Current Topics

A Jewish View

The London *Jewish Chronicle* of September 18 joins heartily in the demand for equal treatment of Catholics and removal of the tatters of the penal laws against Catholics that still disgrace the British statute book. 'We cannot,' says the *Chronicle*, in the course of an able and broadminded article, 'help expressing our regret that the great procession in connection with the Eucharistic Congress should have been interfered with by the Government in so intolerant a fashion. The fact that a handful of extreme Protestants, calling into their aid an obsolete law, should be able to impose their will upon the authorities proves that as yet religious toleration is by no means an assured thing in this country. We Jews, therefore, who have known what it is to struggle for the barest shadow of indulgence all over the world, cannot be indifferent when we see the members of another faith treated in an unequal fashion. We trust that the bigots will not be allowed another opportunity of exercising their will, but that the law will speedily be amended so as to render religious freedom something more of a living reality in this "land of the free."'

The 'Popish Plot'

The annual celebration of the 'Popish Plot' in Australia and New Zealand is sick almost unto death. Even the habitués of the Saffron Sash lodges have in great part ceased to make any of the old fuss about it. They have, as a rule, no clear notion as to

'Why we remember
The fifth of November';

and most people who have read history—and not the sort of romance that contains much more of hysteria than of history—would be well pleased to let the memory of those events drop to the bottom of the well of oblivion and remain there. The central villain in the drama was the infamous Titus Oates. Behind him stood his master in villainy, Scroggs. And between them they played many a diabolical prank before high heaven. A non-Catholic writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* belabors the pair with many a well-aimed blow. 'Never,' says he, 'were so many judicial murders committed in England within a few years' space. The King saw his loyal subjects go to the gallows, and was powerless to interfere even if he would. "I cannot pardon them," he said, "for I dare not." The origin of the plot, or rather the belief in the plot, is a mystery. We know no more than that the English people, being mad, interrupted the course of justice, insisted that the judges should condemn every man brought before them suspected of papistry, and eagerly believed the stories of hired perjurers. Scroggs, a very scourge of Catholics, was a drunken scoundrel who did as he was told, and vastly preferred popularity or profit to justice. His minion, Oates, held England spell-bound. He cheerfully swore away the lives of honest men, and doing this he won the perfect sympathy of the people. His success was due to courage and effrontery. There was no sound reason why his word should be taken by any just man. His career before he set up as an informer was as infamous as it had been cunning. The son of an Anabaptist, he had professed many faiths and brought discredit upon all. Disloyalty was in his blood. His body was as ill favored as his mind. A low man, of an ill-cut, very short neck; his mouth in the centre of his face. A compass there would sweep his nose, forehead and chin within the perimeter. He was one of whom it could be said: "*Cave quos ipse Deus notavit*—Beware of those whom God has stamped." He had already been prosecuted for perjury before he came forth as the champion of "Protestant truth." No Catholic would ever dare say such things with the slightest hope of being believed.'

Some 'Bulls'

A 'bull' (of the Irish variety) has been described as a mental no-thoroughfare. But many genuine 'bulls' contain a truth—but a truth that might advantageously have been otherwise expressed. Of such, for instance, is the example given by a New Zealand Sunday-school superintendent (as reported in the Dunedin *Outlook*): 'In choosing his men, Gideon did not select those who laid aside their arms and threw themselves down to drink; he took those who watched with one eye and drank with the other.' The which contains a truth, but the truth is made to impinge, at one or more points, in a contradiction that crumples it (in the region of the impact) into a shape as droll or grotesque as that which the architectural jokers of the middle ages gave to their grinning gargoyles. The same remark applies to the testimony of one Mrs. Mary Sullivan, who (as reported by the *Irish Weekly* of September 26) recently appeared before the Cork Police Court and gave a sad account of her husband's delinquencies. The emphasis of his methods of ruling his household resulted (she explained) in her having to go to a hospital for alterations and repairs. 'We have been married for seventeen years,' she further explained. Whereupon the magistrate remarked: 'If you have lived with him seventeen years, why not live with him now?' 'Sure,' replied she, 'if I was livin' with him up to this time, I'd be dead and buried long ago.'

*

The production of verbal 'bulls' is, in the popular mind, particularly associated with Ireland. Its literary pastures have, no doubt, produced some splendid examples of this peculiar figure of speech. But such 'bulls' are the monopoly of no country. The oratorical history of the British House of Commons is graced by many a literary gem of this form, of purest ray serene. Thus (to mention only the first few that occur to our memory), Mr. B. L. Cohen, M.P., told an opponent a few years ago that 'the sheet anchor of his (the opponent's) argument is not one which will be listened to by the mouth of this House.' About the same time a prosy Scottish member was one night groping and droning and hum-hum-humming through a dreary speech that went wearily on for almost an hour. At its close he startled his hearers with this parting burst of eloquence: 'Sir, look at the great cities of antiquity! Where are they now? Some have perished so completely that it is extremely doubtful if they ever existed.' The jewel was well worth waiting for, and the House rocked with laughter. 'I will now,' said another British legislator, 'repeat what I was about to say when the honorable member interrupted me.' 'The West Indies,' declared another, 'will now have a future, which they never had in the past.' 'Ah!' exclaimed yet another, 'the honorable member opposite shakes his head at that; but he can't shake mine.' It was an Australian legislator who declared: 'The interests of employers and employed are the same in nine cases out of ten—I will even say ninety-nine cases out of ten.' When Governor of New Zealand, Lord Ranfurly perpetrated a rather pretty 'bull' at the opening of the Otago Jubilee Exhibition in Dunedin in 1898. In the course of his opening speech, he strongly urged the youth of the Colony to 'put their shoulders to the wheel and roll the ball up-hill.' Later on, at a public reception at Napier, he told the children present (in a somewhat similar strain) that 'if they put their shoulders to the wheel they would be sure to reach the top of the tree.' A compatriot of Lord Ranfurly's, who was present, remarked, with a smile: 'Sure, it's an axle-tree he means.' A few years later (in 1901) Mr. Hogg made this remark in the House of Representatives: 'I am glad to see that there are no absentees present.' And Mr. Haselden, in a speech on the Compulsory Taking of Land Bill, spoke of a woman who was the first man to carry a gun into the back-blocks in order to prevent her land from being taken away.

*

In 1901, a committee in Manchester issued a circular in which it summarised Mr. Chamberlain's policy in South Africa in the following terms: 'Vexation, irritation, destroy all, *and grab the rest.*' Here are a few flowers of topsy-turvy fancy culled at random from the newspaper press: 'The gas-lamps, which at this time were not yet lighted, made the streets appear yet darker.' 'Death trod with rough hand this tender blossom.' 'The new political current failed to take root in this district.' Great authors have full many a time and oft adorned their works with 'bulls' that owe nothing to slips of mere expression. Thus, Defoe makes Robinson Crusoe swim ashore on his island, entirely divested of his clothing (which he had left on the wreck), and yet carry with him pocketfuls of biscuits.' Anthony Trollope, in one of his novels, represents Andy Scott as 'coming whistling up the street with a cigar in his mouth.' It would have been interesting to have seen Trollope essaying the task of simultaneously smoking a cigar and whistling (say) a jig or strathspey. In one of his works, Thackeray makes Lady Kew die; moreover, he coffins and buries her, and dismisses her from the story. Forgetful of her extinction, he serenely introduces her later on into the working of the plot of his tale. And did not Wilkie Collins perform the feat of making the moon rise in the west? There are 'bulls' and 'bulls'; but these are prize-takers in their class.