

innumerable minor festivities, from the dinners given by the Speaker of the House of Commons and Mr. Chamberlain, to the garden party at Devonshire House and the Lord Mayor's Ball. Everywhere Mr. Seddon was to be seen, and everywhere he was "the cynosure of neighbouring eyes." Surely in the whole range of the Empire's history we can find no more startling contrast than this, between "Digger Dick" of the moleskins and hobnails at Kumara, and the Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, P.C., LL.D., the guest of Royalty, greeted as friend and equal by British statesmen and British peers. And the chief charm of the contrast—and indeed the only excuse for dwelling at such length on these details—is the recollection that through it all the man remained unchanged. Feted and banqueted, and received at Court, he came back to his own country the same generous, outspoken, unconventional man that his friends had always known, readier than ever to plunge into the vortex of public duty, and to overwhelm himself with a load of responsibilities too heavy for any one man to bear.

THE RETURN.

It was characteristic of Mr. Seddon to get everything possible out of anything that he undertook; and on his way Home he had visited President McKinley at Washington, and there and then he laid the foundation of that friendly interest in New Zealand and things colonial that the two last Presidents of the United States have so frequently manifested. Again, it is characteristic of the breadth of view that he always displayed, that on his way back he sought, and was accorded, an interview with Pope Leo XIII. He returned to us more powerfully inspired than ever before with the conception of Imperialism as a great national policy; and determined, if possible, more resolutely than ever, to make of his chosen country a social, legislative and political model to the world at large.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

To return once more to the course of political events in our own colony, we find that the session of 1898 was, on the whole, rather barren of important measures; but all deficiencies in that direction were more than supplied by the adoption of the Old Age Pensions Act. The idea was not new, and it is a moot point how far the Premier may claim credit for originality in his treatment of this difficult subject. But there can be no doubt about the skill with which he overcame countless obstacles, and the determination with which he forced it through the House. It is well known that Mr. Seddon had always regarded the Old Age Pensions Act as his greatest achievement, whether viewed from the political or the humanitarian standpoint. "Members of the House," says the "Lyttelton Times," "still tell the story how he sat continuously for eighty-seven hours to get the Bill through committee. 'I doubt if I could bear the strain again,' he remarked to a friend once; 'a man doesn't want to do that more than once or twice in a lifetime.'" But in his own estimation the result was worth the effort; and his satisfaction with the measure has been fully justified by the enthusiasm that has evoked among those best qualified to judge of its value. As the "Auckland Star" has said, when, by sheer grit and determination, the Premier, beating down the Opposition stone wall, forced this measure through, he earned the gratitude of thousands of deserving settlers who, through no fault of their own, had been reduced to penury in their old age. "The journalist whose work took him into proximity to Mr. Seddon daily and hourly heard the blessings of God invoked on his head by aged men and women whose hard lot had been greatly lightened by the assistance of the State. The following letter, handed to him by two Auckland ladies prior to his last departure for Britain, and handed to a representative of this paper, who preserved a copy, shows how greatly the benefit was appreciated, and this is but one sample of many: "Respected Sir,—Before leaving, will you permit two old Scotchwomen to express their warmest gratitude for the old age pension which you did so much to pass into law. By your kindly action in the matter you have made many a widowed and lonely one's heart to sing for joy. We are 75 and 70 years of age, and our working days are well nigh past; but it makes the evening of our days pass very pleasantly. I hope this is only one of hundreds of expressions of gratitude for the benefit it has conferred on the weak and helpless. I am sure there has ascended many a prayer for you to Heaven from lowly homes, which may be answered in later years. May God bless you, and bring you back safely to the country you have done so much to serve. May you and yours enjoy all the blessings promised to those "who consider the poor," and may the "righteousness which exalteth a nation" be yours, is the sincere wish of your obliged servants."

Cheered and strengthened by the knowledge that the gratitude of thousands was daily offered him for this inestimable boon, the Premier could afford to ignore the carping criticism of those who denounced the new pension system as calculated to pauperise and demoralise the poorer classes. As a matter of fact, these captious and fallacious arguments are never heard to-day. It is now freely and generally admitted that the pension is not a pauper's dole, but merely the recognition by the State of efforts made and sacrifices endured in the past; an acknowledgment of the indisputable truth that the prosperity and progress of the country and the nation are the joint work of all the law-abiding men and women in the community. And so fully is this fact now appreciated that there is no other measure so certain to maintain a permanent place among our statutes as the Old Age Pensions Act. The first attempt to carry this wise and philanthropic law was made in 1895, but after passing the second reading a committee amendment was carried, with the avowed object of defeating the Bill, providing that, instead of applying only to the aged poor, it should apply to all who had reached the age of 65. The treasury could stand no such strain, and perforce the Bill was dropped, to be reintroduced next year, when, after passing the House of Representatives in workable form, it received its quietus in the Legislative Council, where the Bill was rejected in toto. Next year Mr. Seddon tackled the measure again, and, in the face of opposition which would have overwhelmed an ordinary mortal, forced the Bill through in what was practically a single-handed fight, so far as his side of the battle was concerned. Public opinion was now too strong for the Legislative Council, and the Bill became an Act. Though so bitterly opposed, the Old Age Pensions Act is now as firm as the Constitution itself, and when last session Mr. Seddon proposed to increase the pension from 7/ to 10/ a week, he had the support of the whole colony, and the increase was made within a month of the opening of Parliament.

RESTING ON HIS OARS.

In 1899, during the closing session of the current Parliament, little of importance was done in the way of legislation. It was not to be wondered that after the extraordinary achievement of his five years' office as Premier, Mr. Seddon should be content for the time merely to confirm the position he had already secured. "Mr.

