

Current Topics

Court of Criminal Appeal

The brief lines cabled to these countries regarding the first sitting of the Court of Criminal Appeal a few days ago, indicate an important improvement in British criminal law. Within living memory, jurors were, under British law, allowed to act as witnesses in criminal cases; till a comparatively recent date no provision was made for the defence of prisoners unable to procure it for themselves; and the right of defence throughout the entire trial, even on a capital charge, was not recognised at law till the year (1837) in which the late Queen Victoria ascended the throne. The world keeps moving. And though near in time, we are far in feeling from the methods that obtained in the days of 'Satanides' Carhampton, or even in those of such eminent advocates of criminal law reform as Romilly and Mackintosh.

'A Little Help'

We have a profound respect for the few Protestant clerical and lay workers who expend time and thought and personal effort to bring the knowledge of Christ and of His law to the children that sit in the darkness and the shadow of death of a secular or secularist system of public instruction. But there are many others who, like David Harum's second 'equine wonder', don't lay hold on our affections to the same extent. We refer to the easy-chair clerical 'bodies' who wake up at conference-time or on the approach of general elections and slay the secularity of 'the system' with their mouths. Then they fall back into the cushions again, and so far as the active work of the religious instruction of the little men and maids at school is concerned, remain in a state of suspended animation till another synod or conference or assembly comes around, or a general election stirs them from their long hibernation. And then their waking is as that of the dormouse of 'Alice in Wonderland'.

Auckland and Gisborne and a few other places have recently been furnishing us with some examples of the active and many of the dormouse variety of those who deplore the lack of religious training in our schools. The latter remind one of Thackeray's story of the unhappy Werther and of the phlegmatic Charlotte:—

'Werther had a love for Charlotte
Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter'.

Werther 'sighed and pined and ogled' in vain, till one day 'he blew his silly brains out'.

'Charlotte, having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter,
Like a well-conducted person,
Went on cutting bread and butter'.

Amidst the havoc wrought by lack of due religious instruction, so many of our clerical friends of the separated creeds are content to go on serenely 'cutting bread and butter' as if the matter were no particular concern of theirs—waiting on in the vain hope that public officials may some day or other be forced to shoulder this elementary duty of the Christian ministry. There is not, after all, so very much to choose between fiddling over the burning ruin of a city and merely talking, talking, talking over the spiritual ruin that comes to children brought up in ignorance of the teachings and the duties of religion. That sort of periodical talk passes (to use Carlyle's phrase) like the snowflake on the river or the foam of penny beer. The old French couplet hath it that

'Un chevalier, n'en doutez pas,
Doigt ferir hault, et parler bas'—

a knight of the cross should speak soft but strike hard—work much and talk little. 'Ah, thank'ee, neighbor', said a perspiring sheep-drover to one who 'shoo'd' away his flock from going down a wrong road; 'thank'ee—a little help is worth a deal of pitying talk'. Heaven's blessing be upon those of our separated brethren that run and toil to 'shoo' the lambs of Christ's flock from wandering down the wrong road! And may wisdom come to those who sit with folded arms and periodically talk pitying platitudes to the winds, when they ought to be giving a 'little help' to keep the 'little flock' on the narrow road that leads to Life!

Anti-treating

In 'The Maltworm's Madrigal', Austin Dobson tells of the love-lorn beer-swiller who drank of the ale of Southwark and drank of the ale of Chepe, and paid vain court to 'sweet Alison', who greeted his coming with a 'Te-Hee!' and a

'Fye on thy ruddy nose, cousin! Why be thine eyes so small?
Why go thy legs lap-tappety, like men that fear to fall?
Why is thy leathern doublet besmeared with stain and spot?
Go to! Thou art no man (she saith)—thou art a pottle-pot!'

Nowadays the 'why' of the ruddy nose, and the stained doublet, and the legs that go lap-tappety, is largely to be sought in the familiar 'speech at the bar'—'the same again': in the treating (or, in colonial, 'shouting') habit that, as Mr. Kettle, S.M., some time ago denounced as 'the curse of the country'. We sadly need in this country an organisation like that which, under the title of the Anti-treating League, is doing so much for the cause of temperance in the Green Isle. 'The anti-treating movement', said Archbishop Christie, of Oregon, a few weeks ago, 'is the most practicable temperance reform that has been set on foot in this country. It must commend itself to every thinking person. It combines in itself two elements which give it value. In the first place it is a moderate movement. Hence it should be easily introduced. There are several countries of Europe in which the treating habit is unknown. There is nothing visionary in the hope that it may become obsolete here. In the second place, the anti-treating remedy applies the remedy to the real source of the drink evil. It is useless to deny that the social glass is responsible for most of the drunkenness and wasteful expenditure of money connected with the liquor traffic. The social glass is the curse of the young man who has to make his way in the world. It leads him, out of human respect, to contract the habit of drink—it leads him to excess in the use of intoxicants. It fosters prodigality in spending. I am convinced that the treating habit is responsible for the ruin of thousands of young men whose prospects for life were of the highest.'

Pineal Gland Religion

It is one thing to wear religion as a Sunday coat, quite another thing to be steeped with it to marrow-bone and pineal gland. We try to infuse the pineal-gland form of religion into the girls and boys and hobbledahys at school, to steep them at school in a religious atmosphere, and not to make religion a matter of one or two half-hours a week. Our co-religionists in (say) Belgium and the Tyrol do the same, and the result is seen in the daily lives of the people—a result which we in these countries, where we are a small minority in a population of very mixed religious beliefs, can hardly hope ever fully to attain. 'I know nothing', says a travelled writer in 'St. Anthony's Monthly' (American), 'that saddens me more than to return to our country after having been a little while in Belgium or Tyrol. There the poor people seem so wonderfully to live in the presence of