

Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

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A NOTABLE FAILURE. MR. WALTER BESANT, in an article in the *Nineteenth Century* for March, shows us the complete manner in which the English Board Schools have failed to fulfil all the glorious things expected of them. He tells us that the pupils of these schools are not found to delight in reading, as it was foretold that they would; that they have neither the taste nor the opportunity for such an occupation. "As for their favourite amusements and their pleasures," he says, they grow yearly coarser; as for their conversation, it grows continually viler, until Zola himself would be ashamed to reproduce the talk of these young people." The general state of education, in fact, as promoted by the schools, says Mr. Besant, is far from satisfactory:—"Consider the situation from an educational point of view. How long, do you think, does it take to forget all that the boys and girls learned at school? 'The garden,' says one who knows, 'which by daily culture has been brought into such an admirable and promising condition is given over to utter neglect; the money, the time, the labour bestowed upon it are lost.' In the two first years after leaving school, it is said that they have forgotten everything. There is, however, it is objected, the use and exercise of the intellectual faculty. Can that, once taught, ever be forgotten? By way of reply, consider this case. The other day twenty young mechanics were persuaded to join a South Kensington class. Of the whole twenty, one only struggled through the course and passed his examination; the rest dropped off, one after another, in sheer despair, because they had lost not only the little knowledge they had once acquired, but even the methods of application and study which they had formerly been able to exercise. There are exceptions, of course; it is computed, in fact, that there are four per cent. of Board School boys and girls who carry on their studies in the evening schools, but this proportion is said to be decreasing. After thirteen, no school, no books, no reading or writing, nothing to keep up the old knowledge, no kind of conversation that stimulates; no examples of perseverance; in a great many cases, no church, chapel, or Sunday-school; the street for play-ground, exercise, observation, and talk; what kind of young men and maidens are we to expect that these boys and girls will become?" He adds that there are to be found some few institutions to rescue and preserve, but that these are powerless where the great mass of the population is concerned.

PROMISING PUPILS Mr. BESANT gives us the following example of the condition of the children who have been trained at so great an expense in the Board Schools:—"The evil for the most part lies hidden; yet one sometimes lights upon a case which shows that the result of our own neglect of the children may be such as cannot be placed on paper for general reading. For instance, on last August Bank Holiday, I was on Hampstead Heath. The East Heath was crowded with a noisy, turbulent, good-tempered mob, enjoying, as a London crowd always does, the mere presence of a multitude; there was a little rough horseplay and exchange of favourite witticisms, and there was some preaching and a great singing of irreverent parodies; there was little drunkenness, and little bad behaviour except for half a dozen troops or companies of girls. They were quite young, none of them apparently over fifteen or sixteen. They were running about together, not courting the company of the boys, but contented with their own society, and loudly talking and shouting as they ran among the swings and merry-go-rounds and other attractions of the fair. I may safely aver that language more vile and depraved, revealing knowledge and thoughts more vile and depraved, I have never heard from any grown men or women in the worst part of the town. At mere profanity of course these girls would be easily defeated by men, but not in absolute vileness. The quiet workingmen among whom they ran looked on in amazement and disgust; they had never heard anything in all their lives to equal the abomination of these girls' language. Now they were girls who had all I suppose, passed the third or fourth standard; at thirteen or fourteen they had gone into the workshop and the street; of all the various contrivances to influence the young not one had as yet caught hold of them; the

surely to commit a crime much worse than any of those committed by any of the old offenders themselves."

