

Penelope (in this case his constituency) besieged by numerous suitors. And unfortunately he can have no such assurance as the classical wanderer had that Penelope has been true to him. What wonder then that doubt, distrust, suspicion, by turns lay hold on a mind already jaded by the work and worries of the session, and, worse than these, the thought that another was undermining his influence and taking away his political character while he was absent in Wellington. You will generally remark about the member back from a final session a more or less nervousness of manner, and a marked desire to ingratiate himself with the electors. Of course, all candidates evince the same desire, but I fancy the old member much more than the new for the former feels that he has not only got to create a good impression, but has also in all likelihood several bad ones to remove. Of course, when one is met with a purse of sovereigns and a banquet, the case is quite different. Then the member strikes the stars with his sublime head; but, as I said at the outset, how rare, how very rare, are these tokens of gratitude and confidence.

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THE MAN WHO CONFESSED.

It is to be doubted whether, at the present moment, the death of even the most eminent literary man would arouse even a momentary flicker of interest, so engrossed is public attention with matters more sensational. It is not therefore to be wondered at that the demise of Mr Grant Allen which occurred this week was passed over entirely without remark as a minor cable brevity of extremely minor importance. Yet perhaps there is more that calls for remark in the consideration of the work and character of the deceased scientist and novelist than would be the case with men of greater eminence in literature.

It has been the bitter experience of many brilliant and clever men to find their best and worthiest efforts unappreciated. It has fallen to fewer to discover that though the public would have none of their good work it was willing to take any quantity of what was distinctly inferior, and of very mediocre quality. Mr Grant Allen was one of these men. Recognised as one of the most able and lucid writers on certain scientific subjects, he found that this work—undoubtedly his best—was appreciated only by the minority who are interested in such matters.

A chance incursion into the realms of fiction revealed to him that he possessed the faculty of telling a story. He at first tried to make his stories what he thought they ought to be, but as he has told us, he found that the more he wrote down to the public taste the better it paid him. Other men have discovered the same thing before, but so far as my recollection goes Grant Allen was the first and is the only man who has openly said so. "Much of what I write is rotten," he said, "much is vulgar in style and conception, much is utterly unworthy of me and my powers, but you prefer rottenness, and like vulgarity, and whereas you refuse to buy my best, you tumble over each other in haste to purchase what I know to be bad, but which has been specially manufactured to meet your degenerate tastes." This cynical declaration was made very much more forcefully, and at considerable length, in one of the foremost critical magazines or reviews, the "Nineteenth Century" if I mistake not. Nothing could have been more contemptuous than the tone the novelist adopted towards his patrons. That he utterly despised them and their tastes he reiterated again and again, but since by pandering to their appetite he could secure to himself luxury and leisure in which to write other and better works he would do so, and having obtained goods and leisure would issue now and again, he said, "hill top messages," which would be his best, but which he felt sure would not pay. Naturally the article caused much comment at the time, most of it fiercely antagonistic to Mr Allen. His attitude in the matter was denounced as "a pose" by the weightier and wiser critics, and the younger men shrieked in horror at such a shameless confession of the worship of mammon, and said that it was the bounden duty of every man to give the public only what he knew to be his best even if he had to starve. And of course everyone agreed with these beautiful sentiments. None of us would dare to deny our duty. In theory of course we must all give the

public what we know in our heart of hearts to be best for it, but alas and alack, how many of us dare to do it? How many even of our persons dare denounce the shifty conduct, the meanness, the roguery which just escapes that name, which are daily practised by the most respectable members of their flock under the shamefully abused excuse that "business is business?" They know that under cover of "business is business" things are done which merit the most scathing condemnation, yet they never attempt it. They would pretend ignorance, or make some well sounding excuse if you pressed them, but at the bottom of it all is visible expediency. "It doesn't pay" to put the matter in all its ugly vulgarity. And it is the same throughout, the press not by any means excepted. Grant Allen openly admitted to this bowing down in the house of Rimmon, we do it and deny it, there is all the difference. Probably it is inevitable, it is part of evil of our nature, and it is impossible for the majority of us to overcome it. There are of course men who do do so, and if they are successful, and despite their refusal to bow before the false gods, rise to high places in the land, then we do them honour. But those who through the same brave resolve fall by the way, we merely pass with some disdainful remark about eccentric persons incapable of making their way in the world. Whether the author of those marvellously clever "Strange Stories" was merely humbugging as an anti-humbug or not I have never been able to decide in my own mind. Unquestionably, however, the later novels were of an utterly different class to those first stories in which something approaching genius stood revealed. But whether the unabashed vulgarity of say the "Adventures of Miss Calley" were less objectionable than the Hill Top series is, to say the least of it, a very open question.

