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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

A DREAMY EYE AND A FLIP-PANT TONGUE. The *Otago Daily Times* quotes from the *Westminster Gazette* an interview between the Sydney correspondent of that paper and the Hon Mr Reeves. The *Times* makes neither note nor comment, but submits the matter to its readers in beauty unadorned. Our contemporary has possibly been struck speechless by the confidence expressed by the Minister in his Utopia—and that as a realm, not of the future, but actually existing and enjoying a plenitude of felicity. Mr Reeves' view of the state of affairs is, indeed, a very pretty thing, and nothing could be more delightful to all of us than a clear and full perception of its truth. And, by the way, Mr Reeves himself is evidently, in the eyes of this correspondent, a very pretty fellow. "He is a young man, dark, with a firm mouth and dreamy eyes; a barrister, a journalist, a popular poet, and the first and only Labour Minister in the British Empire." To Mr Reeves in his character, of the "popular poet" is due, perhaps, some little of the interview. But where are photographs of the hon gentleman to be obtained? It seems undeniable that they must tend to the adornment of any album whatsoever. Mr Reeves, meantime, gave a flowing account of the state of things in this colony, and the results obtained by its legislation:—The unemployed removed, at Government expense—which, nevertheless, is no expense, being promptly repaid—to remunerative employment; factories and shops, in which it is a pleasure, if not a positive luxury to serve, and where, if there is any mortification, it falls on the proprietors; perfect freedom for everyone, with compulsory arbitration, and a staff of inspectors to enforce it; a perfect confidence of capitalists, and an abounding prosperity of banks. But Mr Reeves' most enthusiastic point, perhaps, was that in which he referred to the enfranchised woman. Here, indeed, he spoke as we might expect the young man so charmingly described to speak;—"dark, with a firm mouth, and dreamy eyes." The enfranchised woman had, he declared, behaved herself to admiration. She had done everything excellent that any woman could possibly do, and was about to do everything else of the same kind. Above all, past or future, she had supported Mr Reeves himself in opposition to clerical influence—against two clergymen who had stood against him and three or four others—"some of them prominent and eloquent men,"—who had endeavoured to bring about his defeat. But shall the leopard change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin? Reverse the case of the male elector, and let it be one woman two votes, and shall she forget her nature? The well-favoured must win the day with her; the young man, "dark, with a firm mouth, and dreamy eyes," must still obtain her preference. Though the united synods of all the Colony stood against him, let Mr Reeves but multiply his photographs in the shop-windows, and he must be safe. Those "dreamy eyes" alone must do the business. The "altruism" with which Mr Reeves accredits the sex, must, in such a case, assert itself strongly—as, no doubt, the hon gentleman has good reason to know. But Mr Reeves again betrays some slight inconsistency with regard to that altruism in general of which he evidently desires to be taken as an extreme zealot.—The correspondent says he left him reading "A Traveller from Aitrusia." He declares his intention of reintroducing, with some modification, his Undesirable Immigrants' Bill. "Have you read it?" he asked, in apology for that judicious and almost idiotic document. In every Socialistic colony, he explained, some such Act must be passed—"for the moment we raise the condition of our people one inch others will flock in and frustrate our efforts." So be it then. But cease all pretence of "altruism." Plead expediency; plead necessity, but tell the truth. The principle of this exclusion, we repeat, is the very same as that on which his Grace the Duke or the Most Noble the Marquis acts, when, as the old line has it, he "steals the common from the goose." The exclusive altruist, in a word, makes an open profession of "gammon." Possibly we find the explanation of the bare quotation made by the *Otago Daily Times* of this interview, in its concluding paragraph. The

Minister, says the correspondent, spoke with great earnestness. "With the lessons of experience and perhaps too much of the confidence of youth, he seems to believe that the dreams of the Socialist will be realised in New Zealand." Not even this correspondent, favourably, and without sentimentally, though Mr Reeves had impressed him, takes the Minister quite seriously. But in the vapouring of an imaginative member any Ministry must have a weak point. Here Mr Reeves has spoken out of his dreamy eyes; elsewhere we had heard him speak with his flippant tongue, and, whether dreamy or flippant—in the wayward moods of the popular poet—a man whom nobody takes seriously may well be quoted without comment by an opponent of the Government—in suggestive, but powerful, testimony to their weakness. We agree with our contemporary, the *Daily Times*—this interview in itself is quite enough.

MISCHIEVOUS MORALITY. WE do not know whether Mr F. B. Chapman has ever appeared as counsel for *Punch*. There seems to be no doubt, however, that his appearance in the Dunedin police court last week, as counsel for a publican charged with the illicit sale of liquor on the Forbury race course proves him to be duly qualified for such a part. Mr Chapman's defence of his client was as amusing as it was ingenious, and it is hardly possible to read it without suffering a twist in the wrong direction. Not, however, that the defence was void of matter to interest the philosophic mind. There, for example, was the nice distinction drawn between an inadvertent and an unpremeditated act. Mr Chapman gave preference to the latter epithet. There was too, the distinction, mentioned by the learned counsel, "between bringing liquor there for the direct purpose of sale and the bringing of liquor there for another purpose and one of a *bona fide* nature.' But what, may we ask, was the *bona fide* purpose—that the liquor should be consumed by the accused and the two friends from the country, who, we are told, were giving their inadvertent or unpremeditated assistance? And surely, country cousins might well be excused if they took it as a matter of course that races should not be run on slops. Pathetic, again, was the picture of the sporting public arriving, each man with his flask ready filled, which for convenience, if not for safety, he deposited in the booth. The only prosaic figure in the whole scene was the constable in plain clothes who had deposited no flask, full or empty, but who found no difficulty in getting all he wanted—for an abuse of confidence—and could probably pour it out for himself. The owners of the flasks, explained Mr Chapman, asked the people selling the soda-water to put the spirits in.—Country cousins, indeed, might let the soda-water fly. The constable, however, was better advised. He took his "least as is" neat—with all the innocence characteristic of his calling—and no wonder the country cousins were taken in by him. The moral, meantime, is that, if people want liquor they will have it, and that forcing them to play such tricks as those so revealed is not only vain but mischievous. Human nature must become more sour and all of us must take on the Gradgrind frame before we can enter thoroughly into the spirit of the law so outraged. Mr Chapman did his best for his client. He made the law, or rather its administration in this particular instance ridiculous—and sympathy goes out perforce to those with whom we laugh.

ODDS AND ENDS. THE *Muswellbrook Register* (N.S.W.), as quoted by the *Sydney Freeman's Journal* of February 23 gives us welcome news of a much esteemed missionary:—"On Sunday last (says our contemporary) Father Plunkett, who was on a visit to Father English, preached twice, morning and evening, in St James's Church. The reverend visitor, who is a member of the Redemptorist Order, has had a long and varied experience in many lands. He had a high social standing in early life, being a member of a titled family, and was an officer of the British Army before joining the priesthood. He is now nearly ninety years of age, but his mind is as clear and his preaching as forcible, as regards argument and scholarly diction, as that of a man in the prime of life. On Sunday Father Plunkett announced that a mission would be given in Muswellbrook by members of the Order on the second Sunday in Lent, and he then mentioned

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