

Current Topics

Cost of Powder-blazing

The powder-blazing indulged in by the ships of the American fleet during their battle-practices across the Pacific is one of the expensive necessities of every navy. Every time the American Jack Tar fired a twelve-inch gun, he lifted about £32 out of the collective pocket of the American tax-payer. The next largest gun absorbed about £16 per shot; and at every discharge of the modest six-inch guns, bang went £3. The ordinary shells which are stored in the compartmented magazines cost from about £4 to £15 each, and the armor-piercing variety—with noses specially sharpened and hardened in order the better to poke them into the innards of other people's ships—may run into an expenditure of close on £30 each. War is an expensive game. And the next thing to it, for eating up the national shekels, is an armed peace.

Jack Ashore at Auckland

Manners made Marlborough. But Jack ashore is not usually bound to any great extent by little social conventions, and people generally look with smiling indulgence on the (mostly) innocent capers he cuts after the dull monotony and the rigid discipline of a long voyage. In all the circumstances, the conduct of the American Tar ashore at Auckland during the recent fleet visit seems to have been deserving of honorable mention. 'They were a fine lot of young fellows,' said the Mayor of Dunedin to a representative of our local evening contemporary. 'The average age of the crew was about twenty years. They all appear to be happy, comfortable, and well pleased with their lives on board the ships. Asking some of them if they were happy and contented, the reply was: "I guess we are. We are well paid, and comfortable, and are having a chance of seeing the world." I must also congratulate the Americans on the exceptionally good conduct of the men when on shore. No better-behaved set of men ever set foot on New Zealand shores. On Monday morning £80,000 was paid out in wages, etc., to the crews, and hundreds of the men were seen in the different shops purchasing Maori curios, greenstone in every shape and form, mats, colonial rugs, and numerous other things. I feel sure that they spent thousands of pounds among the business people of Auckland.'

Costly Irreligion

France is paying dearly for the luxury of persecution. Last week we mentioned, as an illustrative instance, the case of the public hospital at Dijon, from which the nursing Sisters were driven out. The figures given by us in our last issue have to be qualified by those that we take from the well-informed Paris *Univers* of June 28. Our gifted French contemporary writes: 'Like many others, the hospital at Dijon has been "laicised." Now, a report on that hospital has just been submitted to the municipal council, and has been the cause of keen anxiety in the city. Four years ago, before the "laicisation," the annual expenditure on the hospital was 275,000 francs (£11,000). To-day, it is more than 480,000 francs (£19,200). And even that has not sufficed. It has been also necessary to dispose of rights and properties amounting to enormous sums. Have the sick been better cared? Quite the contrary. In 1902, with the Sisters in charge, the number of days of hospital treatment given amounted to 175,520; in 1907 they amounted to only 152,898—a diminution of 22,622. The Prefect has had to discharge, without a word of explanation, the members of the hospital commission (of inquiry) appointed by him. An effort is being made to hush up the affair. The inhabitants of Dijon are asking for explanations. If (they say) the members of the commission are free from all blame, let this be stated; if guilty, let them be prosecuted. It is, however, much more probably that silence will be maintained as to the abuses of yesterday, in order to begin those of to-morrow.'

French Official Thieving

When the Jewish King Herod ordered the massacre of the innocents of two years old and under—in order to compass the destruction of the new-born Christ the King of the Jews—rumor said that his own infant son was numbered among the slain. Which led to the caustic remark that it was better to be Herod's pig than Herod's son. To-day it is, in France, more tolerable to be a magsman or a pickpocket or even an assassin than to

be a devout and cultured Christian lady who has vowed her life to serve the sick and the poor without earthly guerdon or reward. For the worst criminal in France to-day is assured of food and lodging and clothing; but the lot of the devoted Sister is to be deprived of home and food and shelter, to be thrown out penniless upon the world, and to be robbed of even the pots and pans of the community's simple menage. This is what has recently happened (among so many others) to the Ursuline community at Vanves. On June 20, the official liquidator put up for auction the poor and simple bits of furniture stolen from the nuns when they were driven out of their home at the point of the bayonet. Some of their beds (says the *Univers* of July 1) were sold for one franc (10d), 1 franc 25 centimes (1s); the best of them were disposed of at 1 franc 50 centimes (1s 3d). The chairs were sold for 5 centimes (3d) each; and all sorts of odd lots for 1 franc (10d) each. The sale (says the *Univers*) was conducted 'under the protection of 25 gendarmes.' The stolen altar, the altar-cloths, etc., were also put up for auction, and, with the sanction of the Bishop, were bought in by a devout Christian family of the town, in order to prevent their possible profanation.

Truly, the age of chivalry is dead in France; and the motto of the Third Republic, like that of the First, may be paraphrased. 'Liberte—de mal faire; Egalite—de misere; Fraternite—comme Cain avec son frere' (Liberty to do evil; Equality in the misery which evil produces; Brotherhood, such as Cain showed to his brother Abel).

Fashion and the Birds

In early New England the sturdy Puritan settlers (says a non-Catholic historian) 'christened their children by Old Testament names. They regulated female attire by law. They considered long hair unscriptural, and preached against wigs and veils.' The sternly honest and uncompromising Pilgrim Fathers and their early descendants erred, no doubt, on the side of severity. But circumstances occasionally arise which call for the existence of a sort of censor who shall have power to say to Dame Fashion, Governor of this World: 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.' We allude, in particular, to the custom of wearing the heads and wings and bodies of birds for personal adornment. Fashion has been a Bajazet, a Tamerlane, and a Zenghis Khan—all rolled into one—for many of the most beautiful species of our feathered tribe. The wholesale slaughter of birds for feminine hats and bonnets and the rest of their rigging (we are by no means clear as to its terminology) has caused much and needless suffering, and has already deprived some of the world's forests of their living color, and left them almost as voiceless as net and snare and shotgun have made the Pyrenees.

A large and influential deputation recently waited upon the Australian Federal Prime Minister and pressed upon him the following requests:—(1) That the exportation of the skins and plumes of certain Australian birds should be prohibited; (2) that Lord Avebury's bill in the British Parliament be supported; and (3) that the Federal power be used as far as practicable for the preservation of the bird life of Australia and Papua. In the course of his reply the Prime Minister said:—

'If we dared to speak our minds we should say that it is another sex than ours that has the greatest power of control in a matter like this. If the womanly pity which is so freely outpoured in many worthy causes were only attracted to the abominable misuse of dainty little creatures for the purposes of decorative display, you would have accomplished nearly the whole of the reforms you have at your hearts. If Australian women were active in this regard they would, by their mere abstinence from the use of the plumage of birds, accomplish a reform within Australia which the law will be powerless to reach for years to come.'

He furthermore undertook to do what lay in his power to further the deputation's first request—namely, to prevent the exportation of the plumage of birds. 'We may,' says a merciful writer, 'smile at fashion and even admire her, so long as she is not cruel; but beauty grows barbarous instead of angelic when it forgets to be kind and womanly.' We make merry at Catullus writing a poem to soothe the grief of his pagan lady-love for the loss of her pet sparrow. But the pagan lassie had at least heart enough to regret the death of a feathered friend.

Two Poets

Lane, in his *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages*, tells glowing stories of the love of poetry that filled the hearts of that Semite people in the spacious days of Haroon er Rasheed and his successors. A thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand, even

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