

# News of the Dominion.

## OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

February 5.  
Railways Must Pay.

MR MILLAR is still talking to deputations about the railways and the way to manage them and their belongings. Two things come out from the farrago that gets into the newspapers. They are the expressed determination of the Minister to make the railways pay without coming on the Consolidated Fund—i.e., the taxpayer—to supplement, and the certainty that in the matter of economy the Minister is on the right track. For the first, it is quite true that the Government prided themselves for some time on the fact that they were making it a question of policy to be content partly with the indirect advantages of railway management. But the truth is also as prominent that the time has gone by for any exceptional treatment of any section of the railway users. The time has come for the railways to be regarded as a business concern to be run "on its own." That they can be so run is proved by the evident readiness of so many people to take them over at a rent and feather their nests out of the poor, dear, delightful, unsuspecting travelling public. Therefore the Minister, though apparently out of agreement with the expressed sentiments of his distinguished predecessors in office, is acting with consistency, as well as with the logical consent of his colleagues. The only difference between his management and the management which certain people would like to see brought about is that the profit will be enough, but not abnormal, and the consequence will be that nobody will bless his stars that he was born a drone, with a prodigious power of sucking blood from the well-endowed, and the art of hiding his little game.

### Running Empty and Running Full.

For the second point, the right line. Of course, every railway man will tell you, if you ask him politely and without any apparent desire to suck his brains—a thing every expert blocks on principle—that the right line of management is to keep the train miles down to the minimum. In other words, the more the miles of full carriage, the better will the railways pay, and the more trains are run empty the worse will be the railway balance sheet. It seems absurd to dwell on such a self-evident proposition, but the fact is that the railways are not regarded by the public with anything approaching to understanding. No doubt this cutting down of the facilities offered for carrying nothing expensively may be overdone. There are many critics who think it has been overdone already by Mr. Millar. But they are like the rabbit who is afraid of losing his job, and therefore lets go a good few of the best breeders, so that bunny may show his gratitude with perennial recurrence. These critics want a grievance, but it is apparent that they are going to be wiped out by the ordinary course of events. With the latest figures prove clearly, with £273,000 increased revenue and £85,000 additional expenditure.

### Going to the Bottom.

Mr. Millar has won golden opinions in another direction by ordering the survey of the Rangitoto Channel. The practical man declares that he cannot see what else in the multitude of the conflicting evidence the Minister of Marine could have done than go to the bottom of the sea for the truth.

In this connection it comes with a shock that the New Zealand Shipping Company has determined to offer the Papanui for sale over in Melbourne, where she got into safety after an uncommonly long and plucky fight on the part of all concerned. It reminds us that the company has been exceptionally hard hit during the last few months. A company which has deserved especially well of the Dominion, inasmuch as it rescued the people from the monopoly of Shaw, Savill in the old days, which the pioneers remember well enough. They inaugurated the first shipments of wheat and other grain to the London market, which up to that time was regarded as inaccessible by water from New Zealand. After that the company led the way into steam at a time when the future of the

Dominion was looking particularly blue. On the whole, it has been a very public-spirited company, which, though not started exactly on philanthropic principles, nevertheless did place the public benefit high in its scale of consideration. It therefore deserves much consideration, particularly as it has met with undeserved hard luck with three steamers of the first-class. These disasters have walked into the company's chest one may readily compute to the extent of a cool hundred thousand or so. The loss is no doubt partly covered by insurance, but in these cases of big repairs there is an element of the uncertain and the unsatisfactory always; besides, there is certain loss. Fate has certainly not been at all kind to one of the institutions that has deserved best at her hands. Better no doubt from the material point of view to have made a total loss; like the Waratah, for example. The shipyards of the United Kingdom are full of stories of how many firms refused to tender for the construction of this vessel, which they declared was doomed by her very plans to disaster. But these things you hear only in the cabins and saloons of the ships that frequent the port of Wellington. The subject never finds its way into print, and the big ship lies somewhere at the bottom in the very odour of maritime sanctity. At any rate, the owners are not worried with the necessity for making extensive and expensive repairs.

