Current Comment.

HORSES AND HORSE RACING.

The public most certainly have some grounds to consider that a horse is intended to take part in a race when it figures day after day at the head of the betting in the daily papers, and no warning is uttered by the owner that he has not thoroughly made up his mind as to whether the horse will start or not. Yet it often happens that it is quite impossible for the owner to settle for certain as to whether it is wise to run until the very last moment before the numbers go up, and as he who pays the piper has a right to call the tune, so must the owner have a right to do as he thinks best for himself. The presence or absence of certain other horses that are also entered and are dangerous rivals, must materially affect the chance of his own animal, and if they should happen to catch a cold or a cough at the last moment, or receive an injury on the training ground, or mayhap on the very way to the course itself, and so be prevented from starting, such a difference may be made in the chance of winning that a complete alteration may be necessitated in the plan of campaign, and the particular race for which the horse should start be quickly determined. High-strung horses are often much upset by the bustle of the railway journey and the noise and excitement of the race-course and its surroundings. It may so happen that a nervous youngster, who has been compelled for some reason or other to proceed to the course two or three days before the meeting, has fed so badly since its arrival that it would be in the highest degree injudicious to subject it to the ordeal of a severe race when in a weakened condition, the memory of which might —and, indeed, very likely would—ruin the animal for life, and make it always averse to racing. Cowardly race-horses are far too common, and in nine cases out of ten have been made so by bad management and want of common sense. Perhaps the most frequent cause of their becoming so is either from being run when unfit to do their best—and nothing breaks a horse's heart more than a severe struggle when not thoroughly fit—or from being continually pitted against animals that are their superiors.—"National Review."

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OUR GIRLS' EDUCATION.

DO THEY TRY TOO MUCH?

When one reviews the work of girls of even ten years back, it becomes at once obvious that the girl of to-day is a much busier person than her predecessor, says the writer of the leading article in the "Wellington High School Reporter." High Schools, at any rate in New Zealand, were then in their infancy, and a little knowledge of English, a smattering of French and German, and some fearful and wonderful crewel-work were generally the results of a finished education. But it seems to us that the girl of to-day attempts too much. Her ordinary school work, if she is properly placed, should keep her very well employed, but it appears that this is not enough to satisfy most people. The girls must excel in everything. They must pass musical and drawing and shorthand examinations; they must attend dancing classes and the gymnasium, and then they probably give a few tired hours to their ordinary school-work. Thus no teacher is satisfied, and the parents do not understand how it is that their daughters are not more successful. We would not be misunderstood. All these things are excellent in their way, and if the ordinary school routine does not appeal to a girl, while at the same time she has a decided bent for something else, we would advise her to follow that bent. But as a rule, most girls when they leave school have at least two or three years to themselves before they take their place in society, and that time is often rather dreary. The interest of school life is over, and there is nothing as yet to take its place. This is the time which in our opinion would be profitably employed in following those pursuits which want of leisure has formerly forbidden. And, believe us, my readers, there would be happier and more contented girls if this suggestion were acted upon.

WHY WOMEN ARE CEASING TO MARRY.

It is, primarily, the almost complete downfall of Mrs Grundy that makes the modern spinster's lot, in many respects, an eminently attractive one. Formerly, girls married in order to gain their social liberty; now, they more often remain single to bring about that desirable consummation. If young and pleasing women are permitted by public opinion to go to college, to live alone, to travel, to have a profession, to belong to a club, to give parties, to read and discuss whatsoever seems good to them, and to go to theatres without masculine escort, they have most of the privileges—and several others thrown in—for which the girl of 20 or 30 years ago was ready to barter herself to the first suitor who offered himself and the shelter of his name. Then, again, a capable woman who has begun a career and feels certain of advancement in it, is often as shy of entangling herself matrimonially as ambitious young men have ever shown themselves under like circumstances. Indeed, the disadvantages of marriage to a woman with a profession are more obvious than to a man, and it is just this question of maternity, with all its duties and responsibilities, which is, no doubt, occasionally the cause of many women forswearing the privileges of the married state. To be quite candid, however, I think this is very seldom the real cause of a girl's remaining single. Once her affections are involved, that bundle of nerves and emotions which we call woman is often capable of all the heroisms, and who has not numbered among their friends some delicate creature—the case of Mrs Oliphant is one in point—who has not only supported, by her own exertions, the children she bore, but the father of those children?—"Humanitarian."

