

## Current Topics

### Cage or Bird?

'They who pink and pamper the body, and neglect the soul, are,' says Sir Matthew Hale (in his *Contemplations, Moral and Divine*), 'like one who, having a nightingale in his house, is more fond of the cage than of the bird.'

### No Backbone

Friend or employer can put little trust in the Catholic young man who, in the presence of persons of other creeds, is so spineless as to be ashamed of, or apologetic for, the faith which should be his glory and his pride. To sup with Satan you need a long spoon; and you need to keep your weather-eye lifting if you have dealings with a young man who has so little backbone that he can be wagged about by a bulrush or a straw.

### The 'Yellow Peril'

There may be a measure of 'yellow peril' for us in the placid, slant-eyed son of the Hwa-Kwo (Flowery Kingdom) or in his voluminously active neighbor from the other side of the Sea of Japan. But the peril is not so urgent as other 'yellow perils' that we wot of. Such, for instance, are the 'yellow' journal and the 'yellow' book of fiction. One of our secular contemporaries has recently been uttering a sharp note of warning about some of the vile fiction that is now being dumped upon the shores of New Zealand and indiscriminately exposed for sale or placed in the hands of girls and boys and hobbledehoves through the medium of the circulating libraries. Frankland Lewis once said of the serious books of his son George: 'I wish that George couldn't write or that I couldn't read.' A similar remark might well be made regarding some of the vile or suggestive trash that, to our knowledge, has of late been placed within the reach of 'the young person' in some of the larger centres of New Zealand. Much of this more or less foetid rubbish is retailed at sixpence per copy. It would be well for the morals of young people if it were as difficult to procure as the volume of German manuscript sermons for which—in the days before the printing press—the Countess of Anjou paid two hundred sheep, a load of wheat, a load of rye, and a load of millet. Emerson suggested a professorship of books. We badly need something of the kind—say, an extension to fiction of the legalised British censorship of plays, a whip for the backs of the writers of corrupting and degrading fiction, and a snaffle for the publishers and booksellers who act as if the business of money-getting were divorced from conscience and the moral law.

### The 'Battle of the Fourth'

Americans take their pleasures sadly—the day after. At least they do so in connection with their deadly annual celebration of 'the Glorious Fourth' of July, or Independence Day. T. A. Daly, in the *Philadelphia Catholic Standard*, makes a doubting patriot sing of the annual noise and slaughter:—

'Och! the Fourth o' July!  
Shure, I wonder will I  
Ever grow to be glad fur its deafenin' thunder.  
Will the cannon by day  
An' the rocket by night  
Ever whisk me away  
On a spree o' delight?  
Now, I wonder.'

The celebration of Independence Day has been well named 'the Battle of the Fourth'; for there was not a single battle in the South African war that for loss of life and injury to limb can compare with a strenuous celebration of America's Independence Day. The *Chicago Record-Herald* of July 5 gives the following casualty list of the Battle of the Fourth for the past five years:—1903, 466 killed, 3983 wounded; 1904, 183 killed, 3586 wounded; 1905, 182 killed, 4994 wounded; 1906, 158 killed, 5308 wounded; 1907, 164 killed, 4249 wounded. A 'safe and sane' celebration of the great national festival was promised for 1908. In St. Louis the police seized the deadly toy pistols and cannon-crackers, and other death-dealing contraptions and tossed them into the Mississippi. But these were merely local and temporary manifestations of regard for the public safety. Very incomplete returns compiled by the *Chicago Tribune* of July 6 showed (says the *New York Tribune*) that '72 persons

were dead, and 2736 were seriously injured as results of the celebration, while the fire loss amounted to 525,935 dollars. The fact that instead of being concentrated in one place the Fourth of July horrors are distributed over the country makes them none the less dreadful. The case is greatly aggravated by the consideration that these casualties were incurred gratuitously and defiantly, with the record of the past and its warnings in full view, but deliberately disregarded.

### Controversy Then and Now

When Pantagruel went into the Land of Satin, he saw corpulent elephants 'tossing men high into the air in fight, and making them burst with laughing when they came to the ground.' Thanks to the gentler times in which we live, the rough-and-tumble Papist-tossing of the old-time controversy is gone very much out of fashion. In fact, it may be said to be practically confined to the dime-shows of mid-July; and even then it seems to us that the sport is indulged in, not so much for its own sake as for the opportunity it gives to sundry reverend gentlemen of whooping up their diminishing congregations, or of airing old traditions and preventing them falling to pieces through the joint ravages of time and moth and blue-mould.

Butler, in his day of strenuous and ungentle controversy, wrote as follows of the 'apostolic blows and knocks' which fell to the lot of those who were then in the minority:—

'Some have been beaten, till they know  
What wood a cudgel's of by th' blow;  
Some kicked, until they can feel whether  
A shoe be Spanish or neat's leather.'

But the old, knotty war-club of the controversy known to *Hudibras* rests in the museum, or hangs amidst dishonoring cobwebs on the wall—to be taken down in the dog-days, just as uncouth or drunken rustics may still engage, once in a way, at bouts of quarter-stave. The kindlier feeling of our day is well reflected in a recent sermon by the Methodist revivalist preacher, the Rev. 'Billy' Sunday, which we quote from the *Milwaukee Catholic Citizen*. 'Somebody asked me,' said he, 'why I did not attack the Catholics. Not much, while we have so much filth and dirt in our own dooryards. It keeps me busy with a muckrake in the yards of the Baptists and the Methodists and the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists. . . . The Roman Catholic Church is the Church of God and will stand for ages. . . . No, sir, you will never hear a word against the Roman Catholic Church from me. I will rebuke the sins of its members, but you will not hear a word from me against any Church that stands for the word of God and the truth of Jesus Christ. I want you to be Christians. That's all I ask. Go to the priest and confess if you wish. Tell him how mean you have been, and that you will do better. If you are converted at these meetings, I will send your name to the priest if you want to join that Church.'

### Race Suicide

The restricted family and the canary-and-bull-pup household promise to save Germany the trouble of wiping France off the map of the nations of the earth. In 1907 the deaths in France outnumbered the births by 19,920. But while France is lapsing into national degeneracy and decrepitude, the cradles in Germany are filling at the rate of 800,000 a year faster than the coffins. A simple calculation in mathematical progression will suffice to show approximately when France will be no longer fit to 'talk' in the counsels of the ruling Powers, and to back her talk with the big battalions with which she once dictated to Europe and acted as the arbiter of the world. How are the mighty fallen! And how true it is the poetic aphorism of Frederick von Logan, which Longfellow did into English in the well-known lines:—

'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;  
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.'

The *New York Freeman's Journal* has the following editorial remark in connection with France's degeneracy and decay:—

'Since 1800 the death-rate in France has exceeded the birth-rate only on six different occasions, not counting the years 1854 and 1855, when cholera raged and the two years subsequent to the war of 1870-1. The years when the number of deaths exceeded the number of births were subsequent to 1890. They were the very years the enemies of the Church in France were