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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

OURSELVES.

THE Rev. Henry W. Cleary, recently of Ararat, Victoria, arrived in Dunedin by the s.s. "Monowai," and has taken charge of the editorial department of the N.Z. TABLET.

SOME HOT SPELLS.

THE Melbourne *Argus* has been supplying some fatherly advice to its readers—on Poor Richard's principle: When it is fine bring your cloak, when it is raining do as you will. A short time ago

it published a column of matter, by a Collins street medico, cautioning people what to eat and wherewith to clothe themselves while being slowly roasted alive by one of the heat-waves that drop in unexpected and uninvited among the southern colonies of Australia. It was, perhaps, merely a coincidence that the article in question appeared in a lucid interval between two hot spells—at a time when people were revelling in fresh, cool breezes from the South, and suffering a recovery from the effects of the week-long wave which had reached 118 in the shade; had killed off sleep, like Macbeth; confined sundry scores of men, women and children; trebled the consumption of beer; set soda-water bottles a-volleying night and day all over the land; and caused the thirsty denizens of Melbourne to draw water—for internal and external application—to the lively tune of forty-four million gallons per day. The readers of the *Argus* were busy forgetting that the lines had ever been penned, when, lo! another tidal wave of heat broke from its moorings in the tropics, and once more submerged Victoria and the two neighbouring colonies in a glowing atmosphere fit only for a coolie or a salamander. Meteorologists and weather prophets—for they are not necessarily the same thing—tell us that these heat-waves are usually due to antarctic depressions, that they usually advance in a rotary spiral, and vary in width from a hundred to several hundred miles. All this information must have been comforting to the sufferers whose lives were, for the time being, a pendulum beat between a lemon-squash and shandy-gaff. It is fortunate that these sultry visits are not usually either frequent nor of long duration. As evidencing the high capabilities which a thorough-going heat-wave has of producing physical discomfort we may state that the thermometer at Stawell (Victoria) has reached 120 in the shade. At Euston, in New South Wales, it is stated to have reached 124 in the shade during the heat-wave which ushered in the New Year; and Baron von Mueller, in his *Select Extra-Tropical Plants*, tells us how a district in the Riverina (New South Wales) once stewed to the tune of 124 in the shade. The deserts of the interior, however, seem to be the recognised hot-blast furnace of Australia. Lumholtz describes them as "hotter and more arid than any other part of the earth." An idea of their higher capabilities may be had from the experiences of Sturt and his fellow-explorers in the intensely hot summer of 1844. "The earth," says Sutherland, "split the hoofs of the horses; it scorched the shoes and feet of the men. . . . The heat was sometimes 130 in the shade, and in the sun it was altogether intolerable. They were unable to write, as the ink dried at once on their pens; their combs split; their nails became brittle and readily broke, and if they touched a piece of metal it blistered their fingers. In their extremity, they dug an underground room, deep enough to be beyond the dreadful furnace glow above. Here they passed many a long day, as month after month passed without a shower of rain."

A THREATENED FAMINE. THE English opium-eater said in his *Confessions* that he could "put up even with rain provided it rained cats and dogs," and then ceased. But that is not the way it rains in Ireland. The dismal drip, drip of the Autumn of 1896 ruined the grain and potato crops.

A similar alarming failure of the harvest of 1897 has brought the peasantry of several counties on the west coast face to face with famine. The area threatened with this fearful visitation is a wide one, covering, among other places, considerable portions of Kerry, Clare, Mayo and Donegal. Meetings have been held throughout the affected districts, local bodies are up and doing, and Government is being urged to take prompt and effective action with a view to meeting a situation, which has already assumed a serious phase. In the face of such grave danger, it seems to us that the demands of the people's leaders are both moderate and feasible. They call for the construction of a much required light railway to Belmullet, and of necessary roads in other districts. Among the other measures suggested are small loans to farmers—a system which has already borne good fruit elsewhere in the west—the distribution of seed potatoes and reductions in rents in proportion to the extent of the disaster which has fallen upon the tenant farmers. An urgent and insidious source of danger lies in the old, old policy of delay of the measures necessary to stave off or to minimise to the last degree the tragic and long-drawn suffering of famine. On such a subject Irishmen must ever write and speak with deep feeling. It must not be forgotten that in the background of the present trouble there lie the famine of 1879-1880 and the ghastly agony of 1846-1847, one of the most tragic and awful of all human events. It left two chief memories burned as with iron into the heart and brain of the Irish race: the memory of a terrible suffering, borne with extraordinary patience, and, (occasionally, even with a sort of gaiety, as grim as the presence of a harlequin at a funeral. Think of the haggard, gaunt, starving old dame at Skibbereen! "You're losing your teeth, granny," said the relief doctor. "'Deed an' it's time for me to lose 'em when I've nothing for 'em to do.'" But there is another memory which Black Forty-seven leaves in the Irish breast—that of an unwillingness on the part of the Government to learn hard facts or face them, or to make in due time that due provision which would have mitigated, if it could not have prevented, the colossal calamity which lost the land a million of her children and started the exodus which even still is draining her life-blood away. The same fatal blunder was repeated, in a great measure, when the country was face to face with the happily lesser famine of 1879-1880. The lesson of those two famines points out, as with a finger of iron what the duty of Government is to the west of Ireland to-day.

THE GERMAN EMPEROR.

THE ever-genial "Flaneur" of the *Sydney Freeman's Journal* discourses thus pleasantly upon the mighty atom whose impulsive brain is circled by the Imperial crown of Germany:—

"A splendid (and true) story is told to the effect that an English gentleman on a visit to Germany was recently walking with a friend in the Unter der Linden, and in the course of a discussion on Kaiser William's many absurdities he committed a gross case of that awful offence which is known by the still more awful name of Majestats Beleidigung. 'There's no getting away from the fact that the Emperor is a d—d fool,' exclaimed the Englishman, and the words were hardly out of his mouth before a police officer tapped him on the shoulder, and said:

"'You must goom mit me to der poleesc-station.'

"'What am I to do that for?'" asked the astonished Britisher.

"'Mein Herr, did call ze German Emperor a tam fool,' replied the officer.

"'Not at all,' said the other cutely. 'It was the Russian Emperor that I was talking about.'

"'Oh, no, sare, dot vill not vash,' observed the guardian of the peace, 'there is no Emperor vat is a tam fool except ze Emperor of Zhermany.'

"The Teutonic 'trap' was right, I fancy, but there is certainly a much greater fool alive than the crack-brained Kaiser, and he is Prince Henry, who has started off to China to 'uphold the sanctity of his royal master.' There is no knowing what terrible trouble such a pair of prize idiots as hims-elf and the Kaiser may