

Current Topics

Satan's Relatives

'Take home one of Satan's relations', says an old and wise proverb, 'and the whole family will follow'. Principii obsta: 'resist the beginnings'—the little violations of conscience, the little yieldings to expediency at the cost of principle, the little deviations from the narrow path of right and duty. These are the small members of Satan's family, entering like burglar Sikes's apprentices through the unguarded windows of your soul; and they, once in, will open a way to the father of their clan, who will rifle your souls of their richest and best treasures. 'I tell you', said the old German Emperor William I., 'it is the unfastened button that loses a battle'. It was a burrowing crayfish that let loose the devastating waters of the Charleston reservoir. A seemingly little thing is never a little thing when it opens the flood gates of evil, or makes the difference between right and wrong. 'When Infinite Wisdom', said Wendell Phillips at the election of President Lincoln in 1860, 'established the rules of right and honesty, He saw to it that right should always be the highest expediency.' A reminder to those weak and vacillating souls who act too often as if the morally right may be the personally or socially wrong or inexpedient.

More Quacks

Huck Finn 'didn't care a darn for a thing 'thout it was tollable hard to git.' It has been 'tollable hard to git' our Legislature into motion against what Carlyle calls the 'brass-faced, vociferous, voracious, and pestilent tribe of quacks. But when our legislative wisdom is precipitated in the form of an Act of Parliament upon our Statute Book, we hope that it will be something worth the waiting for. The crass credulity to which the quack appeals is in one respect like insanity or case-hardened yokel-prejudice: you will volley argument against it in vain. You may (as Max O'Rell says in another connection) call to your aid all the principles of algebra, trigonometry, and differential and integral calculus, to prove that it is wrong. But it is effort idly spent. The dupes upon whom the quack-parasite fastens are, in this matter, mentally 'in statu pupillari'—in a condition of legal infancy, so to speak; and they require the protection of the State from those pestiferous harpies, just as the normal citizen requires protection from the insinuating fingers of the pick-pocket and the unseen blow of the sandbagger.

There is one peculiarly odious class of quack that seems to us not to have come within the purview of the Bill now before Parliament. We refer to the so-called hypnotist and 'hypnotic healer'. Male creatures of this description are to be found in every large city in New Zealand; and their operations should be brought to a full stop in the interests of the physical, mental, and moral well-being of their hapless victims. One thing more: To this hour the New Zealand mails are used for the carriage of disgusting circulars that are posted by thousands to mere boys. The Federal Postmaster-General some time ago refused to make the country's mails the medium of spreading the circulars both of 'advertising professionals' and of medical quacks, some of whom use the confessions of clients for the purpose of blackmail, terrorism, and extortion. We once more commend to the special attention of the police and of the postal authorities the sort of 'literature' that is being circulated through the mails by certain blackguards that are doing an extensive business in mountebank 'electric' remedies. Young people who would retain the

bright flower of innocence will avoid the whole horde of advertising 'specialists' and quacksalvers. Samuel Rogers kept both physician and charlatan from his door, and lived to ninety-two on this prescription: 'Temperance, the bath and flesh-brush, and don't fret'. Good advice; but, like patience and cod-liver oil, the last part of it is more easily prescribed than taken.

Cagliostro, the prince of quacks and mountebanks, concocted an 'elixir of immortal youth' that had a great run, especially with ladies, and bulged the enterprising impostor's fob with golden guineas. Some years ago there lived in Melbourne a Chinese 'doctor', childlike and bland, who was much sought after by white people who were, or fancied that they were, 'not themselves at all'—like the swain that loved the Widow Malone, ooh hone! Ching's great curative agent was a pill about the size of a ping-pong ball. It was composed of honey, dates, earth, sawdust, ground horn, and half-a-dozen other equally variegated ingredients. This indigestible salmagundi is known in the Chinese Pharmacopoeia as ning-shin-yoon—'repose to the spirit'. Kee Sam (another bland Eastern) got one 'repose to the spirit' and ate it. Then his spirit flitted. There was an inquest. The Medical Society 'said things' about Chinese 'doctors' and their diagnoses and their 'remedies'. But the gullibles, white and yellow, flocked to the 'doctor' as before, and ate his balls of honey and sawdust and street-sweepings and ground rotten-stone just as heartily as ever. It is the way of the world, as Poor Richard sadly discovered long ago. Many of those who developed a sturdy appetite for 'repose to the spirit' were soon sleeping with Kee Sam where the lilies blow. The others recovered by the blessing of God, sound constitutions, or non-lethal doses. And the rumbling of the hearse-wheels and the noise of the clouds falling on the coffins of Sam Kee and the others were drowned in the hymns of praise which the white survivors sang to the praise of ning-shin-yoon. It does not, after all, seem as if the schoolmaster has been abroad to very much purpose in our day. The quack was a meagre incident in the social life of bygone days. Nowadays he is like lying—one of the world's Great Powers.

The 'Smart Set'

Father Bernard Vaughan has completed his course of oratorical fly-blisters for the pagan 'smart set' among the wealthy and titled lower orders in England. The great preacher's utterances inspired the following epigram by Sir Francis Burnand in the London 'Daily Telegraph':—

'Ere "the Smart Set" becomes a little rowdy,
Its men a-weary and its women dowdy,
All will admit that the bold preacher's art
Has done its best to make "the Smart Set" smart.'

In the latest of his fine philippics, Father Vaughan traces the history of 'the Magdalen in Mayfair.' It is the sad story of a girl born of vulgar, wealthy, and worldly parents; brought up without a mother's love, without religion; trained to a vicious taste for unwholesome romantic literature, and to the worst forms of vanity in dress. Her parents, who 'would not humble themselves to enter the kingdom of heaven, would lick the very dust of the floor to have their names, and their names only, associated with hired guests who did not want to know them', at 'the enchanted castle' where the 'fast smart set' dwell. Then the heavy bribes to secure introductions, the engagement, the marriage (for the Magdalen's hawbees), the downfall of the undisciplined wife, the moral ruin, and death.

Describing the lack of supervision over 'the young persons' among the 'smart set,' Father Vaughan conveyed a lesson, part of which parents in New Zealand may well take to heart. 'Human nature,' said