Current Topics

'Free Portraits'

The 'free portrait' concern is once more shedding its circulars upon the just and the uniust in New Zealand. That sort of literature boils the kettles of the wise.

Commercial Suicide

Some pretty plain English was spoken at the Conference of Colonial Premiers in London. Among other things, there was a refreshing frankness in the discussions that related to the manner in which the British mercantile marine is manned with foreigners, and the great highways of Imperial commerce occupied by subventioned rival shipping, while little or nothing has been done to place on equal terms ocean-carrying combinations that fly the triple cross of St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick. As we read the cabled summaries of these discussions, there kept hum-hum-humming through our brain a stanza by S. T. Coleridge. The poet tells how the fiend rose at break of day

> 'To visit his snug little farm upon earth,
> And see how his stock got on'.

Here is one of the things the demon saw :—

'Down the river there plied, with wind and tide,
A pig, with vast celerity,
And the devil looked wise as he saw how the while
It cut its own throat. There! quoth he, with a smile,
Goes "England's commercial prosperity".'

The proposals of Sir Joseph Ward may, perhaps, arrest the process of commercial suicide, and save the lacerated throat of 'England's commercial prosperity'.

That Suggested Conference

Some time ago an intermittent controversy enlivened our columns for a brief space. The question that lay between the hammer and the anvil of discussion was substantially this : Was it desirable to hold a conference representing the various denominations, for the purpose of arriving at a better understanding on the education question, and with a view to its ultimate settlement? The controversy was sustained with conspicuous ability by both sides, and (as we happen to know) was watched with much interest by priests and prelates even beyond the Tasman Sea. But the period of long pauses and deep hiatuses came at length. And these do not tend to animation in debate. The discussion had hardly guttered out in New Zealand when it lit up in another shape in England. It arose there out of a proposal of Monsignor Brown, Vicar-General of the Southwark diocese, for a representative conference of Catholics, Anglicans, and Nonconformists to deal with the crux of religious education in that country. As in New Zealand, so in England, the proposal has met with a mixed reception—so far as we may judge by expressions of opinion from a few prominent members of various creeds elicited by the 'Catholic Herald'.

Making 'Rome' Quake

Like Chamfort, the Church has three classes of friends; the friends who love her, the friends who are indifferent about her, and the friends who hate her. To the last-mentioned class belongs, we think, the 'friend' who, with a wealth of flamboyant invective, declares in a small New Zealand religious monthly that poor, misguided ex-priest Crowley has made 'Rome' quake. The chances are that 'Rome' has not so much as heard of this latest 'quaker.' And in every case the 'friends' who hate her have long ago exhausted the language of obloquy against her. The Church was rocked in her cradle by the fierce winds of foul abuse. To Suetonius, for instance, she was the 'exitiabilis superstitio' (a deadly superstition); to Tacitus, the 'hater of the human race'; to pagan Roman law, 'the 'enemy of the common weal'; to Galerius, 'the nefarious conspiracy'; to Minucius, 'the desperate faction'; to Caecilius, the 'mob of impure conspirators'; to Julian the Apostate, 'a human fabrication put together by wickedness'; and to many others, other things too unspeakable to be even hinted at in a paper that circulated among clean-minded and God-fearing people.

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The disciple is not above his master nor the servant above his lord. And if they have called the Master of the House Beelzebub, how much more them of His household? A divine prophecy would fail, and a 'reward very great in heaven' would stand forfeited, if the 'friends' that hate Christ's Church were to cease speaking all that is evil against her, untruly. Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, examined his conscience when the 'London Times' ceased for a few days to spray him with its customary vitriol. And the Church of God would be in evil case, and might well 'quake,' if she became so flat and flabby and lifeless that her enemies would deem her not worth even the implied tribute of a slanderous tongue. When, after her long and terrible ordeals, Marie Antoinette stood upon the scaffold, the attendant priest asked her to arm herself with courage. 'Courage!' said she; 'I have been so long apprenticed to it that there is little probability of its failing me at this moment.' The Church of God has had a long apprenticeship to patience under calumny. It is not likely that the fortitude which in this respect she acquired in her first century will desert her in her twentieth. Calumny is indeed the worst form of persecution. And what kind of it has she not endured in her long day? Said Thiers one day when asked to nail a calumny against his fair fame: 'I am an old umbrella, upon which the rain has fallen for forty years; of what account are a few drops more or less?' Of what account is a further spraying of calumny to a Church on whose armor it has rolled and rattled for nigh two thousand years? She has thriven in spite of it; for her Divine Founder knows how to draw good out of evil, as the chemist extracts a healing balm out of the roots of the deadly aconite. And the Rock of St. Peter is not lightly shaken. It is proof against hell-fire itself. And it is not going to be melted into a quaking jelly by a piping voice squeaking stale professional calumnies in hole-and-corner conventicles at 'front seats one shilling, back seats sixpence.'

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To adapt a saying of Charles Lamb: If dirt were trumps, 'the new Savonarola' would hold a pretty good hand. But it is not. Cleanly folk leave it to the sewer and the tip-tilt and the sty. And even the fetish-worshippers consider it a poor form of service to offer to their tawdry god. As for 'the new Savonarola'—or 'the modern Luther,' as an injudicious admirer recently styled him in Nelson: he is merely the ordinary or garden variety of ex-priest. And (as we showed last week) he has turned in his anger to rend the Church which could neither appreciate nor retain his services in her sacred ministry. He reminds us of a young and tempestuously impetuous counsel who (so in substance runneth the story) many years ago made a violent onslaught upon the judge who presided at an English court of assize. The judge heard him through with the calm of a Vere de Vere, and made no comment or reply. Soon the day's work was done; wig and gown were laid aside, and all sat around the festive board. Some one asked the judge how it came to pass that he had not rebuked his assailant. In reply, the judge told a story that reached the ear of all, even of the offending and unrepentant young counsel. 'My father,' said the narrator, 'when he lived in the country, had a young dog that used to go out every moonlight night and bay at the moon for hours together.' Here he paused as if the story were ended. Several voices queried together: 'Well, what then?' 'Oh, nothing, nothing—the moon kept on shining just as if nothing had happened.'

'The bearings of this observation,' as Captain Cuttle remarked, 'lays in the application on it.'