

Yesterday morning a fire broke out in the upper part of the building occupied by Messrs. A. and J. Macfarlane in MacLaggan St., Dunedin, but having been noticed in time by Sergeant Slattery, was extinguished before much damage had been done.

Later intelligence from Formosa shows that the report of the occupation of Tamsui by Admiral Lespes was incorrect. The town is still in the possession, of the Chinese troops, and the French bombardment has continued daily. The local forces are strongly entrenched in the neighbourhood of Tamsui, and all efforts to dislodge them as yet have proved unavailing. Dispatches have been received from Tonquin stating that an engagement has taken place between a force of Chinese, numbering 6000 men, and the French troops, under General Negrier, at Kep. The action lasted for five hours, when the Chinese fled, having suffered heavily from the French fire. General Negrier lost 21 men killed and 50 wounded, and was himself wounded slightly. The Chinese have been defeated at Loo Chung by the French. Their loss is estimated at 1000, while that of the French was only 25. The French authorities are boarding English merchant steamers both at Amoy and Formosa.

The *Standard* explains that the Redistribution scheme published by them was only one of several that is at present before the Cabinet. Commodore Erskine has been instructed to proclaim a British protectorate over the southern shores of New Guinea and the islands immediately adjacent. This step has been taken in accordance with Mr. Gladstone's reply to the question asked on the subject by Sir William Macarthur in the House of Commons on the 11th of August last.

It is currently reported that a conference on matters relating to the Congo will be held in Berlin in November.

An important conference, attended by numerous British and Colonial representatives has sat to consider the situation of affairs in South Africa. Among the principal speakers were Sir William Macarthur and the Right Hon. W. E. Forster, both of whom strongly urged that the Imperial Government should take steps to enforce the provisions of the convention concluded with the Transvaal Republic in 1881.

A cyclone of unusual force passed over the island of Sicily, and did an enormous amount of damage. Its effects were felt most severely at Latonia, a town on the east coast, and hundreds of the inhabitants are said to have been killed or wounded.

MONDAY.

The *Invercargill News* says:—"Through the frequency and extent of the fires in Invercargill certain Insurance companies have decided, we are informed, to abolish their agencies here at once. This decision should act as a further incentive to the citizens to provide improved means for coping with the destroying element. Fewer agencies means less competition and decreased competition probably signifies higher rates, or greater difficulty to get insurance at any price for property in dangerous situations. Representatives from the Australian Mercantile Company, Mr. Hannah, agent; the Union Company, Mr. Perkins, agent; and the Standard, Mr. J. G. Ward, agent; are now in Invercargill for the purpose of investigating claims in connection with the late fire; and it is reported that at least one of these offices has decided to cease business altogether in this town. The Union Company resolved some time ago to take no more risks here, and other Companies have talked about the possibility of their withdrawing. Should the movement extend any further among the insurance companies the look out is a very blue one indeed. Were it to become general, a few weeks hence the hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of property in this large town would be absolutely uninsured. And it would be of no use to think of recourse to the remedy sometimes suggested as a check to excessive insurance rates—a local company. Considering the risk such an institution would have to run, its charges would of necessity have to be enormous."—And this was written before last week's fire.

Mr. Cussen has come into Kihikihi from the King country, the triangulation survey having been completed connecting the Taupo country with Kihikihi, the starting point. Next week Mr. Cussen will proceed to Mokau district to carry out triangulation survey there.

Thomas Kliver, a Norwegian, 26 years of age, a single man, was drowned on Saturday afternoon in the lagoon at the South Spit, Hokitika. The body is supposed to have been washed into the river and out seawards. He formerly sailed out of Dunedin, and arrived here in the *Elibank Castle*. Three years ago deceased was working for Maher, contractor for the protective works on South Beach.

An Auckland paper says a good story is told by old identities at Wellington, at the expense of Mr. Dick, whose Parliamentary career has been brought to such a sudden termination. The story runs that in the old days of Provincialism a scare existed in Otago in consequence of the rapid spread of thistles, and their extermination was prayed for on all hands. Mr. Dick was then Provincial Secretary, and impressed with the necessity of suppressing the evil, he introduced a measure having that object in view. There was, however, strong opposition to the Bill on the part of some of the "canny" Scots, so with the object of convincing the sceptical few of the rapid growth of thistles, Mr. Dick had two placed in flower pots and took them to the Council Chamber. He was first, there, and had arranged the potted thistles on either side of him when Mr. Fulton, now member for Taieri, strolled in. Immediately afterwards the sound of many feet indicated the approach of the members, and Fulton, affecting anxiety, exclaimed, "Quick, quick; put away your thistles; the Councillors are coming." "Why?" Mr. Dick innocently enquired. "Well," Mr. Fulton rejoined, "if they see them they will think you haven't finished your lunch yet!"

The fourth annual meeting of the Canterbury Farmers' Co-operative Association was held yesterday. The profit for the year was £408. The working capital now amounts to £8269, being an increase of £500 during the year. The sum of £293, being 4 per cent. discount on last year's purchases, has been placed to the credit of individual shareholders. The bad debts incurred during the year amounted to £258. The bank overdraft is £2821. No dividend was declared.

