

Oysters were not such moral eating as some other articles of daily consumption. "You see," he went on to say, "if I was to open a grocer's shop, or an ironmonger's, or start an emporium, or a depot, or a warehouse, or a furniture establishment, the police wouldn't think o' looking after me, and they wouldn't trouble my customers; but only let me start an oyster shop, and there they are down upon a fellow a once, and a-watching my customers through the window as if every oyster they swallowed was a bad half-crown which they was afraid of being convicted of for having in their possession. Then they are coming to you at all hours of the night a-saying, 'Joe,' or whatever your name may be, 'has Curly Poll been here to-night?' or, 'What time did Happy Jack,' or, 'When do you expect the Knowing 'Un to turn up?' And they goes on a-asking these questions, and if you don't answer 'em they says they'll mark you for it, and, blow me, sir, asking your pardon, but they do mark you, and make it uncommonly hot and uncomfortable for you. They don't do such a thing with a draper, or a city councillor, or a bookseller, then why do they do it with oyster shops? Well, I'll tell you why: because oysters ain't moral. There's no other reason as I sees or can see. A gentleman will come in late at night in company with a young woman who has been in the shop the night afore with quite a different gentleman, and they'll have a feed o' oysters, and ever so many like that comes in; but I never seed or knowed a respectable woman come in and say, 'Will you be good enough to open me a plate of oysters' just as easy-like as she would go into a pastrycook's and ask for a glass of jelly and a bun. So I've come to think that oysters were not intended to make people moral, but was intended to keep 'em up late o' nights and cause 'em to go on in a manner that it would be much better if they did not."

Here is food for reflection for my readers. I wish some man or woman of an intelligent turn of mind would give the subject his or her best consideration, and let me know the result.

SUCH IS LIFE—A PHILOSOPHIC AND A MORALISTIC DISCOURSE WITH A BOATMAN.

It's not very often I find myself taken aback in giving an answer to any question which may be put to me. It has been a life study with me, and I am open to explain any matter which may be brought under my notice, from pronouncing definitely the precise date of the early lower Silurian formations down to the last thing out in spirit rapping or the fine arts. But I feel quite humbled in having to confess that I was beaten the other day by a specimen of human nature, a second sample of which never in a long world-wide experience, came under my observation. He was an old boatman, who in the course of conversation, told me he was getting on for three score and felt quite equal to taking another score or two out of himself before he was prepared to cut the painter.

It was about one o'clock in the morning that I was leaning over the rail of the lower portion of the Queen-street wharf, waiting the arrival of the Thames steamer. I was meditating upon the mutability of all things mudane. How one man came to get such a precious sight more than he deserved, and—how others including myself didn't get half what they had a right to look for. I was reconciling myself to this state of thing, which I supposed, like earthquakes, volcanoes, cholera morbus, and house flies, were intended for some good purpose, the precise drift of which it was not permitted us to know. The poet has said that whatever is right, and I am not in a position to contradict him. I suppose things will be all the same to us a hundred years hence, but then they are not quite the same to us today, or the week after next; and it's this that puts me out. I must content myself by saying, "Mary, my good girl, draw me half a pint of beer in pewter," whilst old Jones rings the bell, and orders John to bring the claret and walnuts.

Here am I, who have been trying for a long life time to impress upon the world those sentiments which have been dictated by the loftiest emotions compelled to lower my contemplation, and make enquiry whether my boots will stand half soling, while Jones who has never done anything but dabble in corner allotments, can order three hundred and sixty five pairs of Wellingtons in the year, and look his boot-maker in the face, when he presents his bill.

It was thus while in meditation fancy free that the old boatman sidled up to me, and leaning against the rail, asked me "did I feel miserable and was life altogether too much for me." He said he had had enough of the ups and downs in this life, but he had never gone so far as to want to drop himself off a wharf and let the tide float him till he was picked up for a coroner's inquest. He further went on to say that he wasn't going to allow any man to commit suicide while he was present, and if I was on for anything in that line of business he should think it his dooty to give me in custody.

Then I told the old man to disabuse his mind of an illusion. If I had been going to drown myself, any one who had made a deep study of my nature would know it was not likely I should do such a thing in a new suit of clothes, the receipt for the payment of which was at that moment in my pocket.

The old man said "he were werry sorry if he had hurt my feelings, but when a gentleman was seen mooning over a railing of the wharf at one o'clock in the morning while the tide were up it looked as if he wasn't thinking what he was going to have for his breakfast."

My companion, whose whiskers and beard appeared in the cold moonlight as covered with hoar frost, and his nose as if set in carbuncles, then approached me closely, and looking hard into my face said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I think I have seen your face somewhere afore to-night. Ain't you a newspaper gent?—ain't you one of those who is always going on about things in Parliament and the Police Courts, and shewing up people as get slewed and 'salts people.'"

