

Current Topics

To Correspondents

For several weeks from this date the editor will be absent, chiefly in connection with the approaching Catholic Congress in Sydney. Correspondents are reminded that all matter intended for publication should be addressed to 'The Editor,' and not by name to 'Rev. Dr. Cleary.' All letters so addressed by name will be treated as private communications and will be forwarded by earliest outgoing mails to his temporary address in Sydney.

Cow Cheques

The *Otago Daily Times* (Dunedin) published, in its issue of last Monday, a list of some three-figure cheques that were gained in a brief space by sundry fortunate suppliers of milk to some of our butter factories. The figures furnish an object lesson as to the value of her royal highness the cow. They furthermore serve to give a point to the inscription which one of the greatest and wealthiest dairymen in Wisconsin (United States) some years ago placed over his barn door: 'Treat a cow as if she were a lady.' The Swiss mountaineers treat her almost as a member of the family; and their placid little kine have done for the Alpine republic what the golden ore has done for the Switzerland of the South.

Lodge v. Court of Justice

An incident occurred in mid-July at Montreal (Canada) which gives a point to Dr. Johnson's saying: 'Where secrecy or mystery begins, vice or roguery is not far off.' It also furnishes a fresh evidence of the manner in which dark-lantern organisations may, on occasion, be used to thwart the course of justice. A Royal Commission held, during the July dog-days, an investigation in Montreal with a view (says the *Antigonish Casket*) to ascertain the truth or falsehood of charges made against the honesty of some transactions in which the city was interested. Among the witnesses was one Pierre Leclerc. While in the witness-box Pierre refused to answer a question put to him, and made this statement in explanation: 'We belong to the same society, Simoneau and I, and I promised on the Gospel that I would never say anything that could do him any harm, or put him into trouble.' Forthwith he was compelled by Justice Cannon to tell what 'society' he meant. After much hesitation, Mr. Leclerc mentioned lodge 45 of Coeurs Unis [United Hearts], and emphatically affirmed that this lodge is not connected with the Grand Orient, but with the 'English Freemasons.' The same day, at the afternoon session of the court, in explaining some expenditures, Mr. Leclerc stated that he had made a small payment to Mr. Simoneau. The reason for this payment, he declared, could not be told, as his relations with Simoneau were all carried on under the strict oath of a secret society.

Brother Leclerc evidently regarded his obligations to the craft as more binding than his obligations to the State.

Those 'Manifestations'

The slump in spiritistic stock continues in Wellington. The Bailey 'manifestations' began there at twenty-five shillings per head for the curious or the credulous. The fee rapidly dropped to five shillings; and the 'show' will, perhaps, fizzle out at 'front seats one shilling, back seats, sixpence.' Thus far, we have not seen the pretence of test and conditions; not one of the 'manifestations' has passed (if it has even reached) the level of third-rate public-house conjuring; and pressing questioners are moved to scorn by the evasiveness, the childish folly, and the vapid 'flummery' of the alleged 'spirits' that, with ungrammatical lips, are alleged to 'control' the ungrammatical 'meejum.' Dr. Johnson used to speak in so orotund and grandiloquent a way that Goldsmith once said to him: 'If you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales.' The professional medium reverses the process. He professes to 'produce' the spirits of the mighty dead—and he makes the first Napoleon forget French, makes Alexander the Great ramble in Cockney, and the whole company of the immortals talk the brainless and insufferable twaddle of the séance-chamber. Did they but know, it would hurt their disembodied spirits more than it racked the soul of a great English advocate to speak down to the level of the average jury. Yet this is the sort of thing that people are asked to accept as a new revelation of light and grace to a darkened world. It was a witty Frenchman who advised

the intending founder of a new creed to try the experiment of being crucified and rising again on the third day. A good many besides spiritists require such a reminder. Casimir Delavigne spoke in haste when he declared that

'Les sots depuis Adam sont en majorité'

—which, being interpreted, meaneth that, ever since Adam's time, foolish people have been in a majority in the world. There are a good many of them, nevertheless. And their weathercock heads are the first to be swayed and tossed about by every wind of new doctrine and passing fad and theory.

