

# Current Comment.

## Australasian Warships for China.

It is only three or four years ago, says the Lyttelton "Times," that Admiral Pearson aroused the indignation of the Sydney and Melbourne press by declaring that in case of necessity he would not hesitate to take the whole squadron to any part of the world without waiting for the consent of the colonial authorities. He subsequently explained that he only intended to emphasise the fact that the safety of the Empire meant the safety of the colonies, but the Australians refused to be mollified, and for two or three weeks their newspapers were deluged with angry letters protesting against the payment of £135,000 a year for the maintenance of a fleet which might be taken off without a moment's notice to back up Great Britain in some quarrel in which the colonies had not the slightest interest. Since then the colonies have realised that the Mother Country can have no quarrel in which they are not closely interested. Mr. Chamberlain has shown a little more tact than was displayed by Admiral Pearson—his assurance that the assent of the Australasian colonies will be gratefully appreciated by Her Majesty's Government flatters their sense of possession—but if he had framed his request in much less courteous language it would have been cheerfully granted. As it is, the colonies have not only released the war vessels that are required for immediate service in China, but have also offered to provide troops and to send vessels of their own.

## The Sword of Honour Craze.

Speaking of the craze for testimonialing our successful generals, the Wairarapa "Star," in a leader whose sound common sense cannot be too highly praised, observes with much truth: "Have those zealous patriots who are leaders in this direction taken any pains to ascertain in what way men like Lord Roberts and Lieut.-General Baden-Powell would regard a movement which some years ago produced derision. Besides, in another sense they may feel very strongly upon his point. They know full well that their best efforts and most skillful plans would have failed unless they had been so ably assisted by those under their command, especially by the bravery and endurance of rank and file of the army. As it is impossible for all to receive swords or any other form of testimonial, it might be more judicious, where they deserve so much praise, for localities not to make selections, which annoy those thus honoured, because it might be a slight to others at least in some degree deserving of recognition. Lieut.-General Baden-Powell has a most distinguished career before him in the British Army, for when peace is concluded his valuable services will be required to teach the army those lessons in modern warfare so essential at the present day. Furthermore, if external badges are needed to give full expression to national sentiment, there are titles and orders which can be conferred upon him marking the collective feeling of the Empire more effectively than the disjointed efforts of certain individuals to distinguish themselves by extra displays of loyalty."

## The Preference Clause.

The "preference clause" generally causes a good deal of discussion when an industrial dispute gets into the Arbitration Court, and one day last week the President (Mr. Justice Martin) spoke somewhat strongly on the point in Dunedin. He said: "When a union man spends money and takes the risk of getting into hot water with his employer to get his case before the Court and improve his conditions of working it is unfair for another man, who stands by and neither spends his money nor allies himself with them to share equally with the increases that are made. If the Union loses the case this man goes to his employer and says: 'Well, recollect I had nothing to do with the Union.' And to get over this we give preference to Unionists. A Unionist must be equally competent, and be ready to undertake the work." After His Honor had fully explained the fairness of this provision it seemed to lose a

great deal of its repugnance to the employers present. His Honor then commented somewhat pointedly on the fact that the Court had been sitting in the different provincial districts and explaining the awards until they were tired. The newspapers freely printed and circulated them, yet employers would not take the trouble to read them. They would read a "local" stating that preference had been given to Unionists, but they never troubled to find out how this concession was qualified or hedged round with provisions for the protection of both parties.

## Literature as a Profession.

Every now and then I receive pathetic letters from correspondents who have "dedicated themselves to literature," with as much earnestness as Hannah dedicated Samuel to the Lord. They know their work is worth editorial consideration; they see thousands of printed pages not half as good; they come across thousands more that are beneath criticism; and yet they cannot get a line accepted, or if one of them does succeed in obtaining an appearance the "honorarium" (they are all too proud to use a less commercial term) is less than a bootblack might earn in a day at a street corner. One of them, "with a University education" is amazed that "considering the vast increase of publications the demand for cultured work seems to grow less instead of increasing," and another says, "In manuscript my poems have been praised by men of the highest distinction, poets themselves; but quite a dozen of my lyrics, sonnets and society verse have grown ragged with being sent from editor to editor, often coming back, I am convinced, unread. An editorial friend tells me I am lucky to get them back at all. Genius will 'get there' sooner or later—often later, alas! But talent may take it from me that unless you have a bread-and-cheese income outside what you make by literature, or unless you have regular employment and you can make your pen a crutch, it is madness to 'take to literature as a profession.' As for sending your MSS. to editors, the truth is, however tender and sympathetically an editor may feel towards the struggling and worthy unpublished, the time arrives when he grows callous, and his pages being fully occupied, he loses patience, and returns essays, stories, poems, articles and what not en masse. Now and then at long intervals he may be in the mood of discovery—but it is very rare that he is well rewarded for his investigations. No, my dear friends, don't send your MSS. on the chance of acceptance; write to the editor, tell him what you propose to offer him; send him a stamp for reply; if the notion appeals to him he will give you permission to submit the matter, and then you may have a chance of acceptance. Anyhow, the Jordan of literature, like that of the negro ballad, 'is a hard road to trouble, I leave.'—Joseph Hatton, in "The Chronicle."

