

## Current Topics

### The Opening of the School Year

Another year of hard work opens out this week for the tireless Brothers and Sisters, who in their own unapproachable way do so much to keep the light of faith burning in this young country. If in some anxious moment they ask: What will the new school year bring? perhaps the best answer may be found in the words of the poet:

'Is it not truth? as old as true?  
List ye, singers, the while ye sing!  
Each year bringeth to each of you  
What each of you will have him bring.'

The triple blessing that the Psalmist of old desired has come to them with the years of convent training—goodness, discipline, and knowledge. May the Great Master of all, through them, also teach their sacred charges goodness, discipline, and knowledge, and that not only during their early days, but also in the more difficult lessons in the school of life.

All true education must lift the soul to the hills of eternity, there to learn from Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the grandest lesson ever taught, that of God's love for the works of His hands. 'Where have we been all these truant years,' asks a distinguished Catholic writer, 'what silly, ugly things have we been teaching ourselves were wise and fine, outside the school where the humble Master has been asking, asking that the three and thirty years of His alphabet might spell for us the only word we need—love? Birth and death, miracle and parable, the long, silent years after Bethlehem and before Calvary, pity and patience, healing and help, His daily toil for His daily bread, all the thirty and three letters that made that life on earth of the Carpenter Whose Throne the angels were bowing down before in Heaven. He keeps His patient eyes on us, pushing them to us this way and that, and bids us group them into one word, What *can* they spell but love?'

### The Wit and Wisdom of John Ayscough

Some three years ago the present writer quoted a few passages from the most thoughtful Catholic novelist of the day, Mrs. Craigie, otherwise known as John Oliver Hobbes. He again ventures to cull some extracts from another Catholic writer, who as the teller of stories, long and short, has won his way into the foremost rank of living novelists. In point of sheer power, originality, keen observation, rich humor, subtle style and incisive language, John Ayscough is not unworthy of a place beside George Meredith and Thomas Hardy; whilst for sane outlook on life, wide sympathy and elevation of spiritual feeling he far surpasses any non-Catholic author of the present day. For that of course he, and we, too, have to thank the illuminating gift of Catholic faith, which makes all the difference between sadness and happiness, gloomy pessimism and hopeful optimism.

The Right Rev. Monsignor Bickerstaffe-Drew—to give John Ayscough his true name—was born close on sixty years ago in the town of Youghal, County Cork, Ireland; his father being the Anglican parson of the place. His mother was a highly-educated lady and in later years, after becoming a Catholic, did a great deal of work for Catholic literature. Young Drew was educated in England, first at Lichfield Grammar School and later at Oxford University. The charm of the once Catholic seat of learning touched the imagination and heart of the impressionable young Irishman, and perhaps, too, the thought of the Dominican and Franciscan friars who in days of old founded the University, led his mind from the hopeless tangle of his first Anglican belief to the sure ground of Catholic faith, for on the morrow of his taking his degree we find him being received into the Church. This happened in

1878, and six years later he was ordained priest. He became an army and naval chaplain, and in the course of his duties has seen most of the great sights of the world in England, France, Italy, Africa, Egypt, and Greece. One of his books, *Saints and Places*, gives a fascinating glimpse into the thoughts of an observant traveller. In 1903 he was raised to the dignities of Privy Chamberlain and Domestic Prelate to the Pope; and in 1912 received the higher title of Protogonary Apostolic. He received from Pope Leo XIII. in 1901, the cross 'pro Ecclesia et Pontifice,' and is also a Knight Commander of the Holy Sepulchre. Since the war broke out Monsignor has been acting as chaplain to the English Forces both in France and England. He has been telling his experiences in the *Month* for some time past, and his keen appreciation of the nobler side of human nature and its high capacity for heroic charity and endurance of suffering has been to some of us at least a bright spot in the blackest of pictures.

His chief works are—*A Roman Tragedy*, *Maroty*, *Dromina* (an Irish story), *Sau Celestino* (the lovely romance of the Pope who resigned the Papacy), *Mezzogiorno*, *Hurdcott*, *Saints and Places*, *Levia Pondera*, *Faustula* (an imperishable story of conversion, saintly motherhood, and God's boundless mercy), *Outsiders—and In*, *Prodigals and Sons*, *Monksbridge* and *Gracechurch* (almost an autobiography). It would be difficult to name books more capable than these of satisfying at once the literary taste, the mind, and the heart of Catholics.

Now it is high time to turn to the writings themselves. A favorite thought of John Ayscough's is that of God's fatherly love.

'Make little of a trouble, which dark as it seems, must come from God, in Whose every purpose there is pity and most fatherly remembrance.'

'God knows what He is giving better than we can guess what He is offering.'

'Of God's patience and compassion we all take account when it is a question of great sinners. Has He no patience or compassion for those who try not to sin, and fail, and go on trying? When we are mad with impatience against ourselves, and our failures and sloth, is it out of humility? 'He who believeth let him not make haste.' Was Isais giving a counsel of imperfection, or remembering that we must go step by step, and that the steps are steep, and our knees faltering, and only by the hand of Omnipotent charity can we be helped and heartened up at all.'

'God has use for tools of all sorts; all fit for the Divine Workman's Hand, and will not break in it, if they are of true temper.'

'Life is not all tears, though tears are often needed as long as sin and sorrow last; but neither is life all lamentation. God sends His kindly breath to dry our tears, and smiles out of Heaven to see us doing our best.'

'God is never impatient like us: He doesn't watch us in a hurry, but attends to others things, and waits till we are ready for Him. Then He looks again.'

'I don't believe much in optimism, for it generally consists in calling black white; but there's a decent lot of white in the world, for, after all, God made it, and it takes more than six thousand years to spoil His work out and out.'

'When shall God write Finis to the book of His long patience and of man's thankless insolence?'

Here is a new, and as one can see on reflection, a true view of those poor starving souls—too common in these days,—who have no faith and who look down on those who have:—'The great majority of those who profess to be unable to believe are taken too seriously. They are encouraged to regard themselves as terrible creatures, gloomy, tragic familiars of Satan, when they are only his Jack-in-the-boxes and tin whistles. Such figures as they are intellectually are best reformed by the laughter their oddity suggests.'

A touch of shrewd humor peeps out in this remark of Maroty: 'Everyone has a vocation. Some have a vocation to be shoemakers, and some haven't; that's why some people's shoes fit so badly perhaps.'