

## Current Topics

### More Work for Mr. Morel

We have many times drawn attention to the element of humbug and hypocrisy present in the anti-Congo agitation conducted by Mr. Morel and the Congo Reform Association, inasmuch as occurrences just as serious as those charged against the Congo are continually happening in territories under British influence or control, and these gentlemen utter not a word of censure or condemnation. Two fresh and rather striking instances of the sort of thing of which we complain have recently been recorded. In our daily papers of May 31 the following brief cable appeared: 'Sir Edward Grey is communicating with the United States in view of alleged ill-treatment of Putumayo Valley Indians by the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company.' The message was quite a mild one: no mention of 'atrocities'—nothing but 'alleged ill-treatment'—and nothing to indicate that the company named was a British company. Exchanges now to hand, however, give somewhat fuller particulars, which throw a very clear light on the situation. According to the statement in Home papers, 'correspondence has been published between the Aborigines' Protection Society and Sir Edward Grey. The former wrote, on May 11, that nothing in the Congo equalled the horror of some of the acts alleged to have taken place in connection with enforced rubber collection by a British syndicate at Putumayo, in the Amazon Valley. The evidence was too revolting to be published. Sir Edward Grey, replying on May 19, says the question is engaging most serious attention, and the Government is communicating with the United States regarding the course to be pursued.' These atrocities have apparently been going on for some considerable time, but Mr. Morel had eyes only for the Congo.

The second instance is furnished by the British Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. We have already given in this column the official statistics showing the enormous amount of gin which is allowed to enter that unhappy country; but the bare figures give not even a faint idea of the demoralisation and degradation which results. At the annual meeting in London on May 6 of the United Committee for the Prevention of the Demoralisation of the Native Races by the Liquor Traffic, Sir John Kennaway complained that the report of the Committee of Inquiry into the sale of strong drink in Southern Nigeria does not adequately represent the havoc wrought by the liquor trade amongst the natives. Upon the motion of the Rev. Dr. Scott Lidgett, a resolution was passed, calling attention to the growth of gin-drinking in Southern Nigeria; the payment of fines in gin in six courts of the Brass district; the common use of gin as currency; the drunken orgies at festivals, plays, and funeral processions; and the custom of pawning children for gin. Well may the *Catholic Times* remark: 'Here, surely, is a case for the use by Mr. Morel of vehement language. The Congo which he has been watching so intently for years has never been reduced to this degraded state. There is no gin currency there, and the natives do not pawn their children in order to procure that intoxicating liquor. How is it that the condition of Southern Nigeria has escaped the vigilance of Mr. Morel and his fellow Reformers, and that their energies are dormant whilst the natives are suffering this fearful wrong?'

### The Church and Modernism

A lady correspondent writes asking us to explain the attitude of the Church towards the Modernist movement, chiefly for the benefit of several non-Catholic residents in her district who are 'earnest readers of the *Tablet*.' The subject is a big one, and was thoroughly threshed out some three years ago on the occasion of the publication of the Holy Father's famous Encyclical on the question. It will probably suffice, therefore, for our correspondent's purpose, if we give a brief, concise statement—in terms as plain and simple as possible, seeing that it is intended, not for theologians, but for ordinary lay folk. What is Modernism? At bottom, Modernism is simply a form of Agnosticism, the essential difference between Modernists of the Rev. R. J. Campbell type, and 'Modernists' like Huxley, Tyndall, Ingersoll, and McCabe, being that the latter have carried the agnostic principle to its full and logical conclusion. The root principle of Modernism is the limitation of the sphere of reason to the phenomena presented to our senses. According to the Modernists, we are only capable of knowing natural phenomena—i.e., things that appear—and in the manner in which they appear. We can know only what we perceive—what we see, hear, taste, smell, touch. Beyond these we cannot go. These things are visible facts, and, according to Modernism, they are the only facts. The inner meaning—what lies behind them—we are unable to penetrate. Modernism admits that

beyond there is a vast realm—of reality, possibly, and of truth; but it declares that it is unknowable.