## Some British Commercial Characteristics.

"It is an unquestionable fact," says "Pelliden's Magazine" in an article in the current issue, "that there is a kind of trade aristocracy among us based on much the same principle and guided by many of the influences associated with family aristocracy itself. And if we are to assume that aristocracy, so-called, is based chiefly on position and hereditary, there can be no difficulty in according a qualified form of this distinction to notable and other mercantile houses which look back for the period of their establishment to the time of by-gone generations." We are however concerned with the fact that "with many of the old-established houses it is a point of honour to maintain in their integrity all the ancient traditions of the establishment. The old customs, the old methods of business are slavishly adhered to, however discordant with economical conditions that have so entirely changed since they were introduced. They do not appear to appreciate the truth, that business methods which might be entirely appropriate fifty years ago are now utterly at variance with the spirit

of modern days." "It is natural, however deplorable," pursues our contemporary, "that the haughty spirit—at some times approaching arrogance—that distinguished the British merchant of the past age should have been handed down to and been preserved in a measure by his successors. Year after year, and from all quarters of the world, British Consuls voice the universal complaint. He will not deign to consult the consumer. 'There,' he says in effect, 'are my goods, with the accumulated prestige of seventy years behind them. You are the first person who has dared to criticise them. Either take them or go elsewhere.' The consumer, as a matter of fact goes elsewhere; and it is a circumstance which many of our firms, somewhat to their dismay, are beginning to find out. They are also becoming aware that trade is much easier to lose than to recover—that even to recover a lost market the most desperate exertions may be made in vain."

## The Trading Stamp Bubble.

Stripped of alluring prospect of getting something for nothing the process resolves itself into the fact that the Trading Company has contrived a system by which it divides with the trader the discount allowed on cash transactions, in return for which the company gives to the purchaser who has received a given number of stamps something that cannot be the equivalent of the discount surrendered by the tradesman to the company. It cannot be that an equivalent is given by the "company," else its business would be run at a loss. The traders who embarked upon this enterprise were induced to believe that they would have an extraordinary advantage over their competitors, but those who gave their customers trading stamps did not realise that the company was taking in cash from the trader part of the discount usually allowed to a cash purchaser. The company amply took toll of the trader, and gave something of less value to his cash customer, the difference being the profit of the company. It now appears that our local vendors of trading stamps have discovered that there is nothing in it, excepting to the company, and that last night in the House the Premier announced, in answer to a question, that legislation would be passed to suppress the system. Mr Seddon called it a "form of gambling," which is hardly true, though so far as the company is concerned it may fairly be described as a game of "heads I win, tails you lose." The company should be effaced.—Wellington "Post."

## Losses in Great Battles.

There is a very general notion that the losses suffered by the British Army during the South African campaign have been exceptional. But the following figures show that comparatively the losses have not been at all remarkable:—  
At the battle of Austerlitz, December 2, 1805, the French lost 7000 officers and men, and the killed and wounded of the allies numbered more than 3000. The French losses at Bautzen in 1813 were 13,000, and at Wagram in 1809 they lost 18,000, although in that battle they took 20,000 Austrian prisoners. At the Moscow, on the retreat from Moscow, they lost 30,000. At the great battle of Leipzig, in 1813, a three days' battle, the French losses were 65,000. More than 40,000 of the French perished on the field, altogether 80,000 men perishing on the field.  
At Waterloo the British lost 6932, the French 28,850. The total losses of the allied armies there were 4266 killed and 14,539 wounded besides 4251 missing. In the last great attack on Sebastopol, September 8, 1855, the French lost 1646 killed and 4500 wounded, besides 1400 missing, and the English lost 385 killed, 1885 wounded, and 176 missing. At Plevna between 18,000 and 20,000 Russians were killed and wounded; the Turkish loss was about 5000 less than the Russian. About 16,000 men were killed on both sides. In the war between Germany and Austria in 1866 the Prussians lost 9172 and the Austrians 44,311 at Koniggratz; at Nachod the Prussians 1332 and the Austrians 4787; and at Skalitz the Prussians 1365 and the Austrians 5577.  
In the Franco-Prussian war the Germans at Weissenburg Worth lost 12,914 and the French 5000 killed and wounded, besides which the French lost 55,000 prisoners. At

Vionville-Mars la Tour the Germans lost 15,790, or 22 per cent. of their army; the French loss was equally great. The Germans at Colombey-Neuilly lost 4907, and at Spickern 4871. At Gravelot-St. Privat the German loss, according to a German authority, was 20,173. Another authority puts it at 25,000 and the French loss at 19,000. At Sedan the German loss 8931. The French Army of the North consisted of 150,000 men, and the three armies of Germany of 250,000 men in three days' battle, in which 25,000 French were taken prisoners.  
In the American Civil War the aggregate losses at the battle of Stone's River were 13,249 on the Union side and 10,266 on the Confederate side. These figures include killed, wounded, captured, and missing. The Union killed were 1730 and the Confederate 1294. At Antietam the Union killed numbered 2108 and the wounded 9549. At the first Bull Run battle 470 Union men were killed and 1071 wounded; the Confederate figures were 387 killed and 1582 wounded. At Fredericksburg 1284 Union men were killed and 596 Confederate, the wounded numbering 9600 on the Union side and 4068 on the Confederate. The total losses at this battle were 12,663 for the North and 5315 for the South.

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