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CURRENT TOPICS.

Mr. Goldwin Smith, in his address at the Conference on Social Problems held a week or two since in Toronto, said that he once knew an English clergyman, a very kind-hearted man and very active in his calling, who used to say that at the day of judgment he would be able to plead that he had never given a penny to a beggar. Being "very active in his calling," it may be hoped that he would be able to reinforce this negative plea by a goodly array of positive good deeds for the amelioration of the condition of the "lapsed" by whom he must have been surrounded, else he might be in danger of being seriously embarrassed by some of the tests proposed by the Apostles James and John, touching his relations to the destitute. But while much might be said as to the greater blessedness to the giver from a personal contact with the objects of his charity, there can be no doubt of the absolute necessity that, in a city like Toronto, the work of helping the poor should be thoroughly organized and every precaution taken against the fostering of professional or fraudulent mendicancy.

The thanks of every charitably disposed citizen are due to those who have given so much time and attention for the accomplishment of this most desirable purpose.

No doubt, too, those who control these organizations will see to it that, so far as possible, no one who is able to work shall be relieved except in return for honest labour of some kind. "Stick to the unemployed, John; work is our only hope," was the hoarse whisper of a prisoner in the exercise yard of the Pentonville prison, which, John Burns says, in his Nineteenth Century article, is still ringing in his ears. John Burns believes that the cheapest, best, and safest way to prevent the idle man, the potential loafer, pauper, or criminal, from becoming a burden upon society, is to provide him with work which will benefit the community while it saves the man or the woman. Mr. Balfour, late Secretary for Ireland, said in a recent speech that more attention was being now paid in some quarters to the distribution than to the production of wealth, though the latter was by far the more important matter. That opinion may be open to question. There is doubtless plenty of wealth in Christendom to-day to supply the needs of all its population, if only it were better distributed. Nor do men as a rule need to be urged to greater diligence in its production or acquisition. But how to secure on just principles such a distribution that thousands may no longer starve, no matter how willing to work, is surely the question of most pressing moment, at least from a humanitarian and moral point of view.

The single-tax experiment which is about to be tried in New South Wales will be watched with great interest from many quarters of the outside world. Our cousins in the Southern Hemisphere are bold innovators, but this is, perhaps, the most radical step which has yet been taken. The Legislature of that Colony has adopted by a majority of considerably more than three to one a resolution declaring that "in the opinion of this House a system of raising revenue by the direct taxation of land values, irrespective of improvements, would greatly promote the welfare of this country." Both the Premier of the Colony, Sir George Dibbs, and the leader of the Opposition, supported the motion. Hence there can be nothing to prevent the new system from having a fair trial. Whether it succeed or fail it will set before the world an object-lesson such as it has not hitherto seen. Should it unequivocally succeed we shall all be adopting it some day.

According to a letter said to have been addressed to a clergyman in Pittsburg by Hon. Yung Wung, formerly Commissioner of Education for the Chinese Government, that long-suffering nation has at last been roused to adopt a well-considered and vigorous plan of campaign for the protection of its people in the United States. The first appeal will be to the

United States courts to test the constitutionality of the Exclusion Act. Should it survive this ordeal an appeal to public sentiment and to Congress will next be tried. If that fail to bring about the overthrow of this unrighteous legislation, the Chinese Government will try the effect of formal and energetic remonstrance and protest. Should all these measures prove ineffectual, retaliation will follow in the form of abrogation of all treaty rights, discontinuance of all commercial intercourse, and the withdrawal of Government protection to Americans in China. This latter step would no doubt be equivalent to swift banishment or massacre for the merchants, numbering, it is thought, about 1,500, and for the missionaries to the number of several hundreds, who are now in the Celestial Empire. It would be hard to blame the Chinese Government and people should they, after every other means had been tried in vain, resort to these extreme measures, but it would be none the less a calamity to civilization. It is to be hoped that, under pressure of the better sentiment of the republic, the incoming Administration may be able to wipe the stain of this unjust and cruel legislation from the statute book.

While the opponents of Home Rule are ridiculing or denouncing the proceedings of the "Evicted Tenants' Commission" appointed by the Gladstone Government, and Mr. Goschen and other Opposition leaders are waxing satirical over its alleged disposition to renew instead of redeeming the "promissory notes" by which it obtained office, the admirers of that Government are, on the other hand, pointing with smiles of satisfaction to brave reforms already wrought and a prodigious amount of preparatory work said to have been already accomplished. The proof of the latter can be given to the public only when Parliament meets. For the former we are pointed to the wise solution—the wisdom of which has yet, however, to be proved by the stern test of time and trial—of the Uganda difficulty; to the proposed Commission of Inquiry into the bearing of the Poor Laws on the relief of honourable age, and other minor matters of internal administration, including of course the Evicted Tenants' Commission itself. Mr. Asquith's qualified concession of the liberty of public meeting in Trafalgar-square was certainly an act which required, under the circumstances, some courage and a good deal of faith in the Liberal principle of freedom of speech. But probably the boldest reform yet effected, some say the boldest step that has been taken by any one in a responsible position since Mr. Gladstone's abolition of purchase in the army, was Mr. Fowler's decree, reducing the qualification of Guardians of the Poor to the low uniform level of a five-pound assessment. The Minister had, it seems, power to fix the amount of the qualification, which has hitherto been so high as virtually to exclude any one not possessed of considerable means, but not power to abolish a property qualification altogether.