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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

ODDS AND
ENDS.

THE discussion last week in committee on the liquor Bill had some interesting points; the adoption, for example, of a provision inflicting a penalty of £10 on any person obtaining liquor on Sunday under the false pretence that he is a lodger or traveller. Does this, by the way, include the informer who, under such a pretence, might try to entrap the unwary publican? Mr S. McKenzie's proposal, had it not been lost, might add to the interest of our streets and highways. It was to the effect that a prohibited person should wear as a distinctive badge a red or blue ribbon. The opposition was strong against Mr Seddon's proposal that the poll should be taken on the same day as the general election. We do not know however, that Captain Russell's inference might not have another side. Under the circumstances, he said, the sale of grog would dominate the whole political situation. But general politics perhaps would temper or counteract in some degree the prohibitionist fury. Mr J. W. Kelly's motion that the polling day be the second Wednesday in April, was carried on the voices. Most interesting of all, meantime, was Mr W. Hutchison's motion—that no liquor be sold to any woman. How, may we ask, does this fit in with the equality of the sexes? Mr T. Mackenzie would make an exception of the wife of a tourist or a traveller, to whom, while travelling, he would allow a glass of wine. On the whole it will be seen that as we have said the discussion was not without its points of interest.

One of the examination papers of a young girl in a city school contained the question: "Which zone produces the highest type of man?" In unmistakable characters the answer read: "The Temperance zone."

We had ourselves suggested that in dealing with Turkey relative to the condition of things in Armenia the British Government might find themselves in a position of some difficulty. A Mahomedan who writes in the *Nineteenth Century* bears us out. He describes the state of Mussulman feeling in India, concluding as follows:—"If the British and the Irish people, either Conservative or Radical, calmly think over the great responsibilities which they have as the rulers of the greatest Empire now existing in the world, and if they clearly appreciate their duty as the rulers of the greatest Moslem community in the world, they will not be carried away by racial or ecclesiastical prejudices. They will calmly and impartially judge before they condemn or agitate against any Moslem power or kingdom with which sixty millions of their fellow-subjects have strong sympathies. They will not readily take part in any outcry against Turkey or any Mussulman State, simply because the latter is not a Christian or European State."

Meanwhile outrages of the same atrocious kind continue to be reported from Armenia. Whatever, therefore, may be the claims on England of her Mussulman subjects, her obligations towards humanity are still more urgent.

A writer the *Fortnightly* for July says that it is "a fact not less remarkable than unexpected that in our day there should be an unmistakable renewal of strength and vitality in the Papacy." "As with the French peasantry and middle classes," he concludes, "so the Italians of the corresponding class only ask to be left alone, and in their hearts curse their rulers, struggling for plunder in the distant capital. So the Vatican looks on quietly until everything Italian has gone to smash. When the army has died for want of provisions, when the fleet has been seized by her creditors, when France garrisons Spezia, and a Russian squadron is moored in the Bay of Naples, when the last hungry deputy has scraped the final soldo out of the Treasury-chest and has retired to make boots once more in his village, when the *carabiniere* and the brigand, the *financiere* and the *contrabbandista* picnic amicably under the shade of the chestnut—then the time will be at hand for the great Restitution, and once more the character of the Holy Father will unite, with that of Sovereign Pontiff."

"The Church," this writer had before said, "believes that all the poorer and most of the middle and respectable classes sigh for the good old days—all save the political adventurer and the money-lender." "And," he adds in a note, "it must be admitted by any one knowing Italy, past and present, that they certainly were far more contented in those days."

The discovery of argon has led already to that, in our atmosphere, of another gas called helium, which in 1868 Mr Norman Lockyer had observed in the chromosphere of the sun.

At one time we had heard the common house-fly accused as the cause why the sandy-blight—an especially painful disorder of the eye—was a yearly recurring epidemic in a certain Australian township. When the flies were numerous people said it invariably renewed its annual appearance and became worse. Scientific experiment seems now to confirm this view. The experiments in question were recently tried by Mr W. T. Burgess. He, we are told, put flies in momentary contact with certain microbes prepared for the purpose—harmless microbes, lest, his conclusions proving true, mischief might result. Then he let the flies fly about for several hours in a large room. When caught again they were made to walk over slices of sterile potatoes. After being incubated for some days the potatoes were covered with growths of the organism wherever the flies had walked. The conclusion necessarily is that the destruction of house-flies, as a dangerous source of infection, is to be zealously undertaken and thoroughly carried out.

The office of the Church (writes Professor St George Mivart) is not to teach science, whether physical or historical. The Pope speaks, not as a critic but as a ruler, whose duty is to watch over the welfare, not of science, but of souls. Had the office of the Church been to teach science she would have failed indeed. But as long as we hold there is a moral ruler above us, and that our deliberate actions in this initial sphere of our existence have everlasting consequences, the Church's action is abundantly justified. All the errors of science, physical or historical, do not weigh in the balance, even infinitesimally, compared with the everlasting destiny of one human soul.

Mary (writes the Rev J. D. Breen, O.S.B.) is to be held personally responsible for the burning of heretics, only in the same sense in which Queen Victoria is to be held responsible for the massacre of Sepoys during the Indian mutiny.

Lady Cook is also, as we might suppose, an advocate for "rational dress reform." She publishes an article on dress, from the time it consisted in a smearing of the body with unguents down to the present day. One point, however, she misses—"Josephus," she tells us, "says that the Jewish ladies powdered their hair with gold dust. African princes do the same." How then had it escaped her Ladyship's researches that, among the follies of the Third Empire, was the same practice. The Empress Eugénie got the credit of introducing it—and, possibly with more truth than that with which in other instances she was accredited with initiating folly. The splendours of the Imperial court needed to be renewed or sustained. One extravagance brings on another. Probably this burnishing of the hair with gold led to the fashion of dyeing it red—in vogue at the same time, or a little after. The red, however, was not the carrotty hue that, for the most part, people do not admire. It was a deeper colour, somewhat more ruddy than old gold, and to some faces it was not unbecoming. Lady Cook, then, happens on a good deal, real or imaginary, but, in sweeping together her details, some points escape her.

"Inquirer must really address his future questions to 'Notes and Queries.' We do not believe a child's knickers were first worn in Nicaragua."

His Worship the Mayor of Dunedin last week, on behalf of the Governor, presented certificates and medals of the Royal Humane Society of Australasia to certain gentlemen, who had deserved them as follows:—Mr Welby Earl Fisher, of St Clair, who had rescued