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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WITH the progress of the century, it would appear, even the preachers of infidelity have advanced far beyond the position in which their great apostles stood. To-day we are told that the atheistic world will be in every respect better, more civilised, and more enlightened than the Christian world had been—yet they who were the forerunners of the atheistic leaders of the day did not dare to make any such claim. Nay, they rather shrunk back terrified at the imagination of a goddess world. "What," asks our contemporary the *Novellists* of New Caledonia, "will be the fruits of lay-teaching, without morality, without dogma, without God, such as Freemasonry would impose on France, and on the world? It is to Voltaire, whose testimony is not suspected, that we shall leave the task of teaching us. Here is what, before the invention of scientific morality, this enemy of Christ said of the atheism which, in his time, existed in an exceptional condition and which bids fair, thanks to the Revolution and the university teaching, to become the law of a whole people. 'I suppose,' he said, 'what God forbid, that a whole people is Atheist on principle, Thenceforth, all the bonds of society are broken; all secret crimes inundate the earth, as the locusts come almost unperceived to ravage the country. The lower classes will be only a horde of robbers. They pass their miserable life in the taverns with abandoned women; they fight among themselves; they fall down drunk among their pewter pots, with which they have broken one another's heads. They waken up to rob and assassinate; every day they recommence their abominable round of brutalities. Who will restrain the great in their vengeance, in their ambition, to which they will sacrifice all?' (Voltaire, *Edit. Kehl*: in.—12, vol. 68, p. 185.) There (continues our contemporary) is the picture of society without morality—that is to say without God. If there be no God, in fact, morality is a chimera and a trickery. Honest people are simpletons and it is the rascals and robbers who are right. Now, this is what lay-teaching that blots out God, and accustoms childhood to do without, if not to blaspheme Him, is bringing us to." And so the world advances—from the men of the Reformation to the deists, for Voltaire was the pupil of the English infidels, from the deists to the atheists, and from the atheists to the men of the abyss—the leader in the race that every day grows faster, being, as the *Novelliste* reminds us, godless teaching.

WE have been very much interested in learning a PRIZE OX AND that, among the good deeds performed by a certain BEELZEBUB. Bible-class which exists in Dunedin, there is to be found the maintenance of two native teachers somewhere in the New Hebrides. The work is no doubt an excellent one, and if, perhaps, it is not one that costs a very great deal, for Native teachers in the New Hebrides should be cheap to maintain, it doubtless does not merit the less for that. Whether the Gospel be preached cheaply or dearly the Gospel is preached at any rate, and that is all that should be desired. What makes the matter, however, of especial interest to us at present is that we had but now learned from a correspondent of our contemporary the *Evening Star*, as we saw last week, some details of the evangelical work that is done by Native teachers in the South Seas, and, therefore, we are better able to appreciate what it is that the Bible-class get for their money—that is, of course, the particular nature of the spiritual blessings conferred by the indirect means of the Bible-class's money on the South Sea Islanders.—We do not know as to whether the particular Native teachers alluded to are of the prosaic practical sort of piety that seems to have actuated that teacher at Tonga, who, according to the correspondent in question, was expelled for describing the joy caused in Heaven by the liberal contributions of his people as manifested by the roasting of a bullock in those celestial realms. And, by the way, if the people are so liberal in their donations, how comes it that a society in Dunedin must contribute to the support of their teachers? But, at least, let us hope that the Native teachers alluded to are as grateful to their Dunedin friends and supporters—even if they express their gratitude in some more refined figure, as was the

teacher who was so promptly punished. We may further remark, in passing, that the punishment so inflicted may possibly admit of being questioned, and there may be more than one opinion as to whether there was not a breach of the right of private judgment in connection with it. If the "Unaided Word" had taught that teacher that the angels manifest their joy by the roasting of bullocks who had a right to interfere with his conscientious convictions, or to come between him and the teaching of the Word? Doctrines, quite as improbable in some people's minds, have been admitted as lawful on a similar basis, and no one has dared to interfere with them, and if the dismissed teacher has set up a sect whose principal tenet is connected with roast beef there is no member of the evangelical world who may consistently find fault with him. Nay, he may plead strong proofs for his belief—did not Abraham, for example, feast his celestial visitors on well-cooked meat, and did not the angel who appeared to Manoah go up in the flame of the meat that was roasting as a sacrifice? Decidedly a very full body of proof might be brought forward from holy writ, and quite as good a one as many very precious doctrines rest upon for pious evangelical minds. We affirm that that teacher was very unfairly and inconsistently treated. But if these teachers in the New Hebrides are of a different turn of interpretation from that of the teacher in Tonga, let us at least hope that they are not less able than some of their Tongan brethren to do battle with the devil. Native catechists there, says the correspondent, have taken part in pummelling the devil out of a sick person. The Dunedin Bible-class should certainly make sure that their money goes as far, proportionately, in the pummelling of the devil as do the gifts of the converts of Tonga.—But whether is it worse to expel the devil from the bodies of the sick, or to coax him to take possession of the bodies of the healthy? For if theologians are engaged in the one office in the South Seas, theologians in the far North are engaged in the other. In the Scotch Highlands, in fact, according to the Edinburgh correspondent of the *Daily Times*, some very excellent people, who have been filled with indignation at the proposal to introduce instrumental music into the kirk, and to sing "human hymns," whatever they may be, have at the same time been engaged in giving over to Satan the body of an obnoxious exciseman. They had varied their piety, it seems, and their desire for "purity of worship" by illicit distillation, and a practical aspiration after the purity of liquor, and, on being interfered with, they constructed a cunning image of a zealous official, and placed it in a water-course to waste away—in the charitable belief handed down from the times of the witch-burnings that the body of their enemy would waste inch by inch with it. The South Seas and the far North, then, are met together, and the native catechist in Tonga who pummels the devil out of his patient may claim spiritual relationship with the dounce theologian and time-honoured Biblical student of the Highlands. Stump orators, meanwhile, and pulpiteers of every degree assure us that the study of the "Unaided Word" is the unflinching bar against all superstition, and every malevolence—and that where the "Unaided Word" does not rule, superstition holds the reins! We confidently trust, however, that the Bible-class in Dunedin will get the full value of their well-spent money. It is only neighbourly for us to hope that their particular catechists will insist that every celestial bullock they treat of is a prize ox, and that they will absolutely refuse to pummel any other devil than Beelzebub himself. Otherwise, it would be a pity to send the bawbees out of the Colony, and the natives might as well be left themselves to support their own exorcists.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody good,—therefore THE EASTERN QUESTION. Afghanistan will profit by the Russian advance in Central Asia,—the latest phase in the advance has been the taking over by Russia of Sarakhs—the fortress occupied by Persia to control the Tekke Turcomans and prevent their ruinous inroads upon Persian territory, an office which Russia now declares to have devolved upon her since she has become mistress of the country which the Tekkes inhabit. But at the same time the acquisition of Sarakhs necessary to Russia's fulfilment of the office of order and defence she has so chivalrously assumed throws back the frontier of Afghanistan within fifty miles of Herat, and places in her power the whole country that extends to that frontier. The panic, meantime,