

News of the Dominion.

OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

WELLINGTON, July 29.

These Winter Days.

ONE of those howling southerlies that periodically make things lively for us down here swept over Cook Strait this week. Last week's weather was perfect—clear and calm and bright—one of the periods of lull weather that are more frequent in this Windy City than most New Zealanders think. The clarity of the atmosphere was delightful. But it was the calm before a storm. Mr. Bates, the State weather prophet, had patiently predicted a "southerly buster" all that week of calm, and as the week ended up the luster came, and ripped and howled and made things unpleasant for four or five days on end. One pitied the coasting sailors out in Cook Strait those stormy nights, and yesterday came in fine again, the calm after the storm, a cheerful 'tween-gale interlude of sunshine and quiet waters.

It is on such a day as yesterday was, and that to-day, that one really appreciates the beauty of Wellington City and its surroundings. Everything seems clean-washed and refreshed by rain, and the brave cold wind. The warm summer time has its charm here, but I think I like the Whanganui-a-Tara best on clear crisp days of mid-winter. Generally there is sufficient tangle of cold in the air to make an overcoat desirable if you are much out-of-doors, and yesterday the sun glinted on fresh fallen snow on the upper parts of the Tararua Ranges, but clouds hid most of the mountains and sagged low on the rough and crumpled Orongorongo Ranges, on the opposite side of the harbour to Wellington City. The harbour lay bright and peaceful, untroubled but for a gentle, even pulsing, restful in its soft and regular breathing as it lapped the black feet of the tarry tees. Viewed from Kilmorie Hill, it was a picture to fascinate, as the afternoon deepened—the grey and smoky town below, the softly purple mists just stealing out of the valleys and wrapping the high range of Otari (that overtops Timakori) and the Flagstaff Hill and the heights above Day's Bay in a dreamy mantle. A bustling day on the water-front till the five o'clock whistles go; London liners loading and discharging, and a half dozen or so of big "red funnel" steamers rattling cargo in and out. Equalling them in energy, if not in importance, are a score of little coasting steamers, the sharp-nosed wave-punchers with smoke-grimed sails that battle out through the stormy Strait to the East and West Coasts and Nelson and the Marlborough Sounds. A schooner or ketch or two at the breast-work, sails loosened to dry after a fight with the gales. A big Italian barque at anchor down the harbour, storm-tossed far out of her course; she left Dunedin in Gyltelton the other day, but the God of Gales handled her unmercifully—square-rigged wind-jammers for Tachiri-matka to play up with are none too plentiful nowadays, and when he catches them he seems to give them an extra rough "man-handling"—and blew her clean past her port of destination and up into this funnel-mouthed port of ours. A deeply laden coal steamer churns slowly into her berth. Seagulls swoop down after their bread upon the waters. Off the far horn of Oriental Bay a white schooner lies scarcely moving, waiting for the ebb tide to help her Strait-wards. The fall of afternoon into the too-short twilight is a picture of soft colour and serenity, and the harbour is a purple-grey dream. But to the workers of the waterfront and the other billers of the city bustling homewards it is so familiar a scene that its beauties don't call for much notice or remark. Trams and bus are much more important these short winter days.

Politics.

Parliament opened on Thursday afternoon with little fuss. The death of Mr. T. E. Taylor, one of the most prominent members of the Legislature, is responsible for an adjournment from yesterday afternoon until Tuesday next. From all quarters there are expressions of deep regret at Mr. Taylor's unexpected end. "A good honest man gone," is the uni-

versal verdict. Even "Tommy's" old-time political enemies—and he had a good many—agree that he always fought fair and was staunch to his convictions. He was a power in the House, and quite its best speaker. He was incisive and not redundant; everything he said had a "bite" to it, and everyone listened to what he had to say. His loss will be felt for a long time to come.

The sessional fight promises to start off briskly next Tuesday, when the Opposition will take the usual advantage of the Address-in-Reply debate to heckle the Government for its manifold sins and transgressions. Nothing will be forgotten, not even those Coronation invitations that didn't come until too late. The Mokeau land transactions will be another text for Mr. Massey's sharp staccato sermons. Sir Joseph Ward's acceptance of a baronetcy will be worried for all it is worth, with a view to the coming elections, of course.

The session will no doubt last until well into November. Long before that time members will be pining for their loving constituencies again. The general elections are expected to take place about a week or ten days before Christmas.

