

# News of the Dominion.

## OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

May 13.

### Our Coronation Gift.

HERE were many noses pressed against the show window glass of a jewellers' shop in Lambton Quay yesterday, and many pairs of curious eyes gazing at the precious gold nugget which is to go to King George as New Zealand's Coronation gift. The present is, indeed, one "fit for a king," but there doesn't seem to be any particular popular enthusiasm about it. I listened to a few of the remarks from the gazers at that window, and most of those who had anything to say about it seemed to wonder what on earth the Government wanted to give the suggest to King George for. It is valued at £420—the nugget alone, that is; the elaborate mounting must add a very considerable sum to that. And the man in the street, when he learned that fact, muttered something in his teeth about it being a something waste of money. The suggest stands on a solid rock of silver, containing somewhere about 400 ounces of silver; beside the rock stands a solid silver figure of a miner guarding the golden treasure. The rock again stands on a beautiful base of totara-knot timber, greenstone, and gold, supported by four massive silver claws. The nugget weighs 99oz. 12dwt., and 600 ounces of silver are used in the mounting. A plate bears the inscription:—"G.R.I. From the Government and the people of New Zealand, 1911." One hopes that "George Rex Imperator" will value that suggest as it should be valued, and remember that it came from the West Coast of New Zealand, where all the good Seddonites live, and where more rain falls and more whisky is drunk than anywhere in Australasia. And if King George should only be persuaded to carry it in his state chariot at the coronation, or be photographed with it in Westminster Abbey, or do something with it that would be eabled all over the world to the exceeding great advertisement and glorification of New Zealand, we should feel that we had not sent that £420 suggest in vain.

### The Knyvett Court-martial.

I looked in at the Knyvett Court-martial on the opening day this week. It was a real Court-martial this time—quite an impressive, even dramatic, affair. Full-dress uniforms made the big room look like a review day, and Colonels were as plentiful there as M.P.'s usually are on Lambton Quay. One thing that struck me in that Court-martial was the great care exercised by the President (Colonel Heard) in the opening formalities, and another was that every latitude was extended to Mr. Knyvett and his officer-counsel in the conduct of the defence. The Court President was evidently determined that the utmost consideration should be given the military prisoner, and that there should be no room for any complaint of informal or one-sided proceedings.

The decision of the Court had not been made known at the time of writing.

### Kapiti Island as a Bird Sanctuary.

Historic Kapiti Island has been a good deal in the public eye this week, as the result of a visit to the island made last week end by the Hon. D. Ruddle and Mr. W. H. Field, M.P. Mr. Field, who is an enthusiast on the subject of Kapiti, its scenic beauties, and its native birds, induced the minister to make the trip, running across by oil launch from the mouth of the Waikanae River. At Kapiti the visitors stayed one night with the half-breed chief Hemi Matenga who was husband of the late celebrated Julia Martin, the Maori "Grace Darling" of Wakapuaka, and the second night with Mr. Richard Henry, the naturalist-recluse, who has spent nearly twenty years as custodian of the Government bird sanctuaries. The Government owns four-fifths of Kapiti; the rest is owned by the Maoris, who run sheep at the northern end of the island.

The Minister says he is impressed with the value of Kapiti as a native bird sanctuary, and I notice that some writers in the press advocate that huia should be placed there—when the Government succeeds in catching them. From my own knowledge of Kapiti, however, I

don't think it would be a suitable place for the huia, or any other of the rarer native birds. The island is overrun with wild geese and sheep, which have destroyed most of the small undergrowth; and the forest, of which there is a good deal, has lost much of its pristine luxuriance. Wild birds love the deep and tangled bush, and should the Government ever be fortunate enough to capture a pair of huia, the proper place for them would be the Little Barrier Island, in the Hauraki Gulf. There is the forest primal. Another drawback to Kapiti as a bird sanctuary is the presence of wild cats. They should be shot out, and this is by no means an easy task.

But in spite of everything, Kapiti, I am glad to say, is the home of many interesting native birds, one or two of which are already nearly extinct on the mainland. When I was camped there some years ago I was delighted to find that the makomako, or bellbird, was very plentiful and very tame. When we climbed through the bush to Titeremoana, the highest point, some 1,700 feet above the sea, overlooking the wild western cliffs, the bellbirds were all around us, singing merrily and ringing their tiny bell-notes and striking what sounded like tiny silver anvils in their little throats. The tui, too, is plentiful. Even if it were only because of the bellbird, Kapiti would be worth preserving as a sanctuary. I notice that there is a suggestion to turn the island into a sort of summer pleasure resort for people from the mainland. There are some reasons in favour of this, but I am afraid that once the summer pleasurer is admitted to the island in anything like numbers, the charm and value of Kapiti as a "tapu" spot for shy birds will quickly vanish. Fortunately, Kapiti is separated from the mainland by several miles of oftentimes stormy sea, and it has no very good landing-place. All this is in favour of the birds.

