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SPEECH.

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

It affords me very great pleasure to again meet you in Parliament assembled, and to have recourse to your assistance and advice.

During the recess Her Majesty's loyal subjects in New Zealand, as in all other parts of her dominions, viewed with anxiety and concern the serious complications which threatened for a short time the peace of the world. It is a matter for congratulation that war, with its attendant evils, has been averted, and the prestige and honour of the Empire maintained without recourse to arms.

The whole of the Forces of the colony are now armed with the new approved weapon—the Martini-Henry. The Permanent Forces have been increased, and every effort has been made to make the defences efficient.

The frequent presence in New Zealand waters of the Admiral and the Australasian Squadron is also matter of congratulation to the colony, not only as a material evidence of an ever-ready first line of defence, but as a constant reminder of our intimate connection with Imperial interests.

I was able during the recess to visit the Bay of Islands and the romantic and historic parts of the colony north of Auckland, and was much gratified by the cordial and loyal reception everywhere given to me.

In response to an invitation, I, with pleasure, visited the chiefs of the Tuhoe—the chiefs and the people of the Native race in what is known as the Urewera country—and afterwards those of the Ngati-Maniapoto. The loyalty expressed to Her Majesty, together with the friendly greetings and hearty welcome accorded to me personally, will ever be implanted in my memory; and I am fully assured that friendly relations with these once turbulent and warlike tribes have been firmly established, and that they are now peaceable and loyal subjects.

I congratulate you upon the satisfactory relationship of the two races, and on the general benefits arising from the recent legislation affecting Native lands

and the Native Land Courts. The Natives in all parts of the colony have evinced a desire to have their lands opened by roads, and thus bring themselves into closer touch with civilisation. Their anxiety to have schools established in their midst shows that they are alive to what will prove of great moment to their children in the future. I am pleased to be able to inform you that the long-standing and much-vexed question in connection with the Wairarapa Lake has been satisfactorily settled, and has been the occasion of much rejoicing. The construction of roads through the Urewera country is making satisfactory progress, and the erection of Native schools at Ruatoki, Te Whaiti, and Wai-kare-moana will soon be completed.

During the recess several changes in the Ministry have taken place. The Hon. Sir Patrick Buckley, having resigned his Ministerial offices and his seat in the Legislative Council, was appointed to be a Judge of the Supreme Court. I feel assured you will join with me in deploring the loss the colony has suffered by his death so shortly after assuming that position. Next, the Hon. W. P. Reeves tendered his resignation, and was appointed Agent-General. Mr. Hall-Jones has been called to the Ministry, with the office of Minister for Public Works; and the Hon. W. C. Walker and the Hon. T. Thompson have been appointed members of the Executive Council; and, to facilitate the administration of public affairs, they and the Hon. J. Carroll have been allotted portfolios without salary.

The finances of the colony continue to be sound, and afford good reasons for general satisfaction. Strict regard to economical administration in every department has been considered essential, and once more I am in a position to state that the provision made by Parliament has been more than sufficient for carrying on the public service. The public accounts show a substantial surplus of revenue over expenditure.

I am glad to be able to congratulate you on the greatly improved condition of affairs and the general prosperity of all parts of the colony.

The temporary depression which prevailed some two years ago is fast passing away without any far-reaching effects. Renewed hopes are being realised with every prospect of a bright and lasting future. Most of our staple products have risen in price, and the discernment of our agriculturists in respect to grain-growing has met with a profitable return. The steady upward tendency in the price of wool, grain, and other products is a matter for congratulation. The unprecedented falls of snow in portions of the higher lands in Nelson, Canterbury, and Otago, by which large numbers of sheep were destroyed, was a heavy and unlooked-for disaster to the pastoralists and runholders in those districts, but the loss has to some extent been lightened by the measures adopted by Parliament last session to remit rentals and extend the term of leases.

In March last a mining disaster, unparalleled south of the equator, occurred in the Brunner Mine, on the west coast of the Middle Island, by which the sixty-seven miners employed therein lost their lives. An expression of Her Majesty's sympathy and that of the Secretary of State for the Colonies was transmitted to me by telegraph, and, by Her Majesty's command, I caused it to be forwarded to the relatives of these unfortunate men. I also immediately conveyed my heartfelt sympathy with the afflicted. Throughout New Zealand, and in the other colonies, the deepest sympathy has been evinced, and has assumed practical shape. The heroic work done by the rescuers at the risk of their own lives is deserving of all praise, and entitles them to the respect and esteem of their fellow-men throughout the Empire. I have thought it advisable to issue a Royal Commission to inquire as to the cause of the accident, and its report will be placed before you in due course.

