

Topics of the Week.

The Great Negative Pleasure.

Of all the enthusiasms which attack both young and old alike, there is none to compare with the camera fever. When a man is in the throes of his first bicycle days, or deeply bitten with the golf mania, he may be bad enough, but by dexterous leading you can occasionally direct his mind from these pursuits. The really enthusiastic amateur photographer may be said to live for his hobby. He is always seeking what he may photograph—person, place or thing. The retina of his eye becomes a sensitive plate, and he watches nature and man to snap them unawares. His only reasonable conversation is of slides and developer, and lenses, and changing bags, and P.O.P. bromide, gravura, nikko, dark rooms, light, tone, exposure, subject, effect, and so on, ad infinitum. He becomes daring where before he was careful, obtrusive where he was rather shy. Nothing is allowed to stand between him and the quarry he has marked for his shot. If it is a public function he makes his way to the forefront, deaf to the remonstrances of the ill-natured—for as a rule the good natured crowd look with a lenient eye on his amicable weakness. I have known men who were the most absolute sticklers for the proprieties, who never appeared in the street, save groomed to a fault. I have known others so retiring in disposition that they uniformly found themselves in a back seat. But when these became amateur photographers, propriety and bashfulness disappeared as by magic, the same men could be seen tearing along the street in the most dishevelled and disorderly condition, careless of the convenience or criticism of others, that they might get a shot. Those who have never come under the spell of the camera do not understand it. The loss, I can assure them, is theirs. They have never known the delight of warily stalking your subject, camera in hand, the suspenseful psychological moment of focussing, and the thrill attendant on the click of the shutter that proclaims the deed is done. Then that mysterious time in the secrecy of your pitch black or ruby-lighted closet where like some alchemist of old, you work amid strange compounds and curious smells. With expectant heart and often not without misgivings too, you draw the precious square of glass from its sheath. It reveals nothing; but gradually as chemical after chemical changes it from milky white to inky black, the hidden picture takes form before your waiting eyes. Then there are the other interesting processes of printing and fixing, all leading up to that triumphant point where your mounted and framed handiwork from a prominent place on your mantelpiece, courts the praises of your genial friends. "All my work, all my work," you say in your heart, and you feel something of the pride of the artist and creator in one. Has not your hand led it through all these mysterious processes of development. Hence the fascination of the thing. As an honest fact you had very little to do with it, but fortunately one can never persuade the amateur photographer of that—and who would try? Who would deprive him of the satisfaction which he takes in his work, even when it is only a poor, over-exposed, under-developed, badly printed little quarter plate. Did you ever see the mother of the most ill-favoured child in existence who did not think the baby a paragon of beauty? So is it with the enthusiastic amateur. And went all this, dear reader, let me draw your attention, if you are a camera devotee, or if you have friends who are, to the Photographic Competition announced in these pages to-day. Here is a chance for you to repay yourself for the many wasted plates of your life.

China Goes to School.

The other day the Dowager Empress declared through her repentant tears that China had decided to adopt what was best in Western civilization. Now it is announced that the European professors have been dismissed from the Imperial University on the grounds that China needs elementary schools more than universities. Here's a rather suggestive conjunction of word and deed. Presuming the Empress to be sincere—always a rash thing to do—one is led to assume that China is dubious as to the value of the "higher education" of the West. In her unregenerate state, the Western University system, in so far as it meant the cramming of useless knowledge, and the waste of time on unpractical speculations, would seem to have been the thing most likely to appeal to a people who pinned their faith to competitive examinations, and gave the first offices of State to the man who could memorise the largest number of lines from that Confucian classic "The Book of Poetry." But all these ideas are apparently going by the board. Intellectual China is at last getting down to the practical, amid which her toiling millions have been living a life of ant-like industry and unprogressiveness these many centuries. She wants elementary schools to raise these millions from their lethargy, not universities, which will come in all good time. Here's a marvelous recognition of her real necessity that marks more strongly than anything else the dawn of a new era. China is going to school in the Western sense. Just think what that means. It is said that the Chinese mandarins were strangely surprised when the early Jesuit missionaries showed them how small a bit of the world their empire made in the general map. Probably there are not ten millions out of China's 350 millions who are to-day any wiser than the mandarins were. But let the elementary schoolmaster get among those myriads with his maps and his history books, and the Chinese will know not only their smallness but their greatness also; and then their thoughts will begin to move in a somewhat wider circle than their own red-roofed village and the rice fields beyond. A fig for your universities so far as China is concerned. These may but foster the pedantry of the land, but the elementary school will carry the taper of knowledge into the furthestmost corners, and when China lights up then you may prepare for the opening of the great drama of East versus West.

The Arraignment of the Jury.

Fancy a judge having the temerity to tell the full court that trial by jury is becoming a farce, as Mr Justice Conolly did last week in Auckland! And he said this not of the grand jury, which has been reckoned fair game for abuse and ridicule this long time, but of the common or petty jury. Was it becoming in one occupying the seat of judgment to thus summarily convict an institution that has been an integral part of our judicial system since the days of King Alfred, on such evidence of its worthlessness as the alleged stupidity or obstinacy of one or half-a-dozen juries might afford? Within the last thousand years there must have been hundreds of times when juries flew directly in the face of the judge's summing-up—hundreds of times when their Honors felt disposed to rise in their seats and condemn the system as Mr Conolly did. I cannot suppose that the average jurymen of King John's day, who probably could neither read nor write, would have been more skilful in weighing evidence than the average jurymen of to-day. Indeed, at the very initiation of the jury system, the probability, nay the certainty is that there was a greater danger of the jurors coming to a wrong decision than there is now, especially if, as would appear to have been the case, they were much

