

News of the Dominion.

OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

WELLINGTON, April 12.

A Warning to Wellington.

WHAT there is something in the views expressed by Dr Malcolm McLaren with reference to Wellington's geological instability, cannot, of course, be denied, but whether Wellington residents will act on his advice to flee the town is, to say the least, doubtful. Mr R. Speight, of the Canterbury College, was approached on the subject by a Christchurch "Press" representative. Mr Speight pointed out that Wellington's chief danger lay in the reclaimed portions of the city. It was noticed in Japan that where earthquakes had taken place on made-up land, the damage was very much greater than it would have been if the ground had been naturally formed.

Mr H. F. Skey, of the Christchurch Magnetic Observatory, was also asked to give his views on the subject. Mr Skey explained that, in his opinion, the earthquake predicted by Dr McLaren would be purely local, and would therefore not affect other parts of the country. Mr Skey assured the reporter that in the event of a more substantial seismic disturbance occurring at Wellington, the distance between the Empire City and Christchurch was too great for it to affect the southern city to any extent.

From City Council to Arbitration Court.

Keen disappointment was felt by more than one member of the Wellington City Council at that body's refusal to settle the vexed question of what is a fair living wage for a Corporation labourer. There have been two sittings of the conference that was set up to settle the dispute, and still the problem remains unsolved. Mr T. M. Wilford, who presided at the meeting held at the Town Hall on Monday night, expressed his regret at having been unsuccessful in his endeavour to ascertain what a fair living wage really was. He had made extensive inquiries, and found that there was such a diversity of opinion as to how much it taken to keep a house going, that he was unable to arrive at a definite decision. Some of the councillors openly expressed their disappointment at Mr Wilford's failure to arrive at a definition, and raised objections to the chairman's suggestion that the labourers should take the matter to the Arbitration Court. With regard to the schedule that had been drawn up for consideration, a councillor objected to it on the ground that the amount of some of the items supposed to be consumed in twelve months was overdrawn. For instance, it was not likely that a family of four would get through twenty-six bottles of vinegar and thirteen pounds of mustard a year. It was pointed out by the Mayor that if it were agreed to pay the labourers nine shillings per day, they would have to give the tram conductors the same wage, as there could be no discrimination. After a lengthy and fruitless discussion, it was resolved to refer the matter to the Arbitration Court.

Housing Parliament.

Mr. H. J. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works, has sent a reply to the representations of the Architects' Institute concerning the Parliament House competitions. He says the schedules of accommodation were drawn up by parliamentary officers, and the dimensions given in a few cases should serve as a guide. The Government avoided definite grouping of rooms, so as not to hamper competitors. The same reason is stated for the vagueness regarding the size of the chambers and public galleries.

There will be no change of site. The old Parliamentary Buildings will remain, but will not be used for Parliamentary purposes. The scale plans will not be altered, several competitors having already made progress on the stated scale. The Government will be guided by an assessor and committee as to the exhibition of designs, but competitors may exhibit their own.

No amendment is contemplated regarding the competition of Civil servants and no extension of time can be granted. Clauses will be inserted in the conditions

providing that each competitor must certify that the design is his own work or that of assistants under his supervision. No competitor will be awarded more than one premium.

The conditions are now being reprinted.

Disastrous Waterspout at the Kermadecs.

The training ship Amokura returned last week from the Kermadec Islands, having performed the annual cruise round the group for the purpose of searching for castaways, and inspecting the depots placed in that locality for the benefit of shipwrecked mariners. The departure of the vessel from Auckland, which was somewhat delayed owing to the presence of scarlet fever amongst the boys, took place on 30th March, and the trip has occupied 13 days. North-east and easterly winds prevailed during the cruise, the outward part of which was considerably protracted by inclement weather. The vessel brought from Sunday Island Mrs. and Miss Bell, Messrs. R. and K. Bell; also Mr. J. Clarke, who had visited the islands with a view to purchase. The islands are, therefore, now uninhabited. Mrs. Bell, who, with her two sons, has been living on the island for the past six years, experienced a most trying period since last April, at which time disaster befel them, and practically the whole of their plantations, crops, and houses were demolished by a heavy waterspout, which occurred very suddenly, and without warning, just after dark.