The revival of gold-mining has been most noteworthy during the past year, resulting in an increased output of gold by a quarter of a million pounds sterling over the output of the previous year. The great mineral wealth of our colony is attracting the attention of capitalists in many parts of the world, and, with security of tenure and capital expended in the legitimate prospecting and development of our mines, there is every reason to believe that the gold-mining industry of New Zealand will increase in importance, besides affording relief to the labour market by drawing off a considerable number of men to remunerative employment.

The goldfields in the Auckland Provincial District receive at present most attention, whilst those on the west coast of the Middle Island are being brought into prominence; but there is every reason to believe that the gold deposits of Otago will shortly command the attention which their prospects and possibilities demand. The dispute in respect to the cyanide patent has not yet been settled.

The settlement of the people on the land has progressed most satisfactorily during the year, and the benefits accruing under the Land for Settlements Act have been greatly appreciated. That land is sought for by the people of the colony most eagerly is proved by the fact that for most of the sections thrown open there have been a large number of applicants. In respect to the method of making application and dealing with the same, unforeseen difficulties have occurred, and to prevent duplication and insure a proper class of settlers remedial provisions will require to be made.

The beneficent effect of the Government Advances to Settlers Act has been clearly demonstrated, and the decrease in the rates of interest previously charged has proved to be a great boon to those engaged in agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Every precaution has been taken to see that advances have not been made except upon good securities and in accordance with law. The extreme care taken in respect to the securities first offered doubtless limited the number of loans, but it is now generally conceded that the effect has been to compel care in making application, while the increasing aggregate of amounts advanced, together with the increasing number of applications received weekly, leads to the belief that on the whole the Advances to Settlers Department, with its new machinery, will henceforward work satisfactorily.

The systematic grading and cool-storage of our dairy produce have proved satisfactory. Uniformity has been achieved, and higher prices obtained; and, with an increased number of competent experts, the Department of Agriculture hopes during this year to further improve the results of dairy farming. And there is a general belief that New Zealand butter and cheese will ere long command the highest prices in the markets of the world.

Recently a conference of fruit-growers was held in Wellington, and was attended by experts from the other colonies and from all parts of New Zealand. The results were very encouraging, and should be productive of lasting benefit to the fruit industry. The opinion was generally expressed that New Zealand, from the nature of its soils, climate, and other natural advantages, was destined to be a great fruit-growing country. The colony was congratulated for being the first in Australasia to have the proceedings of the conference fully reported, and recognition was made of the advantages to this and the other colonies of publishing in the records of the colony the valuable papers and discussions thereon dealt with at the conference.

The improvement in the price of kauri-gum has had a marked and favourable impression on that industry, and those engaged therein are fairly well satisfied with the results for the year. Well-founded complaints have been made by the gum-diggers of the absolute impossibility of their ascertaining accurately the price of the gum in the market.

It is a matter for regret that the once flourishing and remunerative flax-industry has languished during the year, consequent on the unprofitable prices ruling. With a view of fostering the industry, and meeting a long-felt want, a substantial bonus was offered for improved flax-dressing machinery, but so far without satisfactory results. The matter is deserving of and will receive every attention, and, with proper grading, improved machinery, and capital awaiting investment at low rates, there is every prospect of the industry becoming once more payable and lasting.

The medical conference held in Dunedin was thoroughly representative in character, and was attended by many able professional men from Australia and all parts of New Zealand. It gave me very great pleasure to attend the opening of the conference. The results of their labours will assuredly prove beneficial to suffering humanity. The proceedings of the conference were fully reported, and the papers and discussions thereon will be read with great interest. The public health branch was particularly interesting and instructive, and, if the suggestions made are given effect to, great benefits will be derived therefrom.

The proposal of the Imperial authorities to hand over the control of Norfolk Island to New South Wales is of moment to this colony, as it is possible that the island in question may be a landing-point in connection with the Pacific cable, and on this and other grounds my Advisers protested against the proposed change. The Imperial authorities have decided to reconsider the question. The correspondence on the subject will be laid before you in due course.

The census recently taken, so far as the results are known, goes to show that the population of the colony has largely increased during the past five years, more particularly in the North Island. This must be attributed principally to the rapid settlement which is proceeding and to the development of the mining and other industries. In the Middle Island there has been a fair increase on the whole, and in those parts, particularly on the West Coast, where there has been little or no increase, it is satisfactory to note that, with the almost certain increased development of coal- and gold-mining and timber industries, the population in these parts will surely increase in the near future.

