

Current Topics

Bush Fires

Somewhere in one of his sonnets Wordsworth says that all things are less dreadful than they appear. There is a small negative or positive element of consolation even in the fires that tore with such destructive fury through the forest in Southland and Canterbury last week. The flames that wrought such havoc to some, did for others some welcome pioneer work in turning forest into field. We in New Zealand are happily spared the devastating fires that are to so lamentable an extent a feature of the summer landscape among our neighbors on the other side of the Tasman Sea. Year by year the spark of a passing engine, the match of the careless smoker, the fire of the incautious camper or sun-downer, the brand of the incendiary, or the flame of phosphorised wheat touches the dry, slippery grass, robs the thirsting stock of hundreds of thousands of acres of precious food, and gnaws great black furrows for miles through the green-grey bush. The high capabilities of the Australian bush-fire were never in living memory so amply demonstrated as on Black Thursday, in 1851. On that day the Victorian forests were nearly all in flames. Countless sheep and cattle were roasted alive. Many homes were licked off the surface of the earth by the long tongues of flame. In Gippsland the sun was eclipsed by the smoke, and a thick darkness settled down on the earth at mid-day. Men tell how birds fell dead of heat on the decks of coasting vessels, and how clouds of smoke and falling cinders went out for many a league over the Southern Ocean. Those who sustain losses find proverbs poor plasters for grief, and patience and fortitude much easier to prescribe than to take. But there is enough of La Rochefoucauld in most of us to derive a melancholy negative comfort from the consideration that there are others in worse case. And one or two experiences of a first or second-class Australian bush-fire would tend to make the New Zealand farmer look upon his smaller blaze as, by comparison, a blessing in disguise.

An 'Authority' in Napier

Jokes that in the big cities have become as flat and stale as musty penny beer are sometimes considered by the witlings good enough to serve up as sparkling originalities in the regions 'out-back'. And in like manner some are found to retail as first-class 'authorities' in smaller places writers who are utterly discredited in centres of intellectual life. Last week some individual inflicted upon Napier intelligence the implied slur of supposing that it would accept the slanderous and discredited Michael McCarthy—No-Popery writer and lecturer to Orange and Wiseite audiences—as a first-class and decisive 'authority' on the religious life of Catholic Ireland. As usual, the public were treated to the old wheeze that this bitter enemy of Catholics is himself a 'Roman Catholic'. As a matter of fact, he is, about as much a Catholic as is the master of the nearest Orange lodge. It is true that Mister McCarthy was baptised into the ancient faith. But, while still a hobbledohoy, he was sent to a Protestant Grammar School at Middleton. He proceeded thence to the Protestant University of Trinity, where any rags or tatters of Catholicism that still clung to him seem to have been torn off and scattered to the winds. We find it stated that long over twenty years ago he had ceased to practise the duties of a Catholic. And there is scarcely a doctrine or practice of the Old Faith but he has denounced in his publications in the rough and coarse invective of the Orange platform. Some years ago the 'Guardian' (a well-known Anglican organ) said of him that he proved himself not to be a Catholic, nor even a Christian. And the 'Church Commonwealth' (an Anglican newspaper published in Australia)

wrote editorially as follows regarding one of his slop-shop No-Popery productions in 1902: 'It is as virulently Orange as any professional Church Associationist could ever wish. Protestantism is all light and altogether lovely, whilst Catholicism is as black as Erebus, and reeks of rottenness. . . . An honest controversialist is worthy of respect, but though we dislike the methods of modern Romanism, Mr. McCarthy's attack is not honest'.

The McCarthy publications are melancholy examples of the way in which history should not be written. To Carlyle, on one of his 'livery' days, the population of the world was composed mostly of fools. To the slipshod pet of the Orange lodges, the population of Ireland consists of Michael McCarthy, in an aureole; the adherents of the Reformed creeds, who are wingless angels; and 'Papists,' who are fools or knaves, or incarnate demons—many of these about five shades deeper than the foul fiends of the Abyss. There are no normal human beings in the McCarthy style of 'literature'. The man's worthlessness as a witness was hit off as follows in the course of a review of one of his books by the 'Otago Daily Times' of August 14, 1905: 'That Mr. McCarthy will ever be mistaken for a born historian we have not the slightest fear; nor do we feel very sanguine that any efforts on his part will bring him within measurable distance of that literary summit, for he lacks the first essential quality of the historian, an unbiassed, analytical, and introspective cast of mind'. 'His feelings', says the same paper, 'run away with his judgment to such an extent that he becomes, instead of a faithful recorder of events, a special pleader'. And it dismisses him with the contemptuous remark that 'his prejudices are inexcusable'. But prejudice is the shadow that ever follows little minds.

The London 'Times' has no warmer feeling in its heart for Catholics in the Green Isle to-day than it had in the dread post-famine times, when it cried exultantly: 'The Irish are going with a vengeance!' Yet the 'Times' wrote of McCarthy's second 'shocker': 'Mr. McCarthy's book is like its predecessor, an untidy and clumsily composed volume; its style is poor and pretentious'. Rivarol was only a little more caustic when he said of a dull prosier of the McCarthy calibre that he wrote in laudandum upon sheets of lead. The note of illiteracy clings like a barnacle to No-Popery literature generally. In such stuff, literary quality would be as much out of place as a setting of diamonds in a hodman's hod. And the literary hodman now under review forms no exception to the general literary incapacity of his class. He caters, too, for the 'yellow' and uncritical section of the public—a section that can neither understand nor appreciate literary excellence or sobriety of statement. After having waded through one of his productions—which we shall by courtesy call 'books'—we incline to the opinion of an English non-Catholic reviewer that a sixth standard schoolboy might grind better literary stuff out of a sausage machine than Mr. McCarthy has evolved out of the grey matter of his brain. Our Napier friends should furnish themselves with copies of Dr. O'Riordan's brilliant work, 'Catholicity and Progress in Ireland'. It is obtainable from any Catholic bookseller, and reduces the slanders of McCarthy and his kind to impalpable powder.

In Spain

There are (it is said) tricks in every trade. The vanishing trick seems to be just now the favorite one in the cabinet-making trade in Spain. The Spanish Freemasons (who are closely allied with those in France) are endeavoring to force upon their country a course of anti-religious legislation based upon that which is now in force north of the Pyrenees. A very few months ago Senor Moret (Prime Minister) took up the task of harrying and plundering the Church. He

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