

# Notes and Notions.

I am unaware whether Citizen Sunday, which was inaugurated in Auckland on Sunday last, is observed in other main cities in the colony, but nobody, I think, will venture to deny that in all large towns something of the sort is not merely desirable but necessary. We are all of us far too apt to overlook our responsibilities in regard to the Commonwealth, and even more so with regard to our native city, borough, or, if we live in the country, our county. And it is well, therefore, that we should have Citizen Sunday, when sermons on the duties of citizenship are delivered from every pulpit in the district as a reminder and a stimulant.

But there is one point I would like to raise. Whenever any particular abuse or nuisance grows to such proportions in any of our cities that we are perforce aroused from our usual lethargic and easy-going tolerance of anything and everything, do we not always remark severely to each other: "Ah, well, Auckland (or Wellington, or Napier, or Dunedin, or Christchurch, as the case may be) is the only town in the colony where such a state of affairs would be tolerated? Do we not on such occasions unadvisedly in the strongest possible manner on the apathy of our fellow-citizens and say that their equals in laziness as regards their own interests do not exist in any other locality in the world? I, and so no doubt have you, have heard such remarks in every city in this colony with which I am acquainted. As a matter of fact, the larger and busier the city, the less the interest taken by the public in municipal and corporate affairs. In the smaller provincial cities and country townships the interest and activity of the public with regard to local Boards and Councils is very considerable, and naturally so, there being fewer other competing and conflicting interests.

As a matter of fact, and speaking after considerable experience of the principal cities of England and Europe, I think it may be stated confidently that the interest taken in municipal matters in any of our New Zealand cities is far greater than that manifested in any of the larger towns at the other end of the world. I am speaking now of "the man in the street," or the ratepayer, if you will. There are, it is true, in the larger English cities men of wealth and leisure who devote both their time and substance to the service of the city in a manner to which we in New Zealand are almost wholly unacquainted. We have not yet such men amongst us; but as we get older they will come; we young cities, like our own young people, are all too often apt to expect (very unreasonably) to begin life with all the advantages and luxuries with which our elders leave it, and for which they had to labour and to wait. But, contrary to the general assertion, it is certain that our average citizen in New Zealand takes a greater interest in local government and local politics than his compeers in England. And the better managed and governed the city the less is the interest which the man in the street will take. The earnest thinkers, the enthusiasts, the men of public spirit and tireless activity, are the leaven, and their working quickens our otherwise utterly quiescent and inert mass. And the more powerful and better this leaven of active men is the greater will be the increase of the inert mass. Once people find that they are wisely and well governed, and that there are certain restless and clever folk willing to take all trouble off their hands, why, they very soon let these busy folk have it all their own way. Municipal elections in such cities as Liverpool and Manchester, in the Old Country, arouse, it is true, a vast amount of interest, but that interest has nothing whatever to do with local government; it is essentially a political party question, and the victories are as purely Liberal or Conservative as those for the Imperial Parliament. Proportionately speaking, the voting is usually small, and the interest in the fight on the part of the public is aroused, worked up, stimulated and sustained almost entirely by the newspapers of the

opposite parties which enter on the fray with a vim and often a bitterness seldom reached in Parliamentary elections.

But there is something far more interesting and important in the matter than what has been mentioned. If we look carefully into the question of the apparent apathy with which most of us regard matters of municipal, and to a less extent colonial, government we soon get to the fundamental seat of the trouble. The whole trend of our civilisation is towards specialism; we are every year creating more and more specialists in every conceivable walk of life; every year we ourselves become more purely specialists. We do this because experience teaches us it is both better and more economical to do so. The work is better done than we ourselves could ever do it, and we have more time to do that particular work which we can do better than anything else. This idea, which originally terminated in the creation of different professions and employments, we of our day have carried very much further. We have no time to go round learning the day's news by word of mouth at coffee-houses, etc., etc.; we have it collected for us. We have no leisure to read all the books printed; we pay a man to tell us what to read and what music to go and hear, and what is good and what is bad; and we call that man a critic. We pay leader-writers to tell us what we should think, and to unearth unsavoury subjects and scandals for us to be horrified at. And the better all these things are done the less we do, or need to do, them ourselves. It is this principle which is at the root of the apathy evil—The universal and ever-increasing tendency to attend to our own "speciality" and to pay (directly or indirectly) others to do every other imaginable thing for us. If you come to consider it, how many of us are there now who really think or form opinions for ourselves? We imagine we do; but if we analyse the matter carefully we shall find that our opinion is almost invariably based on something we have heard or read which comes, that is to say, from one of the delegates, whom we pay, through some channel or another, for doing our thinking for us. There is endless opportunity for speculation and philosophising as to the state of affairs which this tendency to "specialism" will eventually lead humanity; but no doubt many readers are already weary of prying on this subject and murmuring: "Something too much of this. Let us therefore change the subject."

