

The Chronicle.

APRIL 13th, 1872.

The defence set up before the Fiji law courts by some of those law-breaking Britons who are hovering about the islands just now is but another instance of the extent to which British impudences will go in a case of emergency. To enter a man's house and rob him of his goods and his liberty, and then to plead English birth as a reason for non-interference on the part of the Government of the country, is one of the most perfectly-developed phases of what is familiarly known as "cheek" which we have ever heard of on the part of our countrymen. Yet this is precisely the course which some of the white-skinned monsters have been pursuing at Levuka; but we are glad to find that any expectations they may have formed of frightening Thakombau's Government by the terrible announcement that they were Englishmen, have been thoroughly disappointed. The Judge before whom this point was urged spoke sensibly and firmly on the point, ridiculing the plea. "Persons," said he, "coming to Fiji must

obey and be bound by the local laws, and were not allowed to escape merely because they denied they courts authority. If he were to permit this, every person, no matter how heinous his offence, had only to deny their right to try him to escape justice; for it was absurd to suppose that a man of war, which might remain in the harbour for a few days only, would remedy this, as on her appearance off the reef a delinquent had only to get out of sight and so avoid altogether being made to answer for his crime." One single example will serve to show the character of some of the individuals who would make the English name a cloak for their malpractices. One Daniel Sinclair, in charge of the cutter Cambria, ran down a canoe containing a number of islanders, two of whom he got on board and chained together in such a way that he thought it impossible they could free themselves. Two Europeans armed were appointed to look after these men, who, notwithstanding all the precautions which were taken to secure them, managed to get out of their shackles, and kill their guards. At the inquest which took place upon the bodies, it transpired that the unfortunate natives had been brutally ill-treated, not only by Sinclair, but also by his wife, who struck one of them several times over the head with a billet of wood, the man being handcuffed at the time and incapable of offering the slightest resistance. This pale-faced Amazon, who would probably have the assurance to call herself an Englishwoman were she placed upon her trial, seems to have escaped with-

upon her trial, seems to have escaped without punishment, and her husband was only subjected to the inconvenience of a fine and a few months' imprisonment. The Judge in passing so lenient a sentence was probably actuated by the recommendation to mercy which the jury added to their verdict of common assault only. What they could find in the evidence to induce them to take such a merciful view of the case, it is difficult to understand. But the ways of jurymen have ever been mysterious, and although the suspicion may intrude itself that in this particular instance a fellow feeling made them wondrous kind, we will charitably suppose that they were governed only by the eccentricities which characterise the race all over the world. But whatever may be the shortcomings, past and present, of Thakombau's Ministers, it is to their credit that they instructed the Crown prosecutor to initiate proceedings against this "alien." They have acted justly and with policy in endeavouring to show their neighbours that they are not disposed to allow violence and bloodshed to go unpunished, without reference to the colour of the offenders or their victims. The readiness with which the Government gave assistance to capture Rosenwax, in the face of the opposition of several influential residents of Fiji, was an evidence of their willingness to support law and order so far as they are able. The experiment they are making is being watched with interest, and much depends upon the way they apply the power which is in their hands. Their present endeavour to negotiate a loan of £5,000 at Sydney may be considered somewhat premature, as at present we look in vain for those signs of stability which would induce the public to invest money in Fijian Government debentures. The proposal is certainly a modest one, so far as the amount is concerned, and if the Government at Levuka were firmly established, there would be no difficulty in obtaining the money. In the meantime they cannot be too eager in their endeavours to secure for themselves a good name. The recent flights of Europeans to the islands, under circumstances of a more than questionable kind, are not calculated to give us a very high opinion of the white population. "Sloped for Callao," and "Gone to Fiji," are synonymous terms with many people in Victoria and New South Wales, who have come to regard Levuka as the rendezvous for the scum of the Australian colonies. If the Ministry can convince the public that such is not the case, that respectability there is sufficiently powerful to keep black-guardism in check, and that the laws are as impartially enforced as in older and more civilised countries, they will be adopting the proper means to effect a speedy settlement of the country. The latter undoubtedly offers inducements to men of small capital to take up their residence there, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that many would do

up their residence there, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that many would do so if they only had the assurance that some protection would be afforded to life and property. It is to be regretted that the Government, in their praiseworthy attempts to suppress the lawlessness of the whites, have had to encounter opposition on the part of the British consul at Lovuka. That individual, whose appointment (as we gather from visitors to Fiji) has been a mistake, supported Sinclair and others in their determination to deny the jurisdiction of the Fijian court, because they were Englishmen.

