

Current Topics

Reverting to Type

The Rev. Dr. Gibb—an ex-Dunedinite, of (more or less) happy memory—who, it will be remembered, was always liable to frequent and acute attacks of Rome-phobia, has, so far as press utterances afford evidence, been on good behaviour for quite a while. It would be too much, however, to expect that such a state of things should last indefinitely, and there are signs that the long lucid interval is beginning to give out. Last week the Anglican Bishop of Wellington was farewelled by the local Ministers' Association; and the speeches on the occasion were for the most part tactful and happy. It was reserved for Dr. Gibb to strike a narrow note, and so far mar an interesting gathering, by dragging in the following *mala-propos* remark: 'It was a significant gathering—significant of the changes which had taken place, and especially of the fact that they were drawing close together for the great fight. They had need to do so. Were there not the devil, and the world, and the flesh to fight, to say nothing of the Pope of Rome, who had been very much in evidence of late.' This may have been only the Doctor's joke; but if so, verily he jokes 'wi' deeficulty.' Rather it looks like the old Adam re-asserting itself. We remember reading how, in the general election before last, a noble lord, an opponent of Mr. Lloyd George, scored rather cleverly off the fiery Welshman. Mr. Lloyd George had for a time abstained from his accustomed railery and invective against the House of Lords, and had spoken quite respectfully of the Peers; but latterly he had lapsed into his old ways. 'Mr. Lloyd George,' said the noble lord we have referred to, 'was for a short time a gentleman. Latterly he has reverted to type, and has become—Mr. Lloyd George.' Similarly with the Rev. Dr. Gibb. For quite a time Dr. Gibb has been a gentleman; last week he reverted to type, and became—Dr. Gibb.

A 'Conversion' Tract

After a long period of comparative quiescence, the harmless, necessary tract pedlar is once more to the fore. A Masterton correspondent has forwarded us a production bearing the title 'Conversion of a Roman Catholic,' which is being circulated in his district, and which we learn from other sources is also being laddled out to pedestrians in the streets, lady passengers in trains, etc., round about Wellington city. The story of the 'conversion' is very simple, and singularly unimpressive. The victim is a Catholic woman married to a Protestant husband—the woman, amiable in character, but weak-willed, and not what Catholics understand as a 'practical Catholic.' After prolonged illness of herself and her husband—during which she was helped from time to time by the St. Vincent de Paul Society—the family, according to the tract, 'got into difficulties, and the home had to be sold to pay debts.' At this critical juncture the woman seems to have been visited and befriended by Protestants, for she describes how, after the birth of her last 'dear baby girl,' when she 'seemed to be sinking,' she put out her hand and found that some person had left some tracts on a chair. She took one of the tracts—read it—and called at once for a Bible, which was later on supplied by one of her new-found friends. Then she 'simply devoured' the volume, and at once 'saw the light.' For the present she is a Protestant; but how long she will remain so will probably depend on circumstances. Eaten bread is soon forgotten; and, with rare exceptions which only serve to prove the rule, these suddenly-illuminated converts are notoriously bad stayers. So far as Catholics are concerned, neither the tract nor the 'conversion' is of the slightest moment. The only feeling we need have is one of pity—pity for the woman, and pity for her innocent children.

Regarding the tract, and the statements contained in it, we have made inquiries, and are in possession of a full history of the facts. It would be giving the publication an importance it in no way deserves to enter into any detailed comment on its contents at the present stage, but we may briefly mention the following points. (1) It may be taken for granted that the woman in question did not herself write the pamphlet. She has, we understand, no 'literary' turn of any kind. The ignorance of all concerned in the production of the publication—the 'convert,' the writer, and the printer—regarding things Catholic may be gauged from the fact that they were capable of perpetrating the following 'howler.' The 'convert' is supposed to be enthusing on the delights of her new faith. 'It is all so different,' she is made to say, 'to that other way: there are no beads to pray on, no cross to kiss, no Scapular or Agnes Days (*sic*) to pray on.' (2) Nearly all the 'interesting facts' supplied—so far as the Catholic side of the narrative is concerned—are not

