

New Zealand Herald

TWENTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION.

VOL. XXVII.—No. 48.

DUNEDIN: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1899.

PRICE 6D.

Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

SUNDAY BATTLES.

THERE seems a strange incongruity of association between the 'peaceful Sunday morning' and the noise and fury and hot red work of war. From the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries the Church succeeded to a great extent in preventing bloodshed between Wednesday and Monday in the many private wars of that stormy period. Nowadays the grim work of war knows no cessation beyond the brief truce that follows a battle in order to give succour to the wounded and burial to the dead. And Sunday is no more sacred than Monday to the fighting man. Quite a notable percentage of the naval and military conflicts of the Spanish-American War took place on Sunday. A correspondent points out to us that the battle of Ladysmith, which ended so disastrously for the Royal Irish, the Gloucesters, and the tenth battery of artillery, began on a Sunday evening. The inference that the disaster was due to the day selected for action is scarcely sustainable. It is a curious coincidence that many of the striking victories of what is a Sunday-resting, if not a Sunday-sanctifying, people should have been won on the seventh day of the week. Thus, in the Marlborough campaigns, during the War of the Spanish Succession, the great battle of Ramilies was won by Marlborough on Whit-Sunday, May 23, 1706; Oudenarde on Sunday, July 11, 1709; and Malplaquet on Sunday, September 11, 1709. Sunday battles led to Sunday victories for the British troops with tolerable frequency during the long struggle which raged between England and France from 1793 to 1815, and which involved the belligerents in the enormous expenditure of £1,250,000,000, and 1,900,000 lives. At least five such Sunday victories are recorded. They are:—Vimiera, Sunday, August 21, 1808; Ciudad Rodrigo, Sunday, January 19, 1812; Orthes, Sunday, February 27, 1814; Toulouse, Easter Sunday, April 10, in the same year; and Waterloo, Sunday, June 18, 1815. One of the decisive battles of the First Sikh War—that of Ferozeshah—was won by Sir Hugh Gough on Sunday, December 21, 1845. Two important Sunday victories marked the progress of the Second Burmese War. Rangoon was stormed and captured on Easter Sunday, April 14, 1852; and Pegu met with a similar fate on Sunday, November 21, of the same year. And, not to mention later dates, the hard-fought 'soldiers' battle' of Inkerman was won by the French and British allies against the unexpected onslaught of the Russians on Sunday, November 5, 1854. The list might be greatly extended by any one who has time and patience to wade through the military annals of the British Empire. According to Mulhall, Great Britain has in less than 300 years expended £1,359,000,000 on war. A goodly percentage of this enormous waste would, undoubtedly, be piled up by military occupations that broke 'the peace of the Sabbath morn.'

A CORRESPONDENT asks us to give a forecast of the probable cost of the Transvaal campaign in blood and treasure, and wants WHO PAYS? to know who is to pay the little bill when it falls due. As to the first query: We are not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, and are satisfied to await eventualities and let others add up the butcher's bill for us. The second question is more easily answered. The brunt of the cost in good red blood will come out of the veins of the British working and industrial classes, and in minted sovereigns out of their pockets. And the end of it all will be that Thomas Atkins will win a certain bedraggled glory, and the capitalists will pocket the profits. In the very unlikely event of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State retaining their independence at the close of the campaign, they would naturally be mulcted in a pretty heavy war indemnity. Great Britain, however, has not done as well as some of the continental countries in the matter of war indemnities. She received two indemnities from China—one

of £4,000,000, and the other, in 1860, of £2,000,000, or less than one third of the vote of credit for the war. China paid to Japan for the late war £37,000,000—a sum which works out at £160 for each Japanese soldier engaged in the campaign, or £12 per week per man. France's indemnity to Germany for the war of 1870-71 amounted to £200,000,000. Leaving out of account the ceded territory, this vast sum was equivalent to £7 per man per week for every German soldier engaged, or £1000 for every man that was killed in battle or died of wounds or disease. A few years before lobbying this enormous indemnity Prussia had received £8,350,000 from Austria, as well as £750,000 in requisitions, for the brief campaign that ended at Sadowa in 1866. The Prussian losses were 11,000 men, so that the indemnity meant £850 for every man lost, and £5 per week for every man engaged. The present struggle in South Africa will be an enormously costly one both for Boer and Briton, and will probably so cripple the resources of the two republics that the payment of a war indemnity by them will be out of the question. The other alternative is the loss of their independence. And this was the cry of the British jingo party all along.

CANCELLED STAMPS AND OTHER 'REFUSE.'

DICKENS's 'golden dustman' gives but a poor idea of the thousand and one uses which are found nowadays for the supposedly waste products of the dust-heaps and the dust-bin. Boxes, old iron, rags, 'breeze,' paper, glass, broken crockery, etc., are separated and put to hundreds of industrial uses, and the refractory residue is, at least in London, fed into furnace boilers and converted into electric energy. There is an unfailing demand for the residual bones of the joint which you have discussed at table. The great wealth and manufacturing activity of England has attracted towards herself the old bones of half the Continent of Europe—and not merely the bones of the lower animals, but even human bones, are said to have at one time formed part of the trade. For Simmons, in his *Waste Products*, tells how many an ancient battle-field has been searched and turned over for their valuable remains, which have been duly ground down, treated with sulphuric acid, and turned into fertilisers to grow our wheat or furnish grass to fatten our bees. And thus the old bone goes to form and nourish new bones, and the threat of the giant to Jack is, after all, no fairy tale:—

Let him be live,
Or let him be dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

The cause of religion and charity has been notably and directly advanced by this new spirit of enterprise which finds a use and purpose for a thousand unconsidered trifles which our fathers would have cast into harbour or river to defile them. Thus, a great hospital at Munich (Bavaria) is entirely supported by the sale of old steel pens and nibs. They are collected from all parts of Germany, sold to manufacturers, and in due time are turned into watch-springs, pen-knives, razors, etc. In one of our issues of last year we showed how a great charitable and educational institute in Belgium is kept afloat by the sale of all sorts of odds and ends, such as old iron, rags, bits of glass, etc., which are daily brought or forwarded to the place by the pupils and friends of an enterprising and zealous community of nuns.

The stamp-collecting mania has, however, been turned to still better account, especially in connection with foreign missionary effort. The Society of the Holy Childhood rescues great numbers of female infants in China from death through the sale of postage-stamps. At least two Catholic missionary colleges are wholly or chiefly supported by the same means. One of these is the 'Bethlehem,' which educates poor children for the foreign mission; the other is the Congo Mission department of the Catholic Seminary at Liège, Belgium. In the one year, 1896, over 30,000,000 used stamps were received at the Seminary from all parts of the earth, and the income from their sale amounted to about £320. As many as 13,000,000 cancelled stamps have been received in furtherance of

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