It would be interesting to know his idea of the extent to which a Briton may go in defiance of the laws of the country in which he resides. Probably it would be found to differ widely from the opinion of the majority of his countrymen; and we cannot for a moment suppose that the Imperial authorities will commend him for the course he has been pursuing.

Those uncharitable people who imagined that Ministers have been running about the country eating and drinking and making merry for their own amusement, or for the purpose of rendering themselves popular, have made a sad mistake. While the general impression was that they were having a very lively time of it, Mr. Duffy and his colleagues were engaged in the discharge of an irksome duty, and nothing less than the conviction that they were doing violence to their feelings for the sake of the country could have supported them in the trial. That the Chief Secretary should tremble at the mere thought of a banquet, and regard such demonstrations with the utmost horror, we can easily understand, for he, poor man, on each of these occasions is compelled to constitute himself a target at which all the paper shots of the Opposition are discharged. Although the business of the country is transacted under the sign of "Duffy and Co.," all the members of the firm, with the exception of the Premier, are generally considered to be sleeping partners, who have only invested the required amount of voting capital, have only to assist in sharing the profits—an act which they no doubt perform with praiseworthy punctuality. This, we say, is the popular belief, but here as in many other cases popular opinion is in error. We learn from Mr. Vale that the "Co." have been misrepresented, and that if they do not actually play the organ, they at least blow the bellows. They are men of inquiring minds, anxious above all things to do their best for themselves and posterity—especially for posterity—and, according to the Commissioner of Customs, they "have spent the recess in personally obtaining for themselves a knowledge of the wants of the people, which will be of use to them here-

after, and they have also been engaged in the consideration of measures which they hope will tend to increase the prosperity of the colony." They raise the wind, so to speak, and forthwith harmonious sounds are heard in Castlemaine and Clunes. They ride about in special trains and special carriages, and say especially pleasant things to their entertainers, but all the time they keep their eyes and ears open, so that they may be brimful of information when they devote themselves to the business of legislation. Of course, this object is a very laudable one, but we are not prepared to say that a public calamity would result if their thirst for knowledge were a little less decided. A desire to possess a thorough knowledge of the working of railways led Mr. Longmore the other day to cross the stormy water to Queensland, taking Mr. Meickle with him as a sort of private tutor. About the same time Messrs. Grant and Vale started upon the same Royal Road to Learning, and never brought up until they found themselves at Sala. This new educational process must be looked upon by Ministers with feelings similar to those with which juvenility regards the pictorial alphabet—the best and pleasantest way of doing a disagreeable thing. The population of Clunes, the extent of its gold mines, and other information necessary to satisfy the curiosity of Cabinet Ministers might be ascertained without paying a visit to that locality; but a mere consultation of blue books would not be likely to fix these particulars so firmly upon the memory as if they were associated with recollections of sparkling wines and epicurean dishes. The unworthy suspicion that these journeys were undertaken for popularity's sake must henceforth be rejected by every honest man, for have we not the authority of the Hon. W. M. K. Vale (of pious memory) for saying they were only entered upon with a view of "obtaining a knowledge of the wants of the people?" Happy people! The day of their redemption draweth nigh. Another session of Parliament will soon begin, and then the results of all the holiday feasting will be made manifest in prodigies of legislation. Then words will become deeds, "by God's will," as Mr. Duffy remarked, and those who have been unable to discover from the Chief Secretary's orations the exact nature of the "policy" of the Government, will be able to judge it by their actions. The "wants" of the country should be pretty well known by this time, although the constituencies have not all prepared Ministerial banquets, and nothing remains now but to supply these wants in a satisfactory manner. There is reason to hope that to do this the Government will exert themselves to the utmost, and that their efforts will not be altogether unavailing.

