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Notes & Notions.

(By our Flippant Flaneur.)

One had thought that the 'marriage a failure' and 'free-love' agitation was as dead as Queen Anne, and about as little likely to be revived as that amiable sovereign. But apparently there are still people who think the question getting excited over, and in Christchurch a very heated newspaper controversy has been (and is, I believe) going on under the sensational heading, 'The Immorality of Marriage.' The so-called reformers, who want us to bind ourselves by no legal or religious marriage contract, but to separate freely when the union and cohabitation becomes irksome, do not now seem to have anything new to say. The old story, the old contention, that good men and women would remain faithful and act just the same if they were free and unfettered by marriage lines, is brought forward once more; and once again we are treated to stories of the degradation of loveless marriages, and the awfulness of unions where love has been killed by some past nuptial disillusionment. These marriage reformers' idea of marriage is very poetical, very nice, very high minded. It possesses attributes and conveniences, which must appeal to all, but it is impracticable, and there's an end to it.

If this were Arcadia, and human nature ceased to be human nature, it might prove successful and even elevating. But it has no place in our work-a-day world.

It presupposes a state of morality which does not exist, and takes for granted that men and women marry for other reasons than they do. If free-love marriages are to be successful there must be mutually what is called a 'grande passion,' and, as Stevenson justly says in 'Virginibus Puerisque,' not one man or woman in

a hundred knows what a 'grande passion' is. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred husbands and wives love each other in an easy, comfortable kind of way, which, after marriage, not unfrequently settles gradually down into friendliness or companionship, as the case may be. But, if there were no binding contract, it is certain that in many cases people who, under the present laws live comfortably and contentedly, if dully, together, would begin to realise their boredom and take steps to relieve it. No doubt many men and women find the ordinary humdrum of respectable married life is wearisome in its way, but knowing it is not to be cured they make the best of it and are happy enough after all. Under the new order of things they would go off with a younger wife. To do so would only be human nature, male human nature, that is. Moreover, imprudent and thoughtless marriages are common enough now, even with the awful possibilities of for 'better or worse till death do us part,' ever before us. Remove that terrible responsibility and marriage would become merely a pronounced flirtation with many. Also, marriage usually results in consequences, and, if under the new system, the husband and wife find the experiment unsuccessful, and, after the advent of, say, number five, agree to separate, who is going to provide and be responsible for 'the pledges of affection'?

Speaking of marriage and the desire to shuffle off its cares, there was a case at Clinton last week where a woman asked for a separation from her husband on account of cruelty and neglect. The case broke down hopelessly, and the aggrieved lady's counsel threw up his brief, for apparently the cruelty lay in the husband 'going to balls' without his spouse. When in the witness-box, the wife said 'Her husband was always out at dances without her,' and she had told him he 'ought to stop going out to so many balls.' The only ground she had for the charges against her husband in connection with other women was the way he had treated her. He wouldn't come home when he got the chance, and wouldn't speak to her when he did come. She had only been to two balls with him since they were married. The husband said his wife was absurdly jealous and always 'going for him' for not paying her enough attention. The Magistrate, before whom the case was tried gave both parties a little lecture. There had no doubt, he said, been faults on both sides, but they ought to try and make it up. The wife had been a little to blame, and had jealousy on the brain. Jealousy was a thing that bit very deep and did a great deal of harm. She had doubtless listened to foolish people, and her husband may not have

had much patience with her. There should be give and take on both sides. On his suggestion, counsel agreed to meet outside and try and arrive at an amicable agreement between the parties. I presume the husband would agree to take her to a specified number of dances, and that this being so, she would promise not to be jealous any more. But this just shows on what grounds people will try and separate even now. What would be the state of affairs under a 'free love' regime?

An incident which occurred in the Southland district recently is apropos of Bret Harte's oft-quoted estimate of Chinese character. A gentleman in business not a hundred miles from Cromwell (says the 'Argus'), was collecting money, and amongst his debtors was an innocent Celestial. On looking John up, however, he pleaded poverty, but the business man was not to be put off easily, and insisted with emphasis. 'Don't get angry; keep your temper,' pleaded the Chinaman, deprecatingly; 'it all li.' But, said the now irate creditor, it's not all right; I must have the money at once, as I'm going away. A broad smile illuminated the Celestial's features, he had solved the question. 'If all li,' he said, 'when you be back?' Not for five years, thundered the angry one. 'Welly good,' said John, triumphantly; 'me pay you then.'

One had never regarded the Premier as being a particularly sensitive individual, but apparently he is beginning to feel more tender as regards what people say of him than of yore. At New Plymouth the other evening he said it would soon be necessary to introduce a Slander of Ministers Corruption Bill. If they did not the people would probably find that violence would be resorted to, for it was certainly a very great temptation when a man had all that was dear to him taken away without compunction by men who, when driven into a corner, said it was only done for political purposes.

This sounds rather ominous, doesn't it? Perhaps next session will prove too much for the patience of Mr Seddon, or some other Minister, and we shall hear of an adjournment to the Lobby to 'fight it out.' It really would enliven proceedings considerably, but who would stand up against the mighty Dick? The only chance would be to wind him.

But, by the way, is (capitals, please, Mr Printer) Mr Seddon sensitive to criticism or not? In the same speech as the one in which he spoke about the Slander of Ministers Corruption Bill he referred to the narrow escape he had had at Wellington from a brick which fell while he was watching the alterations to Parliamentary Buildings, he said, 'White on this subject, ladies and gentlemen, I might mention what might have been a very

serious matter to Mrs Seddon and the children, and which has been looked upon in some quarters as a rather good joke. I refer to that brick which fell from above. But, thank God, I have a chest—(laughter)—which is impervious to any brick the Opposition can throw, and what keeps that chest so strong is the clear conscience within.' (Renewed laughter and applause.) The sentence is, as some of Dick's are occasionally, a trifle involved, but it assuredly seems to convey that Mr Seddon is impervious to adverse remark. And yet, what about that Bill?

From Wellington a correspondent writes: Dear Flaneur.—Have you heard the latest yarns from Club-land in the Empire City?

There is a promising counter-jumper out of a position here at the present time. He is one of those youths who seem really brighter than they are. He had never been behind a counter before, but his good appearance won for him the place. He was to assist at the hosiery counter. The head of the department was absent, when a pretty young lady, wife of one of our prominent citizens, approached the new man, and remarked—

'I bought some stockings here yesterday, and, if you please, I should like to change them.'

'Eg—yes'm,' said the new chum, 'but—er—hadn't you better repair to the Ladies' toilet rooms on the floor above?'

The absent-minded, irrepressible young man was retired permanently.

The other story concerns a recent marriage, over which there has been some talk, the young man's friends, who are in Society (with the biggest S), regarding it as somewhat of a mess-aliance. It was being discussed at an afternoon reception at Thorndon. 'Yes, she's rather a nice girl, I admit,' said the hostess; 'she's a very nice girl, but—er—I should hardly think she'd be received in society.'

'Oh, she isn't,' rejoined an impulsive little woman from the Hutt; 'indeed, I'm told she's been tattooed by nearly everyone in town.'

'Tattoo, or not tattoo?'

Both these stories are at least 'bon trovato,' if even not perfectly veracious, which, of course, I do not doubt—but pardon the dark insinuation, have I not, years ago, heard something like the first before?

Hawera County Council have determined to compel peddlars to pay a substantial license fee. The matter provoked some rather interesting discussion, and several points of interest were raised. It was, for instance, pointed out that peddlars pay no rates and taxes, and can therefore compete unfairly with the tradesmen who have to do both. This is of course true, but the peddlar has the trouble



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