The first intimation of anything unusual about to happen was a dense darkness all round the homestead, the sky being black as ink. The first discharge from the waterspout was accompanied by a few gusts of wind and several vivid flashes of lightning. The downpour increased to such proportions that it very soon flowed through the houses, carrying everything before it. The unfortunate inhabitants managed to find their way to higher ground with difficulty owing to the large amount of water under foot, and the dense blackness of the night. After a most trying time they managed to find a place of refuge, and spent a very anxious night amidst the sounds of rushing flood waters and thunderous noises created by the huge land slips, caused by the fall of such a heavy volume of water. On the following morning they ventured from their places of refuge in search of any articles of comfort or sustenance which the elements might have left for their benefit, only to find that they had been rendered practically homeless and foodless.

It was found that immense quantities of earth, which had been brought down by numerous land slips, had demolished their plantations and crops entirely, and which were in many cases covered to a depth of many feet with stones and pumice, which had been spread out in every direction by the flood waters in their rush through the flat on which the houses and crops were located. Fences were found to have disappeared underground in places, and in some instances gullies were formed under fences to a depth of perhaps eight or ten feet. The only remains of the houses were a few posts indicating their former location, whilst the gravel floors were replaced with stones and pumice. The fences having become useless enabled the cattle to roam at large, and thus was completed the ruin of any higher portion of the plantations which might not have suffered beyond recognition by the flood.

The inhabitants were in sore straits indeed, as their winter stock, on which they mainly depended, had disappeared. Their best soil had been covered with pumice, and they had nothing to sow for future growing. Various excursions, both long and arduous, were made in search of food, which was very scant in the winter months. With the advent of summer, however, things assumed a brighter aspect, and a former neglected plantation was visited to procure fruit when it ripened.

On the day following that on which the disaster occurred, the inhabitants, having witnessed the fruits of their labours for the past six years demolished

in a few hours, decided to return to New Zealand at the first opportunity, which did not occur until twelve months later—in fact, on the anniversary of the disaster, when the Amokura arrived there. The ship remained at Sunday Island for two days to enable the Bells to embark. On visiting various parts of the island it was found that the locality of the homestead had not been the only part affected, as it was found that several slips of land had taken place, and in one case, where had formerly been a well grassed valley, there now appeared a layer of stones and pumice. Judging by the description of the parts visited by the waterspout, it would seem that it first visited the north side of the island, thence following a south-westerly course until taking its departure on the west side of the island. It was noticed that the lakes, of which there are four on the island, were found very high, three of the lakes being 12, 8 and 5 feet above normal, respectively. One crater, usually dry, had become a lake having a depth of nine feet; and did not resume its dry state for upwards of three months.

Mrs Bell, whose appearance indicated that she had undergone a trying ordeal, states that the water spout was not in any way connected with volcanic action. Earth tremors, which occur occasionally, were not evident during the period of devastation. A period of five days of continuous light rain followed the water spout, after which the weather assumed its usual conditions.

Fire at Pakuranga.

Another link with the early days of Auckland was severed last week, when the historic building known as "Bleak House," situated at Pakuranga, was destroyed by fire. The house was for many years the residence of the late Hon. Every McLean, at one time acting-superintendent of the Province and a member of the Legislative Council, and his brother (Mr. Robert McLean). It was built in 1848, at the time when the first party of Imperial pensioners were settled in the neighbourhood, by the two brothers, McLean and their father, and much difficulty was experienced in working the stone used for its walls. The appliances possessed by the builders were few, and much patient labour was required before it was completed. The house had been much added to as the years went on, and at the time of its destruction contained some twenty rooms. It stood on an eminence, and until a thick grove of pines was planted around it the appearance it presented was such as to make its name an appropriate one.

Details regarding the fire are meagre, but it is understood that the building was occupied by a Mr. Doherty, who was outside when the outbreak occurred, and entered to find the kitchen in flames. Efforts to extinguish the fire proved useless, and practically none of Mr Doherty's furniture and effects were saved. The building belonged to the trust estate of the late Mrs. Robert McLean, and was insured in the New Zealand office for £500. The glare of the fire was plainly to be seen in Auckland, owing to the elevation on which the building stood.

Four Maoris Drowned.

Three Maori girls, daughters of Horri Thompson, an old resident, and also a Maori boy about fifteen, were drowned at the Waikato Heads last week.

