

EGREGIOUS RUBBISH. We have sometimes heard people who were astonished at the conversion to the Catholic Church of Protestants of intellect and culture, ascribe the matter in their bewilderment and vexation to the necessities of the *dilettante*. The idea of the Catholic Church, however, possessed by these people had been formed of what they knew or had heard of some of the great ceremonies of the festivals, and of the ordinary life and true spirit of Catholicism they knew nothing. We now find a directly opposite case, that of a man who, as a *dilettante*, received a shock to all his elegant sensibilities that effectually put an end to Catholic sympathies on his part. Mr. Ruskin, in short, in a newly published volume of his autobiography, tells us how he became utterly disgusted with the Catholic idea as he possessed it at the time. He paid a fatal visit to the Grande Chartreuse, which he found to his disappointment situated among quite commonplace hills, with nothing of the romantic beauty or grandeur of the Alps about them. The monk who attended him had "no cowl worth the wearing," "no beard worth the wagging,"—and looked completely bored. Above all he seemed bored by Mr. Ruskin and his father, who accompanied him. Notwithstanding this, however, and even forgetting the commonplace appearance of the hills, Mr. Ruskin put his head out of a window and made a "Modern Painters" sort of a remark about the religious fervour to be excited by contemplating nature. And then, said this monk, "with a curl of his lip,"—and if his beard could not even hide that we must acknowledge it to have been but a shabby crop of stubbles—"We do not come here to look at the mountains." What would you have then? A monastery in a commonplace situation; a monk with a scanty cowl and a scrubby beard, delighting not in the society of the poetic and artistic soul, and having something else to do than to contemplate the mountains! Must we not admit, as Mr. Ruskin claims, that all this was of significance enough to give for the future a different course to his religious thought? Still we cannot help being in some degree astonished at the nonsense that an eminent man and a leader of culture can sometimes talk—more especially if, as in the present case, we are to accept it as meant in earnest.

A DISGRACEFUL STATE OF THINGS. SOMETHING more, perhaps, may be learned concerning a religious system from the morals of the society formed in the country where it obtains, than from the material power possessed by that country as compared with others. A writer in *Truth*, for example, gives us a sketch of the woman of the period as she exists in England—the country where, in the destruction of the Armada, three hundred years ago, the fall of the Catholic religion became final, and where, a hundred years later, Protestantism was conclusively established. Nor is *Truth* a publication in which we expect to find much that is over strict. The writer tells us, then, that the woman of the period is one who will flaunt herself in prominent positions where discussions are taking place in which details are sifted that, says he, "make decent men almost sick with shame." He gives us an example of the crowding of the ladies' gallery in the House of Commons on a late occasion, to which we have referred elsewhere, and when a warning had been duly given of the nature of the debate to take place—Women, nevertheless were present in numbers, and made themselves prominent by their applause. Women and young girls, he tells us are familiar with, and converse with men on subjects that some years ago were held unmentionable among men themselves, and which then would have been tolerated in no place where decent-minded men assembled together. What was written in satire of the casino in 1860, he tells us quoting an outspoken passage from Alfred Austin, is true of places of public entertainment in 1888. But here is the picture he gives us of the women of the day:—"The old women enamelled and aping the antics of youth; the mature women faked up to the utmost verge of meretriciousness; the girls powdered and well skilled in the 'wicked lightning of the eyes' that formerly in the Park used to be the property of 'Anonymas,' who, in the altered state of fashion, might give their innocent sisters many a lesson in modesty and propriety." He concludes his article with the following quotation:—"You cannot think," says Ruskin, "that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth: that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it, and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails." But the state of things to which Ruskin alludes was the outcome of the Catholic system, by which the world of chivalry was controlled. That which prevails to-day, as described by the writer in *Truth*, if it is not the direct outcome of the religious Protestantism whose victory has now been celebrated in the third centennial of the Armada—and, verily, we are loath to accredit any form of Christianity with so foul an offspring—has, at least, not been prevented by it. Can any degree, therefore, of material power glorify the religious system of a country whose morals are shamefully corrupt?

