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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD

THE revelations of juvenile immorality which were made in the cases heard recently in the Wellington Police Court disclosed a state of things which is unspeakably shocking. From the evidence given it appears that numbers of young

girls, in many cases just entering their teens, are in the habit of absenting themselves from their homes night after night and leading lives of open and flagrant immorality. It is only too certain that the evil is by no means confined to Wellington, but exists to a greater or less extent in all the large towns of the Colony. That such a state of things should be possible in this fair young country is a shame and a disgrace to our civilisation, and everyone with a head to think and a heart to feel must see the urgent necessity of taking prompt steps to repress the evil. The cause of the evil is partly the carelessness, or neglect, or viciousness of the parents, and partly the depravity of the children. So far as the latter cause is concerned we believe there is only one preventive, and that is, provision for systematic religious instruction in the schools of the Colony. The experience of this Colony, and of all the other colonies, is showing more and more clearly every year how absolutely necessary such a measure is for the safety and future well-being of the community. It will be a long time, however, we fear, before any Government will have the courage to grapple boldly with that question. In the meantime something at least might be done to induce parents to fulfil the obligations resting upon them in this matter. In the session of last year a Bill was introduced by the Premier, entitled the Juvenile Depravity Suppression Bill, which provided that any constable should have power to take children found loitering on the streets at night to a clergyman, or Justice of the Peace, or to the house of some person of good repute, and then put questions to them. The measure, which passed its second reading, was certainly in the right direction and would have operated beneficially on both children and parents. In some parts of America they have gone a step further and adopted a "curfew ordinance" which requires that all children under a certain age shall be at their homes after nightfall, and makes parents responsible for the carrying out of this provision. It appears to have worked very successfully in the cities in which it has been tried. The Chief of Police of Omaha reports: "It is now an easy matter to enforce home rules." Chief Broder, of St. Joseph, says: "The adoption of the curfew is an act of humanity to that class of fathers and mothers with boys and girls who defy home restraint, and it will prevent crime and save taxes." Employers of Labour say they get better work because better hours are kept, and school teachers testify that they get better work for the same reason. Chief of Police Melick, of Lincoln, Neb., says that "after the curfew was in force a few weeks, arrests for disorderly conduct and truancy fell off fully seventy-five per cent"; and the Mayor of North Platte, Neb., says: "In the two years we have had the curfew we have sent no children to the Reform School, whereas before that we sent quite a number." The curfew is certainly a drastic remedy, but the disease is a desperate one, and the time has clearly passed for playing or paltering with this question.

Apropos of the announcement made recently by the Rev. Father McKenna that steps were to be taken immediately for the erection of a convent in

A TRIBUTE TO THE CATHOLIC NUN. Masterton the *Wairarapa Star* of the 14th inst. pays a generous tribute to the work carried out by the various Orders of nuns in the Catholic Church. In a leading article on the proposed new convent our contemporary says:—"The usefulness of these organised bodies of women cannot be over-estimated. Protestants, who have received their education at their hands, generally speak with gratitude and respect of the affection and wisdom that they have received from these devoted women.

The mental picture one naturally draws of a nun is that she is kind. One can scarcely imagine her being cross or having a bad temper. But where they have most distinguished themselves has been the ward of the hospital. With what marvellous patience, devotion, kindness, sympathy and skill, have they attended the sick and dying in every part of the world for no human reward. Their praise is in every man's mouth, but it has not rippled the surface of their humility. As a corporate body they are one of the marvels of history. One may go to the earliest days of Christianity, and there the same picture will present itself as may now be seen in the streets of Wellington and Dunedin, and soon in those of Masterton—holy women given to good works. The nun never dies; the form and work abide; the personality alone is transformed. One sees her, in every age of Christianity, the same in dress, motive, work, aim and spirit. There is a wonderful continuity in their methods. One hands it down to another, so that though individuals may pass away, the Order always remains the same. Precisely the same qualities are observed in nuns wherever they are met. Devotion, humility, simplicity, piety, discipline, order, method and arrangement give a strange completeness to their lives, a strange effectiveness to their work.' Such testimony from an impartial source is very refreshing, especially when we call to mind the sort of language which was commonly used towards the nuns in days gone by. It may be true that to-day their praise is, as our contemporary says, "in every man's mouth" but there was a time when it certainly was not. That day happily is fast passing away, and as Protestants come to see more and know more of our nuns and their work they will grow utterly ashamed of the horrible suspicions which they had been taught to entertain regarding them. Our contemporary also refers at some length to the Protestant "sisterhoods," but seems to find a difficulty in working up anything like enthusiasm regarding them. His remarks concerning them are, in fact, decidedly uncomplimentary. He says: "We are informed that imitation is the truest flattery. If this be so, Protestants have paid a high tribute to the worth of Catholic nuns. The numerous sisterhoods during the last twenty years, which have sprung up in the Church of England, and even amongst the most rigid Protestants, are simply imitations, in some cases very bad ones, of the Orders of Nuns which have existed since the foundation of Christendom in the Catholic Church. This imitation is a tribute of a twofold character. In the first place it is a witness to the excellence of the work taken in hand, that it was not only necessary, but performed in an efficient manner, in the right spirit, and with the highest aim. Imitation generally implies inferiority, and this appears apparent when the Protestant sisterhood is put beside the Catholic nun, perhaps with the exception of a few deaconesses in Germany. Take the religious agencies of London, and examine the numerous sisterhoods which now abound, in every quarter, some of them very gimerack in their gay apparel, numbering within their ranks a goodly number of smart young women, who in various ways see as much of the world as the Church, if not of the devil, and can they be compared to the nuns of the Catholic Church for either devotion to their work or the results they produce? No one holds them in the same estimation; it seems the difference between play and work." In the main we believe our contemporary's remarks are perfectly true, though we ourselves would have spoken more charitably of the, in most cases, well-meant efforts of the Protestant "Sisters." It is clear indeed, that Protestant sisterhoods never can be successful, because, in the first place, they have not the organisation necessary for securing and maintaining discipline; in the second place, they have not the traditions and associations of the past to guide and steady them, and in the third place, the whole spirit of monasticism is altogether foreign to the genius of Protestantism. It is only the other day that an announcement appeared in the papers of the engagement and approaching marriage of two of the Protestant "Sisters" in Melbourne. A sisterhood, membership in which is capable of being terminated at any time by such a *dénouement* as that, makes no heavy call for heroism on the part of its members, and in the nature of things it cannot possibly hope to ever achieve anything like a stable and permanently successful work.