An Antarctic Curiosity.

Several specimens of ten-legged sea spiders were obtained by Mr. D. G. Lillie, biologist of the Terra Nova during the vessel's recent antarctic cruise. Although they possess two more legs than ordinary land spiders, they have a very spidery appearance. Their bodies are long and narrow, measuring about two inches and a half and three inches, and they have a uniform brownish yellow colour. Specimens were first discovered by Mr. Hodgson (biologist of the Discovery expedition) in 1902, and his specimens were regarded as quite a zoological feature of Captain Scott's first expedition. The exact position of these creatures in the world's fauna has not been definitely determined yet, but their relationship to the arachnida—a class which includes spiders, scorpions and mites—has been established. Mr. Lillie has a great array of bottles with preserved specimens at the Canterbury museum. They are all zoological specimens, and they will be sent to experts in the Old Country, who

will describe them and work out their affinities to animals already described and classified. Several years will be occupied in the work. At the present time it is largely a matter of collecting and noting facts. Later on, when knowledge of marine animals in the Antarctic seas is more extensive, generalisations and theories will be made, and some idea will be obtained of the relationship between the animals that live in the waters of the northern and the southern hemispheres. Up to the present the South Pacific Ocean has been neglected in regard to these investigations, and there is almost a virgin field for research.

Trade Prospects With Canada.

"I find in the South a growing interest in Canadian affairs, and I formed the impression that there will be a much larger business between Canada and New Zealand in the future," said Mr. W. A. Beddoe, Canadian Trade Commissioner, who last week returned to Auckland, after a fortnight's tour of the South, during which he visited Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin.

Mr. Beddoe, speaking to a "Star" representative last week, said he went down as far as Dunedin for the purpose of making himself acquainted with South Island affairs. During his visit he had the pleasure of addressing gatherings at the Christchurch and Dunedin Chambers of Commerce, when he spoke generally of the prospects of New Zealand trade relations with Canada. He found, from observation and information supplied, that business had made considerable expansion during the last year from the previous year, and he found the commercial world intensely interested in Canadian affairs, and anxious to establish closer commercial relations.

Referring to his reception in the South, Mr. Beddoe said he could not speak too highly of the kindness extended to him as the representative of the Canadian Government in every city he visited during his absence. The business men he saw all expressed gratification at the action of the Canadian Government in sending out a representative to New Zealand, and they considered such action would undoubtedly lead to a very substantial expansion of trade with Canada. They realised that the Canadian Government were taking an interest in New Zealand, and a representative of a permanent character, gave them someone to whom they could go for authoritative statements in regard to Canada.

The prospects down Canterbury and Otago, continued Mr. Beddoe, were good, although now, in the latter district, farmers were complaining somewhat of drought. This was evident in some parts of the country, where the grass looked very dry.

Hone Heke Memorial.

Large numbers of natives and Europeans flocked to Kaikohe last week to witness the unveiling of the monument to Hone Heke, for which elaborate preparations had been made.

After luncheon the Acting Prime Minister and his party were accompanied to the memorial stone by 2000 Maoris, and their arrival on the scene was heralded by fusillades of musketry from the hills adjoining. On arrival at the monument, which is in the form of an obelisk, an interesting ceremony, in which two clergy-men took part, was held. The ceremony, of Taingakawa was carried out by representative chieftains of the Northern tribes, after which the combined Maori choirs sang a hymn.

Mr. Carroll, in unveiling the monument, spoke eloquently of the virtues of the deceased Hone Heke.

The Hon. W. C. T. Carnarvon also spoke of his admiration for his dead friend.

Wi Rikihana, on behalf of the Northern tribes, made presents to Mr. Carroll and the Southern Maori visitors of valuable mats and mere with which the obelisk had been decorated.

After the State monument had been unveiled the party went to the Kaikohe Church burial ground, where a memorial stone erected by the relatives of the deceased was also unveiled by Mr. Carroll.

THE LAND DIFFICULTY.

In the morning a meeting of the assembled tribes was held, when a series of petitions were presented by Dr. To Rangihira, on behalf of the Northern natives, to the Hon. Mr. Carroll. The principal requests were that a special meeting of the Native Land Board should be held to individualise titles, and that the sum of £2000 should be made available under the Advances to Settlers Act.

Mr. Carroll informed the natives that