

Current Topics

The French Persecution

M. Briand's tongue is dropping manna just now. A short time ago it dropped daggers—when, for instance, he declared at Amiens that 'we' had driven Christ out of the school life and the charitable institutions of the nation, and that 'we' (again the collective 'we') would also drive Him out of the Government of France and 'en finir avec l'idée chrétienne'—make an end of Christianity. Now, in honeyed accents, he lisps smiling platitudes about 'liberty of conscience', the 'free exercise of religion', and his 'sympathy' with those who desire to worship God in the way of their fathers. But (judging by previous utterances and subsequent facts) M. Briand's 'sympathy' seems to be much akin to that of Lewis Carroll's Walrus for the oysters.

"I weep for you", the Walrus said:
"I deeply sympathise."
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

The extent of the 'sympathy' and the 'liberty of conscience' and the 'free exercise of religion' may be sufficiently gained from the two following illuminating facts;—A cable message announced on Saturday the prosecution of a priest for the high crime and misdemeanor of celebrating Mass without the knowledge and sanction of the Government. Here is (from an English contemporary) another fact illustrative of the war against Christianity that is being carried on in France: 'The Préfet of La-Lozere has demanded the secularisation of the lying-in hospital at Meude; and pending that event has decided that no infants born at the maternity hospital shall be baptised under any pretext whatever. Even should the new-born child be in imminent danger of death, the mother is forbidden to ask for its baptism.'

The weeping Walrus of French atheism has begun to 'deeply sympathise' with its victims. Even Hottentots spared poor women in the throes of maternity the horrors of savage warfare. With an official sob in its voice, French official atheism has discovered a depth of callous tyranny which no self-respecting Hottentot in our day could well have sounded.

'The Poet of All Circles'

The posthumous honor of a monument has come tardily to the grave of Thomas Moore. 'The poet of all circles and the idol of his own' was laid to rest in the little English village cemetery of Bromham (Wilts.) in 1852. And only a few weeks ago a fitting monument was placed by admirers where his bones await the great Roll Call. Like Southey, Scott, and Brougham, Moore withered at the top—to change the metaphor, his once brilliant intellect paled and went out like the last dull flickerings of a tallow candle. But his work was already done. He lives in the hearts of the Irish people as the man who found the dear harp of his country in darkness and silence and 'waked all its chords to life, sweetness, and song.' We lay this flower upon his grave: that he sang the wrongs and woes and hopes of his country at a time when

'It was treason to love her and death to defend',

He, too, it was who wrote the prophetic words that are still as a banner with the star of hope to the Irish people:—

'The nations have fallen, and thou art still young;
Thy sun is but rising, when others are set;
And though slavery's cloud o'er thy morning hath hung,
The full noon of freedom shall beam round thee yet.
Erin, O Erin! though long in the shade,
Thy star will shine out when the proudest shall fade'.

Moore has been described as 'the sweetest lyrist of her saddest songs'. But even in his hopeless moods he sang sweetly. Many of his lyrics will ever make the heart of the Western Celt beat fast; and many of them have become world-ballads, through their matchless fancy, their felicitous expression, and the perennial charm of the ancient melodies to which they are wedded.

Moore's 'Sacred Songs' give glimpses into the clear depths of religious feeling that he inherited from a pious mother. And many passages in his prose and poetic works might be quoted to prove his loyalty to the faith of his fathers. The popularity achieved by his brilliant mental gifts and social accomplishments tarnished to some extent the bright gold of his religious practice. Matters in this respect were not mended by a mixed marriage with a beautiful young Irish non-Catholic actress, Bessie Dykes, although she was to him a tender and devoted wife. But he never repudiated the ancient faith—as some writers have alleged. The Anglican rector of Bromham wrote to Mr. Daniel Ambrose, M.P., on November 12, 1887: 'Having known Mr. Moore well, I can confidently say that he never changed his religious belief; that he died, as he had lived, a Roman Catholic. It is true that during the last two years of his life no priest was allowed to see him; but during that time, in consequence of his mental state, no one—not even a servant—was admitted into his room. "Bessy" Moore nursed and tended him entirely. He recognised her at the last, and his last words to her were: "Bessy, have faith in God."' The same writer told how Moore 'would sometimes accompany his wife, who was a member of my congregation, to the door; but he never entered or took part in the services.'

Like Goldsmith, Moore died 'far from the land' that he loved and sang—he passed away amidst the funereal gloom and despair that followed the days of the Great Famine. But, like the nightingale, in Hans Andersen's fairy tale, he sang hope and conciliation into the people's hearts. And we may all (with Mr. John Dillon) indulge the hope which Moore had often felt might yet be realised, 'that the two nations so long hostile and estranged may learn to understand each other and be friends.'

So may it be!

Another Cable Falsehood

According to Mark Twain, there are 369 different forms of lying. The organisation at the Paris end of the submarine cables seems to be tolerably familiar with most of them. Our readers can easily recall a recent message from Paris to the effect that M. Gaudin de Villaine advocated the bomb as a weapon for the defence of religion in the present war against Christianity in France. Given tyranny on one side and a hot head on the other, one may expect at times strange proposals; and what is called by a poetic license 'the wild justice of revenge' is often advocated when sudden passion gives its cry before calm reason has time to think and speak.

The story of the bomb-policy is, however, merely a fresh instance of the disinclination of the cable agency in Paris and the English echoes of the French anti-religious press to tell a plain, unvarnished tale where the Catholic Church is concerned. Here is how the 'Catholic Times' of November 30 sums up the method of manufacture and the exposure of the bomb-story.