

Current Topics

Secular v. Religious Education

On the next two pages of this issue will be found the fifth of the series of articles which the editor of the *N.Z. Tablet* is contributing to the *Otago Daily Times* (Dunedin) on 'The Secular Phase of our Education System.' The article here reprinted appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of last Saturday, February 6. It deals with the second part of the 'Argument from Results'—namely, 'Catholic Schools and Crime Statistics.'

The Apostolate of the Press

In its current (February) issue, our gifted contemporary, the *Austral Light* (Melbourne) pays the *New Zealand Tablet* the high compliment of placing it 'in the front rank amongst Catholic weekly newspapers.' On the broad question of Catholic journalism generally the *Light* publishes these illuminating remarks: 'A Catholic newspaper is not a mere purveyor of news and record of tittle-tattle. Almost every public question has an aspect favorable or otherwise to the Church, and the Catholic paper should declare the Catholic standpoint. It has to expose fallacies, to give warning of danger, to answer objections, to meet difficulties, to suggest remedies, to explain principles, to advocate Catholic interests in every department of social life, to attack when attack is needed, to defend when danger presses at any point, to support the action of the Church authorities, and to uphold the principles of Christian morality. This is the noble mission of the Catholic press.' The *Light* then adds: 'Though the newspaper is ephemeral, and though each copy has a butterfly existence, the general effect is persistent, for week after week the influence is renewed. It reaches where the priest cannot touch, instructs where the priest cannot teach, and brings back Catholic tone and Catholic feeling where the seed has been sown, but is still waiting for development. This is truly an apostolate.'

The Earthquake Again

An Auckland correspondent sends us a cutting from some unstated paper. It contains a brief paragraph in which a preacher is reported to have described the recent earthquakes in Sicily and Calabria as a 'visitation' upon the hapless people of those regions for their sin of adherence to the 'superstitions' of 'Rome.' Of course the Almighty might now, as in the past, employ natural forces for the punishment of sinners. But, in the first place, it is rather a large assumption that belief in the teachings and principles of the Catholic Church is a sin at all, much less the sort of sin that demands a big earthquake for its punishment. In the second place, if the Almighty were to punish 'Romish' belief in this or any such way, it is rather hard to understand how that belief came unscathed through the ages, and how it is still the numerically greatest in its adherents, and the most powerful religious influence upon the face of our planet. Again: it is by no means clear that the preacher aforesaid is on button-holing terms with the Almighty, and in the secret of His intimate councils. Moreover, there is this rather obvious explanation of it all: that the Sicilians and the Calabrians built their cities and towns upon a quaky area, where the thin, mobile surface of the earth is more than usually subject to the bangs and bumps of the great seismic forces that are at work below. People who go to war must not be surprised if a bullet finds a billet in them now and then; those who went to Hamburg a few years ago know that they took cholera risks; people who build houses in earthquake areas, whether in Tarawera or Messina, must not be surprised if the quakes quake under them now and then. And Providence must not be lightly expected to save them by a special interposition from the risks which they run.

There are other and more humane and more merciful lessons to be derived from the great Sicilian-Calabrian calamity than the making a peg of it upon which to hang a string of question-begging attacks upon the oldest and greatest Christian faith. How curiously, in this matter of public calamities, history repeats itself! Among the pagan Roman populace in the days when Christianity was emptying the temples of Jove and Minerva and the rest of the Olympians, every catastrophe that occurred was pronounced by the preachers and the populace of the day to be due to the presence of the Nazarene enemies of the gods. 'If the Tiber ascends to the walls,' said the contemporary Tertullian (*Apol.*, xl.), 'or if the Nile does not overflow the fields, if the heaven refuses its rain, if the earth quakes, if famine and pestilence desolate the land, immediately the cry is raised: "The Christians to

the lions!"' In a later day, St. Cyprian could write in the same strain in his letter against Demetrian, and Arnobius in the first book of his *Apologia*. St. Augustine (*de Civitate Dei*, ii., 3) could write that the following saying became a proverb among the pagans of Rome in his time (the fifth century): 'There is no rain; the Christians are the cause.' And Locky tells us in his *History of European Morals* (12th ed., vol. ii., p. 408) that 'in three or four instances the persecution of the Christians may be distinctly traced to the fanaticism produced in the pagan mind by earthquakes. It is a curious comment on the enlightenment of our time to find clergymen echoing from the Christian pulpit against Catholics in the calamities of to-day practically the same crude illogicalities that were hurled by pagans at our fathers in the faith during the catastrophes of fifteen to eighteen centuries ago. And yet 'the world do move.'

Lo! The Poor Toper

Some of the American States have an emphatic way of dealing with the toppers who, like Artemus Ward, never allow business to interfere with their drinking habits. They act upon an old principle of British law which allowed every dog one free bite—the overloaded toper was allowed to go free for just once, on signing a pledge against 'sperichus and fomented lickers.' At the next and subsequent offences the law hit him at high velocity—somewhat as it does in Switzerland, where the life of the tippler and the loafer is made a burden to him until he reforms his ways. Our own Habitual Inebriates Act (we are not quite sure of the title) offers the drunkard a deterrent degree of loss of liberty, together with the chance of bracing up and reforming while an unwilling lodger upon the island of Pakatoa. We have heard of a sad toper—

'One part whisky, three parts mud,
The kind that chews the devil's cud,
And chews it to excess'—

who 'swore off' permanently on seeing a tear from the eye of his long-suffering wife fall into the glass of beer which he had forced her to fill out for him. The *Ave Maria* quotes from the *Madras Catholic Watchman* the following story of 'a wife who had suffered all things at the hands of a drunken husband': 'When he became sober no one could convince him that he was a beast when drunk, and that his face was stamped with idiocy. So the wife took lessons in photography, and photographed him, taking one snapshot after another during the hours of idiotic drunkenness. Grown sober, in one of his better hours the man received twenty photographs of himself taken in hours of debauchery. Then fear came upon the man; horror overwhelmed him; in utter disgust he revolted against himself. The sunshine had drawn his portrait in hideous lines. The public portrayal of himself, as he was when drunk, shocked the man into sobriety.'

The young, above all, who are wise will eschew alike the false joy and the meticulous wit that come of looking at the wine when it is red. Some years ago there appeared in the *Boston Pilot* a quatrain which is replete alike with wit and wisdom:

'He drank of wine that he might gain in wit,
As do the fools who have small share of it;
Another, with more wit, kept simpler fare,
Having enough to know he'd none to spare.'

'Priest-ridden'

'It is constantly said of the Irish,' says the noted English author, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in his latest work (*Orthodoxy*), 'that they are impractical. But if we refrain for a moment from looking at what is said about them, and look at what is done by them, we shall see that the Irish are not only practical, but quite painfully successful. The poverty of their country, the minority of their members, are simply the conditions under which they were asked to work; but no other group in the British Empire has done so much with such conditions. The Nationalists were the only minority that ever succeeded in twisting the whole British Parliament sharply out of its path. The Irish peasants are the only poor men in these islands who have forced their masters to disgorge. These people, whom we call priest-ridden, are the only Britons who will not be squire-ridden.'

The Home's Chief Blessing

'If you have got a real good wife,' remarks Josh Billings in one of his *Sayings*, 'keep perfectly still, and thank God every twenty minnits for it.' The spelling may be wrong, but the sentiment is right. In a biography of that great American, Benjamin Franklin, a story is told of a sunny soul whose constant flow of good spirits was