

Indians. Half a dozen of its wearers are negroes, all of whom performed deeds of reckless daring when fighting against Apaches or Sioux. In one case this medal was awarded to a soldier who did nothing more meritorious than to make one of a guard of honor over President Lincoln's coffin. It is alleged that every member of a regiment received it for volunteering to take part in a battle after their time of service had expired. Even one brave general was not above awarding it to himself for some act of bravery—at least what he considered to be such. In another instance the winner received his medal fully a quarter of a century after he had qualified for it, which shows that the United States military authorities do not always perform their work with undignified haste.

The Prussian and German Iron Cross had its origin in the Napoleonic wars. It is a cross of iron, and is framed in a thin rim of silver. In the upper arm of the cross are the letters 'F.W.' (in honor of its founder, Frederick William III. of Prussia), surmounted by a crown. This was the decoration which Bismarck prized above all others. In only one case was the simple design of iron and silver departed from, and this was in honor of Blucher, for whom a special cross edged with gold was made. There was a very lavish distribution of this badge of valor during and after the Franco-German war, when about 50,000 were awarded. In several instances it was given to every member of a regiment, which, according to the terms of its bestowal, had 'distinguished itself by bravery in an important battle.' For her brave soldiers Russia has the Cross of St. Vladimir, and Italy her Medal of Merit, while many other European nations reward gallant deeds by badges or orders, but none of these can compare in distinction with the Victoria Cross, because of the rarity with which it is awarded, not more than an average of a dozen per annum having been conferred since its institution forty-four years ago.

A NOTABLE EXCEPTION. BELGIUM, we presume, was included in the list of countries referred to some time ago by the British Prime Minister as 'decadent Latin nations.' Yet Belgium is one of the most progressive and prosperous countries in the world. Ever since Belgium won its independence it has prospered at home and abroad. In manufactures, in commercial enterprise, in trade, in the cultivation of the arts and sciences this little Catholic country holds a foremost place among the nations of the world. For several years under various electoral laws a Catholic Government has had, and yet holds, the confidence and support of the majority of the nation. And it is with a Catholic Government at the state helm that it is about to face the new century.

When Ireland had a population of 8,000,000 the English Press and English statesmen said it was over-populated. They said the country was not able to produce food sufficient for such a number of people. Belgium has an area of about one-third that of Ireland and yet it keeps in comfort a population of over 6,000,000. Though it is so densely populated (remarks the *Catholic Universe*) there is no poverty nor is there any danger of famine, because it produces its own necessities of life with a good deal to spare for exportation. The balance between agriculture and manufactures is well maintained. One of its colonial enterprises is the Congo Free State, between which and Antwerp there is a fleet of steamers second only to the Atlantic liners. Belgium's trade with the Congo is rapidly increasing. The official returns recently issued show an increase last year of 31 per cent. on the figures of 1898, whilst those of 1898 marked an increase of 25 per cent. on those of 1897. In exports alone the increase is over 50 per cent. The prosperity of Belgium exposes the falseness of the platitude so frequently on the lips of ignorant bigots—namely, that where Catholicity prevails there is nothing but poverty and decay. Belgium is more Catholic than Ireland, inasmuch as the Protestant minority in the latter country is proportionately greater than the Protestant minority in the former. In Ireland there is a considerable English element, and for centuries it has been the governing power. With what result? It is visible in the contrast between the wealth of Belgium and the poverty of Ireland, the latter having more fertile soil and an area almost three times greater than that of the former. In the recent Belgium elections the Catholic party retained their majority over the Liberals and the Socialists, though the latter have had some partial successes.

Unlike England, where the railways are huge monopolies worked in the interest of capitalists, nearly the whole of the Belgian lines are owned by the State, and are worked in the interest of the people and not for the purpose of paying big dividends. Years ago before the matter was even dreamt of in New Zealand cheap train services for workers had been instituted. Tickets at reduced rates are issued to working men on production of a certificate from the Burgomaster or Police Commissioner of the place in which they reside, and another certificate from their employer. There is practically no limit

to distance, and the charges made are exceedingly reasonable, as a few selected examples will show. A weekly ticket, available on the double journey for the six working days to a distance of six miles, costs 1s; 12 miles, 1s 2d; 18 miles, 1s 4½d; 24 miles, 1s 7d; 30 miles, 1s 9½d; 50 miles, 2s 2d; and so on. In a word Belgium is ahead even in this respect of the most progressive portion of the British Empire—New Zealand.

