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Mr Seddon's Interpreter.

When Mr Seddon recently went on his trip to the South Sea Islands, one of the party was a gentleman understood to be an authority in matters Polynesian. It was anticipated that he would greatly aid in the interchange of ideas between the Premier and the natives. But, as the story goes, the interpreter found that his knowledge of Maori stood him in little stead in conversing with the islanders, and as the party went "from island unto island at the gateways of the day" the reputation of the interpreter waned very perceptibly. At last it had waned so much that some giddy-minded individual made bold to play a practical joke on it. So with the assistance of other equally vivid imaginations he concocted a letter that certainly read very much like some Polynesian dialect but was really a concatenation of meaningless words. When the Tutuakai reached its next port in a group the language of which the interpreter felt sure he knew something about he was burning to make up for his past linguistic failures. He would show the party how he could rattle the lingo. But his joy was shortlived. Scarcely had communication been established with the shore before a note addressed to the Premier, and purporting to come from one of the chiefs made its appearance. Then King Richard summoned his interpreter and said unto him "Read." Confident and smiling the interpreter took the missive prepared to interpret ad aperturnam libri. Yet a quarter of an hour later he had not read but was perspiring over those strange and yet familiar characters. The letter still remains among the uninterpreted things of this world. It is certainly no sinecure to be amateur interpreter to a party in strange lands. Be as modest as you please as to your linguistic accomplishment once you weekly undertake to speak for "the party" you are sure to be vilely misjudged. If you on any occasion have been in that unenviable position you will quite understand what I mean. Probably it is with some pride you accept the role; you feel a superiority to the others and a sense that you are doing them a service and earning their gratitude. As a fact they are invariably jealous of you from the start and ready to doubt and minimize your ability. If you do not succeed in making some blockhead of a native understand you at once or fail to catch his meaning, the party smiles compassionately on your attempt. A second failure invariably provokes signs of irritable impatience; and on the third occasion you hear some allusion to "poor Smith's French" or German or Spanish as the case may be. Later your knowledge of the language becomes a standing joke. Of course you might turn on your friends and tell them to take up your thankless billet. In such a case they may be relied on to answer, "Oh, but we never pretended we knew the language," or "If we did undertake to speak it we would see that we were understood." So I take with a considerable grain of salt that story of Mr Seddon's interpreter.

The Differential Honorarium.

Mr Lawry's joenlar suggestion of a Bill to readjust the honorariums of members so that the Wellington representatives got less than their fellow legislators may easily seem to many not at all so unreasonable as the House apparently regarded it to be. Mr Lawry contended that Wellington members, having their residences and businesses in that city, had less expense and more opportunity to attend to their private affairs than representatives who came from another part of the colony. One would naturally infer that they had, and that their political duties did not interfere with their usual work or profession in the wholesale way it must do in the case of the member, for instance, who resides in Auckland. The latter has to leave his affairs in the hands of subordinates, or so to speak, shut up shop altogether; and there may be

instances where the monetary value of the honorarium does not recompense him for the sacrifice the second course entails. I could forgive a member fretting under a sense that his own business was being mis-managed, or was slipping away from him while he discussed the business of the country in Wellington; and it is just when in that frame of mind that Mr Lawry's suggestion would commend itself to his jealous spirit. But, as I have said before in these notes, if it is indeed the case that the local members and members living near Wellington have a little more time to devote to their own particular affairs they can only make use of it under conditions anything but pleasant. The eyes of his whole constituency are upon the Wellington member. His goings in and his goings out are marked; and what is still more disagreeable, his goings on too. The Auckland member, or the Christchurch member, or the Dunedin member, is free from that inquisitorial inspection to which the Wellington representative is subject. He can go out of the Chamber to Bellamy's, he can entertain his friends in the tea-room, he can leave the House and enjoy himself at the theatre, and his constituents will neither know of his ways nor trouble about them. But the Wellington members have to play the role of legislator morning, noon and night. They are, of course, the most freely criticised men in the House. There in the galleries sit their judges, before whom they have continually to be striving to commend themselves. Horny-handed labour comes of an evening and looks down into the arena where the members fight and his eyes seek out his own man. "There's my representative," says Horny-handed labour, "the man that speaks in that there arena for me. Now, what has he got to say for himself?" Should the gentleman not happen to be in his place that evening or be late in reaching it Horny-handed wants to know the reason why; also, if Horny-handed is not sleepy himself that night he wants to know why his member is sleeping on his bench or elects to go home before the House rises. Altogether, from that cause alone, not to speak of the folks who want to see him personally and remind him of his election pledges, his duty as a member, and so forth, the Wellington member's position is no sinecure. Regarded seriously, the proposal to dock his salary would be most unjust; he works as hard for it as any member in the House.