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UNSEAWORTHY VESSELS.

There have been so many accidents at sea during the past few months that the public are naturally doubtful as to the efficiency of the examination made by marine inspectors, and without for a moment asserting that there has been any justification for the recent attacks on the Department, we fear that in some instances a little laxity has been shown. No doubt masters and owners will plead that the accidents of this year have been due to the severity of the weather; but we would remind them that a ship ought to be built and fitted to encounter the heaviest and roughest, and not only the calmest seas. We have been called upon so frequently of late to comment on the dangers of the sea that it is hardly necessary to enlarge on the subject again. But every precaution that experience suggests ought to be taken to protect the lives of those whose business carries them out on the treacherous waters that surround our coast.—"Lyttelton Times."

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THE SERVANT DIFFICULTY.

WHY THEY ARE BECOMING SCARCER AND SCARCER.

The Queen cannot obtain soldiers, nor mistresses servants, for the same reason, though the billet is not a bad one as time goes. Tommy Atkins and Mary Ann are both tired of always being at the bidding of another, sometimes in a bad humour, and yearn for a freedom which delivers an individual from a condition of passive obedience and being mere machines in the hands of others. In reviewing this question it may be well in passing to note that the lady-help has by experience proved herself to be a failure. Being neither one thing nor the other mistresses do not understand how to treat her. She generally possesses tender feelings and is very susceptible to a slight, so that who ruffled it is not only difficult to appease her, but to know what kind of work she will not regard in the light of an indignity. To come then to the remedy which will remove the standing grievance of servants we must suggest a change which we are afraid will not find favour in the eyes of most mistresses. The servant must become a day worker, having fixed hours for labour, and living at home, the same as a girl employed in a factory or shop. Remuneration must be fixed according to ability and skill. The plan will at least have one advantage that before entering service the domestic will be expected to know something of her calling in life, which unfortunately is not the case at present. This step would compel the Government to have girls taught in schools domestic economy as well as cooking.

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ROUGH ON SOME OF OUR LEGISLATORS.

Speaking of the respective merits of candidates for the Wanganui seat, the Wanganui "Herald" observes that both are honourable men, and then goes on to scarify some other of our legislators as follows:—"It is a thousand pities this cannot as truthfully be said of some who now occupy seats in the New Zealand Parliament, where there are carpet-baggers and log-rollers on both sides, who simply follow the course which pays them best, and who do not care a brass farthing for the country or its interists. It is to be hoped the coming appeal to the electors will relegate some, if not all, of these time-servers to the obscurity from which they managed to emerge through the possession of 'the gift of the gab' and a chilled-steel degree of effrontery."

Minor Matters.

A pneumatic safety gaol is the name of a recent navel application of compressed air which, almost needless to say, is reported from America. The walls of the vaults or cells are steel tubes spaced about 4½in. apart, and the floor and ceiling are of double steel plates with an air space between. These tubes and air spaces are all in communication, and are kept filled with compressed air. In case the bars are cut in an attempt to escape, the reduction in the air pressure at once sounds an automatic alarm at any desired point. The door is also built up with air tubes, and the lock is also protected by a hollow hinged bar swinging across its face. This must be removed before the lock can be reached. The tubes contain in their interior octagonal bars about ⅛in. diameter of hardened tool steel. These are pivoted at the ends and readily turn, so that even if the air pressure were removed it is claimed that the cell would be as difficult to escape from as any other.

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An exchange tells of a man in Australia who was killed by ants. Such an occurrence is said not to be so very uncommon in that country. It is described as more dreadful than the horrors devised by the most ingenious of the Grand Inquisitors.

The man was a prospector, and while digging in the side of a hill was injured by a fall of earth. As he lay partly covered and unable to move he was attacked by a nest of ants, and for more than an hour millions of the voracious insects simply fed upon him. He died shortly after being rescued.

