

Imperial Preference.

Some idea of the value of Imperial preference to the British colonies may be gathered from the fact that Denmark alone sends to Great Britain £14,000,000 of dairy produce every year. The Argentine supplies over £15,000,000 worth of frozen mutton, wheat, and other agricultural products. Cheese is sent from Holland, bacon from America, fowls from Russia, and pork from China. The imports from Germany, Holland, and Belgium alone have more than doubled in the last twenty years. The policy of admitting the produce of foreign countries free has had the effect of throwing out of cultivation 13,000,000 acres of arable land. Thus Great Britain suffers by the decrease of agriculture. The colonies have made substantial concessions to Britain, but failing the adoption of a policy of mutual preference between the United Kingdom and the colonies, the latter are under continual pressure to enter into reciprocal arrangements with other countries, which may ultimately undermine the political unity of the Empire.

Railway to Taupo.

The petition of the Taupo Tataru Timber Company asks for the right to purchase 200,000 acres of native land, on the distinct understanding that it is to be cut up and sold within a certain time. The Company offers to sell to the Government its sixty-five miles of line, equipped with rolling stock, for £180,000. There are thirteen miles needed to complete the line to Taupo, and it is computed that the total cost of the seventy-eight miles of railway will be about £200,000. The Company has compiled a statement which shows that the annual return of the working of the line should provide interest at 4 per cent. on this capital. If the Government takes over the line the Company is prepared to pay for freight over sixty-five miles, a sum averaging £11,000 per annum. It is claimed that the advantages to the country through the completion of the line would be considerable. The cost of carriage of goods to Taupo would be reduced by half, an area of over 1,000,000 acres of Crown and native lands now practically isolated, would be rendered accessible for occupation, and an opportunity would be afforded for the first time of testing the value of these punice lands for cultivation and settlement. The petition is supported by the settlers in East Taupo County, and the main objections to the petition have come from the Rotoman Chamber of Commerce, the Wellington Trades and Labour Council, and certain natives. The Company seems to have made out a good case.

Militant Miners.

A strong posse of police has been marshalled at Waipi and Waikino to give engine-drivers and arbitrators something like adequate protection from molestation. The aggressive miners, resentful of the resumption of work with outside labour at the Horakora scheme, have continued in a more or less organised way to intimidate the workers and harass the engine-drivers, whose recession from the Federation of Labour precipitated the strike. The presence of the police in the district has had a restraining influence on the strikers, and, with the exception of following-up tactics and the use of objectionable language, there has been no outbreak of violence. Police proceedings, however, are to be taken against a number of the strikers on various charges. Further developments are possible.

Two Independent Members.

Messrs. T. M. Wilford and A. M. Myers have respectively made important announcements concerning their attitude towards the party now in Opposition. Mr. Wilford says that he is a Liberal of moderate views, and an opposer of trade, and has formally withdrawn from the Opposition for the reason that the views held by a number of members of the party are totally opposed to those he has always held. He reserves full liberty to criticise all legislation introduced, and will support all measures which, in his opinion, are "for New Zealand." Mr. Myers says that before the present Opposition executive was appointed he intimated that he intended to revert to his old position as an Independent Liberal. He explains that in the course of his election campaign he made it perfectly clear that so long as the Government maintained a true Liberal policy he

would support it, but otherwise he held himself free to act in the best interests of his constituents, and the people generally. He took office in the Mackenzie Ministry because they fulfilled these requirements. The Reform party had outlined an advanced and democratic policy, and the measures will receive his support.

The Origin of Life.

Professor Schaefer has been somewhat dogmatic in his assertion that life is purely a matter of chemical interaction, though the theory has for long been held by many eminent scientists. Chemists have been searching for means by which they may be able to produce a living substance similar to that from which, they assert, all living organisms are evolved. But in the experiments which have been made in this direction it has always been found that germs of life were present from the start, or that they found entrance at some stage in the operations. There is no known evidence of non-living matter giving origin to living organisms. But it is possible that living matter may have been evolved from non-living matter, that it is now being so evolved, and that the conditions of spontaneous generation may be artificially reproduced. That protoplasm took its origin from non-living matter was held by Huxley, Haeckel, Nagell, Pfleger, Ray Lankester, and others. Helmutz and Lord Kelvin, on the other hand, held that the germs of life were brought to earth by meteorites from elsewhere. The discussion has gone on for a long time, and, at best, Professor Schaefer has only stated dogmatically what many have held to be a plausible theory. But he has not adduced any fresh facts in support of his theory. The practical value of the discussion on the origin of life has been great. It has brought to light many facts of great importance in connection with the preservation and improvement of food-stuffs, the occurrence of parasites, the use of antiseptics, and the nature of many diseases. The Professor asserts that the theory of supernatural intervention in the first production of life is devoid of scientific foundation, but the theory of abiogenesis is equally devoid of scientific proof. It may be many years before chemists are able to produce living from non-living matter. It may be that they will never be able to do so. But the attempt to solve the mystery of the origin of life has been of incalculable value in the additions made to our knowledge of the nature of low organisms.