A Bit of Old China.

A curious old volume, bearing date 1697, has come into my hands. It is the relation of the French Jesuit missionary, Le Compte, of a visit to China, which he made in 1693. Le Compte appears to have been received well by the Chinese, and according to his account, he made many converts to Christianity. There is no indication in his account of that violent hostility to the new doctrine which to-day has culminated in horrible massacres of native Christians and others. But as it was only forty years after his date that the Jesuits were expelled from China, it is plain that the antipathy to Christianity, if not indeed latent when he worked among the natives, was not long in developing. The Jesuit missionaries of that day appear to have been handicapped in their work through a dearth of miracles. "Miracles are not so common in China as the state of that empire would seem to require," says Le Compte, regretfully. When he and his fellow missionaries related to the Emperor "the marvels God had been pleased to work in other countries," the Son of Heaven very naturally replied that he would like to see an example of these wonders. "What have we done to God?" asked His Majesty, "that He renders our conversion so difficult? You come from the utmost ends of the earth to preach up a new law to us, contrary to nature, elevated above reason: is it just that we should take your word for it? Do some miracles that may warrant the truth of your religion, and I'll pass my word for the sincerity of our faith." No miracle being forthcoming, the Emperor would

have none of the new doctrine. If miracles were wanting in Pekin, "the business was otherwise in the Provinces," says Le Compte, "where several were wrought." He relates some of these. One is of "an idolater devout in his way," who at full moon burned gilded and silvered papers in honour of his gods. One day when he was doing this in front of his gate, a storm arose and forced him to complete the operation in the house. He had hardly got his little fire agoing when the wind blew open his front door and scattered the burning papers, so that his residence was soon ablaze. In the next house, which was threatened by the flames, lived a Christian, whose brother, falling on his knees, implored the Almighty to stay the conflagration, and threw a small relic from his chapel into the fire. "All of a sudden," says Le Compte, "Heaven declared itself in the most miraculous manner: the wind blowing violently forthwith, slackened, and a contrary wind stronger than that arising at the same time, drove the violent streams of the flames to the opposite side, upon the house of a wicked, false-hearted Christian, that had lately abjured. It was consumed in a moment, becoming an example of Divine vengeance, as the house that heaven preserved was an evident token of His protection."

What Do They Think?

I wonder if my iterant green-grocer, Chow Ting—that is his proper name, I have discovered, though we all call him John—knows anything about the war in China or takes any interest in it. Does the culture of cabbages and other greens in season engage his mind as closely as it does his assiduous hands, or do he and his compatriots, in those evil-smelling cabins of theirs, intelligently discuss the situation. When I meet him of a morning bent on supplying the vegetarian wants of the community, his face betrays no knowledge of what is going on in his native country. I have the thought of preaching him a lesson on the brutal character of his nation—the only way I have of taking vengeance for the recent Pekin horror—but I am afraid my acquaintance with pidgin-English would barely suffice to convey a proper idea of my indignation. Even my slightest attempt to get from him a little light on the Boxer movement has met with no success. To judge by his replies he is no student of contemporary history, here or elsewhere, and his mind is centred in his garden and his work. But is it ignorance or secrecy that that inscrutable countenance of his indicates? Even our physiognomists are often at fault in their readings of the Caucasian countenance, mistaking for the signs of wisdom what is only the expression of stupidity; and how much more likely is one to err in striving to read the face of the Mongolian! For aught I know John may be a member of one of these secret societies with which China is honeycombed—why not a Boxer? He may be here as one of their secret emissaries to spy out the land in preparation for the time when the meek Chinaman will inherit the earth. If the lettuce and radishes had tongues what horrible secrets might we not learn from the salad bowl—tales of dark conspirings of Ching and Chow in the garden alleys at early morn or dewy eve. It is impossible to believe that the Chinese who sojourn among us here can love us. They would have to be possessed of an ultra-Christian temperament to do that. It is much more probable that though for the sake of what they make they stay here, they retain all their national antipathy to the barbarian. Little have we done to remove it. And so I should not wonder if they regard us with a secret satisfaction the horrible triumphs of their countrymen in China.

Ich Dien.

Snobbishness is always detestable, always contemptible, wherever it is found, but of all the many species of the genus snob, none is, I think, more offensive than the democratic variety. New Zealand, as a hot-bed of this, the smallest, meanest, and most contemptible form of snobbery, would, I imagine, be hard to beat, and it is therefore not surprising that it should have been solemnly suggested in Parliament that the term "servant" should be abolished as derogatory to the dignity of the human animal, and that household domestic should in future be known as "house assistants." It probably strikes others in a different light, but it appears to me that this

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