THE NEW ZEALAND TABLET

TWENTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION.

VOL. XXVIII.—No. 18. DUNEDIN: THURSDAY, MAY 3, 1900. PRICE 6D.

Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

'IT WAS ALL WONDERFUL.'

PERHAPS the most curious incident in connection with the siege of Ladysmith is that which is recorded by Mr. D. McDonald, who is a non-Catholic and war correspondent of the Sydney *Morning Herald*. In a recent letter to his paper he writes as follows:—'The Roman Catholic convent and sanatorium, which has a commanding but exposed site on the crown of the hill overlooking the town, and right in the rear of our naval guns, has been shot through and through. Every wall has a shell hole through it, and the devastation inside is terrific. Fortunately it was vacated early in the siege, the Sisters going out to the neutral camp to nurse the wounded when the convent was no longer required as an hospital. There is a chapel attached to the convent. One of the largest of the Dutch shells exploded just as it had pierced the outer wall, and raked the sanctuary from end to end. Scarcely a yard of wall or roof or floor that was not pierced with those diabolical splinters of metal that, fashioned like the teeth of a cogwheel, fly to pieces on impact. And amid the ruin was a carving of the Saviour on the Cross, a statue of the Virgin, a picture of the Crucifixion, with not a chip nor a stain on the marble, not a scratch on the gilding. It was all wonderful.'

PLAGUE CONDITIONS.

FOR Sampson 'out of the eater (a raging lion) came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness.' Perhaps out of the devouring plague that is slaying its victims in Australia and seeking a habitat in human organisms upon our own shores, there may come to our chief cities more of sweetness and of healthfulness than they have yet been accustomed to. Municipal Councils and Health Boards are, like some other folk, supposed to have neither a soul to save nor a body to kick; but, none the less, the terror of the hovering presence of the bubonic plague has forced them to look more keenly than usual after their sanitary duties, with the result that in all or most of our chief cities they have come across a state of things which the Christchurch *Press*—speaking of local conditions—describes as 'a disgrace to any civilised community.' The published reports are decidedly unpleasant reading. They go to show that in matters sanitary it is not at all clear that our capitals are much better than, say, plague-stricken Constantinople when Kinglake sojourned within its fetid bounds, or Cologne in the days when Southey declared that he counted in its narrow streets two-and-seventy separate and distinct bad smells, and Tom Hood averred that the inhabitants cultivated them with malice prepense so as to encourage people to invest in the great local product, eau de Cologne—the only sweet-smelling thing in the city, according to the king of punsters. The people who live by the sullen and dark-flowing Liffey have no such resort; and from the Yarra at Footscray (Melbourne) there arises a wall of stench against which you could lean. And this in the closing year of the nineteenth century!

* * *

The shocking condition of filth described as prevailing in quarters of Sydney, in the heart of the most important portion of Christchurch, and among the malodorous dust-tips of Dunedin, is little better on a small way than that which existed on a wholesale scale in London till the eighteenth century was far advanced. 'Every square and open space,' says Syney in his *Social Life in England*, 'even in the heart of the city, constituted a repository for large heaps of filth and garbage, which were removed by the scavengers only when the stench became too intolerable to be borne.' It is a tribute to the nostrils of the citizens to state that there *was* a limit to their toleration of evil smells; and to the energy of the civic authorities that even at this stage they caused the nuisance to be abated. Therein both the citizens and the civic fathers of old London differed from those of at least two of our provincial capitals. The sanitary—or rather insanitary—abominations of the London of those times reached their climax in the Stygian horrors of the Fleet Ditch, which found an all too faithful rythmical description in the plain and forceful lines in which Dean Swift tells us that after a city shower—among other unpleasant things—

> Sweepings from butchers' stalls, dung, guts, and blood,
> Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drenched in mud,
> Dead cats, and turnip-tops come tumbling down the flood.

In some respects it does not seem a far cry from the back-yards and dust-tips of some of our colonial cities—as described by our health inspectors—to the plague-inviting conditions of two centuries agone. The fact is just this: that sanitary scientists are moving much faster than leaden-heeled Boards of Health and dozing City Councils, and all three have outdistanced the heedless average citizen, who, if left to his own initiative, would, in matters of domestic hygiene, remain about at the point that was reached by his grandfather in the days of the fourth George. Along some lines national manners may change speedily; along others the transformation moves at a snail's pace. In the home, the revolution in our social customs has been most felt in the sitting and drawing-rooms—evidence of our love of outward show. It is visible to a lesser degree in the kitchen. It has not yet made its way to any great extent to the back-yard. The result is elsewhere as in Christchurch—imposing shop fronts, etc., in the street, and in the rear, too often, an indescribable condition of loathsome filth that would disgrace a permanent camp of Patagonians. We children of a larger growth somewhat resemble the lazy and untidy schoolboy who polishes the vamps of his boots till they shine again, but leaves the heels be-clogged with the mud of yesterday and the day before. It passes muster, and—well, perhaps most of us were born tired.

* * *

In the middle-age town and city less attention was paid than now to drainage, etc., and perhaps more to personal cleanliness. There was not then the sharp distinction between town life and rural life that exists nowadays. Many of the inhabitants of towns and cities were farmers, and even in such considerable commercial centres as Frankfurt, Nürnberg, Augsburg, and München, cows, sheep, swine, and fowls were kept in great numbers within the city walls, and only when the nuisance rose to an intolerable pitch was it abated somewhat by formal decrees. But then, your middle-age city was a modest assemblage of about 9000 in such an important trade centre as Frankfurt-am-Main, 20,000 in Strassburg, while the great industrial centres of England had even smaller resident populations. The plentiful use of water for personal ablutions probably staved off some of the evil results of the insanitary condition of the streets of the medieval cities of Europe. Wright, for instance, in his *Domestic Manners and Customs in England* speaks of the great frequency of warm baths 'in all classes of society' among the Catholic Saxons. Venerable Bede (A.D. 734), Henry of Huntingdon (A.D. 1146), and Alexander Neckham (A.D. 1200) all testify to the benefits derived by the people from bathing in the waters of Bath and other places. The rules of the Benedictine monks prescribed periodical warm baths. So likewise did those of St. Isidore, St. Augustine, St. Dominic, St. Norbert, and various other religious of both sexes. During these ages—which Sir Lyon Playfair termed 'bathless'—Bishop Wulfstan and his abbots bound themselves to bathe and feed 100 poor people annually and provide them with shoes. Public baths were established in France by Queen St. Radegund, after she had become a

The "ANGLO SPECIAL" Cycle Is absolutely the Best Colonial-built Cycle. B. S. A. and Co. Parts. Prices: Gent's, £21; Lady's, £22. Call and see them. THE ANGLO-NEW ZEALAND CYCLE CO., 6 PRINCES STREET.