friendly bullet finds its billet somewhere beneath the epidermis of the enemy. Fortunately it doesn't. For the average soldier is nervous or excited or a bit—sometimes a good bit—'funky' in battle, and his hand and eye are unsteady, and his aim wild and high. Even now, when he gets within 350 yards of the enemy, Thomas Atkins is ordered to fix bayonets, not so much with a view to carving up the enemy with them as to dip the muzzles of the rifles and so make Tommy 'fire low and lay 'em out.' Every bullet its billet, indeed! According to the eminent statistician, Mulhall,

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