

Current Comment.

A Dunedin man paying a visit to Invercargill remarked that it must be very cold there in the winter, being so far north. "Well," replied a full-fledged Invercargillite, "I think it maun just be as cauld whaur ye cam' frae." "Why do you think that," questioned the Glasgow man. "Weel, because a gey lot o' ye have red noses."

The common, but neither safe nor sensible practice of throwing a sack over a chimney that has taken fire, was the cause of a ringing of the fire-bell and considerable excitement in Invercargill the other day. A chimney in a house in Don-street had taken fire, and in order to smother the flames a sack was thrown over the exit. The consequence was that the stifled smoke poured out through the joints of the brickwork, filled the wall spaces and showed alarmingly through the weatherboarding, some of which at the back of the chimney was hastily torn off. This caused a general impression that the house was on fire. When the brigade arrived the true cause of the trouble was noticed, and the sack being removed things resumed normal conditions. Moral: Stop the draught in a burning chimney at the fireplace.

Here is a capital "old time" yarn of sheep driving-days, as told by a writer signing himself "Omega". It was a cold night and we were all huddled round the camp fire, with our blankets drawn over our heads, yarning. It had been wet all day, but the rain had cleared off at sundown. There were six of us all told, including the cook, and we were travelling with sheep. We were a mixed lot, but taken all round I never worked with a better crowd, bar the cook. He was a bit of a fraud, with his patent stew, which he gave us six meals out of ten, but so long as he was not in liquor he was not too bad. When he got drunk, which he did pretty regularly, he was a fair knock out. He came from the North of Ireland, and although generally as peaceable and inoffensive as a child, when he imbibed freely nothing would serve his turn but blood. We were camped at the Quarries a few miles outside Bourke. It had been raining for days, and the whole country for miles around, bar the little bit of high land on which the tent was pitched, was six inches under water. After yarning feebly for some little time and smoking a pipe or two we all turned in—bar the man on watch and the cook, whom we had not seen since tea-time. We were just dropping off to sleep when suddenly we heard a fearful howl. Out we scrambled, and there was Mister Cook, stark naked save for his hat and boots, chasing poor old Bill—the chap on watch—with an axe and shouting like a madman. He was gaining at every stride, and the prospects of an early funeral looked particularly bright when old Bill, hearing our cries, twisted suddenly and came rushing towards the tent with the cook after him yelling like a fiend. Into the tent darted Bill blowing like a grampus and fairly done up, with the lunatic on his heels, and striking the pole as he fell brought the tent down on top of them both. By David, you should have seen the wriggle! Bill battled for his dear life and screamed like a woman, while the cook howled enough to wake the dead. Luckily for poor old Bill there was no room for any axe work, but by Jove when we got the tent off, which we did particularly smart, the cook had his teeth in the old fellow's throat and was tearing at it like a mad dog. It was the nearest kind of thing for Bill that you ever saw, for we had to hit the cook over the head with a tent stake and knock him senseless before he'd let up. We tended Bill's throat, which was hanging in flaps and bleeding a hurricane. After a long time we fixed it up until morning, and then ran him into Bourke in the cart. As for the cook, we just tied his hands and feet with greasible and dumped him down outside naked as he was to sleep it off. My colonial! If you'd have seen that cook in the morning after the mosquitoes had done with him, and with a lump on his head as big as an emu's egg, you'd have said that you never saw a sicker or sorer man in your life!

BOGUS BIDDING AT AUCTION.

On the subject of "trotting," or bogus bidding at auctions, the "Morning Post" of Timaru makes some very sensible remarks. It says: The system of "trotting" has now grown, by common practice, to be so much a part of the auction system that people are never certain whether a bid is genuine or not until the lot is knocked down and the buyer announced, and not then very often. This uncertainty unquestionably demoralises and retards genuine competition, sellers as well as buyers too frequently suffer injustice, and the true market value or demand for goods or stock sold cannot, in consequence, be accurately ascertained. Ostensibly, a sale by auction means that "the highest bidder shall be the purchaser," but this is not strictly so in probably the majority of cases, for "trotting" so discourages bidding of the genuine order, that many people refuse to bid, and lots have to be sacrificed because of the mistrust of the system. Public confidence is shattered because of the prevalence of "trotting," and a remedy is loudly called for. It is proposed to make "trotting" illegal by statute, and to impose legal restrictions upon auctioneers and bidders alike, in order to stop it; but the matter really rests with the auctioneers themselves, in a very large measure. If they were to set their faces collectively against the system it would almost disappear; but that is hopeless, for while some are anxious to stop it, others will not attempt improvement.

IS THIS TREASON?

A WORKING MAN (?) AGITATOR'S OPINIONS.

British nation! British Government! What do these people mean? Are there certain territorial areas owned by the whole people of the areas? Are there certain legislative bodies which control these areas in the interest of the whole peoples of the areas? If so, then it may be a question for debate as to how far the people of one area may go in wiping out another people whom they may regard as opposed to their ideal of life and progress.

But as an old-fashioned Internationalist, resting my logic upon the truth of the class war—worker versus capitalist, I have believed that there are no nations and no governments in the true sense of the word. What we have in all countries alike is the means of life monopolised by a class. What we have in all countries alike is a legislative club in which members of this class sit and make laws in the interest of their class. The peoples have no country; the peoples have no Government. What, then, do these men mean when they shout, "I'm an Englishman!" I stand by the Government! The first means to me that I happen to have been born in a certain spot of earth in this country. But I have not any of the country! I am simply a landless and tool-less creature to be exploited by the people who have nobbled these. If I had been born in France, in Germany, in America, there are the same people who have got the means of wealth, and I should simply have been a bit of food for their exploitation.