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THE LATEST CURE.

A hitherto unknown experimentalist—I suspect he must be an American—claims to have discovered a means of curing insanity by injecting goat lymph into the patient's veins. But why the goat? To judge by that common slang expression "playing the giddy goat," which I understand means behaving with somewhat unrestrained levity. The goat has never been credited with a larger degree of sanity in his composition than most other beasts of the field, but rather less. Perhaps, however, the discovery is another triumph for homeopathy. And what a triumph! If the madness of mankind could be cured by the injection of goat lymph we should soon be living in a very different world, that is, of course, if the stock of goats did not run out. There is always that danger, for the amount of insanity, altogether apart from what finds its way to the lunatic asylum, is probably incalculable. Consider the sacrifice of kids that would be necessary to cure the boundless silliness and insanity of the race. Man is indebted to the lower animals for many things, but it could be rather a strange condition of things if we had to go to them direct for the renovation of our brains, as we are indirectly obliged to them for the renovation of muscular tissue. Think what it would mean to all of us were the principle here suggested universal in its application. If we could acquire the qualities of the different animals by injection of their lymph, the coward might become a very lion in bravery, and the bully inherit something of the tenderness of the dove. The wicked would cease from troubling after a brief treatment by the doctor, the goals would be empty, the policeman's occupation gone and virtue reign triumphant. And even if this medicine had only power over physical conditions and not mental, what a boon it would be in this age of shattered nervous systems, dyspepsia, and "that tired feeling." Imagine being endowed with the nerves of a British bulldog, the digestion of an ostrich, or the unwearied energy of the fig. But I am afraid that the vision is but a vision. It is a dream that has been dreamt over and over again since the dawn of creation. Was it not to gain the virtues of the men they had killed in battle that our Maori ate their bodies? Probably they deluded themselves into the belief that they actually did assimilate the prowess of the deceased as they did their flesh; but we know better. So before we pin our faith to this latest cure for insanity we shall require some very tangible proof of its efficacy.

Current Comment.

THE 'FRISCO MAIL RIVALRY.

The Aucklanders have rejected, and by political combination defeated, one compromise. There is, however, another which has on a previous occasion been supported in these columns (says the Wellington "Post"). It is that Auckland should be made the port of arrival for the incoming mail, and Wellington the port of departure for the outgoing steamer. Such an arrangement would give Auckland, it is true, more than her fair share of the service, but it would be a distinct improvement on the present system. The Southern districts would at least have the chance of answering by return mail. This compromise also will undoubtedly be opposed vigorously by the Northerners, who are gradually forcing a conflict upon the question whether they are entitled to the mail service at all. Is all the rest of the colony to be sacrificed to the selfishness of Auckland? If Wellington were made the distributing centre altogether, Auckland merchants would still have time enough between the incoming and outgoing mails to reply to their letters, whereas at present Dunedin people never have any time to spare, and more often than not have their outward mail closed before the inward one arrives. It is unnecessary, however, to repeat the many arguments that can be, and have been, advanced in favour of Wellington. We would only ask our own people to make common cause with those of the South Island in compelling a reconsideration of the position, and a re-arrangement of the mail service in the interests of the many and not of the few.

filled the position half so well; happily, perhaps, there is not one so rash as to make the attempt. Those who incline to blame the Premier for tactical mistakes and occasional lapses from the highest standard of political tact and temper, should remember the herculean nature of the task he set himself before they judge or condemn. Taking all the circumstances into account, the Premier deserves to be warmly congratulated upon the ability with which he managed the House during a period when personal and party feeling ran higher than it has done for ten years past. By achieving what he has done, almost unaided, with a small majority, and with followers made restive by the nearness of a general election, Mr Seddon has proved that he has not deteriorated in force of character, tact, and ability to handle men.

LIBEL LAW AND PRESS PRIVILEGES.

