

Topics of the Week.

To Down Laudamus.

The dark forebodings which besieged all hearts last week when successive cablegrams made it seem more than possible that our beloved monarch would not survive his illness have been dispelled by the latest news announcing that King Edward is beyond danger. From the whole Empire has been lifted a load of anxiety heavier than ever rested on it at any critical moment during the Boer war; heavier, too, than was laid upon it when Victoria the Good lay sick unto death. For, in the first case, we knew that there could be no reverse to our arms so great that British valour would not repair it; and in the second we knew that in no case could we look to have our Queen long with us. Death came to her at a time when his coming even to the strongest of us cannot be said to be unexpected. But "the abhorred Fury with the shears" threatened our King in the prime of his faculties, and at the very moment when his exit from the world would have given the most tragic ending to his reign. A strong sense of this, combined with the Empire's affection for its popular King to make singularly intense the universal feeling of sorrow which the most ominous cablegrams of last week inspired. The spectacle of the Prince struck down by sudden disease on the eve of his formal assumption of the sceptre, amid a wealth of pageantry and display of power such as no other Empire on earth could present—such a spectacle appealed to the imagination of the dullest and the most callous hearts. There was but one sentiment common to all classes—the staunchest royalist and the most rabid democrat alike—a sincere hope that King Edward might be spared to us a little longer. Spoken or unspoken, that was the one prayer in which all joined. And now that it has been granted, a no less sincere sense of thankfulness pervades the Empire. That sense possesses our hearts too entirely for us to speculate thus early on what course is likely to be pursued in regard to the Coronation. It is certain that it cannot take place until His Majesty is wholly restored to strength and health, which must be at least three months hence. Whether a function involving so much the spectacular element could be very successfully carried out in the dreary and uncertain month of October is very questionable. There is also to be considered the difficulty of reassembling so soon after they have separated, the military and civil representatives from the colonies and sister states, whose presence contribute so much to the splendour and prestige of the occasion. Under these circumstances it seems not improbable that the three months postponement will come to mean the putting off the great event for another year. That it should be abandoned altogether is, of course, out of the question. That it should be celebrated with much less pomp and circumstance than would have invested it last week had all gone well is an alternative that one does not willingly contemplate. The general feeling, I think, now more than ever, will be in favour of making the Coronation as striking a spectacle as possible.

Lord Hopetoun's Champagne.

Well meant, no doubt, but singularly ill-advised, and as things have turned out, ill-timed too, were Lord Hopetoun's Coronation gifts to the Melbourne unemployed. Generously anxious that the poor should have an opportunity for merry-making on the great occasion, the Governor-General gave three hundred bottles of champagne and £100, to be distributed, and to this a brewing company added six barrels of beer. His Lordship, of course, imagined an orderly, if for the time, jovial crowd, drinking modest bumpers to His Gracious Majesty in unaccustomed champagne, and felt pleased. The crowds in the operas do this sort of thing constantly, and why not the Melbourne unemployed? It is within the limits of possibility that the directors of the brewing company, equally innocent of the ways of the Australian proletariat, may have felt equal confidence in its ability to behave itself.

Had either they or His Lordship consulted an ordinary policeman, he could have given valuable advice. Apparently they didn't consult anybody, but handed the liquid and the cash over to the secretary of the unemployed, and he apparently showed as little discretion in the distribution of their bounty as they themselves. Lovers and drunkards of both sexes swarmed around the secretary's office, and pandemonium ensued. The proceedings had to be suspended after two hours, and after a second attempt to continue this ill-chosen, ill-placed charity, the whole thing had to be stopped. Lord Hopetoun now understands the impossibility of reproducing the ideal conviviality of the opera stage in the streets of Melbourne, with the unemployed as a company. As an instance of misapplied generosity, the incident is, I think, one of the richest in our annals. Lord Hopetoun's champagne will be remembered in Australia for many a day by folks who never tasted it. Indeed, those who actually did seem to have been few, for the majority of those who secured a bottle quickly converted it into beer, that beverage being both so far as quality and quantity was concerned, much more to their taste. We are not likely to make His Lordship's mistake, because we haven't got the champagne, but there is little question that a good deal of the charity going is as ill-judged as his, and in some other way people are every day proclaiming themselves equally as ignorant and injudicious in their eleemosynary acts.

Reminiscent.

Apocryphal of the above, I am reminded by an old Melbournian that this is not the first occasion on which his city has distinguished itself in this way—a fact the secretary for the unemployed should have known had he been up to his business. It was when the late Duke of Edinburgh visited the colonies, and Melbourne, to celebrate the honour, laid herself out to rejoice with unusual prodigality. Among other things, she undertook to emulate the public hospitality of the Middle Ages in the erection of a fountain, from which flowed wine. But the Melbournian populace even in these early days had gone some considerable distance in the development of a taste for free drinks, and it was not long before a man narrowly escaped drowning in the liquid. He was rescued in a state of no doubt blissful-unconsciousness, for his head had been under the rosy fluid quite four minutes, and he must have had his fill of it. I believe the fountain had to be stopped. Occasionally it happens at times of public merry-making that the inebriate folly which gives free drink, as lib to the mob goes a step further, and forces on the unwilling what the greater number probably require no persuasion to partake of. Some old Aucklanders may recall one festive occasion in the old days when casks of free beer were ranged across the thoroughfare, and the passers by had to partake or in default suffer a sharp stroke across the pate from the cudgel of an individual placed there to see that no one shirked his convivial duty with impunity. I imagine there was no organised prohibition or temperance party in those days in Auckland, or there might have been a plentiful crop of actions for assault and battery, for the cudgel was stout, and he was an earnest rascal who wielded it.

