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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

A REPENTANT SYNOD. EXACTLY so. The longer you bite your nose, the more you will vex your face. The report presented to the Presbyterian Synod of Otago on Wednesday, October 28, by the committee on Bible-reading in

public schools, declares that the influence for evil of the present secular system becomes stronger every year. The secular system was adopted, virtually at least, by the Synod because they foolishly supposed they could strike a mortal blow by its means at the Catholic Church in the Colony. They now see the consequence. They have injured their own conventicle and left the Catholic Church scatheless, or even stronger than before, because a manly struggle must strengthen those who successfully maintain it. Dr Copland made a slight mistake in the debate on the report alluded to. He said the secular system was thrust upon the country by surprise. It was a surprise, nevertheless, of which our Presbyterian friends had full warning. The Catholics of the Colony made a loud and open protest. But our Presbyterian friends, bent on biting their nose to vex their face, opposed them and cast in their lot with the secularists, to whom they gave every possible support. Dr Copland tells us no desire was experienced for the change made, but we have not forgotten Dr Stuart's famous telegram to Mr Bowen, "God speed your Bill," nor the defiant manner in which the worthy Doctor boasted of his exploit. Dr Stuart now, no doubt, thinks his shilling was ill expended—*Experientia docet*. But neither Dr Stuart nor any other member of the Synod, so far as we can perceive from their debate, has the slightest desire that justice should be done in the matter. They are bent on making the schools Presbyterian schools and that is all. Of course, as sincere Presbyterians, they are persuaded that their doctrine, and their doctrine alone, is that which the Bible rightly understood teaches, and surely they have no desire that the Bible should be read merely to be misunderstood. That we should think they would believe to be placing precious souls in jeopardy—or, contrary to the Scriptures, a casting of pearls before swine. However, we by no means pretend to interpret the Presbyterian mind, which has many intricacies where we dare not venture. Witness, for example, the extraordinary debate on the liquor to be used in their communion—must, or wine, or water, nothing at all, or the Lord knows what. But this is beside our question, and a digression into matters that hardly concern us. It is our better part to mind our own business and leave our neighbours to mind theirs, however queer it may be. And it really is our business to protest when a proposal is made to ameliorate things by making the position of Catholics even worse than it actually is. The proposal is to apply the money extracted from Catholics to support a use of Holy Scripture that their Church forbids, and which they regard as a sacrilegious mis-use, and, moreover, to have that mis-use made in manner that must necessarily exclude all Catholic teachers from the schools. Dr Stuart said that what was necessary was to have the Bible read every day—to quote his words, "under intelligent and God-fearing masters and mistresses." Making all allowances for Dr. Stuart's liberality and kindness of heart, which, indeed, we know to be very considerable, it is impossible to misunderstand the meaning of this proposal. The Catholic master, besides, who would consent to act the part alluded to, supposing for the sake of argument that any Catholic would be admitted to it, could not be a God-fearing man—for he would be a man acting against his principles, and compromising his conscience. But Dr Stuart gives us a test as to the success of promiscuous Bible-reading in secular schools. He tells us such is the rule in the high schools of the colony. Do the high schools, then, turn out a class of pupils morally superior to those educated in the primary schools? Are our upper ten a pattern of virtue, while our lower orders are sunk in a quagmire of iniquity? If so, Mammon is a god on whose successful worship a good deal depends in New Zealand. We have a faint suspicion, nevertheless, that such is not the case, but that, high or low, all are pretty much alike. It is, however, of some consequence to see that the Synod are

agreed that secularism is rapidly promoting the moral and religious ruin of the country. The one dissenting voice was that of Mr Hutchison, M.H.R.—and, verily, for all the good that Bible-reading appears to have done Mr Hutchison himself, he may well oppose it. No man owes much to a study that has left him on a level with Mr Hutchison, M.H.R. The casting of pearls before swine is a very ancient instance is very apparent. Biting your nose to vex them, hardly a proceeding that proves very satisfactory. That was exactly what our Presbyterian friends have done. They bade God-speed to secularism—for, whatever they may say, all gave their approval to Dr Stuart's famous message. Of it is, meantime, that the vexing of faces must continue until our good friends make up their minds to unite in an effort to do justice. Until all the religious bodies unite in an effort to obtain what each has a right to demand there is little hope of success for any of them. When our Presbyterian friends make up their minds to do this, we shall have some belief in the sincerity of their repentance.

WE do not know whether the following recollections may be considered too personal for publication. They have some bearing on the associations of one whose memory has been made by circumstances of interest to the Irish people, and this is our excuse for publishing them:—"How strange and touching it seems to come by accident across what vividly recalls to you something almost forgotten and that took place years upon years ago. I have just read in an American paper an extract from an article on Thomas Davis in the *Irish Monthly*, and in which occurs a letter from Miss Annie Hutton, his betrothed—"Annie, Dear," as indeed he rightly called her. I do not personally remember her, though I must have seen her, but it is forty-six years ago. I remember well how, afterwards, those who knew her were wont to speak of her; of her loveliness and her gentle goodness. An ideal bride for a poet she would have been. But Miss Annie Hutton had among her friends some who had little of the poet and, if possible, less of the Irish patriot in them. I think it speaks a great deal for both her and Thomas Davis that they should have understood one another among such uncongenial influences. The passage to which I particularly allude is this—"I had such a lovely drive all round Howth yesterday," she writes, "and at the most beautiful part was alone, which I was very sorry for; I like to have some one to enjoy beauty with me; not to talk about it, but just quietly to enjoy. It was very beautiful—Killiney, all brilliant in the sunlight, with white sailed boats dancing merrily over the water, and then the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains behind frowning blackly, as if jealous that they had no sun, and Bray Head, the Grey Stones, and Wicklow Head stretching out farther and still farther away. And there was not a sound to be heard, so different from the other busy side of Howth that we had just come from." Exactly as I saw it, just as I remember it forty-six years ago. Nay, I remember trying, in my childish way, at that very time, to sketch it all. I had been shut up for punishment in an empty room, whose windows commanded that view. I saw its beauties even then through my tearful eyes, and in the light of my eight summers. I, a forlorn little fellow, full of tears and desolation, the pet child of a mother who had died a month or two before, had rebelled for very terror of the devil, a secret terror, but a real one. The devil had a good deal to do with our religion in those days. The head of the household, an unmarried woman, advanced in years, was of the stuff of which her Huguenot fathers were made, and had inherited all their sternness. I might almost say all their religious ferocity—indeed, I doubt, where Rome was concerned, if Jeanne d'Albret or the Baron des Adrets could have been more fierce of spirit. Bible reading entered largely into our occupations, and the verse, 'The devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour,' read and repeated and insisted upon, with due grimaces, had been burnt in upon my soul. Once or twice I had obeyed when sent by myself to fetch the letters from the post office, or the thatched cabin that served for such two long, lonely fields away. But all along the ditch by which the path led, I had pictured to myself the roaring lion as racing with me on the other side, and in the middle where there was a gap I expected him to jump out upon me. Once or twice I bore it, and then

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