

PROGRESS

With which is Incorporated

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Progress

The Scientific New Zealander.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT.

Wanted—An Observatory.

An astronomical section of the Wellington Philosophical Society has recently been formed, having for its objects the associating together of those who are interested in the science of astronomy, and particularly in an endeavour to get for Wellington a properly equipped Observatory. In this matter the section is very anxious to gather funds to supplement a bequest of the late Mr. C. R. Carter, an old Wairarapa settler, who gave his name to Carterton. The following is an extract from his will:—

"As to the residue and remainder (if any) of the said net proceeds of the sale conversion and getting in of my estate aforesaid, my Trustee shall transfer the same to the Governors for the time being of the New Zealand Institute at Wellington, to form the nucleus of a fund for the erection in or near Wellington aforesaid, and the endowment of a Professor and Staff, of an Astronomic Observatory fitted with Telescope and the suitable instruments for the public use and benefit of the Colony and in the hope that such fund may be augmented by gifts from private donors and that the Observatory may be subsidised by the Colonial Government and without imposing any duty or obligation in regard thereto I would indicate

my wish that the Telescope may be obtained from the factory of Sir H. Grubb in Dublin."

The sum he left has accumulated in the hands of the Public Trustee, and now amounts to about £3000, and is under the control of the Governors of the New Zealand Institute. It is a goodly sum, enough to build and equip with good instruments an Observatory, but it will not do to expend that sum, or, indeed, to have an Observatory unless there is also an endowment so that a competent man can be put in charge and real work be done, as well as enabling the public to have the pleasure of observing some of the wonders of the Heavens through a large telescope. So the members of the section will gladly receive any donations towards the object, and will be particularly glad to enrol as new members those wishing to help in the work. Any member of the Philosophical Society can be attached to the section, and it is hoped that some who have not yet joined the Society will do so. The section has been duly formed, has its Council and officers. Mr. C. P. Powles is President and Treasurer, and Mr. A. C. Gifford Secretary. Pending the acquisition of a large telescope, the section is able to make use of a good 5-inch glass by Cook, or York, but it requires housing, and funds are wanted for the purpose. It is probable that the use of a small building near the Hector Observatory might be obtained, but this will require to be enlarged and to have a revolving dome.

The objects of the section surely must commend themselves to many; there must surely be those who are interested in science, and no science is more interesting or discloses greater wonders and beauties than astronomy, and though to understand its depths requires great knowledge of mathematics, there is much that those who do not possess that knowledge can understand and enter into, and the veriest amateur who gets hold of a telescope and observes carefully with it, not only derives great pleasure and profit from the study, but may make discoveries.

The Council of the Royal Astronomical Society of England, in their report for 1828, said, "Every one who possesses an instrument whose claims rise even not above a humble mediocrity, has it in his power to chalk out for himself a useful and honourable line of occupation for leisure hours in which his labour shall be really valuable if duly registered; those who possess good instruments have a field absolutely boundless for their exertions."

A good telescope with an object glass of three inches in diameter, with which much can be seen and done, can be obtained now for £13. This proves that if the goodwill be there, the Observatory will very soon be there also.

The Water Schemes.

The water schemes have not, to use a French expression, fallen into the water. On the contrary, they have been the subject of the liveliest discussion since they first saw the light. As we pointed out last month, the Public Works Statement gave us a further, and, indeed, up-to-date version of the Government position in relation to the schemes announced by the Prime Minister. That Statement was accompanied by two reports—one by Mr. Birkes, a well-known electric engineer of the Dominion, the other by Mr. Holmes, the engineer-in-chief of the Dominion. These being in great detail proved one thing very conclusively, namely, that the Government had not gone into the matter in the blindfold manner special to those who advocate wild cat schemes. The public saw that at all events they had expert evidence behind them in some quantity.

The next point to come out was that the Government had decided to concentrate for the present so far as construction goes, on two schemes, viz.: the Hutt scheme and the Lake Coleridge. The reports in detail about these two we publish in another page this morning, and they will be found interesting reading. Both have been attacked by at least one outside electric engineer, who finds fault more particularly with the figures employed by Mr. Birkes. This is a controversy of course entirely for professional men to settle as best they can. The Government engineers have had their say in elaborate detail, and Mr. Black has replied in some detail likewise and with a good deal of generalising of an order rather more fierce than one expects to find in a cold scientific treatise. Be that as it may, Mr. Black has as much right to his opinion as has Mr. Berks. Between them, they will no doubt thresh the subject out presently to the public satisfaction. But one remark of Mr. Black's can not be allowed to pass. He has stated in his first letter, addressed to the "Evening Post," that the Government have now abandoned all their schemes but two, and the inference is plain that this is the result of the attacks by Mr. Black and the other