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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

### MUCH LEARNING.

...season for the distribution of degrees and diplomas gained in connection with the University of New Zealand has just passed by and during its course we heard much that was interesting if not instructive. The very cream of our accomplished gentlemen and learned professors came forward and spoke in their very best manner and surely none but the dullest of intellect could fail to be edified. Indeed, we may doubt as to whether the dullest themselves could prove an exception, for did not even inanimate things dance to the strains of Orpheus' lyre and the veriest stick, therefore, might be expected to hearken with delight when our weightiest pundits occupied the intellectual platform. In Dunedin among the chief features of the eloquence displayed was Dr. Brown's dissertation upon the advantages of a University course to women, and antiquity as well as the middle ages were called upon by the speaker to afford suitable examples. The doctor did not name any of the ladies who during medieval times had so distinguished themselves although he spoke of them generally, but as he directed his hearers to the late Canon Kingsley's romance of "Hypatia" as a valuable historical record concerning that gentle philosopher, we may, perhaps gather that in his allusions to the ladies of the middle ages he had in his mind's eye the far-famed Romola. She was at least as real a character as that delineated by Kingsley; nay, probably more so, since George Eliot was certainly the incomparably greater genius of the two writers, and could make the creatures of her imagination live with a life unknown to those of the lesser author. *Absit omen*, however, and may none of the fair graduates of our University who walk in the steps, so far as learning is concerned, of these learned ladies, arrive at the dismal fate of the one, or meet with the wretched fortune as to a husband of the other. But, then, Dr. Brown's graduates are not to think of anything in the way of a husband. It is as a *refugium peccatorum*, since the conventual life is no longer available, that he proposes the learned professions to the sex, and under their shelter the old maid's condition may become respectable, perhaps also independent of its traditional cat. Let us hope, at least, that puss may become a mere object of zoological inquiry to the single lady of the future for her introduction into the sick-room might not in every case be agreeable to the patient, and in the law-court she might draw down the rebuke of an irritable magistrate on the fair advocate introducing her. Medieval learning, nevertheless, did not necessarily make the lady who possessed it independent of the sheltering convent, and it was in such a retirement that Victoria Colonna, for example, who, however, was a widow and not a spinster, pursued her studies, and wrote the poems that have made her celebrated. We would, moreover, have our gentle graduates prove more effectual in their particular callings than did Hypatia in hers, a conclusive token of whose success as well as of the witness borne against the Church by St. Cyril's heretical enemies, is afforded by the fact that her chief disciple was afterwards converted to Christianity, and died as a Catholic bishop. The truth of this lady's history, in fact, can never be known, for it is related only by those who, either pronounced heretics themselves, or sympathisers with heretics, were anxious for nothing so much as to convict St. Cyril, directly or indirectly, of her murder. The gallantry that distinguished the conferring of degrees in Dunedin was absent from the proceedings at Christchurch, and there all that was notable was Professor Von Haast's glorification of physical science and apotheosis of nature. When Professor Von Haast, however, dubs Francis Bacon as the "immortal father of modern science," he contradicts, for example, such authorities as Jevons and Draper, who refuse to concede to him any such place. Jevons says that "discovery was achieved by the very opposite method to that advocated by Bacon." And Draper gives the glory of the scientific reformer to Leonardo da Vinci. Professor Von Haast utterly despises the schoolmen, but the scholastic Albertus Magnus understood and followed the inductive method some three hundred years before Francis Bacon was born. We may, besides, claim for our present Pope, Leo XIII., sufficient understanding to discern the needs and circum-

stances of the times, and it is to the study of the scholastic philosophy that he directs the attention of Catholic students so that they may be prepared to take their part in the science of the day. The scholastics, in short, are despised only by those who know nothing about them. But how admirable is the devotion of the learned to science! Was not that doctor to be envied of whom the apothecary in "M. de Pourceaugnac" declared that he would not for all the world cure anyone except with the remedies allowed by the Faculty. What is life in comparison with the interests of science, or what is the whole human race comparatively speaking? Comparatively or absolutely, indeed, we have reason to believe that the human race is a mere nothing. The proper study of mankind, says Professor Von Haast, is not man, but Nature, of which he is only "a minute and unimportant atom." The true man of science will view the human race in comparison with nature as that good doctor of whom Molière tells us viewed his patients with regard to the Faculty. But why should a "minute and unimportant atom" have any object of study? Let him trifle away his little foolish time, and perish as he is destined.—Contemptible, truly, is the history of mankind in the past; contemptible, as Professor Von Haast implies, are all the savings of the ancient writers, and the whole study and experience of the human mind. But are not the happiness and comfort of the race, for which the Professor looks in the future, quite as contemptible? and why should not our motto be that well-known one: Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die? Verily we need another Molière to slay with ridicule the egregious folly of our pedants. Meantime, we heard nothing of the "minute and unimportant atom" in Dunedin. Here the leading place in the day's performance was accorded to the fair sex, and who, under such circumstances, would dare to mention the "atom"? Whatever man may be—and who dare contradict the "Faculty"?—the "sweet girl graduate," not to speak of the professional spinster, must by no means be confounded with that. Every rule has its exception.

WHY is there no one to speak a word in favour of the refugees from New Caledonia who continue to arrive in the Australian colonies? Surely there is here added to our population an element belonging to the advanced progress of the times. These men are the outcome of a century of Freethought, and hail from the very centre of Freethought with all its honours thick upon them. Is it desired to establish the secular system so firmly among us that it cannot be moved? Nothing, then, can promise more hopefully for its future than the advent of multitudes of those whom the refugees so well represent. They are godless to the back-bone, and no baser term of reproach, according to their ideas, can issue from their mouths than that applied by them in contempt to one who acknowledges himself to be a Christian. Is it desired that the lyceum should replace the church among us, and that appreciative audiences should increase there daily? Who so fit to swell the enlightened congregations as those in whose very cafés and places of amusement the lofty sentiments of the lyceum have been habitually expressed even in the bacchanalian choruses? What Freethinkers among ourselves still repeat with some degree of hesitation and as not quite familiar has entered into the inner places of these people's life, and become part of their mental constitution. Why, then, do not our Freethinking friends welcome these refugees as the very santons of their sect, and the sterling hope of their system? For our own part, we confess that were a continual stream to set in towards our shores composed of people who had made as much progress in the practice of the Catholic religion as these refugees have made in those of Freethought, we should hail their arrival with delight, and all our powers would be put forth to give them a welcome and advance their interests in any way open to us. but the police alone seem to have a knowledge of these advanced members of the Freethinking sect, and in lyceum circles absolutely nothing is done to give them a helping hand. Our Freethinking friends, nevertheless, are neglectful of their true interests. The intelligence of even the ill-instructed Parisian is considerable and contact with the world, for which he has been so well situated, has taught him many things and brought much under his comprehending notice that people without his surrounding advantages might hardly acquire by attentive study from books. Our Freethinking friends have an unexplored treasure at their side, and the richness