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After Dinner Gossip and Echoes of the Week.

Exit 1903—The King's Year.

A year happily devoid of striking sensations, and exciting events, is that which has closed since the last issue of this paper. Devoid—to all intents and purposes—of war's alarms, triumphs and reverses, the days and months slid quietly and placidly by, and the Empire has enjoyed the most prosperous and restful twelve months which has fallen to her lot for upwards of a decade. That a period for recuperation from the strain consequent on the tense war struggle of close on three years was needed cannot be doubted, and it is probable that our nation is to-day, rested and revived, in a stronger situation to meet whatever adverse circumstances fate might have in store than for many, many years past. But, happily, the chance of any necessity for showing the strength of the Empire, aggressively or defensively, is far more remote than it was a twelve month since. From our position of "splendid isolation," envied and distrusted by almost every nation of Europe, we to-day see Britain honoured, courted, trusted on every side, and even hereditary enemies reconciled, and anxious to cement a national friendship in every possible means. And for this we have to thank no Government, no Minister, no member of the Corps Diplomatique, but one man, and one alone—the first gentleman in his own vast dominions, His Majesty King Edward VII. The Edwards have been amongst our greatest of kings, and it was a good omen which led our Sovereign to take this great historic name by which to be known to his people, for he has proved himself a worthy follower of the great first and third Edwards, and it is to be doubted if ever the conquests of these two great warriors did more for the glory and advancement of the Empire than the victories achieved by our present King by his knowledge of men and things, his unflinching tact, and that royal charm of manner which overcomes every prejudice and every obstacle to friendly intercourse, and completes fraternal understanding between Britain and the majority of European States. 1903 should, therefore, be known as "the King's year," for most unquestionably to him is due the splendid position the Empire now holds, and which gives us all confidence that the year on which we are entering will be as peaceful and as prosperous as that which has just closed.

New Year Resolutions.

It is the custom to make a huge joke of New Year resolutions, and much humour and wit of varying quality are lavished on the readiness with which they are made, and the celerity with which they are broken. I suppose some of the chaff is legitimate, but I, for one, would be very sorry to see this ancient custom disappear. What does it matter if the resolutions do break down sooner or later; there was virtue in the making of them, and virtue in the keeping of them for a time, and perhaps it may be, paradoxical as it may seem, that there is virtue in the breaking of them too. For example, one year deponent hereof decided to give up smoking with the New Year. Now, no one can doubt that there was virtue in this. To even consider such a sacrifice seriously spoke of volumes of unselfishness and self-denial innate in one's being, and only waiting the demand of duty to be called out. But mark what happened. It affected my nerves to such an extent that my friends and my family—they called it my temper, by the way, but that is the custom of one's family—besought me to take to it again. "For goodness' sake have your smoke, and be done with it, and don't sulk about the house like a bear with a sore head." That was the

terse way the head of the household put it. The clearness with which women can express their opinion on occasion is, it will be observed, considerable. But I was adamant. Break a resolution involving self-sacrifice. Never! However, next day—it was a stormy one, domestically, for the weather was wet and the children aggravating, and my nerves on edge—my wife observed with that decision which is her chief characteristic, "either you give up this silly nonsense of not smoking, and leave off cuffing the children and recover your temper, or I go out of the house!" Here, you see, was a problem! One had either to selfishly stick by a resolution which made one's self objectionable to others or run the risk of being laughed at as a weakling, and smoke again. It must be obvious to all that the pleasantest course would have been to have remained adamant and banished pipe forever, but a man must consider his wife and family, so it was certainly best to give in gracefully and with a sigh fill up the largest pipe in the house. Besides, it quietened things down so much. To return, however, to the general question of good resolutions, everyone should make them, and most do. It may not be that we manage to keep all of them, but even if only part of them survive that is something. And seriously, and apart from the flippancy of this paragraph—whose only excuse is that it is holiday time—it is well that once or twice a year even the most careless of us should look ourselves over. If we do, and see the urgent necessity of a host of "I wills" and "I will nots," something has been achieved, and an improvement of sorts, even though small, is bound to take place; and, small though it may be, it is surely worth while.

