

strength of 39. The fate of parties will thus, in the last resort, depend upon the action of this astute and uncommunicative Maori from the North, who will enjoy for a time at least the sensation of being a person of the very first importance. If, as is anticipated, he throws in his lot with the Government, Mr. Massey will have a bare majority of one—an unsatisfactory position at any time, and more than ever so in the critical period through which the country and the Empire are passing. The position would not be bettered in this respect should the Northern 'king-maker' elect to vote against Mr. Massey; for in that event any new Government that could be formed—barring, of course, the unlikely possibility of a Coalition Government—would still be left with a majority of only a single vote. A fresh general election at the present juncture would amount to nothing short of a scandal; and members, we may readily believe, will be as little anxious as the public for another contest and another strenuous wooing of the electors. Under the circumstances we may hazard a tolerably safe conjecture as to what is likely to happen. An early opportunity will be taken to divide the House on strictly party lines: and the party which wins on this first test division will be allowed to occupy the Treasury benches in peace, at least until the conclusion of the war.

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The lessons which have been most strikingly impressed upon the public as the result of the recounts and election petitions which followed the general election are the astounding extent to which our elections are vitiated by grave blunders and irregularities, and the urgent need for a fundamental reform of our whole system of electoral representation. In this connection, Mr. P. J. O'Regan has given us a needed and timely reminder of the circumstance—which the war had caused most of us to overlook—that we have already on the Statute Book at least a small instalment of the desired reform in the fact that the Legislative Council is now elective, and will be elected under the generally approved system of proportional representation. The first election of members of the Council is to take place simultaneously with the first election of members of the House of Representatives held after the first day of January, 1916, and every five years thereafter. If there is a dissolution the election will be held at the same time as the election of members of the House. The task of electing the members of the Council will be entrusted to those inhabitants of New Zealand who are entitled to vote at an election of a member of the House in any electoral district within the electoral division. For the purpose of the election of members of the Council, New Zealand is divided into four electoral divisions, to be known respectively as the First Electoral Division, the Second Electoral Division, the Third Electoral Division, and the Fourth Electoral Division. The First Electoral Division runs, roughly, from the Bay of Islands to Hawke's Bay; the Second Electoral Division includes the rest of the North Island; the Third Electoral Division covers Nelson, the West Coast, and Canterbury Province down to Ashburton; and the Fourth Electoral Division comprises the remainder of the South Island. At the first election there will be seven members for the First Division, seven for the Second, five for the Third, and five for the Fourth. At every election after the first there will be elected 40 members, 11 from each of the First and Second Divisions (making 22 for the North Island), and nine from each of the Third and Fourth Divisions (making 18 for the South Island).

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In regard to the method of voting, the Legislative Council Act provides for preferential voting, on the lines of what is known as the Single Transferable Vote system. The voter must place in the squares opposite the names of the candidate the figures 1, 2, 3, etc., so as to indicate the order of preference. A candidate, to ensure election, need not poll a majority, but only a certain proportion of the votes cast. This proportion, which is the least number of votes sufficient to render certain the election of a candidate, is called the Quota.

This quota is ascertained quite simply by dividing the total number of the votes by one more than the number of seats to be filled, and adding one to the result. To take the illustration employed by Mr. O'Regan: In the Fourth Electoral Division, comprising, roughly, the southern half of the South Island, there are five members to be returned at the first coming election. Suppose that 30,000 votes were cast. The returning officer would add one to the number of seats, which would bring the number to six. He would divide six into the number of votes cast, 30,000, which would give as the result 5000, to which would be added one, making the quota in this particular case 5001. Any member securing that number would be declared elected, whereas under the system hitherto in vogue a candidate would require to poll 15,001 votes to be successful. Moreover, the system of preferential voting provides for the transfer of votes from candidates who have obtained more votes than they need to secure the required quota. The surplus votes of those candidates who have received more than the quota are transferred to the unelected candidates indicated by the figures 2, 3, and so on, as the next preferences of the electors whose votes are transferred; and the candidates lowest on the poll are one after another eliminated by transferring their votes in accordance with the wishes of their supporters to the candidates indicated as next preferences. This process is continued until the required number of candidates, having each obtained the quota, have been declared elected. This operation renders all votes effective: votes are used and not wasted.

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The merits and advantages of this system have been already explained and expounded in our columns; and our present purpose is merely to draw our readers' attention to the fact that the system is now actually on our Statute Book so far as the Legislative Council is concerned, and that an election under its provisions will take place at no very distant date. So long as the war continues, the present Parliament will no doubt hang together: but so soon as the crisis is over, party activity will at once begin to make itself felt, and a general election for both Chambers may be precipitated at any time. It will be well, therefore, for electors to be on the alert, and for possible or prospective candidates to be making their preparations.

Notes

Offensive Letters

For some time past most objectionable and insinuating letters, in which priests, nuns, and orphan inmates figured as the principal actors, have been received by various people in Wellington—needless to say, to their intense annoyance and disgust. The police have had the matter in hand for some time, but it was not until recently that a clue was obtained and proceedings instituted. We give elsewhere a full report of the case as heard in the Magistrate's Court, from which it will be seen that the Magistrate held the charge to be fully proved, and imposed a fine of £10 and costs. As notice of appeal has been given, the case must be regarded as still *sub judice*, and we are therefore precluded from commenting upon it, further than to express our keen satisfaction, and that of all decent-minded people, that steps are being taken definitely and finally to put a stop to such a morbid and disgusting practice.

A Military Man on Cardinal Mercier

Colonel F. N. Maude, C.B., the well-known writer on military matters, gives great praise to Cardinal Mercier's famous Pastoral in an article which he contributed to a recent issue of the *Sunday Times*. A copy of the Pastoral was sent to the Colonel by a correspondent, and he was so much struck by his first sight of it that he quoted a column of the text. Colonel Maude says of the Pastoral: 'It is not given to many,