

Current Topics

'An "Auld Licht" Idyll'

The Presbyterian 'Auld Lichts'—so interestingly depicted in Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls*—are passing fast, but they are not yet extinct. In witness whereof—as the legal documents say—we present our readers with the following 'gem of purest ray serene,' gathered from a sermon preached by the Rev. W. Scorgie, at Mornington Presbyterian Church, on January 29, in the year of grace and enlightenment, 1911: 'So with Romanism and responsibility—it will take your burden, but it will paralyse your soul. That is one of the growing dangers in these colonies. The Romish Church is making a determined effort for place, power, and compensation for her schools. Give it to her. Let her become supreme through the ignorance and indifference of our growing generation, and the result will be in these young colonies as in those old Empires—blight and decay on those who yield to her, *persecution and extermination for those who oppose her.* (The italics are ours.) Already, it is whispered, we are largely ruled by the Papists, the publicans, and the carpet-bag politicians.'

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There stands forth, naked and unashamed, the hide-bound bigot. That is, apparently, the sort of 'Gospel' that is considered good enough for Mornington Presbyterians. Some of the 'auld lights' present seem to have enjoyed the utterance, for it is said to be 'published by request of those who heard it'; but the more broad-minded and cultured clients of the *Outlook* must have read it both with sorrow and with anger. The Rev. W. Scorgie, if we remember rightly, is the same gentleman who, a few years ago, had to eat humble pie, and publicly apologise, for grossly offensive and intemperate language used on a public platform in Dunedin. Evidently the disease is, with him, too deep-seated to be easily cured. If it may be permitted to us to preach at a preacher, we would, however, remind Mr. Scorgie of the verse in St. James, which we quote as it appears in Mr. Scorgie's own version: 'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.' Needless to say, we do not propose to take any detailed notice of this ill-mannered and grossly offensive preachment. There is sound sense and practical wisdom in the modern saw: 'If a donkey brays at you, don't bray at him.'

That Alleged 'Neutrality'

That Dr. Cleary is neither new-fangled nor singular in his contention that there is no such thing as 'neutrality' in regard to religion where it is a question of education, and that our New Zealand system is essentially 'sectarian' or 'denominational,' admits of easy demonstration. Taking the last point first, it will be seen by reference to an extract published in another column from the *N.Z. Tablet* of nearly forty years ago—that is, even before our so-called 'national' system was introduced—that this aspect of any purely secular system has been insisted on by Catholic apologists from the very first. The extract is an excerpt from a *N.Z. Tablet* leader of date June 14, 1873, which, after dwelling on the secularising tendency of the proposed changes in some of the Provincial systems, concludes with characteristic bluntness: 'Are not the schools secular at least in name, and are not the secularists a denomination?' With regard to the former point—the absolute impossibility of maintaining real religious 'neutrality' in any education system—we find interesting and striking confirmation of Dr. Cleary's position in the pages of one of the most brilliant of American weeklies. 'An honest, earnest attempt,' says *America*, of December 31 last, 'to rule out all religious bias and to establish a course wholly uncolored by religious views or principles may be praiseworthy when made for the sake of respecting the religious susceptibilities of the patrons of a State school; but, regardless of the motive, *objective neutrality in all that concerns religious instruction is as impossible as a square circle.* If there were question of some particular branch of so-called secular instruction, it might be successfully introduced or excluded; as, for example, needlework for boys, vocal music or drawing. The reason is plain, for these or similar matters do not necessarily enter into the life of every child, even though a knowledge of them might be desirable; but religious (or irreligious) views and practices are a part of the everyday existence of all persons that have reached the ordinary use of their faculties.'

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As to the way in which the affected neutrality of the French schools, for example—to which brief reference was made in our last week's issue—is working out in actual practice, we are no longer left in any manner of doubt.

