

News of the Dominion.

OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

The King's Birthday.

THE first day of the week was the day of the King—God bless him. It is exactly what we all tried to do for His Majesty of gracious memory. But the fates were against us. In other words, the wind blew all day with hurricane force. Like all prodigals he ran away to sea in the end, but the King's Day had gone long before he got an offering. You will understand therefore that we were much disturbed in our allegiance. Boreas helped us by making the flags stand out in splendid show. But if he had not made it a condition that nothing else in the world but those flags enjoyed the day we should have appreciated him more.

Birthday Memoirs—Sir George McLean.

There were consultations however the next day. It came in the shape of the announcement of honours to certain persons who may be presumed to have enjoyed the birthday very much more than we did. Of course all mouths are full of the praises of Sir George McLean. The friends of "Geordie" have long memories and these containing nothing but good of the old man so shrewd and so kindly. They remember him in his salad days in old Melbourne, where he landed when almost everybody had gone off to old Bendigo. Naturally Geordie had his pick of the billets going. He might have been the Governor's cook or the chief of the Customs. He might have run the best hotel—Scott's we used to call it in those days, and we always think as we mention the old place now of the old wine of the Moselle which all men of anything like proper habits of self-respect used to call for at the famous hostelry. He might have been "boss" of anything at all, from the Public Works Offices to the sharemarket. He just watched the long line of opportunity, and ended by selecting a bank. He had no banking experience, it is true. But nobody else had any either, and the banks were full of the empty places of the clerks and accountants who had gone off to the diggings to make their fortunes. So he entered into possession of a stool and very soon rose high in the banking atmosphere. The success gave him his bent in life as well as the key to fortune which every true son of Scotia goes to Southern lands to find.

Finding he did not make that pile fast enough in the Victorian capital, and hearing of a Scottish settlement not long established in one of these islands, in which was reproduced the name of old Edinburgh, and a replica of the gold-field of Bendigo, he started and made a descent into the new Scotland. There the banking world held out its arms to the genial newcomer, and presently he was pushing the business of the B.N.Z. in Dunedin as its first manager in that place. Rapidly accumulating capital, he became a merchant on the Rialto—the local name of which was High-street—and before long he became the head of the firm of Cargills and McLean, the first of the merchant princes of that time. As he went about the streets of the capital the folk said of him that he was the old family of the McLean who had a boat of their "sin" which sailed the seas in competition with the Ark of Noah, and its agents were Cargills and McLean.

After that the key he brought with him from Melbourne stood him in good stead. It was the only thing he had with him when he landed. There was not even the usual letter of introduction. The only letter of that kind which he carried was that which nature had written on his face—a genial, kindly, shrewd human document which inspired confidence every time he presented it. Thus he was allowed to approach all opportunities of the day, and every opportunity he approached he produced his key and proceeded to unlock the treasures behind the door. What distinguished him in those days was the faculty of seeing the treasures at the other side of the door. What distinguished many

of his contemporaries was the blindness which made them think there was treasure behind the door where it was not. The play of the key brought him many things.

Easily foremost in the mercantile world, he got into politics and rose high in the Provincial Council what time one Robert Stout was a youth looking on from the gallery, collecting material for a career which we now know to have been marvellous. From the local political world "Geordie" was translated to the general, and before long he was a Minister of the Crown, as has been told in the numerous biographies with which his name has been associated during the last few days. It was a good, useful career, and it earned for him the jibes of Sir George Grey, who preferred declaration of inability to understood Doric to the task of replying to the shrewd comments of the McLean intellect. Nevertheless, the world laughed with Grey, as it always does on such occasions. Since those days Sir George has been a member of the Legislative Council, which has heard many speeches from him of business-like character and knowledge of affairs.

His Big Achievement.

