

# PROGRESS

With which is Incorporated  
THE SCIENTIFIC NEW ZEALANDER.

VOL. V.—No. 6. MONTHLY ]

WELLINGTON, N.Z., APRIL 1, 1910

[PRICE 6d. per copy; 6/6 per Annum posted,  
or in advance 5/-.

## Progress The Scientific New Zealander.

Published Monthly by Baldwin & Ragnard, Patent Attorneys, (215-217) Lambton Quay, Wellington, New Zealand.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.—Posted to any address in the Dominion 6/6, to Australia and United Kingdom 7/-. Payment in advance reduces these rates to 5/- and 5/6 respectively.

All communications to be addressed to "The Editor PROGRESS, New Zealand Insurance Buildings, Corner of Grey Street and Lambton Quay, Wellington Telephone 1389

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### EDITORIAL COMMENT.

#### Oil Wells at Taranaki.

In another column we give some account of the wells of Taranaki, as well as pictures of the plant and scene of operations. It will be seen by readers of PROGRESS that the industry is in a more promising condition than it has ever been in its history. Some years ago the only result was rank failure. But to-day the perseverance of the true believers, if it has not been crowned with success, has come not far from the success which its efforts have undoubtedly deserved. At all events, the whole business now wears the air of something not far from a settled industry.

The fame of the wells, even if they are only prospective, has got far beyond the boundaries of the Dominion. A cable message during the middle of the month speaks of inquiries received from London and prospects of purchase. The story reminds us that the Admiralty is said to have made up its mind to abandon coal for the navy and take to petroleum to drive the King's ships, as those of the Czar are driven in the neighbourhood of the Baku oil district, and as many ships are driven now all the world over. There are many advantages in favour of the newer fuel, the chief of which is that there is less chance of damage from labour disorganisation. Oil flows of itself to the surface or has to be pumped with a minimum of labour. But coal must be won by hands, and the owners of the hands are now displaying some rare powers of "sticking up" the whole business of the world for their own ends.

Without going into the controversy that rages round that point, it is easy to understand that this is a power most inconvenient to a nation dependent upon its fleet for the very life of its people. Of what use is it to build Dreadnoughts and submarines and torpedo boats and cruisers if there is no coal for driving them. At the critical moment there may be a strike of colliers, and the whole fleet of a country may be paralysed. What would be the feelings of the nation if two announcements appeared suddenly in the morning papers, one of a coal strike, and another of the German Fleet racing across the North Sea, bound for a British port?

Of course the Admiralty keeps a stock of coal for emergencies. The nation would not, therefore, be in a panic at the double announcement above mentioned. But there would be dire fear lest the supply gathered by the Admiralty might not be sufficient for the needs of the coming war. As it would be impossible to replace the miners at a moment's notice, for mining is a skilled profession, there would be no telling what a few weeks might bring forth. On the whole, the decision of the rulers of the King's Navy to use oil fuel as much as possible is commendably prudent. It is probable enough that the recent request for information comes from the Admiralty.

It is possible at the same time that it may have come from some German or American house. Although Rockefeller seems to have got tired of the monopoly of piling up dollars through the oil pipes of his gigantic concerns, it may be regarded as tolerably certain that the others of the gang who have been bleeding the American people and the world for some years are determined to enjoy their repasts some time longer. At any rate, they are go-ahead enough to see great possibilities for this oil business opening out in this new and far-off country. It has been their habit through life never to neglect the prospects of rising fields.

If the Germans were to get possession, there would be no fuel for the Admiralty when occasion arose, except on the terms dictated by the Kaiser. If the Americans got ahead first there would be exploitation of the national resources by strangers for strangers. It behoves the Government of the Dominion to keep a wary eye and to advise all concerned that they shall touch these wells at their peril. A great national resource ought not to be allowed to pass out of the hands of British subjects. That can not be prevented now. The only resource would be the imposition of such taxation as would make the holding of the property

financially impossible. By the time the Parliament meets it will be possible to go by a shorter and better road, namely, by the passing of an Act prohibiting the sale of national property to foreigners under any pretext whatever.

#### Repairing the Kaipara.

In some illustrations of the present issue we show the shipwrights working at the "Kaipara" in the bottom of the Dock of the Auckland Harbour Board. It is a sufficiently commonplace business from the point of view of the man accustomed to life in the neighbourhood of the great dockyards of the Old Country. But here it is in reality a spectacle unique and suggestive. When the direct steamers ran into greatness it was objected by the critics, who are always timid, that their repair in case of accident would be the occasion of the owners' undoing. Now here is a dock in which a very serious damage is being repaired with cheerful promptness. It is good news for the merchant shipping of the Dominion and for the ships of the King's Navy also. What is more, there is a touch of two local colours that do not usually blend well. The dock is Auckland enterprise, but the contractors for the repairs are Messrs. Hutchison and Campbell, of Wellington, and Adams, of Auckland. The combine has distinguished itself by effacing all the other contractors, and has shown its mettle by the manner in which it has overcome the difficulty presented by the absence of rolling machinery for the plates it requires for its work. It has just managed with jacks and blocks. This is the spirit of the early pioneers in the midst of modern appliances. The pioneers may be thought to have had the best of the deal, for they had to improvise everything. But, on the other hand, the men of to-day, when they have to improvise—a thing which few of them ever think of doing—have to find something to do the work of very big machinery. On the whole, the business about the "Kaipara" in the Auckland Dock is decidedly interesting, and, as we have said, suggestive.

#### The Dominion Water Power.

At last the Government has determined to utilise the water power under State control, spending half a million a year. As it estimates being able to sell power to the public at one-tenth the price of private enterprise, there is much reason to applaud the Government for accepting so practically a responsibility of such moment.