

## Notes

### New Zealand's 'Foreign' Possessions.

The aspirations of the rulers of this Colony to gain dominion over the islands of the Pacific are well-known, and they do not commend themselves to a large number both in Australia and in New Zealand itself. The open designs of Mr Seddon on Fiji are bitterly resented in Sydney, which is the principal depôt in Australasia for the island trade, and the annexation of the Cook Islands has been the subject of much animadversion in this Colony, even by politicians who on other subjects are friendly to the Government. For a good many years the Cook Islands were under a British Protectorate, and their affairs were administered by a resident appointed and maintained by New Zealand. This gentleman communicated regularly with headquarters, with the result that the public here were tolerably familiar with the position of affairs in the group, and there grew up a friendly regard for the mild-mannered inhabitants, whose language, laws, and customs, resemble very closely those of the Maoris. Consequently the annexation of the islands was almost unanimously agreed to by the New Zealand Parliament when it was proposed, and the Mildura, which Mr Seddon dramatically said was straining at her hawser in Wellington harbor, like a greyhound at the leash, was despatched with the Governor on board to effect the friendly capture. As to what has happened since there is unfortunately but little information. The last despatch from the islands was in December, 1900. At least that is the date of the last published communication. The new Resident, Colonel Gudgeon, has sent other despatches since, but they seem to have contained some reflections on individuals, and were returned by the Government for enquiry whether publication was really intended, and if intended, whether it was desirable. In consequence of the paucity of information, and the slow process of developing the newly formed system of administration, it has been found necessary to further continue the Act of last year, so postponing a definite settlement of the question. But even then nothing will have been gained. The Cook Islands are intrinsically valueless to this Colony. They are small in extent, and the people live amid such plenteous supplies of food, which grows without any exertion on their part, that they are indolent and unenterprising.

But the relative value of those islands would be greatly increased if Mr Seddon's ambitious schemes were realised. In a letter to Lord Ranfurly he suggested that the boundaries of New Zealand should be extended so as to include not only the Cook group, but the Fiji, the Friendly, and the Society Islands. In this memorable letter he even went so far as to suggest the partition of the yet unclaimed South Pacific Islands, giving to the Australian Commonwealth the Solomon Islands and other unconsidered trifles that stud those seas. The Society Islands happen to belong to France, but that trifling impediment was either unknown to Mr Seddon or did not daunt him. Circumstances did not so fall out as to favor the exercise of New Zealand's foreign policy. Only the Cook Islands were annexed, and they were practically our property before. During a recent debate on the subject some member, half in play and half in earnest, suggested to the Acting-Premier that the much desiderated personal knowledge of the peculiarities of these islands could best be gained on the spot, and asked that members be given a trip there after the session. Sir Joseph Ward practically promised that such an excursion might be arranged—after the general election. But by that time the interest of many of the present members in the subject may have evaporated, for few of them can reckon with absolute certainty on their return. Aspirants to fill their shoes are already jostling each other in the arena, and many a promising political career may have *hic jacet* inscribed above it before the end of the first week in December. In any event some legislation was necessary if the attempt to retain the Cook Islands was to be persevered with. The Act passed last year was tentative only. It expires ten days after the termination of the present session. In the interval the Government were to have prepared a comprehensive measure for the good government of the new possessions. Circumstances over which the Government had no control prevented this, so that the question is still hung up.

### The Price of Food.

The rural producers of the Colony are reaping a rich harvest caused by a chain of circumstances extremely fortunate for them. The recent war in Africa caused an unexampled demand for fodder and for other articles raised in the country, with the natural result that prices rose to a degree that a little time before was hardly hoped for. Then followed the culmination of the drought in Australia, causing a demand for cereals, roots, dairy produce, and meats, which are now being exported in large quantities, and with great profit to the producers. The good fortune enjoyed by the