It is a generally credited assertion that there are only four original jokes in the world and that all the others are variations or offshoots of the same. The same might be said of subjects of newspaper controversy. Marriage, its success or otherwise, as a social institution, is probably the most popular question on which the "Constant Reader," "Father of a Family," "Mater," "Pater," and all our well-known correspondents best love to exercise their wisdom and their wit. We have indeed had so much of it, that I am right glad to notice that down South a very old friend—the question of the wearing of mourning—has been resuscitated mainly by means of a strong sermon against mourning by the Rev. H. Northcote (an eloquent preacher as I understand) who warmly denounced the common practice as unchristian and immoral.

The subject, always a capital one for discussion, has been so long laid by, that it comes with an agreeable freshness foreign to almost any other question one could select to write upon. The arguments against mourning are put forward as follows by one correspondent who aptly signs himself "Rejoice."

He says:—"It is most extraordinary to me that Christians persist in clinging to the old heathenish custom of draping themselves in black and weeping and groaning and moaning when their relatives or friends depart from this world for a far better, far happier one. It shows how very, very

weak is their faith in a future life. For my part, I believe that the very instant the soul leaves the body our friends are in a far happier state than ever they were whilst on this earth, and yet, believing that (and 999 out of every 1000 do) people, instead of rejoicing at their departure, do the exact opposite. Again, why should we, by putting on black, persist in remembering the departed mournfully? Why not, by putting on bright colours, say, light blue and white, emblems of hope and purity, think of them as they now are, and thus remember them joyfully. The longer I live the more I see the absurdity and selfishness of mourning for the dead; in fact, I think it would be far more sensible to mourn at the birth and rejoice at the death of an individual, for we know it is born into a world of sorrow and worry and pain, and no one can prognosticate what horrors may happen to it whilst on this earth; whereas, when it dies, we believe that it has at once entered into a far happier world, where there is no more sorrow, no more worry, no more pain.—I am, etc, Rejoice."

The stock arguments of the Anti-mourners—generally are here pretty well epitomised—I repress severely, any frivolous tendency I might have apropos of the "taken for granted" happiness—of the future, state, to quote the hoary chestnut concerning Johnny "aged seven, and gone to heaven," and the person who remarked, "one cannot sometimes always tell, perhaps little Johnnie's gone"—I repress I say any temptation to repeat that aged anecdote, and pass on to what are really the only and serious objections to the reasons given against mourning. There is really only one—that is that Nature is fortunately Nature, and that until we educate ourselves into something quite unnatural we shall go on mourning. The whole point is this, we do not as "Rejoice" and his fellows assert mourn for the dead—we mourn for ourselves. One will admit it is selfish in the strictest sense, but it is altogether natural. The faith that would make us rejoice at the death of our nearest and dearest, might be in one sense spiritually elevating, but it would be a very unlovable one. If this world were, as "Rejoice" would have us believe, really "a word of sorrow and worry and pain"—and nothing else—then indeed we might be able to weep at a birth and rejoice at a death amongst our intimates. But oh my dismal minded Masters and Mistresses, who share the beliefs of "Rejoice," repent you of your errors. The world is NOT wholly a world of sorrow and pain and misery. Pain there is and sorrow there is and misery, but there are joy, and gladness, and brightness too. The sky is not always overcast, and even then, some of the heaviest clouds turn out to have silver linings. When a death occurs which touches us nearly we mourn—because the one that is taken can never share with us again those alternations of joy and sorrow, of pleasure and pain, which make up life. And, it is just in proportion as to how much we have shared those lights and shades, the sunshine and the shadows, that we mourn.

