

Ballarat Courier

10th May 1890

DAVIE IN THE BATH

I have something of a weakness for Davie the fool; the reason is, I suppose, because

From our own wisdom less is to be reaped

Than from the barest folly of a fool.

Davie thinks himself remarkably wise, and he is not slow in setting down other people as idiotic. Poor fellow! It is rather noticeable the amount of wisdom Davie can stare with at times, thus reminding one of Sam Butler's lines in "Hudibras":-

Woodcocks are found out by their eyes;

So fools are known by looking wise.

But it is when Davie least intends to inculcate wisdom that he does so. As I mentioned in my last, the Ormuz only provides one bath for about 300 third-class men; and in the morning there is generally a rush for it. Well, the other morning Davie got possession of the bath, and once in, with the door bolted, he was wise enough to know that possession is nice points of the law, and that the men outside the bathroom have no rights which the man inside the bathroom is bound to respect. In vain the crowd outside stormed and shouted and kicked the door – Davie the fool was in possession, and he thoroughly appreciated his position. He laid and played in the bath, and splashed the water about, laughing and yabbering away, and only noticing the people outside by calling them "fools," thus adding insult to injury, and causing the great unwashed to rage still more. I never saw anything more aristocratic in my life. A Duke of Westminster, or a Duke of Bedford could not have treated their London tenants with greater contempt if the tenants pleaded for tenants' rights, and hinted a desire to see the landlords' title to perpetual possession of the land and all the people's improvements thereon. Davie was in possession. An hour rolled on, but still he kept a firm grip on his position. In vain the would-be bathers pleaded, in vain they swore. What seemed strangest to me was to hear some of the men outside, men who were waiting to bathe, actually defending Davie's action in the matter, and insisting that once Davie had possession of the bath he had a right to stop in it for a week if he liked, just as some people argue in regard to landlordism. But Davie did not stop in a week; he only stopped in about a couple of hours until he got hungry for breakfast; and then out he came calling them all dashed fools.

CLASSES AND MASSES

It seems to me that nowhere are the lines between the classes and the masses more distinct than on such an ocean steamer as the Ormuz. It is true that for an hour on the Sunday, when the captain performs the church service, all the people are invited to be equal; but the service over the classes and the masses separate like sheep

from the goats, and then the classes themselves separate into two classes, the first and the second perhaps more opposed to each other than the third class and steerage is from either. The other day a second class passenger wandered on to the first class deck, and immediately a complaint was made, and the offender was instructed to keep within his own bounds. Now, there is something not very unsilly, though somewhat selfish, in all that; but the first class passengers argue that they paid for certain privileges and exclusive rights, and by the virtue of that payment they consider they should be protected from encroachment. That is certainly a much better title than the aristocracy of Great Britain could show to the wide-reaching privileges and exclusive rights which they claim, and which the people are only beginning to enquire into. When a passenger goes on board ship, he is like the fellow who paid his money and took his choice at the peep-show. The second class have no right to envy the first, nor have the third the right to envy the second. It is a pure money matter- so much money- so much so and so, and such and such. Yet it is funny to notice how some fairly decent sensible people will, on board ship, "spread the jam" very thick, and put on "side" to a very considerable extent, as if they thought that the paying of an extra ten pounds has given them a patent of nobility and lifted them for ever above the ordinary crowd. It grieves me to see such foolery as that amongst fairly average people, even though one knows it will be all knocked on the head at the end of the voyage. Yet it is amusing, reminding one as it does of the story told of the author of the "Book of Snobs." Thackeray was walking in the fish market with a friend when he saw in an oyster shop one basket labelled 1s per dozen, and another labelled 1s 3d per dozen. "How these oysters must hate one another!" said he. But the oysters did not regard such petty distinctions; and people on board ship might learn from the oysters.

