Current Topics

'Yo-ho-ho!'

In the early Church (as some one has remarked) young men went to the lions; now many of them go to the dogs. The road varies, like the shifting channel of the Mississippi, but the ultimate destination is ever the same. For great numbers it is the old story:—

> 'Drink and the devil had done for the rest
> Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum,'

A change of air is still as confidently prescribed for youthful follies as it is for 'nerves' and brain-fag and wasted tissue. It is (as somebody has said of second marriages) the triumph of hope over experience. Dr. Johnson, when on his tour to the Hebrides, gave this advice regarding one who had begun to 'go the pace' on the Yo-ho-ho incline that leads to the door with the inscription, 'All hope abandon ye who enter here': 'Let him go abroad to a distant country; let him go to some place where he is not known. Don't let him go to the devil, where he is known.' But Dr. Johnson wrote before the days of the 'jackeroo' and of 'colonial experience.' The young man who goes to the dogs under the safeguards of a good home, will soon be mortgaged to Satan when he goes abroad in search of 'experience' and in the hope of 'reformation.'

A Postal Reform

A Press Association telegram from Wellington makes the following announcement of an important postal reform: 'The reduction on postage rates for letters in the Colony and Cook Islands to 1d for 4oz or fraction thereof, and on charges for the transmission of telegrams within the Colony to ½d per word, with a minimum of 6d, and on urgents of 1d per word, with a minimum of 1s, comes into operation on November 1.' The new postal rates are the most generous that exist in any civilised country. Yet, as far back as the last two years of the reign of Charles II., Robert Murray introduced a penny post into London that, even allowing for the different values of money in those days and now, must be regarded as remarkable for the times. Murray's penny post passed speedily under the control of William Docwra. The rates between London and the rural districts are set forth as follows by Sydney, a Protestant writer, in his 'Social Life in England from the Restoration to the Revolution' (pp. 222-8): 'All letters which did not exceed a pound in weight, and any sum of money which did not exceed ten pounds in value, and any packet which did not exceed ten pounds in value, should be conveyed at a cost of one penny within the city and suburbs, and of twopence to any distance within a circuit of ten miles'. In the busy parts of the city, there were as many as six or eight deliver es made during the course of the day, and in the outlying districts four deliveries.

England's first penny post was a pronounced success. But religious passion soon broke up what commercial enterprise had established. 'The system', says Sydney (p. 229), 'was loudly denounced by the Protestants as a contrivance on the part of notorious Papists, to facilitate the communication of their plots of rebellion one to another. The infamous Titus Oates, assured the public that he was convinced of the complicity of the Jesuits in the scheme, and that undeniable evidence of it would certainly be found by searching the bags'.' Postal monopolists and city porters also complained. So Docwra was fined, and the penny post was abolished. Through the efforts of Sir Rowland Hill, it was revived and extended under a modified form on January 12, 1840. On May 6, of the same year, adhesive stamps were first issued to the public. In the matter of weight, our new postal rates represent a useful reform in the direction of the generous provisions of Docwra's days.

A Cook Monument

Phil May added much to the gaiety of the nations by his series of 'things that might have been said differently.' Our monuments to our great men are droll (or rather melancholy) examples of things that might have been done differently. The goodness of the intention and the poverty of the performance wrap the beholder in 'a most humorous sadness'. Witness, for instance, the grotesque marble Thing that stands on its corns in front of our Parliament House and brings a blush upon the face of the rising moon. There are monuments we wot of, poor in art, but as good as, or better than, the cause they stand for. But that caricature in marble was a sorry joke to play upon the memory of John Ballance. He deserved better things from a country that he had loved and served so well. But the memorial was kindly meant. It was as well intended as the action of the warm-hearted old elephant that met a brood of orphan chicks in the days when pigs were swine and turkeys chewed tobacco. 'Poor things', said the elephant, 'they have no mother to sit upon them; but I will be a mother to them; I will sit upon them'. And she did. Good intentions do pretty nearly as much harm as does downright malice in this 'wale of tears'.

We venture the hope that Captain Cook has this week fared better at Gisborne than did Ballance at Wellington and Wanganui. On Monday, a monument to the great navigator was unveiled near the spot at Gisborne where he landed on October 8, 1769—137 years ago. The event deserved a fitting memorial. It was Cook's third great voyage of discovery. He was ploughing a furrow round the earth with the keel of the 'Endeavor', after the scientists on board the old wooden sailer had observed the transit of Venus from a point of vantage on Tahiti. Thence he headed away in search of a great southern continent that was supposed to stretch from far Antarctica up to 40 degrees South. But the great lone land proved to be a sailors' myth. Cook then headed away to the north-west, slicing the surface of the Southern Ocean till, on that October morning, he cast anchor in Poverty Bay. The Maoris (then numerous on the coast) were not at the time disposed to receive pakeha visitors. They said so with considerable emphasis, and pounded the earth till it shook with the wild rhythm of the war-dance, performed by lusty 'cannibals that each other eat'. So Cook sailed away. He sailed around New Zealand (he was the first white man that did so), charted its coasts, found that it was not (as Tasman had supposed) a part of New Holland (Australia), and discovered and sailed through the straits which bear his name. In 1770 he looked his last for that voyage on New Zealand, at Cape Farewell, anchored in Botany Bay, and found that Tasmania is an island, and not (as had been thought) a part of the Australian mainland. He next explored, charted, and in part discovered, two thousand miles of the eastern coast of Australia, narrowly escaped shipwreck, and reached home in 1771, after an adventurous three-years' voyage.

Macaulay says in his history that there were gentlemen and seamen in the navy of the Second Charles. 'But', he added, 'the seamen were not gentlemen, and the gentlemen were not seamen'. Cook, the Yorkshire farm-laborer's son, was one of nature's gentlemen. And he was a seaman from the crown of his bob-wig to the soles of his big sea-boots. For his work he well deserves the title of great. For (as Disraeli says in his 'Coningsby') greatness happily no longer depends on rentals—the world is too rich; nor

The Dunedin & Suburban Coal Co. are still at 29 CASTLE STREET, and will supply you with any kind of Coal or Firewood you want at LOWEST TARIFF RATES. Smithy Coals supplied.
TELEPHONE 401