Apropos of the "world of pain and sorrow" idea—and a lot of people who eat and sleep very satisfactorily talk of it as such—may I be permitted to mount a favourite hobby-horse, and to remark from that eminence that the religious shibboleth, "We are all miserable sinners," which all exerts compel us to express at church and chapel services, is both mischievous and offensive when carried into the outside world, or even when repeated too often in church. Sinners, no doubt, are most of us. A few miserable, therefore; the majority no such thing. To whine continually about being a sinner, if one is really and honestly and cheerfully trying to do one's duty, is an unworthy, unmanly act, a relic of the barbarous unspeakable belief in and fear of a Deity who would condemn to eternal damnation a soul of His own creation for the mere neglect of a cere-

monial, such as the baptism of infants. No doubt looked at from one point of view the heart of man is desperately wicked, even as we are told, but there is another point of view. There is a vast amount of goodness besides. It is not the wickedness of the world that is most amazing; it is that all things considered the proportion of good is so considerable. Vice may be rampant, but is not virtue still triumphant? Pessimism never yet did any service to humanity, and though there is no doubt a medium (mediums are always dull), my sympathies are with the extreme optimist who sings so cheerfully lines which (since they are something of favourites with me) I may have quoted before in the "Graphic":—

A lass in good, and a glass is good,  
And a pipe to smoke in cold weather,  
And the world is good, and the people  
are good,  
And we're all good fellows together.

Presumably because (owing to circumstances over which I have no control) these Notes and Notions are written on Sunday, I find it absolutely impossible to avoid semi religious or scriptural subjects, and usually of a somewhat controversial nature, in these columns. Do what I will, like King Charles's Head in Poor Mr Dick's Memorial, they will come in. The mourning question led me astray in the last paragraph, and now looking down my memos. I see another unavoidable chasm yawning. In a pig-stealing case down South the other day one of the witnesses, a manager of one of the coastal stations, deposed that he had given instructions to the men employed on the station to drive away or destroy all pigs found thereon. His Honor referred to the evidence as being of an extraordinary nature. If people were under the impression that they could destroy pigs, might they not also kill horses, cattle, and even go so far as to destroy a man.

Now, for the life of me I cannot recollect why I set the foregoing item of the week's news down on my notes as suitable for comment. It was unquestionably scissored out of a Southern exchange with some set purpose, and I doubt not I had some very useful and perhaps entertaining remarks to make thereon. Certainly I designed it to point a moral or adorn a tale (a curly one perhaps) of some sort or another, but what I cannot, as I say, for the life of me recollect. But, of course, I am going to be tempted and to fail. I feel it. I know it. The memo. recalls nothing but the New Testament story of the miracle where the pigs rushed violently down a steep place into the sea. "Pigs on a coastal station"—the temptation is, you will admit, too strong. Well, my sin is this. Do you remember the picture and story in "Punch" of the countryman who met his vicar at the Royal Academy one summer, when "the picture of the year" was of the pigs rushing violently down a steep place into the sea? Quoth the rustic:—"There's one question, sir, has often puzzled me about that there miracle of the pigs, sir." "Yes, Giles," responds the vicar graciously, "any question I can answer, I shall only be too glad." "Well, sir, and it's this—Who paid for them pigs?"

It is bad enough to have retold this story—a very old one—but I must fulfil the measure of my iniquity and say that as a child, long before "Punch" ever got that story, I used to wonder after the manner of children who did pay for those pigs, and I am still curious and unsatisfied.

Nelsonians have always been, probably with some injustice, regarded as the most solemnest townspeople in New Zealand, and, indeed, "Sleepy Hollow" has come to be looked on as the colonial Castle of Indolence. But there is just now a strong reaction, and considerable local activity and powerful agitation is being displayed in securing for Nelson a wider reputation as a convalescent sanatorium and recuperative resort; and though

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