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Passing Notes

BY JACQUES.

Laugh where we must, be candid wherever we can.—Pope.

Those headlines again! The Southland Daily News recently had the following:—

THE MODERN CRIMINAL.

OPERATIONS IN BRITAIN.

EVERY MAN AN EXPERT THIEF.

Rather sweeping, this.

Tales are being told out of school regarding the recent visit to Samoa. The Parliamentary Party's pretext for the picnic was that they wished to investigate thoroughly, and at first-hand conditions in our new dependency, and the labour members reason for joining in was, according to the member for Grey Lynn that it was as well to "watch the other fellow." And it was. It would seem that the tweedledum—tweedledee crowd were disposed only to enquire in one direction—that of the cheap—labour-loving planter, who was fully prepared for the party's advent, and had them abundantly supplied with pamphlets and other literature to prove the need for indentured labour. Independent enquiry of the Samoans themselves was severely discouraged, not only by the planter, but by the bulk of the parliamentary party. True, on one occasion there was an interview with some chiefs, who, had been instructed by the Samoans to ventilate certain matters, but, according to Mr Bartram, Captain Cotton and Sir James Allen reached the chiefs first, and somehow tied their tongues. Still, despite all obstacles, the independent enquirers managed to elicit from the Samoans some of their opinions, and have been telling us about them. First we are told, there is no shortage of labour in Samoa at present—or would not be, if the planter was prepared to pay a decent living wage to the Samoan worker. The planter says that the cocoa and copra industries will not bear high wages. If that were true, it would be well to let them die, for, as the late Richard Seddon once stated, no industry which could not afford healthy living conditions to those engaged in it was any good to any country. But its truth may be doubted in view of the fact that the Samoan worker, on his own scrap of land, and with his own crude methods and appliances, can make nearly as much a day as the planter wants to pay his labourer in a month.

Secondly, it is said that the Samoans wish to preserve their racial purity, of which they are very proud, and which is threatened with destruction by the wholesale influx of Chinese and other coolie labour. If this is their desire, then it should certainly take priority over the planters' greedy wish for cheaper labour. Our rights in Samoa are narrowly limited by those of the Samoans themselves, and if we ignore this fact it is probable that the Samoan will grow to think that the difference between German rule and British—or New Zealand—rule is just the difference between the frying pan and the fire.

Reports of motor accidents make flat reading. They are "stated by frequency into commonest common-place." There is a dreary sameness about them all. Somebody is either incompetent or reckless—and hey presto! several beds are requisitioned in the nearest hospital, and the local undertaker finds it hard to keep the smile off his usually severe face. Sometimes the reckless or incompetent one breaks his own neck only, and then the world goes on its way rejoicing. But more often he escapes scot free, worse luck, while his passengers, or some wretched pedestrian wake up in heaven or the hospital. And, nearly always, it is a "regrettable accident," no blame being attachable to anyone. But is it not about time that some steps were taken to safeguard the public's lives and limbs. True, we already have some half-hearted regulations, limiting speed, providing a minimum age limit for taxi-drivers (though not for the drivers of private cars) etc. But these fall far short of the public need. It is time that the powers that be took the matter up in earnest, and insist that no one shall drive a motor car in public until he has proved his fitness by the most rigorous tests. This, while not annihilating the possibility of accident, would certainly reduce the present jeopardy to life and limb.

Speaking of motor hogs. I recently came across a curious passage in an old book, which had a strange ring of historic coincidence or prophecy about it. It ran as follows:—

"At the close of the eighteenth, and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the borderland between France and Germany was infested by bands of desperadoes, who were a terror to all the peaceful inhabitants. Bands of brigands roamed about, committing every kind of atrocity. They were often called Chauffeurs, or Scorchers. . . . Sometimes they were called Garotters, or Stranglers."

Well they must have been milder mannered people in those days. Now the man who has just managed to save his skin by skipping nimbly out of the way of a Chauffeur or Scorchers does not call him a Garotter or Strangler. He generally calls him a ———— And, as a rule the epithets are quite in place.

THE TRAVELLER.

I've loops o' string in the place of buttons, I've mostly holes for a shirt; My boots are bust and my hat's a goner I'm gritty with dust an' dirt; An' I'm siting here on a bollard watch-in' the China ships go forth, Seein' the black little tugs come slidin' with timber booms from the North, Sittin' an' seein' the broad Pacific break at my feet in foam; . . . Me that was born with a taste for travel in a back alley at home.

They put me to school when I was a nipper, at the Board School down in the slums, And some o' the kids was good at spellin' and some at figures and sums; And whether I went or whether I didn't they learned me nothing' at all, Only I'd watch the flies go walkin' over the maps on the wall, Strollin' over the lakes an' mountains over the plains an' sea— As if they was born with a taste for travel. . . . Somethin' the same as me!

If I'd been born a rich man's youngster with lots o' money to burn, It wouldn't ha' gone in marble mansions and statues at every turn. It wouldn't ha' gone in wine and women, or dogs an' horses an' play, Nor in collectin' bricks an' bracks in a harmless kind of way; I'd ha' gone bowlin' in yachts and my way (but I couldn't ha liked it more!) Me that was born with a taste for travel—the same if you're rich or poor. I'd ha' gone howlin' in yachts and rollin' in plush-padded Pullman cars The same as I've seen 'em when I lay restin' at night-time under the stars, Me that have beat the ties and rode the bumpers from sea to sea, Me that have sweated in stokeholds and dined off moldy salt-horse and tea; Me that have melted like grease at Perm and froze like boards off the Horn, All along of a taste for travel, that was in me when I was born.

I ain't got folks an' I ain't got money, I ain't got nothin' at all, But a sort of a queer old thirst that keeps me movin' till I fall, And many a time I've been short o' shelter and many a time o' grub, But I've got away from the row o' houses, the streets, an' the corner pub— And here by the side of a sea that's shinin' under a skyline flame, Me that was born for travel, give thanks because o' the same.

—C. Fox Smith, in "The Soldier," Sydney, N.S.W.

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