

COLONIAL PROSPECTS:

CHATS WITH AGENTS-GENERAL.

By CAMPBELL TERRISS.



IN the purlieus of Westminster, almost in the shadow of the old abbey, there stands a fine block of buildings bearing on the various doorways large plates of polished brass signifying to all the world that within are the offices of the various Agents-General for our Colonies in the sunny South. This is, in fact, the scene of labour of a small but able body of men whose activities cover an incredibly wide surface of affairs, and whose functions amount almost to the office of an ambassador.

A chat with a few of these representatives has elicited some very interesting facts concerning their invaluable office, and some equally interesting information concerning some of our Colonies in the most distant regions of the South.

To be asked for every conceivable kind of information about the Colonies by people who would fain write books about them without ever visiting them; to be consulted by high officials in the various departments of the home Government; to be cross-examined by financial magnates or persons interested in frozen meat; and ever and anon to be sought by humble emigrants for advice—such are a few of the experiences in the life of an Agent-General.

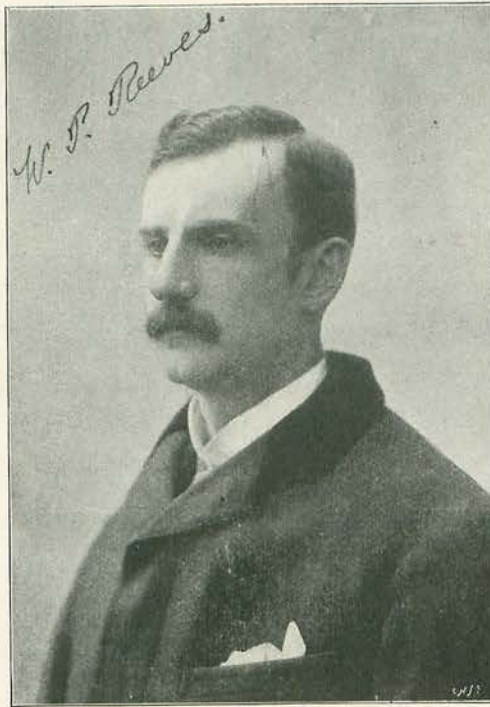
On the other hand he is liable to be cajoled into lecturing to institutions on "Greater Britain" and our cousins over sea; to be called upon to make brilliant speeches at public dinners; and always to be available

for a chat with colonials visiting England, to supply them with the latest news, and, in short, be a guide, philosopher, and friend to them—such is the life of an Agent-General in another direction.

THE HON. W. P. REEVES.

My first call was paid to the Hon. W. P.

Reeves, the able gentleman who has recently been appointed Agent-General for New Zealand. He spoke very hopefully of his colony. "It is not only a place to live in but to enjoy life in. As to the climate, it varies in different parts but on the whole is scarcely equalled in the world. The famous hot springs and geysers in the northern island, and the Alpine and Norwegian scenery in the southern are matchless of their kind. Speaking of the country being essentially one to live in, the death rate is the lowest of the Australasian Colonies, and oscillates between nine and eleven per thousand. Still, New Zealand offers one sad



From a photo by]

[Wrigglesworth, Wellington.

THE HON. W. P. REEVES.

picture, for beside the rapid growth of the Anglo-Saxon race there we see the once great race of the Maoris fast dying out, fully five per cent. of their number disappearing during the last five years. And in some little islands near there is a kindred race failing before the white man's advance. In the Chatham Isles there are only left eleven men and nine women of the interesting Moriori race."

New Zealand being a very large exporter of frozen meat, this subject was entered into

with interest by Mr. Reeves. The shipments from New Zealand to this country during the first half of 1896 were at the rate of 157 million lbs. a year. These vast quantities of meat were sold at Smithfield at $2\frac{3}{4}d.$ to $3\frac{1}{2}d.$ per lb. wholesale. As Mr. Reeves observed, "Any householder who compares these prices with his butcher's bill cannot fail to observe the part played by the middleman." Knowing the general excellence of colonial meat, one has a right to suspect and reject any inferior article that is palmed off as from New Zealand.

