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The Week in Review

The commercial outlook all over the world seems to be distinctly brighter than it has been for some time past. In South Africa there is a very marked revival of prosperity, and the sharemarket is quite active again. Many securities, for long considered practically valueless, have recently advanced by leaps and bounds, till some are now actually higher than they were before the great Baring failure. England also appears to be recovering from the acute depression of last year, and Government supporters are hopeful that they may yet avoid the threatened change in fiscal policy. Throughout the whole of Australasia prospects of a good season are distinctly encouraging, and this, combined with better prices at Home, ought to remove entirely any financial stringency that may still exist. A record wheat harvest is anticipated in the South, and reports go to show that in Auckland the butter yield is better than it has ever been. In Australia the wheat promises well, and the rise in the price of wool and the general recovery throughout the Commonwealth from the effects of the great drought give every hope for the coming year. Mr. Taft's election has caused renewed industrial activity in the United States, and even in Venezuela and the other turbulent republics of South America a more settled prosperity seems to be imminent. The New Year has opened well as far as the commercial world is concerned. We can only hope that it may close under circumstances equally auspicious.

New Zealanders are not the only people who like to have a growl at the railway authorities for the discomfort entailed by the overcrowded state of the trains at holiday times. It appears that in New South Wales, while the Railway Department has been congratulating itself on having put up a record as regards the number of passengers carried last Boxing Day, the passengers themselves are anything but inclined to share in the congratulations. Very little accommodation appears to have been provided for first-class passengers, and thousands of people who paid for first-class tickets were compelled to travel in the already overcrowded second-class carriages. Not only so, but even in the inferior class they were not given a seat, but were compelled to stand the whole journey, and we are told that the platforms of the carriages were crowded to a dangerous extent. If the railway authorities sell a ticket entitling the holder to a seat in a first-class compartment, it seems only just and reasonable that they should carry out their contract and not leave the unfortunate pasenger, whose money they have taken, to battle for standing room wherever he can get it or else be left behind on the platform. The traffic at holiday times is naturally exceptional, but it is not unexpected, and adequate steps should be taken to meet it.

President Fallieres by his persistent refusal to sign the death-warrant has been held largely responsible for the enormous increase of crimes of violence in France, and especially in the streets of Paris. Murders and attempted murders had become of almost daily occurrence, and in Paris the "Apache," or gangs of hoodlums, had become more and more daring from the knowledge that if caught they would never be executed. In a single day they committed no fewer than ten murders, all of them of a singularly brutal and ruthless nature. The French Chamber of Deputies decided last year that drastic steps must be taken to put an end to this new reign of terror, and they passed by a one-third majority a resolution in favour of enforcing the death penalty. As a result of this decision, the President has been compelled to abandon his former attitude, and twenty-two convicted murderers were sentenced to be executed. The crowd cheered as the victims were being led to the guillotine, and one of the condemned men just before his death admitted that he had committed 250 crimes, and that the sentence was a just one. However repugnant the idea of capital punishment may be, there is no doubt that the dread of the death sentence acts as a most powerful deterrent to men who but for it would commit murder on the slightest provocation. The President's ill-advised leniency had cost the lives of numerous innocent people, and he doubtless recognises by now that the sternest justice may in the end prove to be the most really merciful course to pursue.

It is very much to be regretted that the miners at Broken Hill should have alienated so much of public sympathy from their cause by their many acts of violence and wanton destruction of property. For on the face of it the men appear to have had a good case. The Mine owners, in spite of the award given and agreed upon, decided to reduce the men's wages on the ground that they could not pay the rate awarded. The men construed this as a lock-out, and in all probability public opinion would have been entirely with them had they conducted themselves in a peaceful and law-abiding manner. But the tactics they have pursued have received and merited almost universal condemnation. Much of the blame, however, for these deeds of violence must be laid at the door of the irresponsible agitators, who have sought to rouse the passions of the men by inflammatory speeches. The arrest of Tom Mann and others shows that the authorities are fully alive to the dangerous influence exerted by some of those who whilst professing sympathy with the working classes are in reality their most dangerous enemies.

It is very much to be regretted that, in view of the recent rise in the price of wool, the results of the Auckland wool sales held on Wednesday last cannot be considered altogether satisfactory. Buyers made great complaints about the bad classification, even going so far as to allege a certain amount of dishonest baling. This, they said, had a bad effect upon the sales, and had caused a marked distrust as well as a disinclination on the part of several buyers to make any bids. This was especially noticeable in purchases made for America, these purchases being on a very limited scale. On the other hand, many of the wool-growers deny that the wool was badly packed or classified, and they lay the blame elsewhere for the poor prices realised. Not a few consider that there are too many sales in Auckland, and they urge that two would be sufficient, instead of three, as at present. They seem inclined to think that the buyers were trying to depress the market, and the lack of American bidding is attributed to the high duty of 5½ per lb. on imported wool. However this may be, the fact remains that the sale was a distinct disappointment to the growers, and in their own interest they should make the fullest inquiries into the causes, and endeavour to remedy any admitted defects.

