

Current Topics

A Facetious Apologist

The Abbe Duplessy is one of those who believe in getting religious truths home with a smiling face, and a friendly dig in his opponent's seventh rib. In this he is unlike 'The Prig,' whose irritating satire is to sensitive minds what the application of a currycomb or a bunch of teazles would be to a sensitive skin. The American 'Ecclesiastical Review' describes him as 'a facetious apologist'. But for all his quips and 'nods and becks and wreathing smiles,' he contrives to get in some shrewd thrusts under or over his adversary's guard. Here, for instance, is a story which (apropos of religion as the basis of morality) he tells of M. Renaud, who went to Paris in 1871 to attend the National Assembly. 'He engaged rooms at 150 francs a month, to be paid in advance. When the landlord offered to write a receipt for the sum, Renaud said: "There is no need for it; we are both honest men, I take it; and it suffices that God has witnessed the transaction."—"Oh," said the proprietor smilingly, "I see you believe in God."—"And do not you?" queried Renaud.—"No, I have given that up long ago."—"Then please give me a receipt for the payment of my lodging," naively replied the deputy from Bordeaux'.

Coarse-grained Calumny

Dr. Johnson deemed abuse dangerous only when it was marked with wit or delicacy. He had no fear of coarse abuse. There was neither wit, delicacy, nor common Christian decency in the defamatory statements made by the Rev. Dill-Macky in Sydney on the last 'glorious, pious, and immortal' anniversary of the undersized Dutch Patron Saint to whom all good Orangemen offer their annual prayer of supplication from 'The Protestant Boys'. Coarse calumny is certainly not 'dangerous' among the class to whom Dr. Johnson refers. It merely gives them nausea. But it sets up local irritation—especially in factories, workshops, warehouses, public departments, and, generally, where workers of various creeds are assembled in considerable numbers. 'The iron is, in such circumstances, made to enter the souls of Catholic young men and maidens. For the sake of those who are subjected to this most despicable form of religious persecution, we rejoice to see that representations are being made to induce the aggrieved parties to pillory in the law-courts the authors, utterers, and publishers of the calumnies against the Good Samaritan nuns at Tempe. The story and its exposure are already familiar to our readers. The Rev. Dill-Macky's organ, the 'Watchman', ate the story as soon as it scented a libel action. We hope the last has not been heard of a peculiarly infamous attack upon innocent and holy women, the head and front of whose offending is their profession of the Catholic faith and their daily practice of the most noble Christian charity.

It was the hard lot of Henry George Ward to have, at dinner in Oxford University, to sit beside and be agreeable to an insufferable firebrand who had just delivered a 'special sermon' that should not have been tolerated in that ancient seat of learning. Ward was then a Protestant. But his gorge had been raised by the sermon, and he found it 'labor dire and heavy woe' to keep on saying civil things to the black-coated offender. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the preacher persisted in talking about his sermon. 'All went fairly well', says his son and biographer, 'until the preacher touched on the question of his fee for the sermon. "How much do they pay you?" Ward asked. "Five pounds", was the reply; and after a pause: "Don't you think that enough?" The answer that suggested itself was irresistible: "I don't know," Ward replied; "I wouldn't have preached it for fifty."

We are glad to believe that there are not in Australasia more than half-a-dozen clergymen (and they are all 'yellow') who would have taken ten times fifty pounds to preach as the Rev. Dill-Macky did to his fellow-Orangemen in Sydney when the July microbe got into his tongue. Yet in the face of all this coarse and vehement invective we are treated to an annual homily on the love and affection which the lodges and lodge-operators are supposed to display, as an 'obligation,' to their 'Roman Catholic brethren'. 'Brethren! Ah, does not this recall in a way the French revolutionists' 'Fraternite—comme Cain avec son frere' the sort of brotherly feeling that Cain showed to Abel? 'The Indian', says a Sioux proverb, 'scalps his enemy; the pale face skins his brethren'.

Spelling Reform

It is quite true that people can pass through life quite comfortably without being acquainted with the Chinese-puzzle rules of English spelling. Take good old Chaucer, for instance, who wrote long before modern muddleheads inflicted our present orthography upon us. Artemus Ward once said of Chaucer: 'Some kind person has sent me Chawcer's poems. Mr. C. had talent, but he couldn't spel. No man has a right to be a literary man unless he knows how to spel. It is a pity that Chawcer, who had gencyus, was so uneducated. He's the wuss speller I know of'. The Great Duke of Marlborough was almost illiterate. He 'wrote bad English', says Chesterfield, 'and spelled it still worse'. Marshal Saxe—who was not less famous as a fighter—declared when offered a seat among the immortals in the French Academy: 'It would become me as a ring would a cat; I don't know how to spell'. And the spelling of his missive (in French, of course) was fearfully and wonderfully done. For our clever little men and maids at school the specimen may serve as an awful example of how not to do things. 'Ille veule', wrote Saxe, 'me fere de la Cademie, cela miret come une bage a un chas'. But (says Bent) they consoled the rugged old fighter by telling him 'that Marshal Villars was a member, in spite of not knowing how to read, to say nothing of writing.'

What is called 'good' (that is, conventional) spelling is one of the little elegancies that stamp and catalogue a man. Unfortunately, the conventions in English spelling are guided by a caprice that makes them an intolerable burden to childhood and youth, the despair of the foreigner, and the laughing-stock of the scholar who has had a practical acquaintance with the benefits of the more regular and more phonetic systems that prevail in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and even in Maori. And thus it happens that the little hall-mark elegance of 'good' spelling is almost as difficult to acquire and to maintain as the long finger-nail (or rather claw) that distinguishes the 'blue blood' of China from the common herd. Slight improvements in some of our spelling methods have been introduced by American newspapers and publishing firms. But a vast incubus of orthographic lunacy yet remains to be thrown off our social and literary life. Dryden said:—

'It is the talent of our English nation,
Still to be plotting some new reformation'.

In 1877—when the writer of these lines was in the hobbledohy or chrysalis stage of youthful development—the English nation (or, rather, a goodly number of well-meaning but none too active persons belonging to it) plotted a spelling reform. It ended as many attempted reforms end—in sumolent platitudes and drowsy resolutions. The movement died under chloroform. The Americans have now taken the subject in hands, and with a practical good sense that promises a measure of success. A Simplified Spelling Board has been formed. Carnegie has endowed it; the newspapers, the colleges, and the Government (through President Roosevelt) are smiling bland approval; and, generally, the new move-

BONNINGTON'S

CARRAGEEN

IRISH MOSS

A CERTAIN CURE for COUGHS, COLDS, INFLUENZA, BRONCHITIS, ETC.