

# News of the Dominion.

## OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

January 8

### The Imperial Programme.

**P**OLITICS die harder than anything else, as we were reminded early in the week by the interview with the Prime Minister published in the "Lyttelton Times" and sent broadcast over the land. Just as if the poor man had never seen a session of Parliament or passed a sleepless political night. Nevertheless, the whole country has been canvassing the interview, and many admit that the statements of Sir Joseph have opened their eyes to the greatness of the work performed during the late session.

For my part, I meet with several who think with me that Sir Joseph made two mistakes in the interview aforesaid. (1) He gave pride of place to the financial measures; (2) he was remarkably moderate in his proofs of the comparatively sterling character of the session. The first week was an excess of modesty very becoming, but to be set right of necessity for his own sake. The second was an error of moderation easily rectified.

The financial measures are very important certainly, but the pride of place belongs of right to the Imperial division of the Acts of the session, and that division represents, or, rather, is the outcome of, some very masterly conduct on the part of the Prime Minister himself. No overseas statesman has ever enjoyed the same honour, or achieved the same prestige in London. No one has ever succeeded so well by his personality. As smoothing the way for the Imperial programme now being carried out so vigorously by the naval authorities and Lord Kitchener, the work of the Prime Minister in London was supreme. His modesty impelled him to give the second place to the consequential Acts, but they are epoch-making measures entitled to pride of place, and not to be deprived of it because the Prime Minister chooses to keep himself in the background.

### A Comparison.

As for the relative importance of the session beside the other sessions of our long list, Sir Joseph might have cast his eyes over the whole with a bird's eye view for the benefit of that interviewer and the enlightenment of the interviewer's readers. Let us just consider it for a moment. The first session of the list stands remarkable for the establishment of representative government after a memorable struggle. Between that session and well into the 'sixties, the points of mark were of Maori wars; then stands prominent the first loan (consolidated) of six millions, and self-reliance gave a special note to one of the sessions of the 'sixties as did the celebrated "Memorandum" to another. The Public Works policy of Sir Julius Vogel burst into flame in 1869, giving a tremendous mark to the session of that year, and the mark was repeated by the details and alterations of the policy, and the establishment of the first great Public Works Department—a truly wonderful performance, considering that it had to be created, together with its twin sister of Immigration, out of nothing, by men of no experience. One marvels at the success that attended their efforts, and one wonders thankfully that they did not make more mistakes.

### Legislative Events.

Between these years and 1875 the sessions were made remarkable by the passing of the Land Transfer Act and the establishment of the New Zealand Government Insurance Department, two measures of most important and beneficial character. In 1875 came the Abolition of the Provinces with the Counties Act and the Provincial Machinery Act, a batch of measures which gave vast thought and trouble to the Government, and were vastly important in their efforts. 1875 saw the Education Act, by which we all wear to this day. Four years later we got manhood suffrage, and then came sundry tariffs, a big one in 1882, and a bigger one in 1887, with the

spectacle of the Opposition marching every time into the Government lobbies to save the Government measure from the Government followers. 1890 saw the change of Government; it was the first year of the Liberal regime, which has endured to this day, with a promise of indefinite further endurance, and it saw the change of the incidence of taxation long promised. That alone makes that session for ever memorable. The Land Act of 1892 made the session of that year memorable; the Land for Settlement Act and the Advances to Settlers Act did the same service for 1894, and who will ever forget the sensation in that session provided by the Bank of New Zealand Act? In the decade of the nineties, the Labour Acts in their big ahead made many sessions important and memorable. In 1899 the first Imperial note was struck with the South African Contingents, and men felt a new departure in the building of the Empire of which we are all proud. Woman suffrage in 1892 left a big mark on that year's session, and the Licensing Acts, beginning with 1893, left some other marks of importance. In 1908 there was the great consolidation of the biggest division of the law.

### A Record Session.

That makes a good long list of measures, showing bright all along the course of our Parliamentary history. But one sees at a glance that the plums were divided very widely. At most the allowance of them never exceeded three in any session, and seldom reached that height. The contrast of the session just over is, therefore, very great. That session added three great divisions of measures to the Statute Book, amounting to some dozen Acts of importance, many of them of the very first, such as the Imperial division and the financial division, the Native Land Act, and the social division, all of which were detailed in this column last week. Literally, there has never been anything like it in our history. There has been more noise and more reverberation, so to speak. No doubt also there has been a higher level of importance with single measures. But such a big programme has never been carried through at such a high level. The political work of the year was not in the least degree injured by the postponement of the session. The Prime Minister was right to speak of the importance of the session, but he might have put it much stronger, and he might have been more just to himself.

### Food for Mirth.

Mr. Vile is the cause of another reminder of the eternal insistence of politics. He has been writing to the "Spectator" of London. In his letter he said many things, chief of which was that he knows absolutely that many of the State tenants feel themselves obliged at every election to vote against their convictions. He has been denounced accordingly as a traducer of his country, and challenged to prove his assertion, if only with a single case. He replied without accepting the challenge, simply denying that he had done anything wrong, and repeated the assertion, leaving the public to make what they like of it, just as he had left the readers of the "Spectator." Now, Mr. Vile is the editor of the journal of the Farmers' Union, and therefore claims to speak with authority about the feelings of the farmers, and amongst them are the State tenants. There is, of course, only one meaning in his statement to the "Spectator." It is that the ballot is under the thumb of the Government, and that every State tenant who votes against the Government at an election is in danger of harassment, even to the forfeiture of his lease. It follows also from this that the ballot being open to the Government, all men who vote against the Government at elections, if they are in any way connected with the Government employ, are punished by loss of privilege and loss of position. To us in this country such a statement is food for mirth. But to the readers of the "Spectator," who know nothing about our affairs, the inference from Mr. Vile's statement is a terrible thing, implying all the evils I have attached to it. As above, Mr. Vile pleads that he only said that the tenants are of a certain opinion, not that they were

