

Current Topics

Saw the Joke

Our able and quick-witted Sydney contemporary, the 'Freeman's Journal', says: 'The "New Zealand Tablet," edited by the Rev. H. W. Cleary, has been permanently enlarged to 40 pages from the July 12 issue. The choice of the date for enlarging this brilliantly-conducted weekly is a stroke of refined sarcasm on the part of Father Cleary.'

We reckoned at the time that some of our bright over-sea contemporaries would see where the joke came in.

'Rather Suggestive'

'It is rather suggestive to note,' says the 'Catholic Universe,' in a recent issue, 'that the three women essayists who are generally recognised as the writers of the best English in contemporary literature—Alice Meynell, Louise Imogen Guiney and Agnes Repplier—are all Catholics and the products of convent schools.'

Australasia's Thirst

The art and craft of drawing up drink statistics was unknown in Addison's day. Each man kept his own record, 'if so disposed'—like 'honest Will Funnell of the West Saxon,' who in the course of twenty thirsty years had (according to his own computation) personally disposed of 23 hogsheads of October, four tuns of port, half a kilderkin of small beer, 29 barrels of cider, three glasses of champagne, besides (according to Addison) numberless bowls of punch, sips, drams, and whets. We cannot boast nowadays; but we have got a long way off in manners, as in time, from the roystering and whisky-swilling era of Will Funnell and his kind. Nowadays the statist keeps the tally of the nation's small beer and 'punch, sips, drams, and whets,' and he strikes off individual scores by the convenient resort of an average. And the result cannot be said to make very pleasant reading. Here are the latest figures for the six States of Australia, with New Zealand added as a lag.—

	Amount.	Per Head.	Per Adult Individual.		
			£	s.	d.
Victoria ...	4,937,470	4 2 0	7	11	3
New South Wales ...	5,044,590	3 12 2	6	19	7
Queensland ...	1,869,470	3 13 4	7	1	2
South Australia ...	1,550,210	4 5 9	8	7	5
Western Australia ...	1,446,110	7 1 5	11	7	0
Tasmania ...	419,490	2 7 7	4	15	1
Australia ...	15,267,340	3 19 2	7	9	7
New Zealand ...	2,239,290	2 13 1	4	19	1

The order of temperance, based upon per capita consumption, runs as follows: Tasmania, New Zealand, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia.

Germany's huge thirst takes over fifty per cent. more alcoholic assuaging than New Zealand's and slightly more than Australia's. Its annual liquor-bill amounts to £131,517,600. And (says the United States consul at Kiel in a recent report) 'according to published statistics, each inhabitant consumed yearly 6½ quarts of wine, 129½ quarts of beer, and 9 quarts of brandy. The per capita cost was £2 5s, including women and children. The average for male citizens over fifteen years would be £7 10s.' (American dollars are here turned into the corresponding amounts in English currency). Bismarck is stated to have declared that 'Germany is ruined by the beer plague'. And Germans at home of every position do undoubtedly spend an unconscionable time in the thick, smoky atmosphere of their beer-houses, of which the number and the patronage almost surpass belief. Nor can we in New Zealand afford to boast in this matter

of temperance, despite the position that we hold among the Australasian States. Our enormous advantage in the matter of climate and water-supply should, by itself alone, make us rate much higher as a temperate people than our neighbors that dwell in the hot, dry, and thirsty lands beyond the Tasman Sea. Yet the road to ruin is pretty nearly as well paved here as in Australia. We have an unpleasant percentage of people who (like Artemus Ward) never permit business to interfere with their drinking, and who

'Get on a spree
And go bobbing around'.

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Among our licensed victuallers there are, we know, very many who conduct what is a very risky and responsible business, in a respectable and legal way. But there hangs on to the skirts of 'the trade' a bedraggled fringe of scallywags who systematically set the laws of God and man at defiance, who fatten on the physical and moral degradation that they encourage; and who with a light heart send souls to the fiery whirlpool and the bottomless pit—so long as the diabolical game piles the guilty shakels in their fob. They are the real originators and the most eloquent leaders of the Prohibition movement, and not the men who rightly denounce them as destroyers, and who wrongly assume that all in the same business are tarred with the same number of coats by the same red-devil's brush. The law, as it stands, is by no means sufficiently drastic to deal effectively with the licensed malefactor who gratifies his rapacity at the expense of the moral code and the public weal. All too often, the sword of justice fails to touch him, just as the sword of Aeneas failed to wound the impalpable shadows of the dead that flitted before his vision. But the law can be made to reach them—by the double way of prevention and of cure: of prevention, by barring the access of the undesirable to 'the trade', and of cure, by ejecting him (if he secures an entry) with commendable neatness and despatch. We have more than once indicated how this may be done. And we have full many a time urged, and still urge, the licensed victuallers as a body to press for such legislation as shall permanently eliminate the scallywag and the reprobate from 'the trade'. But this urgent move in an urgent reform is, like Prince Charlie, 'lang a-comit'. Ludwig Boerne avers that the typical Fatherlander will wear his coat threadbare while making up his mind whether or not he will have a new button sewn upon it. 'Eile mit Weile' is his motto—'make haste in a leisurely way'. But when a reform is urgently needed in the public interest, 'the present time is the pleasant time'. It was the roue and the trifler who sang long ago: 'To the gods belongs to-morrow'.

The Law's Delays

'Fond of lawsuits, little wealth, fond of doctors, little health.' The first part of this old Spanish proverb finds a curious illustration in the following paragraph that has of late been greeting us with the smile of an old friend from half-a-dozen daily papers in New Zealand:—

'In the two villages of Luceran and Lanconque, in the Alpes-Maritimes, France, June 11 was kept as a public holiday to celebrate the end of a great lawsuit which had kept the two villages divided since November 11, 1162. The question in dispute was the possession of a piece of land at Lova which each village claimed. Recently the court at Nice definitely settled the matter by dividing the land equally between the villages. The total cost of this lawsuit during the 444 years amounts to £30,000, while the value of the land in dispute was about £400. The law papers which had accumulated were docketed in 1856 parcels which weighed 16 tons, and were stored in a large disused church.'

Thirty thousand pounds and (presumably) four centuries of the customary bitterness of Little Pendleton feuds—and all for a parcel of mother earth worth