Are You Going?

What a wonderful folk are the Yankees. I beg pardon—I mean the Americans. The remark is, I am aware, not new, but it is brought home to one afresh almost every day in some way or another. In the shape of a Christmas souvenir this week, I received from St. Louis a little booklet with the enquiry which heads this paragraph, printed thereon in attention-compelling capitals. It referred, of course, to the great exposition, and had it been a mere advertisement thereof, one would have thought little of it. But it was not. It was a concise and admirably compiled guide to the accommodation available in St. Louis and suburbs during the fair, and it is compiled and circulated solely in the interests of intending visitors, to assure them that there will be ample accommodation, and, more important still, to guard them from fraud or over-charge. In the first place, there is to be a monster hotel called the Inside Inn, in the Exposition ground itself, and will accommodate about 6000 guests. The dimensions are 400 by 800 feet. It is three stories high, and has 2500 rooms. Over 500 of the rooms will be equipped with baths, and the hotel will have a drug store, a buffet, restaurant, a barber shop, a news stand, a cigar stand, wash-rooms, and stands for the sale of collars, cuffs, haberdashery, notions, etc. The hotel rates are fixed by contract and bond. The patrons must pay 2/- extra for daily admission to the grounds, the price of admission being added to the hotel bill. With this addition the charge for rooms without baths is 5/ to 10/ per day. There will be not less than 500 rooms at the five shillings price (including the admission charge), 600 at eight shillings, and 500 at ten shillings per day. The rooms with bath bring from 12/ to £1 1/ per day, the price varying according to the size and location of the room. In each case the price of admission is included. The charge for meals is also fixed by contract, and cannot be raised. The price of a breakfast and noonday meal will be half-a-crown each, and that of the evening dinner three and

sixpence. Meals will also be served à la carte at moderate prices. The Inside Inn will open for guests on April 30, 1904, and close on December 1, 1904—the Exposition's opening and closing days. In addition to this, the management has completed a canvass of the city, which has resulted in the following statistics:—Established hotels have capacity for 21,000 guests, and have been supplemented during the year with accommodations for 47,000 more; temporary hotels, 30,000; respectable rooming houses, over 15,000; private houses, nearly 18,000. This computation gives a total capacity of 130,000 persons at rates ranging from 4/ a day to £1. Nearly all of these places are bound by agreement to not exceed their regular rates. To make this canvass has entailed much work and some expense, but it promises to bear fruit for those who intend visiting the Exposition. The hint may be worth remembering in New Zealand some time.

Microbes in the Note.

It is told of an English lady who went to live in Scotland that she said, when she received the very grimy one pound notes which are so popular in that country, and which, like our colonial money, pass through so many hands before being called in, that "never before had she understood what was meant in the Bible by 'filthy lucre'." The sentiment will be echoed by all who have to deal with a paper currency. But it is sometimes forgotten that the paper notes have the advantage of showing the dirt, which is as present, though not as obvious, on our coins. A medical writer in a contemporary mentions that he saw a man who was clearly suffering from an infectious skin disease of the hands paying a tramway fare without a thought of the ill he might convey with the coins he passed to the conductor. The conductor, when warned, was effusively grateful for the warning, and promised, for his own protection, to wear gloves in the future. But there was no protection thought of for the people who might next handle these dirty coins. "Knacker" speaks of it having been once the custom at a club to bring a member the change that he needed in "washed silver." The novelist works this out into an apologue, to indicate that in a gentleman a certain cleanliness of life and thought, as well as of habit, is expected, and, indeed, one could moralise "ad libitum" on the theme. It certainly does not follow that infection lurks in every penny, the previous travels and antecedents of which we have not investigated, but the incident may serve as a reminder that money may adversely be handled with some little caution, seeing that we do not know through whose hands it has last passed.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed." This is an old proverb, but as true as it is old. Here is just such a friend.



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