

WELLINGTON IN RECESS.

CHIT-CHAT FROM THE CAPITAL.

(BY 'FLANRUR.')

WELLINGTON is not a well-built city. Indeed, no one to look at its shops would imagine it to be the prosperous, progressive town that it is. Nevertheless, though we have loitered behind our compeers so far, we do move. Yesterday an auction sale took place which bore witness to this. The premises so long occupied by the *Evening Post* and a certain well-known chemist were put up for auction and realised the handsome sum of £8,400. The *Post* is on the wing, and in another four or five months is to be established in a handsomer, more spacious, and more solid mansion. Then rumour has it that we are to be treated to an eight-page evening daily at last, in which case I should think that the morning journal will have to put its best foot foremost, not to be utterly distanced in the race for popularity. Our remissness in the matter of buildings provokes much criticism from the tourists, who about this time of the year land on our wharves in such numbers from the direct steamers. (One recognises them at once as they stroll down Lambton Quay, the women in their straw hats, the men tanned with the sun and sea wind, and with less hair on their British faces than the average colonial. Not very long ago two ladies of the tourist persuasion were lunching upstairs in one of our larger hotels, where they had encamped and proposed to stay for a day or two. Unluckily some one observed in their hearing that the building was entirely of wood. 'What! a three-storied building of wood!' They could not stay a night in so terrible a death-trap. After a good deal of search and enquiry, they discovered a hotel in another part of the town which is not of wood. But the owner of hotel number one was a humourist and a man of resource. He arranged with a friend of his to sit alongside the nervous English spinsters at dinner time at the table of the hotel where they had taken refuge. In the midst of the dinner with which they were recruiting their shattered nerves, this gentleman remarked in a drawing casual way that it was rather a risky thing to spend the night in a brick hotel in Wellington. 'Why?' 'Because, of course, Wellington was notorious throughout the southern hemisphere for the frequency and destructiveness of the earthquakes!' Tableau: the ladies packed up their trunks and retired to spend the night on the direct steamer which had brought them to this dangerous and uncomfortable city.

Nature has awakened and politics have gone to sleep. Even Wellington, distinguished as it is by a plentiful lack of gardens, looks almost beautiful now in this lovely spring weather. The grass on our steep hillsides has in it the living green of English meadows. Yachts with white sails are sprinkled about the broad harbour. The newspapers are devoting the long columns which for many months have been wasted on the frivolities of Parliament to the serious business of cricket, boating, and lawn tennis. Light spring dresses enliven the streets—when the wind is not in the south. Men have forgotten that such things as Bills, debates, amendments, and conferences ever were. I saw an Auckland M.H.R. solitary in the street to-day; he looked like a ghost of the past. By day their talk is of cattle shows and the price of wool at Bradford. In the evening Brough and Boucicaut reign, and the only debate that is sustained with any interest is on the absorbing topic of whether Mrs Brough in the 'Amazons' looks better in kickerbockers or in her own distinctively feminine attire.

Stay, there is another subject which arouses the gossips. This is the week of sweeps and lotteries. Wellington has not distinguished itself in carrying off any great prizes at St. Albans or elsewhere. Perhaps we are not a speculative people; perhaps we do not draw lucky numbers. More fortunate is Mr Spackman, solicitor, of Christchurch, who pockets £13,500 from the great Queensland sweep. I think I may say that if any man deserved a stroke of good fortune he is that man. When I last heard of him, at the beginning of the season, he had been for many months lying in bed crippled and helpless, struck down in the prime of an active life by a ruthless disease. His friends then told me that his health was at last mending, and that a gradual but steady recovery was looked for. I hope that such has been the case. When well, Mr Spackman was not only assiduous in his profession, but was one of the best known anglers in the colony. He is the author of the pamphlet on trout fishing in New Zealand, which is the best thing I know to send to a friend in Australia or the Old Country who contemplates paying a visit to our shores to try our rivers with rod and line. For such a thorough sportsman as Spackman to have to pass month after month in bed is an affliction which deserves

some compensation at Fate's hands. So I don't grudge W.H.S. his £13,500. May he live long to enjoy it!

The Premier, with the Treasurer and the Minister of Lands, are like many other fortunate people, disporting themselves in festive Christchurch to-day. Though Wellington still keeps three Ministers, only one of them is fit for duty. Sir Patrick Buckley, who has the Judgeship still under offer, is convalescent, and Mr Cadman has also taken a distinct turn for the better, but I don't think the latter will be fit for hard work yet awhile.

ROUND THE BREAKFAST TABLE.

[WITH APOLOGIES TO THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST TABLE.]

I PROPOSE this morning, 'said the Professor, 'to introduce a change in our conversational bill of fare—a change, I may remark, not too often discernible in the actual menu, owing to its sacred conservative policy, influenced occasionally by party feeling—in fact, we only have a change when there is a party.'

'Have some more marmalade, now do, sir,' said our landlady, vaguely impressed with the consciousness of a compliment.

'Why employ the term "Bill of Fare"?' queried the Frivolous Youth. 'It is a name suggestive of Wellington restaurants, where there is much bill and little fare. For an establishment so genteel as ours, where meals are consumed at an Atlantic greyhound speed, "Bill of Lading" would be more appropriate.'

