

Current Topics

The Curriculum

A Northern parent writes to us deploring the mania for overloading, and the tendency to still further overload, the school curriculum. We can offer our correspondent no help, but weep with him (metaphorically, of course) tear for tear. The curriculum of the Catholic schools necessarily keeps well abreast of that of the State schools in the matter of secular instruction. Our Northern friend must patch his griefs, as best he may, with proverbs. We tender him one from Dickens: 'The harder a bad hobby is ridden, the better, for the sooner it is ridden to death.'

Australian Catholic Truth Society

The annual report of the Australian Catholic Truth Society makes reading that presents, like the brilliant, many facets of illuminating interest. The honorary secretaries (our valued friends Father Norris and Mr. J. T. P. O'Meara) efface themselves, with a modesty that is (in Fielding's happy phrase) a candle to their merit, and with a serene unconsciousness of the noble work which they and their fellow-officers of the Executive are doing, in God's good way, without noise or grind. Here is a brief statement that deserves quotation:

'In our last report we recorded the fact that our society had published 382,000 pamphlets during the three years of its existence. That total is now increased to 502,000. Of this number, 95,782 pamphlets have been distributed during the past twelve months, whilst last year only 62,000 went into circulation. Of the various editions of the society's admirable Prayer Book, 33,437 copies have been sold, and of this total 6952 copies have gone into circulation during the present year. Of the Archbishop's *Lectures and Replies*, 2000 were published, of which 668 have been placed.'

We confess to more than a small degree of puzzlement as to how the responsible heads of the organisation have contrived to do so much work on such slender means. The secretaries may well claim that the year's credit balance of £25 11s 10d 'is ample proof that the society has practised rigid economy in carrying out the work specified in this report.' For five hundred subscribers represent a small motive power indeed to do the vast good which such an organisation could perform if adequately equipped for its work. In New Zealand only seventeen clerical and ten lay subscribers have their shoulders to the wheel—a distinctly disappointing thing for this enterprising Dominion. 'There is,' says the report, 'urgent need for a large increase in the number of life (£3 3s) and annual (5s) subscribers. It must be admitted that the zeal of Catholics in the dissemination of Catholic Truth falls far short of that manifested by the Rationalistic Press—the sappers and miners of modern infidelity—and certain non-Catholic religious associations.' This excellent organisation, adequately supported, would indeed throw 'searchlights of Catholic Truth along the dark ways and subtle windings of error.' It may be made a potent weapon against the dangers of a sceptical and infidel Press. Its case is, as the report saith, 'in the hands of our Catholic people. If each brings home to himself that our society is raising aloft the white banner of purity and innocence in literature, that it is using the Press as an instrument for God, and that the practical co-operation of all is needed that our work may take on wider proportions and spread to hitherto untilled fields, then the united efforts, not of hundreds, but of thousands, throughout the Commonwealth and New Zealand will make the work of your committee fruitful a hundredfold to the good of religion and the glory of God.'

We may add that subscriptions may be sent to the Rev. John Norris, 312 Lonsdale street, Melbourne.

A Children's Curfew

Father Morgan Sheedy has contrived to introduce a curfew law for the children of his parish of Altoona, in Pennsylvania. Various pains and penalties are provided for the little men and maidens who are found on the streets after 8 o'clock in the evening—exclusion from the schools, and the more cogent suasion of rod or slipper or strap. 'Yes,' said Father Sheedy to an interviewer (we quote from the *Milwaukee Catholic Citizen*), 'we insist that the children shall be off the streets and at home at

night, otherwise we will exclude them from the schools. Our experience has been that the boys who stay out at night have a demoralising influence on the other pupils, retard progress, and interfere with perfect discipline, and we don't want them in our schools. . . Mothers are charged almost entirely with the care and training of the children. When the father comes home and gives his wife his check on 'pay day, he feels that he has discharged all his duty. He goes to his work in the morning, comes home at evening, eats his supper, and goes down town. There he stays until it is time to turn in. He is simply unloading the moral training of his children on the schools. He expects the school to do it all—inculcate morals as well as develop children mentally and even physically. . . Now, if the father would sit down for half an hour in the evening with his boys and help them with their "tasks," it would open up a new field to the boys. It would set them thinking. They would reason out that, if these "tasks" are interesting to their father, there must be something in them. The chief defect, in short, is that the parents want to absolve themselves from all responsibility for the moral welfare of the child and impose it on the school. Their idea seems to be that the schools can make a scholar and a gentleman out of him. One of the greatest problems to-day is the home—the home, with its atmosphere of religion, morals, co-operation, sweetness, purity, education.'

So much for Father Sheedy and his curfew law—for the success of which our wishes are hearty and our hopes somewhat shaly. Nearly ten years ago—in March, 1899—the people of Invercargill were struck full in the throats by the stench of an outbreak of juvenile immorality in their fair and prosperous city. The outbreak suggested evidences of a wider depravity—a section of which, like begrimed twigs, had been cast up for the moment to befoul the surface of their local life. The public sense of the gravity of the situation found expression in the following petition to the Premier, which was extensively signed in the city and district:

'We, the undersigned citizens of the Borough of Invercargill, and residents of the surrounding districts, earnestly beseech you to introduce a general measure, early next session, in the interests of the moral welfare of the community, authorising local bodies to make regulations for preventing children of tender years from being in the streets and public places after certain hours at night, unless accompanied by a guardian, or possessing reasonable excuse.'

Nothing, however, came of this well-meant petition. It was consigned to the cobwebs. Politicians and petitioners alike probably made haste to forget it—for the South African kettle was soon afterwards bubbling pretty fiercely, and wars and rumors of war are great obstacles to reform. Few men will go on serenely painting their house-fronts or disinfecting their drains while there's a fire or a fight a few doors down the street. Dunedin has had, during the past week, a plea advanced in one of its daily papers for a curfew by-law—which, if properly administered, would be a great, if not very welcome, boon to the rising generation. The home-love and the domestic affections are not, it is generally conceded, by any means as strongly developed in Australasian-born youth as in the 'imported' stock from which they have sprung. We should, however, be the last to attach any blame for this defect to the young New Zealander. The causes must be sought elsewhere—in their home-life, in the different relations which (as compared with the older countries) have gradually sprung up between parents and children, and (among other things) in the readiness with which great numbers of people, in the pursuit of their avocations, flit from place to place. These have hardly time to acquire the sense of attachment to one cherished spot and to crowd it with sentiment and tradition, and their successive abodes become, not so much homes in the old-world and dearest sense of the term, but rather a sort of caravanseries. We have little patience with those who trace the arrested development of home-love to some inherent defect in the native character—who regard it as one might regard a club-foot or a squint-eye, or as some natural freak of local circumstances, like the undeveloped wings of the kiwi, or the twists in the trunk and fibre of the wild fuschia.

Church, School, Paper

'The Catholic school for the youth, and the Catholic paper for the home,' says an American contemporary, 'are among the greatest agencies for the upbuilding of "men and women as we need them."' We have long pleaded that the Catholic newspaper agency for the upbuilding of 'men and

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