The question of the new electoral boundaries has been a matter for anxiety with some of the Southern members, who were fearful of losing their constituencies as a result of the readjustment of districts, rendered necessary by the census returns. The Southerners are happy again. It was expected that Otago would lose a seat, or, perhaps, two, and the Hon. F. Mackenzie was popularly reported to be casting around for a comfortable North Island seat. However, it is now reported that the North Island will only gain one seat, instead of two, or even three, as was at one time expected. The new seat, it is said, will be in the neighbourhood of Auckland; there is every possibility that it will include a large portion of the Tamaki plain—the district between the Waitemata and Manukau Harbours—where population has increased so rapidly within the last ten years. Nothing definite, however, will be known until the report of the Representation Commissioners is published.

Mr. Newman, Opposition member, representing Manawatu, is going to make what capital he can out of Sir Joseph Ward's baronetcy. He has given notice to introduce a measure entitled, "The Hereditary Titles Prevention Bill."

Roderick McKenzie and the Hob-nailed Boots.

The talk of the town in the early part of this week was the extraordinary character of the interview between the Hon. Roderick McKenzie, Minister for Public Works, and the deputation of municipal authorities that waited on him in reference to the new tramway regulations. The Minister had discovered the famous "hob-nailed boots" worn long ago by that fiery little leader, Sir Harry Atkinson, and had laced them on, and with them kicked the deputation unmercifully. It was evident that he was "laying for" his interviewers; the unsparing ridicule which his regulations had evoked was too much for his Caledonian blood. Fortunately for the Minister, the deputation was mild-mannered and meek in the extreme. No sooner had that inoffensive gentleman, Councillor Smith, the Acting-Mayor of Wellington, opened his mouth, as the chief spokesman of the deputation, than then Hon. Roderick told him that the premature publication of the tramway regulations was a crime of which no honourable man would have been guilty; and when the astonished councillor attempted to protest, the truculent Minister threatened to turn him out of the room. Later, Mr. Fletcher, the Chairman of the Wellington Harbour Board, had something to say, and he, too, was severely jumped upon by the Minister, who mentioned, amongst other things, that in his opinion the Wellington trams were about the worst-managed trams in the world. The astonishing thing is that Mr. Smith and the whole deputation—with the single exception of Cr. Fletcher—took their treatment lying down, so to speak. When the Minister bullied the Acting-Mayor, the leader of the deputation, the only course open to men of any spirit was to have walked out of the room with a few parting words to Mr. McKenzie to suit the occasion. The Hon. Roderick has earned a reputation for rough-and-ready

methods; he prides himself on being a "practical man," and "calling a spade a spade." But the general opinion is that he went just a trifle too far this time. No other Minister of the Crown would have so brow-beaten a deputation of courteous-mannered citizens—especially on the eve of the elections.

No doubt Mr. McKenzie felt sore over the publication of his draft regulations, in spite of the fact that they were marked "confidential." But it has been shown that the Wellington City Council authorities endeavoured to get the "confidential" embargo removed by the Minister in order that the regulations might be discussed. The Acting-Mayor may have made a tactical blunder, but he desired publicity, and the Minister secrecy for the draft regulations, and secrecy on such matters is seldom in the public interest. There is no doubt that our tramway system could be improved, but this cannot be done by hard and fast Government regulations. The latest development is that the City Council has carried a resolution characterising the Hon. Minister's treatment of the Acting-Mayor, as "an unwarrantable and unjustifiable insult to the deputation and also to the citizens of Wellington." It is a pity that the Mayor, Mr. Tom Wilford, was incapacitated at the time through illness. Had the handling of the matter been in his hands all along this unfortunate incident would not have occurred. The City Council would have come out of the business with more dignity, and Mr. McKenzie would not have lost his temper. Certainly it is hard to conceive Mr. Wilford doing such an absurd thing as convening a public meeting at the Town Hall, to protest against the regulations. The meeting, of course, had to be knocked on the head, because the committee of experts were dealing with the regulations; but the very fact that it was called by municipal authority was sufficiently ridiculous. Mayor Wilford would hardly have been guilty of such a blunder.

The Mayor's Health.

Mr. Wilford took his seat again in the House of Representatives on Thursday afternoon, and received a very hearty welcome back. He resumed his Mayoral duties yesterday. He has had a "rough passage" of it in his severe illness; in fact, it was very doubtful at one time whether he would recover. His operation for appendicitis was a very complicated, difficult, and dangerous one. He was eight weeks in a private hospital; another patient who went in with him on the same day for a similar operation walked home three weeks ago. The removal of one's appendix is a very simple matter in the majority of cases; but one never knows. Anyhow, all Wellington is glad to see Tom Wilford walking about again, though much pulled down, and all hope that he will soon be his old self once more.

The Sailor at the Wheel.

The little cargo craft that go plying up and down our oft-times stormy coast have a bad time when these sudden Antarctic gales of ours sweep up upon us. Given plenty of sea-room, they are usually safe enough, but even then the sea must have its toll. It snatched it the other night from a small sailing craft, the white ketch Lizzie Taylor, a regular trader to Wellington from the South.