### The Progress of "Roddy."

The Hon. "Roddy" McKenzie is basking in the full glare of the limelight these days, and enjoying it hugely. The big West Coast suggest named after him—why, only the Lord and "Roddy" know—is to grace the King's Coronation, and incidentally advertise "Roddy" and his loving country. And now the masterful ex-contractor has just completed a grand tour through Taranaki in his capacity as Minister for Public Works. A report to hand goes to show that Taranaki is quiet dazed as the result of the Hon. "Roddy's" visit, and is rubbing its eyes hard and holding its head. For "Roddy" McKenzie is quite unlike any Minister of the Crown that Taranaki has ever entertained, not excepting even Mr. Seddon. He is said to out-Seddon Seddon—his blunt outspokenness, his way of calling a spade emphatically a spade, his wonderful endurance as an after-dinner talker, and his "ferocious energy," which, according to a Taranaki paper, has clean knocked out two of his secretaries. His exposition of political ethics made little Opanuke sit up and take notice. A deputation asked him for a railway to connect Opanuke with the great rowdy-dowdy outside world.

"Roddy" drew himself up to his full height just like a Ouida hero, and, scowling in his ferrest contractor manner, asked in hard, level tones: "How can you expect a railway when you return Opposition members, and the Opposition is always protesting against borrowing?" This way of looking at it capsize the deputation entirely. They couldn't think of anything to say in reply that would adequately express their feelings and at the same time placate the implacable-looking Minister. Perhaps they'll take the hint now and return a member who will be of exactly the desired political line. Then, but not till then, they may come and ask "Roddy" again for that railway.

Another incident of the Taranaki tour was a magnificent banquet to the Minister at Whangamomona-in-the-Bush. It was the biggest thing of the kind Whangamomona has ever known, and Whangamomona is nearly eighteen years old, and knows a thing or two. It did itself proud, and the speeches of fiery friendship made should for ever bind together the great hearts of "Roddy" and the Whangamomona citizens. It is alleged that the beer was finally brought in to the banquetting hall in wash jugs and buckets. It was a great night entirely—

one that must have reminded the Minister of his beloved West Coast. And if Whangamomona-ites don't need to humbly petition the Hon. "Roddy" for a railway, they know their duty, and vote loyally for the Government, and the rails from Stratford are close up to their township. Whatever Opanuke thinks of the Minister for Public Works, there is no doubt that his memory is enshrined deep in the big, loving heart of Whangamomona.

### East Coast Railway.

The proposal has been made by Mr. J. H. Gueson, chairman of the Railways Committee of the Auckland Chamber of Commerce, that a public meeting should be held to protest against what he has termed the evident intention of the Government to neglect Auckland railways, and particularly against the action of the Government in ignoring the claims of Auckland with regard to the East Coast railway by establishing a branch of the Public Works office at Napier, and vigorously prosecuting the line from that end, thus ultimately linking up Gisborne with Wellington before communication with Auckland is established.

With this proposal and statement the member for Bay of Plenty, Mr. W. D. S. Macdonald, who is at present in Auckland, certainly does not agree. Few people have a more intimate knowledge of the East Coast route, and the country it penetrates than the junior Government whip. Speaking to a "Star" representative last week Mr. Macdonald said that, personally, he was most interested in the early establishment of communication between Auckland and Gisborne, but he thought the Auckland Chamber of Commerce would lay itself open to ridicule by taking up such an attitude as that suggested by one of its members. The Government was this year spending more money on the East Coast railway than in any previous year, and was pushing the construction of the line on as rapidly as ever it could. To say that no attempt to link up Gisborne with Napier should be made until communication with Auckland was first established, was simply ridiculous. The Government did not build railways for any one particular town, but for the Dominion as a whole, and Auckland would only make itself a laughing stock if it suggested that the Government should pursue such a short-sighted policy as the construction of the East Coast railway only between Gisborne and Auckland. Construction work was being pushed on with commendable rapidity at the Gisborne and Tauranga ends, and the Government was pursuing a really active policy. The settlers between Gisborne and Napier had been crying out for a railway for 20 years; yet Auckland declared they should wait at least another 10 years before any attempt was made to give them what they wanted. At present the line extended north from Gisborne for 42 miles, to Malawa. From Tauranga to Paengaroa 23 miles of formation work had been completed. That left 110 miles to link up via Opoitiki. To the latter place construction would be easy. The 40 miles between Opoitiki and Motu would be most difficult of all. From Gisborne to Napier the distance to link up would be about 120 miles, and in his opinion communication would be established simultaneously between Napier and Gisborne, and Gisborne and Auckland, in 10 years' time. Auckland had nothing to be afraid of by the commencement of the Napier-Gisborne connection. On this, he believed, a start would be made this winter at the Gisborne end. In the meantime the East Coast line to Opoitiki could be pushed on from Te Puke over, easy country twice as fast, and twice as inexpensive to work as that between Gisborne and Napier, so that Auckland would be in touch with the whole of the Bay of Plenty long before the steel rails had been laid between Napier and Gisborne. So long as the Government actively proceeded with the work north of Gisborne, Mr. Macdonald said he quite failed to see the grounds for any objection to a start being made south of that place.

