

Current Topics

That Endless Chain Prayer

The pagan Romans of old had a saying to the effect that even the gods strive in vain against the jolt-head and the fool. One would have thought that the fulminations of the Church—re-echoed from time to time in the pulpit and in the columns of this paper—would have sufficed to put an end here to the piece of arrant folly that goes by the name of the 'endless chain prayer'. Yet we have before us a copy of this wretched parody on prayer, dated January 16, written in a dainty feminine hand, and adorned with the following silly story:—

This prayer was sent by Bishop Lawrence, recommending it to be sent and written to nine persons. One person who paid no heed to it met with an accident. He who will re-write this prayer for nine days, commencing the day it is received, and send one each day to nine persons, will on or after the ninth day experience some great joy. At the Holy Feast in Jerusalem it was said that he who will write this passage will be delivered from every calamity. Do not break the chain'.

The devil tries to taint every pious practice, even that of prayer, with base notions. Instructed Catholics do not need to have the fantastical absurdity of the above-quoted story pointed out to them. They will promptly consign the 'endless chain prayer' to the fire or the dust-bin. As for the others, there are some to whom press and pulpit will alike appeal in vain, and who (in Thackeray's words) can no more see the folly of the 'chain' than they can see their own ears. The strait waistcoat seems to be about the only argument left against this peculiar and persistent phase of un-binged intellect.

Pluto Politicians

The party that has been inoculating Victorian politics with the virus of sectarian passion believe—or rather pretend to believe—that the age of miracles is not dead. The black-coated, white-chokered leaders apparently hold that any ruse, however unworthy, is permissible in love, politics, or war. Hence they devised the story of the impending domination of four-fifths of the population of Victoria by the remaining fifth, and they asked their dupes to believe that a movement to effect this has been for long years in operation—carried on by the poorer fifth, without organisation, without literature, without meetings, without officers, without records! A first-class miracle, in good sooth! We are aware of the serene depths of gobe-mouche which the mental plummet of the smaller clerical canaille can sound. But we cannot think so meanly of the collective intelligence of the real leaders of political sectarianism in Victoria as to suppose that they personally believe in the objective terrors of the bugbear which they have tricked out to scare the more ignorant class of Protestant electors. Children, savages, and simple-minded folk generally have a dread of masks that are made (after the fashion of those of the Pacific Islanders) sufficiently grotesque and terrible looking. Even in these enlightened countries, the schoolmaster has by no means succeeded in expelling all the ignorance. There always remains a substratum of free and independent electors who are in statu pupillari—in a state of political infancy, and peculiarly susceptible to the terrors of Mask and Effigy, of horsehair-and-paint, of hollowed-turnip-and-tallow-candle. And has not conscious political cunning in every age sought to snatch a passing advantage—after the fashion of Pluto in the 'Infernal Marriage'—by putting the majority in awe of the supremacy of the minority? 'Trust me', said Pluto, 'I am a profound politician'.

The 'Church Commonwealth' (an Australian Anglican organ) administers the following editorial sailing to the 'profound politicians', lay and clerical, who in

the recent Federal campaign called in as their ally the red devil of sectarian bitterness and strife: 'The Federal elections are over, and we are enjoying comparative peace after the storm. We have little to be proud of in the recent elections. The trail of the serpent was over them. Everywhere the narrow sectarian issue was raised. Mr. George Reid appealed to all Christians as such to support him in New South Wales, and Dr. Dill Macky seconded his call. By "Christian" these two gentlemen meant evidently "Non-Romans." The result of their appeal was the loss of four seats to Mr. Reid. In Victoria the (Anglican) Archbishop of Melbourne astonished everyone by issuing on the eve of Christmas what appeared to be an appeal for a strong Protestant Electors' Committee to run candidates for the forthcoming State elections. His Grace's venture into the sea of politics has naturally produced much vigorous comment. We can only express our deep regret that he should have deemed it necessary to take such a step. It is fraught with utmost mischief for the peace and happiness of Victoria.'

'Bigotry', said O'Connell on a memorable occasion, 'has no head and cannot think, no heart and cannot feel. When she moves it is in wrath, when she pauses it is amidst ruin; her prayers are curses, her God is a demon, her Communion is death'. Yet this is the thing that the Political Parson has injected into the public life of Victoria, in order to turn Catholics into a race of helots in the land which they have done so much to build up. What would happen if some malevolent enemy were to introduce rabies or rinderpest or cholera morbus into the Australian Commonwealth? The long arm of the law would grope through the land till it found him, dragged him before the tribunal of justice, and placed him, like Judas, 'in locum suum'. But viler and more ruinous by far are the criminals who scatter the germs of sectarian hate and religious strife among a peaceful people. This class of traitors to their country's highest interests are not, unfortunately, amenable to the jurisdiction of judge or public prosecutor. The sword of the law no more touches them than did Aeneas's blade wound the impalpable ghosts that fitted around him. Yet the track of ruin and desolation that they leave is wider and longer than that of the northern or the African or the Eastern pest, for its malign influence may extend (as in Ulster) from age to age. And the end of it no man can foresee. The sodden 'drunk' and the village bully are seized and held in the grip of the law and shaken till their eye-teeth fall. The bigger criminals in broadcloth and gaiters, and the raucous politicians whose tools they are, have no public accuser, no judge and jury, to do justice upon them except the power which a healthy public opinion may create. Victoria and New South Wales now stand in urgent need of a public opinion that shall save them from the devastating curse of a worse than Mahomedan rage that lies so heavily upon the Irish Ulster and upon its offshoot, the Canadian Ulster of Ontario.

The Reformation and Education

'It should not be forgotten', said the Anglican Primate (Dr. Nevill) at last week's General Synod in Dunedin, 'that the principle of State education is quite modern, and is, so to speak, not native to the soil of an old country like England. Educational institutions were both founded and managed by the Church and that from the highest to the lowest grades. This is well known as regards the universities and grammar schools, but it is not so well known that till recently the keeper even of a dame school in a village was licensed to her work by the bishop of the diocese, and this because all knowledge was regarded as sacred and looking back to God. The destruction of the monasteries had also been the removal of the teaching institutions which had sufficed for the simple instruction of