

Baden, Wurtemberg, etc.; the second or middle class (159 to 68 per million) comprises Austria, Bavaria, Sweden, Hungary, Belgium, England, Norway, Alsace-Lorraine. The lowest records (59 to 21 per million) are held by Scotland, Holland, Italy, Russia, Ireland, and Spain, which gives the smallest return of any country. During the last ten years of the nineteenth century, the annual mean of suicides in Europe reached the enormous figure of 38,727. France has kept careful statistics of its suicides since 1827. And nobody who has watched the political rakes progress of that unhappy country will be surprised to learn that between that date and 1900 its self-murders increased by 341 per cent.

The feverish mode of modern human life, the keenness of competition, the increasing pressure of business cares, dissatisfaction with poverty, the unsatisfied cravings of ever-increasing needs—which make the luxury of to-day the necessary of to-morrow—all these are, no doubt, contributing causes to the recklessness of life which seeks relief in rope, razor, bullet, charcoal fumes, arsenic, or deep water. But it is manifest that these factors are not by themselves alone sufficient to account for the appalling increase of the 'bastard valor' of self-slaughter. Portugal, Spain, and Ireland—three countries that, from diverse political causes, are among the poorest countries in Europe—constantly show the smallest percentage of suicides. And readers of the history of the great famine of 1846-7 know that self-murder was almost quite unknown among the Irish poor during that long and agonising period of concentrated suffering and woe. The chief motive cause of the increased disregard for the sanctity of life lies deeper. The historian Lecky, although a rationalist, put his finger on the spot when, in his 'European Morals', he stated that one determining cause (he might have said the chief determining cause) of the increase of suicide in our day is 'the advance of religious scepticism, and the relaxation of religious discipline'.

Suicide is, briefly, in the main an outcome of pagan or materialistic modes of thought and action. Christianity gave a new and sublime meaning to life when it taught that it is a sacred gift of the Creator; that it is lent to us, like the talents of the Gospel, under high responsibilities, to make the most and best of it; that suicide is a crime; and that death is not the end of all things, but the beginning of a life of endless happiness or of endless woe.

'A sacred burden is this life ye bear;
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly;
Stand up and walk beneath it steadfastly'

The Christian doctrine of the origin and destiny of human life wrought a moral revolution in the pagan world. 'Direct and deliberate suicide', says Lecky, 'almost entirely disappeared' within the Church. So rare was self-destruction in the middle ages that for centuries only one suicide was recorded among women. It arose again in periods when faith had lost its robustness and became languid and anaemic—as in Spain during the corrupt Gothic period; in England after the Reformation period, and during the religious stagnation and fashionable infidelity of the eighteenth century; in France during the great revolutionary period. In Germany and other countries it advanced with the spread of materialism and scepticism, the destructive criticism of such men as Strauss and Baur, Schopenhauer's philosophy of despair, Hartmann's theory that life is hardly worth living, Nietzsche's gross philosophy of mere pleasure, and the fad of godless public instruction—an evil legacy which has come to us from the French Revolution. The remedy is an obvious but difficult one: to roll back the tide of scepticism and to get the world back to those Christian principles which caused the disappearance of suicide within the bounds of the old Roman Empire. And the beginning is best made in the schools.

Notes

A Warning

Wise counsel slips through some minds, leaving as little impression as an eel in water. But our Catholic readers will do well if they accept a friendly caution in regard to itinerant strangers who are offering cheap and tawdry religious pictures at fancy prices.

Postal Reform

Please to remember the Fifth of November, says last Monday's Dunedin Evening Star, is a legend which is obsolescent if not actually obsolete, and Sir Joseph Ward would perhaps suggest that "Please to remember the First of November" might suitably take its place, so far as New Zealand is concerned. Certainly, last Thursday should be marked in white in the annals of the Colony. First, the International Exhibition was opened amid promising circumstances; secondly, the rate of letter postage to America was reduced from 2d to 1d per half-ounce; thirdly, the inland rate of letter postage fell all at once from 1d for half an ounce to 1d for four ounces; and, fourthly, the system of telegrams at 1d a word came into operation.

A Victorian Brawler

The clerical 'preux chevalier' who carded the Victorian Good Shepherd nuns in his haste, is now repenting at his leisure. He varied his chivalrous 'divarshun' by an attack upon the Archbishop of Melbourne which was sufficient to make the assailant a social outlaw. It was the old familiar case of a little man seeking notoriety by throwing mud at a great man. He won notoriety. But it was not quite the pattern of notoriety that he sought or desired. His charges were one by one dynamited—the latest by the very flattering report of the Assistant Chief Inspector (a non-Catholic) in regard to the South Melbourne Orphanage school. The demands of poetic justice are rounded off by the added sympathy and support which the defamer of pious and devoted women has won for them and their work. And thus out of intended evil cometh good. The great work goes grandly and serenely on. It is the old Arab proverb once more: 'The dogs bark, the caravan passes.'

The Catholic Editor

We have said elsewhere in this issue that a religious paper for popular perusal must ever be an effort—and never, by the necessities of the case, a perfectly successful one—to compromise among a thousand incompatible tastes. The sledge-hammer critic who stops his paper with a metaphorical club and an unmetaphorical great big D, would realise this pretty fully—and sorrowfully—if he tried his hand at editing, just for one week, and had the luck to get home sane in mind and in one piece at the close of his experience. The man who stops the paper, says the Boston S.H. Review, 'because it does not always say just what he wants it to say, is about as sensible as the man who falls out with his friends because he finds they have opinions of their own. There is adverse criticism and adverse criticism. The criticism, however adverse, which is friendly and helpful is ever welcomed by the Catholic newspaper. That which is fair but unkind is accepted with respect, but without thanks. And that which is neither fair, nor friendly, nor helpful is received in a chastened spirit, but without either respect or thankfulness. D'Alembert, if we mistake not, dealt with criticism upon some such principle as this.

'God,' says Sterne, 'tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' God does better still: He tempers the shorn lamb to the wind; and Boreas may then rage and

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