

THE VICE-REGAL TOUR

OVER THE ALPS WITH THE GOVERNOR.

FROM CHRISTCHURCH TO THE WEST COAST.

(BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST—SEE PAGES 156-157.)



At 8 a.m. on December 28th His Excellency, accompanied by Captain Guthrie, A.D.C., Mr and Mrs Alan Scott, Mr and Mrs Wilder, and the GRAPHIC special artist, assembled at the Christchurch Station to take train for Springfield. The arrangements for His Excellency's Southern tour had been organised by the Hon. R. Seddon, Minister of Mines, and were of the most perfect character. Mr Seddon did not accompany us overland, preferring to meet us on our arrival at the West Coast goldfields. It was a goldfield's constituency which first sent the hon. gentleman to Parliament, and has since returned him at each election by large majorities. Mr Seddon, as will be seen later on, awaited us at Kumara, where a series of popular ovations began.

After a very pleasant railway journey we arrived at Springfield at 11.15, having enjoyed the lovely rural scenery of the Canterbury Plains, which now looked perfect, the various fields of wheat, oats, barley, etc., looking beautiful after the late rains, giving a pleasing freshness to the whole scene; whilst away rolling into the obscure distance could be discerned the gigantic snow-clad range of Southern Alps and the glaciers shining high upon their summits.

At Springfield we all disembarked, the Governor having taken his horses and carriage by train with him. After a substantial lunch had been partaken of, we set out on our journey across the Alps. His Excellency, Captain Guthrie, and myself riding, the others driving.

The country for the first part of the journey looks very homely, pretty little homesteads with cultivated patches dotted around the base of the mountains. Shortly after leaving Springfield we cross the Kowai River (which is now very low, permitting us to ford it) without any difficulty, and soon arrive at the base of the Alps and begin our ascent, reaching Porter's Pass, which is cut out of the steep mountain sides, winding round and round till the summit, an altitude of about 3,000 feet, is reached. Descending on the other side, we arrive at a pretty little lake called Lake Lyndon, where wild fowl were very abundant. Skirting the shores we pass along fairly good country with huge beehiving mountains on both sides of us—Mount Olympus, 6,866 feet, and the Hamilton Peaks, 6,200 feet, rising up on our left, whilst on our right Broken Hill rose up about 5,200 feet above the sea-level. In the midst of this wild mountainous country is situated the Castle Hill Station, which derived its name from the valley of the 10,000 rock near Anoy in China, the district bearing a remarkable resemblance to that rugged region. Behind the homestead the mountains are covered with birch forest, extending for many miles. At the Cloudeley Accommodation House, in the vicinity of this station, the regular coach makes a short stay, and the place has become famous in tourist annals for its scenes, some of the fame of which may perhaps be due to the capital appetite which the traveller usually brings into this elevated and bracing region.

A few miles' ride brings us to the Craigieburn station, where a special coach has just left a number of shepherds to the season's clipping. Passing through Craigieburn, we soon arrived at Lake Pearson, hemmed in by high mountains from whose sides moraines have pushed themselves bodily into the lake, and are continually being increased by the terrible avalanches of slate which are constantly falling from the summits with a deafening roar. We now pass along grass land (tussock) and reach Lake Grasmere, still hemmed in on both sides by the gigantic mountains. Two miles from Lake Grasmere the accommodation house at Cass is reached, where we put up for the night. Just before reaching Cass we encountered slight rain, and it continued drizzling for some time.

SHEEP-FARMING IN THE NEW ZEALAND MOUNTAINS.

Sheep-farming in these mountainous districts is far from being the placid life the pastoral poets have delighted to sing about. The shepherd in his hut far up the hillside has to battle against the inclemency of the elements, and to protect himself and his flock from numerous dangers. It is estimated that one snow-storm in 1867 destroyed half a million sheep on the mountain runs of New Zealand. Some of the vicissitudes of the Alpine sheep farmer are graphically described by Mr Taylor White in a paper which he contributed to the 'Transactions of the New Zealand Institute.' Speaking of the danger from avalanches he says:—

My brother, John White, and C. G. Garratt were caught in an avalanche, and retained one day hatless, and without their long climbing sticks. They started at grey dawn in

winter-time to climb one of the big ranges of the Eyre mountains, situated on the south-west side of that immense inland lake Wakatipu, their object being the rescue of any sheep which might have been snowed in. The two were travelling along, one behind the other, changing places occasionally by the leader falling to the rear, which is requisite in snow-travelling, as the person in advance has the most fatiguing work in breaking down the snow, and so it is advisable to relieve one another in this way. They were near the mountain-top, and moving parallel to the summit, when a crackling noise was heard passing along above them, and almost immediately the surrounding snow, with them on top, commenced to slide downwards, leaving the ground above quite clear from snow. Presently the surface of the moving snow began to undulate and mix up, great newly-made snowballs suddenly consolidating as they rushed down over the surface. They were then knocked down and covered up in darkness, but could feel from painful abrasions that the course was still downwards, and lively apprehensions were entertained lest they should be carried over some precipice. Luckily this did not occur. My brother was the first to force a way out from under the snow, and looked about anxiously for his companion. Soon a portion of the snow was seen to be violently agitated, and arms and legs appeared, presently followed by their owner. They were more or less sprained and bruised by



HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR.

rough treatment, and caps and sticks were lost; so they came home with heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, and looked as if they had been engaged in a free fight.