### Sacking the Large Sack.

While we are talking railways it is as well to mention the satisfaction of philanthropic men with the determination of the management to enforce the regulation limiting the weight carried in sacks. It is an open secret, notwithstanding the outcry on the part of certain merchants of the old school, that the heavy sacks are responsible for the large proportion of men who become prematurely old before they are forty-five. Hence the heavy penalties that are exacted in all cases of excess over 200lbs by the Department. The public likes the penalties because they are a guarantee that obstinate people will not make it their business to make profit out of disobedience of the regulations.

### Military Matters.

Military matters are brisk in connection with the visit of the Marshal. There is nothing definite to report, however, or to gossip over. There is comfort for the military mind from another source. It appears that Lord Roberts has just discovered that the Dominion has accepted the principle of compulsory service, and he has warmly told the Dominion what he thinks of such high-minded patriotism. To which all we can say here is that it is the first time Lord Roberts has during a varied and most eventful career had occasion to ask for the benefit of "better late than never."

### Civil Service Changes.

The changes in high places have been received with favour. Everybody is sorry to lose Mr. Warburton from the Auditor-Generalship, because it is universally recognised that he had the honesty, firmness, grasp, and independence necessary for the position. At the same time the opinion is just as strong and widespread that Colonel Collins, L.S.O., has the same qualities for the position and sundry others which will make his occupancy of the post pleasant to all men. But it must be remembered in this connection that there is not a mind more independent and determined than the Colonel's, but as it is accompanied by tact, judgment, kindness, modesty, justice, and above all things thorough familiarity with the history and practice, to say nothing of the principles, of the auditing of all the public accounts, which he knows like his pocket, as the French say in their inimitably forcible manner, he is likely to make the best Auditor-General we have ever had.

Dr. Fitchett was a member of the Public Trust Board, and happened to be fatigued with his duties of the Solicitor-Generalship. There was, therefore, one reason why he should be put into command of the Public Trust Department. Moreover, there were two things which weighed. Firstly, Mr. Poynton was due for promotion, and the Advances position is promotion, when put together with the Under-Secretaryship of

the Treasury. He has to win his spurs as Under-Secretary, a position of which he has absolutely no experience; so that his acceptance of the office is somewhat of an experiment. But he is an able man, and as there was no one in the Department quite fit for the promotion, the best thing has been done. In the second place, as to the Solicitor-Generalship, it has been for some time evident that there could not be two kings in Breatford. There was, in fact, a surplus of talent. It was not always easy to recognise seniority, and when opinions were asked of one man, which the other thought should have come to him for the solution of the enigmas concerned, it was not the happiest of families in that high place. Thus Professor Salmon is installed in the right place for him, without any disrespect to the other man, who has had a very hard time of it during the last few years, and deserves the promotion that has come to him in the guise of redistribution of offices. The main thing is that the service is generally better for the changes, and as Mr. Warburton's experience and uncompromising character, together with his great knowledge of business, general and particular, is retained for the Advances Department, there is really nothing more to be said, except that the Cabinet has kept its eye successfully on the public interest throughout. Even the Opposition journals are apparently quite satisfied. One almost wishes that the numbers of the party were somewhat larger, for it is not often they approve tacitly of the doings of the Cabinet.

### Opposition Blank Cartridges.

The political war is carried on nevertheless. The enemy uses blank a good deal of course, for at this season there is not much ammunition of the more serious order. A case in point is the pretence of warmth with which the explanation of Mr. Fowlds, in re the education expenditure is being assailed. Words apparently fail the Opposition organs here to characterise the reply he has made. The head and front of the reply of course is that it is so good. Hence it must be attacked as dishonest. The main dishonesty seems to be that the Minister has had the audacity to declare that the £47,000 of the endowment income has been a good thing for the Education Department. We are asked to believe that this is a most disingenuous statement. But the irate critic forgets that the endowments were earmarked for the Education Department. Had it not been for that, the department would have had to take pot luck, share and share alike with the rest of the service in the distributions of a revenue increased generally by a not earmarked £47,000. It simply would not have got the whole of that money. It would have had to share it with others. Hence the statement of the actual fact was a stroke of great power for Mr. Fowlds. Moreover, the real place of pinching is somewhat further back. The Opposition, and many others, insisted for many years on reductions of revenue. Well, the Government reduced the revenue considerably. The result is that there is not as much money to spend as there would have been had there been no reductions. Those who approved so heartily of the reductions have no right to abuse the Minister because he has not as much money as they think he ought to have for carrying on the service. To eat your cake and to have it at the same time is a thing impossible, as we were taught in early life. These critics have forgotten. But as I said in the beginning they are only firing blank.

