

Current Topics

The Strike at the State Mine

The demand of the miners at Point Elizabeth that they should have a special share in the profits of the mine is not unreasonable and indefensible, but as far as we can judge the men are making an arguable, if not an absolutely just, claim in asking that they should be relieved of trucking and rigging, which, as the mine is developed, becomes a very heavy and more serious item for the hewers. We fear not among those who consider that the fact that the miners are averaging the handsome-looking wage of 14s a day is of itself sufficient to settle the question. This high average is doubtless attained during the busy season, but a substantial deduction must be made for the time lost when things are slack. For the rest, coal-mining is at best not a pleasant occupation; every day the miner works he takes his life in his hand; he is old before his time and in view of the attitude of the accident insurance companies, certain lung troubles, the hewer of coal is liable and is likely to be refused work on the faintest suspicion that his powers are impaired. Under these circumstances the miner is entitled to such a wage as will enable him to make reasonable provision for the day, which comes much more quickly in coal-mining than in other occupations when he will be compelled to lay down his tools. If, however, the miners have a measure of justice on their side, it makes the action of their leaders in refusing to submit the question to arbitration all the more culpable. Mr. Bishop, manager of the State mine, is a man of tact, sound judgment, and wide experience in dealing with men; the Hon. R. McKenzie, the Minister in charge, is notoriously sympathetic with the workers; and the head of the Government, Sir Joseph Ward, has always shown in difficult and delicate negotiations a reasonable spirit of give and take. All the auguries, therefore, favor the probability of a satisfactory arrangement being arrived at if conciliation is resorted to; and it is sincerely to be hoped that the miners will be well advised and will go back on their original decision in this respect. As to the moral of the incident—in its bearing on the whole question of State ownership and control of industries—it will be time to speak of that when the issue of the contest is determined.

Hymn-Tinkering: Past and Present

It has been said that the appearance of a really good hymn is as rare as that of a comet; and if that be so there ought to be some enactment visiting pains and penalties on the varlet who would both tinker and tamper with these poetic gems. If a hymn is not suitable for public worship as it stands, let it be rejected outright; if it is suitable, let it be accepted as it left the writer's brain, or at least, in justice to the author, let alterations be plainly and honestly indicated. At a very early stage in the history of vernacular hymn-writing, the verse-tinker and the "bad translator" got to work, and as might have been anticipated, the psalms of David—the noblest of all hymns—were among the first to suffer. From the Reformation down to the close of the seventeenth century, scarcely anything except versions of the Psalter or metrical paraphrases of other parts of Scripture was sung during the Protestant service. Of psalms, one Sternhold published forty in the reign of Henry VIII., and one Hopkins added to them; their collection had a great vogue, but persons of polite ears were sometimes moved to exclaim as Riches, a later did, on hearing a parish clerk sing one of the versions: "Sternhold and Hopkins had great quains, when they translated David's psalms, to make the heart right glad. But had it been King David's own words, they might have heard the psalm sung, and then they would see him in a better way."

After a time the rhyme-twisters extended their field of operations from the psalms of David to the ancient hymns of the Church, and no amount of religious fervor could be done or atone for some of the absurdities perpetrated. For example, the old version of the majestic Gloria, in its honor, under the manipulation of the translator, gave the following:

Be thou, O Lord, with Rider,
And we the little lass;
That to God's holy city
Together we may pass.

The second petition in this invocation must surely have been very amply fulfilled.

Even the possession of undoubted poetic genius does not necessarily qualify for successful hymn-writing. Who, for instance, could use, with any serious feeling of piety or devotion, the poet Herrick's "Litanies to the Holy Spirit"? It was intended in all good faith for a solemn and pathetic invocation in the time of fear and distress, and the following are some of the petitions it contained:

When the artless doctor sees
No one hope, but of his fees,
And his skill runs on the lees,
Sweet Spirit, comfort me.

When his potion and his pill
Has, or none, or little skill,
Meet for nothing but to kill,
Sweet Spirit, comfort me.

The intention is good, and the situation, such as arises with painful frequency; but the author's selection of details is fatal alike to poetry and to devotion.

We come now to our own time and to the incident which has led us to make this little excursion into hymnology. Somebody has sent to the London *Tablet* a programme of an "Autumn Assembly" of the Baptist Union held a few weeks ago at Reading, England, from which it appears that a hymn entitled "Faith of our Fathers," by F. W. Faber, was sung. Father Faber's well-known hymn is sung every Sunday evening in practically every Catholic Church in the Dominion, and, by no stretch of ingenuity, could it be regarded as describing the Baptist body of doctrine, as "The Faith of Our Fathers" (Our Baptist friends) show, never got over the difficulty by bare-faced and unblushing tinkering. The first and fourth stanzas in the Baptist programme are identical with Father Faber's original, but the second and third are faked. The third verse, as written by Father Faber, reads thus:

Faith of our Fathers, Many's prayers
Shall win our country back to thee;
And through the truth that comes from God
England shall then indeed be free.
Faith of our Fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.

On the Baptist programme it runs as follows:

Faith of our Fathers, God's great power,
Shall soon all nations win for thee;
And through the truth that comes from God
Mankind shall then be truly free.
Faith of our Fathers, holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death.

Yet, in spite of the glaring alterations which had thus been made, the promoters of the Baptist gathering calmly put the hymn forward, without qualification, as being the work of F. W. Faber.

On looking into a number of Protestant hymn-books, we find that these English Baptists had ample precedent for their action, and that the practice of faking Catholic hymns to suit the susceptibilities of Protestants, who use them, is one might say, universally followed by the compilers of Protestant hymnaries. All the leading Protestant collections contain a large number of hymns by Catholic writers, and wherever a distinctively Catholic touch or tone occurs the words are watered down or the verse is altogether omitted. We give one specimen, a single sample out of a great many instances, available. The first verse of Father Faber's well-known hymn, "O, come and mourn with me awhile"—as it left the pen of the writer—runs thus:

O, come and mourn with me awhile
See, Mary, calls us to her side;
O, come and let us mourn with her;
Jesus, our Lord, lies crucified.

In the Protestant hymn-books it appears in this form:

O, come and mourn with me awhile;
O, come ye to the Saviour's side;
O, come, together let us mourn;
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified.

This mutilated version appears in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (Church of England), *Church Praise* (Presbyterian), *Church Hymnary* (Presbyterian), *Wesley's Hymns* (Methodist), and *Church Hymnal* (Congregational); and it is indexed as the work of Frederick William Faber, D.D., the Congregational Hymnal being the only one, out of the five mentioned, which gives the slightest intimation that any alteration has been made. The changes thus introduced may or may not be improvements; the point is, the dishonesty of putting forward a doctored version as being the work of the original writer of the hymn. In this connec-