

Passing Notes.

BY JACQUES.

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

Possibly Mr Massey can, by some sort of mental légerdemain, reconcile his actions and opinion of yesterday with those of to-day, but certainly no one else on God's fair earth can. A little while ago, when discussing the proposed regulation of butter prices in the interests of Dominion consumers he laid particular emphasis on the danger of attempting interference with the "iron laws of supply and demand," and pointed out New Zealand prices must be fixed by the world's markets. Yet, with most brazen change of face, he is, at this very moment, fighting tooth and nail (but in the interests of the wool growing fat man this time) to beat the aforementioned "iron law" to a jelly, and make New Zealand the arbiter of the world's prices—at least so far as our wool is concerned. To this end he proposes to still further inflate our paper currency (while the rest of the same world is striving desperately to shrink it in order to avert disaster) and so push the cost of living up to such a height that in a little while a pound note will buy nothing but another pound note. How on earth the wily William manages to wrench these opposing attitudes into harmony with each other, or both, or either, with his promised square deal, or all with his conscience (charitably assuming his possession of such a thing) is one of those things that some of us would give a lot to find out.

An unnamed Dominion has recently placed contracts with Germany totalling £400,000, the lowest British price being £680,000. This item of news was, a few days since, shrieked out to us by the cableman in a tone that plainly indicated horror and alarm at an ominous patriotic laxity somewhere within the Empire. That any Dominion (unnamed) should place its orders with our late enemy for the sake of a beggarly £280,000 is past the understanding of that shopkeeping mind, which regards passive and humble submission to robbery—provided the robbers are our countrymen—as an essential of true patriotism. Well, there are some who think differently, and who hold that in the British profiteer we have quite as powerful and deadly a foe as we had in Fritz, and who will have to be taught just as severe a lesson. For my own part, I consider that the amplest atonement that Germany can make for her manifold past inquiries is to assist in the speedy and utter smashing of the piratical crew who, while assiduous in voicing the loftiest patriotic sentiments, have so long made their country's extremity the occasion of shameless plunder. And the man or Dominion that will not assist her in the good work should seek out a good thistle patch—that is, if the profiteer is not there with a lien on it.

"Creel," who runs the Ananias's (beg pardon, the angling column) in this paper evidently takes his hobby very seriously. At times he grows quite sentimental over it, and, like Silas Wegg, "drops into poetry" of the passionate order, mixing up "fishing brogues," "God," the "Devil," "lost loves" and other things in delightful promiscuity. At others, he becomes distinctly religious, and dwells on the spiritualising influences of "flies," "tackle," "seven-pounders," etc. The fisherman, we are told, "on the banks of the babbling brook, with the canopy of the heavens as his church, and the song of the sweet birds filling the air like some grand celestial choir, feels within himself full reverence for Him who made this universe of ours, etc., etc." Well, "Creel" is to be congratulated on his discovery of a new type of angler. I must confess that I haven't met that sort yet. The kind that I know are more concerned with the state of the weather and the water in "the babbling brook," the likeliest place for a catch and other prosaic things like that, than with "giving thanks in an unostentatious duly reverent manner" to the Deity for "blue skies" and "free air." Certainly, I grant "Creel" that, say, a week's fishing will make its impression on the spirits. One can see that by pointing the empty bottles around any old fishing camp. "Creel" says: "To the true angler it is a grand world." I

wonder what the fish, which has just been landed with a hook in its gullet, would have to say to that.

Which reminds me. It was in the back parlour of Bert Stiven's tavern, and the talk was of fish and fishing. After all the other liars had done, the quiet little fellow with the bald head spoke from his corner. (It was not "Creel," by the way). "Well, you can say what you like, but for big fish the Waimatuku beats anything else that I know. Was out there last Saturday, and at the first throw hooked the biggest thing in fins and scales that I've ever seen. Took me three hours to land him. Talk about a whopper!"

"How big? What weight?" came from the other envious and expectant liars.

"Well, unfortunately, I omitted to weigh or measure it. And I'd hate to make up figures, or otherwise lie about it. But one thing I did notice: that was that as I yanked him out the river fell about three inches."