The night came in very dirty and dangerous; a southerly gale behind the vessel—she was bound from Timaru to Wellington with a load of flour—a heavy following sea, and heavy rain. The skipper went below for the "dog-watch" (six to eight p.m.), and Karl Gustaf Brusila, A.B., took the wheel. All of a sudden a tremendous sea burst into the little cabin and half-drowned the captain. When he got on deck the man at the wheel had gone; also the wheel. The sea had swept the sailorman away at his post of duty. Gone in an instant, in the great tumult of the waters. No one of his shipmates saw him go; in a little hooker like that the man at the wheel is often the sole hand on deck. Captain Peterson did what he could; he threw an illuminated buoy overboard, and also the mizzen sheet—a long length of rope. But Brusila, A.B., was already fathoms deep. The crew had enough to do to get their vessel on her course safely again, for her steering gear was all messed up. Tackles were put on the tiller, and the mainsail was set, with two reefs in it. (One Wellington shipping reporter, with a blissful ignorance of nautical matters usually manifested by local shipping scribes, was permitted to say in his paper that "the double-reefed main sheet" was set—a "longshore howler" that Auckland yachtsmen will appreciate.) Under

small sail the ketch made the port of Wellington safely, after an uncommonly stormy and tragic trip. It was almost the snowy Kaikouras that the big sea swept the seaman to his death—a sailor's end, anyhow. One recalls a passage from D. H. Rogers' little poem, "At Sea":—

"When the southern gale is blowing hard
The watch are all on the topsail yard."

"And when five come down where six
went up,
There's one less to share the bite and
sup."

"Instead of the stone and carved verse,
This is his epitaph, curt and terse:

"John Smith, A.B., Drowned in latitude
53.
A heavy gale and a following sea."

A Magistrate's Comments.

"In my opinion this is a very serious offence, and I don't know whether it is not a criminal offence," said Mr. C. C. Kettle, in giving his decision in a case at the S.M. Court, brought by the Inspector of Awards (Mr. Hood) against Charles William "Buttle, licensed registry, office-keeper of Queen-street, for over-charge in respect of a young man named Armstrong.

The facts as given by the Inspector were as follows: On arrival from the Old Country, Armstrong, a baker, applied to the defendant in order to get a situation. Buttle asked for 5/ in advance, which was given, and the man was told to return later in the day. He did so, and was told he could have a situation at Okakune, and 5/ more was demanded and paid. Armstrong took up the job, but stayed at it only a week. On his return to Auckland he went to the Inspector's office and complained about Buttle's charge. Later a solicitor's letter was sent to the latter, who immediately refunded 5/6.

Mr. Quinn, who appeared for the defendant, pleaded that his client had to go to considerable trouble in obtaining the situation, and he thought he was entitled to charge a little more than the Act allowed.

Mr. Kettle said the law did not give him power, unfortunately, to cancel the defendant's license, or he could not have hesitated to do so. As the law stood the license could only be endorsed. Addressing the defendant, the Magistrate said in severe tones, "You extorted from this young man double the amount you were entitled to receive, and I am not certain whether the criminal law can reach you. In addition to endorsing your license I shall impose the full penalty of £5 with costs."

To the Inspector: I think the facts of this case should be reported to the police. It is very seldom these charges can be brought before the Court, and I believe this is not an isolated case by any means. These young people coming into the country and not knowing the law are very easily swindled.

Mr. Quinn: "In the case of Mr. Buttle, your Worship, I know of my own personal experience that he has often gone out of his way to get people jobs and has never received a penny for doing so."

Mr. Kettle: "I am not taking your evidence, Mr. Quinn."

The Mokeau Affair.

Parliament has been promised some interesting disclosures respecting the Mokeau affair, so it has been freely asserted in Opposition circles. "The position is just this," remarked a well-known M.P., whose duties have given him a close acquaintance of the case, "the Native Minister is declared to have usurped his position as a Cabinet Minister in not complying with the requirements of the native land laws by handing the property over to a syndicate. What really happened was this: Sir James Carroll only consented to sign the Order-in-Council on the condition that the natives were safeguarded in every way, and that the company would within three years dispose of the whole property, under the Act of 1909 with respect to the limitation of area, etc., or, failing that, to hand over the property to the President of the Maori Land Board to administer it in terms of the Act. The throwing open of this great area of country, which had been locked up from settlement for years, was, as a matter of fact, a splendid piece of work, and the Native Minister thereby deserves commendation. I think you will soon find the whole affair will meet the same fate as the luckless Hina charges of last session."