There is one feature of the recent General Election that deserves more attention than seems to have been generally paid to it. This is the great increase in the number of members who are committed to a definite programme of national defence. Nineteen members are unconditionally pledged, and sixteen more have promised favourable support to the movement. It is not a party question, and both political parties are well represented. Indeed, there seems to be a very strong feeling throughout the Dominion in favour of some form of compulsory military training, though not in the form of conscription as it is understood on the Continent. At present it cannot be said that we have anything adequate in the nature of a defence force. We have been spending for some years past nearly a-quarter of a million per annum on defence, and we have nothing to show for it except a volunteer force under 20,000 strong. We have 50,000 rifles, but it is estimated that our reserve supply of ammunition would, at the best, only last 10,000 men for a fortnight. There are not 30 pieces of really effective field artillery, and the commissariat transport and army medical departments are practically non-existent.

In England there seems also to be a growing feeling that the voluntary system has not proved adequate to the demands that might be made upon it in the event of an invasion. The territorial army has not been a success, and Mr. Haldane, by his unwise cutting down of the regular forces, has not tended to reassure public opinion on the vital question of defence. Lord Roberts, in November last, pointed out that it would be quite possible for 200,000 men to be assembled at German ports without any fuss of public notification, and embarked before we could prevent their departure. He also referred to the fact that there were 80,000 Germans in England already, all of them trained to military service, and these would co-operate with their countrymen in the event of hostilities being declared. He contended that the citizen army should consist of at least 1,000,000 men. Admiral Finnis has also expressed the opinion that an invasion of England would be quite possible. During the recent manoeuvres, when in command of the attacking fleet, he had succeeded, under cover of a thick fog, in conveying a force, supposed to represent seventy thousand troops, to the Scottish coast. He agreed with Lord Roberts that no matter how strong and powerful the navy might be, a sufficient and efficient command of the land was necessary to ensure peace and security at home. We have for so long enjoyed the blessings of peace that we are apt to imagine that these blessings will continue for ever, but the situation is threatening both in Europe and in the East, and the best and surest guarantee of peace is to be found in being thoroughly prepared for war. A weak country invites attack; that country alone can dwell secure which can exhibit on its shield the proud motto, "Nemo me impune lacessit."

The recent conference of the Primitive Methodist Church showed that this body has made great progress in its work during recent years. The denomination dates back to the year 1811, when Hugh Bourne and William Clowes founded the Church. Bourne was a man of considerable literary attainments, as well as a fluent linguist, whilst Clowes was mainly noted as a preacher. The main feature of their work was intense evangelical enthusiasm; powerful, fearless preaching of the gospel, and open-air work. The Church grew, and spread to America, Canada, Australasia, and Africa. The first minister in New Zealand was the late Rev. R. Ward, a man who was both a saint and a hero. For some time he worked in New Plymouth, but in 1840 he came to Auckland, the voyage, which was made by schooner, occupying seven days. There are now 75 churches and 89 other preaching places. The churches, schools, and parsonages are valued at £75,000. There are 39 ministers, and nearly 3000 members. There are 83 Sunday schools, with 613 teachers and 5500 scholars. The Church has done an immense work amongst the poor, and has ever taken a foremost place in all matters affecting social and temperance reform.

The annual report of the Panama Canal Commission, recently issued, shows that serious and unexpected difficulties have been encountered, and these have necessitated some change in plan as well as causing considerable delay. One of the most serious troubles was a large land slide, which is thus described in the report:—"On October 4 the Cucaracha slide, which and caused more or less inconvenience since the work was begun by the French in 1884, started to move toward the east edge of the canal at a rate, at first, of fourteen feet in twenty-four hours, decreasing toward the close of the month to about four feet in the same period of time. About 113,000 cubic yards of material moved so as to effectually stop the transportation of material through the 'cut' to the south, and necessitated the handling of all material over the single-track portion of the Panama Railroad via Empire to the south. Work was prosecuted, without interruption, day and night, by steam shovels and improvised hydraulic means, and by the end of the month sufficient space was gained on the moving mass to permit the passage of dirt trains to the south over the old route. The total area of the slide was approximately 34,455 square yards, and it was estimated that about 600,000 cubic yards were in motion." The engineers, however, are hopeful that they will be able to prevent such catastrophes in future, and that the canal will be finally completed before 1915. Its importance can hardly be over-estimated, and everyone will be glad to learn that there is every prospect of this gigantic project being carried to successful termination.

Turkey has at last accepted Austria's offer of compensation for the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there is every indication that she will also accept compensation from Bulgaria. Servia has also considerably modified her former threatening attitude, so that there seems to be every prospect of a pacific settlement of affairs in the Balkans. As regards Servia, we may assume that she has been influenced by the pressure exerted by Russia, and also by the fact that Italian interest has been diverted from the Balkans owing to the recent stupendous earthquake in Sicily. Turkey is face to face with great financial difficulties, and a loan is said to be absolutely necessary. Under these circumstances war would be disastrous, and she is willing to make great concessions in order to escape from further monetary embarrassments. At present it would seem as if the main outcome of recent affairs would be the rise of a Bulgarian Empire that may yet take a prominent part in the councils of Europe.

The annual statement of the Napier Harbour Board shows that the port is making rapid progress, and goes far to justify the Chairman's confidently expressed opinion that it will one day become the third port in the Dominion. Napier has gained considerably in trade by the action of the Government in taking over the Manawatu railway, and also by the subdivision of large estates, hundreds of people having made homesteads