

News of the Dominion.

OUR WELLINGTON LETTER.

WELLINGTON, September 2.

Affairs Political.

SIR JOSEPH WARD'S return has been celebrated in Parliament by the usual congratulations and re-eminations but hard words from his enemies do not seem to worry the Prime Minister overmuch. He looks well and in good fighting trim, and his speeches are brisk and lively, as of old. He has had to reply once more to the charges about the Coronation invitations, of which everyone is heartily sick and tired. These petty matters have wasted a good deal of time this session, but time is no object to the gentlemen of the Opposition. It is not likely that anything particularly useful will be done during the remainder of the session; members are only too anxious to get away to their constituencies. Another two months will be worried through somehow by Parliament; then for the elections.

Sir John Finlay's declaration of his intention to resign from the Upper House and contest a seat in the House of Representatives is warmly commended on all hands. The Attorney-General is a very different man to-day to what he was a few years ago, when he was rejected by a Wellington constituency, and he will not have a great deal of difficulty in obtaining his heart's desire—if only a suitable district be chosen, and there are several offering. His choice is not yet announced, but seats all over the Dominion are mentioned, from the Bay of Islands to Parnell, and Wellington Suburbs to Dunedin West. Sir John Finlay is not the most popular man with the great body of the electors, but this is simply because they do not know him. He is the cleverest man in the Ministry at this moment, and I confidently predict that before very long he will succeed Sir Joseph Ward as Prime Minister. It is the Mr. Asquith of the New Zealand political world; the brains behind the throne.

The House of Representatives was considerably amused on Thursday night over Mr. T. K. Sides and his Mean Time Bill, the Bill which was merely stonewalled out of existence. That is its usual fate; and as Mr. Sides has brought it forward now for three or four sessions one imagines he must feel rather dubious about ever introducing it again, even if his constituents give him the chance. About the funniest feature of the debate was Dr. To Rangihoua's comparison of Mr. Sides with his daylight-saving measure to Maui Tikiki-o-Taranga, the ancient Polynesian hero who set out to delay the progress of the Sun-god across the heavens. The comparison ended with the setting out, however, for Maui the Sun-god never succeeded in his endeavours, while Mr. Sides failed. The House was considerably tickled by the notion of likening the mild, even ladylike, Mr. Sides to the Maori Prometheus and Hercules.

The Parliamentary Library.

Mr Charles Wilson, Parliamentary Librarian, very properly pointed out to Parliament this week the impropriety of allowing recess privilege holders to take out so much fiction from the General Assembly Library. The Library Committee has shown its approval of Mr Wilson's point of view by deciding that no fiction be issued to privilege holders. Some people, according to the Librarian, take out nothing but novels from the Parliamentary Library, and fifteen to twenty per cent of the whole of the volumes issued are fiction. One cannot but strongly agree with the Hon. George Fowler when he declares that it is not a function of Parliament to provide fiction for the people of Wellington, and so compete with the Municipal Public Library; but that the Parliamentary Library should be developed into a great national library, containing all books and pamphlets published in and relating to New Zealand.

There is undoubtedly a great abuse of the Library, not only by those who get the recess privileges, but by members of Parliament themselves. Some members are exceedingly careless in their treatment of valuable books; leave them lying about in hotels and even trains, and try to persuade to see them restored to the Library. No doubt the best cure

for the complaints on the score of the rush for fiction would be to discontinue buying novels for the Library. Members of Parliament can do without fiction very well, and so one doesn't see why it should be provided for them at the taxpayers' expense. A Parliamentary Library is an absolute necessity if members are to keep themselves abreast of the times, but the average modern novel is not necessary; if M.P.'s want it they should go out and buy it. The library privileges are very highly appreciated by many Wellington people, such as journalists, who value the access thus gained to books of reference, and who are able to consult the latest works in science, biography, travel, and so forth. Mere novel-readers should be severely barred. They can get novels from the City Library, on payment of a small subscription, and that ought to content them. But they want their reading for nothing.

Whales and Whalers.

The laws and customs of whaling on the New Zealand coast have been investigated at great length and in interesting fashion over at Picton this week. John Keenan, head of one of the Tory Channel whaling parties, claimed from James Jackson, another old whaler, the sum of £100, value of a humpback whale, killed in the Channel. One of the witnesses called as a whaling expert, was John Love, a half caste sheep-farmer, who said he had lived on the shores of Queen Charlotte Sound for sixty years, and had been whaling for forty years, starting with his father, Dan Love, one of the earliest pakehas in these parts. Other veterans gave evidence, too. The question in dispute was whether a whale-boat crew were entitled to a whale if their line parted after they "made fast," and the whale got away and was claimed by another crew. The incident in Tory Channel, out of which the lawsuit arose, seems to have been an exciting bit of work. They chase whales in oil launches as well as in whaleboats now, over in Tory Channel, and they use bomb-guns as well as harpoons and lances.

