

Topics of the Week.

Election Promises.

Candidates for Parliamentary honours profess themselves willing at this time to make almost any sacrifice in order to serve their country; but it is rare to find them willing to forego the honorarium. The speech of Mr. Hannan, one of the Auckland candidates, deserves notice, if for no other reason than that this gentleman intimated his willingness to sacrifice even the monetary consideration attached to the position of member. At the same time, of course, his offer is not to be taken as unconditional; and the conditions he stipulates for may be regarded by some as minimising the value of his offer. He said that if hard times came he would give his honorarium to the building of Auckland railways. Now, one should not look a gift horse in the mouth, but there is really something about this offer that tempts a closer examination. Why in the event of hard times Mr. Hannan should bestow his £300 on public works when doubtless they could be spent to much better purpose on relieving the necessities of the pinched and poor, I do not quite understand. After all, such generosity on his part could achieve very little in the matter of building railways; it wouldn't even carry a bush tramway very far. And would it not be actually cruel of Mr. Hannan when his constituents were perhaps crying out for bread to offer them a steel rail? In the face of such a proposal it is difficult to resist the suggestion that Mr. Hannan's generosity did not amount to very much after all, as it is extremely unlikely he would ever be called to redeem his promise. However, that is a feature common to most election promises I am inclined to think. How often are they not made only to be broken? If it were not so what an ideal Parliament we should have. Hedged, though it is, Mr. Hannan's prospective self-sacrifice is yet sufficiently rare to be worth noting. How many other members are there who would take even the same risks as he does? The intangible principle, the undefinable amount of private labour and time—these are sacrifices which without a moment's consideration every candidate avows himself willing to offer up on the altar of the country; but when it comes to the tangible guineas they are much more careful. An excellent test to put to a candidate in order to ascertain his single heartedness in the interest of the country would be to ask him to sacrifice the honorarium; but, of course, it would be much too hard a test, and few would come through the ordeal. The electors are not unkind to the Parliamentary aspirant; they know he is only human, and consequently you seldom find among the questions with which he is assailed at the close of a meeting that most inconvenient of all queries, "Are you prepared to vote against payment of members?"

Electoral Purity.

Mr Seddon is much too shrewd a man not to appreciate the force of such a contention as I urged last week; namely, that it is the first business of the Government to see that the electoral law is not only impartially administered, but also that not a shadow of suspicion attaches to its administration. The attitude in which he met the deputation in Wellington of the New Zealand Alliance shows this very plainly. In his remarks as reported he never attempted to combat for an instant the grounds of complaint, but, on the contrary, at once suggested that a responsible officer should be sent up to Auckland to inquire into the charges against the registrar. That inquiry is now being instituted, and it is earnestly to be hoped that the result will remove the dissatisfaction and distrust at present existing. For the sake of the whole colony, as much as for Auckland, it is necessary that the impartiality of registrars generally as a fixed principle of our electoral machinery should

be established. As Mr Seddon himself remarked, if it can be shown that any responsible statutory officer took sides he is not fit for his position. I am afraid that neither the law nor the force of public opinion has sufficiently emphasised this point, and hence in the minds of these officers there may be a laxness which, though entirely unpermissible, may not be altogether unpardonable.

Shaking Hands with Germany.

The Kaiser is now on his way to England on a friendly visit to King Edward, but it is freely rumoured that he means to take the opportunity of frankly discussing Anglo-British relations with the Ministry. It would certainly not be surprising if he considered some explanation of Germany's peculiar Anglophobia was necessary on his part as head of the German Empire; and perhaps that idea has given rise to the report. And again it is very probable, too, that apart from the necessity for an apology, he recognises the wisdom of establishing better relations with England. To the British way of thinking, it is Germany herself who has been responsible for all the ill-feeling that may be abroad. If we are at all antagonistic to the Germans, who is to blame? Surely the Germans themselves. But it appears that they don't admit the soft impeachment. A writer in the "Deutsche Rundschau" declares that the "Times," "Spectator" and the "National Review" have tried to make bad blood between Germany and Great Britain, and have only failed to do so owing to "the correct attitude of the German Government. But," continues he, "if this sort of thing goes on results may take place which will be very hurtful to England. The German Government may not always be able to hold the people in check, and the English press will do well to cease playing with fire." Could anything equal the cool insolence of this? The attitude of the British press, even when the German Anglophobes were foaming at the mouth, was one of marvellous tolerance. And it was not until the German press had repeatedly transgressed all bounds of decency in its attacks that the leading British journals ventured a dignified remonstrance. It is to their action at this juncture that the German writer must allude when he accuses them of trying to stir up trouble. Of course, the Germans may say that the press does not voice the sentiments of the German people or Government. As to its relation to the people, if it did not echo their views it did worse—it prompted them; and as to its relation to the Government, we all know that had the latter objected to the tone or utterances of the journals it would not have hesitated in suppressing them. But the British are a magnanimous as well as practical folk, and if the Kaiser holds out the olive branch of friendship he will not find us backward in accepting it.

Saturday Night Burglaries.