farmers, however, spells hardship to the dwellers in towns, who are consumers merely. They find their staple articles of food supply greatly increased in price, and that without a proportionate increase in wages. The head of a family who has a fixed salary, or, worse still, the one who has no fixed income at all, may be pardoned for feeling a little impatient with conditions that place his means of living practically at the mercy of the needs of other countries. He may philosophically argue that what benefits one section of the community indirectly benefits the whole, but the reasoning gives him little solid satisfaction, when the week's or month's end, as the case may be, sees his household bills demanding settlement, and he ruefully contemplates the ever shrinking margin between his earning capacity and his inevitable needs. But if he will only maintain his equanimity he must see that he will eventually share in the gain now being reaped by the farmer. The large influx of foreign money must permeate the whole community. Farmers are not likely, any more than any other class, to bank their profits and let them lie idle. If they have encumbrances they clear them off, and so increase their spending power. Then they add to their holdings, if they can, they increase the size of their dwellings, they obtain a few more of the luxuries and conveniences that too often they are compelled to deny themselves. And they thus disseminate the golden seed. But the most tangible result will be the impetus given to production. The resources of the Colony have as yet been barely opened up. The history of the frozen meat trade proves this. Notwithstanding the enormous and increasing export of frozen mutton, there are actually at the present moment a greater number of sheep in the Colony than at any previous time. The export of butter has made enormous strides, yet the supply increases in greater proportion. The Colony has entered the world's markets.

\*

In some isolated township, out off from full connection with the outer world by want of railways or roads, a local market only is obtainable, and prices are regulated largely by custom, fixed by local circumstances. The position of the Colony was exactly analogous a few years ago. Then the prices were ruled by local circumstances; now the farmer scans his paper for the market prices in London or Sydney, and the local values fluctuate accordingly. The present high rates cannot be maintained. Under ordinary circumstances Australia produces not only enough for its own wants, but a surplus for export. The seven years of famine are invariably followed by a period of plenty, when the earth gratefully repays the lenity of the elements. If prices fall in Sydney but very little, there will no longer be a margin of profit for New Zealand exporters. The African market cannot be looked upon as a permanent one, so that the ultimate outlet must be Britain. Now is the time, therefore, for the farmer to widen his area of production by increasing the number of lines suitable for export as well as local consumption. Eggs and fowls may be profitably exported, Honey is a valuable and money-making adjunct. There is a large demand for flax and linseed. Beet sugar would find a ready market. Fruit is not grown to anything like the extent to which it should be grown. Let our farmers get out of the everlasting rut—producing oats and wheat, with a little milk and butter, and here and there a few bales of wool by the more enterprising. By so doing they would not only make their calling less precarious, but make it more pleasant and less toilsome. And by widening their field of production they would place the local consumer above the risk of being injured by such a combination of circumstances as that which at present prevails. The farmer might grow less oats, and would not emulate the lucky digger by rare returns of half-crown a bushel, but on the other hand he would not be entirely at the mercy of the world when the return was a shilling.

### The South African Rush.

Great numbers of people, chiefly men, are leaving Australia weekly for the new El Dorado in Africa, but we note with satisfaction that the mania for flight is not gaining much ground in New Zealand. It can certainly be said in extenuation of the Australian exodus that the continent is a very good place to be out of at present, and that the New Zealander has fewer inducements to leave his emerald isle. Distant fields are proverbially green, and to the colonial artisan the allurements of a pound a day is well nigh irresistible. But if out of this he has to pay £4 10s for indifferent board and lodging, of what value to him is the remaining 30s? At the same time he is compelled to live amid the most disagreeable surroundings. There is an undoubted demand for artisans in Africa. Not later than Saturday last the Acting-Premier read a cable he had received from Major Pilcher, in Capetown, in answer to inquiries about the state of the labor market in South Africa. The Major stated that a demand existed for carpenters, tinsmiths, coach and waggon makers, bodymakers, coach painters, wheelwrights, saddlers, harness-makers, cutters, fitters, and tailors. But Major Pilcher added that the present high wages would decline as the supply increased. The greater part of the industrial activity will be found