

"The question at issue was whether FAIR PLAY had accused Mr. Bell of being intoxicated on the election day. The word used was 'exhilarated,' which is perfectly harmless and non-libellous in itself; but Mr. Bell took pains to prove that in this case it meant intoxicated. . . . Newspaper writers who wish to say that a politician was 'exhilarated with something' will now have some idea of the monetary responsibility they incur in doing so. The question of costs is a serious one, and it remains in a very unsatisfactory state of uncertainty. Costs are left pretty much in the discretion of the judges, who resent any attempt of the jury to return a verdict which should decide which of the parties should bear all the costs of action. There is a popular delusion to the effect that no verdict under forty shillings can carry costs. . . . If juries wish to mark their sense of the triviality of an action for libel their proper course is to award the plaintiff the smallest coin of the realm. No judge could with decency then declare that such a verdict carried costs."—*Lyttelton Times*.

"A diversity of opinion exists amongst editors of newspapers as to whether Mr. Bell exercised a wise judgment in taking proceedings against the journal in question."—*Wanganui Chronicle*.

"The case is a curious illustration of the change which has taken place in public opinion. A century ago, it was a matter of course that three-fourths of the candidates should be very decidedly exhilarated after winning an election; and the idea of solemnly denying such an imputation in Court would have been looked upon as ridiculous. Such an improvement in manners is most gratifying. . . . There are offences which, from a moral point of view, are quite as bad as intemperance, but which do not seem to have fallen under the ban of public opinion at present. If you call a man proud and ambitious, he is probably rather pleased than otherwise; you may call him covetous without hurting his feelings very much; that is if you convey the imputation politely by saying that he is canny and cautious, and 'knows what he is about'; but if you insinuate that he ever exceeds the bounds of sobriety, you run the risk of an action for libel. And yet if we look at the history of the world we shall see that, where drunkenness has slain its thousands, pride, ambition, and the love of money have slain their tens of thousands. . . . The lesson which journalists may learn from the recent case is that, though they may say of a man, as Lord Beaconsfield did of Mr. Gladstone, that he is 'inebriated by the exuberance of his own verbosity,' they must not hint that he is exhilarated by anything stronger than soda-water."—*Marton Mercury*.

"It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Wellington libel action was after all a rather trumpery affair. At the declaration of the poll Mr. Bell probably spoke unadvisedly with his lips, as a much greater man once confessed he had done, when in the excitement of victory he said the Wellington people had brushed aside the froth and scum of something—it is not quite certain what, FAIR PLAY understood the expression to apply to the defeated candidates, and actually for aught we know it might apply to them very well; it would at least have been no great injustice to designate a goodly number of the candidates, Conservative as well as Liberal, as froth and scum. . . . It was, however, perhaps unpolite in Mr. Bell to use the offensive expression, and unpoliteness is very apt to provoke recrimination. When a man says to his fellowman 'You're a so and so,' that fellowman quite naturally replies 'You're another.' . . . In politics particularly do men make fools of themselves. We do not mean that the plaintiff made a fool of himself at the declaration of the poll, Mr. Bell is a superior person and would not be likely to do so, but it is pretty clear that he must have been excited when he blurred out his characterisation of (let us say) the Liberal addresses. What more natural then than that his opponents should take him up as saying that they were the scum and froth he meant? And equally natural was it for one of the journals supporting them to retort that Mr. Bell must have supplemented the excitement by victory from another source. And where was the great harm in saying so? . . . Is it after all such a dreadful thing to say that a successful candidate has, in the crisis of his triumph, taken a glass too much? What measly-mouthed times we live in, to be sure. Sir Robert Stout, indeed, said, with the disgust-

ing bluntness of an unimaginative teetotaler and special pleader, that FAIR PLAY practically charged Mr. Bell with being drunk. Such literal-mindedness, if we may so express it, excites pity rather than contempt. But it is characteristic of teetotalers that they can make no distinctions. Good liquor in their eyes is as much poison as the abominations sold in grog shanties; and with them there is no middle stage between absolute water-drinking sobriety and drunkenness. They have not the slightest idea of what it is to be elevated, which is probably all that FAIR PLAY meant in Mr. Bell's case. . . . In these days, when Prohibition is in the air, it is hardly possible to get a jury to allow, so to speak, for allowable elevation. The Wellington twelve decided that FAIR PLAY had practically said that Mr. Bell was drunk, which we should say is against all reason and common sense. Is there not a certain liberty, not to say licence, permitted in the heat of an election? It is as impossible for colonial patriots to choose a representative, as it is to love, and be wise. Lovers and electors are both in a sense beside themselves, so that it is absurd to interpret their sayings quite literally. But such considerations, self-evident though they be, are apparently beyond the common jury understanding—even beyond the judicial understanding. The twelve good men and true (men may be both and yet be dull) held that FAIR PLAY had raised Mr. Bell as it were, above the legitimate elevation, and accordingly found a verdict for the plaintiff. But the case was, as we have already said, of the most trumpety character. Mr. Bell expressly stated, under examination, that he never thought of bringing it on till he was advised to do so by members of his party. We can only say that he was monstrously ill-advised, even though he did get a verdict. Mr. Bell is a very prominent, if a considerably over-rated man. His character is thus perfectly well known, so that he could have suffered no damage from what we cannot help calling the very innocent libel in the FAIR PLAY article. We do not suppose that even a single teetotaler would have believed that Mr. Bell was drunk when he uttered his 'froth and scum' sentence. There are offences, and we should say the FAIR PLAY statement was one of them, which a man in Mr. Bell's position can afford to ignore. Mr. Bell was of the same opinion himself till his Prohibitionist supporters intervened—one of whom (a clergyman) is by the way an adept in the 'high polite,' defining drunkenness as the 'imbibing of intoxicating drink to excess.' Pity but Mr. Bell had acted on his own judgment.—*Napier Telegraph*.

We have heard New Zealand cracked up over and over again as the colony above all the others in the group, that affords the best opportunity for the man who is willing to work to make a good living, and it has also been claimed that if he had a few pounds to go on with, he was sure to get along. We have claimed since our inception that in Wellington there was a rapidly growing plutocracy whose object was to enslave the toiler, and if possible to block his rising from the station which either misfortune or luck had placed him in. The following anecdote, for the truthfulness of which we can vouch, is an illustration of an argument that money and money alone, rules roost in the little city of Wellington. One of the employees of a big butchering establishment in Wellington who had worked long and faithfully for the firm which employed him, but who looked forward to the time when he could run his own business and vulgarly speaking 'be his own boss' recently sent in his resignation and declared his intention to set up in business for himself. The resignation was accepted and congratulations offered, but note the after play. The minute this enterprising young party attempted to establish a route and sell meat to such customers as he thought would patronize him, he was followed to every house by a salesman for the firm with which he had formerly been connected who offered to sell at any price below his, and even to give away the meat, rather than that he should get the custom. When it is taken into consideration that the house that did this is a wholesale house and that in all probability a large portion of the meat sold would have been bought from them, it seems a gratuitous bit of malice to try and crush out a young tradesman. He has our sympathies and those of most fair-minded people who believe in the principle of fair play and the proverb 'Life and let live.'