

## Current Topics

### Te Oranga Home

After considerable delay, an inquiry is to take place into the floggings and other punishments said to be inflicted upon inmates of the Te Oranga State Home for girls. It is pleasant to note that legislators and newspapers have preserved a profound judicial calm in connection with the Home and its management. They are in fact, as undemonstrative over the matter as so many door-mats. What a happy contrast to the water-spouts of party and sectarian passion with which they deluged the Legislature and the press when charges of undue punishment, etc., were levelled at the Stoke Catholic Orphanage a few years ago! It evidently matters a good deal, after all, whose ox is gored.

### The Christchurch Fire

Sympathy generally gives a faint response to miseries that are far away, just as the electric current sets up but a feeble answer in the galvanometer at the further end of the Transatlantic cable. But all flesh is actively akin in the face of a calamity that occurs close at hand, as last week's great conflagration in Christchurch did in relation to all parts of New Zealand. The blackened ruins give a new local meaning to the well-worn Shakespearean saw:—

'A little fire is quickly trodden out,  
Which, being suffered, rivers cannot quench'.

With suitable automatic fire-alarms, the 'little fire' out of which the conflagration started might have been 'quickly trodden out'. But when it had spread and got its grip, the lack of a high-pressure water supply was keenly felt, and at a critical moment the emptied tanks and the sluggish and unwilling artesian wells had to be abandoned and the fire-fighting had to be done at long range from the picturesque banks of the Avon River. The need of automatic alarms and sprinklers and high-pressure water-supply has been branded upon the brain of private firms, Fire Board, and Council. But the cost of the lesson has been, for Christchurch, rather extortionate. Other centres, including Dunedin, have taken alarm at the inadequacy of their fire-fighting and fire-preventing appliances. The result may be that, in this respect, they may set their house in order. If such a consummation is achieved, the fire that left an island of ruin in the heart of Christchurch has not raged in vain. But, unfortunately, the lessons of a scare, though quickly learned, are commonly soon forgotten. The blow that momentarily stuns often furnishes its own anodyne; and the sudden scare that smote our Fire Boards last week may next week find them in the same state of happy-go-lucky serenity as they were before Christchurch's melancholy experience woke them up to a consciousness of their deficiencies. Yet—so may it not be.

Fire-losses have been rising in a rather uneasy way in New Zealand during the past few years. The losses for 1906 have been estimated at £400,000. And a consensus of local opinion seems to estimate at about half a million sterling the value of the property that was eaten up by fire at its big banquet in Christchurch last week. It is poor satisfaction to those more immediately interested to know that Canterbury's capital has furnished the Dominion's 'record' fire. San Franciscans found a sort of grim consolation in the fact that, in their great conflagration of 1906, they stole a record from Chicago, whose historic blaze of 1871 had hitherto stood conspicuous as 'the greatest fire of modern times'. And, in good sooth, Chicago had to pale its ineffectual fires in the face of the stupendous blaze that added a crowning horror to the great disaster at San Francisco. For in Chicago the

flames spread over only 2124 acres, ate up only 17,000 buildings, caused damages that were assessed at not more than £39,000,000, and rendered some 100,000 persons homeless. The ruin wrought by fire in San Francisco covered a greater area, the property that was reduced to smoke and ashes and charred ruins was estimated at £75,000,000, and more people were (it was claimed) deprived of shelter there than in any conflagration in history, 'with the possible exception of the burning of Rome, which has been imputed to Nero'. Happily, New Zealand has not yet contributed to the great fires of history. And some of these bulk very small by comparison with that of San Francisco. The Great Fire of London, for instance, raged over only 436 acres in 1666, and the losses caused by it were set down at £10,750,000. The big Boston blaze of 1872 cost about £15,000,000; the Baltimore fire of 1904, £16,060,000. The losses incurred by the Burning of Moscow during the French invasion of 1812, are commonly set down at £30,000,000. And the incendiary fires lighted by the Communist petroleurs in Paris in 1871 involved a loss of some £32,000,000. Thus, America holds two 'records'. And the rest of the world is, we ween, perfectly willing that it should retain 'em.

### Guarding the Royal Conscience

There exists in Great Britain a very saffron-hued organisation which calls itself (somewhat grandiloquently) the Imperial Protestant Federation. In politics it is High Tory. In religion its chief article of belief is a simple and childlike faith in the theory which makes the Pope the Man of Sin and Son of Perdition, and endues him with a generous allowance of horn and tail and cloven hoof. In practice, its chief concern is to keep the moon from the wolves—in other words, to watch over English Royalty, lest it should 'truckle to Rome' or 'dally with the Beast'; and to defend the masses throughout the Empire from the 'aggressions' and the 'insidious advances' of Popery. The chief means adopted for attaining the latter object is the spread of tales—usually of a highly imaginative order—illustrative of the hopeless perversity and general chuckle-headedness of Papists. In this respect all is grist that comes to its mill, from the latest 'fake' by Continental atheists down to Lord Ashtown's charming variety of 'Irish Outrages', of which the Imperial Protestant Federation is the publisher.

From time to time it becomes the duty of the Grand Panjandrum of the Federation to take the King in hands and reorganise him. And it sets about the work with much aplomb. Some months ago, for instance, the Federation worked itself into a state of spontaneous combustion over a report that His Majesty had attended a Popish ceremony—the Mass, to wit—at a Continental watering-place. After a double passage of anguished correspondence, the federated keepers of the King's conscience learned that the report was (to use the expression of a noted English parliamentarian) 'a terminological inexactitude'. Then their temperature sank to its normal level—which is well above blood heat. But now comes—over Monday's wires—news which, if true, is calculated to make the banked fires of the Federation flame into volcanic vehemence. The cabled story runneth thus:—

'King Edward and Queen Alexandra, with a cavalry escort, attended a Requiem Mass at St. James's Church, Spanish Place. The Prince and Princess of Wales, the foreign Ambassadors, and the Cabinet Ministers were present.'

The Requiem Mass was for the repose of the soul of the murdered King Carlos of Portugal. We await with tremulous anxiety news of what is to happen to King Edward and Queen Alexandra and the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Cabinet Ministers when the Federation gets to work with jawbone or crowquill pen.

**The Dunedin & Suburban Coal Co.**

TELEPHONE 401

are still at 29 CASTLE STREET, and will supply you with any kind of Coal or Firewood you want at LOWEST TARIFF RATES Smithy, Coal supplied.