

PASSAGES FOR DICTATION.

(a.) At the rate of 50 words per minute. Takes 10 minutes.

Do you mean to say handing over to three men for five years the management of your lines is likely to give more control than if they were controlled by Ministers who are actually under your eyes, and are continually to be questioned by you? You must have more control over Ministers than over Commissioners; and do you mean to say that the Commissioners you have appointed are necessarily more able men than you can pick out as Ministers? That is not saying much for the democracy, or the intellect, of New Zealand, if that is so. What, then, is there left? The question we have left to face is this: Are we fit to have railways at all? Now, to refer to a man who is a railway expert. I refer to W. M. Acworth, whose book on railway tariffs ought to be read by every member of the House dealing with the question of railway management. He says that the very fact of railways being handed over to Commissioners means that the State ought not to have railways at all; the logical conclusion is, that if the State, through its Government, is not fit to manage its lines, the State ought not to have constructed them, and ought to have left the construction of them to private parties. Now, we are, then, practically face to face with this question: Ought the State to control the carrying of passengers and goods by railways, or ought it to hand over this function to private parties? I can understand the State doing what is done in France—leasing the railways to private companies. I can understand the State saying this is not a State function, and giving up both the construction and the control of railways. I can understand its having control of the railways through ordinary government—which is its Parliament and its Ministers. But I cannot understand such a system as this. The very existence of the present system is an open admission that the government of the people in the form we now possess it has been a failure, and requires to be altered. One or two words to show the wider bearing of this question. What is the whole tendency of the government system of to-day? The whole tendency is in the direction of the increase of State functions. We have increased our State functions in New Zealand further, perhaps, than has been done in most countries. We have our Government Insurance scheme, our Public Trust Office, our Post-Office Savings-bank. What does all this mean? It means, no doubt, additional care being required; additional burdens being thrown upon Ministers; additional responsibilities cast upon the House of Assembly; and, no doubt, additional functions and responsibilities being cast on the citizens who shall be elected good and true members of the House. That is what the increase of State functions means, if you are to have State functions relegated to irresponsible Commissioners, such as our Railway Commissioners.

(b.) At the rate of 80 words per minute. Takes 10 minutes.

It only needs to select a few typical cases from the many that present themselves to show how heartrending is the misery of many of these people. Here, for instance, is the plight of a widow who lives in Edward Street. She occupies a damp cottage, for which she has to pay 5s. a week, and on entering the front room one sees at a glance that nearly every piece of pawnable furniture has been disposed of. She has four children, and her sole income is the wages of her eldest girl, who earns 6s. 6d. a week at a paper-factory, whilst the woman herself occasionally makes a few shillings at charing work.

The case of a woman in Victoria Street is harder still. The other day the very bed on which she and her children had been sleeping was seized and sold by the bailiffs. The whole amount of the debt—rent—did not come to £2, and the few wretched articles of furniture would not have fetched more than a few shillings. A charitable policeman living in the district, hearing of the affair, redeemed the poor creature's bed, and she has been supplied with partial relief since.

In a house off one of the lanes running from Victoria Street there are three families who cannot boast enough furniture amongst them all to fit out one room. The husbands tramp the city each day in hopes of work, which will not turn up, and the women and children are enabled to just keep body and soul together by presents of food from their neighbours, a shade less straitened than themselves. The charity of the very poor to the very poor is found through all these inquiries to be active and generous—that is to say, within the very circumscribed limits of possibility.

In some of the streets off the Sydney Road there seem to be whole terraces which the direst kind of want has claimed for its own. Some of these houses are comfortable, and evidently in better times were the homes of prosperous working people; and even now it is not safe to judge by externals only, for many of the occupants, in their proper pride, are at pains to keep their sufferings secret. At one house neat curtains are drawn across the windows of the front room, though one is assured that the rooms inside are as bare of furniture as an unoccupied house. You may knock and ring as long as you like at this house but will get no response. If your mission is a charitable one the occupants do not care to see you; if, as is more likely, you are a creditor, you are still more unwelcome. There are many cases like this, where people enduring the bitterest privations would rather die than ask or receive assistance. These, of course, are the most difficult to assist, for they must live, but they will not beg or steal. Work is the only thing that can possibly bring a ray of lightness into their very dark days.

The woman says, when at length by a species of stratagem you enter her cheerless room, "I have had three houses sold over my head, but I am doing pretty well now, as I am making 7s. a week at charing. There are lots worse off than me"; and she directs you to one of them. This proves to be a wretchedly thin young woman, who lives in a bare cottage higher