WILLIAMSTOWN RIFLE CLUB.—The Williamstown Rifle Club will hold their first handicap match of the season at the local butts, on Saturday, 13th inst., firing to commence at half past two. As the club is open to civilians as well as volunteers, there should be some good firing. The subscription being low, viz., 5s., with an entrance fee of 2s. 6d., should induce a large number to come forward and burn a little powder for the credit of Williamstown; and as the dons of the club are heavily handicapped, there will be a chance for everyone obtaining a prize. With a good working committee, the Williamstown Rifle Club should equal, if not rival, any other club round Melbourne, and we hope to see them well to the fore ere the season closes.

ART UNION.—We are requested to announce, that as returns from the country districts are not yet to hand, the art union and drawing of prizes in connection with the building fund of St. Mary's new church will not come off before Wednesday next. Due notice of the hour will be given, and all who take an interest in the drawing are invited to be present at the Mechanics' Institute on that occasion. No charge will be made for admission at the doors.

TEMPERANCE LECTURE.—A temperance lecture was delivered in the Temperance hall, Williamstown, last Wednesday evening, by the Rev. Mr. Bassett, Mr. George Dent in the chair. The attendance at a temperance lecture in Williamstown is never very good, and that of Wednesday evening was no exception to the general rule. The lecture, however, was worthy of a better audience, and at the close a hearty vote of thanks was accorded to the lecturer. The meeting was closed with the benediction, a vote of thanks having been given to the chairman.

FATAL ACCIDENT.—Mr. John Scott, a farmer who had been for many years a resident of Derrimut, near Mount Atkinson, was accidentally killed on Tuesday evening, while travelling from Melton to his own house. It appears that the deceased was bringing 1½ tons of bone-dust in a dray to his farm, and was walking along the road with the reins in his hand, when he tripped and fell to the ground, and before he could recover himself the rear wheel of the dray passed over his body and he died almost instantly. The deceased, who was in comfortable circumstances, was 63 years old, and was highly respected by all who knew him. An inquest was held upon the body yesterday by Dr. Maclean, the district coroner, when a verdict in accordance with the evidence was returned.

GAS AT FOOTSCRAY.—A facetious correspondent sends us the following communication:—"The Footscray Borough Council have determined to apply to the Melbourne Company for gas, or rather a motion to that effect has been tabled by a member. I admire the worthy councillor's courage, and at the same time 'wish he may get it.' It is not likely, I think, that any company will go to the enormous expense of laying down a main to Footscray for the sake of the necessarily small returns that would be received here. I would suggest a much cheaper method. If pipes were only laid down from the Borough Chambers, enough 'gas' is wasted at the Council table almost every night of meeting to light Footscray for the intervening fortnight, and there would be this advantage in the plan, the gasometers would be self-acting and self-supporting, so that the only expense would be that of the pipes. I would respectfully recommend this to the notice of the Footscray borough councillors, as being a very economical plan."

FOOTSCRAY TOWN CLERKSHIP.—At the last meeting of the Footscray Borough Council, a resolution was passed which reflects credit on all parties concerned. Mr. Hyam Hart, who has held the office of Town Clerk and Treasurer to the Borough for the last six years, has lately been elected to the office of town clerk to the Hotham Borough Council. As a slight mark of the Council's appreciation of the manner in which Mr. Hart has discharged his various duties, a sum of £31 was voted to that gentleman, being the amount which would have been due to him had he continued in office up to the end of June next. The Council's books have always been very carefully kept, and it was thought that it would not be right to allow Mr. Hart to depart without some record of the good feeling of the members of the Council. Mr. J. Irving has been appointed to the combined offices of town clerk, treasurer and Borough surveyor.

The story comes from France that a beautiful but strong-minded lady living in Boulogne sent a challenge to the publisher of a humorous journal, who had "twice concerned himself with her private affairs." A formal acceptance of the duel was returned; the choice of arms was waived, but a decided preference for those of the lady was expressed. Reconciliation followed, and the wedding trip is to the United States.