

# New Zealand Gazette

TWENTY-THIRD YEAR OF PUBLICATION.

VOL. XXII.—No. 16.

DUNEDIN: FRIDAY, AUGUST 16, 1895

PRICE 6D.

## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ODDS AND ENDS.

IT is to be feared that the visits to this Colony of distinguished personages as lecturers has been rather overdone. The tour, for example, of that London celebrity, the Rev R. H. Haweis, does not seem to have been especially marked by success. When Mr Haweis preached in a church of his communion—that is, the Anglican—his audience was crowded, but in the lecture hall there appears, as a rule, to have been room to spare. Why, however, did Mr Haweis reserve his best effort for the last. That, surely, was an error of judgment on the part of the management. Had the rev lecturer only come forward at the start as a *ci-devant* Garibaldian he might have drawn much better. The *ci-devant* Garibaldian, indeed, has a good deal that is interesting about him, and, in some instances, at least, could, if he would, impart to his hearers very sensational stories of life. All who followed to the standard of the adventurer were not, without exception, seriously affected. But even into the reminiscences of the rev lecturer himself there enters, we are told, something that is humorous. The lecturer, we find, alluded, "in a humorous way," to Garibaldi's love affairs—matters of a sort of poetic license that was very notable. Heroes of Garibaldi's stamp cannot be expected to submit to ordinary restrictions, nor, perhaps, is it reasonable to expect that those who recall their memories, as bright phases in their own bygone youth, should be over-particular in doing so. Men, for example, to whom, as to the Rev R. H. Haweis, Garibaldi and Mazzini remain as heroes, must necessarily make allowances for even such grave matters as piracy and assassination. How, then, can they be expected to deal too severely with what are, in comparison, mere peccadillos? It is, meantime, evident, as we have said, that for some time, at any rate, the celebrity, as a lecturer, has seen his best days in this Colony. Not even the Rev R. H. Haweis's choicest theme, offered as a last resource and at popular prices, availed to attract anything of an audience.

The Referendum, we find, like female franchise, forms a point upon which members of all parties seem inclined to agree, that is, to agree so far as means are concerned, but not at all to agree with regard to ends. In *Liberty*, for example, the organ of the National Association, for the current month, a plea is entered for the adoption of the system in strictly Conservative interests. Thus the writer expresses a conviction that, were the system adopted, an end would be put, once for all, to borrowing by the State. We have already referred to an article published recently on the subject in one of the London monthlies—the March number, in fact, of the *Contemporary Review*. There the writer states that from the Swiss Referendum, of which he gives a sketch, questions of finance were obliged, after a trial, to be excluded. "It was found, for example, by the experience of several cantons, that, owing to its repeated rejection by the people, the budget could not be included." Undertakings, moreover, such as those for which in New Zealand borrowed money is required, are also excluded in Switzerland—"public works the construction of buildings, the conservancy of rivers and the like." These, we are told, are looked upon as purely administrative and not requiring the formality of popular sanction, but they, or the class of undertakings to which they belong, certainly need an outlay. The suggestion, in short, seems to be that among ourselves the system must be applied in a manner different from that in which it is used in Switzerland and that, therefore, it would be an experiment without practical precedent and of whose working little could be predicted.

Another advantage among the many—always of strictly Conservative import, which the writer in *Liberty* foresees, would be the rousing of a large class of citizens—"whose political apathy," he says, "adds so largely to the chances of bad representation and consequently of bad government." "The referendum," says the writer in the *Contemporary* "has also given birth to a camarilla of politicians who exploit the credulity or passions of the populace in order to

oppose measures which are perfectly legitimate." Has the writer in *Liberty* never heard the old saying, "Better let sleeping dogs lie?" How does he know, for instance, what might replace an apathy which had been routed by the goads of one or other of our fanatical combinations? Our own chief objection, in fact, to the proposed system is the danger in question. In the referendum, in short, we should have a perpetual source of political turmoil. The writer in *Liberty* speaks of it as "only available upon a pretty general consensus of public opinion respecting an important question." The writer in the *Contemporary* says, "The optional referendum. . . . generally provokes a pretty lively contest first over the getting of the signatures, and still more over the votes themselves."

Homœopathy, we perceive, is still in the land of the living—is, indeed, not only alive but kicking. We have at hand the first number of the *Australasian Homœopathic Medical Gazette*, to be published quarterly in its interests. But what have we here—an apology for rattle-snakes? Perhaps, then, it was premature to introduce that clause into the Animals' Protection Bill. If snakes are imperatively demanded for useful or necessary purposes, matters of life or death, snakes should certainly be placed within reach. "The sudden and extreme coldness and blueness which follow the serpent's bite, the collapse, choleric state," etc, etc, afford, we are told, "very strong evidence in favour of the use of *Crotalus* (or rattle-snake venom) in cholera." But fancy the condition of the individual in whose inside the venom of the rattle-snake and the microbes of the cholera should be engaged in deadly combat. Other curious matter is also contained in the *Gazette*. The health and safety that lie in the venom of the rattle-snake, however, seem to us for the moment sufficient.

Personal experience, nevertheless, goes for something in most cases. Our own impression of homœopathy was early received. One day very many years ago, it happened that on our arriving at a certain house we found the family in commotion. An antidote was urgently needed, and some fuss was being made in its preparation. There was a patient, whom we did not see, but whose state we heard described. Her eyes were projecting, her face purple, and her head in agony. Belladonna—not as yet rattle-snake venom—was if we recollect aright, the cause—improperly administered, no doubt, the homœopathist will say. Early impressions, we say, remain, and, on the whole, we, for our part, prefer medicines that, at worst, are harmless. It may be as well after all to take your rattle-snake in the way nature has appointed, or even to let your cholera microbe do his work unassisted by an opponent.

On the other hand we had it once, on an assurance that seemed reliable—the pledged word of a schoolboy—which we believed at the time, and have since seen no reason to doubt—that he had himself swallowed a whole fist full of mixed globules without experiencing any effect whatever—not even by taste. The Doctor (D.D. not M.D.) had been called away, leaving the class ranged around his desk, and his desk open. Within it were the vials in tempting array, and who should swallow the contents wholesale became the question. It was solved as we have said. One globule, perhaps, was antidote to another—or all together were of the nature of bread pills. Rattle-snakes, at all events, remained so far unmedicinal.

Alphonse Daudet, the famous writer, who recently paid a visit to London, has not explained the impressions received by him there in a manner agreeable to British vanity. Indeed he has gone some way towards bringing discredit in the *Porfide Albion* on French politeness. The ladies themselves have come under the lash of his disapprobation. "Not only is the Englishwoman not handsome in feature," he says, "but there is nothing seductive in her physical form, and, moreover, she is an utter stranger to elegance and good taste." The pretty women, it is said, voted the Frenchman a bore. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. Rude expressions, like that quoted, nevertheless, do not tend to promote good feeling between the countries. The judgment of Paris, with modifications and variations, remains generally suggestive.

Two ladies still survive, at the ages respectively of 92 and 86, who were present at the ball in Brussels the night before the battle

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