Here is the latest utterance of M. Viviani, the erstwhile Minister of Public Worship: 'It is now time to say that school neutrality has never been more than a diplomatic lie. We appealed to it for the sake of closing the mouths of the timid and the scrupulous; but as that is not necessary now, we play an open game. We have never had any other design than to produce an anti-religious youth, and anti-religious in an active, militant and combative way.' Presumably this is one of the ways in which 'the Continent of Europe'—as Professor Mackenzie admirably tells us—'is teaching us how to deal with irreconcilables in politics and religion.'

Our Friend the 'Outlook'

Our esteemed contemporary and neighbor, the Presbyterian *Outlook*, attempts this week a courteous, but in every other respect, we are bound to say, anything but impressive defence of the 'calm' Mr. Corkey and the *Belfast Witness*. We will give our contemporary's defence in his own words. We had rallied him on the simple faith with which he had accepted a certain fiery and hot-headed version as 'The True Story of the McCann Case,' merely on the authority of a Belfast Presbyterian paper, which, as most people know, is the very last place in which to look for 'the exact, literal, unexaggerated truth regarding the Catholic Church and Catholic happenings.' To this last sentence our contemporary replies: 'Precisely, but, unfortunately for the *Tablet's* reasoning, the McCann case is a Presbyterian happening, the marriage between Mr. and Mrs. McCann having been celebrated by a Presbyterian minister in a Presbyterian Church, and Mrs. McCann, having gone for succour and assistance to the Rev. W. Corkey, when her home was broken up and her children taken from her at the instance of a Catholic priest. It is altogether beside the question, therefore, for the *Tablet* to remark that 'The true story as reproduced in our Dunedin contemporary is wholly *ex parte* and second-hand, being told not by the man or woman concerned, but by one Rev. W. Corkey, M.A., a hot-headed zealot whose very bigotry—even if he were in possession of the true version—disqualifies him from making an impartial presentment of the facts.' Our esteemed contemporary is not thinking clearly. The McCann case is partly a Presbyterian, and partly a Catholic happening. The actual marriage was a Presbyterian happening; and no one has questioned the competency even of Mr. Corkey to give testimony on that point. The withdrawal of the husband from marital relations, the alleged spiriting away of the children, the alleged concealment of McCann, so far as they are happenings at all, are Catholic happenings. It was around these that the fountain of Corkey eloquence let itself loose; and it is precisely on these points that we maintain that both Mr. Corkey and the *Belfast Witness*—by reason of engrained and incurable bias—are incapable of making an impartial statement of the facts.

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Our contemporary next briefly refers to the 'profound political significance' of the decree *Ne Temere*, especially in its relation to the prospects of Home Rule; and once again he cites as his chief authority—an Ulster Protestant! This time it is 'that brilliant journalist, Mr. James Douglas, who has addressed a lengthy letter to *London Opinion*.' We give a couple of specimens of the wild and misdirected rhetoric which this 'brilliant journalist' has permitted himself. 'The question,' he says, 'is whether the Vatican has any right to annul a Protestant marriage and to bastardize the children.' The question, of course, is nothing of the kind—the Vatican claims no right whatever over the marriages of Protestants. The question simply is: Has the Catholic Church the right to say whether, in her view and in her interpretation of the law of Christ, certain unions contracted by her children are or are not valid Christian marriage. The Church which does not claim this elementary right at once gives up its claim to be considered—even in the most attenuated sense of the expression—a messenger of God. We believe we are correct in saying that the Church now represented by the *Outlook*, itself, at one time loudly claimed this right, and absolutely refused to recognise marriage with a deceased wife's sister, even when such marriages were freely permitted by the State law. Let us hearken once more to our brilliant journalist: 'The Vatican does not want Home Rule, for it dreads the Irish democracy. Is it not possible that this decree, not enforced in Germany, is being astutely enforced in Ireland in order to make Home Rule impossible?' In other words, it is solemnly suggested that the Holy Father has changed the Catholic marriage law in England, Scotland, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, all 'in order to make Home Rule impossible.' Thus does the Ulster-Protestant bacillus reduce even the 'brilliant journalist' to bathos and imbecility. As a matter of fact, from the Protestant authorities cited in the *Outlook* alone, the whole McCann case can be very simply resolved. There are two points in issue: (1) The principle involved;