

SPECIAL SUNDAY SERVICES FOR THE MASSES AT THE THEATRE ROYAL, MELBOURNE.

(From a Correspondent.)
Melbourne, June 17, 1860.

A stranger coming up Great Bourke-street this afternoon, between 2 and 3 o'clock, would have wondered what could be meant by the mob of people he saw standing so thickly together before the doors of the Theatre Royal. His astonishment, however, would have abated immediately he learned that a well-known minister was about to preach the Gospel to the people from the stage of a temple devoted to the love of Thespis rather than to the worship of Almighty God. Curiosity and religious zeal were undoubtedly the prime incentives which a few minutes after 3 o'clock filled the boxes, pit, and gallery of the largest and most handsome place of amusement the capital of Victoria can boast. The vast assemblage was not composed of the class whose religious condition it is sought specially to elevate, for by far the greater number of those present belonged to the middle and trading classes of the community. All denominations appeared to be represented, but the dissenting element seemed to be considerably in the ascendant. As my eyes wandered round the spacious theatre, crammed as it was from floor to ceiling, my thoughts became very histrionic, and I expected every moment to hear the bell ring, to see the curtain rise, and behold G. V. Brooke upon the scene of so many of his triumphs. The law of association, very probably, produced a similar kind of feeling in the minds of many others. These thoughts, however, were soon dispelled by the entrance from the stage door of the Rev. James Taylor, the well-known and much-respected minister of the Baptist Chapel in Collins-street. Taking his stand in front of a small table covered with a common cloth he, amidst profound silence, in a short opening address, alluded to the success which had attended the special Sunday services for the masses, at theatres and other places in the old country, and stated that the example which had been set there, he and other ministers of religion belonging to various denominations sought to emulate here. A short hymn was then given out and sung with great fervor by the audience. The rev. gentleman then read the 55th chapter of Isaiah, after which prayer was offered up to God, and another hymn sung. Then came the sermon, Mr. Taylor taking for his subject the parable of the Prodigal Son. Now this is a very trite Scripture theme—it is one upon which, both in England and elsewhere, I have heard sermons preached over and over again, but I am candid enough to admit that never in the whole course of my life did I hear it handled so eloquently, so powerfully, so movingly as on this occasion. Mr. Taylor has not a good voice, and his reading is too monotonous to bring out strikingly the meaning of the text. Again he was much too near the footlights, whereas he ought to have been under the sounding-board of the proscenium, so that his voice might have had the aid of acoustics; besides this, the glare of light coming up from a floor covered with red carpet threw an unpleasant shade upon his countenance, robbing it entirely of that play which in moments of real feeling lends such a charm to speech. Then there were people ever and anon poking their heads through the corners of the green curtain, the round hole

more were people ever and anon poking their heads through the corners of the green curtain, the round hole in the centre of which was constantly being filled up with a living human eye. These drawbacks, although well calculated to interfere with the success of an ordinary speaker, proved powerless to distract the attention of Mr. Taylor, whose soul seemed rushing to his lips, and setting to eloquence the burning zeal of earnestness. Fully alive to the importance of the experiment then being made, sustained by honest convictions, anxious to improve the condition of that large class of our fellow-men who exist in the lanes and alleys, the garrets and cellars of a large metropolis, relying upon God to lend aid in the work undertaken, cheered by the presence of the vast and majestic audience before him, Mr. Taylor rose above all difficulties, and for a whole hour held the people he addressed in breathless and captivated silence. There was no attempt at display. The language was unpretending, the style simple. The religion of the thing warm and native from the speaker's heart. The mode of dealing with the subject was unusually interesting. The story of the prodigal—the leaving his happy home—his getting into bad company—how he was buffeted about by those dangerous butterflies of society who are always buzzing about well-lined pockets—his utter isolation and misery when the last shilling was gone—the remorse, the anguish, and the degradation—the determination to reform, to confess, to make the white locks of the sorrowing old father go down peacefully to the grave—the feeling passing over the mirror of the young man's mind as he neared the home where he had last heard his mother's prayers and received his father's blessing—the reconciliation—the feast—the envy of the elder brother—all these scenes were word-painted, put in the proper manner, calculated to reach the object intended—the "application" was admirable. At the close of the discourse a simultaneous effort of applause manifested itself, but a deprecatory gesture on the part of Mr. Taylor was sufficient to prevent any such unseemly display; and, after singing another hymn, a benediction was pronounced, and the theatre emptied itself of its contents. The movement has been inaugurated under the most favorable circumstances. It remains to be seen what will come of it.

REAL PROPERTY ACT COMMEMORATION BANQUET.—A meeting of the General Committee was held at White's Rooms on Wednesday. Present—Hon. G. Hall (in the chair), Hon. G. Davies, Messrs. Townsend, M.P.; W. M. Lennon, M.P.; J. Dunn, M.P.; P. Santo, M.P.; W. Owen, M.P.; E. L. Grundy, M.P.; W. Parkin, M.P.; E. McEllister, M.P.; the Mayor of Adelaide, the Mayor of Glenelg, Messrs. W. H. Burford, P. D. Frankerd, J. M. Solomon, R. Cussen, K. W. Andrews, P. Cumming, Dr. Mayo, Stephen Wright, U. Hubbs, L.L.D., and Fenney, Secretary. The Secretary read the minutes of previous General Committee, and the report of the Sub-Committee, which stated that arrangements had been made for the banquet to take place on the 5th of July, at 6 o'clock p.m., and that His Excellency the Governor-in-Chief had consented to preside. The Croupiers and Stewards had also been appointed. [See advertisement]. The toast list having been agreed to, the Secretary was instructed to issue tickets to the Stewards and to the members of the General Committee for disposal.

TEETOTAL LECTURE.—A lecture on alcohol and its effects on the stomach and system, was delivered in

its effects on the stomach and system, was delivered in the large room of the Port Adelaide Institute, at the "White Horse Collars," on Tuesday evening, by Mr. John Williams. The lecture was illustrated with numerous diagrams. The subject was very ably set forth by the lecturer, before a very large audience, W. Dale, Esq., M.F., for the Burra, presiding, who, during the evening made some very lucid remarks relative to the teetotal cause. Messrs. Lake and Litchfield enlivened an interval in the lecture by singing a very appropriate duet, and the audience left, evidently well pleased with the evening's programme. Mr. Williams was announced to lecture at Queenstown on Wednesday evening.

RUMORED ATTACK UPON THE NATIVES AT TARANAKI.—The *Argus* says—Capt. Reid, of the clipper ship *Red Jacket*, which has just arrived from Auckland, reports that, on Tuesday, the 5th inst. (the date of our last advices from Nelson), Mr. Graham, of Mitutapu, came alongside the ship in a boat, and stated that there was a report current in Auckland, on the previous evening, to the effect that the troops at Taranaki had had an engagement with the natives, and the latter had suffered a loss of 400. The report also stated there was no loss on our side. Captain Reid is of opinion this is a mere rumor, as very shortly afterwards the Governor passed close to the ship, in one of Her Majesty's ship *Iris's* boats, with Commodore Loring; and no doubt he would have communicated with the *Red Jacket* had there been any truth in the report.