

News, Notes and Notions.

Invercargill is just as unreasonably touchy about its reputation for sobriety as Auckland is on the subject of its "glorious climate," and a hard, sceptical world is prone to conclude that reputations that require constant bolstering are of the kind popularly described as "no better than they should be." The clergy of the Southern "city of magnificent distances" has issued an indignant manifesto, protesting against certain alleged "wild statements" made by Mr. Harnett, manager of the British football team. Mr. Harnett had the temerity to state to an Auckland Press interviewer that the accommodation in the Invercargill hotels was inferior, that there was extensive drinking in private houses, appalling drunkenness in the streets, fraud and deceit on the part of the inhabitants, and complete failure of no-license reform. These charges, the "douce" clergymen assert, are completely answered by a manifesto signed by the Mayor and hundreds of leading Invercargillites, testifying to the splendid results accruing from the adoption of No-license. It is hard to see how an "answer" published half-a-year ago can dispose of charges made last week; but the Invercargill clergymen are too excited to observe the flight of time.

It is to be presumed that Mr. Harnett spoke from bitter personal experience of the cold comfort offered by the No-license hotels; from pleasant personal experiences of the "extensive drinking" in private houses; and from actual observation of drunkenness in the streets, etc. These things therefore exist, and it does not help matters to say that they did not exist last year, or to assert vaguely that "splendid results" have followed the closing of the bars. In the opinion of some people, extensive drinking in private houses may be a "splendid" thing. We "miserable bodies" probably feel easier after throwing off such phrases as "gross misrepresentation," "an outraged community," "bosmiring the name of our town," etc.; but facts are not to be put down by strong words. It would seem, however, that what is really objected to is plain language in describing the state of things in Invercargill. There are enthusiasts in the un-Sunny South, as may be inferred from the defence offered to a recent charge of supplying drink to an intoxicated person. It was urged that the man had collapsed owing to "a sudden fit of weakness." Now, if Mr. Harnett had known of this super-sensitive Southern aestheticism, he would never have said there was appalling drunkenness in the streets—he would have hinted that unfortunately a large number of respectable citizens were subject to "sudden fits of weakness." Mr. Harnett is hereby convicted of "gross misrepresentation," and ordered to come up for sentence when called upon.

According to several interesting Consular reports transmitted to Washington, now is the time when the Old World lays nets to ensnare American tourists, and the victimisation of unsuspecting Yankees is practised not merely in the cities of Europe generally, but even in the by-ways of Scotland, where in former years all the people were deemed unsophisticated. American tourists are very well able to look after themselves as regards hotels and sight-seeing, and insist upon getting good value for their money. It is quite a delusion to think that the average American when abroad is not every whit as keen as the European in seeing that he gets twenty shillings for a pound, and he gives no more in tips than most people. There is one department, however, where Europeans, to quote New York slang, "have the Yank skinned." We refer to the purchase of antiques. Americans in later years have been taught to love the antique, but in their blissful ignorance the modern creations of Birmingham have been sold to them as genuine old Italian brass oil lamps. As regards antiques generally, American tourists certainly have cause to protest. Supplementing a recent Consular report from Belgium, warning American tourists against the purchase in Europe of so-called "antiques," Mr. Maxwell Blake, Consul of the United States, at Dunfermline, sends ad-

vice pertaining to Scotland. "As the summer approaches," says the Consul, "in anticipation of the usual annual influx of Americans, many of whom continue under the delusion that all things in this country are as old as its history, the growing legion of so-called 'antique' dealers, from cities to remote villages, and unfrequented farmhouses, are now occupying themselves in arranging for the display of their various stocks of made-to-order antiques." Mr. Blake sums up: "Don't look for bargains in antiques. If one wants genuine things he should visit a dealer of recognised standing and reliability, for there are a few such, pay him his price, which is sure to be high, and purchase only upon his written guarantee that the article is as represented."

Whether Esperanto will end its career, with Volapuk and other forms, on the scrap heap of languages, or whether the excellent start which congresses, publicity, and enthusiasm have given it will enable it to survive, is a question on which science may be excused from pronouncing an opinion. But the struggle to retain "native" languages was never keener than it is now; and a struggle at present going on in Switzerland is reproducing in only a slightly less violent form the strife between the Flemings and Walloons in Belgium. Switzerland accommodates three races, which normally live on terms of the greatest amity—the German Swiss, some 2,000,000 strong; the French Swiss, 700,000 strong; and the Italian Swiss, numbering 200,000, who, besides Italian, speak two idioms that are not patois, but real languages having literatures of their own, Romance and Latin, both Latin derivatives. The struggle, however, is bilingual merely between French and German, and at Neuchâtel a union has been founded for the encouragement and teaching of the French language. The quarrel has a humorous side, and the journals of the two languages act as organs of mutual defiance and recrimination. Professor Paul Seippel, of the Zurich Polytechnic School, complains that the usage has been established of translating into German, good or bad, the foreign Christian names of children who are to be registered. A French professor had a son, and wished to call him Rene. The clerk in the municipal office was perplexed. How should he translate that into German? Wiedergeboren (Re-ne, "born again"). No, that would not do. Happily, in virtue of a tradition that dates from the time of the Holy Roman Empire, the Germans consider Latin as an annex to their language. The Zurich registrar therefore finally decided to write the name Renatus!

