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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE NEW PARLIAMENT. 'ALL things come to him who waits.' So runs the proverb. Like many another expression of ancient wisdom it is not more than half true. However, some things do

come to those that know how to wait. For instance: *apropos* of the number of grocers in some of the Australian parliaments—a proportion said to be due to their familiarity with soft-soap—we inquired some time ago if some friend with a statistical turn of mind would favour us with a return of the trades and professions of the legislators of New Zealand. Well, a member of our staff has done this for our present issue, and added other particulars regarding the *personnel* of the new Parliament, which cannot fail to interest our readers.

WAR AND DISEASE.

THERE are, perhaps, few things that so effectually knock the starch out of a soldier's patriotism as typhoid fever and the other destroying diseases that are incidental to camp life. To the mind of the average civilian the vast majority of the soldiers who never return from the wars fall nobly fighting for their country's honour upon the bullet-swept field or die of wounds in the military hospital. As a matter of fact, the great majority die by the more prosaic and frequently more agonising way of disease, and not from contact with bullet or bayonet or the other death-dealers whose direct purpose is to dissolve partnership between soul and body. This, however, is a feature of campaigning life which appeals to the military man and the statistician with greater force than to the war-correspondent, the war-poet, and the war-historian. Hence we hear so little of this unpleasant feature of campaigning life. In the Philippine campaigns some of the battalions lost full half of their strength by sickness. The hospitals were crammed full with the victims of disease. But all reference to the condition of affairs was persistently and mercilessly scored out by the military censor. In South Africa at present the tale of the war correspondent is subject to even a keener eye and a more merciless red-pencil or scissors. But yet enough has been let pass along the wires to show that disease is decimating the garrisons both of Mafeking and Ladysmith. We are left to form our own judgment as to the health of the rest of the army. But, as Otto Berndt has pointed out in his *Figures and War*, the losses through sickness in campaigns are very considerable even in temperate climates. They must be relatively very great indeed in the conditions under which marching, camping, and fighting have to be done in the rainy season of such a climate as that of South Africa. Perhaps we have here one partial explanation of the masterly inactivity which has kept the British troops so long stuck fast south of Colesberg and the Modder and the Tugela.

Where bullet and bayonet slay their thousands in war, disease kills its tens of thousands. In the 114 days' struggle between the United States and Spain, only 279 Americans were killed in battle, and 1423 wounded. The number swept off by disease was 2086; those stricken by disease were, in round numbers, 40,000. In 1870 some 200,000 Germans corralled Bazaine within the walls of Metz. As many as 130,000 of the investing force were in the hospitals. Out of a total of 467,000 sick men that lay in the German military hospitals during the same war, only 88,000 were there on account of wounds received in battle. In the great American Civil War of the sixties, the Northerners lost 73,246 men who were killed upon the battle-field or died of wounds. Their losses from disease reached the appalling total of 149,030. The two great scourges of the private soldier are camp-fever and dysentery. Mulhall, however, has shown that rheumatism is not to be sneezed at as a factor in putting men out of action. In his *Dictionary of Statistics* for the present year we find the following significant

entry under the heading 'Disease': 'During the war of 1861-63 in the United States the Federals had 5,825,000 men under colours, and of these 254,700 were sent to hospital for rheumatism.' In the bungling campaign of the Crimea 362,000 out of a total of 428,000 Anglo-Franco-Sardinian troops were stricken with disease. Of this great host of sufferers, 69,200 died. The deaths from wounds made the relatively insignificant total of 6200. Of the British soldiers, 2755 met their deaths in action; 1847 died of wounds in hospital. The total of British victims of Russian bayonet-thrusts and sabre-strokes and marksmanship was, therefore, 4602. This was, however, a mere bagatelle beside the mighty holocaust of 75,375 men who were cut off in the prime of life by disease. It is the same old tale as far back as military statistics are available. Thus, the long and strenuous campaigns against France from 1795 to 1815 showed an annual death-rate in the British army of 57 per thousand. Only seven per thousand of these met their deaths in action. The overwhelming majority of the remainder were swept off by disease. Improved methods of surgery and sanitation have diminished the proportion of deaths from wounds and disease in the campaigns of later years. But despite all this, the experience of the British troops in South Africa will, like that of the Americans in Cuba and the Philippines, undoubtedly go to show that the worst horrors of modern warfare are those of the military hospital and not of the battle-field.

WAR AND FAMINE.

You remember the lyric in which Tom Moore represented love, valour, and 'wit, the sprite, wandering

Through Erin's Isle
To sport awhile

together, and how he made them 'three godlike friends,' inseparable for ever. The bond that holds them together is, we fancy, a very loose and conventional one. For valour, we fear, often breaks away from the pleasant little triple alliance. Let Valour but stand for war, and we find it frequently allied with two grim powers, pestilence and famine, which are at daggers drawn with love and wit. We have already touched upon war's alliance with disease. The Christchurch Press of last Saturday furnishes us with the following evidence that in South Africa, as in other places, it is associated with famine as well as pestilence:—

The war is reported to have driven things to prohibitive prices between Capetown and the Orange River. Horseflesh is at a high premium. Old screws that in normal times would be dear at £30 are now offered at 70, 80, or 90 guineas. A covered gig with two ponies and a driver can only be hired at a charge of £40 monthly; a bottle of the cheapest lager beer costs 2s, a soda and whisky costs half-a-crown, soda and milk 1s 6d, whilst 8s is the lowest price asked for a bottle of whisky.

Any doubts that may exist as to the destination of a portion of the 'horseflesh' is set at rest by the correspondent of another paper who tells us that it is being used as food in some parts of South Africa. If this be true, the story of the premium on horseflesh tells a more pitiful tale than the enhanced price of 'a soda and whisky.' The poor in Paris, Brussels, Milan, and other Continental cities habitually use and relish the tender, nutritious, and not unsavoury flesh of young horse. But the inhabitants of the British Isles raise around their stomachs a sturdy barrier of insular prejudice which admits the foul-feeding porker but excludes the clean-feeding horse. And this barrier they never lower except under the stern pressure of hunger—as in a protracted siege.

During the Cuban campaign last year horse-flesh, mule-flesh, and even dog-flesh was in great demand, and at high prices. During the siege of Manila, the following cable-message appeared in the New Zealand dailies: 'The richest people are slaughtering dogs and horses for food. The natives are eating rats and mice.' Messages such as this tell in a few words the story of a thousand concentrated griefs and woes. The garrison of Ladysmith has been for some time on short rations, and when the story of the siege is told we shall

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