If we apply this principle to one or two cardinal doctrines on which Catholics and orthodox Protestants are happily agreed we shall get a clearer and more definite idea of the Modernist position. (1) Historic Christianity tells us that God made us, and that we know this truth with certainty, because God has revealed it to the human race, speaking by His prophets and by His Son. Modernism says: 'You cannot know with certainty that God has made you, because you cannot go beyond the facts of your experience in science and history. You have never had any scientific experience of God; and if there are any historical records that seem to tell you about God, they are not, strictly speaking, true. The most that can be said is that in your heart you will find an aching need of something that you cannot find in all nature; and this religious feeling, reaching out beyond the boundaries of science and history into the region of the Unknowable, unites itself to God. But even this religious sense cannot tell you whether God is the Creator of the world or not—or whether you are His handiwork or not.' (2) Historic Christianity says that Jesus Christ is God the Son, made man for us. Modernism tells us that there are two Christs. It says that the real Christ, the historic person, was a man like any other man. Since he was but a man, nothing that he said or did could rise above the human. Any revelations of supernatural truth said to have been made by him, and any stories of miracles wrought by him, are pure myths. They did not happen, because they could not happen. But (continues this incoherent theory) by the exercise of the religious sense or religious feeling before mentioned we have come to read into Christ's character certain qualities and powers—which, historically, were never there—and this historically-fictitious character Modernism will allow us to believe in under the designation of 'the Christ of faith.' To the plain man all this seems to be the merest foolery and jugglery with words; and so, in truth, it is. The essential point, for our present purpose, is that Modernism absolutely rejects the divinity of Christ in the sense in which ordinary Christians have always believed it. (3) Historic Christianity has always accepted the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, and as therefore infallibly true. According to Modernism, however, the Bible is an entirely fallible book. The great facts related in the Gospels—the Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension, etc.—are not historically true. The divinity of Jesus Christ cannot be established by an appeal to the Scriptures, for they themselves are inaccurate and historically false. Thus, under Modernist principles, the very foundations of Christianity are undermined. God is expressed in terms of mere religious feeling or pious sentiment; Jesus of Nazareth stands out as a man like ourselves and no more; and the Bible becomes a purely human record, in which the truth has been overlaid by vast accretions of myth and legend.

The principles and teachings of Modernism being thus both directly and indirectly in opposition to the teaching of Christianity, the Catholic Church, as the guardian of revelation and custodian of divine truth, could not do other than officially condemn it. The Holy Father at first tried to reclaim the leading Modernists from their error by persuasion and admonition. But these proving unavailing, his Holiness issued (September 8, 1907) the Encyclical *Pascendi Gregis*, in which the whole Modernist heresy was definitely and finally condemned. The beneficial effect produced by the Encyclical has been remarkable. For its defence of Revelation, of Christ, and of the Bible, it was received with cordial approbation even in many non-Catholic quarters. Catholics have even greater reason to thank God for the timely pronouncement. As a result of the condemnation, several Modernist papers have had to cease publication; and within the fold of the Church, in a space of less than three years, this dangerous and insidious movement may be said to have been completely killed. One or two other matters referred to by our correspondent will receive attention as soon as a suitable opportunity offers.

### Some Exploded Theories

As we mentioned last week, it would not be difficult to compile a tolerably lengthy list of fanciful conceits and absurd hypotheses that have been, at one time or other, pawned off upon an unsuspecting public as absolute and proven truths which it were folly to question and crime to deny. A knowledge of the elements of logic would often save investigators into natural science from putting forward manifest absurdities as matters of scientific faith. Geologists and biologists, too, have hitherto been far too prone to fancy that their respective sciences could settle offhand questions which can be determined only by mathematics and history. Lord Kelvin, Farge, Professor Tait, Professor George H. Darwin (of the Cambridge University),