

Current Topics

Present Day Masonry

Two extracts from an American Masonic organ, cited by our contemporary *America*, are interesting and illuminating. The first furnishes an illustration of the present intentions and designs of the Continental brethren. The *American Freemason* of February, 1913 (says our contemporary), publishes a summary of a circular letter sent out by a number of very earnest Freemasons who participated in the recent International Peace Congress at Geneva. The editor calls attention to the fact that 'it is signed first by Brother Maghalaes Lima, *Grand Master of Portuguese Masons, and one of the principals among those concerned in the deposition of royalty in his home country, and in establishment of the Lusitanian republic.*' The circular is at once a warning and an appeal. It sets forth what are alleged to be the designs of the Roman Church—to make itself the supreme, even the sole authority, not only in things spiritual, but also in purely temporal affairs. These efforts, says the circular, are adapted to meet every situation: sometimes made openly, defiantly, brutally; at others proceeding by methods hidden or plausible and jesuitical. The unceasing efforts of clericalism, continues the circular, have but one aim—to rehabilitate the Vatican as seat of a world power; to elevate the papacy above all governments. After giving several recent illustrations of priestly intrigue, the framers of the circular call upon Freemasons of all countries to forget their differences that they may unitedly face the common danger. Craftsmen are urged to make such preparation that they may resist clericalism at every point. Only thus can the freedom of conscience, gained by past struggles and sacrifices, be preserved from the destroying hands of bigotry and intolerance.' *

The second throws an interesting light on the question of the connection—or non-connection—between British and Continental Masonry, and on the present day trend of English and American Freemasonry. In the same issue of the *American Freemason* (continues our contemporary) we are informed that the result of the meeting of the International Masonic Club, held in London on November 15, was the conclusion: '1. That the Grand Orient of France, with regard to religious tests, is much nearer to the original plan of Masonry, as set forth in the first Constitutions, than is the Grand Lodge of England. 2. That the French Masons are worthy men, doing a wonderful work for the cause of progress and enlightenment.' 'As a matter of fact,' continues the writer, 'French Freemasonry has ever since 1878 been steadily growing more intelligent and scholarly, more compact, more serene, more self-confident, more effective, and more elevated. At this day it is the model for all the world in respect to these qualities. There is no American jurisdiction that can compare with it.'

The N.S. Wales System and Teachers' Consciences

Apropos of the statement, repeatedly made by Bible League representatives, that where the Australian system is in vogue no case has occurred where a teacher has refused, on conscientious grounds, to give the general religious lessons which form part of the scheme, we print the following letter addressed to the editor of the *N.Z. Herald*, which appeared in that paper of date March 18:—'Sir,—In the Rev. I. Jolly's letter in your issue of 15th inst., he wrote: "The experiences of the four Australian States show that the religious difficulty in relation to teachers has never emerged, so that Dr. Cleary is only giving us stage thunder in his talk about the oppression of the teachers' consciences." In reference to that paragraph it is pertinent to say that a few years ago I called at the education office, Sydney, met there the Chief of Inspection and the Departmental Secretary, stated I desired employment, presented my testimonials, received the syllabus and regulations, and was requested to call next morning at ten o'clock. I

did so. The two chief officials offered very flattering opinions on the testimonials, and produced a list of eleven vacancies, and another of five impending ones. They also said that the making of the appointments was in their hands. Somewhat to their surprise, I said I could not accept service, as I should have to teach religion, and to divide my pupils into "sheep and goats" through doing so, a division odious to make. That was surely an oppression, not only of the teacher's sense of conscience, but also of his sense of propriety towards his pupils; and who can tell how many similar instances have occurred and never been heard of? Nobody. The ugliest feature of the New South Wales education system is this, the ignoring of the fact that school teachers have consciences just as surely as have everybody else. Is it not a shameful business, then, to coerce or force them by any means to palter with or stifle the voice of conscience? That is precisely what has been done for many years under the New South Wales system, which we are now invited to imitate.

'D. O'DONOGHUE.'

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We are not personally acquainted with Mr. O'Donoghue, and we give his story simply on its merits and as we find it in the columns of a leading secular daily. Mr. O'Donoghue is, we believe, a B.A. of N.Z. University, and holds a B1 teachers' certificate—almost the highest certificate which it is possible for a teacher to obtain in the Dominion. The point of the story is that it is probably one of many similar incidents and protests which have never been recorded or brought to light. As Mr. O'Donoghue pertinently asks: 'Who can tell how many similar instances have occurred and never been heard of?'

That 'General Religious Teaching'

'Attempts have been made—with what success our readers can judge for themselves—to diligently whittle down and explain away the 'general religious teaching' provided for in the N.S. Wales and Queensland education systems. In a recent issue we printed a letter containing several queries addressed by Mr. J. A. Scott, per medium of the *Otago Daily Times*, to the Very Rev. Dean Fitchett, as a representative and local vice-president of the Bible in State Schools League. The nature of Dean Fitchett's answers will be gathered from Mr. Scott's reply thereto, a first instalment of which appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* of Thursday last, and which we reproduce herewith.

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'Sir,—I have to thank Dean Fitchett for his extremely courteous reply to the three queries which you kindly allowed me to put to him. I entirely agree with him as to the desirableness of full discussion of this question. That there is urgent need for enlightenment, even amongst Bible Leaguers, as to the exact position of the League on certain vitally important matters is apparent from the conflicting answers that have been given to a simple and practical question which I propounded. The question was, "Is it a fair proposition to compel a teacher, say of the Jewish faith, to administer such a lesson as that on 'The Crucifixion,' given on page 123 of the Queensland manual?" No one has had the courage to come forward and say in plain English that that is a fair proposition, and no one who has the least regard for the conscientious beliefs of a body of citizens who, in New Zealand, have taken a high and honored place in the public life of the community, will or can do so. But attempts have been made to extenuate the proposition. Dean Fitchett was reported—but has since repudiated the report as incorrect—as having said that the lessons were to be given "only as literature." Mr. Joseph Braithwaite, another official of the League, made no such fine-spun distinction, but expressly calls them "religious lessons," and bluntly said that "in New South Wales a State teacher knows before he enters the profession what he is expected to teach, hence a teacher's conscience clause is unnecessary." Even this excuse for League tyranny cannot be advanced in the case of New Zealand, where the teachers have all taken up their calling when no