

Notes

Medical Practitioners' Fees.

In the House on July 15, the member for Masterton raised a question of vital interest to settlers remote from towns. He asked whether the Government proposed to introduce legislation for regulating the fees and charges of medical practitioners so that country residents requiring medical aid might be protected. In support of his contention that the matter was one requiring serious attention, Mr Hogg stated that in his own district a large number of deaths occurred through the reluctance of those requiring aid to run the risk of the heavy charges occasionally imposed by medical men. And he certainly scored a point when he pointed out that the settlers were often compelled by the conditions of their tenure to reside on the land before a track or a road had been made to it. That being so, it was only reasonable that medical men should exact a considerable fee for visits. He therefore contended that there ought to be a mileage rate and a maximum fee. He further pointed out that the Government provided medical attendance for inmates of gaols and lunatic asylums, and for the animals of settlers provided veterinary surgeons, while their wives and families were unable to procure medical attendance without incurring the risk of ruinous charges. That there was something in Mr Hogg's contention was evident from the Acting-Premier's reply. Sir J. G. Ward stated that the Medical Association were approaching the Government with the view of having an assessor appointed in order to tax accounts, and to insure the profession against what might be termed the undesirable members of it levying excessive charges on the people. The method mentioned by the Acting-Premier seems the most reasonable solution of the difficulty, which, however, only touches the fringe of the large question, whether it is not the duty of the State to provide medical attendance and medicine for all who need them and are unable to pay, charging the cost to the consolidated revenue. There is, of course, the objection that such a provision would effectually destroy the last shred of self-reliance in the public, and would open the door to a system of frivolous calls upon a medical man, who might ride miles on a winter night to find his alleged patient recovered by the judicious administration of a peppermint lozenge. And we must not forget that many country medical men live a life of hardship and exposure with a miserably poor reward. The whole subject is beset with more than the usual difficulties which surround questions affecting the obligation of the State to the individual, but it may be partially settled by the method suggested recently in Dunedin, that medical bureaux should be established to give advice gratis to all who require it.

The Mount Kembla Disaster.

The number who have perished in the Mount Kembla mine by the explosion of a few days ago may never be known, because the books which recorded their names were destroyed. Upwards of ninety bodies have been recovered, however, so that the disaster, in point of magnitude, ranks very high among such occurrences. And it will also be memorable among the tragedies that darken the history of coal mining, from the fact that it was totally unexpected, for almost at the very moment that the explosion occurred the manager was testifying to the Arbitration Court that the mine was the safest in the world. In reality so it was. The coal mined there is of most excellent quality for steam purposes. It is not so suitable for gas-making, and for this reason there is not so much explosive gas generated in the process of mining. In addition to this, the coal measure is found in a high hill, which makes it accessible by means of a tunnel instead of the usual shaft, and consequently the means of ventilation are more easily provided for. Practical men say that the explosion was due to the accumulation of inflammable gas in some cavities caused by falls in the roofs of some of the adits. This will probably be found to be the case, and it is not without its lesson to coal miners everywhere. The lesson is especially valuable to New Zealand, where in many districts, from Auckland to the Bluff, coal of a quality that is regarded as inferior from what may be called the 'carboniferous' point of view is found. The 'lignite' so mined has now been followed in many instances miles and miles below the ground. It is mined on the principles which regulate coal mining proper, and the operations are subject to proper Government control. Yet even in this harmless lignite mining there are developed gases, and damps, and fires that call for the utmost vigilance on the part of those concerned.

Every tragedy has its heroes. The spirit of chivalry is not extinct, and let there be a shipwreck, an explosion, or any convulsion of nature that places human lives in peril, there are found heroes ready to give their lives, if necessary, to the rescue of others.