Alongside of the great fields being opened up in West Australia there has recently been a great development in New Zealand gold mining, and from the last return in Mr. Reeves' possession the annual value of gold yielded was over a million sterling. This development presents a remarkable instance of the instantaneous effect of a scientific discovery on the wealth of a country, for before the recent introduction of the cyanide gold-extracting processes gold mining was at a very low ebb. Despite the great increase of gold production, the wonderful developments of the meat trade, the abundant wheat-harvest and the coal mines, New Zealand still exports wool more than anything else, and yet retains some for her own growing manufactures.

In reply to a question as to what class of emigrants should seek this favoured clime, Mr. Reeves admitted that bone and muscle are hardly sufficient qualifications nowadays. The labour market is full, and the Colonies of Australasia present a remarkable picture of emigration from colony to colony, as each one passes through its vicissitudes of progress and development. New Zealand, though increasing steadily in population, has suffered slightly by the West Australian discoveries of gold. Still, for willing men with a small capital, assisted passages are procurable, and if steady they can usually succeed.

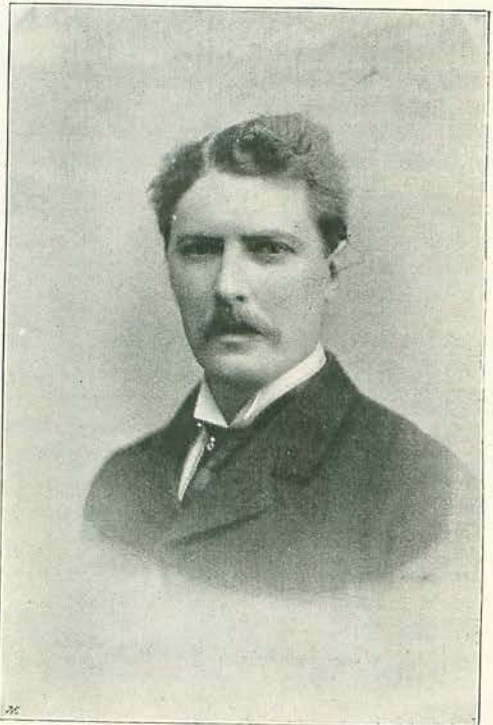
The office of an Agent-General being absolutely non-political, and Mr. Reeves being much more ready to advertise his colony than himself, we are bound to leave his interesting personality undiscussed, and to refrain from questions touching women's suffrage, and other matters that absorb the attention of politicians in the "Britain of the South."

SIR WESTBY PERCEVAL.

After such profitable discourse with Mr. Reeves I made my way to the office of Sir Westby Perceval, the Agent-General for

Tasmania, and himself, as I found, a native of that colony. With her insignificant public debt, her superb climate, and her quiet capacity for minding her own business, this beautiful island is very apt to be overlooked by both emigrant and traveller. But fortunately the strategic importance of places like Hobart is not forgotten, and great progress has been made under the scheme of colonial defence in rendering the island a fit base of warlike operations.

From her temperate and genial climate Tasmania is more eminently fitted than



From a photo by]

[Waterly.

SIR WESTBY PERCEVAL.

almost any Australasian colony for a residence for Englishmen. Here is one of the few corners of the world where one can seek and find a quiet life away from the terrible hurry of modern life in Europe. With cheap food, beautiful landscape, a very Eden of fruit and flowers, every facility for the finest English sports, the Tasmanian, born and bred under the beautiful constellation of the Southern Cross, has much to be thankful for.