facts at all, but very far otherwise. For example: 'I thought I was very good—what people call a good Roman Catholic—always going to Church and confession.' This is simply and absolutely not true, the actual fact being that the woman was not in any sense of the word a practical Catholic. Owing to her large family and her own illness every allowance must be made for her not attending Mass; but if the matter must be referred to, at least let the truth be spoken. Again, she says: 'Often paying money for Mass to be said for some relation—my mother's father in particular. Most of my pocket money went in this.' We have communicated with the priests on this point, and this is the reply: 'She was never known to have had even one Mass said for the old gentleman. If she did, at least she never paid for it, nor would any priest accept an offering from her when for years we had been helping her. That part of the story is absolutely false.' These are samples of the unreliableness of this little conversion story—made, for the most part, in wowserland. There are others—many others—and should occasion arise, we will return to the subject, and deal with it more fully. In the meantime, without unnecessarily advertising the leaflet, we trust we have said sufficient to show anyone into whose hands it may fall the general untrustworthiness of the narrative, and to indicate a little at least of what may be said on the other side. We need only add—for the benefit of Wairarapa readers—that the leaflet bears the imprint, 'E. Whitehead, Palmerston North.'

The Arbitration Treaty

According to a London cable (dated March 30), 'a committee representing both sides of the House of Commons has been formed to promote an arbitration agreement on the lines discussed by President Taft and Sir E. Grey'; and America, going one better, announces—per medium of a New York cable, dated March 31—that 'Mr. Knox is drafting an arbitration treaty with Britain, and it will probably be submitted to the April Congressional session.' It would, indeed, be a magnificent achievement—and one over which the friends of humanity everywhere would unfeignedly rejoice—if the Coronation year should witness, as Mr. Asquith expressed it, 'the sealing of a solemn compact between Britain and America, ending once and for all the hideous and unthinkable possibilities of fratricidal strife.' It is, however, much too soon to indulge in unrestrained jubilation on the matter. Negotiations for arbitration between England and America have before now reached a much more advanced stage than they have at the present juncture, and yet have ended in fiasco. In 1897, for example, a Treaty of Arbitration was actually signed at Washington by Secretary Olney and the British Ambassador; and the fact was hailed by the London press as 'The greatest event of the century.' In order to take effect the Treaty only awaited the ratification of the American Senate on the one hand and of the English Parliament on the other. The approval of the English Parliament was a foregone conclusion; but before it was given any opportunity to say its say, the Senate had mutilated the great Treaty out of all recognition—and, it may be added, out of all possible acceptance.

The Treaty came before the Senate backed by the following interesting and impressive message from President McKinley: 'Since this Treaty is clearly the result of our own initiative, since it has been recognised as a leading feature in our foreign policy throughout our entire national history—namely, the adjustment of difficulties by judicial methods rather than force of arms—and since it presents to the world a glorious example of reason and peace, not passion and war, controlling the relations between the two greatest nations of the world, an example certain to be followed by others, I respectfully urge early action by the Senate thereon, not merely as a matter of policy, but as a duty to mankind.' Notwithstanding this recommendation, and despite the fact that the President used his personal influence with his friends in the Senate to secure its ratification without substantial amendment, the Senate finally killed the great Treaty without even a division. They did not, of course, actually reject it, as that would have brought them into almost universal odium, but they accepted it subject to an amendment which made the Treaty a simple farce. The article of submission in the original Treaty was in these terms: 'The high contracting parties agree to submit to arbitration, in accordance with the provisions and subject to the limitations of this Treaty, all questions in difference between them which they may fail to adjust by diplomatic negotiations.' To which the Senate added the following amendment: 'And any agreement to submit, together with formulations, shall, in every case before it becomes final, be communicated by the President of the United States to the Senate with his approval, and be concurred in by two-thirds of the Senators present, and shall also be approved by her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.' This meant that in every case the