

ETCHINGS FROM THE EMPIRE CITY.

BY THE AUTOCRATIC IDLER.

Camp Meeting in Wellington. A few minutes' walk from the busiest centre of Wellington takes us to Pearce's Paddock at the end of Willis-street, where the Seventh Day Adventists are holding their second Annual Conference in these islands—the first having been held at Napier last March, I think. The paddock is quite a secluded spot, well protected from the wind by trees and houses; it is well swarded with grass, and the 'lay of the ground,' I was informed, was especially favourable for a camp meeting. An immense marquee occupies the centre of the enclosure, and on either side are small streets of well-equipped, spacious, and very nicely furnished tents, all clean and new. Something like a hundred persons (male and female) from all parts of New Zealand are at present living in these tents, where they propose to remain till the middle of the month. A restaurant, book depot, and lodging tents are provided; near the paddock gate is a reception tent, furnished like a drawing room, and full of South Sea Island carvings (amongst which are some beautiful paintings of sea scenes on large shells), and here visitors are afforded all information, and treated with extreme civility. In America these camp meetings are an important and well-established religious institution, but as this Wellington meeting was almost the first of its kind in New Zealand, I thought it worth while to give even a beautiful Sunday morning up to—whatever I found there.

Seventh Day Adventists. Perhaps, first of all, you may desire to know who and what these peculiar people, the Seventh Day Adventists are, and how they differ from one another. As to the last, they appear to be very respectable, and very earnest people. A lady whom we found in the reception tent will give us a general idea of what we want to know, as to their religious views, and the work they have out for themselves. I understand the lady in question (who happened, accidentally, to be in the tent at the time of our visit) is a dentist from Napier, enjoying an extensive practice: a very capable professional woman, making a good deal of money at her employment, and giving the greater part of it to the cause. There was something about her which took my fancy—she looked straight in one's face with clear grey eyes: she gave you, at once, an impression of sincerity—one of the very rarest of qualities, especially amongst sects, in these times. The Seventh Day Adventists, she said, observed Saturday as Sunday, the Bible having so directed: they believed that 'the Lord would provide'—therefore they laid not up treasures upon earth—and they knew that the second coming of Christ was close at hand. As to this latter belief, I ventured to say that people had existed for hundreds of years who were convinced of the same thing; but I did not like to tell her—as I might have done—that St. Paul himself was of this opinion immediately, so to speak, after the crucifixion of our Saviour. Furthermore, the lady gave me some account of her searches for truth amongst the churches, and her total inability to find rest for the soles of her feet amongst denominations who did not practice what they preached. She grew eloquent about the Bible—the Bible, when one came to read and grasp the real meaning of its most hazy and mazy chapters—and informed me that there was a terrible condemnation in store for those thousand and thousands of ministers of the gospel who totally ignored the gospel in living their own lives. I may say this was the best news I had heard for a long time. Although not exactly a Seventh Day Adventist, I have long felt a burning desire that somebody should preach to the parsons; that somebody should tell them how woefully they misapprehend their duty and their mission on this earth! However, the lady dentist from Napier, will, probably do the business in the meantime. It puzzles her exceedingly how a bishop can draw £15,000 a year and live in a palace, when the bishop's Master had not where to lay His head; so it does me. These Seventh Day Adventists have no bazaars, no raffles; none of our peculiar expedients for raising the church wind. They have no trouble as to the incomes of their teachers and pastors; they have no pew rents. Every man and woman gives a tenth of his or her income or earnings to the general fund, and if that is not sufficient, why they just give more. And—however they manage it—they do manage to present a very comfortable and contented appearance before each other, and before the general public.

Austrian chairs for the most part, although there was no lack of other, and even much better resting accommodation. The style of discourse was generally, peculiar. In one tent an American gentleman was describing the progress of the work all over the world. I could hear very little of what he said, as the tent in which he spoke was already fully occupied when I arrived there. Some of the women preachers also came from the United States. I heard a discourse in the large marquee from a Sister White—who stated her usual business was 'writing,' whatever that means—and I am obliged to say that it was the most earnest and practical address I have heard delivered before a congregation of human creatures on Sunday for twenty years. It was, chiefly, addressed to parents; and if children were only brought up as this lady said they ought to be, there would be no fear at all for the rising generation. I believe this preacher came directly from Auckland; but there was in her accent, and in her occasional quaintness, a Yankee suggestion which was by no means disagreeable. Some hundreds of persons, not belonging to the Adventists, listened to Sister White with great attention for more than an hour.

Advice to Girls. A sample of the sort of tenets these people inculcate will, better perhaps than any description of mine, convey an idea of their teaching. Just listen to this, for instance, addressed to young girls:—'What is the use of being plain, girls, when you can all be beautiful just as well as not? Why be plain any longer? If you have the white light of the soul within, it will shine through the muddiest complexions, and the thickest swarms of freckles! It can re-shape snub noses, and wry mouths: it can burnish red hair until it shines like gold! It can transform the very plainest among you into an angel of delight. Why be plain, then, girls, any longer, when the loveliness of a pure spirit imparts its charm to everything connected with it?' Or take this, addressed to the people in general: 'All around us go weary toilers, with burdened hands, weary feet, aching hearts. The mystery of life's toils, and sin, and sorrow, and suffering, seems unfathomable. Many question as to the existence of a God of love; and in their affliction feel they could curse God and die! To all such weary mortals Christ and His second coming is the only hope! Turn ye then, for why will ye die?'

