

New Zealand Herald

TWENTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION.

VOL. XXVIII.—No. 4.

DUNEDIN: THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1900.

PRICE 6D.

Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

CATHOLIC NUNS AND THE WAR.

DURING the great American Civil War a wounded officer was brought to a hospital at Obanninville. It was under the charge of the Sisters of Mercy. The officer was a Protestant. A thick, rugged bark of prejudice had grown round his heart, and for some time he viewed the Sisters with a suspicion and dislike which—for an officer—he took wondrous little trouble to conceal. 'Call them Sisters?' said he to a fellow-patient. 'Sisters! No! They're not sisters of mine, and I should be sorry they were.' 'I tell you,' was the reply, 'you'll find them as good as sisters in the hour of need.' 'I don't believe it,' was the sour reply. And there the matter dropped. But he came to believe it, after all. The unfailing patience and gentleness and kindness and self-sacrifice of those model nurses reached his honest heart at last through the hard prejudice that had grown round it from his boyhood. Under their gentle care he recovered from a dangerous wound. The day he left the hospital, sound in body, but with an altered mind, though still a staunch Protestant, he said to his other fellow-patient: 'Look here! I was always an enemy to the Catholic Church. I was led to believe that these Sisters were all bad. But when I get out of this I'll be—darned if I don't knock the first man head over heels that dares to say a word against the Sisters in my presence.' And he went his ways.

Well, the Sisters are doing the same grand work for the British soldier where the bullets sing and the shells fall in Mafeking and Kimberley and Ladysmith. And there is not a fighting-man within or without the redoubts that displays more nerve and pluck than they when the 'Long Toms' of the Boers are at work. Under the heading 'Splendid Example of the Nuns,' the *London Times* of December 2 pays a tribute to the bravery of the Sisters at Mafeking and their unflinching devotion to duty. The news was from its Mafeking correspondent, and was dated November 18. 'The convent,' he writes, 'has been hit eight times. The nuns refuse to leave their post beyond taking refuge in the bomb-proof shelter adjoining the convent. These heroic sisters take their share in the hard work, making and distributing coffee and tea to the neighbouring redans. Their gallant conduct has set a magnificent example.' In a previous issue we told how the 13 Sisters of Nazareth at Johannesburg remained behind of their own free will and accepted the risks of war and famine among a demoralised population made up chiefly of uncivilised Kaffirs, with a dangerous sprinkling of low whites—and all this for the sake of ministering to and protecting to the best of their power their 700 to 800 helpless charges: orphans and aged poor of all creeds, and nearly all of them British subjects. A cable message dated December 3 was received by the Mother-General at Hammersmith: 'Sister and charges in excellent health; sufficient provisions.' This is news indeed. For famine, with its 'sharp and meagre face,' was the spectre that haunted the daylight thoughts and the nightly dreams both of the Sisters who remained behind for sweet charity's sake, and of the others who stayed in Johannesburg because they could not find the means of flitting. But the gentle Sisters had long ago touched the rugged heart of the official Boer, and after the war had broken out, 'the Government of the South African Republic,' says the *London Tablet* of December 9, 'gave them the welcome announcement that it would afford them supplies if their own failed.' And against this good deed no voice has been raised in all the land of the Boers. Hard upon this comes from France the news that the Monthyen prize for heroic endurance in nursing the sick has been presented to a Catholic nun by M. Brunetiere, of the French Academy. Were Monthyen prizes the rule elsewhere, what a wealth of awards would fall to those noble Sisters who are engaged in the beautiful, if repulsive, work of nursing the victims of yellow-

fever at New Orleans or Memphis, and gently tending the lepers in the Seychelles and Burmah and British Guiana and in that fearsome island of death that Charles Warren Stoddard's book has left photographed upon our mind—lonely Molokai! And all this—in South Africa as elsewhere—without fee or reward, but for Christ's sweet sake alone.

And these are the people the pious Joseph Slattery—after being dismissed by his bishop for intemperance and imprisoned at Pittsburg for the sale of indecent literature—and the female impostor who accompanies him on the dollar-grabbing tour, are now denouncing in Auckland (for so much per night) as monsters of phenomenal wickedness! Oh, the shame of it! For 'who is it,' says freethinking editor Braun of the *Texas Iconoclast*, 'that visits the slums of our great cities, ministering to the afflicted, comforting the dying, reclaiming the fallen? When pestilence sweeps over the land and mothers desert their babes and husbands their wives, who is it that presses the cup of cold water to the feverish lips and closes the staring eyes of the deserted dead? Who is it that went upon the Southern battlefields to minister to the wounded soldier, followed them to the hospitals and tenderly nursed them back to life? The Roman Catholic Sisterhoods. God bless them! One of those angels of mercy can walk unattended and unharmed through our "Reservation" at midnight. She can visit with impunity the most degraded dive in the Whitechapel district. At her coming the ribald song is stilled, and the oath dies on the lips of the loafer. Fallen creatures reverently touch the hem of her garment, and men, steeped in crime to the very lips, involuntarily remove their hats as a tribute to noble womanhood. The very atmosphere seems to grow sweet with her coming, and the howl of all hell's demons is silent. None so low in the barrel house, the gambling den, or the brothel, as to breathe a word against her good name; but when we turn to the Baptist pulpit, there we find an inhuman monster, clad in God's livery, crying, "Unclean! Unclean!" God help a religious denomination that will countenance such an infamous cur!'

WOMEN ON THE FIELD.

CATHOLIC Sisters neither look for nor desire any recognition of their services to the State. But the devoted services of Catholic nuns in attending to the sick and wounded soldiers in South Africa reminds us that Great Britain is more chary than France in her recognition of gallant services rendered to the country by women in time of war. During the Crimean War the newspapers sang hosannas to Miss Nightingale. They almost completely ignored the splendid services rendered to Tommy Atkins by the Sisters of Mercy—for even then the country had scarcely recovered its sanity after the no-Popery fury and the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill of a few years before. But in France women, as well as men, are eligible for the magic red band of the Legion of Honour. M. Aleson's records of the Legion, published in 1889, tells us that up to that time thirty-four women had received the decoration. Among them were several who had been carried into the ranks by the war-fever and distinguished themselves for gallantry upon the field. One of these was Virginie Guesquiere. She took the place of a brother who was unable to endure the hardships of the military life, enlisted in the 27th regiment of the line, fought like a tigress, and attained the rank of sergeant. Another was a Belgian amazon named Marie Schelling. She distinguished herself at Austerlitz, was wounded twice at Jena, and received no fewer than six sabre-cuts at Jemmapes. She rose to the rank of sub-lieutenant in 1806. Two years later Napoleon, with his own hand, decorated her with the cross of the Legion of Honour, and at the same time gave her the more substantial recognition of a State pension. But the best woman's work done on the battle-field was not that of such slashing and slaying amazons as Guesquiere and Schelling. The Sisters of Charity and similar religious Orders do a vastly greater service to their country in the military hospitals or on the battle-field than that abnor-

The "ANGLO SPECIAL" Cycle

Is absolutely the Best Colonial-built Cycle. B. S. A. and Co. Parte. Prices: Gent's, £21; Lady's, £22. Call and

see them. THE ANGLO-NEW ZEALAND CYCLE CO., 6 PRINCES STREET.