

the traditions and affections that surround and sanctify them, sneers at the lifting up of weary eyes towards the veil, and mocks at the melodies that express the thousand emotions of the spiritual life. But how long does this reign of terror last? It is but a short time when intellect finds how much religion has done to purify, elevate, and restrain humanity, and how powerless is mere intellect to grapple with the emotional vices, which religion so controlled. It was so in France, it is so in Italy. Pride of intellect is rampant in the age of mediocrity, and egoism. When the mind rejects the Eternal Verities, denies the Unseen, and refuses to accept sacred revelation, it may enjoy a brief thrill of triumph and superiority, but this is dearly bought with a cold and joyless life. He who crushes his aspirations and beats down his awe and reverence for the Unseen is like an unnatural parent who crushes his offspring to death. Intellectual growth, unaccompanied by the flowers and foliage of the heart's growth may be starting, but it is neither enduring nor lovely.

And in the darkness besotment may occur. What does "sot" mean? It means,—a fool; blinded, sleept, and something more. It means one who has abandoned aspiration, who has ceased to long for the Unseen, or to feel the thrill of a noble ambition. Besotment or the state of the sot, is like tuberculosis, more or less gradual in its development, but sure. The tubercle of the soul is born in darkness. It shrinks from the light and does its dreadful work unseen. It has done it upon the noblest victims. Hopeless and despairing, the darkened mind abandons itself to the pleasures of the hour or (it may be) seeks *repentance*. What are our temperance reformers about, with their quack nostrums and clumsy regimen? Here is the key to the worst developments of intemperance. The drunkenness that comes from mere physical exuberance is a very little thing compared with that which proceeds from the blindness of the spirit, from hopeless groping and despairing effort. Besotment, indifference to all consequences, abandonment to the present, are the abysses into which those in the dark are prone to fall.

The *demonstration* of the drama is despair,—complete loss of hope. Will the reader accompany me to this profoundest depth? It is not inviting, but my purpose is to explore the hidden places; for it is not in the light of day that tragical lives work themselves out; it is in the dark. The misery we see is but a little of the misery that exists. It is not that the "light of God" ceases to shine upon the soul; it is that by years of self-indulgence, of pride of intellect, of disregard and denial,—the victim envelopes himself in a darkness so dense that the soft beams of Heavenly Light are effectually shut out from him. And it is to this sad condition that thousands of human hearts are reduced as I have shown. It is to this sad condition that secularism is bringing our youth. Despite the dark environment of the soul, some spark of the Eternal Fire, a "Star of the East" burns within—enough to prevent the heart from quite forgetting the claims of the Provident Creator and the Generous Redeemer. Here is the tragedy. The soul has encased itself and deprived itself of grace and guidance; but it cannot extinguish the eternal fire which ever strives to stimulate it to virtue. But by this time the soul is weakened, and when under the stimulus of inward fire it stretches forth its hand for deliverance it fails to grasp it, and falls back into black despair. It grows weaker with every futile effort and, always despairing, drags out the rest of its frightful term in unutterable misery. Here is the key to the wasted lives that go on around us daily. Here is the key to half the vice we see, to the strange abandonment of some of the best and most lovely lives to the low vice, to the phenomenon which one unhappy poet has referred to in this pregnant line:—

"Our sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thoughts."

How little the casual observer knows of the darkness which the showy veil of laughter and brightness of gaiety covers. To me, no requiem is so sad, no passing hell so suggestive of woe—as the dazzling brightness of an unnatural joy. And we see it daily around us. It is a special product of the age in which we live. How many minds is the swift advance of our civilisation and secularism driving to despair?

Thus far, dear reader, have we explored the dark regions. My guidance has been faithful, if not skilful, and I have striven, *cum flabibus*, to show you the horrors of the Dark Valley, not to make a picture, but to bring you face to face with reality. You will perhaps answer me that it is useless to gain the light if we do not "walk as children of light." I am not so sure of that. It is of course pre-eminently desirable that spiritual illumination should be accompanied with actual reform of life. But I can conceive of the one preceding the other, of the spirit awakening in the dawn, but being unable to at once marshal its subordinate forces into the right path. There occurs then an incongruity;—the inner and the outer man are not the same. But it is a victory, and the subordination of the life to the guidance of the awakened spirit follows—tardily it may be, but surely, and in the Final Judgment the pious intention counts for much. This, however, is not all; nor is it the greatest thing. The immediate effect of this awakening is less considerable than its ultimate effect, which is the infusion of spirituality into the generations that come after the converts. The germ grows and fructifies in succeeding ages;—every germ of spirituality is a grain of good seed.

And this brings us to the confines of the dark regions. At this point the gloomy silence is broken by the joyous bells that usher in the dawn. The peal, resounding "o'er moor, and crag, and fen," reaches our ears as the first glimmer of light rewards our watching eyes. In this solemn moment we stand, appalled at the darkness behind us, and gladdened with the streak of coming light. We stand on the verge. Our next step must be upward to greet the dawn, or downward to dwell for ever with the night.

Among a large collection of old curiosities left by the late Herr Leopold Ettel, of Innsbruck, there was found a large cupboard partitioned into lockers, filled with instruments of torture of different countries and periods. The topmost locker was inscribed, "Modern instruments of torture of the nineteenth century," and on being opened was found to contain rate papers, duelling letters and summonses.

## Commercial.

THE NEW ZEALAND LOAN AND MERCANTILE AGENCY CO., LIMITED, report for the week ended January 12th as follows:—

**Fat Cattle.**—269 head were yarded at Burnside for this day's sales, medium to prime quality. We quote—best bullocks, £7 to £8—a few extra heavy a shade more; medium, £5 10s to £6 10s; light, £3 12s 6d to £5 2s 6d; cows in proportion.