"Whale-oh!" was the yell raised at the look out station near Te Awaiti, and off set the whaling crews—Keenan's, Jackson's, and Poreno's. Two humpback whales were in sight. Keenan's crew got up close to one of them, and the headman (Keenan) put a bomb from his gun into it, and then threw the harpoon and made fast. The line attached to the iron was about twenty-five fathoms in length, at the end of which was attached a "drogue," or "drag," as it is familiarly called, which stops the progress of the dying whale. Whilst still in pursuit, Jackson's party came in between Keenan's boat and the whale, harpooned the big sea-creature, and claimed possession. For the plaintiff Keenan it was claimed that the custom which had prevailed in Tory Channel waters from time immemorial was that "first iron holds the whale." There were two rules known among whaling men, said counsel for Keenan on the opening day of the case. One was the "fast and loose rule" and the other "the iron holds the whale," the latter being the one adopted in Tory Channel.

The veteran, John Love, gave an interesting account of whale law, as practised in the Sounds ever since the days of the real old-timers in the whaling business. Joe Baker, Isaacs, Phil Himes, Billy Keenan, Jimmy Keenan, Dan Love, and the Jacksons. When he commenced whaling the custom was the same as it is now, and that is when one got fast to a whale, and the line parted, he claimed the whale because of the rope and "iron" attached. Supposing the iron came away from the fish, there would be no claim; the whale was free to an'one. If the rope was intentionally cut away by any of the crew the whale was reckoned to be abandoned, but if it was accidentally cut it would still be claimed. If the line gave out, it was the old custom to put a drag on, and the man that owned the line could claim the whale. He gave an instance of the old days, in which W. Keenan got fast to a whale, and it took all the line out. Witness got up to the whale, asked Keenan's permission, fastened on and got half the value. At that time he was with Jackson's party. He asked permission because Keenan had his rope and harpoon attached to the whale. This was over twenty years ago.

So the Picton Council House has been redolent of whale-lore and harpoons and humpbacks for a week or so. The S.M.'s judgment had not been delivered at the time quoting, but as each party announces its intention of taking the case to the Supreme Court if it loses in the Magistrate's Court, we shall probably hear a good deal more about it, and someone will have to go back to Te Awaiti singing the doleful old chant:—

"For we didn't get that whale, bravo boys,
We didn't get that wha-a-ale!"

About Some Maori Names.

One can hardly imagine any drier reading than the "Schedules of Applications for Confirmation of Alienations," of native land, published in the "New Zealand Gazette." But there is interesting stuff in everything, if you only knew how to look at it. For instance, the lists of Maori names in these schedules. How would they read if they were English, after the fashion adopted with Red Indian names in America? Just translate a few from a couple of pages in the "Gazette," published this week:—

"Old Man, Sky-Streaked-with-the-Rays-of-Dawn" wants to lease part of the Haututu block to John Davis.

"Long-Poll Stand-like-a-Tree" is another applicant for leave to transfer some of his ancestral acres. "Flux-Cloak" also has some surplus land to lease. "Tommy-Without-a-Sweetheart" is transferring a section at Orarohi to one Robert Young. "Heart of River-Girl" and "Cut-up-Alive" are two Maori ladies' names, rather suggestive of cannibalism.

Some of the combinations of Maori and pakeha names emphasise the complacencies of the latter, as, for instance: "Lift-up-the-Sky Brown"—no comma between Sky and Brown, please. Mr. "Stand-Naked" is surely a Maori of the Maoris. "Zachariah Hot-Water" parents evidently were under missionary influence when they got him baptised. "The Sound of Many Birds" (Tangimau-hau) is about as poetical a family name as one could wish to own, but the gentleman to whom he is leasing his share of the Ohra blocks is not nearly so romantically called, for his name is Doherty. Old "Dogskin Mat" is getting rid of some of his Rangitoto-Tuhina lands to a pakeha by the name of Otto. "Dying-in-the-Morning" and "Ward-it-Off" are similarly ridding themselves of their patrimony, and so are "The Spread-out-Sky" and "The Tui-Bird's Tail." Decidedly, there's a good deal in a name—a Maori name at any rate.

Preservation of Native Fauna and Flora.

The report on scenery preservation just submitted to Parliament by the Lands Department contains some interesting bits of information about beauty spots and native trees and birds. The most noteworthy item is Mr. E. Phillip Turner's report on his work as inspector and surveyor of scenic reserves. Mr. Turner is the right man for the position, an enthusiast for forest-preservation, and for the protection of our vanishing native bird life. During the past year he did a great deal of field-work on the Upper Wanganui and in the King Country. In his Wanganui River surveying he cut out three scenic reserves near the famous "Drop-Scene" (Aratira), above Pipiriki. Of this place he says: "This is without exception the roughest country I have surveyed in New Zealand; the bush is light, but it is one tangled mass of supplejacks, lawyers, and other vines. On nearly every line I cut out, a rope had to be used to scale the cliffs. In one line of fifteen chains there was a rise of over 1000 feet. Field-work in this locality is therefore difficult and slow."