CORNISH CONSTANCY

When I look around me, and think of the stories of their lives and their present aspirations, as the principals have related them to me, I feel that were I a novelist I would have materials for a dozen novels. There, for instance, sits a steady, decent, grey, bald-headed old Cornishman. He has just turned seventy years. Well, there is nothing remarkable about that. But, still, there is to me something rather remarkable about the gentle, decent, old man. It is not his wealth, however, for he tells me he fears, when he goes back to his native place to end his days with his wife and family, he will have to try to do something to help to eke out the little money he has managed to save. I find that he has been thirty six years in Australia trying to make a fortune at mining. He spent about eleven years in Ballarat in its palmy days, and he made money, but never what he considered quite enough, and a trifle over. He might have done with the "quite enough," but somehow that did not come to his entire satisfaction, even in Ballarat. Still he kept working on, and hoping on, and going wherever hope looked brightest. All this time the old Cornish miner kept writing home regularly to his wife and his two daughters, telling them how his return was only delayed until the bird in the bush was safe in the hand. And be it noted, to the old Cornishman's honor, these letters were more than mere letters of unremitting kindness, for he never failed to remit to the dear ones at home as much as his

circumstances would permit – sometimes more, sometimes less. So passed the years – five years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years. Still,

Hope told the flattering tale,

Delusive, vain, and hollow.

But still he was not the man to exclaim –

“Oh, let not Hope prevail,

Lest disappointment follow!”

He struggled on for another five years, and then hope deferred began to make his heart sick, and he realised how he had spent the half of his long life away from his wife and children, and that the only chance of seeing them once more would be to scrape together his little and all and go home to his old woman, and his two daughters, who were now grandmothers themselves. I sincerely hope that this old man will not find like Rip Van Winkle, everything too much changed. His long, long constancy and faithfulness deserves the highest happiness. The old couple will surely be prepared to make allowances for the ravages of time. He will surely not expect to meet his old wife the comely, bustling dame of thirty-six years ago, nor will she expect to meet in him the strong, straight, sturdy, sanguine, daring fellow who so many years since left her to return with a fortune in a year or so. “A happy meeting to them,” say I, and so say all of us.

A CONSUMPTIVE

Let me have another look around! Here is a rather pathetic story. It is that of a young man in the last stages of consumption. Two years ago he was sent out to Australia in the hope that the air would work a cure, and after being dieted on what ignorance ordered, and a vitiate appetite craved, the young man is now returning in the hopes of dying in his mother’s arms. Poor fellow, it is said to look at him, especially when he is sleeping; but it is very pleasant to see the anxiety, solitude, and care displayed by so many of the third class passengers on his behalf. If anyone happens to have anything specially delicate and tasty, the question is almost sure to be asked, “Would he taste a bit of this?” We all try to keep him in good heart, but the chances are, I fear, against his reaching his mother’s arms. That he can recover is an impossibility; for though the best of everything in the ship will be eagerly supplied him by the purser’s orders, yet, poor fellow, he needs to be saved, not only from his friends, but from himself. There was, not doubt, much hope for him when he came to Australia two years had he been wise, or had his friends displayed a little resolute common sense in tending to his natural needs. But no! Just as a hundred years ago they would probably have bled him every day to strengthen his system, now they order him alcohol in most things, and it has become a seeming necessity to the poor young man. No physician, probably, has studied consumption with more beneficial results than Dr T. R. Allinson, and he totally discards the use of alcohol for many reasons. He recommends a diet of meals, macaroni, brown bread, fruit and cocoa and lemon-water to drink. He says emphatically – “Cod-liver oil, beef tea, jellies, egg and milk, port wine, brandy, &c., must be banished from the list.

They are poor wishy-washy articles that irritate the stomach, are deficient in nourishment, and when absorbed keep up the fever." This is just the sort of "wishy-washy" stuff that our poor consumptive invalid has been used to for years, and which he can only stomach now. He can only look on a bunch of grapes with disgust, though the grape diet and sun bath is curing hundreds of consumptives every year in Germany and Hungary. But I am agreed with my friend the Rev. Mr Hamilton, of Learmonth, that it is too late to think of reforming the poor young man's diet and drink. The best thing, no doubt, to do under the circumstances is to let him drag along from day to day on his deceptive diet and the fatal stimulants, so that his yearning to see his mother once more may be gratified.