Saturday night burglaries have become one of the institutions of Auckland. The folks look forward to them, and when they open their papers on Monday the first thing they turn to after the births, deaths and marriages is the burglar column. And they have had few disappointments. The burglars are, as a rule, very punctual, and it is the exception to find them not up to time. Considering the obstacles they have to contend with their regularity is astonishing, and in any other walk of life would win them credit. For they have obstacles. I believe the police are really trying to catch them, but they make such a poor band at the work that the betting is all on the side of the burglars. We are generally given to understand that the police have a theory or a clue, or a suspicion or something, but never that they have a

burglar, which would be more to the point. It is alleged that the gang is American, but the only reason one can discover for this assumption is that a special degree of cleverness is imputed to the Yankees, and the police take refuge from the storm of public criticism in this. Have I a theory? No, and if I were a policeman I would not bother to formulate one. It's of no importance whether the burglars are Chinamen or Esquimaux; the fact that they are burglars is enough, and I would go all I knew on that. And I fancy that before this time I would have got a little further than the police, though I lay no claim to being a Sherlock Holmes. Most folks I have come across think the same thing. It may be the egotism of ignorance—of course it may. But to the average mind it does seem incomprehensible that a gang of housebreakers should be able to pursue their work week after week within a radius of a few miles, and to live undetected among a population of barely sixty thousand, and without being discovered. Under such circumscribed conditions it should be a comparatively easy thing for an intelligently organised police force to get on the right track. A capable policeman in a small colonial community should know every face on his beat, and a good deal more than that. He has nothing else to do during the whole day. If, then, Auckland is adequately policed with intelligent men they should be able to furnish such information as pieced together by a capable head would so narrow down the area of suspicion that those within it would find their action hampered at every point.

Go on the Land, Young Woman.

Women have invaded the business and industrial sphere of man at so many points that it is rather a wonder they have not been more to the front as agriculturalists. This is the more striking from the fact that from the earliest times women have been more closely associated with field work than with any other in which men engage. Long before the ladies dreamt of being doctors and lawyers, not to speak of clerks and typewriters, the ranks of agricultural labourers were in most countries largely recruited from the sex; and, indeed, they are now. Then, why is it that they do not show any anxiety to devote themselves to a field from which they are in no way debarred or for which experience has already shown them to be fitted, as they have yet to prove themselves in many other walks of life to which they aspire. Here in New Zealand, for example, why should it only be the young men who are admonished to go on the land? Why not the young women? The problem of what shall we do with our girls if not always so pressing as that other, What shall we do with our boys? is not always capable of the matrimonial solution, and parents have to bethink themselves of the relative advantages of domestic service, typewriting, factory and shop work. Nobody seems to think of the land, however, in that connection, though there is really no great reason why they shouldn't. No doubt most of my readers saw a cablegram in the papers last week, in which it was announced that the Russian Government had decided to establish an agricultural school for women—the first in Europe—where special training will be given in dairying, gardening, bee and poultry-keeping, and cattle and sheep-raising. As showing, too, that the movement is not an uncalculated experiment, it is stated that 325 ladies have applied for admission to the institution. Does not the incident fire some of you young New Zealand ladies with the ambition to become farmers on your own account. I am sure that were such a desire to become general there would be not the least difficulty in securing free grants of land to the adventurous among the fair sex who cared to take them up. They would find Wittefords in plenty to plead their cause. The prospect surely opens out a more alluring future than you can get from behind a typewriter, and if only as a step to marriage, the scheme is superior to any other I have come across, for where is the use of sending the boys on the

land unless you train the girls to be real help-meets to them in addition to being mere wives. We are making great efforts to raise funds for the establishment of a college for the education of Maori girls so that they would be suitable wives for the educated Maoris; but an agricultural school on the lines of the Russian institution is hardly less necessary if our young farmers are to make the best of things.

Newspaper Nonsense.

One scarcely knows whether to be more pleased with the flattery or more astounded at the inaccuracy of an American writer, who has been writing up New Zealand in one of the American journals, a copy of which reached me by the last San Francisco mail. It is to be hoped for the credit of trans-Pacific journalism that the reporters and descriptive writers in the States take a little more trouble with facts than this scribbler does. Most complimentary as he means to be to us colonists, the intense superficiality of his knowledge regarding us, together with its inaccuracy, is most irritating. Scarcely a statement does he make that is not wrong in some important particular, or wrong altogether. It is news to us to hear of a bed of tree oysters just outside of Auckland, the property of two men, who have been made rich by it. In the writer's description of tidal flats covered with small trees, to which the bivalves attach themselves and wax big and fat, one can with difficulty recognise the mangrove mud-flats of some of our creeks. Again, a glance at the year-book would have saved this writer from such a statement as this that "women are much sought after matrimonially, for they are outnumbered by the men two to one. There is no need for a woman becoming an old maid." Before one gets half through the article he is prepared for any misstatement, and so it does not surprise one to learn that the postmasters throughout the colony "collect all taxes, municipal and governmental, and all customs and internal revenues," or that "the Government gives free treatment at Rotorua to all and sundry"; or that everybody in the colony bets, "from babes in arms to tottering grand-parents"; or that if the visitor is an American he "will be royally received and entertained, while a Londoner is left to cool his heels in an ante-room." Allowing for the humour of exaggeration, this account of New Zealand stands out as one of the most inept productions I have set eyes on. One may forgive geographical mistakes, as, for instance, when the Sydney "Bulletin" last week spoke of Rotorua as 40 miles distant from Auckland, but that such nonsense as we have quoted should be allowed to pass unchallenged, as it doubtless will be the case is too much. I imagine that American paper numbers its readers by the hundred thousand, and this is the sort of stuff it gives them by way of description of these islands. Save us from the irresponsible American press, which is ready to print any nonsense of any irresponsible penster that has a little imagination. Talk of the educative influence of newspapers after this!

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