ACCORDING to the reports that reach us by the Euro-
THE PROSPECTS pean cable, the prospects of Home Rule look very
OF HOME dark. If we may judge by them Mr. Gladstone has
RULE. acted rather in a rash and premature manner by
introducing his Bill into the House of Commons
Even his own party is strongly divided against him, and all other
parties are naturally up in open arms. So hostile, indeed, is the dis-
position shown, we may even predict that if an appeal were made to
the country, as some people believe would be the case in event of the
Bill's being defeated either in the House of Commons or the Lords, the
result would not mend the aspect of Irish affairs in the slightest
degree but would prove that the electors fully supported the opposition.
We say, all this would be the case, if a firm reliance might be placed
upon the cablegrams received here. And this state of affairs, if it be
true, surprises us in no slight degree. The apparent feeling of the
United Kingdom generally had led us to expect a very contrary issue
and, although virulent and unceasing hostility had been shown in
various influential quarters, many men of note, high character, and
extensive influence had professed themselves, some in direct favour of
Home Rule, and some by no means strongly opposed to it. To
witness opposition, therefore, as made according to the cable is ex-
tremely perplexing. But how far is the cable to be trusted, for
that is a question on which a great deal depends? And
there are not wanting signs to tell us that the answer must be un-
certain. So far as our own judgment goes, the reports brought here
are extremely doubtful. They are, perhaps, more coloured by the
desires of the agent who sends them, than the truth warrants, and in
any case it is evident that they are carelessly worded more or less.—
Take the following example, as given under date, London, May 3.—
"Lord Rosebery holds that Mr. Gladstone's Irish proposals absolutely
promote Imperial federation, but Lord Selborne contends that their
effect will be to repeal the Union." Their effect will be to repeal the
Union! But is not that the chief, the only object of a proposal to
reestablish a Parliament in Dublin? If Lord Selborne contends for
that, His Lordship contends for a fact that no body denies, and
simply makes a fool of himself in a more than ordinarily silly
manner. It would seem evident, then, the messages are very loosely
sent, and that due allowance must be made for this in attending to
them. Our conclusion, on the whole, is that the opposition offered,
according to the cable, to Mr. Gladstone's proposals is not offered to
Home Rule in itself, but to some particular points in the Bill as
introduced, and which are probably capable of modification. We
do not, therefore, think there are absolute reasons for taking the
gloomy view of matters that might seem at first sight to thrust it-
self upon us, and we shall continue, failing more lucid even if darker
information, to hope for better things.

AND let us take another illustration of the nature
THE SOURCE of the men who are the true promoters
OF of secularism.—A horrible murder was com-
SECULARISM. mitted a few months ago at a place called
Decazeville in France. The victim was foreman
of a factory, and is described as a man of inoffensive character, and
held in high esteem by all respectable people who were acquainted
with him. He was nevertheless attacked one day by a mob, and
about literally torn to pieces, trampled under foot, thrown out of a
window, and beaten down with repeated blows of iron bars. After
he had succumbed to the ill-usage, some women of the crowd made
merry in a ferocious and horrible manner by the outrages they
committed in jest upon the corpse. And the act of murder went on
from six o'clock in the morning, when the attack commenced until
four in the afternoon when the victim died. The authorities, moreover,
had been called to his aid by the man attacked, but they held back,
as it is supposed, in fear of the popular disfavour—and, again, no
disclosure has been made as to the identity of those who took part in
the murder.—This, however, is not all although it is bad enough!
A meeting at which 3000 people attended was afterwards held in
Paris where a warm sympathy was expressed with the criminals.
They were spoken of as the executors of justice, and their deed

as an incident of the social war—a presage of destruction to the bourgeois order. But among the principal speakers at this meeting were three members of the Chamber of Deputies—MM. Basly, Camelinat, and Boyer, each of them a pronounced enemy of the clericals, and a champion of secularism.—And each of them agreed to pass the following resolution: The male and female citizens assembled to the number of 3000, declare themselves one with the anonymous executors of justice in Aveyron (the Department in which Decazeville is situated) to whom they send their most active sympathies."—Such, then, is the source from which secularism flows abroad over the face of the earth, and into the souls of the children submitted to it.—But we know what must necessarily be the nature of a stream whose source is poisoned.

CRUEL
ENLIGHTEN-
MENT.

As a great secular authority and consequently marching in the van of all that is connected with the best progress, and most advanced enlightenment of the day, we should expect that the Government of the French Republic would exhibit