A Financial Success. And now, no doubt, you, being already quite well acquainted with my mocking and scoffing spirit, will expect that this is about the place where the laugh comes in (—or should come in: my humour is a trifle heavy sometimes and isn't always a success—although others may not say so). My respected friend: I haven't the smallest intention of laughing at these people. I dare say they are quite mistaken as to some things—even that I am not quite cock sure: there is nothing more illogical than to be cock sure about any religious question whatever. Let us laugh; let us roar till our sides ache, if you will, at shams and hollow insinuations, and conventionalities of all kinds: but here we have, anyhow, downright earnest, honest folk and for my part I have no words but words of respect for them. Let me mention, too, that, although they are but a mere handful of beings in these islands: here a few, there a few, in every town of importance in New Zealand, and the total number very insignificant indeed; yet in the populous countries of the world they count their adherents by thousands and thousands, and their annual church revenue at some millions of pounds. They have vast publishing offices for the issue of books and periodicals, they have great colleges, medical and surgical sanatoriums on gigantic scales in various States, and they issue, annually, a year book, which I find full of the most interesting and even startlingly new information. Last year they had a surplus of £33,000, after providing for all liabilities. It is one church in twenty that has little difficulty in making both ends meet; and a church with a surplus is very seldom heard of. But when we get a church with a surplus of £33,000 we can't laugh much at it—I don't, indeed, see why it should not be the other way—they might very well be excused for laughing at us! However, they are too much in earnest to do anything but work: and at work we leave them, and pass out of the camp gateway.

Miss Myra Kemble. No one makes any apology for the stage now, nor has such been done for several years past. The simple fact is, that the stage, in these later times, has forged ahead so fast as to be quite even, in our times, with any profession, however high. The finished actor is, in social status, the equal, to day, of any gentleman in the land, and the accomplished actress is a far superior and more refined person than even some of the

much sought after and bepraised female sensational novelists; and ranks—if she be, indeed, an artiste—as high as any educated lady in any country. So that it has come to pass that actors—actors who can really act—require no more vindication than the members of any other profession, or the followers of any other art. It was Macready who began the work of elevating and purifying the stage: the Keans followed; and what these geniuses left undone, or were unable to accomplish, was completed by present day professionals like Henry Irving, the Bancrofts, and others, who swept away the few remaining stage reproaches, and when these reproaches were removed, all intelligent prejudices—if any prejudices can be called intelligent—disappeared. Of course there are some persons still in the world who have yet something to say against the art of the actor—just as there are still people in the world who are horrified on looking at the most artistic and famous picture in the nude. If these people have any intelligence, they are not sincere, and if they are sincere, they have no intelligence. In either case, therefore, they are of no earthly account.

Some Dublin Beauties. I felt some disappointment when Miss Kemble informed me she was not a Dublin girl—as I had hoped her to be. There is a charm and grace of manner; of style, voice, and outline about the Dublin girl which one finds very seldom the exact counterpart of, in the same degree, in any other girl. Some very splendid samples of what Dublin can produce in this way were known, a few years ago as the 'Fosbery girls,' in Dunedin—one of whom married Dr. Mansell, and the other beauty, Mr Mills, of the Union Company. Miss Kemble reminded me greatly of the Misses Fosbery; and when she told me that she was born in Sligo, I gave Sligo more credit than ever I did before in my life. And, after all, Sligo is not so far from the city of fair women. None of the numerous likenesses that I have seen of Miss Kemble, are exactly like her; and, indeed, she appears to take a tantalising pleasure in just giving a suggestion of her bewitchingness—and then leaving one to fill in the details. A very fine three-quarter painting of Miss Kemble was shown here: but even in this, the best half of the lady's countenance is hidden by the handkerchief which she seizes the observer with; and the photos are, many of them, just as provoking. However, as the likenesses are—like the Presbyterian sermon—not quite satisfying, the better way would be to describe the lady. Well, even that I can't do. I know that her hair is a light golden; that her figure is absolutely perfect; that she is above the middle height, that her complexion is that of the lily of the valley, or, for that matter, of the Nile—and that is all I can say. I made a certain dame very wild indeed, and she stamped her little foot with vexation, when I told her I really had not the smallest idea how, or in what colour, Miss Kemble was arrayed—'All I can say, Madam, is,' I said, 'that she was dressed in the neatest, most tasteful, and simple manner possible!'

A Dramatic Genius. There is not, I suppose, an actress better known or more highly valued in the colonies than Miss Kemble. I happened to be in Sydney when Miss Kemble came back there, after her return from England, with 'Dr. Bill.' The play was far more popular in Australia than in New Zealand, and in Sydney it was perhaps more popular than anywhere else. Miss Kemble is, indeed, an immense favourite with the Sydney people, and her home is near that city. It is perhaps as a comedienne that this delightful actress enjoys the widest reputation. But she is a dramatic genius—and therefore her powers extend over the whole dramatic field. There is not, even in London, an actress who can fill the part of Leslie Brudenell (in 'The Profligate') better—and that is somewhat of a tragic character, and as difficult a part, perhaps, as ever a woman played. On this great play the curtain fell for the last time in Wellington, to-night; and to-morrow the gifted actress and her brilliant company go northwards. I shall be glad to hear that crowded houses meet one of the most talented and favourite of actresses, and as altogether charming a lady as there is in all Australia.

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