Though Tasmanian affairs make but little stir in the outer world there is activity enough in her political life, and she is, if the

smallest, not the least staunch in support of the federated Australasia that promises soon to be an accomplished fact. Side by side with the temptations of all Tasmanians to enjoy the *dolce far niente* in almost the only place where it is procurable, there is yet an enormous field for the employment of capital and labour in the vast mines of such districts as Mount Bischoff and Mount Lyell, where large quantities of gold, copper, tin and silver are dug from the earth, and here the Tasmanians are finding an ever-widening scope for their commercial activities. As in the case of some other of our distant Colonies, emigration is a small item in the progress of the island of Tasmania. The colonists find themselves well able to fill the labour market of all ranks of life and quietly to carry on their great trade in fruit and minerals. Besides which a new development is taking form in the export of hard wood for paving, and of this branch of trade very good illustrations are to be found in the shape of wooden pavements in some parts of London, notably at Paddington, Lambeth, and in Cannon Street.

With a firm conviction that when interviewing is played out one might do worse than try Tasmania, I bade adieu to Sir Westby Perceval.

SIR MALCOLM FRASER.

The last, but not least, victim of the insatiable interviewer was Sir Malcolm Fraser, Agent-General for Westralia, as people are beginning to call the western portion of Australia. He expressed himself very willing to talk about the golden colony, that was until recently the laggard of the five sisters of Australia. Now however every mail brings news of fresh finds of gold, and to all appearance Western Australia has donned the seven-league boots of progress,

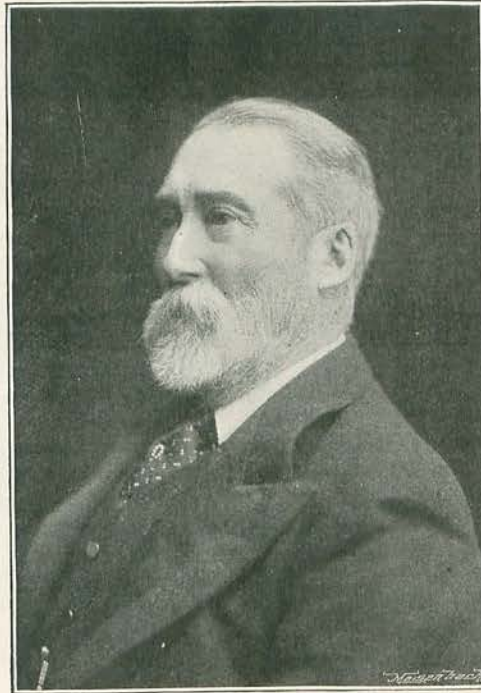
and in productiveness may even outrival any colony of Australasia. A glance at the map shows what a vast territory it is, running far north and south and embracing a wide variety of soil and climate. Despite the sandy wastes inland and the occasionally drought-smitten stretches in its centre, the climate on the whole is excellent, while in parts it is nearly perfect.

As to trade, Sir Malcolm spoke most cheerfully. The pastoral and agricultural interest go in the front rank, and there is still room for any number of farmers. There are flourishing pearl fisheries on the north-western coast; there is much valuable timber in the forests southward; the gold fields are enormously increasing trade in all branches of imports, and profitable attention is paid in some parts to the cultivation of vines and various kinds of fruit, for which both climate and soil are in every way adapted.

Altogether Western Australia, with all her future before her, and with the lessons that may be learnt from her more precocious sisters, is one of our most wealthy and desirable possessions in the southern seas. She is very happy in her choice of an Agent-

General, the value of whose capacity in watching over her growing and widening importance cannot be overrated.

There was never a time when the need for strengthening the "crimson thread of kinship" was felt so keenly by politicians of all parties as the present. The Colonies have reciprocated our most friendly sentiments, and in any hour of emergency we may rely on the same generous and spontaneous support as that accorded to Great Britain by Greater Britain in the past. Our cousins in Australia follow with increasing interest all our political, literary and artistic developments; while we, on our part, wish for them in 1897 the best of prosperity and success.



From a photo by]

[Window & Grove.

SIR MALCOLM FRASER.