

"The New Zealand Graphic."

(PUBLISHED ONCE A WEEK.)

Office—
**SHORTLAND STREET,
Auckland, N.Z.**

TERMS TO SUBSCRIBERS:

Per Annum - - - £1 5 0
(if paid in advance, £1.)

Single Copy: Price SIXPENCE

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Topics of the Week.

Every Man His Own Lawyer.

Dr. Wilkins' conduct of his case in the Auckland Supreme Court last week strongly suggested at one point the ancient saw that he who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client. Probably it was a legal wit who first framed that aphorism, for the pecuniary benefit of himself and his profession, but experience has substantiated it. Still there will always be a strong temptation for a layman to think himself better qualified to plead his own cause than any other man. It seems in a way natural that the individual most deeply interested in the matter should be able to state his view of it in the most forcible and convincing terms; and it is the common ignorance of legal forms and procedure rather than any doubt of his own powers that leads a man to engage a lawyer for purposes of attack or defence. Fortunately it is that difficulties stand in the way of the amateur pleader, or things would be in a parlous condition. The law may be an expensive, tedious, cumbersome and unsatisfactory machine, but without even that very imperfect machinery the course of litigation would be ten times more complicated, tedious and expensive than it now is. In the old times the complainant brought his grievance before his king or chief, and sued in propria persona, the autocrat of the Bench weighed the evidence to the best of his ability, and there was no putting aside his eye or nay. Such summary procedure would not suit now-a-days, however. The administration of justice is a far more complicated affair, and if the parties to every dispute were to be encouraged to conduct their own cases, having no training whatsoever in the matter, the result would be an incalculable loss of time. Take any one session of our Supreme Court, and consider how it would be lengthened out if every one of the accused conducted his own case. The law may be expensive, as I said, but it is cheap to what would be the cost of the other arrangement. And, further, notwithstanding the popular belief that lawyers make quarrels, I am convinced that with the free system of every man his own lawyer our judges would have twice as much work as at present.

The Spring Poet.

The spring poet is not a creation of the comic journals. He is a flesh and blood reality, as every editor knows to his sorrow. The spring time of the year does seem to have some strange stimulating influence on poetaster as well as poet. At that season more than at any other the verse-makers are more than ever rampant. In sympathy with nature, they put forth their leaves in prodigal abundance, and drop them on poor editors' tables, who in turn probably drop them in the waste paper basket. I believe that if some statistician would examine into the matter it would be found that more bad rhymes are produced in this quarter of the year than during the other three. The public don't quite understand this. They are saved the infliction by the interposition of a special providence in the shape of the humble editor. They make the acquaintance of those verses chiefly which have just enough poetical weight to deliver them from the editor's winning pen. If they only knew the material among which that pen has laboured like a flail! Reflection may discourage the true poet, but never the poetaster. A more self-sufficient mortal than the man or woman who writes bad "poetry"—to mislead the stuff—it would be impossible to find. And the trouble is that they are not confined to the indicated. People of education and, one would expect, a certain amount of culture, are constantly writing verses which have little rhyme or reason in them. I read the other day in a small church magazine a semi-religious effusion by the minister—a singularly thin production, with little music and no poetry in it. That an

educated and presumably busy man should write that sort of stuff is not a little surprising, but that he should publish it is unpardonable. It either betrays a sad absence of poetic judgment, or what is much worse, a cruel indifference to the poetic tastes of others. Yet, stay, what does the poetic taste of most amount to? Is it not singularly raw and unformed? Is it not the case that ten people out of every dozen will prefer the juggling, inconsequential rhymes of the local poet to the noblest verse? For that very reason is the sin of him who writes bad verse, and of him who publishes it, all the greater? They set a low standard, which is worse than none at all. The conceited ineptitude of such writers, and the foolish complaisance of such editors are alike to be condemned.

The Partition of China.

It was un-French, because it was ungalant, in General Voyroa to accuse the ladies of the foreign legations in Peking of having taken part in the pillaging of the richest shops. Whether it was true or not, he should have held his tongue, and the French Government, to whom he communicated his story, do well to hold theirs. Between us, I think the tale by no means improbable, and the alleged conduct of the ladies not inexcusable. That the temptation was enormous everyone will admit, and it was a sort of temptation to which ladies are supposed to be peculiarly susceptible. I fancy envy rather than condemnation will be the feeling with regard to the incident in most feminine minds. Let her who is without a grain of the former feeling cast the first stone at these ladies. Imagine what it must have been to them, weakened by fear, anxiety, and want of proper food, to have such a temptation cast in their path. It was at most but a spoiling of the Egyptians for which they could plead Scriptural sanction. It was little after a people had been thirsting for your blood that you should take their silks and bric-a-brac. Loot of another kind would probably have escaped those delicate fingers, but what woman's heart is strong to resist intricate laces, quaint ivories, and pretty jewellery. When, according to Voyroa, the missionaries were not altogether guiltless, shall we marvel that the women fell? The ethics of the matter of course admit of no argument. It was wrong to loot the shops of individuals who had probably little if anything to do with the trouble, and had it been right, these ladies had no claims to the individual possession of the articles. But in a case of that kind ethical considerations become obscured as they are even on such smaller occasions, as when a lady endeavours to smuggle her trunks through the Customs without their being opened.

