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MR J. ILOTT,

Managing Agent for North Island.

Topics of the Week.

DRAWING CLOSER.

The tide of Imperialism rises higher every day throughout the colony, and little places which were always regarded as away from even the minor channels of current public feeling are in a state of flood. Indeed, it seems not unlikely that before long we shall have become more fervid in our patriotism, more devoted in our loyalty, and more abandoned in our generosity than the folks in the Old Country. We have been taught to regard the true nerve centre of Imperialism as situated in Great Britain itself, but one is sometimes tempted to think that it has shifted to the colonies. We appear to be so active in our enthusiasm, so deeply moved. To borrow a homely simile, we know very well that it is the dog that wags the tail, and not the tail that wags the dog, though the restlessness of the caudal appendage might suggest that the vital force of the animal had its seat there; but really in the case of the colonies and the Mother Country, the law that holds good with the canine is by no means so well established. The forces of Imperialism are working just as strongly at the circumference as at the centre of the Empire. All around, on all sides, marked centripetal tendencies are drawing the colonies inwards. Now, the general tendency throughout nature is rather the reverse. The young birds and beasts leave the parent house and never return; the hive year after year sends off its swarms, which form communities quite ajart from the original one. To pass to the history of colonial development in the past, one finds similar tendencies at work. The American colonies wrenched themselves apart from the Motherland; and many predicted that sooner or later these colonies of to-day would follow America's example. But on the contrary, we find not a trace of the disintegrating spirit, but a stronger desire than ever to cleave to the old land. Out of the perfect independence in which we have been nurtured since our birth as colonies has come the true Imperial spirit. The germ of it was really planted when the Mother Country gave us the government of these lands into our own hands, reserving nothing, it may be said, but the right to protect us in time of danger. Events are daily proving how great has been the success of that experiment in colony making, and justifying the policy of non-interference.

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THE MOST POPULAR COLONIAL PASTIME.

What is really the most popular of our pastimes in this colony? At first sight the answer seems obvious, and the universal verdict would give the pride of place to either football or cricket. But, while these are unquestionably in one sense the national games, I doubt if they really are the most popular from the point of view of number of people playing them, and from the enthusiasm manifested in the games by players. Both cricket and football are, if one may so express it, spectacular games, and rely more for their popularity on the number of persons who gather to witness the games, than on the actual number of persons who enthusiastically engage in them. In the football season a large section of the community in these colonies centres its entire interest in life on football, but 90 per cent. of these enthusiasts have never played the game themselves, and are interested in football only as spectators, and, of course, critics. The same, to a slightly more modified extent, prevails in cricket, and I really think that if we were to decide what is the most popular pastime from the number actually interested in the same from a playing standpoint, we should have to give the palm to bowls! The oldest of all English pastimes, bowls, has taken a hold in the colonies which seems to increase every year, and so far as New Zealand is concerned we believe that in proportion to her inhabitants there are more greens and more players within her shores than in any other portion of Her Majesty's dominions. The ever-growing popularity of the ancient game in this colony is easy to understand. Our climatic conditions (especially in the North) are extremely favourable thereto, in the first place. The sub-tropical heat and relaxing effect of our summer months incline attention to a game which combines the most extreme exercise of skill and the maximum of excitement, with the minimum of violent physical exertion, such as has to be exercised in cricket, tennis, and in its season football. The only possible rival of bowls in the direction of mild exercise combined with skill is golf, and though we hear much of the "golf fever," etc., that game can never be mentioned in the same breath with bowls, so far as general popularity is concerned. Golf is essentially a game of the classes. In New Zealand we have no aristocracy, nor have we any "gentry" in the sense that word is used in county circles in England—no class, that is to say, which claims and is accorded a certain position from the circumstance of birth, quite apart from wealth or other worldly circumstances. Our only classes are the small ones we set up for ourselves, which depend on the various amounts of money owned by individuals. Golf, then, in New Zealand is the game of our moneyocracy, and of the moneyocracy alone. Bowls, on the other hand, is unfettered by any such restrictions, and it is no small part of its value to the commonwealth that its whole tendency is to utterly break down the vulgar distinctions and barriers of wealth, out of which we with such execrable taste are perpetually endeavouring to build up local class distinctions, in absurd imitation of those which exist from natural causes in the Old Country. This is no doubt another reason for its constantly increasing popularity. The game is, moreover, remarkable at the present time for the generosity it brings out in the matter of giving trophies for competition. I do not think there is any game or pastime which can compare in this matter, even in the most distant manner, with bowls. One is perpetually hearing of this and that well-known firm making some splendid presentation for competition by one or other of the clubs in the colony. Obviously, then, bowls makes men generous and open-handed. The game has by no means always been regarded with such favour as it is at present. It was at one time regarded as a godless and wicked form of amusement, and bowling greens and bowling alleys were held up to execration as places of vice and debauchery. No doubt some of them were no better than they should be, but the real reason for the suppression of the greens in the reign of Henry III., was that the King feared that so much time was being devoted to the fascinations of bowls that the young men would neglect the practice of archery, in which our army had always excelled, and which was of the most paramount importance. Edward III. and Henry VII. confirmed laws against bowling in public places. Anyone worth over £100 a year could be granted a license to play privately in their own grounds, but public alleys were supposed to be sternly suppressed. No doubt the law was constantly evaded, and, indeed, pretty generally disregarded, but in the reign of George II. offenders were committed to prison, and bowling alleys were once and for all stamped out. A species of nine-pins reigned in its stead for a short time, but soon died down. As soon as the game was outlawed for the common people it became highly fashionable in what Mr Toole would call the "hupper suecles"; indeed towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth no gentleman's grounds were considered complete without a green. But as a club or popular game bowls did not revive till well on into the present century, though there was a bowling club established in Glasgow, and called the Willowbank Club, at the very commencement of the present century. It is, however, only in the last decade that bowling has gained the enormous hold it now has on the affections of the public, a hold which, judging from the Century Tournament now drawing to its close, is destined to increase as enormously in the future as it has in the past.

