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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

WE have been recently told of the great and salutary changes worked in England in cleansing the REFORMATION IN Church there of the corruptions which it is alleged ENGLAND. she had, in the course of ages, incurred. Among these corruptions, we are told, for example, a belief in a purgatory where relief was to be obtained by expiations and penances done here was one of the worst, and one which by its fruits—such, for instance, as the devotion of wealth to procure prayers and oblations—aroused popular indignation and disgust. It is useful for us, therefore, to find some explanation of the methods by which the corruptions alluded to were removed, and better things—more pleasing to the people, and more salutary for them—restored or substituted in their place. Let us, for example, take the charitable institutions of the country, which were certainly supported in great part by the money given or bequeathed to gain indulgences or provide prayers for the benefit of suffering souls:—"The Great Hospital of Norwich," writes the Rev. Dr. Jessopp, a well-known Anglican clergyman, in the *Nineteenth Century* for June, "is one of the very few survivals of those many refuges for the aged poor which existed in considerable numbers down to the time when the detestable oligarchy which made havoc of the land in the name of King Edward the Sixth swept them all away. . . . But it was only one of five hundred hospitals, which were robbed of their all in the first half of the sixteenth century." Dr. Jessopp goes on to describe other actions of the reforming and cleansing powers, which also are not without their suggestiveness. "People," he says, "talk as if the spoliation of the monasteries were the monster act of robbery of that bad time. We are perpetually assured that that measure dealt a crushing blow to the labouring population, as if they were the great losers—the great sufferers. I am by no means sure that it was so. It was the pillage of the hospitals that was the first great wrong done to the poor; but it was the confiscation of the funds belonging to the *guilds* that wrought immeasurably greater mischief. It has been calculated that five hundred hospitals—let us call them almshouses, for they were that, and little else but that—were plundered. Poor old men and old women lost their homes and their maintenance, and were turned out into the roads to beg their bread. That was bad enough; but there were more than thirty thousand *guilds* that were stripped of their all by a sweep of the pen. The *guilds* answered partly to our trades union societies, partly to benefit clubs. Some of them had existed for centuries; some had large accumulated funds, the savings of generations of penurious thrift, grown habitual to those poor toilers by the discipline of long training in the duty of providing for the future. There was not a village in the land that was not ruthlessly despoiled of its little hoards. The *guilds* were absolutely looted: they lost every farthing they possessed, every rag and cup and platter. The gangs of ruffians did their work so thoroughly among the frightened villagers, that not only were they beggared, but the whole machinery of self-help which had been at work from time immemorial was absolutely extinguished." Of the consequences of the reforming and cleansing measures in question Dr. Jessopp also speaks. "Our modern trades unions and benefit clubs," he says, "are things of yesterday. For more than two centuries after that hideous spoliation Englishmen of the working-classes never rose to the conception that they could help themselves. They belonged to the parish and the parish belonged to them; the parish bred them, as the parish bred the owls and the pole-cats; the parish used them till they were past work, then the parish put them into the *poor-house*, where the idiots drivelled, and the palsied mumbled, and the halt and the blind howled and cursed and raved; and there they huddled, gaunt and stolidly desperate till they died, like rats in their holes; and then they tumbled into their graves, sometimes two or three at a time, the sexton taking care not to go too deep, for decent burial couldn't be done at the money." And all this was done, we are continually told—by people, nevertheless, who it is charitable to believe know little of what they are talking about—in order to restore a primitive purity and simplicity.

It would seem, however, that a church in England itself is by no means free from corruption, and requires even a good deal of reformation. The church in question, indeed, appears to be in a continual state of transition, and there is no knowing when it is to become stationary. Its task in fact, is, as we are given to understand, to accommodate religion to the progress of the world, ringing the changes as the successive periods demand it. This endeavor seems to be the rational conclusion from an article written in the interests of the Broad Church party, by the Rev. H. R. Haweis in the *Contemporary Review* for June. "The Low Church has done well," he says, "but they have had their day; they have leavened the laity. The High Church have done well. They have made religion fashionable, but they have not leavened the laity. Pusey never got hold of the masses like Wesley. The reason is that Puseyism was Italian, Wesleyanism was English; but neither was intellectual, and the reform now needed in the Church is essentially an intellectual reform." "We want a form of sound words," explains the writer, "which will ring true in nineteenth century ears. The creeds and articles are now like sweet bells jangled out of tune." "The Broad Church," he explains again, "feels the need of bringing the praying and the preaching of the Anglican Church into harmony with nineteenth century thought and feeling. It does not believe that the theology of Constantine in the fourth century was any more final than the settlement of Henry VIII. in the sixteenth century." The writer evidently does not set too high a value on the work done in the sixteenth century:—"The Luther movement," he says, "became a revolution. England separated from Rome, because Rome would not allow a reform from within. The consequences? External decencies of worship trampled upon, numberless aids to religion, helps, manuals, organisations for charity ruthlessly swept away. Stained-glass smashed, Gothic treasures ruined, the belief in a Divine Presence with the Church enfeebled, half-killed by blows dealt at the supernatural, which is, fence as we will, the life of religion in all its various forms; and only just now are we slowly bringing back Art to the Sanctuary, and the sense of supernatural Principalities and Powers to the world." But, verily, a Church which, as this writer implies, at the outset half-killed the life of religion, and is only just now, after centuries of existence, atoning for the deed by slowly bringing it back to the world, is hardly to be congratulated on the work accomplished by it. It may, moreover, be permitted us to doubt, without much irreverence, as to the efficacy of its restorative efforts. Meantime, Mr. Haweis bears high testimony to the liberal dealing of the Church of England with its ministers, and tells us what is still wanting to them in order that they may be placed completely abreast with the intellectual needs of the period. "We the clergy of the Anglican church," he writes, "have now a liberty in doctrine and ritual unknown to any other Church in Christendom. Is it too much to expect that a Church that can do so much out of deference to modern opinions and carry so rapidly such reforms from within, will some day give us simple alternative forms for the Sacraments? May I add an expurgated Bible, selected Psalms, one Creedal statement, simpler and briefer, additional qualifying and liberating rubrics, sanctioning a more elastic conduct of the services, and, lastly, a total repeal of the Act of Uniformity, an oppressive document unknown to the early Church, and already under the Act of 1865, become almost a dead letter." But when the Church of England is fully purged from the corruptions by which it is itself defiled, some of which are pointed out by Mr. Haweis in the passage quoted by us, it will be time enough for its members to descend on the corruptions they imagine to exist elsewhere. This, nevertheless, we may add, can hardly ever be, for a Church, in permanent transition and advancing *pari passu* with the progress of the world, must be still engaged in freeing itself from the condition of each preceding period, now become defilement.

MR. GOLDWIN SMITH, who has but a poor opinion of Mr. Balfour's Irish Land Bill, and argues that, because farmers in Ontario, as he says, are deep in the books of mortgagees, peasant proprietors in Ireland must also become so, is more comfortable in his mind as to