Regarding native bird life, Mr. Phillips-Turner writes: "While camped at Waimarino I was pleased to find that the bell-bird (korimako, or, on the Wanganui, kokomako) is now very plentiful there. It was absent from there (and from the Wanganui also) for some years, but is now again plentiful. This bird far surpasses in the beauty and variety of its notes any bird I have heard. At day-break at Pipiriki the chorus sung by bell-birds, tuis, native canaries, sky-larks, blackbirds, and thrushes in praise to the great Author of Life and Day (who, one says to the contrary) is music that should compensate a tired and sleepy tourist for the hot he may have reluctantly left. At Waimarino also I saw a few robins, and heard occasionally the mournful but sweet note of the kokako. The robins were so tame that they would

pick for insects under the tripod of the theodolite whilst I was observing; I even had to be careful that I did not tread on them. A bird of so unsuspecting a nature is not likely to last long. I found the canary as far north as Marukopa. As all shooting and killing of birds on scenic reserves are statutory offences, it must be strongly impressed upon bird-collectors and hunters that they are liable to heavy punishment if they take birds from our reserves. It may be mentioned that Maoris are in the habit of ornamenting baskets and mats, which they sell to tourists and the public, with the feathers of kiwis, tuis, and kokus. Such a practice leads to the wholesale destruction of such birds, and must be strongly deprecated."

On the cliffs of the Wanganui River, near its junction with the gorge Alangai, Mr. Turner had the good luck to find a plant that is new to the botanical world, and which is one of the most interesting finds made of recent years in New Zealand. The plant grows only on damp, shady, precipitous cliffs, and belongs to the genus Senecio; it is rather a handsome plant with large bright green cordate leaves about 1ft. long, and is quite unlike any other Senecio. It is confined to a very small locality, and probably there are not more than a hundred plants in existence. "It will be another fact," says the surveyor, "to support de Vries theory of mutants."

"We have treasures in our scenic reserves," concludes Mr. Phillips-Turner, "which in years to come will be thought priceless by our successors. If it is largely our scenery that makes this Dominion one of the most delightful countries in the world, surely it is worth our while to make strenuous attempts to preserve what nature has so lavishly supplied. As Roosevelt lately stated, no nation with purely utilitarian ideals ever reached real greatness in its highest sense. Our unimaginative settler who protests against the reservation of a very small percentage (and that generally poor land) of the country for scenic and like purposes would be astonished at the stupidity of the Londoner, Berliner, and Parisian for not cutting up into allotments the beautiful parks of their cities."

Bound for the Pole.

Seven interesting little passengers, in the shape of Indian transport mules, arrived in Auckland on Friday by the Union Steam Ship Company's Aparima, en route to the Antarctic, where they will be used by Captain Scott in his dash for the South Pole. In view of the fact that there are four expeditions out for polar exploration—Scott's, Amundsen's, Mawson's and Shirase's—and that the book rights are pretty rigidly conserved, it is, perhaps, not surprising to find that even about the importation of this portion of Scott's equipment quite an extraordinary amount of secrecy is being observed. Public interest in the race for the pole has been increased by the knowledge that the British expedition, under Captain Scott, is to race a Norwegian expedition under Captain Amundsen. A great struggle is assured, for the opposing forces, early in the present year, spent themselves wintering in the same sphere of influence, and Captain Amundsen came in for severe criticism when it became known that he had so concealed his plans that nothing was known of his position until the Terra Nova reached King Edward VII. land. The Norwegian, having secured a base in the Bay of Wales, has the advantage of a starting point 70 miles nearer the Pole. For Scott's last stage will be about 350 miles; for Amundsen perhaps 280 or 300 miles. In the opinion of Professor David, given in a recent interview in Sydney, a sensational race will take place, and the Norwegians will have an advantage of travelling by reason of greater strength in the number of Greenland dogs which they possess.

Possibly, therefore, the secrecy which enveloped Amundsen's equipment and movements, and enabled him to spring a surprise on scientists in every part of the world, by unexpectedly establishing a base in the vicinity of Shackleton's old headquarters, and within a point of Scott's base, has led to similar tactics being observed by Captain Scott in regard to further movements connected with his expedition. Accordingly, when a "Star" representative on Friday boarded the "Aparima" he was informed by Captain Stringer that instructions had been issued from the head office to the effect that absolutely no information was to be given out regarding the shipment of mules from India. When the steamer