The big thing of his career was the establishment of the Union Shipping Company, which institution he served as chief pilot for many years with unswerving devotion and mighty care. To him and one other—Sir James Mills—is due the fact that the Union service is the best coastal passenger service in the world to-day, as all travellers freely admit who have had experience of the ways of travel on many waters. There is an idea abroad that the first knighthood bestowed on the service should have been Geordie's, not the other man's. Also, there is some wonder why Sir James Mills should have been selected for another decoration when the knighthood was conferred on "Geordie." It is freely said that the Union—good service as it is—need not have been selected for two decorations on this occasion. These are the partisans of "Sir Arthur" Guinness, "Sir Joshua" Williams, "Sir James" Coates, and other high persons in this Dominion. I speak of the titles in the light of the wishes of their friends. It may be possible that on some future Birthday some of these titles may take their date point. At the same time, let it be understood that no one grudges the honour that has been conferred on Sir George McLean, who, as merchant, banker, ship company director, and good political servant, has deserved well of his country. I am sure the men of the Union Company all support the veteran. They remember well the scene after the great Maritime Strike. Their representatives waited on his after the collapse of that ill-advised operation. They laid their case before him. They talked at length. At last they paused for his reply. It came—slow, short, and decisive. It sounded cryptic as the Delphic Oracle. It proved strong as Fate. And withal it was genial and generous, as well as just. That was one of the finest things this writer ever saw in the management of men. I shall say no more in support of the knighthood except to wish old Sir George long life for its enjoyment, as is right for the man who by his long career of honest, varied success has deserved it.

The Shadow of the Budget.

Of politics what is there to say except that the shadow of the Budget is over everything? In many things this Budget was extraordinary, but in nothing more so than in the small matter of its unreadiness at the moment announced for its delivery. A full House, packed galleries, a hush after many bills, and Sir Joseph on his legs. But instead of moving the House into Committee of Ways and Means, he astounded us all by asking that the debate on the "Queous" interrupted by the five-thirty adjournment might be allowed to proceed, as the Financial Statement was for some reason not quite ready. So for three-quarters of an hour we had to listen to this debate about many things which usually spell nothing. But it had its compensations. It showed, inter alia, that the Government knows how to take care of itself against the pertinacious questioner dissatisfied with

"all things"—which means the Government. The way in which the Railways Minister struck back at the men who had laboured to make political capital out of the case of the man McDermott pilloried in the report of the Police Commissioner was refreshing, and so was the manner of reply given by the Hon. T. Mackenzie to the man who had aspersed the Department of Agriculture in many ways, as the rabbit department and other things. The Hon. Thomas was in his old form, that which he made known to the House when he represented the Clutha, and reminded us, who heard him hold forth, of the swirling power and rough strength of that famous stream. Mr. Buchanan must have been sorry he mentioned those rabbit inspectors so strenuously defended, and when the Hon. Thomas carried the war into the enemy's country by a foaming, curling, roaring reminder of the attack made on the Department for its just defence and proper care of the Lutter interests threatened by the practices of the water party, which ought to know better, and would be compelled to the betterment necessary, there was not much left for the other side to say, or even think.

In re McDermott.

Another sidelight thrown by these proceedings was that provided by the attack (under form of question and protesting reply to the answer of the Minister) on the Railway and Police Departments in re MacDermott aforesaid. There were three aspects. First it became evident that the Opposition are not masters of tactics. Mr. Herdman began with a citation of the case of this much-discussed man, and had not proceeded half way through it when the bell cut him off. Mr. Massey followed his lieutenant in support—according to the right canon of political war. But the performance fell short of the conception, for Mr. Massey, instead of taking up the case where the friends he was supporting had left off, elected to begin at the beginning and was cut off by the inexorable bell of the Speaker before he had got as far as the point at which Mr. Herdman had ended. What can you think of tactics like that?

The second sidelight was supplied by Mr. Millar, who replied in re MacDermott. He had no difficulty in showing that both the Police Department and the Railway Department had acted in this matter in perfect good faith, and with the best precautions. The first had admitted the man on false evidence, a thing that may happen to anyone, but had dismissed him as soon as he had discovered the truth about him. Similarly, the other Department had taken his application out of many thousands, and had found the man to be recommended by some of the best men in Victoria as a good, capable worker, had heard nothing about him from the Railway Department—as how should they?—and had put him on entirely on what transpired in their own experience after the effect given to the recommendations. It was a complete reply, and it disposed of the case of MacDermott completely, without whitewashing that individual, but with every credit to both the Departments the man had deserved.

