

Current Topics

'Tapering Off'

From a letter by Mr. H. H. Driver in our local evening contemporary, it is made clear that the British and Chinese Governments are dealing with the Indo-Chinese opium traffic on the method (not altogether sensible or scientific, we think) which, in the case of delirium-tremens, is known as 'tapering off.'

The Oratorical Geyser

Parliamentary reporting is, it appears, carried on under considerable difficulties in the temporary Parliament Buildings in Wellington. Mr. Wilford's 'verbatim' transcript of a speech (with a motion) by Mr. Mander is said by the parliamentary reporter of the *Otago Daily Times* to have read as follows:—'To carry out,' 'town property,' 'present rate,' 'two and a half,' 'sanitary,' 'yes, yes.' In Western Australia the recent strike of parliamentary reporters resulted in a notable diminution of the flow of members' oratory; and, in like manner, the difficulties of the shorthand men in our own Legislature may have had something to do with the remarkable expedition with which a large class of estimates was recently carried through the House. After all, it seems that the parliamentary report is the soap that actuates the geyser of parliamentary oratory.

Drunk or Sober?

On Friday of last week a stipendiary magistrate (Mr. Bishop), a medical man (Dr. Orchard), a solicitor (Mr. Leatham), and seven policemen tangled themselves up in a Gordian knot of discussion in the Christchurch Court-house. This was done in the course of a well-meant effort to determine whether a wooden-legged man was drunk or sober on a particular occasion on which he stood charged with having been (as Artemus Ward phrases it) 'under the affluence of the intoxicatin' bole.'

There has been unfortunately no lack of subjects, for many a generation, on whom to determine the knotty problem, 'When is a man legally drunk?' For, like the poor, there has always been with us the sturdy soaker whose prayer is that of the Maltworm's Madrigal:

'Oh, would that I were fish, perdy, and all the sea were Ale!'

Neither has there been any lack of the foul-tongued bibber of more ardent spirits,

'One part whisky, three parts mud,
The kind that chews the devil's cud,
And chews it to excess.'

Several provisional tests have from time to time been adopted with a view to determining the question of legal drunkenness. Walking a chalked line is one of these—an awkward test for those living 'pottle-pots' whose legs go 'lap-tappety like men that fear to fall.' The other tests consist chiefly of tongue-tangling phrases, which seem to be a favorite with the Glasgow police. The 'suspect' is liberated if he can utter such sentences as these: 'The British Constitution,' 'Pope Sixtus the Fifth,' 'truly rural,' or 'shoes and socks shock Susan.' In an Edinburgh police-station, the men in uniform required the 'suspect' to pronounce the phrase, 'Burgess's fish-sauce shop.' Even a Good Templar might be pardoned if he failed to negotiate that tongue-twister. Some years ago the London *Chronicle* reported another very suitable test phrase which Lord Ranfurly accidentally coined in the course of a speech at the Royal Colonial Institute in London. Describing the geysers of the North Island, he essayed the phrase, 'From which issued hissing steam.' His Lordship was as innocent of any form of alcohol as a Rechabite lodge, but it was not until the third attempt that he succeeded in getting the h's properly located.

Rival Forest Giants

A cable message in our daily papers some days ago ran as follows:—'The forest fires in California have reached the mammoth grove of sequoia trees in Calaveras County. There is little hope of saving them. One of the largest has already been destroyed.' The message refers to the gigantic sequoias (better known among us as Wellingtonias) which constitute one of the attractions of the beautiful State domain of the Yosemite Valley in California. What the fate of the historic forest giants has been, we have not yet been told—the cable-man having acted

like the author of the serial story who, having landed his hero and heroine in a most terrible pickle, leaves them stewing there for a week or month.

