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Elections As They Were [III]

LAST week we printed an article by Leo Fanning on the amusing side of election campaigns and candidates' meetings in New Zealand as he remembered them or had been told about them. This week we reproduce contemporary accounts from various sources in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, from unpublished manuscripts, posters, etc.

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The Pioneers Weren't Always Polite

FIRST-HAND accounts of Auckland elections for the Provincial Council in the 'fifties are to be found in the writings of James George, of which the manuscript is in the Auckland Public Library and a typed copy is in the Turnbull Library, Wellington. George was a Provincial Councillor for an Auckland electorate for a time, and he called his book *A Few Odds and Ends of Remembrances*. Under the date on the title page (1875-76) he has this in place of dedication or "text": "If I was rich enough I would print it after it was revised a bit."

Here are two extracts from George's book, reproduced by permission of the Turnbull Library, with his own punctuation and spelling preserved:

Life-Preservers and Threats

"Lieut Col R. Wynyard 58 Reg was waited on to be nominated. . . . he like a maid blushed and consented after some time then came the tug of war in politics, which has been the ruin of the place to a certain extent, by the disgraceful scenes of bribery and drunkenness and personation, carried on by those who should know better, at the election of Superintendent in 1853 the soldiers of the 58 Regt was taken to the orderly room and

the voting paper—headed Unity and Peace (Save the mark)—with their Colonel's name on it was put into their hands as they were marched down to the polling booth where the G Post office now stands 1875 with a Sergeant at their head and having voted for Col Wynyard they was marched back to their barracks at 1/2 past 9 o'clock AM. such was our first election in Auckland it put every man against his Neighbour, life-preservers and threats was freely used by some who considered themselves men, and great drunkenness Bribery & c I was assailed by an Irishman and accused of having been the cause of the 1848 rebellion. . . .

After Dr. Campbell resigned in 1856 . . . J. A. Gilfillan was brought out against John Williamson or Promising John. I went on Mr. Gilfillan's act to Waipu the Nova Scotian settlement as agent for him Williamson sent a Mr. Gourly Mr. Leon Delaville was the returning officer when I voted for my candidate Gourly said that he would vote for J. W. Esqr then gave a paper or Voting one, But he had forgot to put his signature, I noticed the omission but did not let on so did Leon Delaville I got all the votes at Waipu, Williamson not one I told Mr. Henry of it Gourly swore that it was a Lie, wanted me to fight on the Beach, but I knew better."

A Lamented Death

In 1855, George was chairman of the "Progressive Party," opposing the "Constitutional Party," at some sort of election. He does not make it clear what post was to be filled by the successful candidate, but he reproduces an "obituary" of the defeated one from the Auckland Paper *The Southern Cross*.

"On the 10th November aged Old Officialism died after a severe struggle. Deceased had been ailing for some time but his friends, even to the last, never despaired of his recovery . . . he suffered a relapse consequent on the previous day's excitement, increased, it is supposed, by an over-indulgence in ardent spirits . . . it was clear to all that the mortal course of Old Officialism was run. During the whole day friends of the deceased (whose struggles towards the end were frightful) mustered in large numbers, including the Protestant Clergy of all denominations, who for once were united possibly because spiritual consolation was not required. Col. Wynyard and the Colonial Secretary were greatly moved at the condition of their friend, and did all in their power to alleviate his sufferings. A great number of the humbler class were in constant attendance during the day, enquiring after the health of expiring Old Officialism. As a proof of how much they loved him we may mention that the majority were so deeply affected as to lose the use of their legs; some indeed became perfectly insensible, and were only recovered after many hours' attention on the part of the police. About 4 o'clock deceased lost all appearance of life, and in that state remained until the night of the 9th instant, when he recovered the use of

WORKING MEN!

WHO CALLS YOU YOKELS?

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MR. FITZGERBERT.

his speech for a moment, and looking anxiously towards his sorrowing friends exclaimed 'Who's to pay the Piper.' These were his last words; he expired at noon on Saturday."

A Quorum From the Bush

Nelson was the scene of election incidents described in the unpublished letters of Samuel Stephens, a surveyor who represented Nelson in the General Assembly in 1854-55. Here is part of a letter (from a copy in the Turnbull Library), written to Anne Stephens, and dated November 28, 1854:

"We have plenty of politics and political business in New Zealand among a certain few—but we have far too much Government for the good of the country or its pocket—elections are constantly occurring by vacancies caused by people getting tired of the duties and empty honours. Few can be found to accept the post, particularly of member of the lesser Parliament, the Provincial Council. I have told you that I had the honour of being returned for Nelson as one of the representatives to the General Assembly by six men and a boy—intense excitement! This was rather better than in the case of a friend of mine (Dr. Monro) one of our sagest legislators, who had to send two or three miles into the woods for two sawyers to make up the quorum of electors necessary for the purpose, which I believe is three."

Suspense in Otago

The slowness of communications sometimes made elections in country districts more exciting than they are nowadays by prolonging the suspense. In 1881, Mackay John Scobie Mackenzie was invited to stand against the Conservative, Cecil de Lautour, for Mt. Ida, in Otago. Telegraphs and telephones were few, and returns took some time to reach the headquarters at the small mining town of Naseby. In the absence of one or two relatively unimportant returns, Scobie Mackenzie was officially declared the victor, and was chaired through the one straggling street of Naseby. As Sheila Macdonald records in her biography of Mackenzie (*The Member for Mt. Ida*): "Mr. de Lautour left hurriedly by buggy for Dunedin, only to discover the following day that a belated and surprisingly heavy return had reversed the decision and left him the victor of the contest by six or seven votes."

Three years later, de Lautour had retired from public life and Mackenzie defeated his successor in a popular win: "Naseby cheered itself hoarse, and

(Continued on next page)

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