

Current Topics

Catholic Education

The highest scores of successful candidates at the recent Junior Civil Service examinations have been published. George W. Albertson, a pupil of the Christian Brothers' School, stands at the head of the successful candidates sent up by all the boys' schools in Dunedin.

A Ride for Life

In Australia, the settler sometimes passes through strenuous experiences—per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum—what time the bush-fires rage and tempests of flame tear through the forest. On Black Thursday, when almost all Victoria was on fire, many lives were lost, numbers saved themselves from the pursuing flames by taking refuge in river, creek, lagoon, or water-hole, and the ashes of that historic conflagration fell thick upon the decks of ships that were sixty miles out at sea. Even a few years ago some 'close things' were recorded by the Australian secular press in their descriptions of bush-fires in Victoria and New South Wales. The Melbourne 'Arms', in a recent issue, tells of a ride for life near Mount Gambier (South Australia) that, for dramatic personal incident, easily 'gives points' to the historic rides of 'Fighting Phil' Sheridan and Paul Revere. In the present case, the rider was helping to fight the flames of a bush fire on the Mount Schank Estate. Suddenly, he 'found himself in front of a wall of fire, and unable to get back to safety. He jumped on the back of a horse, and galloped away, surrounded by the flames. The fire and sparks singed horse and rider as he rode madly. With the fire upon him he traversed about four miles to Benara. Once his horse fell to its knees, and the rider thought he was lost, but the maddened animal recovered itself, and continued the wild race. The wind dropping a little, lessened the onrush of the flames, and man and horse eventually raced into safety. Both were exhausted, and in a pitiable state from burns when they got away from the fire.'

One who witnesses, especially by night, the awesome power and grandeur of an Australian forest-fire, will amply realise the truth of the old proverbial saying, that flame, though a good servant, is a bad master.

Prophecies of Woe

Rabelais tells of some peculiar people who tickle themselves in order to laugh. And which of us does not know some of the simple souls that scare the wits out of themselves in July and November by tricking out the Pope in horns and tail and cloven hoof—after the fashion of the yokel who frightened himself out of his seven senses with a candle set in a hollowed turnip? Last week an amateur weather-prophet in the neighborhood of Wellington gave himself and others sundry spasms of fright by a prediction of woe that was ultimately based indeed upon a well ascertained fact—but rested directly upon a wholly illegitimate inference from that fact. The fact was this: that on February 2 (last Sunday) the earth was a nearer neighbor to the moon than it had been for many years back. The inference too hastily drawn therefore was this: that this proximity of our planet to its satellite would result in 'exceptional disturbances'—including earthquakes and tidal waves, with an alternative of hurricanes, deluges of rain, and other such unpleasantnesses in the air above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters beneath the earth. The critical period has, however, passed. And up to the moment at which these lines are being rolled off the press, the surface of New Zealand is as undemonstrative as a doormat, and the air that stirs above gives but a gentle torque to yon rattling windmill, and breathes so softly that it flecks not with foam 'the blue deep's serene'. From the scientific point of view, it appears, too, that there

is no necessary connection between the moon's closest approach to the earth, and earthquakes, tidal waves, and such-like manifestations of seismic energy. The moon, says Mr. Stevenson, F.R.A.S., 'has been quite as near on former occasions without all these disasters resulting'.

It is, however, hardly fair to club an amateur weather-prophet for a hasty deduction, when even so eminent a scientist as Mr. Piazzi Smyth, the Astronomer-Royal of Scotland, more than once launched out into hasty prophecy and made many

'Believe in his foreseeing
Of things before they were in being'.

By a series of fantastic assumptions he came to the conclusion that the Pyramid of Ghizeh (Egypt) was a sort of stone revelation of God, and that it pointed to 1881 as the year of the crack o' doom. Then people began to quote the hoax concocted some forty years ago and known as 'Mother Shipton's prophecy'—we give it in part:—

'Carriages without horses shall go,
And accidents fill the world with woe;
Around the world thoughts shall fly
In the twinkling of an eye.
Iron in the waters shall float
As easy as a wooden boat.
The world to an end shall come
In eighteen hundred and eighty-one'.

Numbers of people were solidly scared. The Rev. Dr. Koseby, of the Marrickville Congregational Church (New South Wales), states that 'the religious world of New Zealand', where he resided at the time (1881), 'was in something like a panic' over the Scottish Astronomer-Royal's fantastic interpretation of the pyramid. 'And', he adds, 'I preached a sermon in 1881, at the request of many Dunedin residents, to allay the serious apprehension which existed in the sister Colony in that year'.

Well, 1881 passed. And this grey old world has been wagging serenely along ever since. In one of 'Bab's' Ballads, 'A Miserable Wretch' sings to the terrestrial globe:—

'Roll on, thou ball, roll on!
'Through painless realms of Space
Roll on!
What though I'm in a sorry case?
What though I cannot meet my bills?
What though I suffer toothache's ills?
What though I swallow countless pills?
Never you mind!
Roll on!'

And of course, it rolled. The idea might, perhaps, have been better expressed in other terms. But, after all, the fate of the earth, or of this or that section of it, is not quite our business. We are not its rulers. Suffice it for us to work our work here below—to do our three-fold duty—and leave the rest in the hands of Him Who rules both wave and land.

'When my heart beats too fast, I think of Thee,
And of the leisure of Thy long Eternity.'

His days are long, and man's knowledge short. And in the sense under consideration here there is truth in the poet's words: 'God's in His heaven, all's right in the world'.

'A Missionary Tale'

As our readers know, we have not an abiding faith in 'missionary tales.' Neither, for that matter, have two such widely known Protestant authorities on the foreign mission-field as the Rev. H. Hensley Henson and Dr. Needham Cust—the latter of whom wrote with an experience of fifty years on the foreign missions. The pinnacle of distrust (as the Rev. Mr. Henson pointed out, and as our experience of 'missionary tales' testifies, so far as it has gone) is reached when the narra-

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