

## FROM THE FAR NORTH.

Away in the north of the North Island, almost at the top of the long narrow peninsula that occupies the northern part of the Auckland province, lies the picturesque Bay of Islands, the door to the large and fertile district known by the same name. The oldest settlement in New Zealand, its port, Russell, was the first capital of the colony, though it was not long before the seat of Government was removed to Auckland, as being more central, a consideration that in the course of time prompted its removal still further south to Wellington. A short trip by steamer or launch brings the traveller from Russell to Opuia, the terminus of the railway from Whangarei. After a further few miles by rail he reaches Kawakawa, where coaches leave for the West Coast, traversing the Bay of Islands district. One's first impression is one of disappointment, for the country in the east has little about it that is picturesque or promising. The valley along which the railway runs is much of it poor clay land, some day, perhaps, to be turned to account for apple-growing, like so many other similar districts in New Zealand. Here and there are patches of light bush, but to see what the Bay of Islands is capable of producing in this line, one must go some miles to the west. The further one goes to the west, the more rain falls, and consequently the greener the country and the heavier the bush. This difference is especially noticeable in the summer drought which every season prevails for a few weeks, even if it does not extend over two or three months; for frequently in some parts heavy rain may fall, while a few miles further east there is not a drop, and the farmer, with envious eye, sees passing in the distance showers that would revive his parched and thirsty fields.

Here, as elsewhere in the Dominion, much of the original forest has disappeared, and every summer sees increasing inroads made upon it by the fires which, caused by a match carelessly thrown down, or started for the purpose of burning off for winter feed, soon pass beyond control, and sweep the country for miles. But nearer to the West Coast, in the rich Hokianga district, the bush still holds its own, and one marked feature in

many parts is the gnarled old puriri trees, standing detached in green paddocks, the sentry mounting guard over the land. The country is for the most part undulating, level plain or swamp being found only in small areas; and dotted over the landscape are to be seen the rounded cones of extinct volcanoes, so characteristic of the neighbourhood of Auckland, but, unlike them, often having their craters filled with light bush. Being thus volcanic in origin, the country is stoney in patches, and suitable then only for grazing sheep, but otherwise fertile and well fitted for the cultivation of oats or maize, the cereals most in favour in the North.

The climate is very pleasant for the greater part of the year. In summer, when the drought prevails, the heat is sometimes trying, but seldom such as to prostrate one, and more often than not it is tempered by a refreshing breeze. In winter frost is frequent on the lower levels, or when the cold is less severe, fogs and heavy dews prevail, even in the height of summer. But they are followed by beautiful sunny days, that make one quite forget any little discomforts of the early morning or late evening. Rain comes chiefly from the north-east, and the temperature is then fairly high; so rapid growth of vegetation is the result, and it is marvellous how quickly the country changes from parched and dried-up brown to rich emerald green. Easterly rains are usually followed by cold westerly squalls, which may be almost as cold and disagreeable as the "southerly busters" of Wellington. But they generally alternate with bright sunshine, and soon the intervals between them grow longer, and they give place to clear skies and bracing southerly weather. On the whole, the winter in the Bay of Islands is a very pleasant season, a great contrast to the cold and stormy winters that prevail in so many parts of the South.

In spite of the fact that settlement in the Bay of Islands dates back to the early forties, it is still by no means a populous district. Not that there is so much unoccupied land, but the homesteads are scattered, and there is not a single large centre of population anywhere north of Whangarei. But there are many small villages, some of which will surely grow into large towns, as the North develops with the advent of better roads, and

the completion of the North Auckland Main Trunk railway. Kawakawa, that owes its existence to the coal mines that used to be worked in the neighbourhood; Ohaeawai, a centre whence roads diverge to the north, the west, and the south-west; Kai-kohe, a point on the North Auckland Main Trunk, towards which the line, though many miles distant, is slowly advancing; Okaihau, still further west, towards Hokianga, are all mere villages, each with a store or two, a church or two, a school, and the inevitable public-house—one or more. For the Bay of Islands is not, unfortunately, a Prohibition district. There are many Prohibitionists, it is true, and in the 1911 campaign the district, for the first time in its history, obtained a majority for No-License—a small majority, it is true, being under 200—and on the wider National issue, a substantial majority of over 900. But in 1914 here, as in so many other parts of the Dominion, the Temperance poll was overshadowed by the electoral struggle, and the result was a great set-back for Temperance.

Owing to the scattered population, as just described, it will be readily understood that the question of organisation is a difficult one. It is not possible to get large meetings for any purpose, even in the excitement of a general election. Attendance must be counted by tens, and in some parts by units. At ordinary times, the principal attraction to call together the people is the combined social and dance, organised for church support or for social intercourse, or, in these stirring times of war, for assistance to some of the numerous patriotic funds. One clergyman, who is a staunch supporter of the Temperance cause, told me that it was no use trying to do work with the young people, either for church, or Band of Hope, or any other purpose, because parents were unwilling to let their children go the long distances necessary, unless accompanied by themselves. Afternoon meetings, that serve better where women are concerned, are useless for the young people, who, if not still at school, are occupied on the farm or homestead. Thus any work attempted lacks the enthusiasm of numbers.

Notwithstanding this, three efforts have been made to organise the district, and a good deal of work was done. In 1902 the Auckland Provincial No-License League took the mat-