NOTES FROM THE HOUSE.

PROCEEDINGS IN PARLIAMENT.

(From our special correspondent.)

In replying to questions in the House on Tuesday afternoon the Ministers said: The Government will, in making appointments to the Volunteer and Defence department, see that they are filled by suitable applicants from the New Zealand contingents now serving in South Africa, believing that they would make the best officers.—The matter of opening State coal mines, so that the output may be increased, was under consideration of the Government; but the subject was a large one, and would require to be considered carefully.—Everything possible is being done to classify prisoners in gaols. At present young offenders and first convicted prisoners are not allowed to mix with hardened men. As to people suffering from drink, the hospitals were the proper place for such cases, and representations had been made to the hospital authorities on the subject.

In the evening the House went into Committee of Supply on the Estimates. The item 'Legislative Council, £1870,' gave members the opportunity of ventilating their opinions on every conceivable subject, from the treatment of back-block settlers by the clerks in the Lands Department to Federation. The item was eventually passed.

The discussion on the General Estimates was continued until half-past three in the morning, when the House rose.

On Wednesday afternoon the Premier introduced the Industrial Schools Act Extension to Private Institutions Bill. Mr. Seddon explained that it applied to all private schools. Power was given to the Government to take over the management of industrial schools, to appoint visitors to such schools. If any institution was not complying with the conditions imposed that would be considered sufficient authority for not sending children thereto. An opportunity would be given to discuss the question of private industrial institutions upon the second reading of the bill.

The Minister of Lands moved that a select committee be appointed to inquire into the question of meat freezing, manufacturing, and exporting, and the purchase of sheep and cattle, to examine into the affairs of companies carrying on such businesses as to their profit, and as to whether there had been compacts as between the said companies to the prejudice of breeders and farmers. The debate on the motion was interrupted by the dinner adjournment.

In the evening the House considered the Sale by Mortgages Bill in Committee, but there not being a quorum present at half past 10 the Speaker declared that Members might go home.

The House spent the best part of Thursday on a useless discussion as to whether the Carterton Waterworks Bill should be referred back to the Local Bills Committee.

The evening sitting was devoted to consideration of the Public Health Bill in Committee. According to an amendment added to Clause 38 two or more local bodies may combine to provide a sanatorium for consumptives.

On Friday afternoon a report was received from the Stock Committee recommending that the Rabbit Nuisance Act Amendment Bill be struck out. Several members protested, and suggested that the Rabbit department should be abolished. The Minister for Lands, in replying, said that rabbits were materially on the increase or late years. He considered that a great deal of the dissatisfaction with the Rabbit Act arose through want of tact on the part of the inspectors. Still the Act was necessary, as was evidenced by the fact that a great deal of Crown lands had been rendered useless by the pest. It was his intention to give the Act another trial under amended regulations as to poisoning and inspection.

In the evening the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act Amendment Bill was taken in Committee. An amendment, moved by Mr. Herries, to the effect that the measure should apply to any Government worker where it does not involve an increase in appropriation, was carried by a small majority in opposition to the wish of the Government.

LOBBY GOSSIP AND NEWS.

Mr. Seddon stated in the early part of the week that he expected the session would end during the current month. I believe it will be the second week in October before the shutters are put up on Parliament House.

Mr. Lewis says that the discussion of Private Members Bills costs the Colony £30 an hour, whereas the measures themselves were not worth 30s per dozen.

Much sympathy is felt for Captain Russell, who received word during the week of the death of his son. Leave of absence was granted Captain Russell on Thursday in consequence of this bereavement, and the Premier referred in sympathetic terms to the circumstance that necessitated it.

A pathetic request was made to the House on Wednesday. It was a petition from the fathers and mothers of those children who were drowned a short time ago in the Motu River, Bay of Plenty