(Again I say it was not "Creel.")

Few maxims will bear close analysis, especially such as are called from the writings of poets. Many are very like soap bubbles—pretty to look at, but hollow and fragile. They are plentiful (there is one or more for every possible occasion) and cheap, which is, perhaps, why we are so prodigal of them. We scatter them, daily, right and left, without ever stopping to examine them; we are quite satisfied that, because our favourite poet, or someone else, has said something before us, it must be true. Nor are we always careful as to its applicability. I am moved to the present grumble by the fact that four times within the last week I have met in my reading Burns' famous couplet:

"Oh! wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as others see us."

And in every case it seemed to me its use had dubious warrant. Possibly the Prophet of Ayr never intended the lines to have the wide and reckless application that Scotsmen everywhere give them. But, be that as it may, the pious wish was of very doubtful wisdom. For what others see of us is often but a very small part of a very great whole. They see the deed only, and not the circumstance; and, in judging us on the little that they see, they often err as much on the side of severity as we ourselves are prone to do on the side of charity, when surveying our own action. If every man saw himself only as others see him, and so judged himself as others judge him, there would be few outside the walls of the insane asylum in a very little while. It seems the more strange that Burns should have written such lines in that few men have suffered more from the harsh judgment—based on the little that they could see—of his fellowmen than he.

Pill's face wore a smile of reasonable benevolence when he came over last evening. No, he did not want to borrow anything, just came for a yarn.

"Well, Jax," he began meditatively, "Cris'mus is nearly here again. They seems to come quicker an' quicker every year. When yer a kiddie, they're ten years apart; when yer on the down grade from fifty there's on'y about ten weeks between 'em. Funny things, Cris'muses. 'Bout the on'y time yeh can eat all yeh want without bein' called a glutton, an' can be respectable with a skinful of beer. All over the town the women-folk 'ave been 'ard at work fer the last week gettin' everything ready fer the big gorge. Cakes an' puddin's all made; geese, turkeys, an' other feathered things mostly plucked an' ready fer bakin'. New potatoes an' green peas stacked up in the scullery, an' the ol' man's little keg ready fer the tap. An' think what it means to the kiddies—yeh was one yer-self, Jax, if I'm not mistaken. They've been looking' forward to it fer months—ever since last Cris'mus, in fact. It means as much as they can eat of the things they like best, an' chance the castor oil next day. An' old Sandy Claus is sure

to come—dad an' mum 'ave fixed the white whiskered ol' fellow up alright, as yeh could see if yeh could look into the locked wardrobe. I'm not very soft, Jax, but I 'ate to think there's any kiddie anywhere that ol' Sandy'll forget to call on. Jus' fancy 'ow the poor little devil would feel. It would be too tough, altogether. Praps the best thing about Cris'mus, Jax, is that fer one day in the year we get very near to bein' properly civilised. Fer that one day we stop cuttin' each other's throats, an' doin' to others the things that make you mad when the others do them to you. We 'ave a sort of truce, an' everybody wants to shake everybody's 'and, an' wish 'im all sorts of good luck. We all grin an' forget our troubles—unless 't may be that an' empty chair at the Cris'mus table brings a sigh or two. We do our best to be real decent to each other for once, an' find, to our surprise, that it's not so 'ard, after all. It's a great pity, Jax, that we don't all make a big try to carry that fine, old Cris'mussy feeling right through the other three 'undred an' sixty four days of the year as well." Just then we heard his wife calling him to "come an' kill the geese," and he moved off. Bill is very obedient to authority.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

(By "Commentator").

A friend of mine who has just returned from a trip up Otago Central tells me that he is to be prosecuted by the Railway Department for using a ticket dated three days before. His explanation that the date referred to the day on which he started his journey will probably be accepted by the magistrate.

On being asked by the Railway Unions and Public Service Associations when they could expect the increased bonus granted by the Arbitration Court; Mr Massey replied that he could not give them an answer until Cabinet had met, which somehow reminds one of Hans Breitmann:—

"Und to all of those queries he only reblied
If you tells me no kvestions I ask you
no lies."

