

Current Topics

Eucharistic Congress for Australia

The Eucharistic Congress for next year is to be held at Lourdes, from the 9th to the 13th of September. We do not know how the little town will stand the strain in the matter of providing accommodation for the huge throng which will be sure to attend, but from the spiritual and devotional point of view the spot will be an ideal one for a Eucharistic Congress. Even a non-Catholic visitor, going with a full share of prejudices against the stories of miraculous happenings, found himself constrained after a short stay to write of the place as follows in the *London Spectator*: 'It is a very beautiful and a very gracious place. I have no cause to plead, either of creed or of medicine. Only to record the fact that a visit to Lourdes during a pilgrimage is something so singular in its nature as to impress our "curious hearts" as nothing else in this world can, and to leave us pondering as deeply as Hamlet himself on the more things in heaven and earth than any philosophy has yet been found to dream of. Nothing that the miracle plays and mysteries can show can be so vivid and so mystical as this. . . . It was the pool of Bethesda over again. . . . No man or woman at Lourdes remarks upon another's dress, or wears a dress upon which a remark could be made. The business of the place is prayer. . . . It was the intense reverence and simple faith of all the worshippers that left the deep mark upon our minds at Lourdes. . . . It is something, and more than something, to find out a day or two of retreat in a place so detached from the interests of the world, and in its tendencies so distinctly ennobling.' No more fitting place could be found for the great act of faith and devotion of which a Eucharistic Congress is the concrete and comprehensive expression.

The weekly Catholic paper published at Lourdes—the *Journal de la Grotte*—brings a welcome announcement for Australasian Catholics. It is to the effect that the Congress for 1915 will be held at Sydney. At the Malta Congress this year (says the *Journal*) Monsignor Heylen stated that he had received several communications with regard to future Congresses. It was represented that for 1915 Sydney, New South Wales, should be favored; and for 1917 Lima, South America, claimed the honor; therefore, it only remained to arrange for 1914 and 1916. It is also announced that Cardinal Luialdi has asked that his town of Palermo may be honored by allowing the Congress for 1916 to be held there. Thus, for the next four years, the meeting place of the Congress has been arranged, as follows:—1914, France, Lourdes; 1915, New South Wales, Sydney; 1916, Sicily, Palermo; 1917, South America, Lima. The strength and virility of its Catholicity, the many natural advantages of the city, and the proved capacity of the Sydney Catholics for carrying out large undertakings of the kind, make the New South Wales capital an eminently suitable place for the holding of such a celebration, and afford a sure guarantee that the first Eucharistic Congress in Australia will be a magnificent success. 1915 will soon be here; and the great gathering, so near to our doors, is something to look forward to.

An 'Open Letter' to the Premier

As we have already pointed out, Mr. Massey, who has generally been regarded as possessing in an especial degree the virtues of political integrity and straightforwardness, has exposed himself to serious and damaging criticism by his yes-no utterances and attitude on the referendum proposal; and the criticism was not only quickly forthcoming but still continues, and will evidently not be silenced until the Premier puts himself right with the country. One of the latest to give expression, in caustic and plain-spoken comment, to disapproval of Mr. Massey's extraordinary attitude is the Rev. T. A. Williams, Baptist minister of Sydenham,

Christchurch. In 'An Open Letter' to the Premier on his attitude to two rival deputations *re* a referendum on "Bible-in-school" question,' which appears in the *Wellington Evening Post*, Mr. Williams writes thus: 'Sir,—The electors in general, and the two opposing Leagues in particular, have surely a right to a less ambiguous attitude than that assumed by you in your reply to the two deputations which recently waited upon you. At present, none of us know where we are, or what we may expect from you. The two deputations were apparently satisfied with your reply. The defenders of the present system, after your assurance that you would do nothing to impair the secular system, reasonably supposed that you would be no party to a referendum. But after the second deputation had received your reply, Dean Fitchett publicly read a telegram from Dr. Gibb:—"Deputation great success; referendum practically promised next session." Now, where are we?'

Looking at some of the words you are reported to have used in your reply to the second deputation, the confusion becomes more confounded. You said: 'So far as I am personally concerned, I am in favor of moral and religious teaching in the public schools. I am opposed to anything which might introduce sectarian differences and sectarian bitterness—anything which would interfere with the secular system of education.' You must see that these sentences are self-contradictory. They tell us that you are in favor of both religious teaching and the secular system. But how can that be when they are mutually destructive? Now, where are you on this question? You are not even on the rail. You are on either side of the rail at one and the same time. I would respectfully submit to you, sir, that your present position is, thus, not a very dignified one for the First Minister of the State. With all deference, I would ask if you consider this "yes-no" attitude worthy of a responsible statesman? And is it quite fair to the electors? If you really intend to champion a Referendum Bill, then frankly say so, and we shall know where we are and what to do. I am sorry to remind you that your whole attitude, so far, on this important question contrasts unfavorably with that of a former Premier on the very same question, and suggests not the statesman but the politician. At this juncture, it is not smooth, contradictory words that we want, but a clear, definite pronouncement one way or the other. And have we not a right to expect this? Please forgive my plain, blunt speech, and kindly remember that in all realms honesty is usually the best policy.'

The demand for a definite and final declaration of intentions on the part of the Government is plainly reasonable; and Mr. Massey certainly cannot continue to see-saw from one side to the other on this question without suffering a serious loss of prestige.

How History is Made

Mr. Richard Bagot, a fairly popular and prolific writer whose books have a certain vogue and find a place on the shelves of most of our public libraries, has recently been the unwitting means of foisting upon his readers a noxious slander against the Catholic Church. The incident shows how easy it is for a writer of fiction to make himself ridiculous when he is foolish enough to dabble with historical questions in regard to which he has not the slightest claim to special or expert knowledge. In 1911 Mr. Bagot published a book entitled *My Italian Year*, in which, after emphasising his fidelity to facts, and his desire to give as true a picture of Italian life as his pen and competency allow, he goes on to describe a Corpus Christi procession in the province of Venezia in 1705, and how this included a 'Car of Purgatory,' into which, 'for the edification of the faithful,' twenty living infants were thrown into the flames and burned to death. This fact, he declared, 'was substantiated'; and without giving any evidence for his theory or assertion he yet drew the inference that religious superstition was the explanation of the atrocity. On his version of the story being challenged in the