### Lost Overboard.

Jean Yviquel, a young Frenchman who came to Lyttelton a year ago on the French barque Marie, was lost overboard from the schooner Eliza Firth on Thursday morning. The schooner was on the voyage to Lyttelton, and when off Stephen Island, the crew was called to shorten sail. Yviquel was standing on

the timber on the deck, when he slipped and fell through the rail into the sea. A life buoy was thrown at once, but the sailor failed to reach it, and though a boat was got away promptly it was too late to effect a rescue. The captain, who went aloft, saw Yviquel sink within a few feet of the life buoy, his obtuse doublets impeding him. Deceased was about nineteen years old, and was a sturdy, jovial sailor, much liked by his shipmates.

### Wellington Burglaries.

Detectives Lewis, Andrews, and Cameron accomplished a smart piece of work on Saturday in the recovery of a great quantity of valuables, property belonging to private individuals, and the Wellington City Council. For some time past burglary after burglary has been reported to the police as having been effected in various parts of the city. Detection was difficult, but finally the arrest was made of a man of about 33 years of age. The next step was to recover the property, which consisted of rings, watches, silver cigarette cases, odd coins, pictures, clothing, boots, and other articles. Most of the plunder has now been recovered. It had been concealed on some reclaimed land beyond Waterloo Quay, and in places laminary to the detectives.

The dates and places of the burglaries were as follows:—David Williamson, Grant-road, March 18; Phillip Nathan, Hill-street, and W. C. Gasquoine, Hill-street, March 22; Dr. C. P. Knight, Bolton-street, April 15; Richard Pilling, Adelaide-road, April 13; N. Jacobs, Thorndon Quay, April 17; and Algar Williams, Hobson-street, May 3.

Coins of value which had been stolen from the Newtown Museum were also recovered, as well as a large quantity of plates cut from books in the Wellington Public Library.

### Compulsory Life Insurance.

The Mayor Christchurch (Mr. T. E. Taylor, M.P.) remarked to a reporter on Monday that he was favoured the late Sir Harry Atkinson's scheme for compulsory national life insurance, and the case came under his notice recently confirmed him in the belief that life insurance should be a State monopoly. The case referred to, he said, was that of a working man's wife, who was induced by a canvasser in 1896 to take out an industrial policy. She was to pay sixpence per week until she reached the age of 35, and she would receive £24. The policy matured recently, and she was offered £12 in full settlement of her claim after having paid in a total of £19 10/. At first she thought of contesting the matter in the courts, but abandoned the idea when the possibility of losing the money offered in settlement was brought to her attention. The woman was confident that the sum mentioned to her when she took out the policy, that would be payable to her when it matured, was £24. The policy was not issued to her till a long time after her proposal was accepted; it contained a provision that if the weekly payments were in arrears for eight weeks the policy would lapse. Right up to within nine weeks of the maturing of the policy she was waited upon for her payments, and when the policy matured she was informed that it had lapsed owing to the nonpayment of premiums. Upon threatening to take legal proceedings she was offered £12 in full settlement, and this she accepted, and so made the best of a bad bargain.

### Hauraki Plains.

Mr. Kensington (Under-Secretary for Lands) returned to Wellington from a visit of inspection to the Hauraki Plains drainage works, particularly the new works lately initiated to open up a large area adjoining the Whakahora Block, between that block and the junction of Waitoa and Piako rivers. This block, he reports, is of exceptionally good quality, and will amply repay expenditure. He hopes to be able to open a considerable portion of this block for selection in areas of one hundred acres early in the ensuing summer.

Mr. Kensington also visited and inspected a block of excellent quality at Waibaha, which will be opened next autumn. Thorough inspection was made of the whole of the other drainage works, and they were found to be in a most satisfactory condition. The engineer (Mr. J. B. Thomson) deserves great credit for the way in which he has carried out the works. In regard to the lands already opened for selection the results were found to be entirely satis-