every mark of a higher civilisation, and afford to all other countries an example most worthy of being followed. We have, nevertheless, already seen an instance or two in which such an expectation would be disappointed, and Prince Kropotkin, in the article to which we have referred, gives as a good deal of information to a similar effect. He describes, for example, the prison system of this enlightened power in terms such as in old times men were wont to speak in of the prisons of Naples, or of other places whose shortcomings and iniquities were supposed to be the particular result of a close connection with Rome. No such suspicion, we need hardly say, can attach to any thing belonging to the present Government of France, and yet we find these prisons spoken of as miserable, ill managed in the extreme—dirty to an inconceivable, and almost incredible degree—and in almost every respect wanting in all that appertains to a superior civilisation—and indeed, in some instances, out of joint with humanity itself. We are told, for example, of a man's being punished by having the water from a fire-engine pumped on him and being left in such a condition throughout the length of a freezing night. We are also told of a prisoner's being killed by blows of the warders' keys, and generally we are told of insufficient food, and disgraceful clothing. The following instance, however, may suffice to show us the ingenuity of cruelty that prevails:—And let us remark the difference between the prison-management under the care of the religious Orders as described by M. Othenin d, Haussonville, and quoted by us some time ago,—and that which Prince Kropotkin describes as obtaining under the secular rule. He writes thus:—"A man who has been once sent to the punishment quarter, is sure to return thither a few days after he has been released from it," say the warders, even the mildest ones. And this punishment is not a light one. The man is not beaten; he is not knocked down. No, we are civilised people, and the punished man is merely brought to the cellular quarter, and locked up in a cell. The cell is quite empty: it has neither bed nor bench. For the night a mattress is given, and the prisoner must lay his dress outside his cell, at the door. Bread and water are his food. As soon as the prison-bell rings in the morning, he is taken to a small covered yard, and there he must—walk, nothing more; but our refined civilisation has learned how to make a torture even of this natural exercise. At a formal slow pace, under the cries of *un, deux*, the patients must walk all the day long round the building. They walk for twenty minutes; then a rest follows. For ten minutes they must sit down immovable, each of them on his numbered stone, and walk again for twenty minutes; and so on through all the day, as long as the engines of the work-shops are running: and the punishment does not last one day or two; it lasts for whole months. It is so cruel that the prisoner implores but one thing. 'Let me return to the workshops.'—'Well, we shall see that in a fortnight or two,' is the usual answer. But the fortnight goes over and the next one too, and the patient still continues to walk for twelve hours every day. Then he revolts. He begins to cry in the cell, to insult the warders. Then he becomes a rebel—a dreadful qualification for any one who is in the hands of the brotherhood of warders—and as such he will rot in the cells, and walk throughout his life. If he assaults a warder he will not be sent to New Caledonia: he will still remain in his cell, and ever walk

and walk in the small building. One man, a peasant, seeing no issue from this horrible situation preferred to poison himself rather than live such a life."—

AN instance of that love of liberty which distinguishes the secular faction, and in whose interests they act so zealously in opposing religious education, occurred the other day in the town of Bouillargues, in the Department of Gard, France. The prefecture had come to the conclusion to expel the religious from their schools, and to place these under the care of lay-teachers, and in spite of the protestations made by the municipal council on behalf of the people they persisted in their determination. The first attempt was made on the schools of the Sisters, where the Inspector arrived one day accompanied by his chosen teachers. No sooner, however, had the honest man made his appearance within the precincts of the town, than he was surrounded by a crowd of the people, who, in a very plain manner, acquainted him and his companions with their sentiments, and who went with them to the school-door, where they effectually prevented their entrance. The worthy official then had recourse to the mayor, who, although he had remonstrated strongly against the contemplated change, thought it incumbent on him to uphold the majesty of the law, and consequently attempted to make the people give way. But in vain; they heard him respectfully, but absolutely refused to yield to his request, declaring their resolution to resist tyranny, and to defend their Brothers and Sisters. The Inspector next appealed to the prefect of the Department, and from him obtained a military force, which entered upon their duties with

much energy, and attacked the people, still resisting, in a very spirited manner, the result being that serious injuries were inflicted—several women and children, among the rest, being dangerously hurt. The mayor and municipal council, nevertheless, at length persuaded the people to retire, and so the lay-teachers were victoriously established in the schools—the Sisters being conducted to the hospitable shelter of a neighbouring house, which the populace, in testimony of their affection, covered immediately with a profusion of flowers. But this is the respectful way in which a Government that professes itself the especial representative of the people conducts itself on occasion towards them. When there is a chance of injuring religion, it proves itself tyrannical after the sternest model, and willingly tramples the people and their legitimate desires under foot. Of all the deceits and shams of the times, in fact, none by any means approaches the secular sham. It is the greatest and the most infamous, as it must prove the most destructive of all.

AN AMAZING day by the minister of the Free Kirk at Aberlour. MINISTER. His reverence is evidently made of stern stuff, and yet there is also a spice of humour in him. If he preaches often like this, those who sit under him must have pretty lively times in a spiritual sort of a way; but as to the character of their Christianity, we should say it varied a little from the original type—that is from the original type of Christianity, and not of Scotch Presbyterianism, with whose original type it seems to have a good deal in common. A desire for the loaves and fishes, and the hanging of the neighbour who stood in the way thereof, does not seem inconsistent with the spirit of John Knox. Here is that of which our minister, referring to the promise of disestablishment, delivered himself, and it can hardly be improved upon:—"Judas of old (he was like the Established folk, dry and false) got, like them, the money, but, to his honour be it said, he gave it up, and went and hanged himself. The Established folk are worse than Judas, for they got the money, but they have not given it up, neither have they hanged themselves; but the time is coming, my brethren."—Verily our minister, if he was in earnest, would have been a fit spiritual guide for Balfour of Burleigh himself, and surely no minister of the Free Kirk would wag his head jestingly in the pulpit.

