

# Topics of the Week.

## SOCIETY'S SAYINGS AND DOINGS.

SINCE their arrival in Wellington, His Excellency the Governor and Lady Glasgow have been resting quietly, which must be a welcome change from the continuous public exertions. On Christmas Day there was merely a family dinner party at Government House, but they are sufficiently numerous in themselves to prevent any question of dullness arising. Besides, the whole party is noted for its geniality and cheerful brightness.

A SMALL contingent of the Government House party honoured the Dampier Company at their opening performance of 'Robbery Under Arms.' The play went very well, and the acting was excellent.

SIR CHARLES LILLY was present at the Catholic sports on Boxing Day, and was loudly cheered and welcomed to Wellington. He replied thanking them and saying that in all probability he would finally settle down in New Zealand.

ALL the churches were beautifully decorated for Christmas, but the congregations were not large, in Wellington at least. Mr Tallia Trimmell was unable to conduct as organist at St. Peter's, owing to serious illness.

A SMALL picnic arranged by the Misses (Walker) Johnston, and Izard, Wellington, on Boxing Day, was somewhat marred by the wind. The destination was Kandalah, and the excursion would have been delightful but for the disagreeable weather. The party went into the bush where they were comparatively sheltered, though the trees moaned and groaned continuously. Here they gathered ferns and other forest trophies. Mrs Charles Izard acted as chaperone. Others of the picnickers were the Misses Izard, Johnston (four), Cooper, Richmond, Williams, etc.

THE cry of 'no news' is getting somewhat of a chestnut. Wellington echoes the Dunedin note, though it cannot account for the quietness on Scotch grounds. Town is very dull, nearly everyone being in the country. The theatre, occupied by the Holloway Dramatic Company, has been doing good business, the house being packed every night during the holidays. The Dampier Company with 'Robbery Under Arms' have also done very well.

IN Auckland the holidays were busier and brighter than they have been for years. The races were magnificently patronised on Boxing Day, and the Ellerslie course looked quite at its best. The victory of St. Hippo was, of course, an immensely popular one in Auckland, not merely because of the money won, but because Mr L. D. Nathan is so popular a man and so excellent a sportsman. Few who were they and saw the race will easily forget it, and the Nathan party must have felt proud indeed as cheer after cheer went up, first at the splendid appearance of the favourite in the preliminary canter, then at the magnificent and absurdly easily-achieved victory, and finally at the magic words 'All right'—loudest then and most deafening of all. It was a grand race won by the grand horse of a worthy owner. It is now opined that St. Hippo will go for the Melbourne Cup, and I certainly hope so. He will carry plenty of good wishes and a pot of New Zealand money if he goes to the post at Flemington.

THE immense concourse of people at the Ellerslie Races, Auckland, on Boxing and New Year's Day, could not fail to impress visitors as to the vast numbers of well-to-do inhabitants in this highly-favoured and picturesque locality, so renowned for the beauty of its scenery. The lawn at this time of the year looks strikingly pretty, although somewhat robbed of its verdant beauty by the dry weather. Choice pot plants were massed about everywhere, and flowers of every tint, twined and growing articially up the sides of the entire length of the spacious grand stand, which is, by the way, quite equal, if not superior, to any in the

colony. The rich, handsome, and varied costumes worn by the ladies lent an indescribable charm to the whole scene. A day spent at the Ellerslie Races is, indeed, most enjoyable, provided you don't go too heavily on the totalisator or the wrong horse. Races, like balls, cause after regrets, heartaches, and headaches.

MRS D. B. CRUICKSHANK 'Craig Hall,' Remuera (Auckland), gave a most delightful tennis party for young people. The dresses worn upon this occasion were both stylish and pretty, and the hostess, who was gowned in a handsome black silk, had spared no trouble in her efforts to promote the enjoyment of her young guests. Sad to relate, Mr Walter Stubbing was one of them, and no one who saw him bright and smiling could have surmised for one moment that, concealed by a society mask, lay hidden the severe mental depression and agony of mind which only two days afterwards led him to take his own life. As a rule suicides receive little sympathy, but there is not one of his many friends who would not have done a great deal to save the life he thought so lightly valued.

FEW men have so worthily won the esteem and respect of their fellow townsmen as Mr Edwin Hesketh, whose name is a by-word in Auckland for probity, high-mindedness, and hospitality. It is therefore not surprising that both he and Mrs Hesketh should have been the recipients of well nigh countless congratulations on the occasion of the celebration of their silver wedding. If Mr Hesketh is one of the best respected men in Auckland, Mrs Hesketh is undoubtedly one of the most popular and successful hostesses, and the balls and parties at the beautiful house, 'St John's Wood,' are invariably amongst the pleasantest of the season. The silver wedding was there celebrated on December 27th with all due *eclat*, a host of people accepting the invitations and turning up to wish the host and hostess another decade of happy life together. The weather was not too kindly, but everyone enjoyed themselves hugely. Hunter's band was stationed under the trees, and the music was quite delightful.

POLO is immensely popular in Auckland this season as a rule, but the holidays offered too many attractions in other directions to admit of a large attendance at the Saturday's play. Nevertheless, an excellent game was enjoyed by Doctors Shorman, Purchas, Forbes, Messrs Lockhart, Wansborough, McKellar, Gilmore, Noble, Buddie, etc. Amongst the few spectators were Mrs Walker (Ellerslie) and her daughter, the Misses Firth, Hesketh, Forbes, etc.