Prize-fighting and the Law.

Mr. Justice Cooper made a lucid statement of the law as affecting prize-fighting, in the course of a charge to the grand jury at the Hamilton Supreme Court, in dealing with a charge of manslaughter arising out of a bare-knuckle contest for a wager between a European and a Maori. It was a definite criminal offence for anyone to take part in a prize-fight, and he reduced his opinion on the matter to writing: "When one person is indicted for inflicting personal injury upon another the consent of the person who sustained the injury is no defence to the person who inflicts the injury, if the injury is of such a nature or is inflicted under such circumstances that its infliction is injurious to the public as well as to the person injured. But injuries given and received in prize-fights are injurious to the public both because it is against the public interests that the lives and health of the combatants should be endangered by blows, and because prize-fights are disorderly exhibitions and mischievous on many obvious grounds. Therefore, the consent of the parties to blows, which they mutually receive, does not prevent these blows from being assaults, and in my opinion this principle of law is not confined to prize-fights, for every fight in which the object and interest of each of the combatants is to subdue the other by violent blows, is or has a direct tendency to a breach of the peace, and it matters not whether such fight be a hostile fight begun and continued in anger, or a prize-fight for money or other advantage." It was against the public interest that the lives of combatants should be endangered in fights of this description, while they also tended to promote a breach of the peace; also, in a sense, they were disorderly exhibitions. "I do not want my remarks to be misunderstood, so as to indicate that boxing or sparring matches with gloves are necessarily illegal," added his Honor. "That depends on the circumstances.

If in cases of that description the matches are really prize-fights—and in that respect many recent exhibitions with gloves are really prize-fights in the ordinary sense—even fights where gloves are used may be, and very often are, within the law. When exhibitions of boxing and wrestling take place where the element of prize-fighting does not obtain they are not breaches of law unless they take place under such circumstances that necessarily a breach of the peace may be provoked."

Profits from Test Matches.

The "Pall Mall Gazette" says that the Australians received approximately £780 as their share of the gates for their test matches against South Africa, and £2,130 for the English tests, the final match at the Oval leading with £1,120. These figures seem exceptionally high, as G. H. S. Trott declared that about £150 was netted by each of his men in the 1893 tour, a little more than £100 in 1890, and that he himself only made a profit of £80 as the result of nearly five months' cricket in 1888. But it must be remembered that the expenses connected with test matches are always high. Professionals—including the "twelfth man"—swallow up £20 apiece per match, each umpire pockets a £10 fee, the amateur gets his first-class fares—including cabs—to and from his residence, and an hotel allowance, not exceeding 30/- per day, for a maximum period of five days each match; luncheons and teas are generously provided by the Board of Control for the players at a cost of £10 a day. Every player or man employed on the ground has to be insured against accidents, advertising takes £20 per match, and then there are payments to extra policemen and attendants, card sellers, etc. These expenses, however, are not allowed to affect in the smallest way the visiting team's appropriation of one-half of the gross "gates"; and then, from what is left, the club on whose ground the match is played takes 30 per cent., the first-class counties and the M.C.C. divide 60 per cent. among them, and the other 10 per cent. goes to the second-class counties.

Undoubtedly, as a general rule, test matches do not pay—some have paid enormously—but, as in all things, one must take the average—and the risks. Absolutely wet weather, of course, quite ruins a match; a dull and doubtful weather keeps thousands of would-be patrons at a distance; dull play on the first day of a match means very meagre attendances on the second and third days; and yet, if one side's superiority over the other be very marked, there may be no third day's play, as was the case when the Australians beat the South Africans at Manchester recently.

Yet no matter what may happen to a match, all the expenses are practically the same. Players, ground staffs, etc., have to be paid according to their engagements, whether it rains or snows.

