

After Dinner Gossip

and

Echoes of the Week.

The Cry of the Children.

The immense value and importance of the work done by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in New Zealand has again been exemplified by the case brought last week in Auckland against a woman named Coe. When such instances as this of the hideous neglect and suffering inflicted on helpless infants are brought to light, surely everyone with a spark of humanity left in their hearts, or a shred of affection for the little ones, must feel that it is their positive duty to support the Society to the best of their power financially, and to take, so far as in them lies, an active interest in the work.

Some Southern readers may have missed the case, the facts of which are briefly these: The unmarried mother of the small scrap of humanity took it to the woman Coe, and paid her £20 to adopt it. In her turn, this person advertised for some one to take the child off her hands. Fortunately the woman who applied was a woman, and a good woman. She found the child in such a fearful state of emaciation and starvation that she was fearful to bathe it. Its bones were literally sticking through its skin. The evidence was painful in the extreme, and there is no need to borrow the feelings of anyone who may read this. Suffice it to say, that neglect of the most frightful description was proved, and also that the child was practically dying of starvation. It was taken to Miss Porter, of the Society, and on sufficient food has thrived wonderfully. Such, then, was this case. "Not sensational!" I fancy I hear some say. "Commonplace even." Aye, there's the mark. So damnably commonplace, that we know there are scores and scores like it in every city of the colony this day. Imagine that poor child crying, as we are told it did, piteously, from morning till eve for food, and remember that though this one was rescued, there are at this moment others—scores of them—undiscovered and wailing their little lives away in unthinkable, unimaginable suffering. It is only by enabling the Society to extend its labours and influence, it is only by helping actively ourselves, that we can hope to discover these hidden cases, and can expose and punish those conducting a hideous, shameful and merciful profession. To stamp out this evil many efforts may be, indeed, will be, necessary. But the premier course to take is clear. We must make it possible for the Society to follow up every advertisement offering a premium for the adoption of children, and to prove to wrong-doers that there will be no escape from these investigations. And this means work, and work means money. Wherefore, good friend, it is your duty—plain and unshirkable—to help. If you saw the suffering you would not hesitate. Well, you know it exists. It is your privilege to be one of the search party which this Society conducts into the dark forest of infant suffering, and on your head and mine be the inevitable retribution if we do not assist in the manifest duty of rescue.

Who's Who, and Which Comes Where?

Though there is doubtless a serious side to the great question of precedence, which is now being so vehemently debated, the average man in the street naturally persists in regarding the affair from its undeniably comic aspect. There is something genuinely humorous in such a squabble in a community which is never tired of airing its democracy and preening itself on the absolute absence of class distinctions in the colony. It is not a popular thing to say, and therefore not a discreet, but it is a fact that there is more snobbishness of a sort and more petty social jealousy in the colonies than exists in even the smallest of Old

Country "Little Peddlings." True, there are few absolute class distinctions, but, heavens and earth, this is not for want of trying. Our efforts to create society gradations are herculean—absolutely herculean—and are confined to no special section of the community. They are conducted, indeed, after a principle one can best illustrate by quoting the jingle:

"Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so ad infinitum."

The smart woman in her drawing-room coterie, asks with a sneer who someone else is, who has dared to force herself into her set, and declares the intruder to be "common." The intruder pays the same compliment to some ambitious female who wishes to enter her circle, and so on, through all the gradations of profits, salary, and wages. It is an absolute error to suppose the artisan class are free from the universal vogue of colonial snobbishness. They are as bad as the worst, if there is, indeed, any badness in it, which I doubt. Go into any gathering of the wives of lumpers, wharf labourers, road repairers, or what you will, and you will within five minutes hear the universally-used adjective "common" applied to, say, an absent charwoman, with every bit as much scorn and every whit as great an assumption of social superiority as you would hear in the expensively furnished boudoir of Mrs Ponsby-do-Tompkins. Let it at once be said, however, that you easily get beneath the particular brand of snobbishness which afflicts us colonialists. It is very much on the surface, and a true-heartedness lies below it, which is too often absent from the snobbishness of the Old World. Probably we shall outgrow it. It is a juvenile disease, for, as you must have noticed often, there are no more arant prigs and snobs in the world than one discovers occasionally amongst children!

School Holidays.

The midwinter holiday is over, and agonised parents, after seeing the house filled with mud and noise, have returned to the more peaceful domestic routine of schoollife, and ceased to ask each other somewhat peevishly if there are not "too many holidays nowadays." "Things were different in our time," we tell each other. "Children have too much their own way nowadays." Well, I wonder if it is so! How many of us can accurately recall the absolute happenings of our child life, let alone our ideals, our ideas, our feelings, and our imaginings. We see them all distorted and through the glass of "grown-up-dom" darkly. We exaggerate the pleasure and the carelessness of childhood; we forget its intense sensitiveness and the acuteness of its temporary mental sufferings. It always has seemed to the writer that the constant prayer of the parent should be that of little Tim in the Christmas carol, "Lord, Keep Our Memory Green." For thus only can we understand children and their desires. At the same time, I do certainly feel sympathy with some parents, who argue that midwinter holidays are a mistake, and that the fortnight might be with advantage added to the summer vacation. By the way, while on the subject, let me quote from the following amusing answer in response to a query by "Oriol" as to whether a parent considered the midwinter holiday judicious. It runs: In my opinion it is not conducive to the well-being of the State, or the comfort of the individual, to have a horde of boys let loose upon the community annually during a winter month. It is impossible to learn all the habits of the average boy in three weeks with sufficient accuracy to be able to keep him in order. The average boy is unlike the Bourbon. In three weeks' time he can forget more facts and acquire more habits than one likes to seriously contemplate. I am of

opinion that the average boy should be given as little time as possible to think, and that his diet should consist principally of square and cubic roots, and mixed English and colonial dates. If deprived of this diet for three weeks in the middle of midwinter he is very apt to become perfectly intractable, and to attempt to fill the void by means of cheap cigarettes. Only those who have large families can form any real idea of what the midwinter holidays are like. I am in favour of the midwinter holidays being abolished by enactment of Parliament, and I have a petition here, signed by 30,000 parents, to that effect.

