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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

CROSSING THE BAR.

GREAT men nowadays die upon the stage, with the world looking on. Every word, gesture, pang of suffering is noted. Doctors, nurses, chambermaids, are besieged for 'copy,' privacy is outraged, and

the minutest details are served up to the expectant public and embalmed in print. The feeling is, to a great extent, morbid, like that of Caligula, who displayed a gruesome curiosity in watching the countenances of the dying in the arena. There is no privacy for the man who has the misfortune to die either great or notorious. But the stories of such death-beds only emphasise the fact that a man's death is of the same complexion as his life. Rabelais' last words were: 'Let down the curtain. The farce is over.' Moody, the actor, died with a quotation from Shakespeare on his lips. Napoleon III. tripped feebly about Sedan. Columbus, Tasso, and most of the saints passed away with the sweet words: 'Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.' Mr. Gladstone died reciting the Lord's Prayer. It was a fitting close to a life which was permeated through and through with deep religious feeling. One noteworthy incident in connection with his closing hours is related by the London correspondent of the Irish ultra-Protestant organ, the *Dublin Daily Express*. The correspondent states that the last piece read to the dying statesman was Father Matthew Russell's touching little poem, *My Last Rondeau*. One of Mr. Gladstone's favourite pieces was Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. The devout lines of the Irish Jesuit could scarcely have failed to smooth the dying statesman's parting hours with some of the sweet resignation to the Divine Will which breathes through the every line of Cardinal Newman's famous poem. Father Russell's poem runs as follows:

'MY LAST RONDEAU.

'My dying hour, how near art thou?
Or near or far my head I bow,
Before God's ordinance supreme;
But, ah! how priceless then will seem
Each moment rashly squandered now!

'Teach me, for Thou canst teach me, how
These fleeting instants to endow
With worth that may the past redeem,
My dying hour!

'My barque that late with buoyant prow
The sunny waves did gaily plough,
Now, through the sunset's fading gleam,
Drifts dimly shoreward in a dream.
I feel the land breeze on my brow,
My dying hour!

NEW ZEALAND Catholics are paying some £60,000

THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION BILL. a year for the maintenance of a godless system of public instruction which they cannot in conscience accept. They also pay for the erection and maintenance of their own schools, which do

much of the work taken over by the State, save the Colony large sums of money, and instil into at least a portion of the rising generation day by day those principles of religion and morality that are the country's best safeguard. For this we are penalised. The Technical Education Bill is big with the promise of still further disabilities for those who dare to train the heart and will of the little ones to good, at the same time that they lead them gently through the thorny labyrinth of the three R's. People often build lofty fabrics of hope on a hair's-breadth of foundation. But we are not aware that the Catholic body in New Zealand ever had much foundation for being prodigal of hope in the present Technical Education Bill. At the same time a strong, not to say a violent, effort will be made to confine its benefits to the godless State schools only. The campaign has already been entered upon

with a show of bustle and temper which, in the circumstances, seems a waste of useful energy. A 'no surrender' party has been formed in the House. It consists of Messrs. Montgomery, Meredith, Tanner, Smith, Taylor, McNab, R. Thompson, and J. Hutcheson. They have formed themselves into a Vigilance Committee. Their object—as a *Dunedin* daily paper puts it—is 'to eliminate any vestige of the provisions granting State aid to private (including denominational) schools.' In other words, the 'no surrender' party would inflict a further double burden on the Catholic body: (1) their quota of the additional cost of the new measure, and (2) a further drain on their resources to keep their own schools abreast of the new line of competition opened up under the aegis of the State. And yet Catholics, through their wilful lack of any semblance of organisation, have left themselves with scarcely a voice to speak boldly of their rights and wrongs in the House of Representatives.

WHO has not heard of the wit that sparkles in the WIT FROM THE 'gods' gallery in the Dublin theatres? It is as sharp as a needle, and as pointed. We do not necessarily mean a pun. One of the pet aversions

of the Dublin god is what is termed 'fiddle-stringing'—long-drawn tuning up. Once upon a time, when the top gallery was preparing to throw a rowdy customer over into the dress-circle, one of the 'gods' cried out: 'Don't waste the man. Kill a fiddler with him!' 'Flaneur,' in the *Sydney Freeman*, gives a later instance of gallery wit. The story is told of a very poor soprano who, after worrying through the part of Arline's music in the *Bohemian Girl*, came to the great air which, commonplace though it be, invariably receives a welcome. On this occasion the murdering of it was too atrocious, however, and as soon as the warbler had sung, 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,' a disgusted 'god' shouted back: 'By dad, it was a blazin' pity they ever woke you!'

'OUIDA'
ON
ITALY.

IN an article on 'The Recent Troubles in Italy' in our last week's issue, we gave some extracts from 'Ouida's' *Village Commune* pointing out the ruin which the present régime has brought upon Italy. The same writer has an article on the same subject

in the June number of the *Fortnightly Review* under the title 'Misgovernment in Italy.' It deals chiefly with the devastation wrought by the spoiler in the picturesque old cities and towns of 'United Italy.' The following extracts will sufficiently indicate more than one method of rushing a country to ruin:—'There is neither common sense nor common decency in the chief part of the measures taken within the last decade to humiliate and imbastardise the cities and towns of Italy. The process of destruction began indeed much earlier; but within the last ten years the pace has increased from a leisurely walk to a furious gallop. The scramble to be the first to outrage, to deface, to despoil, has become a *St Vitus's dance* among the syndics, assessors, and councilmen, each deliriously eager for the approving smile of the various ministers in whose hands the destinies of the great and unrivalled *Urbes* unfortunately are placed. . . . It is such shocking and wicked waste of money as this (the destruction of a whole quarter of *Pistoia*) which impoverishes every town, and disfigures each with vulgar piles of bricks and iron, and grotesque monuments of black metal, whilst a miserable woman at their gates pays four centimes (about $\frac{1}{4}$ d) duty on a pint of milk before she can take it past the guards to sell, and a wretched man, who owns a little road-fed flock of goats is taxed two hundred francs (£8) a year before he may drive them into the streets to yield the little nourishment which they can afford to invalids and children. Should the law proposed by Luzzatti, now under consideration, pass, and the debts of the Communes be paid by the State, and the monies be henceforth lent by the State to the Communes, this wicked expenditure will increase tenfold, and the jobbery accompanying it will be multiplied in similar measure.'

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