

## Current Topics

### Bible-in-schools

Panurge, in Rabelais' fantastic work, once got the father and mother of a roasting from a Turkish Bashaw. But (said he to Pantagruel) 'this roasting cured me entirely of a sciatica, whereunto I had been subject above seven years before, upon that side which my roaster, by falling asleep, suffered to be burnt'. During the past twelve days or more, the remnant of the Bible-in-schools party have been getting a rather severe rib-roasting from politicians and from the secular press of the Dominion. It will probably cure them, for some considerable time to come, of their desire to capture the public schools for sectarian purposes. The latest application of blistering comment comes from Christchurch 'Truth'. It says in part:—

'After many hopeless efforts to come to some common understanding they have got down to this' that the Bible should be read as a classic, presumably in the same fashion as any secular literature. But the very fact that it had to be read at stated times, and apparently as a preliminary to the day's work, shows that the whole idea of the "Bible as a classic" is a subterfuge and a device to conceal the ulterior object of the Bible-in-schools party. If ministers of religion were actuated by any genuine desire to get hold of the children in the day schools and impart to them a knowledge of the principles of Christianity, there is nothing to prevent them doing so, and most school committees and teachers would gladly co-operate by encouraging the children to come half an hour earlier for the purpose. But the Bible-in-schools advocate rarely betrays any desire to add to his duties; he would rather thrust them on to the shoulders of the unfortunate school teacher, who has plenty to do already for the inadequate pay that is the reward of his services.'

'But it will come back to us again', says a Northern religious contemporary. It will come back, we ween, as from the wars came back Malbrouck in the old French popular song. The comforter spoke to the lady that watched from the tower-top for the home-coming of her warrior-lord:—

'Il.  
Reviendra a Paques,  
Ou a la Trinite'

('He will return, lady, by Easter, or at latest by Trinity day'). But his place knew him never again; his fate was that of the fair one who—in the old Virginny plantation chorus quoted by Burnand—'never came back no more'.

### 'Marked Success'

In its issue of October 31, the Wellington 'Evening Post' has the following editorial remarks regarding a non-Catholic missionary who is raising funds in New Zealand for the erection of ecclesiastical buildings in Buenos Aires (Argentina). The visitor 'who takes up the collection', says the 'Post', 'is a New Zealander who has had "marked success" there as an evangelist—such success that he comes back and asks for £3000 for building purposes. . . . To our mind the demand savors of unreasoning importunity. If the evangelist's work is really a "success" he should be able to raise funds on the spot.'

### A Cruel Fashion

In early New England the Puritan leaders regulated female attire by law. They considered long hair unscriptural, preached down wigs and veils, and condemned as inventions of Satan the jewels and farthingales and other feminine frippery with which ungodly women used to decorate themselves outside New England. The sternly honest and uncompromising Pilgrim Fathers and their early descendants erred, indeed, on the side of severity. But circumstances occasionally arise which call for the existence of a censorship of fashion as well as for a censorship of plays and books.

We allude in particular to the needless slaughter of egrets, which within the past few weeks has been taking place on a big scale along the banks of the Murray, in Australia. Melbourne papers tell a pitiful tale of the wholesale destruction of those beautiful and harmless herons for the sake of the plumes which adorn them in the nesting season, and which are sold for the decoration of the head-gear of ladies who follow the cruel fashion of the time. And the slaughter of the parent birds causes, in turn, the slow and agonising death of tens of thousands of their callow fledgelings.

Fashion has been a Bajazet, a Tamerlane, a Zenghis Khan—all rolled into one—for the feathered tribe. Happily, the wholesale slaughter of birds for the adornment of feminine hats, bonnets, and toques has somewhat abated—if we may judge by our observations in New Zealand. The massacre of the feathered innocents seemed to have reached its height just ten years ago. At that time the Congress of American Ornithologists stated that England alone imported about 25,000,000 a year, and Europe about 300,000,000. Lovely woman and her fashions are responsible for the almost complete extinction of some of the most beautiful and interesting feathered tenants of the world's forests and streams. 'We may smile at fashion', says a recent writer, 'and even admire her, so long as she is not cruel; but beauty grows barbarous instead of angelic when it forgets to be kind and womanly'. According to an eye-witness of the slaughter of the egrets, writing in the Melbourne 'Age',

'It is not possible to conceive of anything more horribly brutal and barbarous than the methods employed that may enable one of the gentler sex to become the possessor of an "egret plume." Surely no woman worthy of the name can have any idea of the fiendish cruelty and pitiable suffering that must ensue ere she can become the possessor of such a bauble. Our civilisation is but a veneer, and a thin one at that, or trade in such ghastly relics would not be possible.'

We make merry at Catullus writing a poem to soothe the grief of his pagan lady-love for the loss of her pet sparrow. But the pagan lassie had at least heart enough to regret the death of her feathered friend. In one at least of its aspects, modern fashion has far less feeling.

### Two Duels

In England, duelling was almost as much a matter of course as shaving and gambling, from the Restoration to the Revolution. It flourished exceedingly throughout the eighteenth century, and died a hard death in the nineteenth. Good, wholesome ridicule—hot, strong, and plentiful—did most in the way of choking off duelling. Especially was this true of the ridicule of the dramatists, who harped upon the comic side of duelling, and made the public diaphragm shake with laughter at the antics of the swashbucklers in 'The Corsican Brothers', and of Bob Acres, and of Mansie Waugh, the Musselburgh tailor. The last duel—at least the last fatal one—fought in England, took place, we think, between Colonel Fawcett and Lieutenant Munro (brothers-in-law), in 1843. On Continental Europe the folly has still a great hold. Last week, after the close of the 'Peace' Conference, two of the delegates settled a little 'point of honor' with 'pistols for two and coffee for one'. The sense of humor in the combatants showed poor development. However, the encounter was of the harmless character that is supposed to distinguish French political duels, and both valiants have the consolation of knowing that they 'may live to fight another day' an equally bloodless duel.

What is called 'a remarkable duel' is reported to have taken place in Naples a few weeks ago. Here is how it is described in a London daily paper:—

'It arose out of a quarrel between two Neapolitan aristocrats, to settle which a duel was arranged. When, however, the combatants were facing each other sword