Almost every calamity of the kind produces its heroes. Let it be a shipwreck—some will be found plunging into the waves to rescue their fellow-creatures. Let it be a mine accident—eager volunteers are ready to plunge into mephitic darkness to snatch their comrades from death. These heroes may win no crosses. As in this case, they die in the attempt to save life. But, to adopt Tennyson's line—'When shall their glory fade?' Alas! industrial history is too full of deeds such as those which have adorned the Mount Kembla disaster, and ranked it amongst the incidents that redeem human nature from the imputation of selfishness. The divine instinct of love for others is not yet extinct. And if there were a Victoria Cross (as there should be) for bravery in such cases as that of Mount Kembla, the men who dared and died, as well as the men who dared and lived should be fittingly honored.

The Bank of New Zealand.

The declaration of a dividend of 5 per cent. by the Bank of New Zealand may be accepted as proof of the soundness of the arrangement under which the Colony stepped in to the aid of the bank some years ago. Severe critics may demur to the payment of a dividend while there still exists a liability in the shape of uncalled capital, but the directors are quite willing to accept the responsibility of deciding that the position is such as to warrant the course. An analysis of the figures in the balance sheet justifies the action, and it has to be borne in mind that the shareholders were deserving of some consideration. A great many people have considered that the shareholders have not received the consideration they deserved, because there can be no doubt that the fall in the value of the shares ruined some whose livelihood depended on the dividend. An indication was given at the annual meeting on Friday last that Parliament will be asked to renew in some form the arrangement that exists between the Government and the Bank whereby the State guarantees the deficiency that will have to be provided for between the amount secured by the Assets Realisation Board's debentures and the amount which the realisation of the board's properties will produce. These debentures mature in 1904, and the unpaid capital of the bank is held in reserve for their redemption but Mr William Watson, the former president of the Bank and now one of its directors, estimated at the annual meeting that in seven years' time, if the existing arrangement with the Government is continued, the institution will be able out of its surplus profits to provide for the deficiency that will accrue, and that then the Bank will be practically free.

DIOCESE OF DUNEDIN.

On next Sunday at 11 o'clock a Mass of Thanksgiving will be celebrated in St. Joseph's Cathedral in connection with the King's Coronation.

The euchre tournament which took place at South Dunedin on Monday evening between representatives of St. Joseph's Men's Club and St. Patrick's Literary and Social Institute resulted in a win for the latter by 36 points.

On Sunday there was Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Joseph's Cathedral from last Mass until Vespers. Large numbers were present for adoration during the day. In the evening there was a procession in which the children of the Christian Brothers' and the Convent schools, and the members of the Sacred Heart Society (men's branch) took part.

A pleasant ceremony took place in the office of the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages, on Friday afternoon, when Mr W. J. Hall was presented with a purse of sovereigns in recognition of the tact and ability with which he discharged the duties of registrar for a number of years. The presentation was made by the Hon. H. Gourley, who eulogised Mr Hall's services, and expressed regret at his retirement. He had always found Mr Hall courteous, kind, attentive to his duties, and ever ready to consider the convenience of the public. Mr Hall, in replying, said it was most gratifying to him that his efforts to discharge his duties for a period of over 26 years had met with public approval. Words failed him to express his feelings for this mark of appreciation, and all he could say was that he was proud to close his official career with such an assurance of their high esteem. He heartily and sincerely thanked them for their handsome present. Mr Hall's successor and the deputy-registrar also spoke, both of them paying a well-merited meed of praise to Mr Hall for his unfailing courtesy and attention to duty.

A list of winning numbers in the Beeton Catholic Art Union appears elsewhere in this issue...

On Saturday, August 9, certain alterations in and additions to the ordinary train service will be made. Full particulars will be found in this issue...

In connection with the Coronation celebrations holiday excursion tickets will be issued on the Government Railways from 7th to 9th August, and will be available for return up to August 27...

The Sisters of Mercy, Hokitika, notify that the drawing of the Art Union in aid of the funds of the new Catholic school will take place on October 15. It is to be hoped that their many friends in all parts of the Colony will assist in making the Art Union a great success...