The Elderly Maiden Aunt made a move, which she often does, presumably to escape a draught, but never, apparently, to take a man. The Professor addressed the Frivolous Youth severely:

'As a continual dropping on a rainy day is to your immaculate collar, my friend, so is vulgarity to fun; it takes the starch out, and makes of wit a limp and shapeless and bedraggled object, fit only to be pegged up on a clothes line of scorn, beneath the scorching rays of intellectual criticism, whence it becomes dry humour. I propose,' he continued (while we assisted in picking up the pieces of the Frivolous Youth), 'to retail a few experiences of a lady friend of mine with her domestic servants—those problems of universal interest which cry to us for solution (by reason of their large demand and little supply) in the "Wanted" columns of every daily; whose woes are emblazoned, to our reproach, on the fiery banners of trades' unions; whose positive faults and negative virtues are served up to us with a regularity proportionate to our grumbings over the irregularity of our meals—thrust upon us in the inner sanctity of home. Truly the fair domestic makes as many family jars as she breaks.'

'I advertised for an experienced general servant,' said my friend, relating her trials. 'For three weeks I waited in and had no applicants. The morning I went out thirteen girls called. I was desperate, and wrote to the first name and address pushed under the hall-door. That was how I never saw, until I had engaged her, the girl destined to turn my fair locks grey. Her attitude pleased me when she arrived. It was one of respectful attention, inquiry, and determination to master every detail of her work. How much inquiry, how much detail, I was to learn to my cost. That girl was a bundle of questions, an interrogation point walking about. Each separate curl bobbing on her forehead grew to the shape and dimensions of a query in my horrified imagination. She was a whole edition of Magnoli—without the answers; these, the unfortunate who happened to be near her, had to supply. She was more effectual than a brand new set of Inquisition toys, rack and thumbscrew and all. She questioned me on my manners and methods of doing things down to the minutest, most trivial detail, not once, in order to learn, but again and again. I said to her one day, ironically, 'Perhaps you would also like to know how I cook a husband, Kate.' She said, 'Yes, munn,' and prepared to hear the recipe with an unmoved face. My entrance to the kitchen was the signal for a six-barrelled revolver load of queries, while a broom, or a duster, or a flower-vase in my hand made the target for a whole volley of questions. She discovered me once preparing a dose of Mother Seigel, and proceeded upon a medical enquiry so exhaustive that I dreamt wildly of chloroform. Yet to repulse that earnest, inquiring nature was to feel a criminal. I endured for a fortnight what would have settled Mr Pharaoh faster than all the ten plagues put together. Then I told her that my mother-in-law's sister's daughter, or my sister-in-law's daughter's mother—I forget what in my agitation I concocted, but may Heaven grant extenuating circumstances—was coming to stay with me, and that henceforth I shouldn't require a servant. Exit affliction No. 1.

'The second was hardly more successful. She was

recommended to me by a Slum and Drift Society. I went down early on her first morning to superintend the making of breakfast. This followed—'Did I put two or three handfuls of oatmeal in the porridge? Three? Her old missis on'y put two, but then her old missis was that mean, an' her 'usband a small built man with a appetite no bigger'n a mosquito, which ought to 'ave 'ad dainties to feed 'im up, but not she! an' took to drink 'n tried to shoot himself, 'n was no good any'ow, all along of that extra 'andful of oatmeal, which he 'ad ought to 'ave got, an' came to her one night late with his pore bones shewin' that plain thro' his clothes, you could 've rattled them in a bag, an' says, 'Maris,' says he, 'get me the keys of the cupboard for the love of 'eaven. With that I walks into 'er an' demands them keys in the interests of 'umanity an' the starvin' skellington what she promised to love an' cherish, an' seed 'er go green an' tremblin'-like all over an' give 'm to 'im out of the curling papers in 'er 'air, which she thought we wasn't cut enough to find out, an' give me notice there and then, an' glad I was to go. Whether she experienced a similar delight on leaving my house I cannot tell, but go she did—packing!

'The next was a pretty girl who asked innocently if her young man 'that went to church reg'lar and had kep' company with her for three years come Christmas' might call for her and 'fetch her home' on her night out. I said 'certainly,' indulging the while in a little pleasant, fanciful speculation over these two young things sipping their innocent draughts of happiness at my back gate. I had occasion to enter by it the next evening, and encountered a row of nondescript males keeping guard—of every age, attire, and profession, including quart-breaking Government contracts' to judge by the appearance of some of them. The hostile looks with which they regarded each other suggested a free fight. The place looked like a Convict Barracks. I noticed the milkman, on the strength of one day's acquaintance, amongst the number, and straightway banished my fair domestic to uninterrupted enjoyment of her conquests.

'Then came a girl who occasioned such endless repetition of orders that we believed her deaf, until undeceived by the discovery of all our private gossip circulating through the neighbourhood. A Primitive Methodist young woman followed, who got off to attend prayer-meeting on two nights of the week, and Bible class and Sunday-school anniversary tea-fights the remaining five. She left me hurriedly one day to nurse her sick mother—so did the beat silver teaspoons.

'And so on. There was the book-loving girl, who burnt the toast in one hand, while she devoured a novel in the other. I sympathised most with this type, but, in view of her domestic reputation, conceived it my duty to introduce her to a Mutual Improvement and Debating Society, where she had the love of literature for ever quenched!

'I could mention many more but *tempus fugit*. Despite a few seeming contradictions, my experience of the Colonial "general" on the whole has shown her a capable and worthy representative of her class. Her domestic training makes her of necessity a better wife for the average small-wage-earning mechanic than the girl trained in a factory can be, although the latter occupation unquestionably affords her a greater degree of freedom, and above all, that companionship with her fellows, so dear to the ordinary daughter of the people, whose powers of self-resource have never been cultivated. She naturally prefers these advantages to the isolated drudgery of a servant's life, yet, in the natural order of events, a common destiny awaits both, and that training must surely be best which best enables a woman to fulfil it. If only in view, then, of the probable lifetime to be spent in managing a home of her own, one wonders that applicants for domestic service are so persistently in the minority.'

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