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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION.

POSSIBLY the somewhat lengthy cablegrams relative to the silver question and the monetary conference that have been of late published have aroused, but not satisfied, the curiosity of our readers. The question has arisen principally from the condition of things in the United States where, by an Act in force for some years, the Treasury are bound to buy every month four and a half million ounces of silver. In payment notes are issued—and of these there are now outstanding a quantity representing a very large sum, and which increases monthly. But adding this to a mass of paper otherwise issued, a vast sum is arrived at. The available gold, meantime, held by the Treasury amounts to, comparatively, a very inconsiderable sum. What, therefore, a run upon the Treasury must involve is plain. As a remedy, it is proposed that the Treasury should cease its monthly purchase of silver—in which case the credit of the country would be sufficient for the rest. Meantime India is also strongly affected. There a fall in the value of the rupee has been the cause of no little disturbance in trade. The exchange value of the rupee has fallen from 2s to 1s 3d, and, as a consequence, civil servants and others whose salaries are paid in the country have virtually lost about one third of their income. The question is how to retain the value of the rupee. But the effect of a further fall in the value of silver, such as must ensue on a stoppage of the monthly purchase made in the United States is clear. If, however, the Indian currency were changed for that established in the United Kingdom—that is, if gold instead of silver were made the standard—wages and prices must fall all over the country and the boards of silver in the possession of wealthy natives would lose heavily in value. The consequence would be serious irritation—nay, possibly rebellion against English rule. A proposal, we perceive has been made at the Conference for a bimetallic or gold and silver standard, but this, which, especially owing to the difficulty of maintaining a fixed ratio between the metals, is a knotty question, could only be carried out by means of an international agreement—and, indeed the proposal alluded to is for an International Bimetallic League." What are the probabilities, we may ask in conclusion, that certain of the great powers would agree to this, with the end chiefly in view of maintaining the popularity of the British Government in India?

A MODEST DEMAND.

THE report of the visit paid on Thursday from Dunedin by the Native Minister to Otakou—more generally known as the Maori Kaik—has made us acquainted with a quite unsuspected state of things.

It seems there is the remnant of a Maori tribe living in our neighbourhood who as they state, are in trouble and wailing and pain for the last 48 or 50 years. Their reception of Mr Cadman was most pathetic. They blessed him, and thanked him, and prayed for him, as the first Native Minister they had ever seen. Their grief becomes much more pathetic and much more interesting to us when we learn its object. All, it would appear, rests on a claim made by this remnant of a tribe to a sum of tenths of the Otago Block amounting to £937,945, and a further sum of £78,000, the value of the Dunedin boat reserve—and very solid grounds, too, we should say, for a display of feeling. We do not, however, know whether our Maori friends blessed and prayed so much over the departure of the Minister as they did over his arrival. The Minister, in some way or other, explained to them that they had already been paid every penny that they had a right to. There was no disguising, he said, that he did not imagine that Parliament would for a moment think of entertaining such a claim. And then he fell back on the unearned increment. "The land," he said, "had no value till the Europeans came and gave a value to it." The Minister, nevertheless, promised that Government would do their best to provide the landless Natives with suitable blocks, warning them to take advantage of the offer before it was too late. The Hon H. K. Taiaroa, meantime, though hardly in the scientific spirit to which we are accustomed, displayed a faith in the better

disposition of the men of the future. He requested that the Government would set down in writing their proposal as to the blocks of land in question, lest it might be said in after years by other Governments that the Maoris had thus cancelled their claim. And possibly there may be some satisfaction to the individual who entertains it in the delusion that he is rightful heir to a vast inheritance. We should be sorry to think that the payment of the sum of money in question was really necessary for the relief of the wailing and trouble of our Maori neighbours. There is a vulgar old saying, in short, that seems applicable—Don't they wish they may get it?

LORD SALISBURY, in an article in the *National Review* for November, sets at derision Mr Gladstone's project of Home Rule, and, more especially his idea of compelling the House of Lords to pass the measure. He ridicules the notion of passing a Home Rule Bill in a House of Commons where they have a "motley majority of thirty-eight." As to the House of Lords, he says Mr Gladstone's threats carry with them all the terrors of the unknown. Lord Salisbury however, proceeds to deal with Mr Frederick Harrison, who, he admits, is more definite. Mr Harrison proposes the disappearance of the House of Lords. But this proposal, writes Lord Salisbury, is not original. "It is very much what the House of Commons did in 1649." For its success, however, the command of a military force was needed—a desideratum not as yet possessed by Mr Gladstone—and, adds the writer, the House of Commons that had acted in the manner alluded to, did not live long to enjoy its solitary grandeur. As an alternative, Mr Harrison proposes a creation of Peers by the Crown—"five hundred sweeps," if desirable—the penalty being, in case of the Crown's refusal, a refusal of supplies by the House. Lord Salisbury, however, questions the power of the Crown to do what Mr Harrison desires it should be punished for not doing. The question he says has never been decided. He quotes precedent, moreover, to prove that the House of Lords can refuse to allow Peers so created to sit and vote. This, he says, was done in 1711, in the case of Scottish Peers created Peers of Great Britain, and again in 1856, when Lord Wensleydale was created a life Peer by Prerogative, the reason assigned being that the independence of the House as a legislative body was being threatened. Lord Salisbury, nevertheless, agrees with Mr Harrison, that the Lords would give way if Mr Gladstone and the nation were thundering at their doors." "Yes," he says, "even if the nation were thundering alone." What he denies is that the nation will so thunder—indeed he declares that the thunder will roll in an opposite direction. In an electorate of four million eight hundred thousand, he asserts the total majority amounted only to seven hundred and sixty-five votes. Then his Lordship falls back once more on the no-Popery cry and asks whether the Orangemen of Ulster would accept such a vote, scattered over England and Scotland, "as a sufficient warrant for surrendering them for ever to the good pleasure of Archbishop Walsh and his Party." We must not, therefore, be over-sanguine as to the immediate prospects of Home Rule. A violent, protracted, and repeated struggle, and many other devices, still lie between Mr Gladstone's proposals and their accomplishment. Another appeal, or more, perhaps, to the country, a question as to the power of the Crown, a question as to the prerogatives of the House of Lords, a passionate summoning up of the spirit of anti-Catholic bigotry, that possibly has not been killed, but scotched, among the ranks of the people of Great Britain. We must not delude ourselves by any vain hopes of a walk-over. Lord Salisbury and his party are able and wily enemies, and in their hands are many powerful weapons.

Now that is the way to talk. There is no beating a candid lady, about the bush there, but an outspoken expression of opinion that all of us may understand. And, by the way, there is an opening pointed out right off for the amazons of Dahomey. Now that the French have deposed their king and spouse, there can be no need for their services at home. We allude to the candid expression of opinion made the other day, at a conference of the Women's Emancipation Union in Birmingham, by one Miss Coxens, a delegate from London. There was a lot of speeches and papers delivered or read, but all was namby-pamby in