THE rain on the second holiday last week in Auckland damped a good many pleasure-seekers. Picnic parties suffered most. What would certainly have been a most charming expedition of this nature came to grief in consequence of the drizzle all the afternoon. Mrs A. Kerr-Taylor and a number of young people proposed a picnic to Waitakeri. They, however, only got as far as Baxter's, where the unfavourable condition of the atmosphere detained them under shelter of a large tree all the afternoon. They were very merry, notwithstanding, one gentleman from town displaying considerable histrionic ability in the way of recitations and tales.

AMONGST the guests were the four Misses Scherff, Dr. Atterbury, Mr A. E. Gilmore, Mrs Bilborough, two Messrs Parsons, Mr McKellar, Miss Devors, Mr Collins, Miss Sellers, two Messrs Hazard and their sister, two Misses Kempthorne and a brother, Miss Dawson and three brothers, three or four Misses Kerr-Taylor, Mr Bassett, Mr Gifford, and two other gentlemen whose names have not transpired. The womenfolk wore cotton gowns and water-proofs with pretty summery hats, while mackintoshes and light tweeds or flannels distinguished the men.

'MOUNTAINING,' one of the large boarding houses in Auckland, had a somewhat gloomy Christmas, owing to the

suicide of Mr Stubbing, a well-known society man and efficient teacher of music. It appears that the unfortunate fellow was subject to fits of depression, and being weary of life, ended it with prussic acid. Mr Stubbing looked a very much younger man than his years, which were on the wrong side of forty. Most people would, at first sight, have said he was only twenty-five, or at most thirty. He was a pleasant and accomplished conversationalist, played very agreeably, and was very popular amongst the set with whom he spent most of his time. His death created a profound sensation, mingled with intense surprise, when it was known that he had sought his own life. A letter to a friend, Jim, read at the inquest, was not without pathos, and one can but feel profoundest pity for a man, who in the very prime and vigour of life, feels so weary as to destroy himself.

THE Choral Hall, Auckland, was, of course, greatly overcrowded on the public performance of the 'Messiah' by the Choral Society. The members deserve the thanks of the community, at least those who turned up did. Many were too lazy or too pleasantly occupied to do so. These deserve a certain amount of censure, for the least people can do who take up a thing is to carry it out properly. The soloists and the conductor too may justly complain of a want of respect to themselves. Each one on these occasions is apt to think only of themselves, and that their absence cannot much matter. This is wrong. Individually they may not be much good, but those who slip up engagements of this sort at the last moment are seldom people of individual value. Collectively their absence may, however, make all the difference.

THE Otago team of cricketers were not supposed to have had enough exercise at cricket in Auckland, so a little more was arranged for them by their fair friends in the shape of a dance in the Masonic Hall, Princes-street. The Misses Wilkins are credited with much of the getting-up of the affair, very ably assisted by many lady friends. The dance was a subscription one, but very enjoyable for all that. A description of the dresses is unavoidably held over until next week.

THE conversation of teachers in the Choral Hall, Auckland, on December 23th, was a very successful affair, Mr Draffin giving some very interesting exhibitions of thought-reading, and Mr M. R. Keating displaying to the wonderment of all his extraordinary powers of memory. Some three hundred numbered cards were distributed, and on request, by merely mentioning the number, he told all that was written upon the card. As on some of these were words in seven languages and figures representing billions, the correct replies he gave were loudly applauded. In the adjoining rooms were displayed microscopes and other interesting exhibits. Sir George Grey sent his regrets in a very pleasant letter. Dr. Laisley filled the chair to the general satisfaction of all.

FOR the future, 'Topics of the Week' will be written in the 'Personal' style and signed 'The Flaneur.' Those willing to contribute paragraphs will address them to the editor.

TO any lover of botany, the reckless manner in which ferns of all kinds, branches of evergreens, shrubs, and flowers, are handled during the Christmas season, must cause a thrill of sympathetic agony to shoot through his frame. These plants are things of beauty and a joy—for a short hour or two—thus abused. In this warm climate, it is simply ridiculous to deck our churches with masses of lovely flowers and tender ferns on Christmas Eve, leave them all night without water, and expect them not to present a wilted and day-after-the-ball appearance on Christmas morning. It seems to me to be the height or depth of childish folly to dot the wreaths of evergreens with floral trophies, which, parted from the parent stem, die in an hour or two.

THE whole system of colonial decoration when Christmas Day comes in midwinter is at fault. Why cannot a few neat tins be procured, wreathed with ivy, tastefully arranged with choice flowers—for the best would then be given gladly—and used for adorning our churches, instead of the old-fashioned, evil smelling myrocarpa, fir, pines, etc., dying and dead ferns and flowers, which, to those who attend divine service on Christmas evening, present a deplorable spectacle, mingled with depressing odours of mis-used and badly-treated gifts. Dame Nature is lavish in her floral and horticultural productions in these favoured isles, but is that any reason why we should so stupidly waste them?

EXCEPT for the races and kindred public functions, very little has been going on in the social world during the holi-