

Current Comment.

YOUTH VERSUS AGE.

Writing recently in the "National Review," an Englishman maintains that we are relying too much upon old men, and points out that "the generals who made their names on the side of the North during the Civil War were all young men. Grant was forty when he commanded at Shiloh; Sheridan was thirty-three when he received command of the cavalry of the army of the Potomac; Sherman, one of the very best, if not the best man that the war produced on either side, was only forty-four when he started forth upon his immortal Atlanta campaign. On his side of the South, too, the generals were young by modern standards. 'Joe' Johnston was only 52 at the outbreak of the war; Lee was fifty-four; 'Jeb' Stuart was twenty-eight; 'Stonewall' Jackson thirty-seven. If we turn to our own field army to-day, we shall find that not one of the officers in high command in South Africa is under forty." These are the ages:—

Age.	Age.
Gen. Buller 61	Gen. Warren 80
Gen. Gattorneo 57	Gen. White 85
Gen. La. Meyer 55	Gen. Buller 61
Gen. Clery 62	Lord Roberts 59
Gen. French 48	Lord Kitchener 64
Gen. Kelly-Kenny 60	

And now let us turn to the men who control the fortunes of the Empire to-day. Their names and their ages are as follows:—

Age.	Age.
*Lord Salisbury... 70	*Duke Devonshire 67
Mr Chamberlain 64	*Ld. Lansdowne... 63
*Mr A. Balfour... 62	*Lord Wolsey..... 67
*Mr Goschen..... 60	*Lord W. Kerr... 60
*Sir M. Hicks-Beach..... 63	

*Members of the Defence Committee.

There is no one under fifty in this "inner circle." The two youngest men in the number are, rightly or wrongly, especially identified with the want of foresight and preparation which has brought the Empire to its present pass. Mr Balfour's speeches show him to have been blind and indifferent to the danger; the plight of our army in South Africa, the half measures, the manifest hesitation, and the tardiness of the despatch of reinforcements, equally condemn Lord Lansdowne.

"Daily News."

THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON CRIME.

For many years the best efforts of social reformers have been directed to the consideration of means of diminishing crime. Various theories have been advanced, and different schemes put into execution with this end in view. The routine of prison discipline has been materially altered and the experiment tried of a more humane and considerate line of treatment. All these attempts made so far have proved more or less unsatisfactory, and the problem is regarded as one of those that baffle the shrewdest thinkers. Solutions, however, of such questions, or at least practical solutions, often turn up in the simplest and most unexpected ways. From London we learn that there has been a marked decrease in the number of prisoners at the winter assizes, and in explanation the suggestion is put forward that in consequence of so many men having gone to the war in South Africa employment has been more plentiful, with the result that one of the chief incentives to crime—want of work—has been removed. If this theory can be accepted to account for the satisfactory decrease in crime we must perforce come to the conclusion that in many instances offenders are in a sense more sinned against than sinning—that they have taken up arms against society because society could not provide them with means of earning an honest livelihood. The war in South Africa has been responsible for many important discoveries in various directions; but this of the true relation between crime and work deserves to rank as one of the most striking. In spite of the pleasure which this ingenious theory affords, many will remain sceptical about its soundness and prefer to think that other and more obscure causes are at work to bring about the result which has been observed. Should later investigations, however, support it, then legislators

will have before them the means of effecting a great amelioration of society. All they have to do is to provide work and plenty of it.

SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTE TO RELIEF FUNDS?

It is not surprising (hints the "Otago Daily Times") that many thoughtful people have experienced some difficulty in arriving at a decision on the question whether it is right or desirable that public money should be contributed to the Ottawa Relief Fund—followed now by the further proposal to make a public grant to the Indian Famine Relief Fund. On first thought, at all events, the idea appears to be of a very questionable soundness. The essential value of charity and generosity lies in their spontaneous, voluntary character—in the definite, conscious volition of the giver—and there is precious little conscious volition about a Parliamentary grant. Moreover, apart from this aspect of the question, is Government or Parliament morally justified in using public money for these purposes of outside charity? We are bound to say that, so far as regards the general principle, we think that this question must be answered in the negative; and though we are not inclined seriously to criticise or deprecate the present proposals regarding Ottawa and India, we only refrain from so doing in consideration of the exceptional circumstances of the moment and in the confident hope that the Government's action will not be recognised as a guiding precedent in the future.

