

(published by Hodder and Stoughton: cheap edition is 6d). If the subject is at all connected with New Zealand politics, fly at once to the 'Official Year Book,' published by the New Zealand Government. It is not meant to be a partisan production, and will not, therefore, supply you with arguments ready made; but it will furnish you with a complete and accurate account of the main provisions of our leading legislative enactments and a full statement of all statistics bearing on their operation. Suppose, for instance, the club decided to debate the question, 'Should Dunedin adopt the system of rating on unimproved values,' you turn to your 'Year-Book,' and find there a full account of the provisions of the Rating on Unimproved Values Act, showing precisely what the system means, and giving a list of the boroughs which have adopted the system, with the respective years in which the adopting poll was carried. The date of the passing of the Act—which is supplied by the 'Year-Book'—will put you on the track as to the proper volume of 'Hansard' to consult in order to ascertain the principles underlying the system; and thus in a very short time you will have ample raw material from which to work out arguments and ideas. Apart altogether from its value for debating purposes, every member of a club who wishes to be considered as taking an intelligent interest in public affairs should have a copy of the 'Year-Book' by him for reference. It costs only 1s or 1s 6d, and is a perfect mine of information on all that concerns the commercial, agricultural, and industrial life of the Dominion.

#### If the Question for Discussion

is connected with Imperial politics or affairs, there is a very large number of sources of information available. I will not confuse you by going through the whole list, but will content myself by directing you to the two, which, so far as my experience goes, I believe to be the most serviceable. 'Whitaker's Almanac' is one of the best known works of reference, and has a great name and reputation, but I have never found it of any particular use except for statistics. In my judgment, by far the most comprehensive and practically useful manuals are 'Hazell's Annual' (3s 6d); and the 'Daily Mail Year-Book' (cloth edition 1s 6d; paper edition, 9d). 'Hazell's Annual' has been established for about thirteen years, and has gained such a reputation for accuracy that any statement taken from it will now be accepted as authoritative. It contains a sketch of all the men and women of the day who are eminent in literature, politics, art, or the Church; an account of every country in the world, with its political constitution and political history for the current year; a list of all registered organisations and societies in England, together with an account of all important happenings during the year, and special articles, written with exceptional ability, on most of the leading questions of the day. The amount of up-to-date information crowded into the volume on every conceivable subject is simply marvellous. The 'Daily Mail Year-Book' is a more recent institution, and has not yet secured quite the standing of 'Hazell's.' It is, however, a splendid publication, and if it continues on its present lines will soon take a foremost place amongst the cyclopaedias of the day. It does not cover quite such a wide range of ground as 'Hazell's,' but fastens attention on the specially live questions, and treats these with a clearness and copiousness that leave nothing to be desired. Suppose, for instance, you wanted to get an idea of the exact position of the Education question in England at the present time. You look at your 'Year-Book,' and find, within the compass of a few pages, a brief account of Mr. Balfour's Act of 1902; a comprehensive account of Mr. Birrell's recent measure, with a summary of the arguments advanced by its friends, and the objections made by its foes; an authoritative statement of the official attitude of the Catholic, Anglican, and non-Conformist bodies; extracts from the speeches of leading representatives of all the Churches; the attitude of leading members of the House of Lords; and extracts from the speeches of leading statesmen on both sides of the House of Commons. What more could you possibly desire in the way of material for debate? All the other live questions of the day—from Home Rule and the Irish Local Government Bill, down to the so-called 'New' Theology—are treated on similar lines and with equal fulness. I earnestly recommend members of clubs to have a glance at the book the next time they are in a book shop and if they do not make up their minds on the spot to save a week's cigarette money and purchase the volume, I shall be very much surprised. There are two other books, especially written for controversialists; that perhaps I ought to men-

tion. The first is 'Pros and Cons,' a little work compiled by J. B. Askew, which you can get for a shilling. It contains a comprehensive list of questions for debate, with a clear and fairly full statement of the arguments that can be advanced for and against. It will certainly prove

#### Suggestive and Helpful

to the young debater. There is a similar book published in Australia, called 'Australasian Pros and Cons,' dealing specially with Australasian questions. But I do not remember having seen the volume in any New Zealand bookshop. The other work which I intended to mention is Matson's 'Handbook for Literary Workers.' This book goes very deeply into all the social, ethical, political, and scientific problems of the day; and gives at the close of each dissertation a complete list of books and magazine articles dealing with the question in hand. The price—15s, if I remember rightly—places the book beyond the reach of most of us, but for anyone who is specially ambitious and desirous of going very deeply into things, the work is well worth having. For the general abstract principles bearing on political questions you will often get great help by dipping into some text-book on Political Economy. In this connection I would specially recommend Mill's work on Political Economy. His practical conclusions have been freely challenged by modern writers, but for clearness and lucidity in stating the principles underlying political and economic questions Mill is still unsurpassed.

I have dwelt at some length on this aspect of preparation for debate, because I believe that many a young member is debarred from venturing to take part in club discussions because he has no knowledge of the facts, and has still less idea where to find them. Summing up what I wish to say under this head, I would recommend every young debater to get a copy of—or at least get access to, and make frequent use of—the 'N.Z. Official Year-Book,' 'Hazell's Annual,' the 'Daily Mail Year-Book,' and any recognised text-book on political economy. If these sources fail, you can always fall back on the general encyclopaedias, such as 'Encyclopaedia Britannica,' 'Chambers,' or the 'Globe.'

(To be continued).

## THE PANAMA CANAL

### A HISTORY OF THE UNDERTAKING

The Government of the United States is evidently intent on carrying to a successful completion the construction of the Panama Canal. There are now, as we were informed by cable last week, 30,000 men employed on this gigantic undertaking which, when completed, will undoubtedly attract a good deal of the trade between New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It will prove invaluable to the United States for strategic purposes, permitting its warships to pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific in a few hours, instead of weeks, as is the case now when they have to go around by Cape Horn.

Since 1528, when first the idea of an artificial channel between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans was suggested, the Isthmus of Panama, being in its narrowest part only thirty miles across, has been regarded as one of the most practicable localities for this purpose. A route using the Chagres and Grande Rivers, emptying into the Atlantic and Pacific respectively, and connecting them by an excavated canal, was first examined by two Flemish engineers under the orders of Philip II. of Spain, but the matter was not carried any further. Many surveys of many different routes were made during the last century by Frenchmen, Colombians, and Americans. Finally, in 1874, two expeditions were sent out by the United States Government—one to survey a line between the Atlantic and the Pacific across the Colombian State of Cauca, a route first suggested by Humboldt, and the other a line parallel with the Panama Railway, between Panama and Aspinwall, a distance of 47½ miles. After a careful examination it was decided that on this latter line a lock canal was possible though difficult, and would cost over £20,000,000. A canal at the level of the sea was deemed impracticable, the violence of the freshets in the Chagres River placing it beyond successful engineering control. No move was made by the United States; but in 1876 French enterprise took hold of the project, and in that year the International Society of Interoceanic Canal was formed in Paris. Certain French speculators had obtained the necessary concessions and privileges from the United States of Colombia, of which Panama was

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