

Current Topics

Greetings

We return our cordial thanks to the many kind readers, both clerical and lay, throughout New Zealand and Australia and much further afield, who extended their greetings to us on the sweetest feast of all the year. One valued friend—a subscriber of thirty-three years' standing—accompanies a cheery greeting with these encouraging lines: 'I wish the dear old *Tablet* God-speed. If anything were to happen to it, I do not know what we should do without it. We look for it here on Fridays as regularly as we look for fish for our dinner on that day.' With *Coriolanus*, we

'Thank you for your voices—thank you—
Your most sweet voices.'

and we pray that every day of the coming year may, for our readers, be strung together with blessings, like pearls upon a necklet or beads upon a Rosary.

The Holiday Gun

Judging by the newspaper reports, the gun that 'wasn't loaded' has not, this year, slain or maimed as many people as it usually does during the Christmas holidays.

Your Company

A noble lord was once trying to induce Dean Swift to dine with him. Swift was loth and slow. 'Come,' said my lord at length, 'I'll send you my bill of fare.' 'Send me your bill of company,' Swift retorted.

Even in holiday time, our young men and maids should be more particular about their bill of company than their bill of fare.

Aerial Locomotion

According to Wilbur Wright (in an interview with the *Motor* of November 17), the future of flying machines is with armies. 'Every army,' says this record flyer, 'will have, not one, but hundreds of these machines, carrying three or four men and ammunition, and capable of keeping the enemy continually harassed. Naturally,' adds he, 'these machines will take the place of cavalry, and will be very much more effective than that branch of military service.' 'The aeroplane,' says M. Léon Delagrangé, the noted French 'aviator,' 'will undoubtedly be used very extensively in the army; every regiment will have a certain number to be used for scouting and continually harassing the enemy. As a sport, flying will be unique, while for short touring it will be without a rival, for it will make possible a journey from Paris to Marseilles in five or six hours.' And, with the breezy optimism of the enthusiast, M. Delagrangé predicts that the aeroplane will, in the near future, be brought within the reach of 'the man of moderate means.' 'Doubtless,' says he, 'the initial cost will not be more than £160, which will make it one of the cheapest forms of locomotion known, upkeep being confined to the cost of oil and petrol.'

The tussle at present is between the monoplane (single plane) and the multiplane aeroplane. Wright's, Farman's, Delagrangé's, and most other aeroplanes have two planes. But we are told by some of the experts that the future is with the single-planed machine. At present, monoplanes are rather kittle-cattle. M. Blériot believes in the monoplane—under difficulties; for its humors are terribly sudden and incomprehensible. Without visible provocation it stops its upward or level glide; dives earthward; breaks its wings, and slams, hammers, and bangs its rider against the mother from which he sprung. The other day it almost shivered his timbers and nearly pounded his brains out. The flight is right; but the alighting—there's the rub! M. Blériot's experiences remind us of Uncle Remus's story of the terrapin (tortoise) that wanted the buzzard (falcon) to teach him to fly. 'He had seen Brer Buzzard sailing in the air, and he thought he could sail, too. So he persuaded Brother Buzzard to take him on his back and give him a start. This was done. Brother Buzzard carried Brother Tarrypin in the air and dropped him. He fell, plunk, and nearly killed himself. He was very angry with Brother Buzzard, not because he failed to fly, but because Brother Buzzard failed to show him how to light. Says he: "Flyin' is easy as fallin', but I don't speck I kin learn how to light." If you don't know what this

means, ask some grown-up person. Before you begin to fly, be sure and learn how to light.'

Yet, despite his bumps, M. Blériot is confident that 'in five years there will be thousands of aeroplanes in use,' and that 'they will go everywhere.' M. Henri Deutsch de la Meurthe predicts that the present century will be 'the century of the air.' All the world wondered when, at the end of 1906, Santos Dumont made his sensational balloon flights over Paris. A new era was opened when Farman covered a kilometre (about two-thirds of a mile) at Issy in January, 1908. Then Delagrangé 'went one better,' and covered four kilometres on the same ground. The aeroplane, as an effective flying machine, is of the year 1908. What the future may bring, it is impossible to say. But there are big possibilities in those wonderful French petrol motors that weigh only three and a half pounds per horse-power—with the hope of a turbine petrol motor that will turn the scale at as low as one pound, or even less, per horse-power. Yet, the dangers of the aeroplane, the high degree of skill required in its management, its inability to stand the stress of storms, the necessity of starting apparatus (such as falling weights) or a preliminary run over the ground, and the difficulties of landing-places and of housing, will, we rather think, for many years make the aeroplane the luxury of the few rather than the flying car of the many.

An Apt Argument

Dean Phelan, V.G., of Melbourne, has been 'sizing up' the recurrent agitation that is once more wagging its tongue in Victoria with a view to the capture of the public school system for sectarian purposes. 'We are told,' says the Dean, 'that there is no possible danger [from the introduction of Protestant Biblical instruction and Protestant forms of prayer during school hours], for there will be a "conscience clause" exempting the teachers who object and the children whose parents object. Well, without enlarging on the difficulties in the working of such a system, or relating how ineffective a similar clause proved in protecting the Irish Catholic children in the early days of the present national system, I will call your attention to this fact: If the proposed lessons are so harmless as we are assured, what is the need of a "conscience clause"? Why is the red flag raised on the railway line, or why does the electrician use an insulator when handling wires charged with electricity? As a protection from certain danger. The conscience clause gives away the whole case—it shows that the State is introducing a system which contains in itself an element of danger to the consciences of some of its children, whose parents are forced to pay for this very poison.'

The Education Question

Our esteemed local contemporary, the *Otago Daily Times*, is apparently convinced that our education system is entirely neutral in regard to religion. But is the system really neutral? What is its attitude towards religion? So far as the system is concerned, it simply ignores religion; it trains 'the young idea' to pass a notable portion of its most impressionable years (as secularists and agnostics do) without the thought of God or of moral obligation arising from God's law. But this is, in practical effect, the attitude of the secularist and the agnostic; it represents, so far as religion is concerned, the ideal of education that the secularist and the agnostic would put into operation for their children; and, no doubt, the system is, for this small section of our population, entirely satisfactory. The system is professedly secular; it is in practice, so far as it goes, secularist and agnostic. And the matter is in no way affected by the fact that the system so far condescends to the prejudices of a Christian people as to graciously print the name of God (where it has at times to be introduced in literary extracts) with a capital G, or that it mercifully permits religious instruction to be given to the children within the school buildings. For the God, of the system (even though His name be spelled with a capital G) may—so far as the system is concerned—be a dingy Baal or Mumbo-Jumbo, or a mere figment of the imagination. As to the religious instruction: it is not (so far as the law goes) permitted during the time that the system is in progress—that is, within school hours. When the system begins operations, the Almighty must move out; and He is barred and bolted out until the system has packed up its bag and gone its way. Like secularism and agnosticism, the system has no God, and no moral law whose sanction is of God. And yet we are asked to suppose that it is neutral, and holds the balance evenly as between creed and creed—between religion and non-religion!

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