

of false religious registration in the prisons of Victoria. The Melbourne 'Advocate'—which has from time to time done yeoman service in exposing this class of calumny and fraud—has the following observations in point in its issue of September 8, in the course of a reply to Orange-Grand-Master Snowball:—

'What is the authority upon which he bases his conclusions? If he answers truthfully, he must confess that the figures upon which he relies are founded upon the unchallenged statements of every convicted criminal in the State, and upon no other ground whatever. He knows well that, beyond the mere statement of the criminal, which is never questioned, there are no ordinary means of ascertaining his religion; nor, for that matter, his name, nationality, age, or any other matter of the kind. This is a fact well known to officials charged with the custody of malefactors of every degree, and the statements of prisoners on these matters are not merely regarded with suspicion, but are known to be absolutely worthless and utterly misleading.'

The 'Advocate' then directs attention to the following cases, which are taken from the official records, adding that 'such instances could be multiplied by many hundreds':—

'M.B., convicted on five separate charges, including forgery and uttering; on the first batch of convictions religion is given as Church of England, on the second Roman Catholic. J.M., three convictions; religion on each occasion, Roman Catholic. This man was known to be a bigoted Orangeman, and never had been a Catholic; his marriage certificate, when produced in the Divorce Court, showed his religion to be Victorian Free Church. W.B., with a number of aliases, seven convictions, seven years and one month sentences; record of religion, Church of England, Church of England, Roman Catholic. W.K., with an alias, four convictions, sentences, 22 years; religion, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic. M.P., a notorious criminal, with forty convictions; religion in each case, Roman Catholic; parents Wesleyans, and the criminal had never been a Catholic. J.D., with an alias, 10 convictions; sentences, 9½ years; religion, Presbyterian Roman Catholic. The last example which we shall cite is rather striking. H.T., with six aliases; convictions, 29, birthplace, Newcastle, N.S.W., England, London; born, 1871, 1870, 1868; religion, Wesleyan, Wesleyan, Roman Catholic.'

'It may be argued,' adds the 'Advocate,' that the practice of deception works all round, and 'that there is no reason why a majority of criminals should misrepresent themselves as Catholics. Unfortunately, there are substantial reasons for knowing what criminals do habitually misstate facts in the manner referred to, and that the Catholics are unjustly made to bear the odium of crime perpetrated by men of other denominations.' Our Melbourne contemporary then recalls the case of Knox, the Williams-town murderer, who had his name entered in the charge-sheet as a 'Roman Catholic'. We have a very distinct recollection of the man and of the crime, which was a peculiarly brutal case of murder. The criminal was a Sunday-school teacher and had never been a Catholic. When it was discovered that he was, and had always been, a Protestant, the question was put to his mother: 'Why did he designate himself a Roman Catholic?' And (according to the Melbourne papers) she answered: 'I suppose he did not want to disgrace his own religion.' We have a personal recollection of many such instances of religious misdescription.

Entries of the religious profession of prisoners are made for two purposes—with a view to spiritual ministrations, and for statistical information and comparison. For this latter purpose, accuracy becomes a matter of public right and of scientific and moral interest, and it should be secured by adequate precautions. Such affirmations as to religious profession should be taken as statutory declarations, in which false statements would be punishable as perjury. The details of this much-needed change could be readily worked out, and a few prosecutions for perjury would serve to convince even the criminal fraternity, that, in this matter at least, truth-telling is the better policy.

Notes

The Tohunga

The Maori tohunga has fallen far from his old place in war and peace and in the councils of the tribesmen of Ao-tea-roa, the Land of the Long White Cloud. He is now little more than a combination of the sorcerer and witch-doctor—a sort of quack with occult powers. And in many parts the simple-minded tribesmen believe in him with the same simple, and childlike faith that the 'superior' white man manifests towards the quack 'cancer-curer', 'specialist', 'hypnotic healer', and 'astro-mathematician'. 'Fatalism', says Dr. Pomare, Native Health Officer, in his just-published report, 'hangs over the (Maori) race like a funeral pall. . . It is the fatalistic idea that drives the Maori to his tohunga, for all diseases which cannot be accounted for are considered mate Maori, and no one can cure a mate Maori except a tohunga. It is pleasing to report that some councils have blankly refused to grant tohungas licenses, and yet in one district nearly all the members of the council are followers of a tohunga. It is hard to know what to do without interfering with the liberty of the subject too much. Of course, as long as we allow crystal gazing, fortune-telling, spiritual mediums, and a host of other quackeries to thrive in our midst we cannot very well see clearly to take out the mote in our brother's eyes; but, nevertheless, we cannot help recognising the greatness of the evil of tohungaism, and that it must be grappled with at once. The only solution of the problem that I can see, and this has been pointed out years ago, is the compulsory registration of every death. The fear of gaol and a few post mortems will bring them into line quicker than anything I know.'

The Snake's Return

A small spark may create a great fire. And, in Ireland at least, a small snake may create a great blaze of excitement in the neighborhood where he is discovered. A little reptile (escaped possibly from a travelling show) was discovered some weeks ago in the garden of a Dublin suburb. It was no longer than one of the giant earthworms that fatten under the rich compost of the fern-gullies of Gippsland. But it seems to have scared some people as much as if it were a Bengal tiger at large. Snakes generally do so when they get free in a snakeless land. The reptile terror was at last captured after an exciting chase, imprisoned in a glass jar, and brought to the Zoological Gardens. The newspapers made much of the event, and there arose much discussion about the legend of St. Patrick banishing the snakes from Ireland. Tim Healy accounted for the snake's presence in his own characteristic way. 'I don't believe in the St. Patrick tradition,' said he, 'the fact is, no respectable reptile could live in Ireland under the regime of Irish landlordism, and like some self-respecting people, they removed to a free atmosphere. With the disappearance of the landlord, they, like every other patriot, desire to return to their own country.'

The 'Sirio' Disaster

Some day a gloom-pampered man may arise to harrow people's souls with a history of famous shipwrecks. That of the 'Sirio' will then find its place among the woful tales of the 'Pomona', the 'Layee-moon', the 'Wairarapa', and the rest of the first-class disasters that sometimes befall those who go down to the sea in ships. There were on board the 'Sirio' (an Italian emigrant ship bound for South America) eight hundred and eighty-two souls. She ran on the rocks off Cape Palos, in Spain. Through her gored sides the seas came surging in, and she sank

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