

'Popery' is penetrating into the blessed kirk itself—not in any underground, back-stairs fashion, but openly, in the very courts of the Church. Here is the latest evidence. The General Assembly of the Established Church of Scotland was held the other day in Edinburgh; and—as we learn from the *Outlook*—the feature of the report of the Temperance Committee was the recommendation as to occasional fasting as a means of grace, which evoked a mild controversy. Mr. W. S. Thomson, of Aberdeen, described it as more a matter of monkish mediævalism than modern Christianity, and Mr. Crabb Watt, an eminent King's Counsel, described it as the introduction of a new cult into the Established Church, which was on a par with flagellation and the wearing of a hair shirt. Despite all opposition, however, the recommendation in favor of fasting was carried.

*

It may soften the blow to the anti-Rome 'stalwarts' to know that the action of the General Assembly in approving of fasting is but a return to the attitude which has ever been adopted by the overwhelming majority of Christians in regard to this practice, and which was adopted by the early Presbyterians themselves. The early Reformers (says the Protestant historian Schaff) approved of fasting 'as a means of self-discipline and a preparation for prayer.' This was the view of fasting taken by Luther in his commentary on the following words of Our Lord: 'And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward.' Calvin in his *Institutiones* (IV.), says: 'Holy and legitimate fasting is directed to three ends; for we practise it as a restraint on the flesh, to preserve it from licentiousness, or as a preparation for prayers and pious meditations, or as a testimony of our humiliation in the presence of God when we are desirous of confessing our guilt before Him.' Down to the present day the Church of England retains in her Book of Common Prayer all our days of fast and abstinence, together with a number of vigils which we no longer keep; and many of her foremost divines urge the Christian duty of fasting as strongly as it is inculcated from the Catholic pulpit. In the formularies of the Presbyterian Church 'religious fasting' (which requires 'total abstinence from food') is reverently and emphatically laid down (in the 'Directory for the Publick Worship of God') as 'a duty which God expecteth from the nation and people' in certain circumstances. In the 'Confession of Faith' (xxi., 5) solemn fastings are set forth as 'part of the ordinary religious worship of God'; while the 'Directory' contains minute instructions for the conduct of national, congregational, and family fasts (in the section 'Concerning Publick Solemn fasting'). Unless we are wrongly informed, Scottish almanacs to this day publish the fasting days fixed by various Assemblies. So that in approximating now towards the Catholic idea of fasting the Scottish Presbyterians are at the same time returning to the original teaching and practice both of their own denominations and of the Reformed bodies generally.

Leprosy and Fish

According to a Sydney cable in Saturday's papers, in giving evidence before the Food Commission, the Naturalist of the New South Wales Fisheries Department, dealing with the connection between leprosy and fish-eating, said that 'with proper cooking there was nothing to fear, even when fish had internal parasites. He emphatically disclaimed any connection between leprosy and fish if eaten fresh or when reasonably fresh, after being treated by any method.' The emphasis of the Sydney official was amply justified, and both the facts and the authorities are on his side. Some months ago Sir James Crichton-Browne, one of the most famous specialists in England on mental and nervous disorders and public health, and president of the Sanitary Inspectors' Association, in his presidential address at the annual Conference of Sanitary Officers took occasion to dispose of the absurd notion that the Church should consider the question of modifying

her laws of abstinence in order to avoid the danger of a spread of leprosy through fish-eating. This theory was first advanced by a Dr. Jonathan Hutchinson, whose peculiar views received considerable prominence in New Zealand papers some few years ago. 'Wherever Catholic missions are successful,' he had said, with particular reference to India, 'there is an increase of leprosy'; and he continued: 'The facts which I have brought forward are such as to impose a duty upon the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church to reconsider their fast-day ordinances.' To this view the president of the Sanitary Inspectors' Association gave no countenance. Whilst admitting that there could be no question of the generally pernicious effects of fish that was in any way diseased or in even the incipient stage of decay, he declared that 'leprosy, even were its dependence on a diet of decomposing fish fully demonstrated, which was not the case, need not now in this country be mentioned in such a connection.' So far from thinking an abatement of the Church's fast-day ordinances desirable Sir James referred with unmistakable regret to the decline of the old custom—which prevailed in the old days when England was Catholic—in accordance with which the people marked the observance of Lent by confining themselves, during the whole of the period, to an exclusively fish diet.

*

It would seem clear, from the facts, that the use of fish, even when it is far from fresh, has nothing to do with the causation of leprosy. Our New Zealand Maoris eat largely of fish, and their favorite food, eels, is always eaten 'high'—yet the Maoris do not develop leprosy. A writer in the *Manchester Guardian* supplies—from Burmah—a valuable set of facts to the like effect. 'Every Burman,' he says, 'eats fish, and even eats putrid fish, with every meal. This food is known as "ngapi," which is fish pressed in a primitive and unscientific way. Yet it would appear that leprosy is not only not prevalent in that country, but is declining. According to the census of 1891, there were 6464 lepers, while ten years later the number was only 4190, or eight per 10,000 of the whole population. The numbers vary greatly in the different districts, but Mr. Hutchinson's conclusion, drawn from his recent tour in India and Ceylon, that the great prevalence of leprosy is almost always in or near a fishing place does not appear to apply to Burmah, where the investigations of Mr. Lewis, the Census Commissioner, show that the highest rates for the districts are not in those near the chief centres of the fishing industry. Mr. Lewis's conclusion in regard to the distribution of the disease, so far as Burmah is concerned, is that it prevails more in the West than in the East, and (curiously enough) more in the dry than in the wet area.'

*

The Census Report of the protected native State of Travancore for 1901 also comes into ruinous collision with Dr. Hutchinson's theory. The figures are specially valuable in view of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Christians in Travancore, as in the rest of India, and in Ceylon, are Catholics. In the diocese of Travancore there are one Bishop, 270 priests, 50 monks, 60 nuns, 38 ecclesiastical students, and 140,000 native Catholics. Volume XXVI. (part I., p. 243) of the Report has a chapter on Leprosy in the State (chapter x., No. 185). 'Leprosy,' says the Commissioner, 'considered by religion, is most common among the Musulman males and the Animist females, the least common among the Christian males and the Musulman females. Taking a lakh (100,000) as representing each class of religionists, the lepers among them will be 64 Animists, 53 Musulmans, 50 Hindus, and 38 Christians.' In chapter x., p. 248 (table II.), the Commissioner gives the average number of lepers per 10,000 of each sex by religion. It sums up as follows: Hindus, 7.1 males and 3.0 females per 10,000 of each sex respectively; Musulmans, 8.5 males and 1.8 females; Animists, 7.1 males and 5.7 females; Christians, 5.4 males and 2.3 females. The indisputable and ascertained facts of the case knock the fish-leprosy theory 'kite-high.'