

Current Topics

Reunion

'Can ye not discern the signs of the times?' asked the Anglican Primate on last Monday in his synodal address in Dunedin. One of the signs of the times (added he) is the 'great movement towards Christian unity, now too manifest to need apology.'

The sixteenth century threw down the apple of discord in Western Christendom. Perhaps the twentieth century may be destined to heal some of the wounds of division that were introduced by the disintegrating principle that lay at the root of a 'reform' that was 'made in Germany.'

The Eucharistic Congress

A wondrous change has come over the spirit of England since the wild and whirling days of 1851, when (as the *Punch* cartoon put it) the bad boy, Lord John Russell, chalked up 'No-Popery' on the nation's door, and then boldly ran away. No better evidence of this change of heart could well be desired than the generally friendly attitude of the mass of the public towards the Eucharistic Congress in London, and the kindly spirit and intent with which the leading organs of public opinion in England, of every political hue, devoted an unexpectedly large amount of their space to the proceedings of that historic gathering. Though shorn of its chief glory—the Blessed Sacrament—the public procession in connection with the Congress was viewed with friendly and respectful interest by dense crowds composed of people of numerous forms of religious belief. 'The crowd,' says the London correspondent of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 'was the most kindly and courteous I have ever known. Handfuls of police on actual duty at various points managed it with perfect ease. The impressions I gathered on the scenes were that the non-Catholic throng were disappointed that the full spectacle had been modified, and thought that Mr. Asquith had misread public feeling.' And of another and highly popular feature of the procession, the London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* said: 'The most beautiful procession which I have seen in London—the procession of children to Westminster Cathedral on Saturday, carrying banners of the most ingenious and delightful kind—was appreciated as it ought to be.'

The elimination of the Eucharistic phase of the procession, at the request of the State authorities (under strong pressure from an extreme section among the Protestant body), may, after all, have been a *felix culpa*—one of those errors that have a happy ending. For it served to direct public attention with singular force to the disabilities under which the Old Faith of England still labors, owing to the rags and tatters of the penal laws that still cling to the British statute-book. One of the most pleasing and promising features of the discussion that swirled and eddied around the proposed Eucharistic procession was the firm and manly stand for equal religious liberty which was taken by the leading English newspapers, and which found happy expression in the editorial and correspondence columns in many of the principal organs of public opinion in Australia and New Zealand. In the London *Observer* of September 20, a clever non-Catholic writer threw into wise and witty poetic form the humor of the protest against the Eucharistic procession:

'When anarchists upon the stump
Propose, in terms they do not bridle,
To nail to some convenient pump
The ears of all the rich and idle,
We tolerate their fervid cult,
Nor notice any great result.

A Cardinal, although in red,
'Is not to bloodshed an inciter;
The mitre on a Bishop's head
Does not denote a dynamiter;
And Smithfield is not now the seat
Of martyrdom, but merely meat.'

We deal further with the Eucharistic Congress both in the news and editorial columns of this issue.

'The Other Side' of Literature

After a trial of the unaccustomed comforts of a tidy home and abundance of tender care, Huck Finn drew the conclusion that 'bein' rich ain't what it's cracked up to be.' So, too, after

an experience of much literary fame, David Christie Murray passed out of life with the conviction that it does not always butter sufficient parsnips to make life much worth the living. He passed his later life in dingy and hardly decent poverty, and the modest sum of £50 that (according to last week's daily papers) he bequeathed to his heirs represented all that he had left to fight the wolf that would have come to his door had the once-popular novelist's days been further prolonged. Yet he was a prolific writer, and (so far as we are aware) not extravagant or unmindful of the shekels that he won with the point of his pen. But he never attained the cult which brought wealth and ease to many a slipshod and sloppy writer (such as, for instance, Marié Corelli) that was, in a literary sense, unfit to wait at his table.

Herbert Spencer wrote for fifteen years before he made enough to pay the cost of pens, paper, and ink. Rider Haggard (to compare small things with great) drove his quill over reams of paper for three years for a net reward that did not exceed the value of a £10 note. But these achieved comfort in due season. Others a-many were left to the bitterness of feeling how wide a gulf sometimes separates literary fame (or notoriety) and creature comfort. The proud literary genius 'Ouida' might have won wealth with her heathenry and her preposterous and unreal stories of aristocratic roués; but her eccentricities of spending ended her career in Italy in the midst of pitiable poverty. 'The marvellous boy,' Chatterton, took rough-on-rats (or, to speak more precisely, arsenic without the coloring charcoal) to still the clamorous pangs of hunger, and 'passed out' in a storm of agony at the age of eighteen. Robert Tannahill, the Scottish weaver-poet, also took his own life to end the struggle with hunger—but his 'Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane,' will not die while the language lasts. A well-known story tells how Thomas Otway—who has been well described as 'one of the greatest masters of English tragedy'—was choked by a piece of bread which (bought by a coin dropped into his beggar-hand by a passing stranger) he was devouring with the too eager haste of a starving man. St. Simon, the noted French author, narrowly escaped death by hunger. Just before death knocked at his door, he wrote to a friend: 'For fifteen days I have lived on bread and water, without a fire; I have even sold my clothes.' 'Rare Ben Jonson' died in want in a garret situated down an alley in the London slumland of his time. Hearing of his unhappy plight, King Charles II. sent him a small dole of money. Jonson sent it scornfully back by the same messenger that had brought it. 'He sends me so miserable a donation,' said the dying author, 'because I am poor and live in an alley. Go back and tell him his soul lives in an alley.' The poet Richard Savage knew hunger unappeased through many a year, and 'passed out' in the debtors' prison at Bristol. Robbie Burns also tasted the bitterness of want. As late as fourteen days before death took him, he wrote a piteous appeal to his friend Cunningham, to press the Excise Commissioners to raise his slender stipend from £35 to £50 a year, 'otherwise,' added he, 'if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.'

Improvvidence, or vice, or both, were, no doubt, at times responsible for the pitiful close that came to many a promising literary career. Thus, Dr. Dodd (the author of *Beauties of Shakespeare* and other works, and for some time chaplain to George III. and a popular preacher) drifted through extravagance into debt and ever deeper debt. One fine day in February, 1777, *suadente diavolo*, he signed Lord Chesterfield's name to a bond for £4200, presented it to a stockbroker, drew the shekels, and went his way. Forgery was then, and for many a decade afterwards, a hanging matter. Dodd was arrested as a forger, disgorged a considerable part of his booty, was put upon his trial, and sentenced to be hanged by the neck till he was dead. Strenuous exertions were made by Dr. Johnson and many others to obtain a reprieve. But George III. declined to be moved to that pity for his former chaplain. So poor Dodd passed into the next world through the slip-knot of Jack Ketch. Less tragic, though hardly less unhappy, was the passing of two poets that were hardly surpassed, each in his own brief walk: Edgar Allan Poe and James Clarence Mangan. Poe was the originator of the detective story, and is best known by his weird and wonderful fugitive poem, 'The Raven.' But he looked upon the wine when it was red, went-time and again through the mental tornado of delirium tremens, and died in dishonor in a Baltimore hospital in 1849. Such another—but with a far finer and tenderer poetic gift—was the poor drudge-author, James Clarence Mangan. His poems are filled with a deep tenderness and pathos, and rich with the jewels of a delightful imagery. They are compara-

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