

Current Topics

'Young People's Day'

With many of our separated brethren, last Sunday was 'young people's day'. It is good—so far as it goes. 'The youth of a nation', says Disraeli in his 'Sybil', 'are the trustees of posterity'. We Catholics, who try as best we may to realise the tremendous perils, possibilities, and responsibilities of childhood and youth, have three hundred and sixty-five 'young people's days' in the year. In leap-years we raise the number to three hundred and sixty-six.

The Education Question

We do not commit ourselves to the scheme outlined by our friend, Mr. J. A. Scott, M.A., in the letter which appears on pp. 11-12 of this issue. But we do commend it to our readers as a thoughtful and well-intended effort by a scholarly and observant layman to get the various religious denominations in New Zealand more 'aux prises' with the education difficulty, and to drag the whole question, without needless delay, within the focus of practical politics.

In our issue of July 15, 1898, and on many occasions since then, we urged constant, never-ceasing action to push our claims and to educate public opinion thereon—to spread right views of our demands among non-Catholics, and to get hold of the ear of the electors who are out of range of the Catholic paper and of the voice of the Catholic preacher. In this, as in all educative movements that are to lead prejudice and misconception captive, 'it is dogged as wins'. The path that leads to success is the old plebeian one of rugged, persevering, and organised effort. 'The secret of success', says Disraeli, 'is constancy of purpose'. Constancy in self-sacrifice has dotted our country over with the evidences of Catholic charity and given us a practical monopoly of religious education. It is the best earnest of a capacity for constancy of purpose in other and allied, though less strenuous, directions. In the matter of the political pressing of our educational demands we might, for instance, learn much from a certain League among our Protestant fellow-colonists. Between us and them there are grounds of solid agreement as well as points of serious divergence of view. We are, for instance, in substantial agreement with them as to the principle of religion and of a religious atmosphere in the school. We differ in the application of the principle. We push the principle to its practical and legitimate conclusion. They do not—as yet. They maltreat the principle by trimming, lopping, and shaping it to fit the seeming expediency or doctrinal compromise of the hour. We freely accord to others the educational rights which we claim for ourselves. They do not—as yet. We know our mind, and have over and over again set forth the broad minimum of right and justice which would satisfy our legitimate demands. They are tossed about by every shifting wind of expediency, boxing the compass of variable opinion and contention—

'One foot on sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never'

A patient of Sir Dominic Corrigan's was once tossing, turning, and straining under the stress of an internal pain. 'Oh, Sir Dominic', he exclaimed, 'is there any position that will give me relief?' 'If there is', said the great surgeon, 'you're very likely to find it'. The incessant changes of position taken up by the Bible-in-schools people are, to our minds, one of the really hopeful features of the situation. It may lead to the discovery that the one position which, thus far, they have been ignoring or avoiding, is just the one in which they will find relief. So far, their

ignoring of the Catholic claims has only helped to make their movement a forlorn hope. As matters stand, it is generally recognised that the introduction of any (Protestant) Bible-in-schools-scheme would have for its natural and inevitable corollary the satisfaction of the Catholic educational demands. And this conviction has been enormously strengthened by the pronouncements of our Hierarchy on the Bible-in-schools scheme. Some people learn, as some people joke, 'wi' deeficulty'. But so obvious a lesson cannot fail to make an impression upon our Protestant fellow-colonists who are at one with us in deploring the hard secularism of our system of public instruction. The moral to be learned from it is this: that there can be no settlement of the education difficulty in which Catholics are not treated as principals, and no settlement in which just and concurrent count is not taken of our demands. All treaties of peace are shaped between the hammer and anvil of discussion. And such conferences as our esteemed correspondent advocates are (apart from their details, to which we do not commit ourselves) in full accord with the principles and methods of action advocated by us in our issue of July 15, 1898. In this matter, too, we are not moving in the dark, as we have satisfactory, though diverse, solutions of the religious education problem legalised in Canada, Germany, and elsewhere. The cause we have in hands—that of the Christian upbringing of youth—is a sacred trust. Catholics will not fail of sacrifice for it. But it needs pushing in its political aspect. And this is not to be achieved by the timid silence and inactivity that are liable to be interpreted to mean loss of faith or hope in our cause, or a sense of inability to present it adequately before our fellow-countrymen, or a lack of trust in their sense of justice, or tame acquiescence in a great national wrong.

A Spendthrift Act

Death in the house brings some people face to face for the first time with the hard realities of life. The housefather's light goes out, and the funeral pall 'comes down with the crash of a storm'. The poetry of the position is not easily perceived through the tears of the bereaved; and others besides strangers have the Archey Road philosopher's remark in the mind, if not upon the tongue: 'It's a nice day f'r a drive to th' cimitry. Did he lave much?' The anguish that for many long lay in the question had its root in the absolute dominion which the housefather had over the money which he had inherited or earned, and in the too frequent caprice or injustice with which he exercised that dominion in his last will and testament. A New Zealand statute secures the family, in certain circumstances, against that old resort of the wealthy 'stern parent', 'cutting off with a shilling', and against inadequate provision for their proper maintenance. An amending Bill is now before Parliament. But French legislation has long ago gone farther than locking the stable door, after the steed has been stolen, in order to save the collar and hames. The French law—the substance of which we might very usefully copy—'goes one better'. It provides a means of preventing the housefather squandering the family substance in drink, dissipation, wild or reckless speculation, or risking

'That which makes gamblers play with those
'Who have least wit and most to lose'.

'If', says Max O'Rell in 'Between Ourselves', 'a Frenchman—be he father, husband, or brother—shows an inclination to squander a fortune which is one day destined to go to his children, his wife, or his brothers and sisters, the latter have a right to call a family council to examine the case, report on it, and obtain a restraint which prevents that man from having the sole and entire control of his fortune. . . . He is only allowed to peacefully enjoy the possession of that fortune so long as the interests of his family

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