

Current Topics

The New Punctuation

A while ago it was phonetic spelling which absorbed the energies of the well-meaning faddists who have devoted themselves to the 'reform' of literature; now they are turning their attention to an amendment of our methods of punctuation. Their aim, they tell us, is 'to eliminate the unessential in language'; and in a recent volume by Mr. A. J. Eddy, we are favored with an illustration of the application of the principle: 'New punctuation: . . . a living style . . . creates itself without the use of absurd commas and periods. To accentuate certain movements and indicate their directions, certain mathematical and unusual signs will be used.' Thus:-

• Cannon to right of them ☞☞

Cannon to left of them ☜☜

Cannon behind them ☞☜

Volley'd ***** and thunder'd —————

The system might conceivably prove of service to impressionist war correspondents; but it would, we suspect, tax the resources of the most complete printing establishment to find a symbol adequate to illustrate the whiz from a 'Jack Johnson.'

What the Priest Soldiers are Doing

Samson, as Holy Scripture tells us, drew honey from the lion's mouth, and the manufacturing chemist can distil a pain-soothing balm from the roots of the deadly aconite. In an analogous way Providence appears to be so ordering things in France that the 'evil-beginning hours' of the war may end in good, and may prove, so far as the Church is concerned, a blessing in disguise. The ground for this hope is found in the remarkable effect which has been produced by the conduct and bravery of the 20,000 priest-soldiers who form part of the great army of France. Catholics the world over are familiar with the story of the bitter and relentless persecution to which their co-religionists in France have been subject for thirty years. During that long period Catholics have seen all the resources of an irreligious and lodge-ridden Government used against them. Even so late as May last a law was passed which imposes a fine or imprisonment on every citizen who persuades parents not to send their children to the lay schools. But the war gives promise of changing all that. It has already, we learn, acted as a shock which has banished many prejudices, animosities, and other evil elements. 'The ordeal and the glory of our country,' writes Eugène Tavernier in the *Constructive Quarterly*, 'the bravery of the soldiers, the patriotic inspiration, which call forth the spirit of sacrifice and the spirit of fraternity, all this has brought about a profound and visible change in the common mind.'

The conduct of the clergy, according to this well-informed writer, has been one of the principal factors in hastening and making permanent this change. Their happy and beneficent influence had, indeed, been making itself felt even before the present crisis. 'For twenty-five years,' says this writer, 'the ministers of religion have, like other citizens, been compelled to become soldiers. This obligation was established by the free-thinking sectarians in the hope that the sojourn in the barracks might weaken or destroy a great number of clerical vocations. Then, after having borne very courageously and worthily the two years in barracks, the greater number of the aspirants for the priesthood take up again the way of the seminary. Afterwards they accept regularly, on appointed days, their part in the military exercises and manoeuvres to which they are called as reservists. Their presence in the regiments has exercised a very happy influence on the crowd of

soldiers who have no idea of religious things.' But it is since the war broke out that the Church is reaping the full fruition of the priest-soldiers' splendid manifestation of the spirit of discipline and sacrifice. The way in which the priests responded to the call for service is thus described: 'At the first signal the seminarists and priests, curés and religious, have rejoined the army to take their places in the combat. At the beginning of the war there were nearly 20,000 in the ranks. Among them were found, and still may be found, members of the congregations whom hateful and impious laws had driven from France. Many of the priests and members of the congregations arrived at the barracks in their cassocks. Many were obliged to wait, some for a short, some for a long time, for their uniforms. All, in their cassocks, took part in military duties and labors. All have displayed a frank, dignified and cordial disposition which has called forth respectful and eager sympathy for them. And not a single act has caused any voluntary offence on the part of these citizens, torn suddenly from the environment where they were exercising their special vocation. There has been manifested their desire simply to accept, without regret and without hesitation, a duty which ill accords with the office of a priest at the altar. Everyone has recognised something peculiarly praiseworthy in such an abnegation, patriotic, civic, Christian.'

But it is on the field of battle itself that, from the popular point of view at least, the priest-soldiers have won their brightest laurels. 'Then, the field of battle has seen numbers of these 20,000 priest-soldiers, vicars, curés, or members of congregations, give an example of courage, brave under fire, fighting and dying like heroes. A long list of them, for their military exploits, have received the honor of being praised before the whole army. In the midst of soldiers and a soldier himself, the priest, whom the free-thinker pretends to treat as an inferior citizen, has suddenly proved a living manifestation of the spirit of discipline and sacrifice. Finally, another thing which seemed about to be forgotten has been understood that faith and prayer, aside from their individual importance, have a patriotic and social rôle. Between two battles the soldiers, formerly so indifferent to the things of religion, went to church in a multitude. In different places, an hour before the battle, the regiments took part in the Mass, celebrated in the open air upon an improvised altar by a priest-soldier surrounded by other ecclesiastics whose military uniform was completed by a sacerdotal emblem! Many other similar events have followed which, commented upon by the newspapers, have produced an extraordinary impression throughout the whole country.'

The one question which will be eagerly and earnestly asked is, Will these good results be lasting? or will France, when her hour of difficulty is past, return to the husks and swine of profligacy and infidelity. On this point, Eugène Tavernier, at least, is more than sanguine. 'Without doubt,' he says, 'that impression will endure. The violent shock of the war has set in motion new feelings which will assure the full maturity of the efforts generously made for thirty years by French Catholics.' To which the friends of erstwhile Catholic France can only fervently respond, So may it be!

Letters from the Front

In view of the fact that the trained observers and competent historians represented by the body of capable and accredited war correspondents have, wisely or stupidly, been banished from even the most distant approach to the firing line, the letters sent home by individual officers and men acquire a greatly enhanced interest and value. Their value does not lie primarily in the information which they afford as to the actual course of operations or as to the actual military situation at a particular time and place—though even in this direction they are of distinct service. What could be more vivid and illuminating, for example, than this

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