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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ODDS AND ENDS.

THE following is the translation of a reply received from Madame de MacMahon, Duchess of Magenta, by the Auckland branch of the Irish National Federation. Our readers will remember that on the death of Marshal MacMahon, the branch had addressed a letter of condolence to his widow:—"To Mr Joseph A. Tole, President of the Irish Confederation. Sir, I have been deeply touched by the last homage, which you have just rendered, in the name of the Auckland Irish Confederation to the memory of him whom I weep. The marks of sympathy which in this day of mourning the old co-patriots of the family of the Marshal send me, are to me a very sweet and special consolation in the great grief which has crushed my life. Have the kindness then, sir, to express to the members of the confederation over which you preside my complete gratitude for it, and to kindly accept the assurance of my marked esteem.—MADAME DE MAC-MAHON. La Forêt, 10th December, 1893."

We clip the following from a contemporary:—"In Victoria recently, a Mr Ryan, in strolling over his paddocks, noticed a small cluster of trefoil which bore Cape weed blossom. The flower is the same size and colour as that produced by the Cape weed, but the stems of the specimens obtained were those of trefoil. If the character of the best grasses of our pastures is to be altered by a process of inoculation, the question assumes a serious aspect, and the Cape weed will be considered a greater 'curse' than the Californian thistle." Now it is a curious fact that a few weeks ago, the writer of this note was thrown into a state of wonderment by the discovery in his garden of a plant of Cape weed—bearing about half way up the flower stem a pansy blossom. Nothing less was thought of than a new antipodean marvel—even surpassing those that have been famous. On the submission, however, of the curiosity to one of the principal Dane linnæa florists, that gentleman admitted that it was indeed a curiosity—but no *lusus naturæ*. An insect, it appeared, had carried the pansy blossom up the stalk and tightly glued it there. Possibly a similar state of things may account for the wonder reported from Victoria.

It seems that in Italy the old superstition attached to the number 13 is carried to an excess. Elsewhere it has been confined to the sitting together at table of that number of people.

"Nombre fatal! présage épouvantable."

In Italy, however, we are told that to do anything particular on that particular day of the month is reckoned most unlucky. The case in question is the return to office of Signor Crispi, which was thus ill-timed. It would be fortunate if superstition only made the matter one of ill-omen.

The Sydney *Freeman's Journal* reports that Mr William Redmond, M.P., who, with Mrs Redmond, had been for some months on a visit to his father-in-law, Mr James Dalton, of Orange, has left New South Wales for Europe. Mr Redmond, says our contemporary, confined himself to private life during his stay in the Colony. It is to his credit that he not only refrained from making any attempt to introduce the elements of division among the friends of the Irish cause in Australia, or to increase those existing there, but even deprecated anything of the kind. He, nevertheless, declared, in an interview with a representative of the *Freeman*, that were the followers of Mr Justin McCarthy to send out a representative, the Parnellites would be obliged to do the same, so that no misrepresentation made about them should go unchallenged. This, Mr Redmond thinks, would probably result in a rowdy meeting. Mr Redmond's particular allusion was to an invitation sent to Mr Michael Davitt, which he thinks that gentleman should not accept. Mr Redmond claims that there is a strong minority of Parnellites in New South Wales, though he admits the great majority to be McCarthyites. He thinks that things have settled down so well in Australia, it would be unwise for either section to send out delegates.

We see that there is imminent danger in Westport of intellectual starvation. Owing to the condition of the finances the town council

have been obliged to reduce by one half, the subsidy granted to the local Athenæum. The chairman of the Athenæum committee consequently writes a letter that might bring a blush to the face of a barber's block—probably the least brainful thing covered by a head of hair. One of the councillors, in fact, was so moved by the sublimity of the thought and the beauty of the language, that he proposed that the writer should make up for the loss by a course of lectures. Another councillor seemed to think that, though the chairman had been as good as any four men to the institution in question, his services had not been quite of a lecturing kind. He condemned the suggestion as light and frivolous. And possibly it was so. Judging, at least, by the tone of the letter, its writer, as a lecturer, would be more likely to empty halls than to fill them. We should like to see what are the "hundred books" this "hifalutin" pundit would recommend. Meantime, we admit that it seems a pity when, on a full allowance of books, the gentleman in question shows such lean proportions, to cut him down to half rations. The council, however, remain obstinate, at least until they are blessed with an improved financial position.

The *New Zealand Herald* has a suggestive word or two to say respecting education. Our contemporary enumerates the great sums expended on education in this Colony. "Any foreigner," he says, "looking at this return would come to the conclusion that if the young New Zealanders were not well educated, it was not for want of a most elaborate and costly machinery for the purpose. It might naturally be expected that now, after the Colony has been in existence for more than half a century, a large proportion of our leading politicians would be men who had passed through our secondary schools and our universities. In all these colonies, however, the native element has not yet come strongly to the front, our politicians consisting for the most part of men who have been educated at Home. Many of them indeed are men who have not had what is called a "liberal" education anywhere, and who have come to the front by natural vigour and force of character. Such men, with all their good and useful qualities, never can be free from that narrowness of vision which such training almost necessarily implies." Into the political aspect of the matter we have no mind now to enter. We may, however, remark in passing that narrowness of vision may also, and actually does, exist in combination with a very "liberal" education, and that, too, most notably in the case of politicians. What we have to remark is the testimony borne to the waste of money in the particular line referred to. Last week we quoted the *Napier Telegraph* and the *Thames Star* in rebuke of the defects of our primary schools. Now we quote the *Auckland Herald* in condemnation of our secondary schools.

A correspondent has supplied the *Otago Daily Times* with the following paragraph taken from the *London Times* of Tuesday, July 14, 1846, and referring, as we are informed, to Mr Clifford, of Dunedin, who holds the Royal Humane Society's medal for the courageous feat narrated:—"On Sunday afternoon, about five o'clock, just as the Waverley, Kew Bridge steamer, had left the Cadogan pier, Chelsea, on her upward trip, an elderly gentleman was thrown, by the violent heeling of the vessel, occasioned by the immense number of people on board, from the fore part, where he was standing, some distance into the water. Mr George Clifford of the Temple, who was on board at the time, and while the vessel was still going on, boldly leaped in after him, and though a very indifferent swimmer, succeeded in getting hold of him and keeping him above water until the tide (which was very high at the time) fortunately drifted them across the hawser by which the floating barge attached to the pier is held. To this he clung tightly, grasping his prize, till both were fortunately taken from their perilous situation by a boat that had put off from the shore to their assistance, when they were landed in safety." All who are acquainted with Mr Clifford, we may add, will admit that he still retains the kindly disposition that prompted the bold deed in question. The public of Dunedin will recognise also that the gentleman referred to acted consistently in his late efforts to prevent the drowning of the residents of a certain suburb of our city by the bursting of a reservoir. What the members of the Dunedin Corporation may say or think concerning the matter, we do not pretend to divine.

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