

Current Topics

Basil and Julian

Bad example in the home, and evil associations outside the home, sometimes taint and poison the good that is instilled into the souls of little men and maids in the Catholic school. The fault lies not with the teachers, the system, or the school. The parents are here chiefly responsible for the failure. 'Basil and Julian,' says Cardinal Newman, 'were fellow-students at the schools of Athens, and one became the Saint and Doctor of the Church, the other her scoffing and relentless foe.' Many lesser Basils and some minor Julians have passed through our schools. The Basils had the foundations of their goodness well and truly laid in home and school; the defection of the Julians can easily be traced to causes that lie outside and beyond the Catholic school.

Habitual Drunkards

Bacchus (according to an old Spanish proverb) has drowned more than Neptune—strong drink more than salt water. Last year the New Zealand Parliament rendered what we hope will be an important service to the cause of temperance by an effort to raise a few of Bacchus's 'submerged tenth' and restore them to a wholesome mode of living. This was done by the Act 'to make better provision for the care and detention of habitual drunkards.' 'Under this Act,' says last Friday's 'Otago Daily Times,' 'a magistrate is empowered, upon the conviction for drunkenness of any person who, having been thrice convicted for the same offence within the preceding nine months, has become an habitual drunkard in the eyes of the law, to commit him to any recognised institution willing to receive him and make provision for his proper care and detention. Further, the Governor-in-Council is empowered to authorise any institution, by gazette warrant, to receive and detain habitual drunkards, and it is prescribed that regulations may be issued by Order-in-Council to ensure that the objects which the legislation has in view may be efficiently carried out.' A recent 'Gazette' contains a copy of the regulations which are to 'apply to every institution that is authorised under the Act to receive and detain habitual drunkards in terms of the law.' Inspectors are to be appointed by the Minister of Justice to see that the regulations are properly carried out, and idleness, disobedience, insubordination, profanity, assaults, indecency, obstruction of officers, misbehavior at religious services, etc., will be visited upon the offender in one or other of the three following ways (we quote from our local morning contemporary):—

'He may have to submit to a withdrawal of tobacco or other indulgences comprehensively described in the regulations as "extras," or he may be sentenced to confinement to a room or cell for a limited period, or he may be placed upon a special scale of diet inferior to that in general use. In the case of the occurrence of an offence of a graver order, such as that of offering personal violence to any officer or inmate, or of aggravated or repeated assault, or of wilfully destroying the property of the institution, or of any act of gross misconduct or insubordination, the regulations contemplate that the offender shall be brought before a magistrate in court and, upon summary conviction, sentenced to a term of imprisonment, at the expiry of which he shall be returned to the institution to complete his term of detention.'

A previous, and not well considered, State experiment in the reclamation of the habitual drunkard ended in failure. But it was not all a failure; for the warning danger-notice on precipice or hill serves its purpose as well as the finger-post that points out the true road.

To climb steep hills,
Requires slow pace at first.

And in a problem of such enormous difficulty as the reformation of the habitual drunkard, the mount of vision—success—is not scaled at the first venture. The present effort of the Government to grapple with the problem is an earnest, well-intended, and thorough-going one, and will be watched with sympathetic hope and interest by every friend of temperance. And there will not, we ween, be any lack of institutions for the reclamation of the unhappy ones who have 'put an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains'.

Thirsty Law-makers

There is a certain amount of human nature even among legislators. The later private history of most parliamentary institutions in English-speaking countries records (though, we are glad to say, very exceptionally) a few law-makers who, like Artemus Ward, never allowed public business to interfere with their drinking habits. A recent scandal in the House of Lords—when two members appeared in the gilded chamber obstreperously 'under the affluence of the intoxicating bole'—serves, however, to point a moral and adorn a tale that is not without its pleasant side. In the first place, Home Journalism was sufficiently restrained and self-respecting to avoid making the 'scene in the Lords' the occasion of a first-class sensation of the 'yellow' order. Which is something to be thankful for. And in the second place, the incident (which was obviously no reflection upon the corporate honor of the upper House) serves to illustrate the vast distance that law-makers in the Mother of Parliaments have travelled on the road of temperance since the days of the Restoration, and even since the time of Pitt and his contemporaries.

In the days between the Restoration and the Revolution, what were called the 'upper' classes were mighty swillers of 'mum' (very heady wheat-beer), spirit of clary, usquebaugh, sack, brandy, spiced ale, wines, hypocras, and other specimens of the potent liquids of the time. They had, perhaps, nothing quite so deadly as some of the special 'liquid fire and distilled damnation' (as Robert Hall calls it) of our time, that would eat the sulphur out of a vulcanised tyre. But what they had 'got there' by a pretty short cut. Deep potations, and frequent, were (says Sydney in his 'Social Life' of the period) 'almost imposed by the social code of the age, were most marked among all statesmen, and were countenanced to a very extreme degree by the king himself. . . . Hard drinking was quite the fashion. Even members of Parliament found it difficult to keep sober'. Good, garrulous old Samuel Pepys delivered his great speech of 1688 to a House that was in great part half intoxicated. Those were the 'days' of Rochester and Sedley, of Bully Dawson and Fighting Fitzgerald. They were succeeded by the deep toying, the bravado, and the easy-going devilry of the days of Queen Anne and the campaigns in Flanders. These were the palmy days of the St. James's Coffee House, of Steele and his reveling cronies, and of the bibulous joviality of the 'three-bottle men' at the October Club. And fustian foregathered with frills and ruffles to celebrate in heavy-headed revelry the Great Duke's rushing victories of Malplaquet and Ramilies. They knew how to 'Maffick' in the days of Anne. Both as Secretary of War and as Secretary of State, Lord Boingbroke spent whole nights fuddling his fine brains with fiery fluids. And did not Robert Hatley, first Earl of Oxford, when Premier and Lord Treasurer, sometimes present himself before Queen Anne—in his cups? Yet, for his time, this devotee of the wine when it was red, was looked upon as a man among men.

In a later day, it so befell that Pitt and Henry Dundas (Lord of the Admiralty in Pitt's second Ministry) were in so 'illivated' a condition that they could not be 'got ready' to meet an attack in the House of Commons. One of the wits of the day celebrated the event in the following rhymed dialogue:—

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