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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

OUR learned and brilliant contemporary the *Grey River Argus* has honoured us with some attention. He has had also the privilege of being assisted by a correspondent who signs himself "Catholic,"

assuming the character of a man who has taken ever so many steps in advance of his people, who indeed has so far outstripped them that the wonder is the name they bear is any longer patronised by him. The *Argus*, however, notwithstanding his learning and brilliancy, should abide by the truth. It is not true, that the *Tablet*, as he says, devoted an article to the term "howling bigots," as reported to have been used by Mr. Guinness. The *Tablet* in an article on quite another passage in a speech made by Mr. Guinness, referred incidentally to the term "howling bigots," not having at the time received the contradiction published by the paper which had given the report. We do not know to what Christian denomination the *Argus* belongs, or whether indeed he belongs to any. His standing in religion, however, should be high, if we may judge from the way in which he lays down the law. It evidently requires an intimate insight into religious conditions to guarantee Catholic parents, as our contemporary does, that the moral and religious welfare of their children who attend State schools will not suffer. But the Catholics of his district, no doubt, will know how to appreciate our contemporary's assurance. Those of them who, as he tells us, send their children to a State school, although a Catholic school is within reach of them will, perhaps, place the highest appreciation on it. As such Catholic parents, if such indeed exist, have but little scruple about the moral and religious welfare of their children, it should be easy to reassure them. We beg to congratulate them on their having a congenial patron in the *Grey River Argus* Catholic parents worthy of the name, meantime, will continue to look upon Catholic schools as the only schools their children can with perfect safety attend. They will prefer the teaching of their Church and the experience of the Catholic world to the doctrine of even the most profound and religious of our secular newspapers, and religious as well as profound, no doubt, our contemporary the *Grey River Argus* is, particularly qualified, perhaps, also to act as a guide and leader of Catholics, and particularly deserving of their confidence. Still after all, you know, he must come a step or two behind the Pope. No offence to our good contemporary, however. All the world acknowledges Pope Leo XIII to be a man of very exceptional abilities. As to our superior friend "Catholicus," we have to acknowledge with gratitude a word or two of commendation he deigns to bestow on us in passing. Coming from a man of his distinction, if we only knew whom he is, it could not fail to be flattering to us. The Catholic, however, if such there be, who sets aside the religious education of the young as a trifle compared to any other question, even the most important which can concern the State, is a Catholic who let his distinction be otherwise what it may has forfeited his right to the name. He is, besides, a very short-sighted and unwise politician, for, whatever in other respects may be the wisdom of the course pursued by it, no State that repudiates Christianity can, in the long run, prosper. And the State that excludes religion from its schools repudiates Christianity. But really the profundity of our contemporary the *Argus* is difficult to fathom. Listen to this for example. "It would seem to the great majority of mankind" says our contemporary "that the potential truths of Christianity, which underlie our social and religious welfare are not of so abstruse a character that they must necessarily be drilled into children along with the three R's six days a week, backed up and aided as they everywhere are by homily, prayer, and example, and the weekly ministrations and devotions at places of public worship." An organ that is an authority as to the inmost mind towards Christianity of the "great majority of mankind" must necessarily be a formidable organ to differ from. For our own part, we possess no such universal insight or information. What we do know perfectly well is that the vast majority of Christians who should certainly be the highest authority on the matter, are fully agreed on the necessity for

a religious education. Especially is this the case with the members of the Catholic Church who form the majority of the majority in question. Our contemporary is equally profound in his explanation as to the loss of temporal power by the Christian Church. "It was not for the successes they achieved," he tells us, "that, by a consensus of the opinion of the leading civilised peoples, the power and influence once possessed by the ecclesiastical forces of the day have now largely, if not altogether, passed into the hands of the people." But was there such a consensus, and how did it come about, and when did it occur? Historians tell us, for example, that revolutions by which such changes have been brought about were, in fact, the work of agitators comparatively few in number. M. Taine, for instance, says, that such was certainly the case in France. We know, moreover, that to-day the great body of the people of Italy are still in favour of the ecclesiastical power that of more recent years has been destroyed among them, and during whose existence nothing of the misery now rife in the country was known there. Had not the ecclesiastical forces, besides, achieved success, the course of the world must have been very different, for they alone kept oppression and tyranny in check, and spread abroad education and enlightenment. In the degree, in fact, in which the people are capable to day of managing their own affairs they are debtors to the ecclesiastical forces. Their ingratitude is one of the worst and most menacing characteristics of the times. Finally, our contemporary asks. "Can it be maintained by anyone of experience that the pupils educated at denominational schools are in any respect morally better than those taught at State schools? Do they become better members of the community or make more respectable parents?" Our answer is most emphatically, (1) It can, (2) they do. The brilliancy of our contemporary then, and the superior enlightenment of his correspondent, are, as we see open to some doubt. Matters at least, we may legitimately conclude, are capable of being considered in a different light from that in which they regard them.

OUR contemporary the *Grey River Argus* wants to PROOF POSITIVE know if people who have been educated in denominational schools are more moral, better members of the community, or more respected as parents than those brought up in godless schools, and we have answered him to the effect that they are so. Here, for example, is a case very much to the point in justifying our reply. We take it from M. Charles de Mazade, the political writer of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the particular number of the periodical being that for September 15:—Since the first years of the century, says M. de Mazade, the years following the overthrow of those ecclesiastical forces of which our contemporary has spoken, and when godlessness in France had begun to run its course, the birth-rate has not ceased to follow a continuous uninterrupted movement of decrease, and by degrees has fallen from 32.9 for one thousand of the population to 23.9, and even, during the last years, to 23.4. This is a diminution of a quarter in the number of births. There were, in 1800-1810 3.93 children for each marriage; there are now only 2.96. M. de Mazade, moreover, makes it plain that the result in question is one attending on culture, and consequently on godless education which now more than ever prevails. It is, he says, the populations suffering the greatest hardship, the poorest, the most removed from progress and the enjoyment of well-being, the populations of Finistère and Lozère—devout Catholic populations, we may add, who have the most children. M. de Mazade goes on to refute the argument, as a matter of course advanced, that religion lay at the bottom of the evil. The causes, he says, are surely not the philosophic fancies of the author who has advanced this argument, and who insists that if France is sterile, she is so because the democracy remains centralised and Catholic, because she has not yet succeeded in freeing herself from the influence of the past, of royalty, and clericalism. The fact is, on the contrary, says M. de Mazade, that the depopulation has commenced and kept pace with the emancipation spoken of, that it has not since ceased to develop itself without interruption, to attain, in these last few years, its most marked degree. The remedy, as proposed by M. de Mazade, he explains at the same time, as being out of harmony with the policy of the period, that namely, as we know, of secularising everything, especially the schools, with which New Zealand also has entered on a similar policy. The