less aided in coming to a verdict by the suggestions of the Bench than they are now. Yet through all these centuries the institution has been most jealously guarded both by the people and the greatest legal authorities as the great bulwark of the people's liberty. Nor are we prepared to-day I think to discard that institution, even if the alleged stupidity of twelve men may have led one of our judges to condemn it. Nay the very fact that the judge permitted himself that unwonted license might be regarded as an unfavourable reflection on the judicial wisdom of the Bench, and an argument in favour of the retention of "the twelve good men and true" as the final judges. It is certainly not uncommon nowadays to hear the jury system ridiculed and condemned in lower places than the courts of justice, but we must not take too seriously the casual judgments of a time that is as superficial on the one hand as it is profound on the other. It is rather in fashion among those who do not discern the true inwardness of things to depreciate ancient institutions which have stood the shock of years. But what would they propose to put in place of the jury? Until judges become infallible as well as incorruptible there is a plain necessity for some sort of substitute, and none that I have ever heard suggested could hope to serve the ends of justice so fully well as the present system.

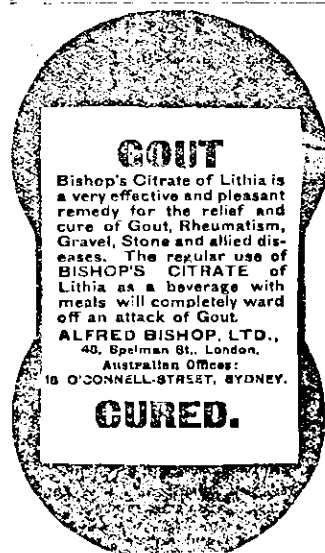
Our Friend in the East.

Kipling's dictum that "East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet" may be true as expressive of the radical and ineradicable antipathy between the two divisions of the race. For instance it is difficult to think of a Chinaman ever seeing eye to eye with an Englishman. But such rapprochements as that between Great Britain and Japan, of which the cable informed us last week, are inevitable. Yet, does it not strike us as strange, this meeting of the extremes of the Old World, this clasping hands of the island Empires of the European and Asiatic continents? Ever since Japan came to rank with the West as one of the great naval Powers, the possibility and desirability of a European alliance has been present before her. And, in the same way, the European peoples had not ignored the value of such a powerful ally in the East. Of them all Japan courted the friendship of Great Britain most, and Great Britain, both from the point of view of her own interest and her sympathy with the progressive islanders, seemed marked out as Japan's natural ally. All the same these considerations never bore fruit till the other day. Indeed, the newspaper and review world, which believes in fore-shadows where it does not direct Britain's foreign policy, had given up all reference to a Japanese alliance and had taken to advocating a union with Russia or with France, when, lo and behold! without warning this new arrangement is sprung on us. We all feel surprised, not to say a trifle taken aback, to find ourselves so suddenly a relation by diplomatic marriage of the Japs, whom we have rather been accustomed to patronise on less in everyday life than in comic opera and musical comedy. Treaties we have had many with black as well as white people, but I don't know of anything in the sable line that approached the same dignity and equality of give-and-take on both sides as this compact with Japan. The arrangement at once concedes the parity of position in the European family which Japan politically and commercially has been striving after. As the ally of "the mistress of the seas" her prestige goes up fifty per cent. She can speak of "our cousin, England," with a certain haughty confidence that does not come unnatural to the Japanese. We, on the other hand, will doubtless have to bear the jealous criticism of the Continent that we had to go to the East for an ally, and until we get rid of racial prejudices we may be doubtful as to the amount of cordiality we should extend to our new friend. But despite criticism abroad and prejudice at home the value of the alliance to Great Britain is indubitable. Of course, it

has its dangers, as, for instance, the chance of our plucky friend jumping into quarrels precipitately because he can more or less depend on our being dragged with him; but it has its safeguards too.

The Royal State.

King Edward's first levee is described as having been an exceptionally brilliant function, and it is understood that in that respect it foreshadows the large degree of pomp and circumstance with which the King intends to invest the Royal Court of Great Britain. During the long lifetime of Victoria there was comparatively little display in the Court functions; more especially of later years this was the case; and the memory of the oldest inhabitant does not associate pageantry with the Royal House. And, indeed, throughout Europe there is an absence to-day in the regal entourage of those elements of magnificence which in an earlier time dazzled the eyes of the common herd. His Majesty the King goes about in sack suit and hard hat, and even his Royal Cousin of Germany, who affects display more than any of the crowned heads, is occasionally attired in sombre tweeds, to judge by the photographs. As to princes of the blood, there is nothing in their apparel to distinguish them from the poor bank clerk who spends a tenth of his income on cuffs and collars and ties, unless it is that he is better cuffed and collared and tied than they. Now, you can't conceive of our English Harrys or French Louis in such plebeian garb. We figure them glittering with gold and purple, ermine and diamonds, from their rising up to their lying down. Could you fancy them for a moment in commoner's doublet and hose? Perhaps the historical perspective deceives a little, but in those days, when the male bird had not relinquished his natural prerogative of fine feathers, there was an atmosphere of glory and effulgence round about a throne which we have not nowadays, and cannot have. The fashion has changed to a much more sombre key than of yore. Perhaps our taste is more correct now, and we would find such pageants as filled "the spacious times of Great Elizabeth" somewhat tawdry and wearisome. Then there is this great difference between the Royal pomp of to-day and that of the past. While the latter blazoned itself before the eyes of an admiring populace, the Court splendour is now—save on special occasions—reserved for the eyes of the privileged few. Perhaps, too, it would not be advisable in these ultra democratic days to give too much publicity to that sort of thing.



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