

# News, Notes and Notions.

Candidates for Parliamentary honours in the Dominion are being asked questions on every conceivable topic. An answer to a very common and important query might be made, on a suggestion recently put forward by a French Minister, whose brilliant idea is a special decoration, with a special ribbon, of a special pattern and colour, for fathers of large families. The weakness of Frenchmen for ribbons in their button-holes is well known, and has been laughed at by none so much as Frenchmen themselves, but it may as well be turned to account, so the ingenious statesman in question proposes granting the new Order of Merit to fathers of six children at least. Less than that number would not be a qualification. The round dozen of offspring would entitle the happy sire to the highest rank in the Order, with star or brilliants. But the strange thing is that no one seems to think of decorating the mothers.

The people of the United States are beginning to feel considerable astonishment, and not a little concern, at the remarkable importation of heathen cults into the Great Republic. The latest record is that the call of the muezzin to prayer to Allah has been sounded forth in Union-square, New York City. Those two sections of the famous sects of Persian religious reformers, the Bahais and the Bahaists, have during the last five years gained several thousands of American adherents, who are almost fanatical in their profession of the curious tenets which originated with "the Báb," the famous martyr of the last generation. They are holding their meetings regularly in several cities. Several of the Hindu Swamis are holding parlour meetings for the idle rich. In California the Buddhists have a splendid shrine. Now the Confucianists propose to build a temple in Chinatown, New York. The first Hindu temple in the United States has recently been opened in San Francisco. The number of Hindus has been steadily increasing in America since 1900, and at this moment there are 17 Hindu students in the University of California alone. The "Vedanta," a monthly organ of the Vedantic philosophers, is published in New York. According to the Vedas, the Hindus can claim the earth. So the San Francisco temple was dedicated "to the service of all religions under the auspices of the Rama-Krishna Mission, Belur Math, Calcutta." This temple is a curious and fantastic conglomeration of various styles of architecture, including the Taj Mahal of Agra, the grotesque temples of Benares, the temples of Siva, the temple Garden of Dakshineswar, and old castles of Europe! All is supposed to be symbolical, including all countries and all religions. This invasion has till lately been little noticed, but is beginning to cause great searchings of heart in the American churches of various denominations.

Why is the Chinese Minister in Washington in imminent danger of being recalled? The more obvious version is that Wu Ting Fang has been indiscreet in recent speeches, particularly in his anti-Japanese tone. But the "Daily Mail's" New York correspondent says that it is largely because the Minister has become what, from the Chinese point of view, may be considered a food faddist. He has denounced roast pig, one of the favourite delicacies of his country, as injurious to health, and has even presumed to urge the Empress Dowager to eat cabbages, turn-cobs, and turnips cooked in American fashion. It is difficult to imagine the recall of a British Minister from Peking because he had taken to chopsticks, or from Washington because he had become an learned in the subtleties of the American bar. But the Chinese point of view is intelligible. "Let who will make the laws of a nation, if only I may write its menus," is a dangerous doctrine that may carry a conservative country such as China far. A Chinese Parliament may come; but pork will probably survive even the pigtail.

The Irish gentleman who has left £1000 to a religious house on condition that his wife enters it and spends the rest of her life in prayer, is another example of the quaint methods by which the dead sometimes endeavour to control the living. It was a blunt farmer who drew up his will leaving £100 to his widow. When the lawyer reminded him that some distinction should be made in case the lady married again, he doubled the sum, with the remark that "him as gets her'll deserve it." It was a wealthy German who, fifteen years ago, bequeathed his property to his six nephews and six nieces, on the sole condition that each of the nephews married a woman named Antoine and each niece a man named Anton. The first-born of each marriage was to be named Anton or Antoine, according to sex. Each marriage was also to take place on one of St. Anthony's days. What happened to the nephews and nieces is "wropt in misty" in the office of the German Registrar-General.

This little story bears with it the moral that it were well to make sure of prospective wealth before entering upon its distribution: The other morning a man received a letter. On opening it out dropped a draft for £2000, and his heart stopped beating as he read the letter, and saw it was from Melbourne, and signed "Your unnatural but penitent Uncle." He gave a wild shriek of exultation and sank senseless to the ground. When he revived he couldn't wait until the bank opened, but rushed to the nearest shops, and ran about buying new furniture, new clothes, new carpets, glass, bonnets for his wife and dresses for his girls, and half-crown drinks for himself. When ten o'clock came and he entered the bank, he found a man there at the counter who was sufficiently composed to read the draft through with an equable mind, and who explained that he could not pay £2000 on it because it was merely an advertisement of somebody's Pain Annihilator. It took that man until six o'clock in the evening to countermand the orders he had given before ten o'clock a.m., and then he forgot half of them, and his wife had to stand at the front gate all the afternoon, turning away delivery vans that came lugging up to the pavement with new things.

