

OLD AGE PENSIONS IN NEW ZEALAND.*

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Shillin' a day,
Bloomin' good pay,
And,— lucky to get it.
A shillin' a day!

—*Rudyard Kipling.*

PERHAPS the most striking characteristic of colonial legislation is its tendency toward experiment. Nor is thus unnatural. England, the mother of many colonies, is old and slow to change her ways, and public opinion takes long to form in a nation of thirty-eight millions of people. The chains of precedent are not easily shaken off in a land where civilization has been the slow growth of many hundreds of years, where pictures are dimmed, and statues and public buildings blackened with the decay of centuries, and where the whole environment speaks of an historic past. But in the colonies the naturally conservative feeling of Englishmen undergoes a reaction. Traditions have little hold upon us. Public opinion is more quickly formed, and the dream of a few quickly becomes the ideal of many. We live in an age of universal suffrage, and popular leaders are naturally appreciative of the aspirations of the vote-possessing multitude. Besides, it is only to be expected that colonists who have been thrown upon their own resources from the very outset, who have had to make homes with their own hands in a new country, should develop a constructive faculty, an originality, and habits of self-reliance which would lead them to form plans of action as bold as they are novel.

POLITICAL EXPERIMENTS.

New Zealand is a typical colony, and it must be admitted that its legislation is largely experimental. Some, pessimists for the most part, would have us believe that it is the happy hunting ground of the political faddist. Are

we really rushing in where angels fear to tread, or are our laws simply a little ahead of the times? To illustrate the tendency of progressive legislation at length would be beyond the scope of this article; but it requires no far stretch of imagination to prophesy that, before many years are over, many of our laws, which now appear to contain new political principles of doubtful expediency, will be adopted in other colonies. The women's franchise is "coming." It is only a question of time. Our Conciliation and Arbitration Act is attracting attention even in England, and our Lands for Settlement Act, giving powers to the State of acquiring large estates by compulsion (as a last resort), is now recognized, even by those who were at one time most opposed to it, as not having been productive of any injustice in practice, and as having done much to promote closer settlement on the land.

Probably no measure passed in any colony has been so experimental, progressive, democratic (whatever it may be called) as the Old Age Pensions Act, just passed by the New Zealand Parliament, and it is for that reason, and because it is the first Act of its kind passed in any colony, that I consider some account of its provisions might prove interesting.

The idea of an old age pension arises partly out of a feeling of repugnance to a poor law, or charitable aid system, and partly from the spread of socialistic views which are directly antagonistic to the *laissez faire* principle, and are constantly urging on legislation tending to the equalization of wealth. Even those who are most energetic in preaching the virtues of thrift admit that in a civilized country we cannot allow our aged poor to starve.

* Mr. Montgomery, the writer of the article, is a member of the New Zealand House of Representatives.