ON STRIKE

Let me have another look around! Yes, there is that young man and his wife and their infant- he on his way back to the old country, after an absence of some six years. I have taken a special fancy to that little family group, so quiet, so happy, and so self-contained. His simple story is to me the story of a hero. He is a first-class iron moulder, and had been working at Messrs Davis and Baird's, Brunswick, for four years, and for some time as foreman. But in November last a trade dispute arose in connection with the working of some machinery, and though he was on the very vest of terms with his employers - whom he tells me are fine fellows - he felt it to be his duty to go out on strike in accordance with the principle of his union. Eight men struck work, with the consequence that the four "irreconcilables" went back to work. Alfred Watson, however, though aware that moulders' wages in England only ranges from 34s to 38s per week against a minimum of 11s per day in Victoria, thought it would be better for him to start for home, which he has done in fine style. His union not only has given him a most friendly clearance, but it made him a present of £5 towards defraying his passage. He parted on excellent terms with his late employers, and all their employees, except the strikers who returned to work; and though he says he was obliged to smash up his home, still considers he, as a unionist, only did his duty, and, as he says, had he proved to be a blackleg, his name would have been posted up all over England, Ireland, Scotland, and America, and he dare not show his face in any decent shop, which show the organisation and strength of trade unionism. I never met a modester and quieter worker than this same Alfred Watson, and I only hope that when he gets to England he will not be long out of work, after such a ruinous spell of enforced idleness in Melbourne.

GROUPS

Dear me! dear me! what a task it would be to tell the stories of the thousand and one persons on board the Ormuz. I would like to know the separate stories of that very clever group of Arabs, who are passengers to Port Said. I am still more interested in that family who are returning to their native city - the oldest in the world - Damascus. They are, indeed, a remarkable handsome and intelligent family group - the father, the mother, the boy, and the girl. The girl is somewhat of a prodigy in her way, for though less than nine years, she looks to be fully thirteen. She is dusky colored, but very pretty in face and graceful in figure, and she has a very beautiful voice, which she proves by singing child's songs about her dolly, and also in her

clear execution of "Killarney." The child is a born actress, and I should not be surprised to hear of her turning out to be another Sarah Bernhardt. I would like to tell the story of James Hartwell Wood, bricklayer, of Fitzroy, who is going back to Bradford to take unto himself a wife. He gives Victoria a good name, and will probably return after a time, when the building trade again takes a turn for the better. Wood and his mate, Jack Comrie, lately of the Sunnyside woollen mill, Ballarat, are two of the men on board that we could about least afford to lose, for where they are about there is good fun and good fellowship. Both are excellent singers, and I am somewhat undecided which of them sings the best comic songs to make me laugh loudest and longest. Jack Comrie was born very young in Dublin, but he was bred in Yorkshire, in the woollen factories, like Michael Davitt. There are quite a number of weavers returning to Yorkshire and Scotland, and I will have more to say of them hereafter.

OFF COLOMBO

Monday morning, 14th April.

We have been steaming along the beautiful island of Ceylon all the morning, and now we are all rushing about getting ready to go ashore. From what I can hear I fear that we will not be able to see Arabi Pasha, as he lives too far away for our time. Before I go ashore I must make up my budget, which I cannot do better than by giving news of the Ballarat contingent. Well, Mr and Mrs Rowsell are having a new honeymoon; basking in the sunshine of each other's company. Mrs Bean also appears to be in excellent spirits. Mr Wasley has quite recovered, and has enjoyed the latter part of the trip very much. He has had an opportunity of inspecting the whole machinery of this vast ship, accompanied by the chief engineer, Mr Scott, who, from a phrenological point of view, has as square a head as Sir Walter Scott himself had. Mr Wasley sends his regards to all his mates on the railway and firemen, and he hopes to be able to entertain them hereafter with some of his experiences. Mr David Cooke is enjoying fine health, and he requests me to remember him, through The Courier, to the mayor, the City councillors, and all his friends outside the council. Mr Jago looks in splendid form, and says he feels as happy as a big sunflower. He wishes to be remembered to Mr W. Eyres, Mr Whiteside, Messrs Young and Ince and all his other old friends, whom he recommends to make the trip as soon as possible. Mr Curthoys is also in good form, and, notwithstanding the great heat, he enjoys good rest at night, which few do. He means to enjoy himself as much as he can on the trip. Mr Goddard has recovered from his long illness, and is now well. Mr Race and his family are getting along finely. He desires me to remember him to Mr Maughan, manager of the Madame Berry, and a number of other mining friends, too numerous to mention. Mr and Mrs Adams are keeping pretty well in health, though Mr Adams, for the last two days, has suffered somewhat from the heat; but on the whole, the old couple consider they are better than they have been for years. And now, here's off for Colombo, and what I see I will send in my next. Mr Hall will be with me, and with his new detective camera, purchased in Adelaide, we expect to get some interesting scenes on board. He desires me to remember him to one dear young lady friend in Ballarat and all enquiring friends. I would like to remember myself to my friends, especially the little

ones, but if I started to make the list out I would lose the boat. So good-bye everybody.