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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

RIBALD

BALDEBDASH.

THE funny man of our contemporary the Napier *Evening News*, who goes by the name of "Curmudgeon," plays the part of a mistaken Betsy Prigg towards the devil. He, though possibly without

being in his cups, gives us to understand that there "ain't no sitch a person." Our funny friend is quite convulsed with laughter, and his guffaw might be heard from one end of an Australian gum forest to the other if he were only mounted on a stump there. The subject of our funny friend's mirth is a report lately published by the Liverpool *Catholic Times*, and quoted by us two or three weeks ago, respecting a case of exorcism which recently occurred at Gif, in the diocese of Versailles. Our funny friend, of course, is mightily tickled by the matter. Monsignor Goux, Bishop of Versailles, and all his priests, who can hold their own, nevertheless, among the freethinkers of the chief centre of freethought, are a fit object of mockery for a hilarious penny-a-liner in Napier. Perhaps Dr Charcot would be glad of the services of our funny friend at the Salpêtrière. He, at least, acknowledges that there are cases there which his science is not able to explain; but our funny friend, "Curmudgeon," knows all about it, and a great deal more besides. Our funny friend, nevertheless, is obliged to call in the aid of an enlightened publication named the *Humanitarian* to put him up to the state of things in the "dark ages." That, of course, according to the *Humanitarian* was most ridiculous. Supposing, for example, our funny friend and the *Humanitarian* had to do with the devil, they would treat him very differently. They would, perhaps, use a short spoon instead of the traditional long one, and find themselves in very good company. But in the "dark ages," the ages of St Thomas of Aquin, and Dante, and Thomas à Kempis, and many others whose works or whose memories will last while the world endures, men were all idiots, and only knew how to deal with their devil idiotically. The pretended quotation of the *Humanitarian* from the form of exorcism, we need hardly say, is the impudent invention of some would-be wit, some penny-a-liner most probably in want of trash for fools to grin at. Our funny friend adds a word of his own as to the effect on the insane of the assumed action of the clergy, and let us at least admit that, though he may err as to the madmen of the past, there are the best reasons why he may be taken as an authority concerning the "cranks" of the present. But our funny friend is not done with it. He goes on, by the aid of one Rev Dr Momerie, to make an attack on the saints of the Catholic Church—every one of whom, he says, "confused nastiness with piety." Does our funny friend borrow his lie from Dr Momerie, or is it of his own invention? Our funny friend, whether by his own presumptuous ignorance or that of the Rev Dr Momerie we cannot distinguish, accuses the clergy of encouraging dirt among the people by their preaching, and consequently of breeding pestilence. He seems, moreover, to confound together the black death and the great plague of London—one of which took place in the fourteenth and the other in the seventeenth century—one in the reign of Edward III, the other in that of Charles II.—and again accuses the clergy of the mischief. But the Catholic clergy in the reign of King Edward III. were as they have been in the reign of Queen Victoria. In our own time they have neither brought on pestilence by their encouragement of dirt, nor increased it by their fanatic denunciations. They have braved it everywhere to bring comfort and relief to the sufferers. As a matter of fact, acknowledged even by their enemies, in medieval England the clergy were closely engaged in the care of the sick, and notably in that of the leprose—whose condition was as revolting as that of any victim of the plague, and hardly less dangerous in contact. But let us not be too hard on our funny friend. He necessarily takes up the tone of Betsy Prigg. The existence of such a person as the devil could not possibly be admitted by our contemporary the *News*—so smirkingly civil all round, so obsequious—in every direction where obsequiousness is payable.

AT A meeting of the Congregational Church held AN IMPOSSIBLE last week in Dunedin, the Rev J. Gibb, of the Presbyterian First Church we presume, delivered himself of some very profound sentiments. The rev gentleman quite despairs, it would seem of the Catholic Church, of which he thinks nothing whatever can be made while she continues in communion with the See of Rome, or, as his reverence elegantly expresses, or is reported as expressing it, "synonymous with Vaticanism." We must confess, however, that the rev J. Gibb is tolerably correct in his guess. The Catholic Church is sure to stand apart, separate from all so-called churches, until the day of judgment and the sound of the Archangel's trumpet will find her in communion with the See of Rome. With the Rev J. Gibb's sentiments respecting the Church of England we must also in some degree concur. Her tradition of Apostolical succession certainly is, as the rev gentleman says, a figment. We do not, however, know that her assumption of superiority over other Protestant churches is, as the rev gentleman claims, an arrogant assumption. In a social point of view the Church of England undoubtedly has advantages that those other bodies do not possess. She is, moreover, associated with more renowned seas of learning, has produced more eminent scholars—and takes a higher standing from the venerable cathedrals and ancient churches she first plundered and then preserved for her own uses. The men of the Anglican Church may thank their forefathers that they were not so brutal as those of the Scotch Presbyterians. The Church of England, for some three or four hundred years, has had decided advantages over the Scotch Kirk, and cannot now be overtaken by her. We can understand the Rev J. Gibb's claim that there is nothing, or should be nothing, to prevent a union of the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Wesleyan Churches. So far as doctrine is concerned, probably ministers themselves cannot tell why they stand apart. The Rev J. Gibb, for example, does not seem to know what is to be made of the symbol of his particular Church—that is the Westminster Confession. Of the faith that is in the Wesleyan body we may possibly judge from the jargon of stale Rationalism delivered at their conference last year, and which appeared not very distasteful to most of them. It is, moreover, a little remarkable that, in proposing a political alliance of these sects, the Rev J. Gibb made an exception of the only purely religious point mentioned by him. He said that on the question of the Bible in schools they would probably differ. It is in the blood of Protestantism, in fact, to differ on religious points, and it cannot be at one with itself where they are concerned. Another speaker at this meeting was the Rev Mr Dutton. The rev gentleman in question expressed himself in a very remarkable manner. "He would," he said, "have every millionaire arrested on suspicion of having a lawful visible means of support, and called upon to explain how it came about that in the midst of so much misery he had amassed so much wealth." Madame An'ouette Sterling, before she started from Sydney, exhorted her hearers to burn down every house of ill-fame in the city before her return—and then she came to Christchurch and saw a ghost! We hope that the Rev Mr Dutton may never see anything worse than himself. It is, meantime, suggestive to find that at this meeting the Catholic Church was slighted. Wherever folly and vanity go together she is lightly esteemed.

### THE BLACK DEATH.

WE do not find that Professor Thorold Rogers, for example, who is an authority anything rather than favourable to the Catholic Church or her clergy, and whose testimony must be taken as that of an enemy, attributes to the influence of religion any aggravation of the Black Death. On the contrary he mentions one case in which the cleanliness of a churchman had resulted in mitigating its effects. The Black Death, he says, is alleged to have had its origin in the East where nearly every infectious or contagious disease appears to have arisen. Nor does the writer seem to think that the uncleanness of the people had much to do with the matter. "The period just before the plague," he says "was one of prosperity and abundance; and though our forefathers were immeasurably unclean in their habits and surroundings, and remained unclean for centuries afterwards, the best conditions of life do not appear to have given an immunity from the plague." "The Black Death," adds the writer, "visited