The Red, White and Blue.

I am afraid Mr Murray, the head-teacher of the Kirikiriri school, whom the Auckland Board of Education have dismissed because he refused to salute the school flag, or to instruct the children to do so, will not get very much public sympathy. His attitude will inevitably suggest pro-Berlinism, and in these late days pro-Berlinism, which we used to tolerate smilingly, is under the popular curse. As a fact, however, there is not a word in Mr Murray's vindication of his conduct that gives an inkling of disloyalty on his part. The ground he takes up is peculiar; I never heard of it before. He protests that he is entirely loyal to the authority, honour, and Empire, which the flag symbolises, but that he objects to do homage to the symbol itself. Apparently he associates the saluting of the piece of hunting with something akin to idolatry. "It is against my conscience to salute any flag," was his final declaration. From which I gather that it is not loyalty, so much as poetry and imagination, that is lacking in this proceptor of youth. He does not see, it would seem, that the saluting ceremony is the most harmless piece of symbolism on the face of the earth. Even though the ceremony has not come into vogue in the Old Country a point he makes much of—the idea, which was borrowed by us from the United States, is merely a further expression of a sentiment all true Britons should feel. In heart we all pay homage to the old flag, wherever and whenever it flies aloft to remind us of national glory. What possible objection can there be to translate into graceful action the tribute of our hearts? Rather let us say what a great gain there is if by such translation we can more strongly impress on the mind all that the flag stands for, and intensify public love for it. What an uninteresting world would it be were we to get rid of all symbolism, as Mr Murray would have us do. But the thing could not be done. It is ridiculous to suppose that we could ever sail through life thus under bare poles, and not a rag of emblem aloft. I commend the study of Sartor Resartus to Mr Murray, if he would understand the sheer impossibility of such a thing. There is not a day or hour of our lives when we do not call symbolism to our aid. We could have no intercourse without it; we could have no education without it; we could have no religion without it. How would we ever get to know the abstract were it not for its emblematic clothing? How could we ever keep touch with the world beyond, nay, with that about us, if we were deprived of symbols? Mr Murray is altogether at sea in this matter, and if for nothing else than that he would be apt to lead those astray who are under him, it is better that he should be relieved of a position where the best work is to be done by means of symbols.

A Faith That Pays.

A recent cable announces that Dr. Dowie, the faith healer, has amassed a huge fortune, being assessed by the Chicago authorities as owning property to the value of £200,000, while Mrs. Eddy, another faith healer, is reputed to be worth close on a million and a half sterling. In face of that who will say that this is a generation of little faith? When it is possible to go out into the highways and the byways of the modern world and preach with such effect a lawdery creed appealing not at all to the reason and so little to the spiritual and moral instincts of mankind, surely it is foolish to talk of our advanced age. Surrounded by all the great scientific triumphs of the time, inhabiting cities which reflect the marvellous ingenuity of inventive man in adopting means to ends, with a thousand agencies ministering to the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of the race, the great mass of the people are, in spite of these advantages, not much farther forward than their fathers were five thousand years ago. They live in the midst of it all, seem an integral part of it, and believe themselves to be so. They borrow its phraseology, they take on its polish, they swallow its ideas, they are grooved up to its level by an artificial process. Did that process cease to operate they would slip back thousands of years till they found their true level among their ancestors of stone-age and totem-worshipping age. My dear reader, have you ever considered how little you owe it to yourself that you are a twentieth century man with all that term implies. Take away the million years by which successive ages have hoisted you into your place, and could you stand in it by yourself? Remove the harnesses, mental and spiritual, that safely confine you in the present track of thought and feeling; cast you adrift from the influence of the age and where would you be? The world has been dragged up to its present altitude by a succession of great minds—the generation of the wise. It is a comparatively small body, and if it were wiped out, as sure as fate the world would fly back to barbarism as a piece of stretched elastic flies back to its normal length. The success of faith healer Dowie and faith healer Eddy shows this too plainly.



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