

The N.Z. Transvaal Contingent

THE DEPARTURE FROM WELLINGTON.

The New Zealand contingent of volunteers for the Transvaal, 200 strong, left Wellington for South Africa on Saturday last. Enormous enthusiasm was displayed on the occasion, the demonstration being the largest and most hearty yet witnessed in Wellington or any other city of the colony.

The march of the men from their camp at Karori to the place of embarkation began at twenty minutes past one. On the way the contingent was met by an escort of the Heretaunga Mounted Rifles, and at the Botanical Gardens by the Garrison and Palmerston Bands, who played before them the rest of the way. Most of the route lay through back streets, which were well lined by spectators, but the real crowd was only encountered when the contingent reached Lambton Quay. Here people were to be found in thick ranks, which increased in volume as the streets abutting on the wharf were reached.

Jervois Quay itself, the broadest avenue in the city, was thronged from end to end, as well as the open land abutting on it. All the roofs commanding a view were lined, the steamers at the wharves were packed even to the rigging, and the long breastwork along the quay was crammed. The quay was lined by a double rank of volunteers, who kept an open space for the passage of the contingent. The latter, after making their way up and down a number of short streets, for the purpose of giving as many as possible a chance to see New Zealand's chosen, reached the quay shortly before three o'clock, and amid continuous cheers formed up in front of a temporary stand projecting from the breastwork. Up to this time the weather had been cloudy and windy, but no sooner had the men placed themselves in two ranks than the sun shone out brightly and the wind began to lull. His Excellency, Lady Ranfurly, and suite, arrived at three o'clock, and the speech-making then began.

Mr Blair, Mayor of Wellington, said he took up a position as representing the whole of the people of New Zealand. No movement in the colony had ever been so spontaneous and so general in its extent as the despatch of the contingent for the Transvaal. He had received telegrams from Mayors of about sixty towns and boroughs, wishing the contingent God-speed. These telegrams might be divided into two categories, and as indicating the spirit which pervaded all the messages, he read two of them as follows: "Thanks cordial invitation. Sorry cannot attend personally. Kindly convey to contingent good wishes from myself and inhabitants of Grey-mouth. May they have successful and brilliant career, and speedy return to New Zealand.—Mathieson, Mayor, Grey-mouth."

"To Officers and Men of New Zealand Contingent: Friends,—Be united; be strong; trust in God, the King of Kings. Then the victory will be to the Empire. Good-bye all. I had had hopes of having gone with you.—F. Jeanne, Coronandel."

Mr Blair went on to say that they had been told the contingent was only a small force, but those who said that overlooked the spirit which had prompted its despatch. They overlooked the fact that the despatch of this contingent would have a great effect on the future well-being of the Empire. It showed that the British nation would not be divided by any Power on earth. In conclusion, Mr Blair addressed the contingent thus: "On behalf of the people of New Zealand, we wish you God-speed. I am sure you will worthily uphold the honour of New Zealand, and that you will come back with honour."

Lord Hanbury said the huge concourse of people that had assembled that day showed the vast interest the people of New Zealand had taken in the despatch of the contingent. For the first time in history New Zealanders were gathered together to say farewell to troops sent to the seat of war. He felt convinced that should occasion arise these men would do their duty nobly, and prove no unworthy defenders of that damnable island race whose colours waved over us, and whose record was second to

none. An occasion such as this should arouse in their hearts the greatest patriotism. "This," said Lord Hanbury, "is Trafalgar day, and may Nelson's motto be yours! The eyes of the world are upon you, and we in New Zealand wish you God-speed."

Mr Seddon said it was with pleasure he would speak a few words on this great occasion. That gathering represented not only Wellington, but every man, woman, and child in the colony. The people, by their presence and sympathy had shown that they were of one mind in supporting the Mother Country in her present trouble. It would be cheering to the people of the Mother Country, and would show all nations that we were one people. The New Zealand Parliament had been the first of the Australasian Parliaments to sanction the despatch of a contingent, and the decision to do so should have been unanimous. New Zealand had shown what it could do. On October 5 the contingent was accepted, and on the 21st the people were gathered together to wish them God-speed. New Zealand was the first colony to embark its contingent. This prompt despatch reflected great credit on all concerned, particularly on the Commandant of the Forces, the Commandant of the Contingent, and the shipping company. All those who had worked to bring this about had their heartfelt thanks and gratitude. This was Trafalgar day, and our men were going to battle for freedom. They were going to assist in making the people of the Transvaal free, and in maintaining civilisation and liberty in the Transvaal. The position was unique. We were simply working out our destinies, and tending to make ours the dominant race of the world. Our men were going to fight for one flag, one Queen, one tongue, and one country. Imperial and colonial troops were about to fight side by side, and a bond of union would be formed that would last for ever. Addressing the contingent, he said he had no fear of their bravery. They would maintain the traditions of their race, and coolness, determination, and bravery must win in the long run. They must also remember that the hearts of the people of New Zealand went with them. Major Robin would do his part, and it was for the men to do theirs. The result must be for the glory of New Zealand and of the Empire.

Captain Russell said it was indeed a privilege to be able to say a word of congratulation on this occasion. The contingent, when they reached their destination, would be aided with an army that had won honour in every part of the world. As an old Imperial soldier, he felt sure they would be dutiful and brave men. They were taking with them the goodwill of the whole of New Zealand. In the Imperial army they would find charming comrades, and they would come back with Imperial instincts, feeling they were working partners in a great machine. Concluding, Captain Russell said, "When you return to New Zealand covered with glory and full of experience the whole of New Zealand will be here to welcome you as returning brothers who have done good service for the Empire."