THE DECAY OF GOOD MANNERS.

The want of manner, or rather insistence of manner of the rough-and-ready type in our ordinary detailed every-day life is becoming a distinct bugbear. I do not mean to say (writes a lady signing herself "Mater") that society—men and women of means and culture—forgets itself, and what is expected of its position and dignity at home, but abroad it often degenerates into a rough bully, unwittingly, perhaps, but none the less certainly, simply in its craze for living at high pressure. There are men and, alas! women also, who have reminded me often of express locomotives in full steam, and rushing through life, whether on business or pleasure bent, at the highest possible speed. One dreads to imagine what ordinary men and women will be like in twenty years' time. The "independent" woman, the "new woman" (who invented this terrible title?), is certainly making life a trifle hard for her gentler sisters. Let there be independence, an you will, but without roughness; and gentleness will surely not deteriorate ability for making a way in the world. For my part, I think the remedy of the evil of bad manners is in the hands of our young women. Let them not choke the womanly smile in the masculine tie ordained by Dame Fashion. The tie is chic, and all the more chic, combined with a feminine manner and expression, and safely may a charming woman wear what she will and do whatever work her means and position entail on her, and still remain charming.

KRUGER'S PEACE PROPOSALS.

Possibly President Kruger is proceeding on the principle of the litigant who fixes his, or her, damages at a preposterous figure, in the hope of getting something. The bargaining instinct is inveterate in the Boer. The dealer who confidently asks £50 for his horse and is glad to take a ten pound note has always been the President's model in matters of diplomacy. He may reason with himself thus: "If I ask for the abrogation of the London Convention, and offer to negotiate on the basis of the status quo ante bellum, I may at least be permitted to retain some partial independence, and at the same time secure credit for showing a spirit of magnanimity and compromise." If that is Mr Kruger's idea, we fear (says the Cape "Argus") that he has failed to grasp the altered conditions

to realise the sacrifices England and her Empire have made. He has now to face the inexorable logic of events. The sword cannot be sheathed again when its use becomes inconvenient. President Kruger, at the beginning of the war, boasted to a New York yellow journal that he would stagger humanity. He has certainly dealt us some hard knocks. Many a gallant fellow has fallen, and the blood of the sons of the Old Country and of the "native born" stains the South African veldt. England did not enter into this war lightly, or even willingly. It was forced on her, and it is going to be a "fight to a finish." When the fight is over we hope in time to be friends again, but any monstrous artificial peace on the lines suggested by some enthusiasts or fanatics would mean unending trouble for Africa, and an ultimate renewal of the strife. Unconditional surrender is the only message England can accept from the Republics, and for this the Republics have only themselves to thank.

HOW TO ESTIMATE CASUALTIES.

Colonel F. N. Maude, writing in the "Contemporary Review" for March on "Military Training and Modern Weapons," sets himself to correct some of the fallacies current on the subject of the war. The belief that the breech-loading rifle and smokeless powder are the factors which have revolutionised modern war is, he says, a gross error. The real basis of judgment as to the severity of losses, Colonel Maude points out, is the time in which they were suffered, and not the total amount, and he gives the following table of percentage losses per hour in battles between European combatants:—

Names of Battles.	Duration in hours.	Percentage of Loss per Hour.
Chloris	1	4.3
Jouppes	1	0.8
Austrins	1	0.5
Austrins	1	0.3
Austrins	1	0.2
Alles	2	0.2
Kougaritz	11	0.3
Worm	2	1.5
Crovetotte	8	1.1
Sodau	12	0.5
Plevna	12	0.5
1st Battle	4	4.5
2nd Battle	10	1.0
3rd Battle	6	2.2
Moeder River	30	2
Magersfontein	10	7
Coleseo	6	1
Turks	4.5	7
Russians	9.2	2
Russians	2	2
Russians	2	2
Boers, unknown	7	7
Boers, unknown	1	1
Boers, unknown	1	1

"DRINKS."

In all classes of society, from the highest to the lowest, there is a pitfall open for young men to fall into, and it is dug by generosity and good nature, and is betrayed by the words, "Come and have a drink." A drink, at all times of the day and night, is an Englishman's idea of hospitality, whether it be aniced whisky-and-soda at the club, or a glass of ale at the hotel.