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THE VERY LATEST PROHIBITION PLATFORM.

It is frequently asserted that the proudest boast of a Britisher is that he never knows when he is beaten. In common fairness to that hard-fighting body, the Prohibition League, it must be admitted that the fanatics of the temperance movement are imbued with this characteristic to a truly remarkable extent. Not only are they satisfied with the terrific thrashing bestowed on them at the recent licensing and general elections, but they have actually convinced themselves that the aforesaid thrashings—which were of the completest description—were in reality glorious victories, and on the strength of these they are now setting up a platform, which excels all previous efforts in the direction of absolutism and thorough going tyranny. They now propose the unconditional amendment of the Constitution of New Zealand, on the basis:—"That no person shall, within the colony of New Zealand, manufacture for sale, or for gift, any intoxicating liquor, or import any of the same for the sale or gift, or to keep, or sell, or offer the same for sale or gift, barter, or trade, as a beverage. The House of Representatives shall by law prescribe regulations for the enforcement of the provisions of this article, and shall thereby provide suitable penalties for the violation thereof."

So far as the manufacture of beer, wine or spirits in the colony is concerned, the first clause is clear enough. It must cease absolutely. The breweries must be closed, the hop fields destroyed, the vineyards allowed to relapse into a state of wilderness, and the cider orchards be left unreservedly to the attentions of the codlin moth. It is when we come to the matter of importing, that matters pick up a certain interest. This clause is by no means so clear as the former, but as I read it, I take it that if this arrangement becomes the law of the land, I may not import any inspiriting and intoxicating liquor to sell, give, barter, or exchange, but that I may do so for my own personal consumption if I do so choose.

If this is so—and this is the way the clause will read to most persons, New Zealand will become a country with singularly quaint customs. Those of us who like what Mr Swiveller termed a "modest quencher," will be restricted by law to a perpetual "lone hand" or as it is known in the rich vocabulary of colonial slang—"a slinter." Should you come to spend the evening with me, I should have to outrage my hospitable intentions and mix my toddy before your very eyes without offering you anything stronger than say a decoction of the lemon peel which I had cut up for the flavouring of my own special brew. At a dinner party the host would be the only person able to drink a glass of claret, and had I bidden you to an oyster supper, I should be in the unhappy position of having to finish the stout myself. Of course this would soon breed a change of habits. People who liked a moderate amount of alcoholic refreshment, would most assuredly not be bluffed out of it by the prohibition tyrants, so the custom would rapidly be established of each guest bringing his or her own "refreshment." No doubt, the prohibitionists will insist on some means of ensuring that the individual receptacles for liquor belong to the persons drinking therefrom, and we shall see the vast demijohn of Mr Hardcase with his name emblazoned thereon, while Miss Oldmaid's modest little, containing "just the smallest taste," will also have to have set forth therein her full name and address. The case of husband and wife will too be peculiar, for they will both have to import their individual supplies, and if Mrs Jones takes nothing but claret (or gin) and contracts a violent cold, her affectionate husband will be a criminal and a breaker of the law if he allows her to make a comfortable hot and curative toddy out of his whisky. To be serious, however, I have treated this subject in a comic strain because it is impossible to treat so preposterous a platform seriously. The "reductio ad absurdum" is the only method one can employ in such a case. But if one admits for a moment that such a platform could be carried and the constitution altered so that alcohol was absolutely unprocurable save as a drug in New Zealand, cannot the prohibitionists see the danger that we should run of an increase in the morphia, the cocaine, the hadesh, and other drug habits? There are men and women who require some stimulant or sedative, and alcohol in different cases supplies either of these. If these be forcibly withheld be sure nature will insist, and the innate cussedness of human nature will provide a different and perhaps a substitute which will perhaps be worse than the original evil.