

## Current Topics

### An Anti-Humbug Society

Cardinal Moran, on a recent occasion, smilingly suggested the formation of an Anti-Humbug Society. Such a society would have so wide a scope and so much work to do in the world of shams of our day, that it would be kept as busy as a Swiss bell-ringer by day and not have time for 'forty winks' by night.

### Cruel Fashion

The National Council of Women have (says a recent cable message) 'decided to appeal to the women of Australia to refrain from wearing the plumage of birds, with the exception of the feathers of ostriches and of birds that are killed to be eaten.'

Queen Alexandra made a like appeal, at least once, to all women within the Empire. Naturalists and societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals have lost their speech and dislocated their tongues beseeching lovely woman to spare the nesting egret and the beautiful humming bird and the harmless, necessary gull. But their appeals for mercy to 'our little brothers and sisters, the birds' (as the Saint of Assisi used to call them) have fallen on heedless ears; the cruel and unnecessary slaughter proceeds apace; fowlers, ministering to the passing craze,

'Keep the game alive  
By killing all they could'—

after the fashion of Hood's poacher; and whole species of the brightest of the world's bird-life are being sacrificed at the altar of fashion. Three things make woman cruel—love, and hate, and fashion. And of these three, the least forgivable is the last. But feminine fashion, like religious passion, has no head to think and no heart to feel.

### A Penal Law

According to an article in London *Truth* on the Eucharistic Congress, some curious relics of the penal code, besides those mentioned last week in our editorial columns, still cumber the British statute book. Among them is the law which compels a 'Papist' to sell his horse, no matter of how a value, to a Protestant purchaser for £5. This provision, says *Truth*, 'would apply to this year's Derby winner.' We look up sundry histories on our shelves, and we find that this particular Act was passed in the seventh year of the reign of King William of Orange (c. 5, s. 20); it was renewed, with various degrees of stringency, in the tenth year of the little Dutchman, in the second and eighth years of Queen Anne, in the second and sixth years of George I., in the first and ninth years of George II., and in the fifteenth and sixteenth years of George III. No Catholic was allowed to 'have or keep in his possession, or in that of anyone else for him, any horse, gelding, or mare which shall be of the value of five pounds.' Any Protestant was empowered to obtain a search-warrant, break open doors, etc., and, on tendering £5, was entitled to the possession of the hunter, racer, carriage-horse, or hack belonging to a Catholic. Any Papist concealing, or aiding in concealing, such horse, was liable to be sent to prison for three months, or to 'forfeit treble the value of said horse.' O'Connor, in his *History of the Irish People* (p. 209), gives an instance of the working of this Act: 'A Protestant walked up to a Catholic who rode a splendid horse on a racecourse, offered him £5, and arrogantly ordered him to dismount. The gentleman dismounted, drew out a pistol, and shot his horse through the brain.' By sections 4 and 18 of 2 George I., the horses of Papists might be seized and detained for ten days for the use of the militia. At the end of that time the authorities had the option of purchasing the animals at £5 each. If the horses were not purchased, they were returned by the authorities—provided that the Papist owners paid the sum demanded for their seizure, removal, and maintenance.

It is about high time to tear these rags of the penal code from the statute book and consign them to the oblivion which they would so well adorn.

### The Eucharistic Congress

Many of the great English organs of public opinion have been getting their back knuckles on to the headpiece of the Government over the blunder perpetrated in first permitting a Eucharistic procession in the quiet streets about the Westminster Catholic Cathedral, and then exercising official pressure to stop

it at the eleventh hour, after all arrangements had been completed. The London *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, gets in some shrewd blows. 'The Government,' it says in the course of a lengthy and highly condemnatory article, 'have done the worst possible thing in the worst possible way. The Home Secretary allowed all the arrangements for the procession to be brought to completion. And then he and his chief got frightened, and yielded to the clamor of a small section of extreme Protestant opinion. These protests have come from organisations which draw no support whatever from the great mass of educated Englishmen, who are just as true as their fathers were before them to the abiding principles of Protestantism, though they now express themselves in ways more consonant with the enlightened spirit of the age.' Mr. Asquith, with much finesse, 'endeavored,' adds the *Daily Telegraph*, 'to induce the ecclesiastical authorities to act as though it were they, and not the Government, who had changed their minds, and to alter the fundamental significance of the procession, as though it were they, and not the Government, who were quailing before the manifestoes of the Protestant Alliance. In that case the Government would have been able to save their face, and the angry disappointment of Roman Catholics might have been diverted from themselves to the timid surrender of their own hierarchy. Naturally, the Archbishop and his advisers resolutely refused to walk blindly into so obvious a trap, and insisted that the Government should shoulder the responsibility which Mr. Asquith was anxious to evade. Archbishop Bourne replied that if the ceremonial had to be abandoned, the Prime Minister must publicly declare that it was abandoned at his request, and Mr. Asquith was then compelled to commit himself to the statement that "his Majesty's Government are of opinion that it would be better in the interests of order and good feeling that the proposed ceremonial, the legality of which is open to question, should not take place." Such an expression of opinion on the part of the Prime Minister was tantamount to a command; and the tone of the speech at the Albert Hall in which the Archbishop announced his decision did him infinite credit.'

'The ecclesiastical authorities,' says the same paper, 'are to be congratulated upon the calmness and dignity with which they bore a disappointment that must have been exceedingly bitter, and upon the success with which they communicated their own well-disciplined self-restraint to the followers who look to them for guidance. Had there been any rioting or breach of the peace in Westminster yesterday, the responsibility would have rested wholly upon the shoulders of his Majesty's Government, whose conduct throughout this lamentable business has been inexcusably weak and inconceivably foolish. The proper course for them to have taken was to make up their minds whether they meant to allow the procession to be carried out, and, having once made up their minds, to abide by the decision, whatever might be said on one side or the other. The improper and unpardonable course was first to give assent and then withdraw it a few hours before the procession was due to take place, after arrangements had been concluded which involved the inconvenience and the disappointment of thousands of persons dwelling in all parts of the land.' In another part of the same article the *Daily Telegraph* remarks: 'If the Mahomedans and Hindoos of the same city have been forced to tolerate each other's processions, was it too much to expect Christians to do the like—especially on the very day of the whole year when the Christian Church is invited to pray for unity and consider the blessings of reunion?' 'It is easier,' adds the same paper, 'to bear injustice than stupidity, and everyone must feel that this affair has been stupidly and needlessly mishandled. It deals a heavy blow at the sacred cause of complete religious toleration.'

### That Italian Scandal

A flamboyant and misleading article in a politico-religious organ published in Wellington recalls the sensational manner in which a section of the English and New Zealand secular press 'wrote up' the scandal that took place some time ago at what was known as the Fumagalli Institute in Milan. This establishment was an orphanage. It was conducted somewhat on the lines of the 'Homes' conducted by the self-styled 'Pastor' Housely and his wife in Manchester, and which have recently figured by no means creditably before the Blackpool Bench. The Fumagalli woman who founded the Institute in Milan went into the business for the money that there was in it; she donned the religious habit and professed to be a nun (which she never was) in order the better to capture the coins of the charitable; and she and her business were, in the most public way, placed under the ban of the Church in Milan. Irregularities took place within