right. But that it the thinness of oddities. He wanted the readers of the "Spectator" to understand that this is a country very much over-ruled by its Government, which gets knowledge from the ballot boxes denied to every one else. He has held the Dominion up as an awful example of the tyranny of Liberalism, which is Socialism and demagogism rolled into one, and when confronted with the only possible explanation of his words, refuses to do anything but repeat them. Nobody takes him seriously here, for every one knows him to be quite harmless in playing with these issues. But for the "Spectator" letter there is an idea that an official exposure ought to be sent to the journal. But there are people who differ. To them the whole affair is so absurd, as put by Mr. Vile, that before long the readers of the "Spectator" must see for themselves that there is nothing in it. Mr. Vile's wild, outrageous statement is curious, as showing the extent to which prejudice can blind men in the Dominion.

### Educational Conference.

The teachers are in conference, and they have been busy. "Inter alia" discussing the address of the president. Of all the pessimists this is the worst. It appears that the physical training of the school children is a myth, that 90 per cent of them, having bad teeth, are past praying for utterly; that the school buildings are for the most part filled with infection which they disseminate broadcast in all directions; that home influence has arrived at such a state of evil that all children ought to be clapped into boarding houses, and attended to by the State; that the air space in the schools is shockingly inadequate in most of the schools; that the private schools are doing a vast deal of harm, and ought to be at least put under the inspectors forthwith; and that there is little or no attempt at imparting anything worthy the name of agricultural instruction. After that farrago we must be thankful to learn that the inspectors and the teachers have got on friendly terms, and are doing real good work. Really, one finds it difficult to realise where we are educationally, and still more to reject the conclusion that the entire generation is on the eve of perishing, of bad teeth, bad air, bad instruction, bad drilling, and bad home influences. Public opinion is not wildly disturbed.

One thing is endorsed out of all this pessimism. It is a fact that if we export, this season, twenty-one or twenty-two millions of value, three-quarters of it will come from the man on the land. An interest that represents some fifteen or sixteen millions out of twenty-one ought to be better catered for under a system of education that professes to fit all youth for the struggle it has before it in life. We spend money to enable boys to make themselves lawyers, doctors, clergymen, artisans, mechanics, what not, but anybody who wants to become a farmer, if he cannot go to Lincoln, must hire himself out as a farm labourer and pick up what rule-of-thumb farming he can, and put up with it even if half is hidebound with all sorts of ancient prejudices.

### The Wool Sales.

Wool is wool this year, and the sales have begun briskly therefore. The old controversy has arisen, as it is bound always to do at such times, "Is it better to sell in the local market, or will it pay better to send the wool to London?" We have all the ancient arguments on both sides. The representatives of the London brokers declare that they can guarantee a better price per bale. The buyers who have come out so far insist that they have brought out all the necessary competition for keeping up the interest and the prices. Those who know the wool markets declare that if we only knew how prices were going to rule for some months ahead, we should have some certainty about the matter. At present, however, it is certain that the money, from the local sales is prompt, and there is no chance of having some day to cash up. Prices being what they are, the producer takes this advantage, and feels, moreover, that it is not necessary to gamble for a rise, which is unlikely, and may take the shape of a drop. So it is probable that some millions' worth of wool will change hands this season before getting afloat. There is a very broad smile on every country face one sees just now. To the owners "Happy new year" is a thing very real and substantial.

### More Strikes.

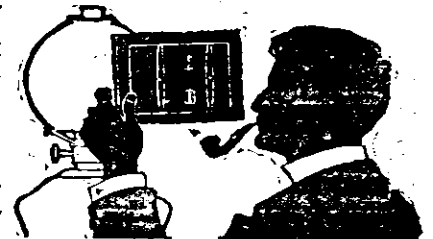
No sooner is it announced that the Greymouth strike remnants are settled than another strike looms large. This time it is the slaughtermen of the big meat companies, who have observed the law, by giving fourteen days' notice of their intention to retire from employment unless their terms are complied with. There is much excitement in the street. The law is clear enough on one point, however. It is that the matter must be dealt with by the Conciliation Commissioner, to whom the employers have appealed. The Commissioner is, moreover, bound by law to appoint assessors to act for the men, who have failed to do so for themselves. The point is that the men, like the Greymouth colliers, have no intention to recognise the Conciliation man at all, and the law will have to make them. It is disconcerting to the men who have persuaded themselves that the strike trouble had been scotched, if not killed, in 1908. After eighteen months, the Arbitration machinery, as amended in 1908, is once again on test. For my part, I have little doubt it will win through all right. Nobody ever pretended to have found perfection in 1908; but everybody acknowledges that the improvements of that year have reduced all the difficulties.

### The Coming of Kitchener.

"The devil to pay and no pitch hot." This ancient remark I heard from the lips of a local soldier who was discussing the coming of Lord Kitchener. He added that the noble lord had made, and was making, everybody "sit up" in Australia, and would end by making us go through the same process here. My friend is one of those who wants to see the whole of the forces of this glorious country concentrated—the word has a military sound, and reminds him of Napoleon—

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