A fancy dress ball in which the dancers took place in water was held last month at Leucocles-Bains, in Switzerland. The ballroom was the "Grand Bain," which was full of heated water, and was decorated with electric lights. Chinese lanterns, flags, plants, and flowers. All the available seats at the sides of the bath were sold, the proceeds going to charity. At an early hour the spectators' seats were crowded with ladies and gentlemen in evening dress, and at 9.30 p.m. there was great excitement, as the dancers and singers—all amateurs, and dressed in expensive costumes and some wearing jewellery—entered the water. Most of the ladies wore silks and satins, which were ruined in a few seconds, but all stepped gaily into the water. Some of the most striking costumes represented reigning queens and kings, Chinese mandarins, Mephistophiles, costermongers, English policemen, etc. The evening commenced with a concert, all the bathers, up to their chests in water, singing part-songs and choruses. Afterwards dancing commenced in the water. First of all, there was a quadrille, which had been studied beforehand and was well executed. Then followed very slow waltzes, and finally two-steps. Not till the early hours did the aquatic ball come to an end. The spectators remained to the last, and congratulated the dancers, most of whom were American and English.

The opening, in August, of the Hedjaz Railway as far as El Medinah, in Arabia, with an extension to Mecca to follow, brings the sort of pilgrimage which the late Mr Richard Burton undertook, some half-century ago, well within the more modern notions of a pilgrimage. No doubt, when the personally-conducted pilgrimage gets organised, others besides

the faithful will pay a visit to the Prophet's Tomb, and it is even possible that curiosity may become strong enough to obtain what Burton himself was unable to obtain: a sight of this historic sepulchre. All Burton saw was a curtain with inscriptions in gold, and decorations of precious stones, which he ventured to think "greatly resembled the glass stoppers of the humbler sort of decanters." He never, he says, saw any one who had seen more than this. If there is anything more to see, the new railway is likely to bring plenty of people to see it.

Grandmotherliness is being shown by the telephone authorities of Paris towards their young women in a cleverly practical way. It has been discovered, we read in the "Daily Express," that most of the telephone girls live alone, and consequently neglect their meals, as bachelor girls will. An independent young Englishwoman in such circumstances is apt to specialise too much upon pickles, tea and unhealthy cakes, and no doubt the Parisian girls do likewise. So the authorities have instituted a luncheon and dinner canteen for them, where roast beef and mutton and plenty of sweets can be obtained for a few pence. This is not philanthropy or chivalrous gallantry, but sheer business, since the work of telephone users, in the way of inefficient service and having their heads metaphorically bitten off at the other end of the wire, have been traced largely to the state of the girls' nerves, and this to their diet. A very pretty instance of the working of the logical French mind! Caramels, however, are to be barred, since these "tend to disorganise the service"; but nothing appears to be said about cigarettes.

Already plans are in preparation for a type of armoured cruiser that will be superior to the Invincibles. The first ship of the new type is to be commenced at Devonport soon after the Collingwood has been launched. Very little is known about the design of this cruiser beyond that she is to be an "improved" Invincible. The most interesting point that has leaked out in connection with her relates to speed. By incorporating in the design of her turbines the various improvements discovered since this kind of propelling machinery was first introduced into warships, it is hoped to give the new cruiser a speed of about thirty knots per hour. This seems a "tail

order"—but in view of the splendid performance of the Indomitable engineers do not regard it as an impossible achievement. We have yet to see the full development of the turbine, and it is quite probable that in very few years the battleship or cruiser that can make thirty knots per hour will not be reckoned a nautical wonder. High speed will be an important feature in the new battleship that is to be laid down at Portsmouth towards the end of the year. This vessel is to displace something like 20,000 tons, and in several other ways will be a marked advance upon the Dreadnought. She was to be started as soon as possible after the St. Vincent was launched in September.

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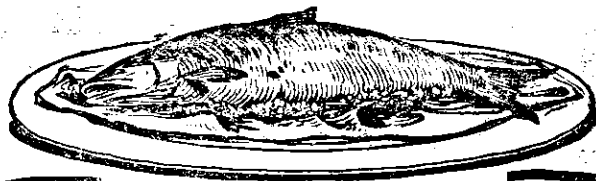
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