And yet we know that the bulk of the workers are in this position. And yet we know that the so-called Governments of the nations treat the millions of the people in this manner, and our so-called Socialist gentlemen would encourage them to shout, "My country! My Government! I'm an Englishman," and would waste their energies in petty race quarrels! Pie on them! Pie on them! I would rather be a dog and bay at the moon, than such Englishmen.

John Tamlyn in "Justice."

SOLDIERS OF THE NATION.

WAR BY DEMOCRACY.

The fact that this war is being waged under new conditions is slowly coming home to the British people. It is not only fought "under a microscope," every detail being subjected

to close and instant scrutiny in a way which, as Mr Asquith says, might have unnerved our Marlboroughs, Clives, and Wellingtons, but it is the first great war conducted by England as a democracy. The momentous struggle against Napoleon was carried on by an aristocracy, the Crimean war by a Government controlled by the middle class. This, observes the "Australasian," is the first time that the democracy in power has entered upon a struggle of real magnitude; for there can be no doubt that it is the masses of the nation who have given the word for war, and are resolute to see the contest through. Until their consent was obtained—until, as Ministers phrase it, the country was at their back—they dared take no decisive step. Hence the backwardness of our military preparations, which a bureaucracy like Germany would have quietly completed long before the dispute with Pretoria grew critical.

One of the most striking circumstances associated with this change is the solicitude which the democracy displays for the safety and welfare of its soldiers. This is a development which may be separated from the all-round amelioration that has taken place in the conditions of every sort of service during the century. Brutalising floggings in the army and navy, and the general treatment of the men as belonging to a lower species, are ugly features which have dropped out of memory, not because the democracy has the reins, but because the age has undergone a softening process. But it has been reserved for the governing masses to attach a new preciousness to the safety and comfort of those who take the field. So far from being neglected and underrated as of old, the soldier is nowadays far more likely to think privately that his exploits and perils are magnified by the millions who wait in quivering expectancy at home.

TO THE EMPIRE'S CALL!

ARE THE LAND-OWNERS RESPONDING LOYALLY?

You can stand upon the highest point of land round Waipukurau, Hawke's Bay, and get a view of thousands of acres of land that is contributing nothing towards the equipment of those willing to go to the front, and the reflection is forced upon our minds that its numerous owners are doing nothing towards the maintenance of their ancient titles. For the honour of our race, if not from a sense of the obligation handed down from the days of old, let those of our sheepfarmers who have not yet contributed, now come forward and find the means to put at least 100 robust yeomen under the Union Jack in South Africa. We have nothing to do with what other provinces are sending, urges "W.A.C." in the local journal, and for so rich a district 100 is not a great number when we consider that under the feudal system from one estate less in area than many in Hawke's Bay a much greater number would have been led forth by the owner of the land to battle for the Crown. The workers and small settlers will supply plenty of men if the moneyed men will divert sufficient from their usual accumulations to pay the piper.

ARMOUR-CLAD SOLDIERS.

Several newspapers in Great Britain have seriously taken up the question of supplying the troops of the British army with armour. Though they do not go to the length of suggesting that each man should have a thin sheet of Krupp armour to hang in front of him as he advances to the attack, they do not think it is wise to pass the thing over with a mere laugh, as many people, at first glance, are naturally inclined to do. One writer, who elaborates the idea in "Engineering," and who seems to be quite fascinated with it, avers that the armoured soldier is not so rare to-day as might be believed. The fairly large supply of coats of mail, he says, indicates a much greater demand than can be produced by capitalists and royalists in dread of assassination. He asserts positively that coats of mail were adopted in expeditions against enemies who used somewhat antiquated weapons, and he surmises that a good many have gone to South Africa, though he doubts their utility against modern bullets, except when the latter are fired from long distances.—Lyttelton "Times."

THE RIVAL CABLES.

We think that Mr Seddon is quite right in looking somewhat askance at the gifts which the Eastern and Australian Cable Company are offering us in the shape of an "all red" cable line via the Cape, says the "Press." We have not the least objection to such a line; on the contrary, we should welcome it. The point to be borne in mind, however, is that it may be purchased at too dear a price. The Eastern Company have at present a monopoly, and they are naturally very anxious to preserve it. It is to the interest of these colonies that the Pacific Cable should be constructed, if only for the purpose of breaking that monopoly. What we have to be careful about, therefore, is that the concessions we make in favour of the Cape Cable are not such as to render it unprofitable for the colonies to undertake the construction of the Pacific line, as they proposed to do.

WELLINGTON AND THE PLAGUE.

There are hundreds of houses in Wellington not connected with the sewerage system, and many old drains, and we are infested with rats. These invite the plague. If the plague were to spread the death-rate might rise as high, as long as it was with us, as it did in London in 1665 in our year. If it did the deaths would be about 7000, and if we consider the misery and the loss of trade that the plague would cause, the injury to Wellington would be incalculable. Property would fall in value, landlords would not get their rents, the shipping would have to be done from other centres, and the loss to the city alone would be more than a million. It would take many years before Wellington recovered. Parliament would have to meet in some other centre, and all who have means would flee from the city. And yet (writes "Alarm'd" to the "Post"), with all the possibilities of what this dire scourge might be, our municipal functionaries seem to be exceedingly quiescent. No proper or efficient effort has been made to compel sewerage connection, to shut up old drains, to kill the rats, and to insist on cleanliness, and I believe there are other cities in the colony just as bad as Wellington.

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