In just the same way, any big profits which the visiting team may derive from a test match may be largely swallowed up by losses in previous county and other games. For example, the total expenses of an Australian team touring in England average about £125 per match played—over £2,000 going on steamship and railway fares alone—and this means that, with a sixpenny "gate," supposing the Australians take half, an average attendance of 10,000 for each game is necessary to cover mere out-of-pocket expenditure.

In some county matches the attendance falls considerably below this figure; other matches are ruined by weather, though the expenditure of £125 per match has to be made good just the same; and, therefore, a very great responsibility rests on the shilling "gates" of test matches to ensure an ultimate profit!

Solving the Servant Girl Problem.

Domestic servants are so scarce in New Zealand, so hard to get, and so hard to keep, that one does not wonder that the modern mistresses make use of wireless to engage girls coming out from England. In the case of one of the more recent emigrant ships, which brought out a small batch of girls from Rome, the mistresses who thought to be in good time by being on the wharf to meet the vessel were surprised to find that their more enterprising sisters had already engaged most of the girls by means of micrograms. There is, however, one woman who claims to have found no difficulty in getting servants. Mrs. John H. Flagler, of New York, says that she has solved the servant girl problem, and as

she has twenty-seven servants we may admit that she speaks with authority. Here is Mrs. Flagler's plan of campaign as described in her own words:—

I never cheat a girl out of any pleasure she has planned by asking her to work when she has expected to get off.

When I entertain I notify the servants at least two days in advance, so that they won't make any engagements for that day.

When I give big entertainments I employ extra help.

My servants arrange among themselves so that some of them have Sundays off.

My servants have access to my library, and they take advantage of it, too. They like to read, and they have the time to do it.

I should feel conscience-stricken if I thought persons in my employ slaved all day long. The work in my house is so systematized that they are not compelled to do it.

I urge them to go out every afternoon and get the air, if they only remain out an hour.

I do not know who ever started that half-day-a-week rule. I do not know why women, supposedly intelligent and sympathetic, should continue to practice it on their servants. One-half day a week is not enough to popularise a mistress in the eyes of the maid.

Of course, this is all very nice, but that it should be considered exceptional goes far to show why girls should prefer the shop to domestic service. Of course, the shop does not as a rule provide libraries, but it does provide a certain fixity of duty and regularity of hours not to be found elsewhere. In other words, it permits a girl to call her soul her own, which is a kind of liberty quite beyond the powers of comprehension enjoyed by the average mistress.

The Waning Birthrate.

The birthrate for England and Wales for the quarter ended June last was 3.7 below the average of the second quarters of the ten preceding years, and is the lowest on record for any second quarter. It is the same all over Europe. Germany is the latest of the European nations to deplore a waning birthrate. The full census returns are not yet completed, but in Prussia and Bavaria the figures are unsatisfactory. And at last we have an authoritative voice to ask why Europe should regard depopulation as an evil. Octave Mirbeau, speaking in the French Senate, disputed the claim with energy and fervour. If the people were only logical, he said, they would hasten the process of depopulation instead of retarding it. Why, he asked, should there be so much twaddle about a decreasing birthrate? What is that you fear? Do you dread the day when there will no longer be enough men to send to their death in the Sudan, in China, and in Madagascar? You dream of population only that you may have a violent depopulation later on. But no, thank you. If we are to be born only that we must die on the battlefield, under the rigors of military discipline, in camps and barracks, we prefer not to be born at all. Octave Mirbeau naturally made a great sensation by his speech. But in view of the enormous growth of armaments throughout the civilised world, one cannot be surprised if many people are to be found who take a similar view.

Women and Academies.

The Spanish Academy has refused to open its doors to the Countess Pardo-Bazan on account of her sex and in spite of the fact of her eminence as an author. A few years ago France was in a turmoil over a somewhat similar disability inflicted upon Mme. Curie, and perhaps it would be well for these dignified institutions to see to it that the weight of intelligence be found outside their doors rather than inside. We are reminded that Spanish conservatism seems to have increased rather than waned with the lapse of time. In 1783 a woman was admitted to the University of Alcalá, and by a special decree of Charles IV. The favoured one was Maria Isidra de Guzman y La Coida, and she was duly invested with the doctor's degree. The lady was then seventeen years of age, and she passed brilliantly in "languages, philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, ontology, geography, physics, and astronomy." She also wrote a thesis maintaining "the aptitude of the educated woman for teaching subjects sacred and profane in the universities." But there is no record that Maria ever made much use of her prodigious erudition. It often happens that way. The world receives least where it expects most.