Sir Robert Stout also spoke a few words. He said the despatch of the contingent showed we were one in mind, and had not forgotten what Britain had done for us. He felt sure the contingent would reflect credit and honour upon themselves and the colony.

The following is the full text of Bishop Wallis' special prayer, offered up after the speeches had been delivered:—"Almighty Lor God, King of all the earth, who hast formed our nation to show forth Thy praise, and has protected it unto this day, continue to us, we pray Thee, Thy loving kindness that we may hand down to the generations to come the heritage which Thou hast given us. Strengthen our soldiers, especially those who have gone forth from these islands, that they may fight manfully against all oppression and injustice. Defend them in every peril and comfort them in every trouble. Give victory to their arms, and teach them in the hour of triumph to remember mercy. And, finally, grant to us all, and to our enemies, a perpetual fear and love of Thy holy name that we may hereafter serve Thee in peace to, ther, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The following letter from Major Robin's father was read by the Premier:

Dunedin, October 18, 1899. To the officers and men of the Transvaal contingent,—I am very sorry I cannot possibly be present with you to-day to bid you God-speed, but I cannot let this opportunity slip of addressing to you a few words. Many kind friends are writing us to say that the colonial troops will be so placed as not to be exposed to dangers. We thank them very much for their kind solicitude, but as you will, I understand, form an integral part of the Imperial army, you will no doubt be found in the place where duty calls, and taking your fair share in the army's work, whatever that may be. I feel confident that you will follow wherever you are led, and should you face the enemy in the field of battle that you will so comport yourselves as if you felt that on each of your own individual arms hung victory. I have not the least doubt that your officers will, as far as in them lie, see to your safety and comfort, and I feel confident we may rest assured that your honour, and that of New Zealand, will be found in safe keeping. Boys, may the God of Battles be with you in the ranks, as elsewhere. He will, if you ask Him, he found a very present help in time of trouble. In the far distant land, amid war's alarms, may there be underneath and around you the everlasting arms, is the sincere desire of yours faithfully, J. Robin.

On the conclusion of the speeches Colonel Penton gave the men a few minutes to take leave of their friends. The ranks of the Navals immediately opened out, and the crowd poured in. Hugging and kissing were the order of the day, and tears flowed freely as farewells, which, no doubt, many felt might possibly be farewell, indeed, were taken. So great was the crush, that some of the men were cut off from the rest, and had afterwards to struggle to the steamer as best they could. As once again the battalion formed up, and began to march to the steamer's side, the people massed on the roofs opposite broke out into a corona of white handkerchiefs. The effect of that lofty elevation of these fluttering signals was rather striking. The spectators then moved off to points whence a view of the marine spectacle could be obtained. Thousands lined the shores of the reclaimed land, and spread beyond almost to Point Jerningham. In fact, the water front was pretty well lined for a stretch of three miles. The wharves, of course, were filled, and hours before the steamers announced to escort the troopship had been packed with thousands of voyagers. The waters had rather a long interval to fill in, as the embarkation took some time. The substantial gangway, by which the horses had been taken aboard, had notices conspicuously posted on it, warning stowaways that they would be prosecuted at Albany, and under these Colonel Penton took his stand, roll in hand, and each man's name was checked before he went on board. This occupied nearly an hour, and the opportunity was seized by some to have another and less public leave-taking of their friends than the one on the way, and as soon as a fair number of the men got on board, demonstrations of friendship and good feeling began to be exchanged between ship and wharf. Baskets of fruit were sent up by rope and hand. One gentleman was able to get a parting snapshot of his son, who had encircled himself in the rigging. By-and-bye the men broke into "Soldiers of the Queen," and the National Anthem, which was heartily responded to by the volunteers. The crowd ashore then, led by a half-caste member of the contingent, gave the Maori war cry composed for them, which was replied to with even more vigour by another native battle cry from a country corps. Thus the time was filled in till the final shout betokened the passage of the contingent officers up the gangway, and as Colonel Penton stood at the barricade, the men gave him three cheers, and then once more raised the National Anthem. The spectators joined in, and the Waiwera began to cheer off.

As the big vessel slowly drew away, cries of farewell, shouts, and cheers, now for individuals, now for all, were unceasing, and amid a scene of the utmost enthusiasm, precisely as the clock struck five, the Waiwera headed out into the harbour.

The demonstration, however, by no means ended here. By this time 14 steamers, blazing with bunting, and loaded with thousands of people, had pulled out from the wharves, and formed into two lines, in readiness for the troopship. They were of all sizes,

from the stately Mokola to the tiny Manuroa, which bore Mr A. G. Johnson, a veteran at this work, and nursed of the day.

At half-speed all moved off down the harbour and escorted the Waiwera to the Benda. Here they closed up, and at a signal all the vessels fired bombs, blew their whistles, and generally made as much noise as possible, their passengers waving flags and handkerchiefs, and the men of the contingent shouting themselves hoarse in return. It was a scene of even more excitement than on the wharf, and could not very well be surpassed for spontaneity or heartiness. Then the big ship put her head determinedly to sea, and in a few minutes was steaming out into the Pacific on her four weeks' journey.

The prompt despatch of the New Zealand Contingent for South Africa is especially creditable to the colony in view of the fact that the idea of sending forces to the Cape was proposed in Australia before it was started here. The Australian forces are not yet ready, and it will be some time before the New South Wales and other forces get away. The New Zealand Contingent will therefore be the first of the colonial troops on the scene of war, and as our force will be there soon after the British army corps is landed they will have a very good chance of being sent to the front, brigaded with Imperial troops, and of seeing active service.

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