

conscious abuse. It has been again and again brought to our knowledge that the book-prize system of the State schools has been made the means of placing in the hands of Catholic children some of the most strongly flavored controversial literature of ultra-Protestantism. We protest against such a thing as being essentially wrong and unfair, and as being, when done intentionally, an unspeakably mean proceeding.

The Dunedin branch of the Catholic Federation have just submitted to us a prize book which was presented to a Catholic child in December last at the Wendon State School, Southland. It is a gold-lettered, gaudily upholstered work of fiction entitled *Gallant Sir John*, and is published by that aggressively Protestant association, the Religious Tract Society. The book is virulently no-Popery in character, is markedly controversial in its purpose, and was written with the evident aim of arousing in the young mind a hatred of 'Romanism,' and a contempt for the sacraments, practice, and characteristic doctrines and devotions of the Catholic Church. The 'Gallant Sir John' of the title is Sir John Oldcastle, or Lord Cobham, a prominent leader of the Lollards in the years following the death of Wyclif, who, having been convicted of being concerned in plots to carry off the King, was put to death as a traitor. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Art. 'Oldcastle'), the evidence of his guilt was conclusive, and his condemnation was entirely justified according to the universally recognised law against traitors. Needless to say, that is not the version of his history which is set forth in this sumptuous presentation volume. It is an established fact that Sir John Oldcastle was the original of the Sir John Falstaff of Shakespeare, and that in his youth he was the boon companion of Prince Hal in all his wild carousals. But the guileless reader of *Gallant Sir John* would never have suspected the fact. 'The story of Lord Cobham,' says the author in his *Preface*, 'offers striking proof of the tenacious hold of personality upon the popular mind. The character that won the hearts of the peasantry of his own day has not lost its fragrance and charm. . . . He stands out clearly as the champion of the Lollard faith. . . . He fell seemingly defeated, as many another reformer has done, but his work lived. Although hidden by the death-struggle of the House of Lancaster, and apparently lost, it was destined to spring into new beauty in the golden dawn of the Reformation.'

As is usual in violently anti-Catholic works of the kind, the author has only two colors in his palette—gold leaf for Oldcastle and his friends, and lamp-black for the monks and friars. The typically Catholic characters are all either cold, deceitful, and cruel, or they are gluttonous, avaricious, and sensual. The Lollard types, on the contrary, are all specimens of the most transcendent holiness and spirituality. The contrast continually conveyed by the author is well illustrated in the following outburst by one Granny Ursula: 'They are the heretics, the false monks and friars; they are the unclean livers and greedy dogs, who make their dwelling-places worse than a sty—they and not holy Master Wycliffe! We had departed from the true path and he led us back to it, as a flock that had gone astray from our good Shepherd. . . . But, bless the Lord, I do not weep now, for my heart singeth for joy, and though my eyes have grown dim my soul is filled with light.' The voice that had sounded almost defiant in its first outbreak had softened, and the aged face glowed under the power of strong emotion, as if the inward light of which she had spoken glowed through a transparency,' etc., etc. Master Arkwright, one of the Lollard preachers, mouths the same amiable, anti-Catholic reviling. 'And what think ye of these priests, the devourers of the flock they should feed; of these monks, idle and unclean; of these friars, that steal our lands and prowl around our houses more greedy than dogs that snatch the bread the child should eat withal? These men have corrupted England with their doctrine and shamed our holy religion with their lives, and are

for their ignorance worse than the beasts of the fields, for those live as God made them, but these in departing from all godliness and in hating the Scriptures, of which they are altogether ignorant, have turned again from the service of God to the filthiness of sin.' Nor can it be pleaded in defence of the book that the author is merely denouncing the particular abuses and evils of the time, for he roundly assails the cardinal doctrine and great act of worship of the Catholic Church. Let us hearken once again unto the gentle Master Arkwright: 'Hence are these false priests, who pretend to make out of bread and wine—things that have been made of men—the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, Who made all things—hence I say, are they full of fury against the preachings of the Gospel, for if Christ's sacrifice be complete and perfect for the taking away of the sins of all who shall believe on Him, then is the sacrifice of the Mass vain and abominable.'

There is much more to the like effect, but we have cited sufficient to show the character of the book that has been placed in the hands of a bright little lad in the Second Standard. Viewed simply as literature, the book is in the last degree one-sided, unveracious, and unhistorical. But that is not the main grievance. The point which we wish to emphasise is that it is an utterly improper thing that a book should be given as a 'prize' to any child which is a set attack on the faith of his fathers and on the religious beliefs and practices which he and they hold dear. So far as we can gather, the responsibility in the present case rests with the teacher. The act may, of course, have been merely one of inadvertence—though a glance at the volume would have been sufficient to show that the book was entirely unsuitable for presentation to a Catholic scholar. But whether inadvertent or otherwise, the incident illustrates the standing necessity for Catholic parents to be on their guard. In this as in other cases prevention is better than cure, and it is even more desirable to forestall the evil than to attempt to correct it after the deed has been done. One way, at least, is open in all parishes, and has been tried in some cases in New Zealand with complete success. The priest may request permission from the local State School Committee to select each year the prize books intended for the Catholic children attending the particular school under their jurisdiction. If the committee is made up of reasonable men the request will be granted as a matter of course. The teachers will be instructed to furnish the priest in due time with lists of the number and prices of books to which the Catholic children in each standard are entitled: and the work of procuring suitable volumes will, of course, be a labor of love. This plan, as we have said, has worked well where it has been tried: and it is worthy of practical consideration in every district where, through the absence or distance of the Catholic school, Catholic children are compelled to attend the State school.

Notes

One Qualification

A London paper records that a city solicitor, who has joined the 1st Sportsman's Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, has received the following congratulatory telegram from an old client:—'Accept my congratulations on your gallantry in joining the Sportsman's Battalion. Anyway, you know how to *charge*.'

The Best Women Nurses

No name stands higher in the medical world than that of the late Dr S. Weir Mitchell, well known as an author and as the founder and chief exponent of the famous and highly successful Weir Mitchell system of treatment for neurasthenia. In view of the war, American papers are recalling public attention to an address on 'The Medical Department in the Civil War,' de-