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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

TRUTH CONCERNING BUDDHISM.

WE have of late years been accustomed to hear a great deal about the excellence of the Buddhist religion. So enamoured of the system referred to did some members of the Western nations become, in fact, that they took it upon them to set up a Buddhist propaganda and they have at least done something towards strengthening the religion in certain of its own quarters. There has, moreover, more widely been a special disposition to draw comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity, which were more or less unfavourable to the latter. The reality, however, as compared with the imagination, hardly appears so excellent, or leads us to believe that the adoption of the Eastern creed would be of much benefit to Christendom. A special correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, who has recently paid a visit to Peking, gives his newspaper some details that are not particularly edifying. His description relates to a monastery in the Chinese capital, into which curiosity induced him to penetrate, but out of which he afterwards found himself exceptionally fortunate in being permitted to make his escape. The sights seen in the temple, which is under the charge of the Buddhist monks, are not of much interest to us. They consisted chiefly of images of various sorts, some of them apparently remarkable as works of art:—"In a couple of hours," writes the visitor, "we had seen everything and came out again into the central court-yard. Here were already a hundred or more monks waiting for us, all with their heads shaven like billiard balls, and, on the whole, a set of as thorough-paced blackguards as ever I set eyes on; filthy, vermin-covered, bloated, scrofulous, and with the marks of nameless vices stamped clearly on many of their faces. 'I shall be glad when we are out of this,' I remarked, and my companion heartily assented. But easier said than done. They crowded round us with brutal inquisitiveness, pulled us about, shouted to us, and laughed grossly as half-rational gorillas might do." The correspondent and his companion, however, replied as politely as they could, signifying at the same time their strong desire to quit the premises. This, nevertheless, was not to be so easy a task as they hoped for them. From crowding around them, the monks betook themselves to an open attack, and a fight that must in all probability have ended fatally for the visitors was with difficulty avoided, and they were obliged to pay a rather high price for permission to leave. And is this, after all, the naked truth that theosophism, for instance, clothes in such glowing colours for us? Where in this great monastery were the sages engaged in contemplation of far greater depth and more marvellous insight than anything known even to the wisest men of the Western world? Where was the profound knowledge gathered as the fruit of ages of study, or any of the great and wonderful things which we are assured exist among the Buddhists throughout the East? Let this mob of turbulent monks, evidently arrived at the lowest depths of degradation, answer. The fact is, meantime, that the asserted excellence of Buddhism, like that of many other false systems of the present day, is due not to any real good in the system itself, but to the anxiety which exists in some places to escape from the responsibilities of Christianity, and to substitute in its stead some form of belief or philosophy which may not include a warning as to the judgment to come.

CATHOLIC CONSENT.

THE inquiry that has for some time been going on before a committee of the Legislature of Massachusetts, relative to a Bill intended to make the maintenance of Catholic schools in the State an impossibility, is of interest to people residing in every country where Catholic education is under the ban of the Government—as in our own colony. The out-spoken testimony, given by men of every nationality, for example, as to the desire of the Catholic people for a thoroughly Catholic education, and the voluntary manner in which, completely uninfluenced by the priesthood, notwithstanding the common pretence that they are so, they support such schools, are very important. We have now before us, for instance, a report of the in-

quiry in question, given by the *Boston Pilot*, in which a good deal occurs to the effect that we have mentioned. Louis Plout, a French Canadian, for example, testified that most of his countrymen settled in his neighbourhood, favoured, as he himself did, the Catholic schools. His children, nevertheless, he said, attended the public schools, because there was no room for them, nor for half the children applying, in the parochial schools. No priest had ever threatened him with excommunication, he added, because his children went to the public schools, nor had he heard that such a threat was made in any other case. Louis Poirer, who was of French-Canadian parentage, though a native of the States, gave similar evidence. The French population of his town, he said, were unanimously in favour of private schools. This witness, moreover, gained applause for his outspoken declaration against unjust laws. The Catholic Church, he said, had always advised compliance with the laws of the country. "But does not the Church canon specify all 'just' laws?—Witness: 'All just laws, but the minute you pass unjust laws that are not fitting to any enlightened people, then I stand up as an enlightened man and good citizen and say I am going to fight them.'" An appeal made by Mr Thomas Gargan, a native of Boston, however, is still more important. "None of these poor ignorant Catholics," he said, "have come up here to ask to be relieved from this tyranny to which it is claimed they have been subjected. It will be well for you to take a leaf out of the recent history of Germany before you put this legislation upon the statute book of Massachusetts and attempt to supervise the private schools. In 1870 Bismarck undertook to set the State above the conscience of the people. Bismarck said he would have absolute control of education, and that he never would go to Canossa. What was the result in proud, imperial Germany? It was not five years before the son of the Emperor made a pilgrimage to the Pope, asking him to do something to suppress anarchy in Germany. The Catholic Church did give its aid in that work. Gentlemen, I predict that in this country the day is not far distant when, with the monopolies upon the one hand, and discontented labour upon the other, the great conservative force which will be called on for the salvation of the Republic will be the Catholic Church. The people who, from the Commanding General of the army, General Sheridan, down to the lowest private in the ranks, have proved their loyalty to this country, who have shed their blood in battling for the maintenance of this Government—those men, when a different mission comes, and they are asked to perform something more graceful, will be as true and as loyal in the future as they have been in the past. Do not alienate them by such legislation as this. If those people have the suspicion, well grounded or not, that you mean to persecute them, I appeal to you to respect that suspicion. If you place this law upon the statute book, every man of them would glory in being arrested under the fourth section, and he would want no prouder and better title than that, in the cause of morality and conscience, he disobeyed a bad and unjust law. I say to you, gentlemen, pause. Let well enough alone."—We see, therefore, how unanimous Catholic opinion on the subject of education is; how in all parts of the world alike Catholics, uncoerced and uninfluenced by their priests, desire a Catholic education for their children. From the testimony of Mr. Poirer and Mr. Gargan, again, we learn incidentally the light in which resistance to an unjust law is generally looked upon by honourable men—a matter that should be duly considered by those, for example, who accuse the Irish people of turbulence because of their opposition to the oppression of their country.

AN ENCOURAGING COMPARISON.

IN the *Westminster Review* for April a comparison is made between the American revolution and the Irish agitation of the present day. The writer first states the Irish situation as it exists, and as the Government of coercion explains it, a situation with which we are, for our own part, sufficiently acquainted. The views in question he compares with those existing in the reign of George III. with regard to America:—"In the King's speech at the opening of Parliament on the 31st October 1776, he tells us," the following passages occur:—"Nothing could have afforded me so much gratification as to have been able to inform you that the troubles which have so long distracted my colonies in North America were at an end;