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There is a case on record of a Ballarat woodcarter who was found under his overturned dray, suffering fearful torments. He had been attacked by ants, and would certainly have succumbed had it not been for his dog. The animal, a cattle-dog, only discovered what was wrong after several hours, and then, by persistently scratching at the stream of ants on the ground and licking them from his master's face and arms, kept him comparatively free until help arrived.

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Miss Mary Kingsley, the intrepid explorer, has recently related a personal experience in "The Woman at Home," which shows the disadvantage at which a "feminine bachelor" finds herself in a cannibal country. Not, we hasten to add, because a spinster is less toothsome than a matron, but because cannibals do not understand the bachelor woman.

Miss Kingsley had to answer many embarrassing questions in West African wilds as to why she had not a husband and family, and found it awkward to explain her position. On one occasion she was being rowed to Andaude by a native who called himself Samuel. His wife sat in the stern of the boat. Presently Samuel began a conversation in his best English.

"Where be your husband, ma?" asked he, after looking at Miss Kingsley curiously for a time.

"I no got one," she answered.

"No got!" said Sam, paralysed with astonishment. After an interval he recovered himself and returned to the charge. "No got a husband, ma?"

"No," said Miss Kingsley, furiously. "Do you get much rubber round here?"

"Me no trade man," replied Samuel, refusing to fall into her trap for changing conversation. "Why you no got one, ma?"

"Because I haven't," retorted Miss Kingsley.

But this intensely feminine reply failed to satisfy Samuel, and she had to run the gauntlet of further questions and comments until her adventures in wading swamps, shooting rapids and penetrating forests, in which she had hitherto felt pardonable pride, paled to insignificance besides the greatest of all adventures, to the cannibal mind, that of getting married. Then, to cap all, it was not long before it was generally believed in West Africa that she was a sort of Dido, Queen of Carthage, in search of a husband!

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Here is a story of strange coincidences in which a New Zealand lady plays a part. It is the Rev. J. H. Crofts, of Waldron, Sussex, who tells the story. Many years ago his father gave him as an heirloom a ring containing the hair of the Duke of Wellington, and in 1879, when on a visit, his wife lost the ring. Nothing more was heard of it until about a year ago, when Mrs Crofts received a letter from her half sister, Mrs Hodge, in New Zealand, saying that a church in which she was interested there had received help from a very unexpected source.

A friend in England had sent her some gloves purchased at Bides, and on trying on a pair of these Mrs Hodge discovered inside one of the fingers a ring containing the hair of the Duke of Wellington. Unable to find the owner of the ring, which had evidently been drawn off by someone trying on the gloves at Bides, and knowing nothing of the loss of the ring by her half sister, Mrs Hodge sold it to a gentleman in aid of the church fund. By another coincidence the purchaser was a grandson of the lady who had originally given the ring to Mr Crofts' father, and at last, after having travelled round the world and being lost to its owner for 18 years, the ring had found its way once more on to the finger of Mr Crofts' wife. The absolute truth of this story is vouched for by Mr Crofts.

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A case which will be of interest to tradesmen was decided in the Magistrate's Court, Christchurch, last week. A tradesman had been entrusted with the repairs of some leather polestraps, and the customer, considering the charge exorbitant, refused to pay. The Magistrate said that the Court could not interfere in these cases unless the charges were manifestly outrageous. If the customer did not take the trouble to ascertain the price before giving the order, then it was his own fault if he considered himself overcharged.

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A glance at the specifications of patents accepted at the Patent Office, and as published in the "Gazette," shows (says an exchange, the "Graphic" forgets which) how some people spend their spare time. A Wellington letter-carrier goes in for improvements in whipping-ropes. Two Auckland residents, a carpenter and a clerk, have devoted time and money in the direction of an improved hair curler, for which the ladies, no doubt, will profoundly thank them. An Auckland printer's weakness is a coupling chain, while a Christchurch journalist's hobby is dehairing hides and skins for tanning purposes. What between spring clutch door-lock spindles, improved sleeve links, compressing gas and air, the distribution of electrical power, portable fire escapes, wet separations, and improved bullet-re-