Commonsense would suggest that the newspaper giving an accurate report of statements made at a public meeting should be privileged (says the "Southland News"), but against this it is urged that were such the case evilly disposed persons possessed of means might be able through the medium of "men of straw" to gratify their malice or spite. There is not much, however, in this view. A scandalous or libellous statement made in a crowded meeting is so far public property that it becomes the topic—probably with embellishments—of the "man in the street." And, a quite possible contingency—the absence from the meeting of the person assailed or maligned—he is placed in the awkward position of having to bear half a dozen or more contradictory versions of what really was said about him. For it is an established fact that after the lapse of a few minutes, to say nothing of hours or days, so two persons will give exactly the same version of what they both firmly believe to have heard. The person aggrieved is, therefore, placed at a disadvantage—that is if their discretionary power of elimination has been exercised by reporter or editor, in that he has no positive legal evidence. Were reports privileged he would have at least the least questionable, proof in the reporter's notes. As to supposititious immunity of the "man of straw," there is already the recourse of criminal action for libel. The procedure under this may be somewhat cumbersome, but it should not be difficult to simplify it so as to make punishment swift and sure.

MODERN JOURNALISM.

It is vulgar in its mendacity, vulgar in its catch-halfpenny scares, in its thoughts, and in its way of expressing them (says a writer in the London "Telegraph"). And the moralist truth is that in the ancient cant of the trade it supplies a want; its existence is an answer to a popular demand. It is at once a consequence and a cause of ignorance, of sensationalism, of rapid incapacity for thinking. It reflects the modern mob as in a mirror. It images the greedy passion for emotion which has no reference to justice and reason, as when it transforms the figure of a sordid murderer into that of a tragic victim to a brutal law. It is no less true to the popular vice of unreasoning feeling, in its occasional clamour for war. It plays, in short, to its own audience, and its audience were of a different sort would play other tunes. Like everything else, it acts and is acted upon. It could not exist without the existence of certain lamentable elements in the character of the people, and it constantly tends to augment the characteristics by which it lives. "My son," said the preaching friar to Pannartz and Sweynheim, when he found them and their clumsy printing press by the wayside, "you carry here the very wings of knowledge. Oh, never abuse this great craft! Print no ill books! They would fly abroad countless as locusts and lay waste men's souls." And the chronicler of this episode—real or imaginary—adds: "The workmen said they would sooner put their hands under the screw than so abuse their goodly craft." But those were days of much simplicity and little competition, and there was then no great beast of a populace to roar for garbage.

A TIMELY WARNING.

The dredging boom, so much in evidence at present, is beyond question based on a solid foundation (says the Dunedin "Star"). The returns in certain fortunate claims reasonably indicate that there are rich deposits to be exploited in the beds and on the banks of the rivers, and that the field for investment is, at the least, distinctly promising. Where, however, the taroona is, there will the vultures be gathered together, and we find the speculative promoters to the fore with all sorts of schemes, offering attractions to the sanguine of making much out of little, and sketching visionary prospects of big dividends and accumulated wealth. The temptation to gamble in shares has taken hold of all classes of the community, from the staid merchant and the substantial tradesman to the clerk and the office boy. Shares are consequently being taken up with no idea of meeting the inevitable liability of calls, but in the certain hope of selling out at a profit. There will beyond question be a rude awakening when the day of reckoning arrives; when calls come thick and fast, and there is no chance of unloading; when everybody wants to sell, and nobody is particularly anxious to buy; when the statements of flaming prospectuses are tested in the fires of experience, and it is found that all is not gold that glitters, and realisation falls very short of anticipations based on the reports of mining experts, who always have such a wonderful knowledge and appreciation of ground which they have never succeeded in utilising to their own advantage.

OVER-WORKED PREMIER AND UNRULY HOUSE.

In habits and behaviour the House has not during the past session shown any sign of improvement. The hours kept were scandalous; the conduct of members was frequently very bad (thinks the N.Z. "Times"). This too, despite the fact that the Speaker was more than usually alert to suppress personalities and uphold the dignity of the Chamber. Perhaps some of the responsibility for the orderly "scenes" must be placed upon the Leader of the House, who was all the session suffering from over-work. However, with two Ministers absent, one an invalid hardly able to address the Chamber, and another struggling half the time to rebut charges made against his administration, Mr Seddon's achievement in leading the House so well can only be described as wonderful. There is not another man in the colony who could have