



ATHLETICS.

BY THE JUDGE.

IN 1889, the year of the Dunedin Exhibition, a big Athletic Meeting was held in that city, and as a team from New South Wales was present, this fixture ranks as the first one of an Inter-colonial nature held in the Colonies. A return visit was paid to Sydney by New Zealanders in the following year, but the first Australasian Championship was held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in November, 1893. In this New South Wales was successful, with the home team second, and New Zealand third. Lancaster Park, Christchurch, was the convincing ground for the second meeting, which took place in January, 1896. New Zealand easily proved victorious, New South Wales coming second. In October, 1897 a third meeting took place on the Sydney Cricket Ground, when New South Wales was declared the victor after a keen fight with New Zealand.

The Amateur Athletic Union of Australasia was formed in 1898, Mr. R. Coombes being unanimously elected President, and it must be honestly admitted that the honor was well deserved, for no one has done more for the cause of athletics. In his day a great walker, a fine oarsman, a good shot, and a cross-country runner, Mr. Coombes has worked untiringly for the last fourteen years, and, as far as the present generation is concerned, has been aptly termed the father of amateur athletics in the Colonies.

In writing of athletics it would seem, judging by the very poor attendance at every sports meeting of recent years, that such sports are slowly, but surely, losing their hold on the affections of the Anglo-Saxon race. This very regrettable state of affairs

is due to numerous causes, but possibly the two most serious are the plethora of athletic meetings, and also, I am afraid to say, the rigid efforts made to stamp out betting by the governing bodies of clubs generally. It seems a curious thing to state, but unfortunately it is but too true, that the very efforts to purify the sport seem to react most disastrously from a financial point of view on the promoting clubs. The tendency of the present day is towards gambling, so that if the public are debarred from having a bet on a foot race, then they will go somewhere else, where there is no such prohibition. If no betting were allowed on horse-racing I suppose the attendances at the big equine carnivals would not be one-tenth of what they are at present. It is possible that the utter apathy now shown in athletics may gradually pass away, and encouragement be given to the various manly exercises; but at present such a revival is out of sight, and, as purely amateur clubs cannot for a moment be expected to lend their support to the betting evil, they must be prepared to put up with the consequent non-attendance of the speculative public, and just "grin and bear it" till better times dawn.

In the various branches of amateur athletics the colonies are hardly in a line with England or the States, that is to say as far as the performances of their best exponents go, although the general management of meetings, such as those held in Melbourne, Sydney, or Auckland, leave nothing to be desired. Here and there, however, a bright particular star has shone out above the mass of mediocrities, such men as Macpherson, Hempton, Holder, Rosegrave, Smith, and