

Current Topics

Those 'Free Places'

The following paragraph is taken from the Dunedin 'Evening Star' of July 21. It refers to a meeting of the Dunedin and Suburban School Committees Association—

'A statement of startling importance was made at last night's meeting by Mr. W. C. Alnutt, head master of the Kaikorai School, who mentioned incidentally that out of forty-five pupils who would qualify this year for "free places" in the secondary schools he did not think that more than half a dozen would proceed to the High Schools. And Mr. Whetter (head-master of Forbury School) backed up the assertion, saying that out of thirty-two children in his school who would qualify he doubted whether more than two would go to the High Schools. Yet another suburban head-master declares that though nearly twenty pupils in his school will be entitled to "free places," he is extremely doubtful whether any will go forward to the secondary schools. It would thus appear that the opinion expressed by this journal when the "free place" scheme was inaugurated that the rush of primary scholars into the secondary schools would ease off is likely to be sooner borne out than even we expected.'

There is another and uglier side to this question. What class in the community is likely to reap the greatest proportionate benefit from those 'free places' in the secondary public schools? Beyond doubt, the children of parents that are well-to-do or at least in easy circumstances. These may, if so 'disposed,' send their children to the State High Schools. The poor must, generally, instead, send their children from the primary school straight into the stern school of life.

'For men must work and women must weep,
And there's little to earn and many to keep.'

And the poor man's boy and girl must not alone toil to keep the pot boiling upon the humble paternal hearth, but a portion of their earnings is filched from them (in the shape of taxes upon the tea they drink and the clothes and boots they wear) to pay for the 'free places' enjoyed by the children of Moneybags and Co. This is pauperism in excelsis. And in effect—though not in intent—it amounts to an odious piece of class legislation.

Some Wills

To the late Michael Davitt, faith was evidently something more than the mere intellectual acceptance of speculative truth. It was apparently a leaven that fermented the mass, and searched into the very substance of his life. Here is an extract from his last will and testament that came right out from the restless heart that is now still.

'My diaries are not to be published as such, and in no instance without my wife's permission, but on no account must anything harsh or censorious written in said diaries by me about any person, dead or alive, who has ever worked for Ireland be printed, published, or used so as to give pain to any friend or relative. To all my friends I leave kind thoughts; to all my enemies the fullest possible forgiveness; and to Ireland the undying prayer for the absolute freedom and independence which it was my life's ambition to try and obtain for her.'

The parting thoughts for friends and enemies remind one of the touching piety of the English pre-Reformation wills, such as are to be found in the fourth volume of the interesting collection ('Testamenta Eboracensia') published by the Surtees Society. Here is an extract from the 'preface' of the will of John Dalton, of Hull, made in 1487:—

'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. I, John Dalton, of the Kings-town upon Hull—considering and remembering, think in my heart that the days of man in this mortal life are but short, that the hour of death is in the hand of the Almighty God, and that He hath ordained the terms that no man may pass. I remember also that God

hath ordained men to die, and that there is nothing more uncertain than the hour of death. I seeing princes and (men of) great estates die daily, and men of all ages end their days, and that death gives no certain respite to any living creature, but takes them suddenly. For these considerations, I, being in my right wit and mind (loved be God!), whole not sick, beseech Almighty God that I may die the true son of Holy Church and of heart truly confessed, with contrition and repentance, of all my sins that I ever did since the first hour I was born of my mother into this sinful world, to the hour of my death.'

The testator then beseeches pardon of his sins, bequeaths his soul to God and his body 'to the earth whereof it came'. And so on. Judging by the wills of the period, religion must have been a very real thing indeed to Catholics in pre-Reformation England, and the Christian brotherhood in man a principle that, however variously expressed, was deeply felt and practically understood. The completion of the great revolution of the sixteenth century produced a marked difference in the wording, tone, and purpose of wills. These documents throw a curious side-light upon the diminishing grip that religion had upon the hearts and intelligences of the English people in post-Reformation days.

Enemies of the Cross

According to the Auckland 'Herald' of July 18, the 'glorious twelfth' was celebrated at Otahuhu in a characteristic way. Some enthusiasts (probably from that part of 'Scotland' which lies in or near Belfast or Newry or Portadown) saw 'Popery' in a cross that had been presented to the local Anglican church. They hotly pressed for its removal, failed, and (says the 'Herald') 'retired from the meeting'. And the sacred emblem was stolen from the church in the silent watches of the night that is dedicated to the 'glorious, pious, and immortal memory' of the little Boer monarch. The occasion was auspiciously chosen. It was the night on which full many a time and oft, the scarved brethren, returning home from tipsy revels, turned aside from their path to smash (as at Mommolin, North Wexford) every grave-stone that bore the emblem of the cross. To this hour external crosses may not be erected upon non-Catholic churches in the very 'yellow' regions of Ulster. The annual orgie of the 'glorious twelfth' sets one wondering what strange Moloch of unrelenting hate is the object of the brethren's worship. At least it cannot be the gentle Saviour

'Who heeds the sparrow's fall, whose loving Heart
Is as the pitying father's to his child,
Whose lesson to His children is, "Forgive,"
Whose plea for all: "They know not what they do."'

Ian Maclaren (Rev. John Watson), a staunch and gifted Presbyterian, could have taught the ungentle and unlearned enthusiasts of Otahuhu some lessons of respect for the cross. Nay, he even caught, with true Catholic instinct, the voice that speaks to eye and heart from the figure of Christ crucified. In his work, 'The Potter's Wheel', we find this beautiful appreciation of the crucifix:—

'When one enters the dimness of a foreign cathedral, he sees nothing clearly for awhile, save that there is a light from the eastern window, and it is shining over a figure raised high above the choir. As one's eyes grow accustomed to the gloom, he identifies the crucifix repeated in every side chapel, and marks that to this Sufferer all kneel in their trouble, and are comforted. From age to age the shadow hangs heavy on life, and men walk softly in the holy place; but ever the crucifix faces them, and they are drawn to His feet and goodness by the invitation of the pierced hands.'

This extract from 'The Potter's Wheel' might well be framed and glazed for the benefit of some of the worshippers in the church of the Holy Trinity, Otahuhu.

More About Dancing

The satined dandies of the Georgian days amused themselves by 'pinking' each other with the protruding points of their dress swords. In an analogous way, the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table 'pinked' with