

Current Topics

Devil-Worship

It is one thing to achieve mere notoriety. It is quite another thing to win the honest fame that leaves one's name 'fast anchored in the deep abyss of time.' Many people are given to confounding mere notoriety with fame—the burnished gold of a bright renown with the pinchbeck and Brummage vogue that may be worn by the magsman that steals a Gainsborough portrait or makes a big 'seccop' in Kimberley diamonds. Last week (according to the cables) there passed away in Italy a man who achieved the sort of notoriety that with the unthinking passes for renown. His name, Giosue Carducci. His achievement, the writing, in nervous Italian, of a 'Hymn to Satan' ('Inno a Satana'). The tervid thing is before us—a tempest of frantic blasphemy against the Creator of heaven and earth. It may interest some of our non-Catholic friends to know that Carducci sounds the loud timbrel over Wicliffe, Huss, and Martin Luther as (so to speak) aides-de-camp of 'Satan the Great' in his war with God. The 'hymn' was taken up by the Italian socialists, anarchist-socialists, and other anticlerical organisations and sung at their reunions—men who refused to acknowledge the infinitely good God cracking their cheeks with the terror of their worship of the Evil One. Such was the achievement which put the name of Carducci in the public mouth. Fame? 'As much like fame' (to quote Beaconsfield's 'Venetia') 'as a toadstool is like a truffle'.

The Old Bible-in-schools

Werenfels, a Protestant theologian, was the author of the famous Latin distich which says of the Bible:—

'Hic liber est in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque;
Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua.'

The well-packed Latin of this historic saying finds diluted expression in the following English versified translation:—

'Within one Book each seeks to read
The tenets of his private creed.
And, strange to tell, each reads so well,
The selfsame words all doctrines spell.'

It is not in the nature of things that a Book which so many hundreds of conflicting religious bodies regard as their creed-document could be taught in State schools without sectarian bias. Even with the best intentions, teachers could not well avoid coloring even their 'literary, historical, and ethical explanations' with their own beliefs or 'unbelief. The Royal Commissioner's Report on Religious Instruction in Victoria contains abundant evidence of the flagrant manner in which the religious rights of minorities may be violated with impunity during Scripture instruction. And this in the very teeth of an Act of Parliament and under the mock 'protection' of the very conscience clause that was offered as a magnanimous concession to Catholic and Jewish susceptibilities in New Zealand. The results of introducing the Protestant version of the Bible into the public schools of the United States were described as follows in the course of an editorial article in the 'Biblical World' (a Protestant magazine), in its issue of October, 1902:—

'Protestant teachers taught the Bible in a way that antagonised the Roman Catholics; and teachers of the several Protestant denominations interpreted the Bible to the children from their own point of view. But the public money which is raised by general taxation for the support of the common schools comes from men of widely differing ecclesiastical creeds and connections, and cannot therefore be used for the dissemination of sectarian tenets'.

This kind of history has an unpleasant trick of repeating itself. The success of the movement for clapping the white 'choker' on our State teachers would speedily have resulted in the utilisation of our public schools 'for the dissemination of sectarian tenets' and the teaching of the Bible in a way that would antagonise very many besides 'Roman Catholics.' That political movement put up its handsomest performance when it drew its last breath. And little, if any, craze has been worn to its memory.

The New Bible-in-Schools

The clerical leaders of the old and now happily defunct Bible-in-schools movement were firm believers in personal effort and sacrifice for God's little men and maids at school. But they as firmly believed that 'the other fellow' (the State teacher, to wit) should put forth all the effort and make all the sacrifice, while they snuggle into their eiderdown cushions and go nod-nodding like the dormouse in 'Alice'—for the glory of the Lord. But there is, thank God, a body of earnest non-Catholic clergy who do not believe in abdicating so elementary a duty of the Christian ministry. We learn from the 'Outlook' of April 6 that they are bent on utilising 'whatever facilities are offered for giving Bible lessons out of school hours.' 'The Ministers' Association at Invercargill,' says our esteemed contemporary, 'have taken this matter up, and are organising so as to reach every public school within their district, all the ministers, including the Anglicans, having signified their willingness to give assistance. So soon as the necessary detail arrangements have been made and the co-operation of head-masters and School Committees secured, there is every reason to hope that regular Bible lessons will be given in each of the public schools at Invercargill. And although one half-hour a week is an infinitesimal amount of time to devote to inculcating the lessons to be learned from the pages of the Book of Books, yet even this is something to be thankful for.' Thus far the 'Outlook.' We may remark incidentally that the Catholic clergy of Invercargill, as well as of the rest of New Zealand, have long been setting an example which deserved earlier and better imitation by the spiritual guides of other faiths. One half hour of religion in the 120 hours of the school-week is indeed 'an infinitesimal' dose of spirituality to a vast bulk of secularity—a small half-penny worth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack. There is (according to an official return presented to the Legislative Assembly on November 2, 1903) one non-Catholic clergyman to every two State schools in New Zealand. From the same official return it appears that only about one in eight of them took the trouble to impart religious instruction to the little members of their flocks in the public schools. The new Bible-in-schools movement will, perhaps, remove that reproach. At any rate, it is a good beginning, and may possibly lead to better things than those engaged in it at present foresee. It took the non-Catholic clergy a long time to find a hole in the Education Act. When found, they spent an unconscionable time in tinkering at it in the wrong way. They may yet find the true remedy for the defect through which Christian belief is last leaking out of their various folds.

The Great Annual Slaughter

A Cincinnati paper once burlesqued the 'greatest-country' boast by claiming that the rivers of the United States are larger, muddier, wetter, deeper, faster, noisier, and more damage-producing than anybody else's rivers; that its rail-cars and steamboats are bigger, longer, and broader, and burst their boilers oftener, and send their passengers higher than in any other country; that its men can fight harder, and shoot straighter and faster, and chew more bad tobacco, and spit fur-