

## Current Topics

### Secular v. Religious Education

The attention of our readers is directed to the contribution to the discussion on secular v. religious education which appears on the two next following pages. The reader will find therein much cause to admire the great ability and acumen displayed by the late Bishop Moran in dealing, shortly after his first arrival in New Zealand, with educational conditions that were quite new to him. After a lapse of thirty-eight years there is hardly a detail of the stand taken up by him that we of the present day need to amend or alter. The same statement holds good in regard to the fight over the 'free, secular, and compulsory' Education Act of 1877, which will form the subject of the next article of the series.

### Presbyterian 'Fast' days

The advent of Lent, the season of special fasts and abstinence, brings to mind the fact that at one time in the early history of New Zealand 'fast' days, of a kind, were almost universally observed throughout the Presbyterian Province of Otago. The Westminster *Confession of Faith*—the authorised doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church—includes 'solemn fasts' as part 'of the ordinary worship of God,' and prescribes that they are 'in their several times and seasons to be used in a holy and religious manner.' Otago, which was a Presbyterian settlement, was, in its earlier days, practically 'run' by our Presbyterian friends, and the appointed 'fast' days were recognised by the Provincial Government as public holidays and were generally observed as approximating to what Catholics call holidays of obligation. The history of the decline and fall of Presbyterianism from even this little touch of Catholicism is succinctly told in *The Story of the Otago Church and Settlement* by the Rev. C. S. Ross. 'Fast days, as a sacramental institution, had taken firm root in Otago. They had been introduced as a most excellent custom of the Free Church of Scotland, and were observed as days of humiliation and prayer, preparatory to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. . . . For many years all sections of the community paid outward respect to the institution; business operations were generally suspended, and the Provincial Government recognised it as a public holiday. But as population increased, and the religious element in it grew less influential, the churches, on these days for preparatory exercises, became more thinly attended. . . . The Church courts became greatly exercised over this, and in May, 1873, a conference of ministers and office-bearers was held in the First Church [Dunedin] to consider the whole subject. The following resolution was then passed, namely: "That this meeting regrets the great indifference manifested by members and adherents of the Presbyterian Church in Dunedin to the proper observance of the Fast Days, and expresses the desire that ministers and office-bearers will direct the special attention of members and adherents to the due observance of these days, and in the hope that it may not be found necessary to abolish them." Things did not mend, however, in this direction, and the churches, while lamenting the necessity for it, began to move for their abolition. After a good deal of discussion in the Kirk Session of Dunedin and suburbs, and after two conferences of office-bearers had been held on the subject, it was agreed that the continuance of Sacramental fast days in those churches was inexpedient.'

The institution lingered on for a few years in some of the country districts and in remoter parts of the land, but it is now, we believe, utterly extinct. The Rev. John Macpherson, M.A., in his handbook on the *Confession of Faith*, written for Presbyterian Bible Classes, remarks: 'Occasions are ever occurring to render such fasts . . . appropriate. If the churches are not in a state to observe them profitably, it indicates a very low development of spiritual life.' We express no opinion ourselves on the matter; but we cannot help suspecting that the comment just quoted gives expression to the sentiments which the Otago ministers and office-bearers themselves felt when they made such strenuous efforts to retain this wholesome and Scriptural custom.

### Bishop Gibney

A Sydney secular weekly recalls one notable adventure of Bishop Gibney, of Perth. 'He was at Glenrowan, Victoria,' it says—'a mere priest he was at the time—when the Kelly gang [of bushrangers] was in possession of the local hotel. Superintendent Hare and his peelers had

set fire to the house that held the outcasts, and were bombarding it. It contained some innocent folk, who had no connection with the Kellys. The present Bishop of Perth dived in and rescued the non-combatants; also he satisfied himself and the police that Dan Kelly, Joe Byrnes, and Steve Hart were not shamming, but dead.'

### A Blasphemer's Prayer

When the saintly Archbishop of Paris, in 1871, was brought before Raoul Rigault, one of the boldest of the communards, the venerable prelate, addressing his accusers, said: 'Children, what do you wish to do with me?' 'We are your betters,' said Rigault, who was hardly thirty years of age; 'speak as if to your superiors. Who are you?' The Archbishop, whose great charities had been known in Paris for a generation, replied, 'I am the servant of God.' 'Where does He live?' asked Rigault. 'Everywhere,' was the answer. 'Very well,' said the Communard, 'send this bishop to prison and issue an order for the arrest of one God, who lives everywhere.' That order was never executed; but a few days later Rigault lay on one of the streets of Paris: half his skull shot away; one eye a clot of blood; and the other, open, was glaring wildly into space, as if he saw the Being Who cannot be arrested.

It is part of the regular stock-in-trade of the shallow atheist to make irreverent gibes and jests at everything that is considered sacred; but so long as the universe continues to be ruled by a Supreme Being Who cannot be arrested, the path of the blasphemer will be a dangerous one to tread. The Rome correspondent of the Melbourne *Advocate*, writing just after the recent disaster, says that Messina was a nest of infidels, and that, the very night before the earthquake began, a meeting of Radical-Socialists and Anarchists was held in the city, at which anti-Christian resolutions were passed. But the London *Daily Chronicle* and a number of other papers record still more significant incidents. Although the office, the editor, and the staff of the 'comic' paper, *Il Telefono*, were destroyed at Messina, some copies of the issue which appeared on Christmas Eve are still in existence. It contains a blasphemous parody on the Hymn then being sung throughout the city in the churches and a mock novena to the Infant Saviour. At the conclusion of this profane litany, the 'Bambino'—the Christ-Child—is invited to send a general earthquake—a *tutti un terremoto!* The 'humorous' journalist prayed for an earthquake; three days later he got it. The significance of the incident has impressed even the secular papers, and is delicately hinted at in the following temperate comment of the *Daily Chronicle*: 'It is much to the credit of the clerical papers that they do not make capital out of this revolting parody, do not point a moral or adorn a tale with this horrible coincidence. Inasmuch as the singers of the hymn as well as the composers of the parody, were in fact impartially crushed, they do not improve the occasion. But it is impossible to prevent an impression of chastised blasphemy among the simpler of the survivors.'

### Teachers and Religious Education

It is commonly asserted, or assumed, that the teachers employed in State schools are almost unanimously opposed to the whole principle of religion in education. And this argument is commonly advanced as one reason why the Catholic claim—the counterpart of which is some measure of non-Catholic religious instruction in the public schools—cannot be entertained. Public school teachers might not unreasonably be expected to look askance at any fresh burden thrown upon the already hopelessly over-loaded syllabus of the public schools. But the Catholic schools follow the same syllabus, and give, in addition, the moral and religious training which go to constitute true education. And on the broad principle that the religious side of the child ought not to be neglected and that attention to the moral faculty is an essential element in true education the best members of the teaching profession are heartily agreed. Mr. Ossian Lang, editor of the *School Journal*, a monthly journal of education published in New York, says in his December issue: 'About the need of religious education there is no division of opinion whatever among thoughtful people. "How much?" and "How?" form the only lines of division.' The *New Zealand Journal of Education* (the organ of the N.Z. Educational Institute) in its issue of October 15, 1908, quotes the following among a list of 'Moral Don'ts' selected from an exchange: 'Don't train the head and forget the heart. . . . Don't neglect the teaching of morality and religion (in the widest and best sense of the word).' And in the recently published report of the International Inquiry on Moral Instruction and Training, organised in London by Prof. Sadler and carried out by a particularly

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