

A Quack Remedy

Longfellow tells how a quack once invited him to write a verse for the label of a 'marvellous drug.' The poet's fee was to be the free use of the medicine for himself and his family for an unspecified period. Which, by the way, reminds us of an advertisement that was inserted, in all seriousness, in the London 'Times' in 1895: 'Any person who can show that my tapioca contains anything injurious to health, will have three boxes of it sent to him free of charge.'

It is said to be on record that a medical charlatan once actually took a dose of his own bolus. The black-coated enthusiasts of the Bible-in-schools League do not, however, manifest much willingness to swallow their own political nostrum. They gaily and vociferously prescribe for State school teachers of every creed and no-creed a round of extra toil and trouble which they themselves are too indolent to undertake, although it is one of the primary obligations of the Christian ministry. We refer, of course, to the sacred duty of the religious instruction of children, which the Bible-in-schools clergy have, perhaps, more than all others, so flagrantly neglected in this Colony. Their itinerant paid politician is still perambulating the country, lecturing to desolately small audiences, and endeavoring to enlist the votes of a generally sarcastic and unsympathetic public to compel the Government to assume the white 'choker,' turn parson, and teach a battered and wobbly Unitarianism of a single subject.'

One of the latest freak contentions advanced on behalf of the League is this: that Catholics are, in this matter, playing the part of opportunists. The author of this fine 'break' is the Rev. Mr. Gray; the scene of its announcement, a thin and chilly meeting of the League held in Christchurch during the past week, amidst a monotonous waste of empty benches. Donald Dun O'Byrne cut a notch in his ponderous ashen flail for every Hessian he sent to his account in the dark and evil days of '98. And the 'Lyttelton Times' can place a fresh score on its tally-stick for the neatness and aplomb with which it dynamited the fatuous contention of the Rev. Mr. Gray. 'The Roman Catholics,' says our Christchurch contemporary, 'were described as opportunists, and Mr. Gray declared that they were advancing the secular condition of the primary schools as an argument for denominational grants. The truth is, of course, that if the Roman Catholics were really opportunists they would encourage the League's agitation, in the sure and certain hope that the introduction of Bible lessons in the public schools would give them, as conscientious objectors, a strong moral claim for State assistance for their own schools.' 'But,' adds our Canterbury contemporary, 'whatever aspect of the question we consider, we get back to the original assumption on which the whole Bible-in-schools movement is based: that it is the function of the State to teach religion, and that the primary schools are suitable places for this instruction. . . The men and women who oppose the Bible-in-schools movement are not Agnostics, and they are not opposed to Bible teaching. Most of them—the overwhelming majority—reverence the Bible to the full. Some of them are honestly afraid that religious teaching would introduce sectarian bitterness and would seriously impair the efficiency of the system; many more believe earnestly that their children should not be instructed in spiritual matters by men and women who have graduated only in language, literature, and science. But all found their objections on the principle that the State should not lift a little finger to offend the conscience of a single subject.'

The Law of Plunder

Artemus Ward says somewhere that American mining towns usually go through a certain course of 'unadulterated cussedness' before they settle down to a life of normal quiet and order. It seems as if the French Government is passing through a similar experience.

Nothing since the wild days of 'Bluff King Hal's' great pillage has surpassed the regime of legalised disorder and tyranny and plunder which has been for some time past sweeping over France. The forcible seizure and confiscation of over fourteen thousand religious establishments is, in itself, a 'steal' of colossal magnitude. Strangely enough, the great body of the English and colonial secular papers passed it over as a trifle scarcely worth recording. And yet

'The Ten Commandments will not budge,
And stealing will continue stealing,'

despite ministerial majorities, whether in or out of France.

The 'entente cordiale' may have furnished one reason for the manner in which the British press shut up its shell over the seizure of the English church in Paris. 'The church,' says Mr. Richard Davey in the London 'Tablet,' 'was built by the voluntary contributions of English and American Catholics residing in Paris, and was originally entrusted to the charge of the Passionist Fathers. At the recent suppression of the Order a number of Catholics subscribed very largely for the preservation of the church and mission; among those subscribers was that generous lady Mrs. John Mackay, who contributed not less than £1000. Now, sir, if the smallest Protestant church in France, or the tiniest synagogue, were about to be closed by order of the Government, there would be a hue and cry raised from one end of this country (England) to the other; the press would be rampant, and meetings would be held in Hyde Park, Exeter Hall, and in every town in England, and the Government would in the long run be compelled to intervere. But, strange as it may seem, a Catholic church, built by English and American Catholics, can be put up at auction without producing the least excitement, either among British Catholics or in the general public.'

An Amazing Proposal

Mr. J. McGregor, M.A., of Dunedin, speaks from a non-Catholic point of view when he criticises the aims and methods of the Bible-in-schools movement. Catholics would strongly dissent from many of the positions taken up in reference to the subject by Mr. McGregor. But when he takes in hand the leaders of the sectarianising party, he (so to speak) tars and feathers them, gives them a paternal lecture, and turns them adrift. Here is how, in a special article in the 'Otago Daily Times,' he mops an amazing proposal that is being advanced by the paid political agitator of the League. Mr. McGregor is describing what he personally saw and heard on a recent occasion in Dunedin.

The League's itinerant agent (says Mr. McGregor) 'went on to relate the case of a newspaper editor of his acquaintance who, on the paper changing hands, and likewise politics, went on writing to order and decrying what he had been wont to praise, and vice versa. Mr. Wright was so surprised at the conduct of the editor that he asked him to explain how he could act in such a manner; and the answer he got was that he simply wrote professionally! Probably a good many in the audience expected, as I did, to hear the speaker turn this case to account for the purpose of minimising the effect of hostile press criticism. But, instead of this, Mr. Wright, to the surprise and consternation of several of those who occupied seats on the platform, pointed out, with an air of triumph, that the position of the teachers would be similar to that of this editor—they would teach the Bible lesson PROFESSIONALLY, although they might not believe what they taught, any more than the editor believed what he wrote! After the meeting I expressed in strong terms to two of the ministers my opinion of such teaching, and both were candid enough to admit that it was "very bad indeed." One of them expressed his intention of pointing out to the organiser his mistake, so that he should not repeat