

## Current Topics

### The Crusade Against the Fly

The facts given by Dr. Champtaloup in his recent lecture in Dunedin regarding the disease-bearing capacity of the common house fly were sufficiently interesting and sufficiently uncomfortable. 'With legs, bodies, and intestines,' said the lecturer, quoting Dr. Nash, 'laden with putrefactive germs, these flies in the fly season swarm all over all exposed food, drown themselves in every uncovered jug or cup of milk, range over every tin of condensed milk or piece of sugar on which they can alight, each fly contributing its quota of generally unknown and often unmentionable filth, including its own intestinal evacuations, polluting human food to such an extent as in a short time to convert, for instance, milk from a wholesome food to a virulent dangerous poison.' 'It had been estimated,' he continued, 'that 1200 flies would issue from a pound of horse manure, and that a pair of flies mating in spring might be progenitors of 191 thousand billion flies by late summer.' The average housewife has an instinctive horror of the creature, but her perpetual puzzle is, how to get rid of the pest—a point on which the popular lecturer is not always very explicit. In this connection we recall, for the benefit of the scared mothers of households a suggestion on the subject made some time ago by no less an authority than the *Lancet*. Fly-papers, it pointed out, are unsightly, even offensive, and often ineffective. It continued: 'In our own experience the best exterminating agent is a weak solution of formaldehyde in water—say, two teaspoonfuls to the pint—and this experience has been confirmed by others. Flies are attracted by the solution, which they drink. Some die in the water, others get as far only as the vicinity of the plate, but all ultimately succumb, and, where they occur in large numbers, thousands may be swept up from the floor. It is consoling to know that by this method the flies have died under a dose of a fluid which is fatal to disease organisms, a fluid also which is inoffensive, and for practical purposes non-poisonous.'

### Priests in the Titanic

No names of priests were given in the list of passengers saved in the Titanic disaster: and there was some speculation in clerical circles at this end of the world as to whether any priests had actually made the journey. The view generally taken was that it was practically certain that there would be some priests on board, and that it was equally certain that they would stand by the ship so long as there were souls to absolve and bless, and would if necessary go down in the discharge of their duty. It turns out that this conjecture was entirely correct. Two priests at least (latest exchanges say three) are now known to have been aboard, and to have perished in the final catastrophe. Father Thomas Byles, of Ongar, in the Archdiocese of Westminster, who entered the priesthood after his conversion some years ago at Oxford, was going to America to officiate at his brother's marriage. The other priest certainly known to have been amongst the passengers was Father Peruschoetz, a German priest. Their place, as priests, was with the dying; and with the dying they remained until the ship took her final plunge. As the result of personal interviews with a large number of the survivors, our contemporary, *America*, is able to give the following authentic description of the final scenes, in which our Catholic priests played so worthy and heroic a part. 'All the Titanic's survivors,' says our contemporary, 'with whom we have spoken, some forty in number, referred to one very striking and consoling incident connected with the tragedy. Father Byles, of England, and Father Peruschoetz, a German priest, had held Sunday services that morning and evening for the Catholics of various nationalities, addressing them in English and German. The Rosary and the Litanies were recited by all. When the disaster came and the women were being put into the boats the two priests were quickly on the scene, attending to their people and to

all others whom they could help and comfort. Some were unaware of their peril, but as the sense of danger grew into alarm they sought the priests' services more eagerly, and Father Byles was soon busy consoling the English-speaking passengers and giving absolution to the many Catholics, who either knelt at his feet or cried out to him from a distance. Tall, thin, pale and ascetic, he seemed the picture of hope and faith, and his calm self-possession assured and quieted as he went about blessing and absolving, and urging all to prayer. When the last life-boats were launched and stood out from the vessels their occupants saw distinctly the two priests reciting the Rosary and heard a large number of the kneeling passengers, many of them just come up from the steerage, responding fervently. Some would interrupt to ask for absolution, and again the priests would resume the Rosary or Litany, the kneeling crowd growing larger as the end drew near. Some had been moving excitedly on deck, but as the ship was sinking all appeared to be on their knees. Then the lights went out, so that in the last moments nothing could be seen; but no shrieks were heard nor cries of terror, only the sound of prayer as she sank into the waters.' *America's* account is corroborated by the following brief but expressive press cable which was despatched from New York to the English papers: 'Survivors enthusiastic over Father Byles's final zeal.'

### Other Incidents

Particulars regarding other interesting incidents connected with Catholic passengers in the ship are also coming to light. Our readers will remember a brief reference in the cables of the time to the action of two sisters—name given as Murphy—in saving a passenger named McCormick. 'Mr. Thomas McCormick,' said the cable, 'got his hands on the gunwale of a lifeboat, but the members of the crew struck him on the head and tore his hands loose. After making repeated efforts to get aboard he swam to another boat, but met with the same reception. Finally two sisters, named Mary and Kate Murphy, pulled him aboard, despite the crew's efforts to keep him out of the boat.' The full details of the incident are even more interesting and remarkable than the bare facts given in the cable version. The girls' names were Alice and Agnes McCoy. While they were sorrowing for the loss of their brother two swimmers laid hold of the stern of the boat. Twice they were beaten off by the sailors, but a third time they seized the boat, and with the help of the young women succeeded in climbing aboard. It was only then that the two girls recognised in one of the swimmers, their brother, and in the other their friend and neighbor from their home in Ireland. 'They had lost,' says *America*, 'their united fortune of £180 and all else they had, but now they were rich.' We learn now also that Major Butt, who displayed such heroism and gallantry, was the bearer of an autograph letter from the Pope to President Taft. When his Holiness learned of the disaster, and heard that Major Butt was a passenger on the Titanic, he telegraphed to the American President asking whether the Major had been saved from the wreck. Unfortunately the reply was in the negative.

### The Education Commission

It has been satirically remarked regarding the 'Stop-Gap' Government that if it has done nothing else it has at least set up three Royal Commissions. We cannot help thinking that if members of Cabinet had a thorough detailed knowledge of their departments—such a knowledge, for example, as was possessed by the late Mr. Seddon and by Sir Joseph Ward—two at least of these Commissions—those on the Civil Service and on Education—would be unnecessary; and the third—that on the Cost of Living—is of such a largely academic character that it is hardly likely to issue in any immediate or tangible benefit. But whether necessary or unnecessary, the Commissions have been duly set up: and if they are to do work which could and should be done directly by the Government, we may at least hope that they will do it well. In the case of the Education Commission there is special