

Current Topics

A Non-Catholic Appreciation

An interesting and ably-written series of papers on 'The Making of a Nation: Beginnings of New Zealand Nationality', is now running its course in some of the leading daily papers of the Colony. The author, Mr. Guy H. Scholesfield, is a non-Catholic. But he finds it in his heart to say that 'the Roman Catholic belief' 'has probably the most powerful religious influence in the country'.

A Warning

The man that makes a sheep of himself will find a good many people ready to shear him. And how many Catholics in this country have allowed their locks to be taken by the bland, smiling, and oily-tongued itinerant vendor! In countless homes one meets with worthless books, gaudy religious gewgaws, trashy pictures, and tuppenny-ha'penny 'shrines' that sleek and enterprising road-knights have pawned off on them at prices ranging from thirty shillings to three pounds. Full many a time and oft we have issued warnings to our Catholic readers against the payment of exorbitant prices for objects—and especially for rubbishy—objects of devotion. Many have profited by our words. There are others whom—to their cost and through their own fault—our monitions have never reached. And there are others not a few who have heard good counsel and then (like Poor Richard's friends) on the first opportunity made haste to set it at defiance. One must, however, suffer the foolish. And till the crack o' doom there will ever be some into whose brain-cases the point of a joke or a lesson of caution can only be inserted with the aid of a diamond-drill. We leave them to their own reflections and to the pungent comfort of any Cynic Diogenes that may be in their neighborhood. In another and allied connection, our warning in regard to high-price purchases of low-price wares is both appropriate and useful at the present time. A word to the wise ought to be sufficient.

Pledge or Prison

Judge Pollard, of St. Louis (U.S.A.) has a way of his own of dealing with casual offenders who fuddle their brains and tangle their feet with doses of liquid lightning from vat or still. 'He gives the offenders', says the 'Ave Maria', 'the option of signing the pledge. If they consent, he suspends punishment for a prescribed period, at the end of which, the pledge having been kept, the punishment is entirely remitted. He has by this plan restored to their families and society as reformed citizens a large proportion—which we have seen stated to be 98 per cent.—of those who preferred Pledge to Prison. The same plan of reformation rather than punishment has been tried in England, and found to work well. While we doubt that the percentage of reformations is at all so great as that stated, results much more moderate would still entitle the plan to very general adoption'.

In New Zealand the law has recently made provision for placing the habitual drunkard in institutions 'far from the madding crowd', with a view to reforming him—if, happily, he has not been already 'formed' beyond the hope of reformation. But so far as our police court practice goes, little has been done to hold back the casual 'drunk' from drifting into the ranks of the swilling sots who are ever ready to welcome an opportunity to

'Get on a spree
And go bobbing around'.

'Drunks' are occasionally 'let off' in our police-courts on taking a pledge to abstain from the wine when it is red. Unfortunately, the courts leave the

promise, as the trout leaves its brood, to shift for itself. A benevolent surveillance would tend to 'armor' the resolution of the occasional or the practised toper, as steel rod or bar 'armors' concrete. And the fear of imprisonment is a stimulus that is not to be despised in the case of man or boy or hobbledehoy who has violated the elementary natural virtue of temperance. Judge Pollard's little plan is good, so far as it goes. We should like to see the experiment fairly tried in New Zealand.

The 'Neutral' School

Here is a notable passage from a brilliant Lenten Pastoral Instruction to the Catholics of the Hobart Archdiocese:—

'The preservation of the gift of Divine faith must constitute the chief concern of the Catholic. This explains why it is that Catholics in every land stand out prominently in one respect, in the energy they display and the frequent sacrifices they face, for no other reason than to safeguard the faith. At the present day it is felt, for example, that the school must become an agency either in support of religious training, or also that its effect will be to endanger the faith of Catholic children. The school cannot be merely neutral. Either the teacher and the rest of the children have the same attitude towards the Catholic religion in all its bearings as the Catholic parents of the child, or they have not. If they have, then the child, in passing from the home to the school naturally experiences no obstacle to the explication of its rudimentary, but all important, concepts regarding the objects of faith; whereas if the teacher's notions of religion are quite different, and if those of the other children are different, it is obvious that with the best goodwill on their part, the immature mind of the Catholic child is exposed to obstacles which, like the pebble on the streamlet's bank that "turns the course of many a river", will prejudicially determine the trend of that child's character with regard to the great subject of Catholic faith. Such a course of reflection will doubtless appear far-fetched and unpractical to the average man outside the pale of Catholic faith; but it is vital in the estimation of Catholics, and they show that it is so by the constant and unswerving attitude they maintain in reference to it throughout the world, and above all in the sacrifice of means which they incur for this and this only.'

The 'Irish Comic'

For years past we have tried to arouse among our Celtic readers a religious sentiment and racial pride that will, we trust, lead to the speedy disappearance of the stage Irishman from Catholic entertainments in New Zealand. He still, we think, performs his apish antics here and there on St. Patrick's night in the social hinterlands—bawling Cockney 'comic' songs whose 'comicality' is that of the street-corner, and whose 'wit' consists in the vulgar, the suggestive, the coarse, or the rough-and-tumble. 'A typical Irish song', said Mr. F. W. Bancroft, an American non-Catholic lecturer and singer, 'like a typical Irish character, is always misrepresented on the stage. Both, according to the stage, are always common and often vulgar. In reality the Irish song is beautiful in sentiment, transcendent in imagination, graceful in sentiment. . . . The comic song we always hear in the theatre as an Irish song is not an Irish song from any viewpoint. There is not the least bit of Irish about it, and those who give or accept it as such display lamentable ignorance. This song is not at all to be compared to the real Irish song, and indeed very few of our latter-day songs, comic or otherwise, are to be compared to it'.

In his pleasant volumes of 'Records and Reminiscences', Sir Francis C. Burnand—the sparkling wit and editor of 'Punch'—expressed his strong repugnance for 'the so-called "comic song"'. He could never find it in his heart to sneer at, or find a subject of ridicule in, the faith or race or country of any man. 'I have no sort of inclination', says he (vol. i, p. 82), 'to laugh at a Brahmin, a Mahomedan, a Hindoo, a Protestant of any denomination, on account of his creed.

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