Apropos of the above a public servant of my acquaintance has relieved his pent up feelings somewhat, by discharging the following:—

"Of all the sad words of tongue or pen
The saddest are these, I cannot say
when."

The Press is inundated at the present time with fiery resolutions passed by trades unions protesting against the action of the Arbitration Court in reducing the weekly bonus from 9s to 3s.

This agitation will never cease while the cost of living remains at its present preposterous price per bottle.

You and I know that prices have dropped. Mr Massey knows it. The newspapers know it. Won't it be splendid when the shopkeepers know it?

Signs of the Times.—The Bottle Oh! with his barrow is now very much in evidence.

One of the things that are sent to dry us:—Mr J. S. Baxter.

The latest maxim of the hatless brigade—reduce the cost of living by starting at the top.

"Will there be a corner in mistletoe this year?" asks a newspaper. A more vital question is: "Will there be mistletoe in a corner?"

The Jews harp please:—

For Phyllis I have bought a fan,
For Jane a diamond dart,
For Daphne (who has turned me down)
A ruby broken heart.
A jade affair for Ermytrude,
But nothing yet for Flo.
To her I want to give a ring
And something soft and lingering
Beneath the mistletoe!

Mr Dennis Hunt, who has been carrying out important work at Sunnyside for the Electric Power Board, has just returned to town for the Christmas holidays. He will submit his report on the flora and fauna of the district to Mr C. Campbell in the course of a few days. In the course of conversation, Mr Hunt cryptically remarked that the district was an ideal one but very dry.

Disraeli used to say that although he was always forgetting their faces and never remembered their names he had no

difficulty in being pleasant to his followers in the House of Commons.

"When I meet somebody in the lobby whom I don't know from Adam and I see that he expects me to know who he is, I take him warmly by the hand, look straight into his eyes and say: And how is the old complaint? I have never known it to fail!"

Strolling casually down Dee street on Saturday afternoon, I met an old crony whom I had not seen for some time. After the usual salutations, I asked: "Who are you working for now, George?" "The same old firm," he said sadly, "a wife and seven children."

Speaking from the Rotunda recently Sir Thomas Mackenzie remarked that he had known Southland in the early days, "when it was like the description of the Globe in Genesis, without form and void."

We all know that "Tam" has had many unique experiences in his day, but assuredly, a trip to Southland during that interesting period would be one to remember. Sir Thomas should be much sought after by exponents of the nebular hypothesis and Sir A. Conan Doyle.

HUMOUR IN THE LAW COURTS.

To the average individual proceedings in the Law Courts would not appear to be a very promising field for the seeker after humour. And in general it is true that the business of the Courts is of such a nature that anything approaching levity would be quite out of place. In the Criminal Courts the cases are often too momentous and generally too sordid; in the Civil Courts, whilst they seem and may be of great importance to the parties, they are, as a rule, very boring to mankind at large. Nevertheless even the sombre Halls of Justice sometimes ring with laughter at a witty sally or a humorous rejoinder. True, the laughter is speedily hushed, but the wit is often bright, the humour genuine, if sometimes unconscious, as the following examples, selected from different sources, will show.

Sir Edward Carson is one of the brightest (and most biting) wits at present practising in the Old Country. On one occasion he rose to cross-examine a witness with an obviously red nose. "You drink, my man!" he said bluntly. Witness: "That's my business!" Sir Edward: "Any other business?" Collapse of witness. On another occasion the Judge pointed out to him a discrepancy between the evidence of two witnesses—one a carpenter and the other a publican. "That is so, my Lord," said Carson. "Yet another case of difference between Bench and Bar." Jests concerning drinking recall a story told of Mr Plowden, perhaps the best known magistrate in the City of London. He was once asked if he had ever tried gin and ginger beer. "No," he said, "but I've tried lots of fellows who have."

Mr Hardinge Giffard, better known as Lord Halsbury, in a case where he appeared for a local body in South Wales, displayed great vehemence on behalf of his client. So much so that Baron Bramwell remarked on his enthusiasm. "You are not a Welshman, you know," he observed. "No," said Giffard, "but I have had a good deal out of them in my time." "Ah," said the Judge, "then we may take it that you are a Welshman by extraction." Bramwell, indeed, was a naturally witty man. It was he who invented the well-known classification of perverters of the truth. "Liars, d—d liars and expert witnesses."