Husband and Wife.

As a simple, private and inexpensive substitute for the paraphernalia of a divorce suit, and also under conditions which would not support a divorce, discontented couples not infrequently resort to deeds of separation, which confer all the advantages, and produce all the disadvantages, of divorce, in the case of those who do not want to try a second venture into the toils of Hymen. By such deeds the husband generally binds himself to contribute so much per month to the support of his wife, and some provision is made with regard to the children, who may go with either parent as the parties please to agree. If in an appropriate case the Divorce Court had been appealed to much the same result would have followed, for the decree would have required the husband to pay alimony, and would have dealt with the custody and maintenance of offspring. The separation deed has, however, this merit, that it permits the "divided hearts" to unite again, and to treat the transaction as a mere incident that has passed. And the law strongly favours any such reunion. Proof of effectual reconciliation will therefore nullify all the provisions of a separation deed. If the parties come together the deed is at an end, and if they separate a second time a fresh deed is requisite, for the old one does not spring into life and force again by the mere conduct of the parties. Now and then one finds this benevolent disposition of the court towards reunion of severed bonds turned to account by the husband in a manner not contemplated by the judges. Thus in Sydney the other day a wife sued her husband under a deed which entitled her to £5 per month for the support of herself and family. The defendant pleaded that the deed had been avoided, and he proved that on the day of its execution he went to the wife's house—therefore the conjugal home—and, representing that he had nowhere to go, induced his wife to let him stay the night. He went away next day, and for two or three years he paid the allowance under the deed, but now, being sued for arrears, he set up the events of that night as a legal reconciliation debarring the wife from treating the deed as valid. Mr. Justice Owen left it to the jury to say whether or not there was any proof of an actual intention to be reconciled on the part of the husband and wife, so as to put an end to the deed. The whole matter, the judge pointed out, was one of intention, though the jury were to attribute to the acts done such intention as they thought reasonably likely. The payment of the maintenance money for so long after the deed had been executed was also a point to be regarded in arriving at the real intention of the parties on the night in question. Moreover, it was to be remembered that the events relied upon by the defendant took place on the very day of the signing of the deed. The jury found for the plaintiff, and so established the position that it must be shown, in order to constitute a legal reconciliation, that the acts set up were done with the purpose of putting an end to the division provided for by the deed.

A Cruel, Unnecessary Sport.

It is with infinite satisfaction one notes from an Australian exchange that the Governor of Queensland (Sir Herbert Chermiside) flatly and definitely refused to attend a pigeon-shooting match arranged in his honour at Rockhampton, on the ground that shooting pigeons from traps is a cruel, a brutalising, and an unmanly sport. Sir Herbert is a soldier, one who has faced powder and proved himself a gallant Britisher, so his deprecation of this monstrous, so-called sport cannot lay him open to any insinuation of milk-topishness. There are many who feel the same way as he has done, but who have not the pluck to speak out. He having done so, others will follow, and this indefensible practice will be put down with a strong hand. There is not a single excuse or palliation for the cruelty of pigeon-shooting from traps. For encouraging good shooting the artificial pigeon and the patent trap are far preferable. The sport is a relic of barbarism, of the days when it was genteel to bait bears, match game cocks, and enjoy rat pits. It is time the last relic of those times was stamped out, and a bill to make pigeon-shooting matches illegal would be warmly approved by the electors, and would win credit for the member who introduced it to Parliament.

The Latest Swindle.

Personally, I always like to hear of a new and amusing swindle—that is, of course, when I have not been the victim. A "Bulletin" correspondent tells of one which is fresh to me. In true Bulletinness he begins:—Witnessed a pathetic incident to-day. A blind organ-grinder's machine broke down with a wild whirring noise as he was finishing "Love's Serenade" in front of a suburban hotel. The landlord rushed out to see whose soul had just been lost, and 17 men, eight women, and 44 children collected before the last wild cry had died away. Two men offered to fix the machine up. The blind man was still frantically turning the handle, while his little girl was trying to stop him, saying it was no use. The two men started to overhaul the machine while the crowd increased. Rumour spread it round that a drunken man had wrecked the machine, the sole support of the blind man and 14 kids. The women turned up their eyes, and said, "What a shame!" The two experts, whose efforts were breathlessly watched by the crowd, at last pronounced the machine incapable of further torture. A pin which connected the revolving disc with the handle had been lost—had fallen into the bowels of the machine probably; and it was all up with it until another pin was fitted in its place. At this juncture a forceful-looking man with a bleary eye proposed a collection, and made a short speech picturing the 14 youngsters starving at home. He wasted no time, as the crowd showed an inclination to dodge down a side street or slip into the adjacent pub. The collector followed them into the pub, and levied on all, the landlord contributing a shilling "as it was his pub, the machine shied at." Finally, the forceful man presented the organ-grinder with 6/3, and that worthy wiped his sightless eyes and said "Gawd bless 'er" 17 times. Then he left. Three minutes afterwards a cynic arrived, and, addressing the few who were still lounging about, said, "Collecting for a horgan-grinder here?" Somebody nodded. "Fourth collection I know of to-day," said the cynic; "he takes the screw out of his machine and puts it in his pocket. Then the other bloke takes the hat round."

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