**Fat Sheep.**—Best crossbred wethers, 12s 6d to 13s 6d; medium, 10s 6d to 12s 3d; best do ewes, 11s 8d to 12s 3d, medium 8s 6d to 11s.

**Lambs.**—791 penned. A few pens prime brought 9s 6d to 10s 6d; medium to good, 5s 6d to 8s 6d.

**Pigs.**—167 penned. Suckers, 6s 6d to 10s; slips, 12s to 15s 6d; stores, 20s to 21s; porkers, 23s to 25s; baconers, 27s to 29s.

**Store Cattle.**—The market for these continues dull, a few occasionally change hands, but the demand is far from being active and the number offering considerably in excess of requirements. The only sorts that are in any demand are grown bullocks half to three parts fat.

**Store Sheep.**—We have numerous enquiries for young sheep, merino and crossbred of both sexes, with but few offering, while on the other hand a considerable number of old sheep are for sale, more especially merino of which a few sales are being effected, and several large lots are expected to change hands during the next few days.

**Wool.**—By the San Francisco mail we have priced catalogues of the first three days of the last series of Colonial wool sales in London which fully confirms the unsatisfactory tenor of the cablegrams previously received. Our London circular which is also to hand says that although reports from the manufacturing centres have not recently been altogether of a reassuring nature the requirements of the trade are undoubtedly considerable, and while the adoption of the McKinley Tariff Bill in America and the lately increased cost of production have for the time being at all events exercised a depressing influence on the market, the present position of the industry may, on the whole, be regarded as fairly satisfactory one. The second series of local sales was held at the Chamber of Commerce Hall last Thursday and Friday when the attendance was large and representative, including English, Continental, and all the local buyers, also representatives and owners of four woollen manufactories. The improvement anticipated in business had been realised, though perhaps not to the extent that might be looked for by some as satisfactory. Some of the wools offered by us make a one-tenth to 1½ per lb more than was offered at our previous sale. Competition was keen for light, fine, and well-grown good combing crossbred and halfbred, but while a very good demand existed for heavy and coarse lines, also merinos of all qualities, prices obtaining for the former were relatively higher. We catalogued 1125 bales, none of which showed superior quality, but were all disposed of with the exception of a clip of 250 bales greasy merino and a few bales of scoured and washed wool. Greasy crossbred and halfbred made 9½ to 11½d, coarse and heavy 6½ to 9½, quarterbred 7½ to 10½d, merino 5½ to 9½, longwool 6d to 8½, pieces 4½ to 8½d per lb.

**Sheepskins.**—At our weekly auction sale on Tuesday, we had the usual attendance of the trade, and for all good lots competition was fairly active, last week's prices being fully maintained, especially for green pelts and lambskins, while dry skins were easy. We offered a full catalogue, comprising a good proportion of woolly skins, the rest green crossbred pelts and lambskins. Country dry crossbred, inferior to medium, brought 1s 6d to 3s 3d; do do merino, 1s 5d to 3s 3d; full-woolled crossbred, 3s 9d to 6s 3d; do do merino, 3s 8d to 5s 10d; dry pelts, 5½ to 1s 4½; green crossbred pelts, 1s 7d, 1s 6½, 1s 5½, 1s 4½, 1s 3½; do lambskins, 1s 7d, 1s 6½, 1s 5d, 1s 4½, 1s 3d, 1s 2½.

**Rabbit-skins.**—A very good demand prevails at the auctions whenever any are offered, but the supply is very much contracted, and the number now changing hands is necessarily to a very limited extent; only odd lots of inferior quality as a rule now come to market, but are easily placed although at low prices. We offered a small catalogue this week, which elicited keen competition, when full prices were obtained, quality considered.

**Hides.**—There is no change to record, and prices remain unaltered. Medium and light weights badly saved are still difficult to place, except at very unsatisfactory prices, while heavy weights are in short supply and in demand. We quote, good conditioned heavy hides, 2½ to 2¾; extra heavy, 3½; medium, 2d to 2½; light, 1½ to 1¾; inferior and shabby, 1d to 1½d per lb.

**Tallow.**—We have the following cablegram from our London office dated 9th inst.:—"Market firmer, fine mutton worth 27s 6d; good beef, 25s 9d per cwt." The stock in the local market, except that held by manufacturers, is exceedingly light, hardly any being in agents' hands, in consequence any coming forward is readily placed at about equal to late rates which are pretty much in sympathy with those current in the Home market. We quote—prime rendered mutton, 19s to 20s; medium to good, 16s to 18s; inferior and mixed, 12s 6d to 15s 6d. Rough fat continues to have a very good demand at for best mutton tallow 13s to 14s; inferior to medium and good, 10s to 12s 9d per cwt.

**Grain.**—Wheat: It will be satisfactory to note that the English market continues firm and slightly advancing. The Continental also has an upward tendency, and the American unchanged. This improved tone will doubtless be reflected in the colonial market. Locally stocks of prime milling are low, with perhaps the exception of tuscan, of which there is a moderate supply, though not more than will probably be required for Home consumption, late rates are therefore more likely to harden than otherwise. We quote—Best tuscan, 3s 9d to 3s 10½; extra prime a shade more, medium to good, 3s 6d to 3s 8d; best red wheat, 3s 5½ to 3s 6½; medium, 3s 4d to 3s 5d; inferior 2s 9d to 3s 3d (ex store). Oats: The market during the past week has not been quite so lively. The speculative spirit