

Current Topics

Mr. Devlin

Mr. Devlin, M.P., arrived at the Bluff on Monday, and is already well launched upon his New Zealand tour. We wish the gifted orator and envoy a hearty cead mile failte. This is indeed a case in which (as the gracious Shakespearean hostess Silvia saith) the comer's quality and worth are warrant for his welcome hither. We bespeak for him a welcome 'according to his worth'—and a generous welcome that will 'appear in other ways than words'. For sympathy with a struggling nation, like truth, 'hath better deeds than words to grace it'.

Tommy Let-it-alone

A query: 'Dear Rev. Editor,—To settle a discussion among some members of our club: Would you advise against "backing one's fancy" even in a strictly fair, moderate, and very occasional way, at horse-races?'

The answer: Son, you ask for counsel. And our counsel on the subject (which, of course, has no force of precept) is best summed up in the dictum of Mark Twain: 'There are two occasions in a man's life when he should not wager—when he can't afford it, and when he can'. But if any of you young men are bent upon 'backing your fancy', then let it be the reliable flyer on which (according to his biographer) William Terriss often staked, yet never lost and never won—a little filly called Common Sense, ridden by Tommy Let-it-alone.

An Anti-Catholic Crusade

There have been pretty nearly as many crimes perpetrated in the name of religion as in the name of liberty. In Victoria there is an interesting knot of enthusiasts of saffron hue who call themselves 'The Protestant Electors' Committee'. They fought out yesterday's Federal elections, but not on Federal, or any political, issues. Their platform was a single-plank one—the exclusion of Catholics and of tolerant and fair-minded Protestants from public life. And this great political and social crime—the crime of conspiring to set aside a fundamental principle of the Constitution and injecting the rodent virus of sectarian hate and strife into Victorian public life—was committed in the sacred name of religion. The guillotining Reds of the French Revolution erected their statue to Liberty. The lesser Reds across the seas in Victoria may now erect a statue to the wooden-headed idol—more hideous than a Maori grotesque—that presides over religious persecution. A strange, grim 'atua' indeed is the god of their worship—not the God of mercy and brotherly love, nor even the Allah of the Mahomedan, but a dehumanised Giant Blunderbore, with merciless club, and single ever-raging eye, and teeth to lacerate his victims. How true the words of Warburton: 'The bigot reverses the order of creation, and makes God in man's image, choosing the very ugliest pattern to model from—namely, himself.' We are not sure that there exist south of the Tropic of Capricorn uglier patterns of bigotry than are to be found among the ill-guided few who have been for some time past preaching the Moloch gospel of sectarian hate and strife in Victoria. The recent grand protest of the Melbourne Catholic laity was both timely and much needed.

An Unctuous Rascal

Years ago, the profits of the sham 'ex-priest' and 'ex-monk' business were so considerable that this branch of the magsman's 'profession' became for a time uncomfortably overcrowded. The congestion was, however, gradually relieved by the action of the police

and the criminal courts. We have traced—and retain in our 'Rogues' Gallery'—the careers of some scores of the so-called 'ex-priest' and 'ex-monk' slander-mongers that have been retailing pornographic filth to the public during the past twenty years at (usually) 'front seats one shilling, back seats sixpence'—or its American equivalent. The vastly greater part of them were never priests or monks; a big percentage of them were never Catholics. The few of them that were once in the sacred ministry were merely weeds that the Pope threw over his garden wall—cast forth for conduct unworthy of their high and holy calling. We have failed to find among this class of coarse 'lecturers' even one man of unblemished character. With a few exceptions, they are known to the police and have made (some of them repeatedly) the acquaintance of the prison cell. And one and all of this loathsome class made a dishonorable livelihood by arousing and trading on sectarian passion and corrupting the minds of youth with pamphlets which (in the words of Newman) 'cannot have been intended for any other purpose than to afford merriment in the haunts of vice and profligacy'.

One of the bright particular ornaments of this brand of the philosophy of the sty is the unctuous rascal who calls himself 'ex-monk' Widdows. He was never a monk and his real name is Nobbs, not Widdows. He was sentenced in Canada (says London 'Truth' of March 30, 1899) to ten years' penal servitude for a crime which involved 'a piece of as revolting immorality as it would be possible to conceive'. In the House of Commons in July, 1901, the Chief Secretary for Ireland (Mr. Wyndham) told how the brutalised impostor 'was convicted in London in 1888 of the offence referred to' (an unmentionable crime) 'and sentenced to ten years' penal servitude'. Shortly after Mr. Wyndham had exposed the bogus 'ex-monk' in Parliament, the fellow was 'sent up' for a term of penal servitude for another abominable crime. On his liberation, some two years ago or thereabouts, he was welcomed back to his conventicle in Hackney (London) by a bevy of the 'ladies' of the little congregation that are satisfied to listen to the unspeakable blackguard's exposition of the Gospel according to Nobbs. Few in his noisome trade have learned better than he

'The knowledge of the thriving art;
A holy outside and a hollow heart.'

But the profession is not so profitable as it was—the schoolmaster has been abroad to some purpose. And the sham 'ex-monk'—but genuine ex-convict—of Hackney is now, as Panurge was at thirty-five, subject to a 'kind of disease' which is called lack of money. Here is how London 'Truth' of September 19 deals with the unctuous ex-convict and his 'urgent appeal' for shekels:

A correspondent forwards a copy of an 'urgent appeal' from the unspeakable scoundrel Widdows, which was put into his hand at an open-air religious service in Hackney. Widdows is in urgent want of £400 to discharge a debt which is hanging over his head, and by way of suggesting that the debt is driving him into an early grave, he goes on thus: 'The winter of my life is approaching, and, sleeping I dream, and waking I hope, that, before I go hence, this debt may be wiped out. Mental worry and anxiety have caused a serious breakdown in health, and I was obliged to give up work for a time, but thank God I am somewhat restored.' It is easy to understand that a man who has done two terms of penal servitude in this country, subsequently to imprisonment in the Colonies, has experienced a good deal of mental worry and anxiety.

When Nobbs (alias Widdows) has passed through 'the winter of his life', his tomb may appropriately bear the following inscription (adapted from Baifham's 'Rob' Gilpin):—

John Widdows was a convict bold,
Of very bad 'renewal'
Of no great 'credit' in his own,
Or any other town.

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