I understand (writes the Wellington correspondent of the *Lyttelton Times*) that an idea has got abroad in Christchurch that the Westport and Greymouth Harbour Bills have fallen through. This is not the case, and they now stand upon the order-paper among the orders of the day for committal. What happened in reference to them was this: The bills were introduced in the first instance as general public bills; the Speaker ruled that in his opinion they were local bills, and could not be proceeded with. The Government then moved for a suspension of the Standing Orders relative to local bills, so that they might be proceeded with all the same as general public bills. To suspend the Standing Order it is requisite that two-thirds of the members should be present. Upon that particular occasion there were not enough members in the House, and in case there should not be enough the next day the Government introduced a bill covering both harbours, and making the matter a general public bill, which could be gone on with as usual. Subsequently the Standing Orders were suspended. Both bills passed the second reading; and as there was then no necessity for what may be termed the "bogus bill," which had been introduced in case of accidents, this was discharged from the order paper. Hence the error which has arisen with regard to this matter. I may say further that they have been referred to a Select Committee, and will be committed in the form in which that Select Committee has left them. The borrowing powers have been largely shorn, and the Government guarantee is also very hardly dealt with; in fact, if much more mutilation goes on, there will be cause to sing, with Lady Jane, "Little will be left of me in the coming by-and-bye."

The *Thames Star*, of October 1, gives the following particulars concerning the New Prince Imperial mine.—The shaft will be down 80ft. below No. 6 level by the end of the week, and as soon as the guides have been placed in position a start will be made to cut out the No. 7 level chamber, which will be 70ft. below No. 6. At the latter level the winze to connect with No. 7 is down about 15ft. The country continues of a very favourable class for gold, and the leader is also of a fair size, especially in the western end, where there is a foot wide of good looking quartz showing. A clay seam appears to have somewhat disturbed the lode in the eastern end, but it is making solid again under it. The minerals visible are excellent, and so long as the present class of country continues there need be no fear of the reef not proving auriferous. In the stopes, work is being continued as usual, and payable grade dirt is coming to hand. A few pounds of stone were secured from the footwall leader yesterday afternoon, gold being left showing. Not more than three stopes have been carried up to the break, but at the winze the last but one has just been commenced, though both these latter stopes will be higher than usual. At No. 5 level, a winze is being sunk 130ft. east of the cross-cut to determine the true course of the lead. It is down 12ft. and the reef is a fine solid body of stone 16 inches wide. As soon as this winze is down about 40ft., supposing the reef to maintain its size, the manager will resume driving east at No. 6 level. The other workings in the mine are being continued as usual.

The English and German Governments are now discussing the question of the appointment of a mixed commission to adjudicate on the conflicting claims of English and German subjects at Angra Pequena. The German Government invite the Powers interested to send delegates to a conference to be held in Berlin in November next to consider the best means to secure the freedom of commerce on the Congo and Niger Rivers.

Telegrams have been received from Dongola with details of the treacherous massacre of Colonel Stewart's party by the Arabs at Wady-el-Homar. The news states that the whole party were not killed, but that the lives of 14 of them were spared by the Arabs, who hold them prisoners. General Lord Wolseley has ordered the Mudir's troops at Merawi, a town 30 miles below the fourth cataract of the Nile, to rescue or ransom the prisoners.

Two explosions of dynamite occurred outside Parliament Buildings at Quebec on Saturday. The edifice was considerably damaged, and several workmen who were in the neighbourhood were injured. Nothing is yet known as to the cause of the explosions.

The announcement that a British protectorate is to be forthwith established over a portion of New Guinea is now fully confirmed. Commodore Erskine has been ordered to proclaim a protectorate over the southern coasts of the island eastward of the 141st degree of longitude, as well as over the islands adjacent to the coast. The British Government have, however, decided that for the present settlement in the territory and islands shall be prohibited.

TUESDAY.

In the House of Representatives yesterday Mr. Downie Stewart and the Hon. Mr. Stout presented a petition from residents in Otago in favour of the Bible in Schools.—Mr. Holmes presented a petition from the Free Thought Society of Christchurch protesting against the passing of any blasphemy laws in New Zealand, seeing that there is no State religion in the Colony.—The Hon. Mr. Stout made the following statement as to the order of business. The Government looked upon the following as policy bills, and would push them forward at once, in anticipation of the delivery of the Public Works Statement and the passing of the Estimates:—East and West Coast (Middle Island) and Nelson Railway Bill, District Railways Leasing and Purchasing Bill, Government Insurance Association Bill, and the West Coast Harbour Bills. They would push these on at once and get them to the Upper House, so as to avoid a practice that had hitherto gained ground—viz., of important measures of this kind going to the Legislative Council at the closing hours of the session. There were other bills, but Government would reserve its statement respecting them until a future date.—Mr. Wakefield resumed the debate on the second reading of the East and West Coast (Middle Island) and Nelson Railway Bill. The motion for the second reading was put—ayes, 39; noes, 12. On the motion that the bill be not read a second time, the Hon. Sir J. Vogel said that the Public Works Statement was not pertinent to this question. Their aim was to get these measures forward to the Council, so that they might have time to consider them during the time the House was engaged on the