

Notes

Cheap Railway Fares.

At the end of last week the Minister for Railways was waited upon at Dunedin by a deputation interested in obtaining cheap railway fares to Lake Wakatipu. The ostensible object of the deputation was to induce the Minister to so reduce the fares that the man of small means might be able to take his family to the Lakes district and share with them the pleasure of beholding Nature in one of her most striking phases. In reply to the deputation, Sir Joseph Ward was in a position to state that the new rates to come into operation shortly would be of such a character as would meet their views. He distinctly stated, however, that no special concessions would be made with respect to Dunedin, but that they would apply to all parts of the Colony. He indicated that the rate for such a distance as from Dunedin to Lake Wakatipu would be reduced to about half the present figure. As this reduction is to be a permanent one, it evidently applies to ordinary fares, and it enables us to make an approximation to a forecast of its nature. From Dunedin to Kingston is 174 miles, which at 2d per mile makes the fare 29s. If the new fare is 15s, the reduction will be an appreciable one. The distance from Christchurch to Dunedin is 230 miles, and the fare £1 18s 4d. By a similar process of reduction the new fare may be expected to be £1. From Wellington to New Plymouth the present fare at 2d a mile is £2 1s 10d, and the new fare will be about £1 1s. Here, then, we have all the necessary data for the sliding scale of which we made mention in a previous issue, and by which the fare for a short distance will be twopence per mile, and the fare for 200 miles something under one penny per mile. If this result can be gained, and the railway revenue still maintained, then the consequence must be general gratification, and if, as promised by the Minister, there are still further reductions for excursion purposes at holiday seasons, then the railways will indeed become what they ought to be, the servants of the people.

Without going so far as the extremists, who contend that the railways should be free to all, as the roads are, these persons conveniently omitting to mention that traction is provided in the one case and not in the other, it may be observed that all experience goes to show that the reduction in charges which leads to a more general use of anything is a profitable as well as a wise step. The recent reduction in postal rates in this Colony proves it. The loss which was expected to accrue in the first year was not nearly so large as was anticipated, and it may now be regarded as certain that penny postage will in future yield an embarrassingly large revenue. A large profit from such a source is embarrassing in some respects, for it leads to demands for further concessions. The revenue from the British Post Office continues to swell until the authorities are almost at a loss to devise new conveniences for the public. The people of New Zealand already send more letters per head in a year than the people of any other country. If the railway fares are correspondingly reduced, it may eventuate that the people of this Colony will travel by rail more miles per head than any other people. Such a result would not be without its social and economic significance, and it might be that the influence would not be always for good. But no one can deny either the abstract justice or the economic soundness of proposals to reduce railway fares to the lowest point consistent with the utmost possible distention of the demand. For example, the railway fares now deter many a family in moderate circumstances from making a railway jaunt that would take them for a little time out of the melancholy rut in which they move, and from which they would return to take up with renewed vigor of mind and body the round of daily duties. Many commercial transactions which are now impossible would be possible if excessive freights did not bar the way. The freights in New Zealand are anomalous. If a dairy company imports a plant from America, it will find that the railway charges from the seat of manufacture to the seaboard, added to the freight oversea to New Zealand, together amount to less than the railway freight from the port or landing to a district 100 miles inland. That is to say, the material was carried 1200 miles by rail in America, and about 14,000 miles by sea, for less than it could be carried 100 miles for in this Colony. Such cases have already occurred, and they prove how badly existing rates need revision.

Penny Postage With Australia.

In return for some concessions of vaguely disclosed extent in connection with the new Pacific cable, these concessions being made by New Zealand, the Federal Government has consented to receive New Zealand letters bearing a penny stamp, and distribute them without the surcharge of one penny hitherto imposed. Practically this gives New Zealand a penny post with Australia, but in one

direction only. The Federal Government has not yet screwed its courage up to the point of granting a universal penny post. Letters, therefore, from Australia will be charged the old rate, which means as far as New Zealand is concerned that while a writer here may send a letter to Australia for one penny, the correspondent there must pay twopence for the privilege of sending a reply. Not that the Commonwealth stands alone in this respect, though we should have thought one of the first directions in which the newly born national aspiration would have sought expression would be the provision of a public boon so obviously just. The Federal Postmaster-General demurs on the ground of finance, and in the ordinary official mind such an objection is quite natural. No doubt the immense distances which mails must be carried in Australia deter the authorities from suggesting a penny post, but they should look at the example of New Zealand, where, though the distances are not so great, the natural obstacles are many, while the population to be served is infinitely smaller. There is no hamlet, however secluded, in New Zealand, which has not at all events a weekly post, and in many instances the mails are carried in spite of difficulties that would daunt any but the most intrepid traveller. And if under the comparative circumstances a nation of four millions of people cannot supply itself with the conveniences possessed by one of much less than a million, the contrast is not creditable to Australian public spirit.

In Lighter Vein

(By 'QUIP'.)

* Correspondence, newspaper cuttings, etc., intended for this department should be addressed 'QUIP', N.Z. TABLET Office, Dunedin, and should reach this office on or before Monday morning.

'THERE'S nothing like a little judicious levity.'

R. L. STEVENSON.

'Ye Englishe Tongue.'

In last week's issue there was a long list of proper names with very improper pronunciation. Most of them were the names of members of the aristocracy, and they show how badly the education of those in the 'huppah suckles' is neglected. The man who makes pills worth a guinea a barrel has evidently been 'dragged up' better than the noble lord who was formerly Governor of New South Wales, for, while the former always spells his name Beecham, the latter has all his collars marked Beauchamp. But when a man named Chumley is found to spell his name Cholmondeley it is time the matter was looked into. I know a man named Brown who got two years 'hard' for signing himself Jones on a cheque. And yet J-O-N-E-S spells Brown just as much as St. L-E-G-E-R spells Sillinger, or W-H-M-Y-S-S spells Weema. You have heard of the young lady of this name celebrated in song. The verse is not remarkable for its sublimity of sentiment, but this is accounted for by the fact that the author belonged to the Kipling school, and that he was only beginning to let his hair grow.

There was a young lady named Wemyss,
Who was very much troubled with dremyss,
If she took pork at night,
She'd awake with a fright,
And arouse all the house with her scremyss.

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Those poor people who haven't English for a mother tongue must be for ever regretting the accident by which they were born foreigners. The storekeeper's assistant at White Island is a Frenchman. When he first came he used to be nearly always late in the mornings. Then he began to come in time. Lately he has been at the store before his employer. Imagine the poor man's tribulation in trying to find out what was meant when his master addressed him as follows: 'You used to be behind before; you've been early of late, and, my word, you're first at last.' The English language is enough to make a man blow out his brains with a bicycle pump—at least the poet says so.

If an S and an I and an O and a U
With an X at the end spell SU;
And an E and a Y and an E spell I
Pray what is a speller to do?
Then, if also an S and an I and a G
And a H.E.D. spell cide,
There's nothing left for a speller to do
But to go and commit SIOUX-EYE-SIGHED.

A Sad Case.

This reminds me that we in White Island are just as civilised as the rest of the world. Like Florodora Island