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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE good Sisters of St. Mary's Convent, Wellington, have made, in a small way, a new departure in their educational work, and we are sure the new venture will prove so satisfactory and successful that everyone will wonder that the idea was not carried out long ago. The Sisters have decided to publish a Convent Annual, and under the title of "Our Fernery" their first Annual has just been given to the world. "Merely a little fernery, of all sorts, with interests mingled as in fern life, to be added to at some future date if the present collection gives pleasure," is the modest announcement with which the Sisters introduce their publication to readers and friends. That the present collection will give both pleasure and profit we have no manner of doubt whatever. As furnishing a history of the work done by the convent since its establishment at Wellington it will be most interesting to old pupils and friends, and as a sample of the high literary level which the present pupils have attained, under the careful training of the Nuns, it will be read with pleasure by all who can appreciate bright, cheery, chatty articles and well thought-out and well-written stories. "Our Fernery" contains thirty large-sized pages of reading matter, and is adorned with a well-executed illustration of the Convent Chapel and a photo of Miss Brady, a convent pupil who won distinction as the vocal exhibitor of 1896. The bulk of the reading matter is supplied by the pupils of the convent and shows that the contributors possess literary ability of a very high order. It is evident that there is no lack of talent at St. Mary's, and it is equally evident that it is carefully trained and developed by the gifted teachers. In addition to the articles and stories already referred to there are a large number of poetical contributions, all of which breathe the spirit of true poetry, and some of which, as, for example, the "Ode to the Deity," by L. Y. B., show a high power both of thought and expression. A short history of the establishment of the convent and of its various branches is given, from which we learn that the present institution was founded in 1850, so that it will soon be able to celebrate its Golden Jubilee. An account is also given of the branch establishments at Blenheim and Palmerston North. The latter is a comparatively recent foundation, but the Blenheim branch is now well established and is able to show an excellent record of honours and distinctions achieved. Altogether this little Annual furnishes ample evidence that the Sisters of Mercy at Wellington have done and are doing a noble work and that their labours in the cause of education are being attended with signal success. We notice that though there are a good many advertisements in the Annual the good Sisters have quite forgotten to advertise themselves. It may be said that the Annual itself is their best advertisement and no doubt that is very true. But it does happen occasionally that prospective patrons are anxious for information on such details as terms and fees, course of tuition, etc., and it would probably be worth while to devote a little space to supplying such information. We would have very much liked to see also in "Our Fernery" something in the nature of a musical composition from some of the pupils. There is abundance of literary talent at St. Mary's and the institution has won the highest possible musical distinction. Why should not some of the literary scholars write a few verses on which some of the more advanced music pupils might try their prentice hand at musical composition. We are sure the effort would be appreciated by readers of the Annual and seeing that music is such a strong point at the convent, it is only fitting that some prominence should be given to it in what is practically the pupils' periodical. It is right to remember, however, that this issue of the Annual is in the nature of an experiment, and it is not wise to be too ambitious in first ventures. The matter which "Our Fernery" does contain is altogether excellent, so excellent, indeed, that one cannot help wishing there was more. We heartily congratulate the Sisters on having

produced at the first attempt such an altogether admirable Annual, and we hope they will be encouraged by the success of their venture to launch out still more boldly in the years to come.

THE TRUTH
ABOUT
MADAGASCAR.

WE have heard a good deal lately about Catholic tyranny and intolerance in Madagascar. A somewhat sensational article has been going the rounds of the Press, in which it is asserted that a fierce persecution is raging against the Protestants in Madagascar, and that a determined attempt is being made to destroy all religious liberty in that unhappy island. This account has been supplemented by the further announcement that the directors of the London Missionary Society, though naturally extremely reluctant to question the *bona fides* of French officials, have decided to make public the "painful development of affairs in Madagascar." They have accordingly issued an appeal to the Christian feeling of the land, and to all true friends of religious liberty. As usual, it is the Jesuits who are at the bottom of the mischief, who are, in the words of the London Missionary Society, the *fons et origo* of the system of oppression now said to be in operation in Madagascar. The facts on the other side, however, as stated by Father Gerard in an article in the *Month*, put a very different complexion on the case. The alleged "facts" about Catholic tyranny are, he declares, when probed to the bottom, found to rest upon unreliable Malagasy testimony interpreted by Protestant pastors. He has, indeed, to admit the melancholy fact that since the advent of the French into Madagascar, in 1895, the English schools have been depleted and the French Catholic schools have received 85,000 scholars, instead of 25,000 as formerly. How is this to be accounted for? Not by the machinations of the Jesuits, and certainly not by any partiality which the French Government have shown towards the Order. The friendship of the French Government for the Order is shown by the fact that it has been altogether proscribed in France, and it is hardly likely that they would allow the Jesuits to violate, at their pleasure, the regulations established in a country practically subject to martial law, and in which the Colonial Minister, M. Lebon, is himself a Protestant. The real answer is this:—"Under the old *régime* a law was enforced, at the instance of the Protestant missionaries, by which it was forbidden, under the penalty of a fine imposed both upon himself and his parents, to transfer a pupil from a school in which he had been entered to another; which practically meant that the great majority of children must be educated as Protestants, for it was compulsory to register every child in some school, and the officials, who were all Protestants, were charged with the execution of this duty." With the advent of the French this regulation came to an end, and now the reign of "religious liberty," about which the London Missionary Society are so anxious is really only beginning instead of having come to an end. The liberty which they appear to be anxious for is a very one-sided liberty.

A SPLENDID
TRIBUTE TO
JESUIT
MISSIONARY
WORK.

A FEW weeks ago we referred in these columns to the proposal which was brought before the American Senate to withdraw Government aid from all sectarian schools amongst the Indians and we reviewed the circumstances under which such aid was first granted and the reasons why it was now proposed to discontinue such help. It was shown that at first when the grants in aid were practically confined to non-Catholic bodies there was not so much as a whisper of dissatisfaction, but as soon as Catholic schools began to be established and to claim a substantial share of the Government grants the cry of denominationalism was quickly raised, and a general clamour was made for the withdrawal of the State subsidies. A provision was introduced into the Indian Appropriation Bill doing away for the future with all Government aid to sectarian schools, and the proposal was unfortunately adopted. In the course of the debate in the Senate, though a good deal of bitterness and bigotry was exhibited, there were some splendid vindications of the work done by the Catholic schools among the Indians, perhaps the most notable being the manly utter-

Smoke T. C. Williams' JUNO TOBACCO.
COMPARE SIZE AND WEIGHT OF STICKS.