OUR contemporary the *Otago Witness*, claims to be RUFFIANLY a respectable newspaper. It even put in an excep-

REMINISCENCES. tional claim to respectability a few months ago by refusing to publish the revelations of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and we believe that, as a rule, the claim of our contemporary may be generally allowed as just. It, therefore, is all the more remarkable when without any due cause our contemporary seems to depart from his ordinary position in the world of journalism by publishing matter that is anything rather than fit for the columns of any respectable newspaper. We allude to the series of narratives written by the late Mr. Henry Garrett, alias Rouse the bushranger. What is there to recommend these contributions, we should like to know, for, on reading them, or rather on scanning over as much of them as possible for anyone not having time to throw away, or not being disposed to use it in the perusal of what is both nasty and stupid, we have been wholly unable to discern one tittle of merit in their contents. Full of slang, abusive, and libellous—libellous of the dead in the case, for example, of the late Mr. Price cruelly murdered in 1857, and who in the person of his brother Sir Charles Price of Cornwall, of his son, an officer in the Royal Navy, and also in the family of Lord Talbot his relatives has left survivors of high position who may probably be pained, not by the abuse heaped upon him by such a fellow as Garrett but by the fact that circulation has been given to those slanders by a paper extensively read, and, as we said, occupying a respectable position—libellous of the living, again, in the person for example, of Mr. Caldwell, for he is evidently the "Buttons" alluded to in last Saturday's issue of the *Witness*. And let us hope, libellous also of that reporter of the Press, serving perhaps under Sir Julius Vogel, then editor of the *Daily Times*, who is charged with having been invited to enjoy, and having gloated over the sufferings of the redoubtable hero of the narrative "Dick Burgess" when that worthy was whipped for gross insubordination in Dunedin gaol, his head being covered with a sack not as a note of derision and insult as the admirable Mr. Garrett seems to suggest although he also gives the true reason, but by order of the gaol surgeon and simply that he might not see the flagellator who made this the condition of his undertaking the office. It happens, moreover, that the inhumanity charged against Mr. Caldwell in this case relating to Burgess, was exemplified in the case of Garrett himself by Mr. Caldwell's saving that worthy the receipt of twenty-five lashes with the cat o'-nine-tails which the Justices had sentenced him to receive for an attempt to murder one of the gaol officers with a poker. But gratitude is hardly to be looked for from such a man as Garrett. With Garrett's narratives, moreover, we cannot take it upon us to deal very closely ;

a respectable newspaper may for some inscrutable reason, and once in a way, consent to publish a production of the kind. For that we have the evidence of our eyes, and therefore cannot deny it. But no respectable writer without very strong reasons can possibly undertake to search strictly into what are the mere records of villany and blackguardism and these alone, very suitably entered on the page of history. One quotation we shall make from the highly objectionable fustian set forth by Mr. Garrett, and it is the following:—"How easy it is for the Press and police to manufacture a thief's reputation or, to destroy an honest man's credit." The *Witness* might take these words to heart and act upon the lesson they convey as to the position of literary man he accords to a fellow described by one of the Judges of the colony as "a monster, a fiend, and a foul blot upon the page of nature." He might also learn to refrain from allowing anyone to make use of his columns to place in the pillory honest men, and wreak the vengeance of a convict on them because they had done their duty. Mr. Garrett, in fact, in these words we quote, conveys a lesson quite sufficient to close the columns of any respectable paper against his lucubrations, even if those lucubrations in themselves were not disreputable and disgusting.

CLEARLY
PROVED.

THE oft repeated statement that Ireland has no real grievance, but that her people are as well off and as well treated as those of Great Britain, has received a final refutation from Mr. Giffen, the head of the English statistical department. Writing in the *Nineteenth Century* for March, this gentleman shows how the country in her poverty, which he also makes apparent, is heavily taxed, and that without its conferring on Great Britain any proportionate benefit.

