

# Current Topics

## Dirty Bank Notes

In a weird and 'creepy' story entitled 'The Germ-Growers,' an Australian Anglican dignitary imagined, some years ago, a colony of half-demons, half-men, living in the heart of the great lone continent. The chief occupation of these malignant beings was to produce the germs of various deadly diseases and distribute them to the ends of the earth in invisible 'volors,' or balloons. But, as the bacteriologists assure us, there is little need for the germ-plots or the guidable germ-balloons, so long as such things as milk and meat and dust and clothing and bank notes form such excellent vehicles for the propagation and spread of deadly microbes, from those of influenza and lockjaw up to those of typhus and cholera morbus. Most people would, perhaps, be quite willing to accept a barrowful of the uncanceled notes of a solvent bank, and take their chance with whatever microbes had their local habitation therein. But Dr. Purdy (District Health Officer) has been suggesting to the Auckland Chamber of Commerce a means by which the public may, so to speak, pull the teeth of the microbes that infest filthy bank notes. You simply take a file and run it through the note. This does not destroy its face value, but it would probably prevent its re-issue. Some of the bank notes in circulation seem to have passed through a charmin' variety of experiences—per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum—and to have picked up samples of every sort of grime (and, presumably, of every family of germs) within the limits of the Dominion. They do things better in the Bank of England. An average of about £25,000,000 worth of its notes is constantly in the hands of the public. But no note, once received by the Bank, is re-issued. It is cancelled and destroyed. As many as 300,000 new notes are issued sometimes in one week, and the Bank of England paper thus remains clean and crisp, and its population of enemies of mankind, per square inch, must therefore be vastly less than that which swarms in the disgustingly filthy notes that one sees so often in New Zealand.

## Punishment in School

Once again the question of corporal punishment in the schools has been ventilated in our courts during the past few days. And again, judgment has been given to the effect that the reasonable use of the rod for the preservation of necessary discipline is upheld by the law of the land; but that the teacher must mind his p's and q's in the matter of delegation and in the mode of infliction.

The incentives to study have changed almost as much in the past generation or two as the apparatus of education. For the schoolboy brought up under the old regime, the path of learning was strewn with thorns and nails and broken glass; by comparison the pupil of to-day passes between banks or roses, along a mossy carpet where only incautious feet strike tack or flint. Till a comparatively recent period, some of the traditions of the terrible Dr. Busby hung about our educational methods. 'Hudibras' has it that

'Men as resolute appear  
With too much, as too little, fear;  
And when they're out of hopes of flying,  
Will run away from death by dying,  
Or turn again to stand it out,  
And those they fled, like lions rout.'

Fear was, under the old regime, the chief incentive to work. And in the English public schools, and in the Lichfield and other Free Schools, men like Garrick, Addison, Ashmole, Locke, Dryden, Wollaston, Hooper, and so many others that bulk large in English history, were 'birched into scholarship' on the 'altar of punishment' known as the flogging-horse. The 'too much fear' inspired by the Busby methods seems to have spurred the youths of those times to scared exertions, and made them 'turn again to stand it out' against the difficulties that beset the thorny path of learning in those strenuous days.

Our memory does not go far back, but it goes far enough to remember a school regime that was made a

reign of terror by one who, like Goldsmith's pedagogue, was a man, a man severe and stern to view. Hood, the king of punsters, lamented lightly over the death of his hard-hitting old preceptor. 'He "died of a stroke,"' writes Hood; 'and I wonder none of his pupils have done the same. I have been flogged by many masters; but his rod, like Aaron's, swallowed up all the rest. We often wished that he whipped on the principle of Italian penmanship—upstrokes heavy and downstrokes light; but he did it in English round-hand, and (we used to think) with a very hard pen. Such was his love for flogging that, for some failure in English composition, after being well corrected, I have been ordered to be revised. I have heard of a road to learning, and he did justice to it; we certainly never went a stage in education without being well horsed. The mantle of Dr. Busby descended on his shoulders—and on ours. . . . Pictures, they say, are incentives to learning; and certainly we never got through a page without cuts. For instance, I do not recollect a Latin article without a tail-piece. All the Latin at that school might be comprised in one line: "Arma virumque cano"—an arm, a man, and a cane. In one word, he was disinterestedly cruel, and used to strike as industriously for nothing as other workmen strike for wages. Some of the elder boys, who had read Smollett, christened him Roderick, from his often hitting like Random and being so partial to Strap.'

## A Reform

The 'S. H. Review' tells of a saloon-keeper (publican) in Renovo (Pennsylvania) who has begun a little reform movement on his own account. He advertises as follows in a local newspaper:—

'We wish to notify the wife who has a drunkard for a husband, or a friend who is unfortunately dissipated, to give us notice in writing of such cases as you are interested in, and all such shall be excluded from our place. Let fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters do likewise and their request will be complied with.'

In this country, the real leaders of the Prohibition movement are not those whose names are commonly associated with it in that capacity. The real leaders are those scallywags in 'the trade' who set the human law and the moral law at defiance, and clutch at guilty shekels through the souls of drunken fathers and sons and brothers.

## Up in a Balloon

Says a cable message from London:—

'Messrs Kellow and A. J. Staughton, two Melbourne residents, ascended to a height of 4,800ft in the Hon. Mr. Rolle's balloon, and travelled from Battersea to the shore of the North Sea at the rate of forty miles an hour. Mr. Kellow also made an ascent in Paris on M. Farman's aeroplane.'

The Hon. Mr. Rolle's balloon is one of those enormous gas-bags with propelling mechanism that can drive the big, cigar-shaped contrivance more or less in a given direction through the fields of air, provided the conditions are favourable. But dirigible balloons are 'kittle cattle,' as experience in England and France with warships of the air, and (a few days ago) American experience in Berkeley (California) when the Morrell airship, which was 450ft long and propelled by five 40 horse-power engines, fell from a height of 300ft on her trial trip, have testified. Maxwell's parody-ballad of the balloon asks:

'Gin a body meet a body  
Flyin' through the air,  
Gin a body hit a body,  
Will it fly? and where?'

And again:—

'Gin a body meet a body  
Altogether free,  
How they travel afterwards  
We do not always see.'

Messrs. Kellow and Staughton may esteem themselves fortunate that their friends were able to tell how the balloonists travelled afterwards, and that their fate was not as that of the two French officers who first went up, and then went down, in the airship 'that never returned.' But, then, we cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs;