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The Week in Review

Quite a number of legislators, apparently, desire to re-open the question of the site of the capital of the Dominion. The appointment of a committee to report on the rebuilding of Parliament House has given these gentlemen an opportunity of airing their opinions. Auckland, Rotorua, Palmerston North, and Port Underwood have all had their advocates, and of course, there are members who think the ideal site for the seat of Government is somewhere on the Canterbury Plains, near the foothills of the Southern Alps. Those people who advocate the creation of a new legislative capital may be divided into two classes—those who are animated by jealousy of Wellington, and those who desire to commit the State to a costly and doubtful experiment in land nationalisation. With many, the pretext for change is found in the liability of the present capital to be looted by an armed force landed from an enemy's cruisers. The Hon. S. T. George advocated the placing of the capital far inland, so that Parliament would be safe from hostile invaders. But why this anxiety to safeguard Parliament? Do our sapient legislators fondly dream that they would be the principal objects of attack by possible enemies? Or, do they imagine that the enemy would want to seize the State archives and clean out the Treasury? There is no need for alarm on either of these grounds. Parliament would be the last thought of an invading force. Neither would such a force want to lay impious hands on the State blue books and vouchers; and, as for the Treasury, everybody knows that our Government does not keep vaults full of bullion and specie, and that a conquering invader would find no more in the Treasury than Mulai Hafid found on his recent visit to Pz. The Moorish gentleman got a pile of old clothes; the conqueror of New Zealand would get a bundle of old papers! No; there is positively no need to remove the capital; and it is a relief to find that the committee has not been instructed to go upon a wild goose chase for a new site.

"O, come ye in peace here, or come ye in war!" The question that was put to Young Lochinvar, of the well-known ballad, might well be put to the American Fleet by the Japanese; for though it is widely and officially announced that the voyage of our trans-Pacific cousins is one of an entirely peaceful nature, the suspicion exists that the cruise has its minatory aspect. This suspicion is strengthened when we find an American naval officer, turned politician, taking every opportunity of shouting a defiant insult at Japan, and endeavouring to incite his countrymen to war. Some eight weeks ago, when relations between America and Japan were somewhat strained, Capt. Hobson—who seems to be the American equivalent of England's "Fighting Charlie"—declared that "only one thing remains before war, viz., a pretext"; and he added that "America must refuse to let a crisis arise until the battleship fleet reaches the Far East." Now, after the fleet has sailed on its westward course to the East, Capt. Hobson has indulged in further inflammatory oratory, emphasised by expletives, and backed by an alleged statement made by President Roosevelt recently, to the effect that there was "now a greater possibility of a war with Japan."

Wild talk of this sort is only pernicious, in so far as it may represent the under-current of feeling and conviction among Americans. To us here, the idea of such a war seems utterly pre-

posterous. And as to making a pretext to declare war when the fleet is within striking distance of Japan, such a course appears entirely foreign to American methods. Further, the fleet now on its way hither is quite unequal to the task of coping with that of Japan. If it attempted hostilities in Japanese waters, it would probably meet the same fate as did the Russian Squadron. The notion of war must therefore be dismissed as the mere vapouring of a "Jingo" politician. The Japanese have evidently no thought of treating the Americans other than as honoured guests; but it is significant that their preparations for welcome include a naval display on a scale of magnitude that will make it an effective reply to any element of bombastic threat that may underlie the American visit. The ancient Romans said: "If you wish for peace, prepare for war." It may, therefore, be assumed that the displays of force about to be made constitute a guarantee of peace; yet somehow, when one sees a man peel off his coat and "put up his props," one does not get the impression that he is about to move a Peace Congress resolution. It may be different with nations, however. Let us hope it is.

It would seem that the position in the Dominion to-day may be described in the words of Goldsmith, with the alteration of a single word—

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The Colonial Treasurer has just announced a "record" surplus of £707,849, the revenue continues redundant, business generally is good, despite the usual winter cry of the unemployed—a few scores of them, spread over the four chief cities; the deposits in the Post Office Savings Banks have increased during the year by about a million and a quarter sterling, and now stand at over £11,500,000; but in spite of all these gratifying facts, there is "a fly in the ointment" and perplexity in the minds of our statesmen. The trouble is the declining birth-rate and the consequent falling off in the supply of young folks. The education statistics show a marked decrease in the number of children of certain ages who are in school attendance; our factories clamour in vain for juvenile workers, and the "boy wanted" advertisement of the city business man remains unanswered. The question is not "What shall we do with our boys?" It is rather—"How are we to keep up the supply of boys and girls?" A Labour organisation has suggested a Government bonus for large families, and the Minister for Labour, to whom the resolution was submitted, has declared that the Government must soon "deal with the matter in a practical way." He has obtained figures on the subject for his annual report which, he says, will "simply stagger" the community. Our industries, he holds, must languish if we have not a natural increase of population. He realised the value of good immigrants, but considered "it was a poor country that had to depend upon immigration." And even immigration may fail us, for the departmental report shows that the number of immigrants who came to this country last year was only 3104, as against 3712 for the preceding year.

But there are people who object to immigration. The Labourites do not like to have the market fully supplied, and other people think it wrong to induce farmers with capital to settle here. One of the

latter class of objectors, writing from Pohui, Hawke's Bay, draws our attention to the fact that there recently arrived in Wellington several farmers who were "assisted" by the Government, despite the fact that they had each over £1000 in capital, while one had, in addition, an income of £2000 a year. We quote the correspondent's letter:—

"I enclose a cutting from your issue of the 17th June, and should esteem it a favour if you would inform me if a man with a capital of £2000, and an income of the same amount, is considered by those in authority either a desirable import, or one for whom the worker of the Dominion ought to be called upon to assist to enter the country? A man, with such a pecuniary standing, who is willing to supererogate himself to his future home, cannot, even by the most ingenious imagination, be expected to benefit a new country to any appreciable extent. It surely cannot be that our country is in such a critical state that it is compelled to subsidise such capitalists."

In reply to the question propounded in the opening sentence, we can only say that "those in authority" (assuming that they know the circumstances) evidently consider it right to assist rich men to come here. Possibly they have no choice; perhaps they were deceived; but the person with an income of £2000 a year who accepts such aid might well be awarded the medal for meanness. For the rest, it is absurd to suppose that this country would be benefitted by the importation of wealthy people. One good, sturdy, independent farmer is of more value than a dozen millionaires, but the farmer is none the worse for having a few hundreds of pounds wherewith to make a start. It is well to encourage the immigration of farmers, and no reasonable person would object to the State contributing towards their passage money, so as to place this country in fair competition with Canada and the United States; but we should certainly draw the line at helping men with £2000 a year.

"Oh, my prophetic soul! My uncle!" It seems to be quite on the cards that in this favoured Dominion, the State will ere long set up a monopoly in pawnbroking. There is now before Parliament a bill to amend the Pawnbrokers' Charges Act, and in the course of the debate on its second reading, Mr Barclay, M.P., for South Dunedin, expressed himself in favour of a State pawnshop. In referring to this suggestion, the Hon. J. McGowan said "it would be a step in the right direction," but he thought the time was not yet ripe for such a proposal. Simultaneously with this, it is to be noted that there is a movement among certain legislators to acquire for the State a controlling interest in the Bank of New Zealand—the biggest pawnshop in the Dominion. It is no doubt quite in accord with the Government's "cheap money" policy that it should control the rates of advances of all kinds, and it cannot do better than begin with the pawnshops, which are the banks upon which the poorer classes draw advances. The success of the Mont De Pieté establishments in France can be quoted in support of the idea of Government pawnshops. At present, in this country, pawnbrokers can charge as high as 80 per cent per annum for small loans; the bill before the House proposes to restrict the rate to 25 per cent for loans under £2, and to 20 per cent for loans exceeding that amount. The French institutions go more than "one better" than this, for four of them lend money gratuitously, while the others, over forty in number, charge only from 4 to 12 per cent. In the case of thirteen of the establishments, the profits are devoted to the support of hospitals. The business done is equal to two millions sterling per annum. Similar institutions exist in Germany, Holland, Brussels, and Italy—the latter country having originated them as early as 1440. The State in New Zealand having assumed paternal relations to the people, why should it not also be the "uncle" of the impecunious? The objection may be urged that

the Dominion is dependent upon Uncle Bull for advances, and that she cannot always depend upon getting them cheap.

If you go to your uncle to borrow some money,

'Tis right he should fork it out cheaply to you;

But then, to supply you (it really is funny),

He must seek his avuncular relative too!

There must of course be a limit to this sort of thing, for John Bull has not a rich uncle upon whom he can draw for advances. On the whole, it will be well if the efforts of our Government are directed towards obviating the necessity for pawnshops. Where these flourish, poverty is most in evidence. If we can keep that Wolf from our doors, there will be no need to advocate State pawnshops.

The example set by the municipality of Christchurch in the matter of theatre regulation should at once be followed by every similar body in the Dominion. The city fathers of the beautiful town on the Avon have decided that the seating accommodation of every theatre under their jurisdiction shall be fixed by by-law, and that every ticket sold, be it for "tony" circle or for humble pit or gallery, shall bear a number corresponding with that of the seat, so that the sale of tickets must automatically close when the theatre is full, and every unit of the audience can be assured of a comfortable seat, according to the length of his purse. Why such a necessary reform was not insisted on by the theatre-going community long ere this is another instance of the long-suffering patience of that extremely good-humoured section of the community. But, since Christchurch has headed the advance, and since all other cities must inevitably follow in its wake, would it not be judicious and graceful if up-to-date managements at once recognised the position, and in addition to the compulsory numbering of every seat, granted patrons in any part of the theatre the privilege of reserving their seats? The extra expense involved would be small compared with the enormous benefits bestowed. With regard to the gallery, where large numbers would have to be handed by ushers, the time up to which seats would be reserved for holders of the tickets could be fixed at a quarter of an hour before the starting of the performance. The stalls could be, say, eight minutes, and the orchestra stalls and dress circle five minutes prior to the rise of the curtain. Once the performance had started, there should be no admission to any part of the auditorium whatsoever, until the first interval. This last rule, as was amply proved during the ill-fated opera season, would effectually cure the insolent inconsiderateness and rudeness of those nuisances who persistently arrive after the opera or play has commenced, while the other advantages of registration of seats are too obvious to need mention.

Certain it is, that many a puter familia who cannot afford to take four or five seats at 5/- or 7/6, and who objects to standing for hours in a crush, and therefore never goes to a popular entertainment under present conditions, would swell the ranks of pleasure-seekers if he were allowed to reserve gallery seats at the usual prices. Another point, on which nearly every theatre in the Dominion needs urgent reform, is the width between the seats, and, in some cases, the paucity of alley ways. The matter of mere comfort is worth considering, quite apart from the question of safety; but it is on the ground of safety that the present intolerable squeezing of seats needs instant attack. The theatre proprietors, if tackled on the point, immediately quote some more or less legendary time in which a full house