Seddon," as a by no means sympathetic critic has recently reminded us, "secured the Premiership in May, 1894; he had at very short notice acquitted himself with great credit in the session which opened during the following month; but it was not till after the general election at the end of the same year had been decided in their favour that he and his colleagues were able to pull themselves together and to propound the splendid programme which was realised, as already detailed, in the session of 1894. It was not in the nature of things that such a series of successes could be repeated year by year; and when it is remembered that the same man had to supply the Parliamentary programme for thirteen years in succession, the wonder is not that the stream of ideas occasionally flowed a trifle thin, but that it did not dry up altogether. The work of so long a reign cannot fairly be compared, year by year, with that of an Administration which comes fresh into office and is hustled out again before it has time to get stale; yet even so it has no need to shrink from the comparison with any ordinary short-lived regime. And how many Premiers after thirteen years of it would still have a number of attractive novelties in store for the fourteenth session?"

EXIT STOUT—RE-ENTER WARD.

The session was, however, rather lively; for the Marine Scandal and the defection of Mr. John Hutcheson from his chief introduced a strong flavour of personal interest into the work of the House. But Mr. Seddon was opportunely reinforced by the return of Sir Joseph Ward, and he was in a better position to face any contingency that might arise. Sir Robert Stout had retired to the honourable obscurity of the Supreme Court Bench, and there was no one left in political life who could for a moment contest Mr. Seddon's undisputed sway. The establishment of an Accident branch of the Government Insurance Department and the passing of the Immigration Restriction Act were hardly matters of momentous importance to the general public. But it was in this year that Mr. Seddon attained the completest measure of ascendancy over the people of New Zealand; for it was in 1899 that he taught the colony to identify itself at once and for ever with the Imperial interests of England by the despatch of the contingents to take part in the South African war.

THE WAR.

Probably no single act of Mr. Seddon's long and dramatic career stamps him so clearly with the hall mark of statesmanship. Detractors have sometimes ventured to sneer at him as an opportunist, forgetting that, after all, the highest quality of the statesman is magnificent and successful opportunism. The statesman is he who foresees, interprets, predetermines, and when "the psychological moment" has arrived, recognises it with unerring certainty, and seizes it with masterful strength. Long before any real need for sending aid to England had arisen, and while the great majority of people believed that the Transvaalers could make an effective resistance to British arms, our Premier had decided that this was the golden opportunity for making clear to the world the true meaning of British patriotism, and the real strength of the British Empire. On September 28th, 1899, he rose in the House to propose that the colony should offer a contingent of mounted rifles for service in South Africa; and the speech that he then made contains so full and striking an exposition of his Imperialistic ideas that it may well find a permanent place in such a memorial as this:—"Mr. Speaker," said the Premier, "on no previous occasion have I risen in this House with a greater sense of the responsibility that is cast upon me than I rise to make the proposals now submitted. An emergency has arisen; the occasion now exists for us to prove our devotion to the Empire, and honourable members are called upon to-day to pass a resolution offering a contingent for service in the Transvaal. The passing of this resolution means entailing a heavy expenditure upon our colony. Outside that expenditure, it also entails a grave responsibility; and not only that, but what we propose means in the case of war that some of our volunteers—our New Zealanders—will go to the Transvaal, perhaps many never to return. Now, I hope members will approach this subject and deal with it in a matter creditable to us and to the benefit of the Empire. The resolution is:—That a respectful address be presented to His Excellency the Governor, requesting him to offer to the Imperial Government, for service in the Transvaal, a contingent of mounted rifles; and that, in the event of the offer being accepted, the Government be empowered, after selection by the Commander of the Forces, to provide, equip, and despatch the force." The question will naturally be asked, why should New Zealand take the course which I am now proposing? The answer is simple. We belong to, and are an integral part of a great Empire. The flag that floats over us and protects us was expected to protect our kindred and countrymen who are in the Transvaal. There are in the Transvaal, New Zealanders, Australians, English, Irish and Scotch; and others from British dependencies; they are of our own race and our kindred. As one coming from the goldfields, I know what tempted many from our shores to the Transvaal. I know what transpired years ago when they left the Mother Country, other countries of the globe, and other colonies, and came to New Zealand; but when they came here they had their freedom. They had their civil rights granted to them, and there is nothing so dear—almost next to life itself—as civil rights to the British race. Our kindred to the number of 150,000 in the Transvaal have been deprived of these civil rights and civil freedom. Had the conditions made by the British Representative been overbearing, harsh, or unjust, or in the slightest degree degrading to the Transvaal Government, I should not have felt justified in taking the course which I now ask the House to take. But the fact is that the British Government have, consistent with honour, done everything to avoid a conflict, and have given the Boer Government the fullest time to consider the position. That hesitancy has, in my opinion, been taken as a sign of weakness; but it was better to wait. It was better, to hesitate before the dogs of war were let loose. As you will note by the cablegrams you have read, the civilised world commends the British Government for the merciful course they have taken. Further, the nations of the civilised world say the demands made by the British Government are just and reasonable, and in this honourable members will, I feel sure, heartily concur. Under these circumstances, I say we have no reason—nor would it be in keeping with our position—to question the action of the British Government. I hope there will be no receding; no going back."

ONE FLAG—ONE EMPIRE.

Another reason why we should take action is that we are a portion of the dominant family of the world—we are of the English-speaking race. Our kindred are scattered in different parts of the globe, and wherever they are, no matter how far distant apart, there is a feeling of affection, there is that something, that bond,