The 'Mother of the Forest' of Calaveras County (now ring-barked and lifeless) rises to a height of 327 feet, the 'Father of the Forest' (now fallen) must have been somewhat over four hundred feet when it came toppling down, and inside its vast trunk runs a tunnel thirty-five feet long and from eight to ten feet in height. That was the king of the giant trees of California's mammoth grove. In the matter of height, Gippsland (Victoria) may probably claim the monarch of the forests. It was a specimen of the *eucalyptus amygdalina*, known locally as the brown and white peppermint tree, the giant gumtree, and the swamp gumtree. In his *Select Extra-Tropical Plants*, Baron von Mueller, F.R.S. (late Government Botanist for Victoria), says (p. 145) that 'Mr. G. W. Robinson, surveyor, measured a tree at the foot of Mount Baw-Baw, which was 471 feet high. Another tree,' adds the distinguished scientist, 'was found to be 415 feet high and 15 feet in diameter, where cut in felling, at a considerable height above the ground.' The 471 feet giant eucalypt 'represents probably,' says Baron von Mueller, 'the loftiest tree on the globe.' The karri of South-Western Australia is another of the colossal trees of the Commonwealth, reaching, exceptionally, a height of 400 feet. 'Mr. Muir,' says Baron von Mueller (p. 149), 'measured stems nearly 300 feet long without a branch; widths of timber as much as 12 feet can be obtained.' The 'Mother of the Forest' of Calaveras County has an enormous 'houl' on the ground—its circumference there running to nearly 80 feet. The 'Father of the Forest' has a girth of 110 feet where he meets mother earth. But vast as these ground measurements are, they are far surpassed by the 'rotundity of the periphery' of one of the famous sweet chestnut trees of Mount Etna which has a stem of no less than 204 feet in diameter. But whether even this phenomenal girth represents an existing 'record' in vegetable corpulency, this present deponent saith not.

Cardinal Logue

The New York 'cable-cram' about Cardinal Logue furnished a fresh and striking evidence of the uses of prudent doubt in regard to news messages affecting Catholic persons and institutions; it likewise proved how advantageous wet towels would have been for binding the brows of some hot-headed Australasian politicians, and how necessary an ice-bag may be, as a regular piece of office-furniture, in the sanctums of some of our daily papers. In the course of a recent letter to Mr. J. W. McNeale, of Rangiwahia, the Cardinal worked in another of his neat 'upper-cuts' upon the sundry precipitate politicians and newspapers that poured such fine furies of invective upon him in connection with the bogus 'interview' credited to him by an Ananias of the New York 'yellow' press. His Eminence said in part: 'I have long since sufficiently contradicted the assertions attributed to me (in an alleged interview given to an American paper). I accused the colonists of New Zealand or Australia neither of disloyalty, rebellion, nor a trend towards rebellion. By the way,' adds the Cardinal, with his customary touch of dry humor, 'if the loyalty of some of the Australian politicians and newspaper writers be as strong as their language, it is very enthusiastic indeed. It strikes me a more practical proof of their interest in the Empire and its welfare than strong language would be to pay their due quota towards the Empire's defence, and not leave a poor country like Ireland to bear much more than her due share of the burden of defending their Australian shores against the Japanese or any other Power which may take it into its head to make a descent upon them.'

The Gospel of Work

The idle person tempts the devil; and the devil retorts in kind. 'Work,' says Abbot Snow, 'is the protection of moral and spiritual well-being.' Idleness, says Holy Writ, is the enemy of the soul, for it leaves the soul open to the enticements of passion. Envy and anger, gluttony and lust find their opportunity in times of indolence. Crimes are hatched in idleness. There is much truth in the old proverb: 'Idleness is the mother of mischief.' When the body is occupied, the attention of the mind is fixed, and all the grim spectres gotten by thought have no chance of entry. Protect a man during intervals of leisure, and you secure his well-being, for in time of work he is safe. Those who are eminent for holiness are always men full of work of mind or body; an idle saint is an impossibility. As with individuals, so is it with nations: the evils of society arise from absence of work, from the idle rich or the idle poor. Decay

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