Another avalanche occurred in this manner. I was in chase of some thirty sheep, which were endeavouring to circumvent me by climbing upwards to some steep rocks from which the snow had blown away, and which looked so inviting at a distance, but, of course, were too steep for even a sheep to travel on. I sent my dog after them to head the mob down. He overtook them just below the rocks, turned them, and then I was amazed to see him, with legs stretched out, spinning round and round in the same place, with the sheep standing below. Presently the dog ran off upwards, and I then saw the reason of his strange efforts to escape, for the snow had evidently been in the act of parting where the dog had been. Then a great sheet of snow began sliding down, carrying the sheep with it, and shooting into a narrow channel leading down the mountain abreast of the

spur on which I stood. On entering the gully the snow began to break up, and at times all the sheep were buried from sight, then several bodies would pop out, disappearing again like porpoises playing at sea, others appearing and disappearing as the whole mass rushed down hill. When the snow came to a stop the sheep commenced to force a way out and shake themselves, and I believe everyone came out all right. Of course these sheep were merinos, and so good climbers, and very active.

A most wonderful sight was the remains of a very large avalanche at the shady side of Mount Nicholas. I saw it after the bulk of the winter's snow had thawed in the spring on the sunny slopes. Travelling round the back, along the foot of the mountain, which is detached from the main range by small valleys, I came to a large valley which descended the mountain side. This was at the foot filled up with gigantic snowballs one on top of another, 30 feet or 40 feet deep, some 6 feet through, others not less than 3 feet, all circular, very hard, and distinct one from the other. I went across, stepping from each one as if they had been large boulders, and could hear the water of the creek rushing under them, deep down underneath.

THE BEALEY AND WAIMAKARIRI RIVERS.

But to resume the story of our journey. On the morning of December 29th we left Cass on our next stage, which is Jackson's, thirty-six miles distant, the weather beautifully fine, giving us a splendid view of Mount Misery, 5,768 feet high. Past this the road strikes the banks of the Tere-makau River, and following it along for a distance of five miles reaches the Bealey, where an accommodation house and telegraph station exist. Shortly after passing the Bealey we have to ford the Waimakariri River. It is joined here by the Bealey River, and we ford the Waimakariri, which is here one mile wide. It is a most dangerous river for fording, and great caution has to be exercised in crossing the swift torrent. The ford is well defined by substantial posts erected at intervals, and a white flag is kept ready on the left bank to warn travellers when the passage across is more than ordinarily risky. Away along the Waimakariri can be discerned the Rolleston Glaciers shining in all their parity. It is from these glaciers that the Waimakariri takes its source, and flows through the Alps and Canterbury Plains to the eastern shore of the island. Many interesting features often induce tourists to stop at the Bealey for two or three days. The hotel is picturesquely situated upon a point jutting out into the river, and the fern-gatherer may secure some valued additions to his collections from excursions into the adjacent woods and along the river valley.

Following the Bealey river along the left bank, the scenery becomes more and more interesting. The road sometimes passes through dense forest which covers the lower slopes of these mountains, and sometimes along the river-bed. The ascent of 1,000 feet to the famous Arthur's Pass is made along the winding course of a stream which flows into the Bealey. Near the summit daisies and the pretty mountain lily grow in profusion, and a fine waterfall, known as the Devil's Punch Bowl, is brought into view. From the summit of the Pass lovely scenery is to be met with everywhere the eye glances. Right on top of the Pass a small lake exists called Lake Lonely, about 3,000 feet above the sea level. To the left Mount Rolleston rises up 7,000 feet covered with small glaciers, whose patches of pure blue ice shine and sparkle with dazzling brilliancy whenever a passing ray of light from the clouded sky happens to strike full upon them.

From Arthur's Pass we get a grand view of the famous 'Otira Gorge,' which looked at its best, and without doubt some of the wildest and grandest scenery in the world may be seen here. Below us can be discerned the zigzag road winding round and round the steep mountain-side for a depth of about 1,700 feet, in some places hewn out of the solid rock, and intersected with small streams falling, as it were, in silvery threads from the skies. One large water-fall comes down with violent force right on the edge of the road, and then flows in a good stream across the narrow track, eventually falling sheer down into the rushing seething torrent 150 feet below. The scenery on the descent is of the most varied and romantic character, now presenting one lovely view, the next minute another, and so on till we reach the bottom, where we gaze around in wonder and ecstasies at the grandeur presented to us. On our left stands Mount Rolleston rising 7,000 feet high, almost perpendicularly from the gorge, clothed with forest to the snow-line, and now looking particularly brilliant on account of the rata (which grows very prolifically here), its scarlet blossoms forming a brilliant contrast to the dark sombre foliage with which the mountains are clothed. The summits are nothing but a mass of slate that is being continually loosened by the action of frost and heat, and crumbling away falls down the gullies in hundreds of tons with a terrible roar, eventually finding its way into the river-bed beneath. The flora of the gorge is particularly striking, being of the most varied description. The lovely mountain lily abounds, and the beautiful tints of the lichens clinging to the rocks form a lovely bit of colour in the foreground. The descent for a considerable distance is down the track of a huge moraine, and then along the side of the hill above the Otira River. The winding and zigzag course of the road, which in many places has been cut out of the face of the hill, makes the journey tolerably sensational, and the attention of the traveller is sometimes abruptly diverted from a rapturous contemplation of the beauties of the scenery to consider the nearer perils of the precipitous track he is pursuing.

On we travel down the gorge, crossing en route two substantial bridges which span the rushing torrent, till at length we emerge and arrive at the Otira Hotel, a very comfortable hostelry presided over by Mr Dyer. We make a short stay here, and then push on, following the left bank of the Otira River, which now gets much broader, and