A TELLING LETTER. THE significance of the Gladstonite victory at Ayr was emphasised by its evidently being promoted by a letter from Mr. Gladstone to the proprietor of the *Ayrshire Post*, in which he briefly but forcibly reviewed the situation. The Tories, he said, in effect, were now the advocates of what they had repudiated in 1886. They had then denied that coercion was the alternative to Home Rule, but now their watchword was permanent coercion, and that not aimed at crime but at combination apart from crime. Nay more, men were now punished in Ireland on the simple proof of exclusive dealing, although the Tories everywhere favoured this, using it against Home Rulers, and more especially, to the writer's knowledge, if they happened to be clergymen. But not only, continued the writer, had the Tories in 1886 condemned coercion, but they had also promised to Ireland, at the very least, the system of local government intended for Great Britain. They had now, he added, announced that local government would be withheld from Ireland until she had renounced her national aspirations, that is to say for ever. Under these circumstances, they asked the electors to return them on the principles they had abjured in 1886. "They then promised no coercion and plenty of local government; they now stand for no local government and plenty of coercion." Lord Hartington wrote a contradiction of this letter, which, in a letter written directly to his Lordship, Mr. Gladstone answered without difficulty. Mr. Chamberlain also wrote endeavouring to counteract the effect produced. The result, however, has proved the force of Mr. Gladstone's influence, and shown how he has triumphed in the face of the strongest opposition. But Mr. Gladstone's statement of his conviction that Ireland's national aspirations must last for ever is hardly exceeded in importance by the support given by Scotland to his views generally, including that referred to.

EXTREMES MEET. Among the strange phenomena of the day is the sympathy with despotism which, in a particular case or too, we see exist in men whose principles embrace freedom in its most liberal form. The friendly feeling that exists between the United States and Russia, for instance, has long seemed to us an anomaly, and now we find, on the part of an individual, a similar case that it seems even more difficult to explain. Mr. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who is nothing if not democratic, has gone on a visit to St. Petersburg where he finds everything as charming as it is possible for anything to be. The railway through Central Asia he pronounces a most admirable work—not only as a piece of engineering skill, which it undoubtedly is, but as spreading abroad the influences of civilisation,—though we had never heard that Russia itself was so thoroughly civilised in all its districts. There is even reason for us to believe that Mr. Stead, who, of course, scents all notion of a rivalry in India between England and Russia is convinced that English rule in the great empire referred to is confirmed and strengthened by this line of railway. What, however, seems most of all to delight him is the management of the Russian gaols, that is those for ordinary criminals; for the prisons of the political offenders he had not as yet seen. He describes these gaols as places where a man might be fortunate to find himself incarcerated. There are schools; there are workshops in which the men are employed at trades and which only differ from those of free artisans by their superior cleanliness. There is an abundance of food—excellent soup, and above all, beer, and though rather a small beer still beer, being supplied to every prisoner at will, and all who are able to afford it are permitted to supply themselves with tea. Mr. Stead, remembering his own experiences of skilfully only during the days of his late imprisonment for libel in London, grows quite pathetic over this indulgence. If all Mr. Stead writes, in fact, be pure unvarnished truth, the Nihilists are men of double dyed guilt; and a despotic government has many features that Constitutional States might imitate with advantage. But though the meeting of extremes is interesting it is not very trustworthy.

A FORLORN HOPE. LORD WOLSELEY is an enterprising man. His latest undertaking, however, is possibly the most difficult that he has as yet confronted. Indeed we may reasonably question as to whether, on the whole, his chances of success against the Mahdi were not infinitely higher than those with which he now acts. It is certain that against Arabi Pasha and his forces he proved himself much more formidable. Speaking the other day at a Savings Banks meeting in London his Lordship delivered himself of the following bold and remarkable sentiments. He had no iced, said he, ever since he was a boy an increase in the tendency on the part of Englishwomen to spend a much larger portion of the incomes of their husbands than they were entitled to on articles of attire. There, now, what are we to think of that? Yet they say Lord Wolseley is a timid man. He has opposed the construction of the Channel tunnel; he has alarmed the country as to the possibilities of a French invasion, but he has not been afraid to face with such a statement the whole united better-half of the kingdom. But fancy a gallant soldier who, ever since his boyhood, has kept his eye on the fair sex, only to perceive the extra-