A case was once being tried before the Scotch Judge, Lord Young—"Crabbe v. Crabbe" was the name of it. "I may explain, m'lud," said the advocate, "that my client, Crabbe, is a nephew of our opponent, Crabbe, but a few years ago he dropped the 'i' in his name for the sake of euphony." "Oh," said the Judge, "he has Biblical authority for that—"If thy 'i' offend thee, pluck it out."

But, as in other types so in Law Court humour, some of the most scintillating gems come from Ireland. Towards the latter end of the eighteenth century Curran probably stood supreme as the readiest wit and most brilliant advocate in the Irish Courts. Small of stature and ugly of face he was endowed with a keen mind and a ready tongue. One burly counsellor who was once opposed to him tried to make capital out of his physical insignificance. "If you go on so, Mr Curran, I'll put you in my pocket." "Egad, if you do," retorted Curran, "You'll have more law in your pocket than you ever had in your head." Nor was he averse to giving the judges a "dressing-down." "If you say another word I'll commit you," shouted the Judge on one such occasion. To which

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Curran replied, "If your Lordship shall do so, we shall both of us have the consolation of reflecting that I am not the worst thing your Lordship has committed."

Of present day Irish counsel Mr Timothy Healy is possessed of a rapier wit. He was once engaged in a marital case at Dublin as counsel for the husband, the defendant. The plaintiff's counsel made an impassioned address on behalf of his client, an address which moved both judge and jury to tears; at length himself overcome, the advocate sat down and buried his face in his hands. Mr Healy rose, he looked at the Judge, he looked at the jury, he looked at the opposing counsel; again he let his eye travel round the weeping court and then began: "My Lord, never since Moses struck the rock has there been such a miracle." Irish witnesses too have been responsible for much of the humour of the courts. One was asked by the Judge if he knew what an alibi was. "Sure," said Pat, "it's just like this—it's to be after proving that ye wasn't where ye was when ye committed a crime that, sure, ye never committed at all." Here is another specimen. Judge: "Mike, I wouldn't think that you would hit a little man like that." Mike: "Suppose that he called you an Irish slob." Judge: "But I am not an Irishman." Mike: "Well suppose he called you a Dutch slob." Judge: "But I am not a Dutchman." Mike: "Well, suppose that he called you the kind of slob that you are."

Women in the witness box sometimes—only sometimes—get a bit flustered as witness one who when asked if all her children were born in wedlock, replied, "No, sir; they were a' born in Paisley. I've never been near the other place in my life." Quite clear and to the point was the reply of one who when asked, "Did your husband hit you between those dates?" answered "No, in the eye." Which is on a par with this one: "Did you marry him on the spur of the moment?" "No, sir, at the Registry Office."

In conclusion let me tell the story of a case tried in a County Court, in an action for the wrongful detention of a donkey. The plaintiff was a costermonger; the defendant was a costermonger; they conducted the case in person. At one o'clock the Judge said: "Now, my men, I'm going to have my lunch, and before I come back I hope you'll settle your case out of court." When he returned the plaintiff came in with a black eye and the defendant with a bloody nose. The defendant said: "Well, your Honour, we's taken your Honour's advice; Jim's given me a dam good hiding, and I've given him back his donkey."

There is not much difference between the average life of a dog and of a cat. A dog averages 12 years, a cat 10.

The amendments to the Shops and Offices' act, 1908, become operative as from January 1, 1921. The principal provisions are that shopkeepers will be limited to only one night in Xmas and New Year weeks, and the hour is fixed at 10 o'clock instead of 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock as before. Also, if a shopkeeper observes his ordinary late night on the Thursday before Good Friday, he must give the Holiday on Saturday, thus giving the employee a holiday from Thursday night in Easter week till the following Tuesday. If, however, he chooses to make his late night say Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, he need not give the Saturday holiday. The amendments also provide for a 48 hour week instead of 52. Shopkeepers are advised to make themselves conversant with these amendments.