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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE entry of the world into the last decade of the THE NEW YEAR. Nineteenth Century is a memorable event. The age is now drawing sensibly towards its end, and we may begin to look forward to the dawn of that which is to succeed it. Ten years, indeed, are a long time to look forward to, but how short they seem to most of us in their passing or on their completion—to most of us that is who have reached the middle or the decline of life.

"Days that were as long
As twenty days are now."

So did Wordsworth speak of the days of his early youth, and, indeed, as we come closer to the end, time gallops with ever-increasing swiftness. During the years of the century that have passed by the world seems to have shared the lot of the individual, and to have moved more rapidly in its declining age. Judging by the course of events, time has certainly gone forward with it much more quickly. Great and complete changes have occurred, and the slowly moving methods have gone by for ever. The development of civilisation, in short, has proceeded with a swiftness undreamt of before, and so much has been done under the eyes of many of us who are living still and have not even attained to the limits of human life, that our own experience alone has prepared us to witness almost whatever may come without surprise. We may, therefore, hope that, short as is the interval that lies between the year upon which we have now entered and the end of the century, we may see many changes, still to be desired, carried out. What, for example, may we not hope for with respect to our own colony? The settlement of New Zealand, so far as it has proceeded—and that is comparatively in a very great degree—has been the growth not only of the Nineteenth Century, but of its latter portion. Fifty years at most have built and peopled our cities, and spread flocks and herds and cultivated tracts abroad over the land. They have given us a legislature and statesmen trained in the ways of government. Since progress quickens as it goes, what then may we not expect from a fifth part of the time already so fruitfully accomplished? We are, moreover, entering upon the period in question with favourable prospects, and the fullest encouragement to hope. We may confidently look forward to beginning the Twentieth Century—to begin with the next decade that sets in—all our difficulties surmounted, and with the path smooth before our feet. There is, meantime, another country in whose condition we also take a warm interest—but which has hardly shared the common lot—or kept pace with the progress of the age. Our readers will understand that our allusion is to Ireland, where an effort is being obstinately made to continue a state of things totally inconsistent with an advanced civilisation. Fortunately, however, signs are not wanting that this effort must fail—and that the evils so long continued must yield to wiser counsels. During the ten years on which we now enter Ireland also will attain to ameliorated conditions. The century, therefore, draws to a close for us with improved prospects, and in a manner that gives us reason to conclude that the general advancement which it has fostered will proceed in the new age with renewed vigour.

ACCORDING to the London correspondent of the CIVILISATION Sydney *Morning Herald*, the advanced civilisation DISGRACED, of the day has characteristics that are on a level with the worst that barbarism ever produced. It would seem, according to the authority in question, that it is quite common in Ireland for young girls to be carried off against their will, so that it is dangerous for them to be allowed into the streets alone. The correspondent gives one particular case in which a young lady of good standing in society, had been so treated, being eventually found, after indescribable suffering and degradation, in a German town. But surely such a state of things is infinitely disgraceful and reflects badly on the Government under which it occurs. We have been accustomed to regard it as distinctive of a ruder age that life

and honour were less secure than our more perfect institutions ensured their being. As in the case of the Whitechapel murders, however, we see that life may be taken with impunity in the open streets, and, in the instance mentioned by the correspondent to whom we allude, a proof is given that women are unprotected. What, therefore, is at fault? Can it be that the law is not severe enough, and that its penalties, in consequence, have not a sufficient deterrent effect for the evil-doer? The penalty of death might be thought severe enough, and, if not out of keeping with humanity, it would at least be out of harmony with the milder spirit of the age to advocate a thing that might add to its terrors. But, perhaps, those men who in older times thought it necessary to inflict torture as well as death were not altogether actuated by the cruelty that we are wont to attribute to them. The rougher natures they had to deal with might not have felt the deterrent effect of the penalty of death inflicted in accordance with the dictates of humanity and that it was so the legislators of the times were, possibly, aware. What, meantime, seems certain is that the law as it exists for the protection of women is not sufficiently severe. It has not sufficient terrors for the ill-doer, and it leaves a discretionary power in the hands of his victim that may also give him encouragement. In that case, for example, of the young lady spoken of by the Sydney *Herald's* correspondent, and in which the victim had been overcome by an anæsthetic forcibly administered to her at the Victoria Station, we are told that her relatives were unwilling to have any stir made in the matter because of the exposure entailed by it. But this was to act against the interests of society, to shelter the criminal, and to condone his crime. It may seem a harsh thing to advocate, but such inaction on the part of the sufferers should not be tolerated. They should be obliged to speak out and to take all such steps as lie in their power for the detection and punishment of the criminal, and no feeling of consideration for the suffering and injury already endured by them should be allowed to stand in the way of this. While there is room for people of criminal disposition to believe that a loop-hole of escape may be left for them in the shame and reticence of those injured by them, there will be additional encouragement given them for the commission of crime. Silence or inaction, then, in any such case as this should certainly be made penal. As for the criminal, it must indeed be a mawkish sentiment that would show him any leniency. Laws of extreme severity—inflicting even the capital penalty, if nothing else could deter—should in his case be administered without flinching. Finally, as to the conduct of the police, for whom the *Herald's* correspondent offers some excuse in the indiscriminate manner in which foreigners are admitted into England, is it quite sure they are always as active in the prevention of crime as they ought to be? To detect a crime and bring the criminal to justice is a merit on the part of the constable, and advances his interests in the service. But why should it not be reckoned quite as much or even more to his credit that the district in which he was employed was free from crime? The watchfulness and activity that had this result should be looked upon as doubly meritorious. London, it may be argued, is a long way off, and why should we trouble ourselves about what goes on there? or how does it concern us in New Zealand? We would say in reply that it is in the great centres we must seek for the characteristics of the age. Elsewhere they will also exist, in a greater or less degree, and there is no part of the civilised world in which we may not believe that what takes place habitually in London will also take place under modified circumstances. No part of the civilised world can afford to regard with indifference a failure of civilisation in one of its great centres.

DOUBTFUL PROSPECTS. THE New Year appears to be coming in with a lion. Let us hope it may complete the proverb by going out like a lamb. There is, for example, a threat of trouble with Portugal, who, in some way or another, has encroached on British rights, or what are claimed as British rights, in South Africa. Germany, if we recollect aright, did as much, if not more, a year or two ago; but trouble with Germany would be far too serious a matter to be lightly encountered. British rights, or the claims to them, were, in consequence, waived. We heard nothing as to a rendezvous of the British fleet anywhere so as to be ready for German