'Early-day' and Other Prices

Reminiscence is the ambrosia of age.

*'When Time, who steals our years away,
Shall steal our pleasures too,
The mem'ry of the past will stay
And half our joys renew.'*

Memories of Canterbury's early days have been coming in clusters out of the past to speakers at last week's golden jubilee of the Christchurch Chamber of Commerce. One of the speakers (Mr. Hargreaves) has been dropping into interesting reminiscences of prices in 'the early days.' Flour (now about £10 per ton) was, for instance, sold by him at Lyttelton in 1863 at a wholesale price of £24 per ton; sugar (now from 2½d to 2¼d per lb) changed hands at £52 and more per ton; and 'he did not remember in the old days tea at less than 2s 6d per lb wholesale by the chest. . . . To-day tea of equal quality could be bought at less than half the price.' And so on. All of which moves the speaker to wonder at the present-day 'complaint against the high cost of living.'

But dearthness and cheapness are relative terms. Lytteltonian purchasers of Canterbury's early days had little cause to complain by comparison with the thousands that tramped to the diggings after gold had 'broken out' at (say) Ballarat and Mount Alexander, and Victoria had become at a bound a new Aladdin's land, the Transylvania of the modern world. Even as late as 1853 oaten 'hay' changed hands in Ballarat at £60 per ton; cartage from Geelong (some 50 miles) ran into £80 per ton; and in the following two years flour cost £6 10s per bag, potatoes 4½d per lb, eggs 6s per dozen, horse-shoeing 24s per set. In 1852 cartage from Melbourne to Castlemaine (77 miles) cost £100 to £120 per ton, oats were purchased at £3 per bushel, hotel charges ranged from 50s to 140s per day, a horse at livery cost 15s a day (105s a week); and even in Melbourne imported Wellington boots (then in almost universal use) were quoted at 50s to 60s per pair—if made to order the fee ran from 75s to 90s. 'And it must be remembered,' says Withers in his *History of Ballarat*, 'that these prices were paid for the roughest and rudest accommodation and service, while the quality of the goods could never in those days be very closely—or, at least, profitably—scrutinised.'

Victorian goldfield prices were, indeed, siege and famine rates by comparison with those that prevailed in 'the early days' in any part of New Zealand. People fared still worse in quite recent days within the beleaguered lines of Ladysmith and Mafeking and Kimberley during the South African war. Kimberley seems to have fared the best of the three. Yet eggs sold there at 24s a dozen, fowls at 25s to over 30s each, potatoes and tomatoes at 3s 6d per pound, grapes at 3s 6d to 5s a pound, while milk, butter, cheese, or ham could be procured only on the production of a medical certificate that the bearer was an invalid. Short rations of horse-soup, horse-steak, some bread, and crushed mealies and water constituted the daily bill of fare. Parisian stomachs were better prepared for the chances of the sieges of 1870-1871. For they had already acquired a taste for the tender and nutritious and (as we can personally testify) by no means unpalatable flesh of that eminently clean feeder, the horse. As famine settled down upon the doomed city, the pinch of hunger made them less and less squeamish as to their food. In November, 1870, there was a brisk demand, at high prices, for the flesh of mules and donkeys. The lions and tigers and elephants and rhinoceroses and dromedaries and eagles and polecats and the other foreign fowls and beasts in the Jardin d'Acclimation were butchered, divided, cooked with pepper and salt in portions true, and devoured with the relish that a nipping hunger gives to unaccustomed and unsavory meats. Dogs, cats, rats, and mice were bought at high prices and eagerly gnawed to the last bone. An English war correspondent describes the flesh of the rat—from personal experience—as 'white and very delicate,