I said that I sometimes put my hand to that powerful lever which had been so instrumental in raising the world to the pitch of civilisation which it had now reached—which made the Press a terror to the doers of evil, and a source of strength to those who delight to do well.

The aged boatman appeared to be impressed with the profound observations I had entrusted to his consideration. He leaned both arms upon the wharf railing and watched meditatively the ripple of the tide as the sheen of the moonlight danced upon its surface. There was evidently a something preying upon his mind—something which he desired to relieve himself of.

Then he delivered himself of this question, "You newspaper coves knows lots of things; now, just you tell me where's Heaven?"

I pointed to the firmament on high, and said, "It's up above."

Then he asked, "At what o'clock."

I said clocks hadn't got anything to do with the question.

He told me, in reply, he thought clocks had everything to do with it. "Look here, now," he said, "ain't cart-wheels got axle-trees to work on?"

I said cart-wheels had.

"Then," he said, "Ain't the world got an axle-tree to twist itself round on?"

I said it was generally believed the earth revolved on its axis in the space of twenty-four hours and some minutes.

"Werry well," was the answer, "that's just what I want to come to. If the earth revolves as you say—that is, goes round on its axis or axle-tree, which I suppose are both made alike and of the same material, then Heaven may be above us at night and below in the morning. Now, what I want you to say is, which is it, and at what o'clock?"

I was not going to show myself beaten by a hoary headed three-score waterman, and so I evaded his question by saying that I would consult a nautical almanac, and would tell him the exact time of day to find where the locality he was on the for, and which I trusted we were all in search after was located.

My friend, apparently quite satisfied with my assurances, then lapsed into profound silence for several minutes;—when he awoke from his reverie, and with an abruptness that was sufficient to make the blood curdle in my veins, said, "Where do you get hold of all them lies as goes into print?"

"What lies?" I asked.

"What lies?" said the old man; "why them lies as gets into print in the papers. Just 'cause I happens to get a little fresh one night, and the bobbies spotted me out and locks me up in the watch-house, and the magistrates fines me five Roberts the next morning, you newspaper coves comes out with a long yarn, and talks about the advisability of a permissive

measure—which I suppose means some sort of measure that will hold such a little liquor as will neither do a fellow good nor harm. And you go on a moralising about the intemperance of the working classes and the necessity of closing up half of the public-houses, and talking of what you know no more about than a baby does where its mother gets its tucker from to keep it going. Supposing the public-houses was redooed to one half, why what would be the consequence? The one half would lay their heads together and say—Let us get the most out of the people for ourselves as ever we can, because there will be no other half to come in competition against us. We'll make hay while the sun shines, that's what we'll do. Give 'em bad liquor and worse accommodation, and make tip-top charges; that will be our little game. And as for these Templars, who are so blessed good as won't touch a drop of liquor, 'cos if they did they must go on a-drinking and a-drinking, till they get themselves into an everlasting state of tightness,—who are they, I should like to know, who says a fellow musn't drink a drop, for fear he should come to be like theirselves? And then there's those members a-sticking themselves up to the making of Acts of Parliament, one lot of which says the Bible must be read in schools, or the rising generation—which I suppose means boys and girls—won't grow up moral, and all that sort of thing; while another lot goes a-writing to the newspapers, and says the Bible musn't be read in public schools, or it will interfere with their secklar education. What's education, and what's secklar, that's what I want to know. My old woman, as has been a wife to me, girl and boy, as I may say, for the matter of the last thirty years, says to me the other night, 'Joe,' she says, 'these chaps are always and a continually manufacturing of Acts, but what I say is, give me the Acts of the 'Postles, which is worth the whole bilin' of them stewed down and turned out in the handsomest mould that is to be found for them.' Says I, old girl, I hink you are about right. If people, instead of fighting about whether the Bible should be read in schools, would only read them a little more theirselves by their own bedsides, my opinion is that there'd not be so much talk about what their kids are to do. Many of them chaps as is going on about the Bible being read in school never turns over the leaves of one theirselves from year's end to year's end, and those who make the most noise about the thing is like a drum, the hollower it is the more sound comes out of it.' 'Susan, my loved one,' I goes on to say, 'make your children read their Bible of a Sunday afternoon, and make 'em say their prayers every night before turning in; but if they tell lies, Susan, my lawfully begotten, whack 'em even if they have read ever so much Bible. If they go picking and stealing, even though they can say their Church Catechism by heart, backwards or sideways, or anyhow, you whack 'em; or if you don't I will, if it is only to make 'em honour their father and mother that their days may be long in the land. The Bible's good and the Catechism's good, and religion's good; but if they don't honour me and you old girl, and go a-keeping away from school to catch fish as they do sometimes, what I say is, 'Whack 'em, and never you go minding no Acts of Parliament.' This is what I told my old woman the other night, and she says, 'Joe, old boy, I believe you are right,' and then she goes to the cupboard and brings me out a drop of square gin, and she gives herself a drop because, she says, 'What's good for the gander is good for the goose,' and she always finds she sleeps with a greater amount of innocence and a less inclination to have sinful thoughts come into her head than when she gets nothing.

