

# Current Topics

## "The Duel"

The last issue to hand of the *Strand Magazine* contains a story ("The Duel") from the pen of L. J. Beeston. It deals with the doings of a picturesque quintette, members of a powerful secret society formed for the purpose of pulling down the social edifice in order to rebuild it upon a different plan. The distribution of deadly subversive literature is part of the society's activities. So far so good, but as we proceed, we learn that one of the thugs is a priest from Ireland named O'Bourne. Now, what on earth was a priest doing in a society of that kind? Is the Beeston person so shockingly ignorant that he does not know that the Catholic Church reprobates all secret societies? And what was the editorial department of the *Strand Magazine* thinking of when it allowed the drivel to "get by"? The inclusion of a priest as one of the conspirators was not necessary to the plot of the story. An editor would have been more in keeping with the character of a distributor of deadly subversive literature. Either the author does not possess the elementary knowledge of a Catholic infant, or his wretched story was written as an attack on the Catholic Church. In any case, the *Strand* people must bear the odium of their contributor's ignorance or prejudice. Further, if respectable and prosperous British periodicals wish to warn their readers against secret societies, why don't they begin on the Freemasons? Most of the respectable and prosperous editors could do that from first-hand knowledge of the subject.

## Lourdes Miracles and Joseph McCabe

Joseph McCabe, renegade monk, pseudo-scientist, atheist, and popular humbug, has delivered judgment upon Lourdes and its miracles. He commences by saying that the magnitude of the subject prevented him from making the kind of investigation that would enable him to speak with authority—and then he proceeds to speak with authority. He dismisses the cures as frivolous deceptions, and he appears to think that considerable weight is added to his testimony by admitting that he knows nothing about the subject. Those who remember Joseph as a lecturer on evolution, and as an apologist for Haeckel, will also remember that ignorance of a question does not prevent him from lecturing dogmatically upon it. His noise is not regulated by his knowledge.

## His Method

Men like McCabe, however, do not welcome knowledge. It embarrasses them by disclosing flaws in their reasoning to which they wish to close their eyes. If all the evidence in the world were placed before McCabe to prove the cures at Lourdes miraculous, he would not admit it. It is not a case of honest conviction; it is the case of a man whose living depends upon his ability to slander Christianity; it is the case of a man who has lost the faith, and who seeks to draw profit from his infidelity. His opinion of Lourdes is based upon the smallest work

on the subject he could find—a two-penny pamphlet of the Catholic Truth Society. The pamphlet in question is merely part of a lecture delivered by Father Woodlock, S.J., and it was read first of all as a preliminary to a discussion, and as an introduction to the standard works on the subject. The dishonesty of the atheist is disclosed by his methods. He sets out to deal with a question which, on his own admission, is a huge one, and in doing so he ignores the standard works which contain full and authentic information, and delivers judgment upon a popular lecture mainly intended to advertise those standard works. The pamphlet contains the names of the books to which reference is made, tells where they can be purchased in England, and urges the people to procure and read them. All this is ignored by Mr McCabe, who professes to regard the pamphlet as a full and sufficient statement of the case for Lourdes. Dishonesty seems essential to atheist philosophers.

## His Logic.

Mr McCabe is just as illogical as he is dishonest. His grounds for dismissing the miracles are confined to three:—(1) That there are too many miracles; (2) that it is easy to imagine still more staggering wonders; (3) that scarcely any miracles happen to English people. *Catholic Truth* says the phrase "too many miracles" is meaningless: "miracles" may be unproved or they may be sheer lies, but they cannot be too frequent; again, the more staggering cures that may be imagined do not in the least invalidate the staggering cures that have actually occurred—one cannot either explain things or argue them out of existence by imagining other things; and, as to England, it is not important whether miracles happen to English people or not; a miracle is a miracle to whomever it happens. Mr McCabe makes a strong point of the fact that the pamphlet contains "only ten cases out of a possible ten thousand." On this head he accuses Father Woodlock of deliberately suppressing relevant matters which would destroy his case. The fact that not more than ten cases can be squeezed into a two-penny pamphlet does not impress Joseph. Father Woodlock is a Jesuit, and therefore everything omitted for want of space is "suppressed" with sinister intent. He complains that the cases cited are all over fifteen years old. This is simply explained: it was thought advisable to give standard cases about which a medical literature has grown up, which have been fully tested, and about which no fear of relapse can any longer be entertained. He finally dismisses the pamphlet by saying that the work is full of minor inaccuracies in spelling, as if that could in any way affect the claims of Lourdes. But even here it is the critic who is at fault. Mr McCabe writes: "Marie Barrell (not Barel, as the Jesuit says) . . ." Here are two inaccuracies. Her name was not "Barrell,"

and Father Woodlock did not write "Barel," Her name was "Borel," and so Father Woodlock wrote it. After all, Mr. self with confusion, an exercise to which McCabe has succeeded in covering him—he is well accustomed. It is a great pity, however, that people who are slightly interested in scientific subjects should permit themselves to become the dupes of garrulous humbugs whose chief reason for talking about things completely beyond them is their fierce and abiding aversion to any and all kinds of useful work.

## The Boundary.

The Boundary dispute still lies very close to the heart of British politics, which means that it lies very close to the heart of British trade. It is a grim, uncompromising fact which is much too tragic to be discussed in the House of Commons or treated openly in the British press. A shell of fiction has been raised around it, and Ministers make speeches and hold conferences about *that*. In like manner newspapers print ponderous leading articles about *that*—leading articles containing well-balanced periods, treating of psychology, national temperament, religious prejudice, and liberty of conscience, with a phrase or two of French thrown in to add tone to the whole. But all the time the kernel inside the shell is not touched. During the past few weeks Ministers have referred to the Boundary on several occasions, but the words on their lips give no clue to the thoughts in their minds. Cable messages informed us that the Free State wished to have the Anglo-Irish Treaty registered with the League of Nations Union and that Great Britain objected on the ground that the said Treaty was merely a domestic agreement between the Empire and one of its units. The objection is untenable, but the motive behind it is quite clear.

## The Legend.

Napoleon described the English as a nation of shopkeepers, and the motive of British policy in Ireland will be found in the mind of the shopkeeper rather than in the speeches of the politicians. The frequent Ministerial references to the claims of "Loyal Ulster" may serve the purpose of convincing some British electors that the Government is mightily concerned about protecting the loyal Orange minority in the North from the oppression of a rebellious Catholic majority in the South; but all the same, those who know the history of Ireland in English politics will pass over all the windy declamation about religious liberty and seek the motive of the policy in the Board or Trade statistics. We do not go so far as to assert that Ulster is a negligible quantity in the question. Ulster is important as a fiction: destroy the fiction and you destroy the fact. Destroy the legend of a small band of thrifty, God-fearing settlers consumed with loyalty to the Empire and to British tradition—a sturdy company whose souls revolt against the surrender of their liberties to a nation of ignorant, thriftless, discontented people dominated by a clergy giving obedience to a foreign prelate—destroy that legend, and Britain's last excuse for remaining in Ireland fades away. It is the business of the British politician to see

**Burn Linton Coal**

**SOUTHLAND'S BEST.**

Depots, Branches: Riverton, Invercargill, Oamaru, Timaru, and Agents in every Town.

**A TRIAL WILL CONVINCE YOU.**