

Current Topics

Facilis Descensus

The road to ruin is broad, well-kept, and graded for fast going. A wide strip of it is neatly paved with empty bottles.

That 'Referendum' Again

Brigadier-General Thomas Francis Meagher's famous division was wiped off the face of the earth in the two days and two nights of desperate fighting that took place around Chancellorsville in May, 1863, during the great American Civil War. Only a few of the dashing leader's valiant men answered the roll-call when the grim work was over. A few days later, Meagher handed in his resignation. It would, said he, be 'perpetrating a public deception' to keep up the pretence of a brigade when it had been practically wiped out, and when he had been refused permission to withdraw the little remnant of his men from service for a time in order to recruit. The leaders of the Bible-in-schools Referendum League would have been well advised had they followed the sensible and spirited example of 'Meagher of the Sword'. Their movement differs in one important respect from Meagher's hard-hitting death-or-glory brigade: it never was formidable. The country never could be induced to take it quite seriously, much less to wax enthusiastic over it. As a political fighting force, it never got beyond the hay-foot straw-foot stage, and the time is pretty well ripe for the undertaker to place it under the roots of the flowers that bloom in the spring. The leaders of the dead or dying movement that waited on the Premier on Monday were, in effect, 'perpetrating a public deception' by inferentially professing to represent a live movement, with a big slice of the country at its back. They should, like the hero of Marye's Heights, have withdrawn and re-cruited and reorganised their shattered forces, if they could, and given some evidence—namely, the evidence of personal and collective effort and sacrifice—that they are in earnest about the Christian education of the children of their various flocks. They could then consistently approach Parliament—on the lines of the Catholic demand.

As matters stand, the bulk of legislators and of the general public can have no other feeling but one of contempt for ministers of the Lord whose ideals rise no higher than this: scheming to unload one of the sacredest and most elementary duties of their calling on to the shoulders of lay State officials; to create and endow a new juvenile Established Church on Unitarian lines; to turn the public schools of the Colony into supplementary Sunday-schools for the propaganda of the latest fad in religion-making; and to pick the public pocket for the cost of the process. It is cheap to wag tongues where the footlights glare. But people who think, will think hard things of the sort of religion that for thirty years has not had sufficient steam in it to make the most obvious and urgent sacrifice for the little lambs of its flock. Are the shekels and the easy-chairs more precious than the souls of the little men and maids at school? We Catholics think not. Has religion no head to think and plan, no heart to feel, no hand to work, for God's little ones in the schools? Or is it merely a Tongue clacking sleepy political clap-trap, and beseeching Parliament to put surplice and gown-and-bands upon the Civil Service, so that the clergy, like the dormouse, may loll and sleep in ignoble peace?

A Fantastical Story

He is a bit of a jolt-head or a hurry-worry or a don't-care who allows himself to be bitten twice and thrice by the same yapping cur-dog. Yet secular pa-

pers continue, despite the lessons of experience, to allow themselves to be bitten again and again by sundry journalistic curs who invent and retail the sort of Vatican 'news' that is fit only for the marines or the silly season. The latest sample of this sort of stuff is now going the rounds of the New Zealand secular press—appearing, thus far, in the Saturday brimstone-columns. It is a romance about Father Tyrrell's passing from the Jesuit society to the secular mission. The story (which is credited to the Rome correspondent of the 'Berliner Tagblatt') rehearses a lot of fantastical nonsense as to what the Pope has been doing, is doing, and is going to do in regard to the Jesuits. The mooncalf who concocted the story winds up with this fine bit of extravaganza: 'There is also talk of Cardinal Newman, one of the most liberal-minded members of the Jesuit Order, being visited shortly by a practical demonstration of the displeasure of his superiors in the faith.' There is only one thing the matter with this story: it is a piece of grotesque folly from beginning to end. The writer is so ill-informed that he takes Cardinal Newman to be a living member of the Jesuit 'Order'. It so happens that Cardinal Newman has been dead for the past sixteen years and more. He has no longer any 'superiors in the faith' upon this earth. With him, we trust, faith has given place to the Beatific Vision. And he is far beyond the reach of being personally 'visited' by the 'displeasure' of mortals here below. Moreover, Newman never was a Jesuit. The truth of the story about Father Tyrrell may be well gauged by that of Cardinal Newman and 'the Jesuit Order'.

'Tell the truth and shame the devil'. So runs the old motto. There are a great many people (says an American wit) who find no difficulty in shaming the devil. It is the other thing that bothers them. To this class belongs the imaginative wight who devises Vatican news for the silly season. But for our knowledge of his high capabilities, we might have been tempted to take this latest bit of Vatican 'news' as a hoax—somewhat similar to that of the petrified man with which an American wag imposed upon the too trusting secular newspapers of the Eastern States. They did not notice that the petrified man's ten fingers were spread fanwise, in an attitude of derision, from the point of his stony nose. And our incautious, and perhaps over-driven, journalists forgot for the moment that Newman sang his last rondeau in 1890—a date that in these fast-moving days seems almost as remote as the times of the Barmecides. It is another instructive instance of the dangers of taking Catholic news and comment from other than well-informed Catholic sources.

A Slump

It is a bank-note world, as Halleck hath remarked. Finance has a sensitive skin, and a big monopoly is easily sent to bed in a fever of fear. This is apparently what seems to have got into the blood of a great Irish financial corporation, if we may credit a cable-message that appeared in last Saturday's daily papers:—

'The Bank of Ireland stock fell from £330 to £307 in ten days, owing to alarm over the Government's Home Rule intentions.'

The Bank of Ireland was founded in 1782. It was the year of the Volunteers—the period when bigotry had largely lost its force in Irish public life; when the penal code had (as Lecky said) 'perished at last by its own atrocity'; and when Irish Protestants were eagerly moving to place a large measure of political power in the hands of their Catholic fellow-countrymen. 'Catholics,' says Lecky, 'had begun to take a considerable place among the moneyed men of Ireland; yet', he adds, 'when the Bank of Ireland was founded in 1782, it was specially provided that

The Dunedin & Suburban Coal Co.

TELEPHONE 401

are still at 29 CASTLE STREET, and will supply you with any kind of Coal or Firewood you want at LOWEST TARIFF RATES. Smithy Coals supplied.