He shows, in fact, that not only a repeal of Union but a total separation of the two countries would result in improving the condition of the larger Island, and he goes on to argue that the dangers supposed to be entailed on Great Britain by Irish independence are in the altered state of the world wholly imaginary. The population of Ireland he tells us, if added to that of Great Britain would form only one seventh of the whole, and if that were taken away, the United Kingdom would be as great a power now as it was in 1870—nay, even a greater power, as the population has grown since then not only in numbers but also in strength and riches. The seventh part of the population, however, that now inhabits Ireland, and has not as yet been withdrawn from that of the United Kingdom generally is much poorer than its neighbours across the Channel. The tenant farmers and labourers of the country taken together are not as well off as the average of English agricultural labourers, which, adds Mr. Giffen, implies that many must be far below that level. But what then, we ask, becomes of the arguments of those good folk who so constantly assure us that the population of Ireland is not worse off on the whole than that of England, and that Irish complaints of wretchedness arise chiefly from the turbulence of the popular mind? We frequently hear complaints, meantime, of the state of the English agricultural labourer who, nevertheless, is better situated than even the Irish tenant-farmer—not to speak of the labouring classes of that unhappy country. This poverty-stricken population again is heavily over-taxed, and while it constitutes only about a twentieth part of the population of the whole kingdom where resources are concerned, it pays a tenth or eleventh part of the taxes, or, in plain figures, while it ought to pay about £3,500,000, it actually pays nearly £7,000,000. Nor does the advantage gained by England from this over-taxation seem to counterbalance the hardships inflicted by it on the people from whom it is forced, its whole effect being to cause a saving of £3,200,000 in the sum expended on maintaining the garrison that the bad Government of the country renders necessary, and that Government generally. As the case is, England loses as a government nearly £3,000,000 annually while taxing Ireland £3,000,000 more than it ought to be taxed—but without that taxation the English loss would be nearly £6,000,000. The maintenance of the Irish landlords, therefore, we may conclude, and that of the ascendancy generally, while it imposes a heavy burden upon the Irish taxpayers, falls with no light weight also on those of England.—Mr. Giffen further shows that it is the Irish landlord almost solely who is benefited, for as a field for the investment of English capital it is his belief that Ireland does not count for much.—Mr. Giffen, in fact goes on to argue rather more than the cause of Ireland demands, and than the Irish people have any desire to establish—for while he proves within the limits of his own department, and by the aid of figures that total separation would be of very little consequence to Great Britain, he asserts that owing to the changed circumstances of the times—such as the poverty of Ireland in resources, the fact that it is no longer needed as a recruiting ground, and the substitution of steam vessels for sailing ships as men-of-war, by which England is rendered as liable to an attack from a continental port, as from Dublin or Belfast—its falling into the hands of a hostile power would also be of but little consequence.—Mr. Giffen's argument, in a word, makes for total separation rather than Home Rule, and, if practically followed up, would thrust upon the Irish people more than they

desire to obtain.—In the matter of taxation alone, however, and to speak of nothing else, the writer proves beyond all controversy, that Ireland has a most serious grievance, and one to justify all her dissatisfaction. “At present, nearly the whole taxable income being about £15,000,000 only, the Imperial Government, as we have seen, takes nearly £7,000,000, and the local taxes are over £3,000,000 more, or about £10,000,000 in all. So large a proportion of taxation to taxable income would be a serious fact for any country, and there can be but little accumulation in Ireland under such conditions. Considerations like these, which are so material, have, however, made no impression in the Imperial Parliament hitherto, and that this has been the case is one reason, among many others, why on this side of St. George’s Channel we should speak with some modesty of the Imperial Parliament being capable of dealing with Irish affairs. Here is certainly a matter on which, with no intention to be unjust, with an apparent willingness to be more than fair to Ireland, as is shown by the exemption of Ireland specially from certain taxes, we have nevertheless acted unjustly and to the injury of Ireland.”

THE testimony borne lately both in England and A SUCCESSFUL the United States to the ingenuity, ability and INVENTION. success of the Christian Brothers as teachers, would naturally lead us to form great expectations of what the order could accomplish.—The following however, which we receive on the authority of *Public Opinion*, of February 19 is still capable of astonishing us.—But charity seems almost as capable of performing miracles as is faith itself :—“A French photographic review, *L’Amateur Photographe* announces that the Brothers of the Christian Schools have made an ingenious application of photography in teaching deaf mutes to speak. The Brothers choose one of their pupils who is able to pronounce perfectly all the letters, diphthongs, and syllables, and photograph him at the moment of his pronouncing the various sounds. All the movements of the mouth necessary for pronunciation have been thus accurately photographed ; and in this manner the deaf mute pupils, though not able to hear words pronounced, are enabled to see them, and study their lesson of pronunciation from the photograph, as we learn it by the ear.”