The third sidelight, therefore, concerns the Police Commission. When there was so complete an answer, what was the sense of making this MacDermott case so prominent? That question the Commissioner will have to answer. And what is the sense of dragging all the similar stories out of the report and setting them before the public as a proved infallible delicious "chronique scandaleuse" justifying the demand for the removal of the head of the Police Department? That is a question which the newspapers will have to answer. At the bottom of these questions lies another. What confidence can we place on the report of the Commission anyway?

The Great Announcement.

At last the Budget began, after three-quarters of an hour of the above discussion. It was mild and gentle at the first. It built up figures firmly, like a master workman does. Presently, it showed the soundness of the position. Three hundred millions added to the assets while but forty had been added to the public debt—and most of that forty self-supporting. It was a great opening. It led to great things. As the voice of the Finance Minister travelled, revealing the various points of the most varied, most important policy of later times—one of the most important ever

announced to the Dominion—the attention of the House grew more and more intense. There was not much applause, but there were emphatic little choruses of interruption, denoting approval of all events the courage with which heavy responsibilities were being discharged and acknowledged duties performed. The proposal to find the money for the Dreadnought in eighteen years, while the life of such warships stands in the official books at twenty to twenty-five, was received with lively satisfaction. The surprise at the announcement of compulsory military service was as genuine as it was agreeable. The announcement of the land policy threw many of the listeners on their beam ends, and the statement of the approaching liquor compromise forced the House into the seventh heaven of guessing delight. When the figures at the end were reached, speculation had given place to contentment. As the House separated the impression was general that the power of the Government for initiative, for enterprising resource, and due sense of responsibility and financial prudence had been vindicated by one of the most remarkable Financial Statements in the annals of the Dominion.

What Does the Country Think?

What do the people of the city think of it, and what do the politicians say? Of the latter we cannot say anything definite, except that the men who are refusing with a reticence rare among public men on such occasions to be drawn will speak for themselves next week. Of the city opinion, it is early to speak yet. I find the financial condition is regarded as extremely good in the city, considering all things. It is true that there is on the year's transactions only a profit of £4,000; but the balance brought forward from the previous year (£184,000), is enough to provide for the Supplementaries. It is true that over three hundred thousand will be required for the new policy, but it is also true that provision is specially made for it to the extent of £448,000, leaving a balance estimated to the good of £118,000. This is good enough to meet the chance of a further shrinkage in the Customs revenue. When we add that the revenue Customs Income Tax and Chinese Poll Tax—is estimated at a shortage of £300,000, it is borne in on us that the finance for the year is prudent and far-seeing. A glance at the items of taxation convinces all sound men of the fairness of its incidence, and so there is but little left to be said on the subject.

Of the military service, I find much, and in places enthusiastic, appreciation of the principle, and general determination to wait for details before expressing further opinion. On the land question the compromise is felt to be on the lines of the least resistance. There is general approval of the extension of the freehold—outside the reserves—and there is general approval equally of the securing of a share of the unearned increment for the State, with a general reserve of opinion on the side of the bush settler who has felled his acreages that he shall get all increments possible except those due to the starting of great townships unexpectedly.

On the liquor question (detailed later) there is an infinity of opinion with a general idea, that the moderate man has been "left," and an equally general idea that the agreement is not representative of the interests most concerned, and that both of these interests are gambling terribly with their respective interests, which they do not correctly represent, whatever may be the case in a few days. It does not appear, however, that the interests will fall in with the agreement achieved by the men who have undertaken to represent them. Such at all events is the indication of various interviews that have been published on the subject. It is notable at the same time that the New Zealand "Times," which is certainly not a Prohibition organ or a No-license advocate, expresses fears lest the blue-ribbon men have obtained the advantage. Against that there are the opinions of men in the trade who think openly that the Prohibitionists are "dished." But of all these matters more anon, when men have had time to digest what is set before them! At that feast all agree that never has so plentiful a table been arranged for the political banquet.

Some Famous Budgets.

One throws one's mind naturally back over the past for the comparison of budgets, so as to place this one in its right category of importance. Looking back, the most momentous in our annals