

# Current Topics

## Free School-Books.

We live in a day when we can procure, at sixpence per volume, neat reprints of the masterpieces of English literature. And people of means appear to take quite kindly to the latest form of pauperism devised by our Legislature—namely, the free distribution of text-books to children of the lower standards in our public schools. It is a far cry back to the times preceding the invention of the Catholic art of printing, when sand, the blackboard, and the teacher's voice were largely the substitutes for books, and when a Countess of Anjou gave two hundred sheep, and a load each of wheat, millet, and rye, for a volume of sermons written on parchment by a German monk.

## Christ in the School

'Say-well and do-well end with one letter.  
Say-well is good, do-well is better.'

From end to end of the earth, Catholics are linked together in the noble 'do-well' work of training the hearts and wills, as well as the minds, of Christ's little ones in the schools. Thus, in Scotland they have to pay rates for the erection and maintenance of the Board Schools, which are Presbyterian denominational schools. But (says a recent circular by the Scottish Catholic Hierarchy), Catholics cannot, for reasons of conscience, take advantage of these schools. 'They have, therefore, expended over a million sterling in building schools for their own children—a saving to that extent to the rates of capital expenditure—and they do not consider that they are making an unreasonable claim in asking that, as regards the maintenance of these schools, they should be put on the same footing as their Presbyterian fellow-citizens. The Catholic schools of Scotland represent nearly 100,000 children, or about one-ninth of the whole. These children belong almost entirely to the working classes, whose efficient training ought to be a matter of supreme importance in an industrial nation like ours. The highest efficiency cannot be reached while the schools are starved through lack of the financial aid which would enable them to be put upon a level with their rate-supported neighbors.'

## Domestic Science

Good advice, like good medicine, is not always pleasant to take. Monsignor Falconio (Apostolic Delegate to the United States) has been giving—with some diffidence, be it said—sundry wise counsels to woman. 'I think,' said he, 'she should attend to her husband's home, and take care of her children, and see that the dinner is well cooked. If she will see to her own business and be busy in her house, she will be happy.' And now comes the Rev. John J. O'Keefe, a Clinton (Massachusetts) pastor, with a big building and an Association of Domestic Science, just to show the maids and the married women and even the school-girls how to 'be busy in the house,' with cookery, millinery, art work, sewing, garment cutting, and sundry other feminine arts and crafts. But cookery is among manual domestic sciences what charity is among the virtues—the chief of them all. There was more of wisdom in the substance, than of courtliness in the form, of the answer given by Max O'Rell's Englishwoman to a young bride who sought counsel as to the best means of retaining the affection of her newly-wedded husband. 'Feed the brute!' quoth the experienced dame. There is even a modicum of truth in a maxim laid down by that *fin gourmet*, Brillat-Savarin, in his *Physiologie du Goût*—that our comfort here, and (to some extent) our hopes of happiness hereafter, depend upon the manner in which our food is cooked. Well, a dyspeptic and 'livery' subject is usually in bad case on the spiritual as well as on the bodily side. But God still sends the food, and the devil (for his own ends) often sends the cook. Our convents might do much to keep his sable fingers out of the domestic pie.

## Artificial Flight

Prophecy, according to George Eliot, is one of the most gratuitous forms of human error. But Marconi had some solid ground under his feet when, a few weeks ago, he took down his harp and told New Yorkers some of the things which he sees in their city's future, fifty years away. 'The airship,' said he, 'is certain to come into general use, and that within the lifetime of our generation; not for freight, perhaps, but for people surely. In fifty years you of New York will be freed of the vexing problem of rapid transit. There will be no need for surface cars, elevated roads, subways, tunnels and ferries. The crowding, the delays, the foul air—all will be things of the past.

One may indeed predict a purer political and financial atmosphere, for there will be no need to steal a franchise for the use of the open highway of the clouds. With the certain advent of the airship as a means of transit you will behold a New York with thoroughfares uncongested and free of the din of vehicles wrangling for the right of way, and its people unfretted with pushing and elbowing their way about will take on a more Christian serenity of mental habit, and with this will come a revival of public taste and a demand for a city beautiful no less than a city luxurious.'

The wonderful performances of the Wright aeroplane furnished an unquoted text for this golden prophecy of flight achieved, for which mankind has been pining as far back as the days of the myth of Dædalus. As far back as the last decade of the eighteenth century, the English poet and naturalist, Erasmus Darwin, sang in vague poetic numbers the triumphs of steam-traction, and, with tuned lyre, predicted, too, the coming of the day when the same motive force would,

'On wide-waving wings expanded bear  
The flying chariots through the fields of air;  
Their crews, triumphant, leaning from above,  
Shall wave their fluttering kerchiefs as they move;  
Or warrior bands alarm the gaping crowd,  
And armies shrink beneath the shadowy cloud.'

Tennyson, in his *Locksley Hall* (published in 1842)

'Looked into the future far as human eye could see,  
and described the aerial war of the coming time in these lines:

'Then the heavens were filled with shouting, and there  
rained a ghastly dew,  
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central  
blue.'

It is doubtful that so cumbrous a mechanical contrivance as the steam engine could ever have achieved the conquest of the air. That has been reserved for the light, petrol-driven, internal combustion engine, with its wonderful development of horse-power in proportion to weight. The Wright brothers' epoch-making performances have been done with the aid of comparatively heavy and clumsy motors of this kind, of their own make—much inferior to such light and delicate and beautifully finished machines as (say) the Antoinette engines. Yet, with such relatively imperfect motive force, the Wrights

'Cast off the foolish ties  
That bind us to the earth, and rise  
And take a bird's-eye view.'

They soar and dip and circle and turn, with the grace of the condor of the Andes. It seems plain that we are fairly on the track of the discovery of the true principles of mechanical flight. And every error and failure will serve the same purpose as the caution-marks that, negatively, help in directing the wayfarer to his destination.

## A 'Scandal'—and the Sequel

Full many a time have we cited instances tending to illustrate the extent to which the swiftest-flowing channels of journalistic information have been captured by agencies hostile to the Catholic faith. Especially is this true in regard to the cable agencies that deal with Catholic events from Rome and Paris. They are scandalously partisan; they are the echoes or sounding-boards of the atheistic and anti-Catholic press and faction; they have a keen nose for allegations of clerical 'scandal'; a story of this kind, when proved to be false and calumnious, is never corrected or withdrawn; and repeated exposure seems to bring to them no sense of shame and no saving lesson of caution. We have said the substance of this before. But it is one of the things that it is well to say often, and to say loud enough to be heard. Such campaigns of conscious calumny are not to be met with kid gloves and lisping accents and swords of boiled leather. For lack of a live cable agency of their own, Catholics in these countries have, in the face of this ding-dong of fabricated or exaggerated scandals, to patch their grief with proverbs and wait, with the best patience they can summon, while the truth comes lumbering along in mail-bags in the hold of a passenger steamer. So true, in this case, is the Chinese proverb, that falsehood gets around the world while truth is drawing on her shoes. Or, as Billing quaintly phrases it, 'slander is played on a tin horn, while truth steals forth like the dying song of a lute.'

Many of our readers will recall a sensational French clerical 'scandal' that went the rounds of the secular press

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