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THE General Assembly of New Zealand was this day opened by the Governor, when His Excellency was pleased to deliver the following

SPEECH.

HONORABLE GENTLEMEN, AND GENTLEMEN,—

It is with much satisfaction that I am again able to avail myself of your advice and assistance in the consideration of the measures required for the welfare of the country.

I have called you together without delay after learning the result of the negotiations in Great Britain consequent upon the legislation of last Session; and it now affords me much pleasure to be able to inform you of the success of the measures adopted for relieving the country from the financial difficulties in which it had been for some time involved. The Loan which you authorised has received the Imperial Guarantee, and an arrangement has been entered into with the Union Bank of Australia in London to take up the whole amount on very favorable terms.

For this successful result the Colony is mainly indebted to the ability and energy of Mr. Sewell, to whom the conduct of the necessary negotiations was entrusted.

The Acts of the last Session have received the gracious assent of Her Majesty, with the exception of the Scrip Act, as to which Her Majesty's pleasure has not yet been signified, and the Waste Lands Act, which has been disallowed, on grounds which will be communicated to you.

It will be necessary to consider measures to provide for the future disposal and management of the Public Lands, with a view to render the security to the public creditor as perfect as possible, and at the same time to ensure the settlement and improvement of the country from which the Land Revenue is derived.

In accordance with your wishes every exertion has been made for the establishment of Inter-Provincial Steam Communication, and to secure an extension to the Colony of the English Mail Service. It has not, however, been found possible hitherto to effect either of these objects, except at an expense far exceeding the legal provision for the purpose, and greater than the Government felt itself justified in incurring without the sanction of the Legislature. This failure, as regards the Inter-Provincial Service especially, is much to be regretted, as a speedy and regular communication between the Provinces is absolutely essential to the good government of the Colony. Negotiations for both an Inter-Colonial and Inter-Provincial Steam Service are still pending, and it may reasonably be hoped will be brought to a successful termination.

During the recess a provisional arrangement was entered into by the Governments of New South Wales and New Zealand with the Royal Mail Company for the establishment of Steam Communication with Great Britain, by way of Panama, but that arrangement has been abandoned in consequence of the refusal of the Company to ratify the proposals made by its agent.

The discovery of a Gold Field of considerable extent in the Province of Nelson is an event of importance. Having regard to the known existence of gold in the Province of Auckland, and the late discovery of auriferous indications at the opposite extremity of these Islands, in the Province of Otago, there is reasonable ground for anticipating that the material interests of the Colony will receive a powerful stimulus from the new source of wealth thus made known. Measures having for their object the maintenance of law and order amongst those who resort to the gold fields will be submitted to you.

I have to inform you that during the recess the Territory open to settlement in this Island has been extended by the cession to the Crown of the Native rights over about one million of acres. The newly acquired lands are situated, in nearly equal proportions, in the Provinces of Auckland and Wellington; and negotiations are in active progress in both Provinces for further purchases.

I congratulate you on the steady advancement of the Colony as manifested by the increased Revenue of the Customs during the last year. There is every reason to expect that the present year will exhibit the same indication of progress.

GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

I am happy to be able to state that the expenditure for the year 1857 has been kept considerably within the amount granted to Her

Majesty for the public service. The Accounts for the last financial year, and the Estimates for the current year, will be laid before you on an early day. The Accounts of the Colony for the period from the 1st January 1853, to the 30th June 1856, have, as recommended by the Finance Committee of last Session, been reconstructed upon principles which have already received your approbation.

In conformity with the understanding when the Customs Duties Act was passed, it is proposed to remedy such imperfections in the existing Tariff as have been indicated by experience. These imperfections are, I am able to state, less numerous than might reasonably have been expected to occur on the introduction of an entirely new system of collecting the duties on imports. A measure for the consolidation and amendment of the Laws regulating the management of the Customs will also be submitted for your consideration.

The great importance of an independent and efficient Audit of the Public Accounts is beyond question, and a Bill will be proposed for effecting this object.

HONORABLE GENTLEMEN, AND GENTLEMEN,—

The Electoral system of the Colony urgently requires revision. A series of Bills will accordingly be laid before you, by which it is proposed to provide for the periodical apportionment of the Representation,—the improvement of the franchise—the reform of the mode of Registration,—the impartial conduct of elections,—the determination of controverted returns,—and the prevention of bribery and corruption. I am confident that measures framed for the purpose of placing the Electoral Laws, as far as may be, above the effects of local jealousies and party passions—of protecting electors in the honest discharge of their public duty—and thus securing in their integrity the privileges and liberties so justly valued by the colonists of this country, will receive from you that attentive consideration which the importance of the subject demands.

During the last year considerable evils, which I have greatly deplored, have resulted from the inability of the Supreme Court (consequent on the absence of one Judge, and the fatal illness of two others) to provide for the efficient administration of the laws. These evils have for the present been mitigated by the arrival of a Chief Justice and the temporary appointment of another Judge, but it is obvious that a more extended provision is now required to meet the present circumstances of the Colony. The speedy and certain administration of Justice is the most sacred duty of a Government, and I earnestly recommend to you the consideration of measures for increasing the judicial strength of the Supreme Court, and for the establishment of Local Courts of inferior jurisdiction, so as to ensure throughout the Colony the administration of Justice in a prompt and effective manner.

It has been felt to be a great hardship that the property in this Colony of persons residing abroad cannot be made available for the payment of their creditors, and that those who contract engagements here can readily evade the fulfilment of them by continued absence from the Country. Carefully considered Bills will be laid before you to remedy

these evils. Other measures for the consolidation, simplification, and improvement of the existing Laws on various subjects, have also been prepared, and will be submitted for your consideration.

The condition of the Native race has, during the recess, received my most earnest attention. To confirm the reliance of the Natives on the wisdom and justice of our institutions, it is important that the principles, and, to some extent, the details also of our Civil and Criminal Law should be made known amongst them in a familiar shape. With this view, I have directed the compilation, in the Native language, of a Summary of English Law. This work has been executed with care, and is on the eve of publication.

For some time past there has been observable an increasing activity amongst the Native tribes in whatever relates to their social organization. I believe that this movement, if well directed, will lead to excellent results. Your attention will accordingly be invited to measures devised to supply the rapidly increasing social wants of the Aborigines. To guide and assist this remarkable race in its efforts to emerge from barbarism, and to qualify itself for the enjoyment of the full rights of British citizens, is the most arduous duty of the Government of New Zealand. Your co-operation with the Executive in this work is indispensable, and will, I trust, be secured by the proposal of plans for the permanent welfare of the Natives, founded on definite, liberal, and comprehensive principles.

While congratulating you on the generally peaceable and loyal disposition of the Maori Population, it is with much regret that I have to inform you that the Native feud at New Plymouth still continues. Circumstances have recently occurred which satisfied me that the interests of both races imperatively demanded the intervention of the Government; and I have acted accordingly.

The subject of the Postal Service of the Colony requires to be carefully considered. You will, I feel confident, recognize the importance of establishing a system commensurate with the rapid increase of the population, and the consequent necessity of conducting this service with regularity and despatch, so as not only to keep pace with the demands of the larger centres of population, but to encourage and facilitate the settlement of the interior. With special reference to this subject, it is necessary that provision be made for rendering the inland portions of the country accessible by thoroughfares.

I have a firm reliance that the subjects to which I have alluded, and others of importance to which your attention will be invited, will receive your due consideration; and that, under the Blessing never withheld from conscientious endeavour, you will so deal with the business submitted to you as to promote the well-being of the people of both races in these Islands.