

Current Topics

A No-Popery Harangue

The twelfth of July functions in New Zealand now pass off so quietly that the great date comes and goes almost without the public being made aware of the existence of the well-known fraternity. Not that the effervescent Orangeman has ceased to effervesce; but he has found his level. The more influential and reputable dailies have learned to appraise him at his true value, and his 'celebrations' are now for the most part dismissed with the most inconspicuous and briefest possible par. The Orange organisation is ignored by an enlightened public opinion, in the first place, because of its intrinsic insignificance. It is ignored, in the second place, because its methods—those of noisy vituperation, coarse abuse, and underhand and unscrupulous attack—are recognised as being out of place in a reasonably civilised community. And it is ignored, in the third place, because its cause—that of fomenting religious strife and of keeping alive sectarian animosities which should have no place in this new land—is one which does not, and which never will, appeal to broad-minded New Zealanders.

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Seeing that the respectable secular papers almost uniformly decline to give publication to the wild and inflammatory harangues of the Orange orators, it is certainly not for us to bother our heads about them, or to give them free advertisement, and an importance which does not really attach to them, by according them serious notice. For this reason we do not feel called upon to waste time and space on a detailed reply to the fierce no-Popery tirade delivered by the Rev. W. E. Gillam, vicar of St. Matthew's (Anglican) Church, Auckland, at the recent 'church parade' of the brethren in the northern city. The Anglican vicar's deliverance was an extraordinary hotch-potch—ranging from an ignorant denunciation of 'papal pretensions' and the bull *Unam Sanctam* down to a disquisition on the massacre of St. Bartholemew and the bogey of Home Rule. It was from first to last mere vitriol-throwing and tom-tom beating—a fair dead-level specimen of the vulgar and abusive tirades of the usual type of twelfth of July Orange 'oration.' The clergy of the Church of England as a rule are cultured gentlemen, who are not only willing but anxious to dwell in peace and amity with their fellow-citizens of other creeds; and we refuse to regard the Rev. W. E. Gillam as representing his fellow-clerics in this vituperative outburst. The paper which published his address did him, in fact, the greatest possible unkindness. It is the Rev. W. E. Gillam—and not the Catholic Church—who stands discredited and disgraced by such an ebullition.

The Poet Laureateship

Speculation had been busy for some time past as to Mr. Asquith's probable choice for the Laureateship; and considering the number of names that had been suggested in one or other of the English papers there is bound to be in some quarters a feeling of disappointment—not to say surprise—at Mr. Asquith's final decision. As we learn from the cables, Dr. Robert Bridges has been appointed to succeed Mr. Alfred Austin as Poet Laureate. Dr. Bridges is not very widely known as an author; but the laureateship, like kissing, goes by favour rather than by merit. Poet and Poet Laureate are often, if not usually, two widely different things. The late Laureate, for example, Mr. Alfred Austin, could only be called a poet by courtesy; and Dr. Bridges may be safely trusted to at least rise to the level set by his predecessor. England's crowned heads have had a sort of traditional regard for the small poets. Sir John Denham, for instance, who was a literary ancestor of Mr. Austin, was in high favor with Charles I. In one of the frays with the Roundheads, Withers—a Puritan officer who was the writer of an unconscionable amount of prosy doggerel—was taken prisoner by the Cavaliers.

He was condemned to die by the halter. But Sir John successfully besought the King to spare the wretched versifier's life, 'because'—as a quaint old history naively puts it—'so long as Withers lived, Denham could not be accounted the worst poet in England.'

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Although no less than fourteen names had been mentioned as being 'in the running' for the Laureateship, there was something very closely approaching a consensus of opinion in favor of the predominant claims of the well-known Catholic poet, Mrs. Alice Meynell. The London *Tablet* has gathered together the utterances of a number of authorities on the point, from which we make a selection. Of past critics, it is pointed out that Rossetti knew Mrs. Meynell's sonnet 'Renouncement' by heart, and thought it one of the three finest ever written by women. Ruskin wrote, 'The last verse of that perfectly heavenly "Letter from a Girl to Her own Old Age," and the end of the sonnet, "To a Daisy," are the finest things I have yet seen or felt in modern verse.' Coventry Patmore described her as 'one of the very rarest products of nature and grace—a woman of genius,' and in a letter to the *Saturday Review* definitely claimed for her the succession to Tennyson. Of great names amongst the living we turn to that accomplished critic, Mr. Garvin, who a few weeks ago said in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 'By her best, Mrs. Meynell is far the first of living poets,' and again, speaking of the banquet given in her honor by the Poetry Society, Mr. Garvin wrote: 'It is one of many signs recognising the real place in English letters held by the woman who has been by much our greatest poet since the death of George Meredith.' Strangely enough, Mrs. Meynell had also the support of the paper which most directly represents organised Labor. The *Daily Citizen*—the Labor daily,—after mentioning several names, said: 'There is one other name that at such a moment cannot be ignored—that of Mrs. Alice Meynell, who has enriched English verse more notably than perhaps any other member of her sex, living or dead. If it were thought well to confer the Laureateship on a woman-poet—and why not?—not only would the best traditions of the office lose nothing of their dignity, but a recompense would be given for the obstinate denial to woman of a vote.' Even the Nonconformist bodies, who are supposed to be very influential with the Government, gave their strong support to Mrs. Meynell's nomination. Sir Robertson Nicoll—himself a great literary critic and authority—wrote in the columns of the *British Weekly*:—'Who is to be the new Poet Laureate? Happily, we have poets among us well worthy of the distinction, but would it not be a graceful and righteous thing to put the wreath on the brows of a woman poet? I will not go so far as Mr. Garvin and say that Mrs. Meynell is the greatest of living poets, but I will say that she ranks with the very best, and I believe there will be no disposition to dispute her claim. It may be recalled that before Tennyson was made Poet Laureate the *Athenaeum*, much to its credit, suggested Mrs. Browning. Why not make Mrs. Meynell the Poet Laureate?'

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It may be that the suffragette agitation has soured Mr. Asquith against women, or that he deemed that the butt of wine—which, together with £70, is the emolument attached to the office—might prove an embarrassment to a lady laureate. Whatever may have been his reason, the Prime Minister has lost an excellent opportunity to honor, and at least partly conciliate, a whole sex, and to give fitting public recognition where recognition was well deserved.

The Federation and Politics

At the important meeting of the Dominion Executive of the Catholic Federation called for July 27—which, by the way, may be, and we venture to hope will be deferred to a slightly later date—considerable discussion will doubtless be devoted to the question of the relation of the Federation to politics, or rather to the politicians. At the last annual meeting of the Australian Catholic Federation, held in Melbourne, a resolution was passed declaring that 'politicians'

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