And here's the steamer a-crawling up and its wishing you a good night I am, and hoping your shadow may never grow less."

And the old man retired, leaving me to wonder whether he who could only read a little and spell never a bit, was not as fairly on his way to Heaven as the more enlightened part of his fellow-men who made Acts of Parliament in order to show him and others like him the way.

SOMETHING ABOUT BLONDIN.

How Blondin first learned to walk the tight-rope is replete with interest. He states that when only six years of age he walked along his mother's clothes' line, one end of which was fastened to an apple tree. This enabled him to steal the

apples. He balanced himself with a clothes' prop. His father witnessing the exploit made him practice for some months. He was in the habit occasionally on warm summer nights of sleeping on a line. He always he says, felt it more refreshing than by lying on a mattress. Blondin relates how once he waited on the Archbishop of Canterbury and offered to carry him across on a rope a hundred feet high, the proceeds of which were to be given towards the formation of a home for decayed acrobats. The Archbishop would not accept the offer, but appointed a poor curate in his place. Blondin, however, declined to have anything to do with any one below the degree of a Bishop, and then he was to be carried over in full canonicals. The event did not come off. There is only one man of whom Blondin is afraid. This is an agent of the great American showman Barnum, who follows him to whatever part of the world he may travel. This agent attends every performance. Should Blondin happen to fall and smash himself, Barnum has commissioned his agent to buy up the mutilated corps, the balancing pole he fell with and the rope. Barnum's intention is to have Blondin stuffed and exhibited, by which he reckons he will make an immense fortune. Blondin states that he knows this event will happen him at some time but to disappoint Barnum and his agent he has by will disposed of his final remains for the benefit of his children. Blondin has tried to get his life insured at several large offices but the risk has upon every occasion been declined, which he thinks is coming it very hard on him.

WAR CORRESPONDENTS AND OTHERS.

MR ARCHIBALD FORBES has done some very big things as a war correspondent for the newspapers he has written for; and I am of opinion he is now doing even bigger things for himself as a lecturer, and as old Gourley was wont to say, "and wherefore no?" He is earning great fame for himself with hosts of amused and interested listeners, and I feel sure his bankers give him a large amount of credit as he journeys along on his way. But I want to point out, without wishing to be thought too presumptuous, that other newspaper correspondents have done quite as big things in another direction as Mr Forbes has done; but somehow or other they have not been in the way of making themselves as well known. War correspondents run many risks and have plenty of hard work cut out for them. They have plenty of hair-breadth 'scapes, but not very often 'i the imminent deadly breach. Like commanders-in-chief, they are at times in the fight, perhaps in the thick of it; but, as I have been told, they more often view what is going on by the aid of telescope or binocular. By such means war correspondents are much better able to describe in narrative what has happened or happening. But how about

danger to life and limb; how about hard rides and perilous swims; how about brave and gallant things done by newspaper correspondents in the early days of gold-diggings rushes to new and unknown places, in company with rough-and-tumble men, hastening pell-mell through swamps, crossing rivers and ascending heights in search of the precious metal. I have not heard of many war correspondents having lost their lives, although a large number of them have been taken prisoners, to be almost immediately liberated. But there have been to my knowledge twenty or more than this number of goldfields correspondents who in doing their work have perished miserably or have suffered fearfully. There was poor Terry, for the Port Phillip Gazette, while examining a claim at the Bald Hill (Ballarat) had his brains smashed in from the fall of a lump of quartz. The diggers round about made up sixty ounces of gold for his widow and children. There was Young Boyd, of the Argus, as brave a fellow as ever breathed, while gallantly defending the gold commissioners who, with a number of police, were attacked by a number of miners, got both his legs broken, and yet in his great agony wrote a graphic account of the outbreak, and despatched it to the paper he represented. There was Clarke, of the Geelong Advertiser, who rode a draught horse from Creswick Creek into Geelong, a distance of 76 miles, in eight hours and a half. He did the greater part of the distance on a dark moonless night. His saddle was a folded corn sack; his stirrups a piece of rope looped