### The Coming Storm.

Something more than blank is being fired about the bookies. The worst of the gentry have broken out in a bad place, proving at Miramar the rottenness of pony racing as sometimes practised. It is quite immaterial what was the cause of that disgraceful exhibition. It is enough for most men that the whole thing was due to the class of sport prevalent at meetings of that sort. These are doomed under the Act of last Session of course. But their enemies are not satisfied to denounce them. They are making the running strong against the bookies generally, and there is a row brooding which will burst next session. There will be a trial of strength in re the bookie without a doubt. A counter is threatened against the totalisator, but no one believes that any harm will come to the popular instrument.

### Echoes of the Australian Strike.

Newcastle has its echoes here. During the week those champions of the

Labour cause, Messrs. Richardson Rae and McLaren, M.P., have contributed their quota to the discussion, and very strong they have shown themselves to be as champions of their friends. It is a good case on paper. But the case will be settled before long on the lines they dislike so much. On the whole, however, the public does not like importations from the other side, as witness the applause accorded to the prosecution of a certain newspaper. About that matter, one cannot at the present stage say anything, of course. But of the other it is pretty certain that the defeat of the men of Newcastle will not cause any one to wear mourning here. It will be one of the misfortunes of our best friends in which we take a certain amount of rather keen delight. The lesson is good for the world, for it seems that despite the fact that there are several undeniably good points in the case for the men, points involving the "vend" the shipping ring, and the general uncertainties of the coal market, the strike is, after all, the worst remedy, as ineffective and unprincipled. The dock strike of 1889 is quoted by Mr. Richardson Rae as an example of the efficacy and righteousness of the strike method, and this ex-M.P. for a N.S.W. constituency and ex-labour leader of the Mother State, has some right to speak as one knowing many things necessary to discussion, and he puts his points well. So does Mr. McLaren, who is beginning where the other left off. Both forget that the world has advanced a great deal since the time of the Dock upheaval, in the direction of proving the general usefulness of the strike remedy and the superior efficacy of arbitration laws justly administered. Then there was no remedy but force. Now there is every reason for avoiding force. Hence public opinion then stood by the dockers, and now turns its back on strikers in sorrow surely but without hope of alteration.

### The Dock in Difficulties.

The dock continues to puzzle the engineers who are responsible as much as the public, which is not. The former now are lamenting that they have come almost to the end of their experiments with various kinds of cement, all of which refuse to do the right thing in deep water without the coveted coffee dam, and there is talk of their having to go to Japan for wrinkles; the Japanese solving the difficulty, it is said, by the use of scoria in their concrete. Now there is much scoria in this country. While we are waiting for the next move, we have the protests to consider which are rising thick in favour of the discarded cranes of the King's Wharf. The criticism gaining ground outside is that the Board was too much in a hurry to capitulate to the protest of a single firm. It should, we are informed, in many keys of complaining ferocity, have told this firm that the cranes are new, and for that reason slow, that this defect will disappear gradually, that all users of the wharf must therefore submit, and that if they can make out a case for a rebate the Board is ready to listen. That would have saved the cranes, whereas now it seems that sixteen thousand pounds have been thrown into the sea. We want that money taken out and put back on to the wharf.

A violent discussion at the Board's meeting about the Board's habit of going into committee adds point to these things. It also serves to exonerate the chairman from responsibility for the practice, and happily it does not show that the practice is doomed.

### Ten Per Cent.

The Gas Company has just added to the happiness of the N.Z. gas list by completing a nice dividend of 10 per cent. for the year. It reminds us all of the incandescent mantle of a dozen years ago, which sheltered gas with apparent completeness from the rivalry of electricity, or at all events gave it a new lease of life. Wellsbach was the name associated with the change. Therefore the prosperity of gas companies reminds one of Wellsbach. The name, however, reminds some readers of the "Scientific American" of a paragraph recently appearing to the effect that Wellsbach had invented an incandescent mantle to be used with electric lighting, and was about to exploit the same for all it may be worth, to the consternation of the owners of gas shares. The story gives force of a sort to the company's complaint that the Council does not permit them to compete against its own electric installation for the lighting of the city. It does not at the same time lessen the desire of the citizens to avoid buying the company out at high figures.