When I last addressed you I mentioned the fact that the Midland Railway Company had failed to complete its contract, that great injury to the colony would result owing to the consequent locking-up of five million acres of land, and that the arbitration demanded by the company had been postponed by the arbitrators. The arbitration on this important question has since taken place. The company claimed over £1,800,000, and, after an inquiry lasting over several weeks, the umpire (the Right Hon. Edward Blake) found that the company had no claim against the Crown, nor any right to recover any sum of money from the Crown in respect of the said claims. The umpire further found that the unreasonable and inexcusable delay by the company in the prosecution of the works connected with the railway, and also the wilful breach of the contract as between the company and the Queen, justified me in taking possession and assuming the management of the railway, and that the power to do so had been rightly exercised. The good faith of the colony having been impugned by the company, and the honour and integrity of its public men being at stake, the finding of the umpire is eminently satisfactory.

GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

The estimates of revenue and expenditure for the current financial year will be laid before you. The estimates of expenditure have been prepared with a due regard to economy. The increased demands in connection with education, school-buildings, technical schools, the Post and Telegraph service, roads to open up lands for settlement, defence forces, and defence-works have been considered, and votes for these purposes will be placed before you.

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

The prevention of undesirable persons coming to New Zealand, especially the Chinese, is of great importance as affecting the well-being and purity of our race, and as unduly disturbing our trade and industries. In consequence of the Australian Colonies having taken steps to protect themselves, and from other causes, an increasing number of Chinese and race aliens have at recent dates arrived in New Zealand, and my Advisers therefore deem it necessary that restrictive measures of a complete and comprehensive nature should at an early date be enacted. A Bill dealing with the subject will be laid before you.

As you are aware, an Act was passed last session empowering this colony to enter into a reciprocal treaty with South Australia. The Parliament of that colony, however, declined to pass a similar measure. My Ministers deem it advisable that steps should be taken to facilitate the opening-up of fresh markets for our products, and that further efforts should be made in the direction of reciprocity with the Australian Colonies, the Empire, and its dependencies.

It is with much pleasure that I am able to announce that there are evidences which, during the latter portion of the last financial year, afford proof of substantial progress having been made, and the increased revenue through the Customs on articles not affected by the tariff of last session goes far to prove

that the earning-power of the people has improved, and, with the marked growth of our population and the advancement in the prices of our staple products, the outlook is most promising.

Returns will be laid before you showing that during the year there has been, notwithstanding the granting of large remissions encouraging our industries generally, a steady increase in the revenue from nearly all branches of traffic upon the railways, thus affording evidence of an advance in the productive capabilities of the colony.

The steps taken to open up a trade for our timber in the London market have not met with that success which was anticipated. From latest information to hand, however, there is every prospect, with care being taken to send suitable timber, of a trade being established with the Cape of Good Hope and the Johannesburg goldfields in the Transvaal. The success which has attended conferences in respect to fruit-growing, dairying, and other industries leads my Advisers to hope that a conference of persons connected with the saw-milling and timber industries would be conducive of much good, and at an early date such a conference will be convened.

My Advisers have deemed it expedient, in the public interest, to abolish the "delayed system" for telegrams which has hitherto existed, and in lieu thereof have reduced the charges for the transmission of ordinary telegrams. It is anticipated that the increase in the number of telegrams transmitted will more than cover the extra cost entailed, thus conferring a great boon on the public, without increasing the burden of the taxpayer.

In respect to the banking legislation of last session and the management of the Bank of New Zealand, circumstances have transpired which, in the opinion of my Advisers, render it necessary that steps should be taken to remedy certain defects, and to insure the interests of the colony being properly safeguarded.

For the fourth time you will be asked to give relief to ratepayers by passing a Bill authorising local authorities to levy rates upon unimproved-land values. This system, as you are aware, now obtains in respect of direct taxation for Government purposes.

Bills have been prepared to prevent usurious rates of interest being charged, and to enable local bodies to apply the co-operative system to the construction of works under their charge.

A Bill dealing with prospecting for gold and the ceding of land by the Natives for mining purposes will be placed before you.

You will be asked to consider Bills dealing with land for settlement, workmen's villages, State labour farms, wages protection, private benefit societies, limiting the hours of labour, old-age pensions, the referendum, local government, Government fire insurance, special juries, master and apprentices, fair rents, Government valuation of land, advances to settlers, and alcoholic liquors sale control. You will be asked to consider an important change in the electoral law, dispensing with the registration of electors on account of property, also securing the representation of majorities, and dealing with the changes in the boundaries of the electorates.

I commend these important matters to your careful consideration, and earnestly beg to assure you that it is my desire and wish to co-operate with you in promoting the best interests of the colony, and I trust that, with the blessing of God, your deliberations may result in the increased happiness and prosperity of the people of New Zealand.

