

Current Topics

A Beneficent Institution

Sancho Panza invoked a blessing on the man who invented sleep. Readers of newspapers would—if they did but know—call down the benisons of heaven upon the man who invented the waste basket. It is with

'A sad little sigh
Or a tear in the eye'

that the soft-hearted editor consigns to the willow-sided grave inoffensive contributions that are merely belated or untimely or inappropriate, or the efforts of struggling genius to find expression in verse before it has mastered the simpler art of prose. It is, however, with an unholy joy or a 'saeva indignatio' (fierce indignation) that the religious editor tosses into the office limbo intemperate partisan communications, personal attacks, efforts (open or indirect) to make his columns an arena for the performance of parochial war-hakas, and, generally, all written stuff that should be directed to the corporation tip-tilt or destructor rather than to the bureau of a respectable and responsible newspaper. To the writers of such, we commend the example of Edmund Burke when, in a season of folly, he wrote a play. 'Have you shown it to Garrick?' said Fox. 'No', replied Burke; 'I had indeed the folly to write it, but the wit to keep it to myself'.

'Loyalty'

'What name', asks Vinet (the Swiss Protestant theologian and literary critic) 'shall be given to the citizen who braves the law? The word is easily found; he is seditious, rebellious, in the eyes of the law. But laws themselves are sometimes rebellious to the eternal principles of righteousness'. Such, for instance, is the law which has made the celebration of the Mass a crime ('delit de Messe') in lodge-ridden France. It is not truly a law, but an act of tyranny against the individual conscience, and an outrage upon the eternal rights of God. The rights of conscience are no mere civil grant. They are rights of the Creator, against which no man and no human organisation have any rights. They are rights of the spiritual order, which is anterior and superior to the civil order. They cannot be surrendered. They cannot be taken away. Every Government is bound to respect them by the very law which justifies its own existence. Such so-called laws are (to quote Vinet's words) 'rebellious to the eternal principles of righteousness'. They are 'ultra vires'. Reasoned and proper defiance of them is a meritorious act; for, in the conflict between Christ and anti-Christ, one must rather obey God than man. That is the answer to the Paris 'Matin' and its echoes in London and the echoes of its echoes in New Zealand, which affect much pious indignation with the hierarchy and clergy of France because they have not sufficient 'loyalty' to fall in like dumb dogs with the provisions of the atheistic campaign for the banishment of Christ from that 'machine'-ruled land. Artemus Ward advised Lincoln to fill his Cabinet with showmen—they 'hain't got any principles', said Artemus in explanation. On a somewhat similar principle, Waldeck-Rousseau, Combes, and Clemenceau have packed their Cabinets wholly with the enemies of religion, partly with the foes of social order. The result of their handiwork is before the world—in the grand battue to banish Christ and Christian principles from the land. But in all that revolting campaign against religion, there is nothing more revolting than the hypocritical cant (manufactured for export only) about 'liberty, equality, fraternity'—and 'loyalty' to 'law'.

Inconsistency

There are perhaps few men wholly consistent. Few, for instance, reason out their own systems or theories and carry them to their logical conclusion. They commonly shy to right or left from some point of practice that is too good or too wicked for them to adopt. Even Bill Sikes had sufficient good in him to feel the tortures of remorse. Charles Peace was in his better moments a collector of rare moths. Zola—the philosopher of the sty—in a moment of grace cautioned an inquiring maiden not to read his books. Carducci (to whom we made editorial reference last week) penned, as an insult to the Vatican Council, the lurid blasphemy of the 'Inno a Satana' ('Hymn to Satan'), and popularised devil-worship among the atheistic anarchist-socialist and Freemason factions in Italy. Yet he had his daughters piously brought up in a convent, and in his later days wrote two sweet little poems (recently reproduced in a Roman secular newspaper)—the one a reverent address to the crucifix, the other to 'our tainted nature's solitary boast', the ever-blessed Virgin Mary. Few, it seems, are as good, or as wicked, as the principles they profess. On the other side of the picture we have a clergyman in Melbourne who falls below his principles, and whose professions and practice are as antagonistic to each other as the famous Kilkenny cats. His reverence has temporarily abandoned Pope-baiting for the occupation of anti-gambling detective, which offers a much bigger percentage of red meat to the risks of the game. The intolerable 'tote' and Tattersall scandals in Melbourne afforded, in good sooth, sufficient material for the moral reformer. The methods of reformation selected by our No-Popery friend across the water were, however, hardly in keeping with the principles of one in whose eyes every form of wager is a grave moral deordination. His reverence (says the 'Sydney Morning Herald') 'got men into the club and "tote" to make bets, so as to procure evidence to support that given by the police'. There are evidently some pious and well-meaning people who hold to the principle formulated by Dr. Martin Luther (and falsely attributed to the Jesuits) that a good end or object justifies the use of what they consider sinful means.

Some Quacks

A number of people up Christchurch way have been tasting quackery, and it has made them very sick. 'Brass-faced, vociferous, voracious' are the terms which Carlyle applies to all the tribe of medical quacks. The postal authorities have lately been refusing to deliver letters or packets to some of those irregular practitioners in Christchurch, and the 'Press' has been publishing matter that is calculated to scare the lacquer off the brazen faces of the Canterbury charlatans. A patient (Mr. C. Brown) who is lying near death in the Christchurch Hospital tells a story to the following effect in the 'Press' of April 12: He is a worker with a large family. Some time ago he placed himself in the hands of a quack, 'a very pious, soft-spoken, individual'. A cure was verbally guaranteed; 'it is God you will have to thank for it', quoth the quack. Regular fee, £20; reduced charge for this special case, six guineas; and (said the 'curer') 'I do not think you will be a day from work'. Gnawing acids were repeatedly applied to the patient's lips (the seat of the trouble) and down his throat. He went almost delirious with agony; 'the burned flesh and skin dropped off'; and it was three weeks before the sufferer could return to work. The trouble recurred. The patient returned. Three more guineas were demanded for fresh treatment. The patient asked about that guarantee. Thereupon the 'very pious and soft-spoken' quack refreshed himself with some very emphatic profanity. In the end, however, he fobbed the three extra guineas, started another 'cure', scorched and blistered his patient, and kept him out of action for another three weeks. Financial result of the whole 'cure': the

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