Occasionally young men feel bound to accept these invitations. It places them in a cheerful, disagreeable light to have to refuse, and yet to accept too often means—if nothing worse—a ruined constitution and a diseased liver—not a very pleasant outfit to start life with.

The great thing to be considered, then, is to be able to refuse, and to refuse gracefully, without giving offence; and the best way to avoid offence is to give a very decided and downright answer. For instance, if a friend asks you into his club for a brandy-and-soda, and you hum-and-ha, and mutter something about being busy, and not having the time, your friend may not unjustly jump at the conclusion that you wish to avoid his company, and a feeling of offence and consequent estrangement will be the result; whereas if you say good-naturedly:

"Delighted to come with you and see you drink, but my head won't stand spirits at midday"; or, "I never drink between meals; it makes me so awfully seedy," or something of that kind—your friend grasps the situation immediately, and there is no feeling of annoyance about it.

Everyone knows young and smart men, and always on evidence, who are either complete water-drinkers or very nearly so, and yet are considered among other young men of their age "first-rate fellows," and "real good sorts"; whereas many a man who drinks a great deal more than is good for him in the course of the day, and accepts and gives endless invitations to have a drink, is but very little esteemed, even by those who the most frequently accept his hospitality.

Fortunately for us times are changed, and to be a hard drinker is no longer considered to be one of the marks of being a well-bred man or a "good fellow"; whereas to have the courage of your opinions helps to gain a man a reputation for being "a good, straight sort of fellow."

DIVORCE LAWS.

The plaintiff in a recent divorce case said he was told £150 was needed to secure a divorce. "That is one of the many lies told about lawyers," a barrister waived. Admitting that £40 is the price of a divorce, it may still be said to be the luxury of the classes. It is surely a barbarous system that allows all sorts of people to rush into marriage and then erects barriers to keep in those poor wretches who find that they have committed a serious error of judgment. What good does it do to keep two hopelessly ill-assorted people tied like Kilkenny cats across a line all their lives, when either party might chance to make a happy partner for some one else of more congenial temperament? Instead of the State, which tied them up for half a crown, sensibly untying them for the same amount on proved incompatibility of temperament, it demands that the man shall maltreat the woman, or become a drunkard, or neglect her for several years; or that the woman shall be unfaithful to the man, and besides these it demands some £10 in hard cash to break the half-a-crown contract, and most of this £10 it hands over to a meddling middleman parasite called a lawyer! No wonder men shrink from marriage where the penalty for making a mistake in their selection of partners is so relentless and irrational. Statistics go to prove that in countries where divorce laws are reasonably easy the marriage rate of that country rises, before wasting money on immigration a sensible Government would first exhaust all the possibilities of breeding its own population.

Since it seems probable that fleas are the principal agents which convey the plague microbe from rats to human beings, I am surprised that some means have not been adopted for ridding us of these small nuisances. I am not up in the natural history of fleas, but have noticed that some places, notably the sandy ground along our sea coast, are more infested with them than others, and I have also noticed that they appear to have a predilection for certain individuals. Of this I have no doubt, as I am unfortunately one of them, I was lately engaged superintending the erection of a building on the sandy soil above referred to, and was driven nearly crazy with fleas. Knowing the aversion that bees and many insects have for the oil of wintergreen (the Oleum gaultheriae of the Pharmacopoeia), I determined to try the effect upon my small persecutors, and a few drops on my stockings had the desired result. As prevention in this manner is far more likely to meet with success than attempts to destroy rats and bacterial infected matter, your readers are welcome to the hint, but I would suggest mixing a little fatty matter with the oil to retard evaporation.

It would doubtless also be found useful in warding off mosquitoes, which are now known to be the agents in spreading malarial fevers. I am, etc.,

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CHAMBERLAIN AND AUSTRALIA.

The present position of the Commonwealth Bill clearly shows that Australians have their own little fight for Home Rule ahead of them. Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies and an Imperial Jingo of Jinges, is the Cheap Jack who plucked England into a South African war to please Rhodes, the capitalistic buccaneer. It seems to delight in dictatorially interfering with a people's right to self-government. He betrayed Gladstone when