It is not surprising to learn that a demonstration is being organized, to take place at the Franco-British Exhibition, in favour of the silk hat. The visible decline in the popularity of that coiffure (the sale is said to have shrunk 50 per cent. in the last few years) must have seriously affected the trade, and it is only natural that the Silk Hatters' Union should be taking the matter up. Whether it be true, as a representative of the Union has told a reporter, that "from a hygienic point of view a silk hat is the best headgear a man can wear," is perhaps open to question; some men might even go so far as to say it is about the very worst. But one thing is certain—that fashion has not yet discovered any form of hat that adequately takes the place of the silk hat. A bowler is a mean thing, of course, when worn with a suit which makes no pretensions to the dignity of full dress. A straw labours under the same disability, with the added one that it is only suitable for summer. A cap is unthinkable, except as a cap. On the whole, we believe that the silk hat can never be displaced in its relation to the well dressed man.

A machine has now been devised for writing short-hand. The stenotyper, as it is called, is in bulk and weight a mere fraction of the standard typewriter, and can readily be worked on the operator's knees. It has just six keys, and by permutations and combinations of these

six keys, taken two or three together, a complete alphabet is built up—an alphabet of a dot and dash, similar in kind to that of the Morse code. The learner has simply to commit this alphabet to memory, and the machine will do the rest. The construction of the machine is of admirable simplicity. The keys print on paper that is self-feeding from an endless roll. A spring-lever and a few cogwheels make up the essential working parts. There is none of the mechanical intricacy of the type-writer, and, therefore, there is nothing to go wrong. The machine is so easily portable and works so silently that there is no reason why it should not be used in ordinary reporting work.

"Is the system of government in Russia getting better or is it getting worse?" asks Sir Edward Grey, Britain's Foreign Minister, in the House of Commons. "I say, with full knowledge of the reports which we have been receiving for the last two years, that the system of government has been getting emphatically better. And the evidence is there. There is a Douma is Russia to-day. The complaint is that it is not elected on a democratic franchise. How long has this House been elected on a democratic franchise? Within my lifetime the change has come to what we should now call a democratic franchise. Are there no other countries in Europe of high standing whose parliaments are not elected on a democratic franchise? You can easily find other instances. Three years ago in Russia there was no Douma, constitution or Parliament of this kind. There is to-day a Douma which, even if it be not a democratic franchise, criticises the Government, votes money, and sometimes refuses to vote money, and is composed of different parties, some of them advanced parties, and many opposed to the Government."

Professor W. A. Newman Dorland has just gone deeply into the records of achievements of the world's chief workers and thinkers, and finds that the average age for the performance of the master work is 50. For the workers the average is 47, and for the thinkers 52. Chemists and physicians average the youngest, at 41; poets and inventors at 44; novelists at 46; explorers and warriors, 47; composers and actors, 48; artists and clergymen, 50; essayists and reformers, 51; physicians and statesmen, 52; philosophers, 54; mathematicians and humourists, 56; historians, 57; naturalists and jurists, 58. Professor Dorland concludes that if health and optimism remain "the man of 50 can command success as readily as the man of 30." He adds that "health plus optimism are the secrets of success; the one God-given, the other in-born, but capable of cultivation to the point of enthusiasm."

After studies extending over years, and prosecuted in every country of Europe and America, Professor Gieler, of Munich, has come to the conclusion that women's feet are rapidly growing larger, and that the time will come when in the matter of feet there will be little difference between the two sexes. He has made careful measurements of the proportions of feet on ancient statues and as delineated in drawings and pictures of other times and has compared these measurements with the feet of modern women, always to the disadvantage of the latter. In England he finds the most striking confirmation of his theory. He attributes the change to the growing taste of Englishwomen for walking and other outdoor exercises.

A German newspaper destroys the pious fiction that Emperor William writes those remarkable sermons for whose delivery he has gained such a unique reputation. Before His Majesty goes travelling or cruising on the Hohenzollern, expecting to stay away a certain number of weeks, the Court Chaplain on duty, it is said, is ordered by the Court Marshal to prepare a sermon for each Sunday, coinciding with the religious significance of the day and the environment in which the Emperor and the crew find themselves. When the Kaiser goes to the North Cape, for instance, he always orders six sermons, each appropriate to the neighbourhood he expects to visit on the date set. Even the prayer with which he closes services is written by the Court Chaplain and read by him from the manuscript.

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