

# New Zealand Tablet

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## Current Topics.

AT HOME & ABROAD.



THE Russians, it would seem, are uneasy at the thoughts of the nations of the East being supplied with arms, and having their thoughts directed to Western conquest. History repeats itself; but it would be a grim repetition of the past were we once more to see vast hordes descending upon civilization, or comparative civilization, and laying all waste before their march. There is a great deal to captivate the gloomy imagination in dwelling on the incursions of the barbarians from the north and east upon the declining strength of the Roman Empire. It is impossible to contemplate without a certain wild charm the fierce bands of Attila sweeping over Italy and Gaul, and retreating thence with the spoil of ruined countries and cities back into their rough home beyond the Danube, and leaving in their rear whole realms so desolate that the forest springing up covered them, and wild beasts were their sole inhabitants until the monks came in after ages, and by degrees the hermitage became a monastery, and the monastery the centre of a city, and so human society and civilization were restored. The incursions of the barbarians across the Danube, tribe after tribe coming down and requiring room upon the borders of the empire; the wild Avars swooping at will upon the Greeks who grew more feeble every day, and carrying off their splendid spoils and the treasures of Constantinople to that hurdle-fenced camp amongst the marshes of Hungary, the future conquest of Charlemagne. The atrocious cruelties related of Zingis and Timur, the exterminations, the slaughters marked with monumental towers of human skulls; all these things engrave upon the north-east of Europe, and away into the regions of Central and Northern Asia, an epic for him who has eyes to read it, that is akin in horror and weirdness to Dante's description of the Inferno. But the crime of those, by whose instrumentality a repetition of such things should occur, would indeed cry to heaven for vengeance. Were it possible by turning the minds of the inhabitants of India or China to conquest, and by facilitating their obtaining a supply of arms, to throw western civilization especially open to their incursions, the guilt of those who would prepare the way for any such things would be beyond expression. But, in fact, the idea seems strangely far-fetched. It appears to be one that could hardly have been seriously entertained by a man worthy of the name of statesman; and we cannot wonder that the English delegates treated it coldly when proposed to them at Berlin by Count Schouvaloff. The vigorous Europe of to-day, with all her mighty armaments, is not the region to be over-run by Asiatics, however numerous, far less powerfully armed and totally unable in other respects to cope with her soldiers. If Count Schouvaloff made the remonstrance attributed to him, he must have concealed his true meaning. It is far more probable that what is feared by the Russians is that the Eastern tribes whom they are now oppressing may be encouraged to resist, or that their further advance in Asia may be checked by the steps taken by England in preparing to employ her Indian forces against them. The spirit of the Asiatic tribes may be roused, and they may be found more difficult to keep down or more persevering in resistance, by finding kindred people esteemed capable of confronting and subduing the Russians at home, backed up by the whole strength of their empire. We do not, indeed, consider the intended employment of Indian troops well-judged; but this is not because we have any doubt of its paving the way for an independent Eastern descent upon even Russia, but because we think it unwise for England to have displayed her weakness, or given cause for it to be supposed she was weak, amongst a people and to an army that has already rebelled against her, and that may perhaps again rebel.

IN looking through the columns of our contemporaries, we meet with much that is curious. Sometimes we are instructed, sometimes edified; but occasionally we are amused or disgusted. We confess, however, that it was a combination of amusement and disgust which we experienced in coming across a certain controversial letter in the

columns of our contemporary the *Thames Advertiser*, and which purports to be a final clincher for the Church of Rome, and one that makes it as clear as daylight that no man with an ounce of common understanding could possibly belong to her communion. We, who actually do so, are all the merest simpletons; there is nothing plainer than that her doctrines are a mass of contradiction, her councils, assemblies that give each other the lie, her Popes opposed to each other and to the councils, her saints fools, and her bishops ready to condemn in the most violent and undisguised terms the opinions and interpretations of her Popes. The miracle, in fact, of the prolonged existence and present vigour of the Church is shown to be more remarkable than even we had supposed it to be; for, if it be difficult for an institution united in itself, and well knit together, to bear the storms and adversities of centuries, how much more difficult must it be for such a bedlam, as this strong controversialist to whom we refer asserts the Church to be? Moreover, another thing he teaches us is that the word of Christ has failed, for behold a house widely divided against itself, and yet it stands and promises to stand until the end of time.—Let us not forget Lord Macaulay's New Zealander—and, by the way, let us remind our editorial friends who have helped to make him immortal, we might perhaps, indeed, say eternal, that even him they owe to the Catholic Church, for unless to illustrate the marvellous youth and vigour of this, he would never have been called into existence. But to return, our man up North is vastly erudite; somewhere or another he has evidently managed to furbish up a volume of printed controversial sermons—by some Irish parson we will be bound, they are the boys who know how to do that sort of thing to perfection—and has gleaned out of it a prodigious list of names and dates; but all beside the purpose. We know how such things are got up; by suppressing a bit there, misinterpreting a passage here, mistranslating in another place, and occasionally by the bold assertion of a direct falsehood; the thing is very simple. The fact is, however, our controversialist has made a grievous mistake; his point is to prove that the "Apocrypha" was not pronounced canonical until this was done by the Council of Trent in 1546; but, alas! for his conclusions, his text-book has not informed him that that portion of Scripture which Protestants consider apocryphal was included among the canonical Scriptures at a Council held 1149 years before that of Trent—namely, the Third Council of Carthage. And again, that it was clearly defined as canonical at Florence in 1439. So much for his strong point, and the argument by which he has convinced the southern hemisphere that the whole Catholic world are comparable only to "asses." As for his details they are complete nonsense, and most nonsensically stated.

A WRITER who has contributed to the *Melbourne Review* an able article on colonial literature, amongst other reasons which he assigns for the failure in many instances of colonial authors to attain to the position to which their talents have entitled them, gives that of the jealousy which he assumes, and possibly justly assumes, to prevail amongst certain literary men who, having failed to make an independent reputation for themselves, are lost amongst the anonymous crowd that supply with matter the columns of the newspaper Press. He does not, indeed, in so many words accuse the reviewers to whom he alludes of jealousy; he deals more delicately with them; but, nevertheless, his meaning is very plain from the definition he gives of that "Bias of age and experience" which he attributes to the professional journalist. He says, "If he (the professional journalist) has attained to any position he is generally a man past middle life, and worn in the daily service of letters, but from the fact that his voluminous writings are anonymous, and upon ephemeral topics, he receives but scant personal recognition for his labours. Whatever his intellectual ability and requirements may be, so long as he takes refuge under the anonymity of the Press, he is *non, et proterea nihil*. Naturally, it annoys him beyond measure to notice on the title pages of books the names of obtrusive young men—unless they happen to reside on the other side of the equator. He, himself, has not published a sonnet to his mistress' eye-brow these many years, and has not thought of bringing out even a sketchy book of travels for the last quarter of a century. There was a time when he may have attempted odes to Liberty, or love verses to Melinda, but now he devotes his talents to the more practical questions of Underground Sewage and Roll-stuffing. He has outlived the period when literature appears as