

Supernumeraries of the Press.

BY ONE OF THEM.

IT flashed upon my mind one day that after all we were only penny-a-liners—whom we had always supposed to be a foreign species of mankind of the very lowest type, a sort of scribbling Bushman. Our chosen name for ourselves is "Journalists," but though our "stuff" (a flattering office phrase) is only now and then paid for by the yard, I fear we are little better than a colonial Grub Street. We are nearly all retired geniuses with extinct missions. I might say all, and so avoid comparisons. There is evidently not a large demand for colonial geniuses with missions. When in our youth we laid plans for taking the world by storm, our friends looked on and marvelled. We wrote epics, dramas, philosophic novels and social treatises, improved versions of Shakespeare, Browning and Tennyson. At that stage most of us had dedicated ourselves to the Muse of Poetry. We sent our creations over the seas and they always came faithfully home again. We continued heroic and secreted piles of MSS. The newspapers gave us support and inward comfort by publishing from time to time accounts of great authors whose works had been rejected by publishers. As publishers had rejected our works, it followed that we were great authors. But at middle age one becomes tired of blushing unseen and being a gem in unfathomed caves, besides it does not pay. Our adoring relatives were the first to perceive this fact, and to point it out to us with comments. At present we have given up working for Art and are writing for bread and butter. As we had begun at the end of Literature, we are now likely to end at the beginning. Some of us find our life tragic, and some of us find it

humorous—it amounts to much the same thing.

We write articles of all kinds to order of the public taste, leaders, leaderettes, topics of the day, the facetious notes column, sketches, correspondence, country gossip and reports on such special subjects as chess or tennis tournaments; our highest artistic level is generally the Christmas story. Sometimes we get an article into an English magazine, and never recover from the shock. This happens, on a rough average, two or three times during the life of a Maoriland supernumerary. The first occasion has been known to be fatal. Bewildered at never seeing the body of MSS. again, but only its glorified form in the pages of "The Atlantic," or "The Gentleman's," or "The Cornhill," the author has been known to go on sending feebler and feebler copies of himself to the magnificent donor of three guineas a column until he finally died (in a literary sense) of sheer exhaustion. Of course this fate befalls only weaklings. A hardened supernumerary merely sits down, and finds on calculation that while one article out of a dozen may be accepted in England and paid for at the rate of three guineas a column, one out of every two will have a better chance of being paid for in Maoriland at the rate of one guinea a column; so he decides that the grey old mother has no particular use for his talents. Except as an advertisement, writing for English or American journals is sheer waste of time—that is, for a genuine inhabitant of our Grub Street, who has got to keep his house and family there. Within the colonies a great deal depends upon your town, and the generosity or parsimony of the particular newspaper company that favours you; for the rest, your success or failure