The Colonial Muso.

The laudable attempt of the Wellington Coronation Committee to grace the celebration with a patriotic ode was defeated through the poverty of the productions submitted for their approval by local and col-

onial bands. Committees in such cases are not over hard to please. They are not experts in prosody, and something with a good patriotic flavour, and a bit of a swing in it, even if it comes short in actual poetic merit, has a fair chance of a hearing. But the odes sent into the Wellington Committee appear to have had no saving grace whatsoever, to judge by the verse, said to be, from one of the best, which was telegraphed to Auckland as a taste of their quality; and the judges took refuge in a resolution to the effect that all the compositions offered were unsuitable. Only editors know the priceless value of that euphemism. Without it the art of graceful refusal would be impossible. I speak from experience. Long ago I should have been buried deep beneath the weight of MSS., which I dreaded to reject outright, if there had not been such a word as "unsuitable" in the language. But with it one can deal summarily alike with the passably good and the unspeakably bad contribution, without the risk of offending the contributor. In the matter of verse especially, it has pained me to have to use it so frequently. I imagine that in New Zealand we must have more people to the square mile who think they can write poetry than any other country in the world. They flourish under the most discouraging aspect of the daily and weekly press, and give them but half a chance, and they would inundate the colony with rivers of rhyme. A request for an ode, whether payment is attached to the work or not, sets scores of pens a-scribbling in every province. It is significant of this cacophony scribendi, that this colony, with a population of 800,000, has just contributed 71 Coronation odes to the "Good Words" competition, while Canada, with a population of five and a half millions, only produced twenty more. Perhaps the drain made by "Good Words" on New Zealand's poetic resources is responsible for the poor quality of the stuff submitted to the Wellington Committee. In the interests of the colony, one grasps at such an assumption, for it is sincerely to be hoped that the odes presented for home consumption were not a fair sample of what was exported to the Old Country. We have built up a name for ourselves by the quality of our mutton and our butter. It would be most regrettable if we should in the least degree jeopardise it by the inferiority of our poetry.

Getting Rid of a White Elephant.

A correspondent, writing all the way from Aratapu, makes a suggestion which should commend itself alike to His Excellency the Governor and the Auckland Harbour Board. The former is desirous of establishing a comfortable home for the old veterans resident in the colony; the latter are at their wits' end to know what to do with Admiralty House now that the building is finished. My Aratapu correspondent comes to the rescue of both with the proposal that the ornate edifice should be turned into a veterans' home. There is no doubt that the place would be a delightful residence for our old warriors, whose lines in later life may not have fallen in the most pleasant or prosperous places. Compared, for instance, with the Costley Home, the place is absolutely paradisaical. The other day I paid a visit to the building with this idea in my head, and I confess that I felt myself rapidly becoming a convert to it. I pictured the happy veterans luxuriously housed in these spacious rooms, or smoking the pipe of peace and contentment on the broad piazza that commands one of the finest views of the gulf, and I felt that if the choice is to be between the place lying empty—as appears almost certain to be its fate if the Auckland Harbour Board persist in reserving it exclusively for the Admiral and naval visitors—and being turned to some purpose, the old veterans had probably no good a claim as tenants as anyone else. The Board are averse to diverting the building from the purpose for which it was built, but if such divert-

ing is necessary, to give it to the old military men would seem the next nearest thing to keeping it exclusively for their naval brethren. A good deal has been said against the founding of any permanent institution on the lines suggested by the Governor, the argument being that in a decade or two there will be no old veterans of the old school to provide for. There is wisdom in the contention, but it in no way affects the proposal for a temporary institution as Admiralty House might be made.

The Coronation Honours.

Grief and anxiety for our Sovereign have so filled our hearts and minds that there is little room for interest even for the published list of coronation honours, the conferring of which has not been interfered with by the postponement of the great function. The spectacle of the sovereign of the greatest world Empire hovering between life and death was calculated to minimise the value of such distinctions; and even the recipients of them must have received the public announcement of their elevation with a satisfaction greatly qualified by the sad circumstances under which honour had come to them. Of the New Zealanders to whom it was expected a knighthood would probably be given, Dr. Campbell, of Auckland, and Captain Russell, of Hawke's Bay, are the only gentlemen in the official list. As was stated in these pages before, Dr. Campbell's distinction was an assured thing some time ago, and nothing but the sincerest pleasure and satisfaction has been expressed regarding it. As to Captain Russell, all colonists of all shades of political opinion will unite in congratulating that gentleman. The absence of Mr Seddon's name from the list has caused some speculation. It is interpreted to mean either that our Premier refused a knighthood—as he did once before when it was offered him—or that he is reserved for some great honour. Personally I do not hold with the latter supposition, as I understand it would be, if not entirely against precedent, at least contrary to a strongly confirmed rule to offer anything beyond the knighthood. The other names on the list concern us little, the ones that will attract most attention being those of Mr Charles Wyndham, the actor, Mr Burnand, the editor of "The Punch," Mr Conan Doyle, and Mr Gilbert Parker, the novelists. The knighthoods conferred on these gentlemen are a tribute to art and literature; but it is not so easy to understand why they should have been singled out of the army of players and writers for distinction. Much as Mr Burnand may have helped to keep us merry, and Messrs Conan Doyle and Gilbert Parker to amuse our leisure moments, a dozen other names will suggest themselves to my readers of men equally worthy, if not more worthy, of the honour.

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