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THE Fourth Session of the Thirteenth Parliament of New Zealand was this day opened by the Governor, when His Excellency was pleased to make the following

SPEECH.

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

It gives me pleasure to meet you, and to be again able to congratulate you on the marked progress and continued prosperity of the colony.

Since the last meeting of Parliament I have been able to visit many districts in both Islands, and, amongst others, the goldfields on the west coast of the Middle Island, and also those on the Hauraki Gulf, in the North Island.

The expressions of loyalty to the Throne, devotion to Her Most Gracious Majesty, and cordial welcome to myself as Her Majesty's representative will ever cause me to remember my visits to the goldfields of New Zealand and their warm-hearted people. I was much impressed with the importance and value of the extensive mineral deposits which I have seen in my tours through the mining districts.

I was pleased to receive a visit from Mahuta, the principal chief, and other influential chiefs of the Waikato tribes; and their assurances of loyalty to the Throne, of love to the Queen, and of good wishes for myself personally afford every hope that the interview will be productive of much good. Later on it is my intention to visit the Waikato and what is known as the "Rohepotae."

I have also visited several Maori settlements. The most important meeting took place at Waitangi, where the famous treaty was signed in the year 1840. My meeting with the chiefs and Native people generally was of a very satisfactory character, and sincere assurances of their loyalty to the Constitution and to our Sovereign Lady the Queen were given.

The majesty of the law having been vindicated, I was pleased to remit the unexpired portion of the sentences passed on the misguided Natives who took part in the disturbances last year at Rawene and Waima, and restored them to their freedom, on the assurance of the chiefs that they would not offend again.

Notwithstanding that the relations of the Empire with other Powers continue to be of a friendly character, my Ministers have deemed it expedient to push on the completion and equipment of our harbour-defences, and to increase and fully arm our Volunteers. I am glad to be able to inform you that a scheme of defence for the colony has been submitted to the Imperial Colonial Defence Committee, and that our harbour-defences are in a much improved position.

During the year, at the request of the Secretary of State, I paid a visit to the Cook Islands, and found an improved state of affairs. I have pointed out to the British Resident, Colonel Gudgeon, certain alterations which were necessary, more especially in connection with the systematic checking and keeping of the accounts. I consider that it would be of advantage if a fully qualified auditor were sent down from New Zealand to ensure satisfactory results from the present methods, or, if necessary, to initiate a better system.

You have learnt with regret of the troubles at Samoa, and the loss of life that has taken place there. At the commencement of the outbreak, in order to assist the Imperial authorities, my Advisers promptly offered to send troops, and to place the Government steamer "Tutanekai" at their disposal. The Secretary of State, while thanking the colony for the offer of Volunteers, did not see his way to accept it, but accepted with pleasure the offer of the use of the Government steamer. She has done good service, for which the Admiral and the British Consul at Samoa have thanked the colony. That Volunteers of both races were ready for service in Samoa demonstrated that, should the necessity arise, Her Majesty's subjects in New Zealand are ever anxious and ready to do their duty to the Empire.

The Auckland Industrial Exhibition more than fully realised the expectations of its originators. The display of mineral and natural products and manufactured articles was worthy of the district and the colony; and commerce, agriculture, and manufactures will be beneficially encouraged thereby.

Certain allegations have been made as to the conditions under which marine officers' certificates have been obtained, and the manner in which examinations therefor have been conducted. It has been deemed advisable that a full and complete investigation should take place, and for that purpose a Royal Commission has been appointed.

The Victoria College has been opened, and the Professors have been appointed, and are at work. Thus Wellington and the adjacent districts are enabled to enjoy the advantages of university education.

The erection of the new Library and a portion of Parliament Buildings has just been completed. That your valuable library will be placed in a worthy and fireproof building, and that as a Parliament you will be surrounded with greater and more suitable conveniences, are matters for congratulation.

Considerable areas of land have been purchased during the year under the Land for Settlements Act. The number of applicants far exceeds the number of farms available. Proposals will be submitted for extending the compulsory taking of land to boroughs and suburban lands, in order to enable provision to be made for workmen's homes and villages. An amendment of the law is necessary, to provide that in all cases brought before a Compensation Court compensation shall be assessed on the marketable value only.

I regret to state that a serious railway accident, attended with loss of life, occurred at Rakaia. A Commission, consisting of Mr. Pendleton, Commissioner of Railways, South Australia, and Dr. Giles, has been appointed to inquire fully into and report as to the cause of the accident. The Commissioners commence their duties at an early date.

MR. SPEAKER AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,—

The estimates for the various services for the current year have been framed with due regard to economy, efficiency, and the growing requirements of the colony.

There has been an increased revenue, as compared with last year, from railways, Excise, and Customs.

Doubts exist respecting the equality of sacrifice as between direct and indirect taxation. Inquiries will be made, and, if it is found that inequalities exist, and that adjustment is necessary, my advisers are of opinion that such adjustment should be in the direction of reducing the duties on the necessaries of life.

In respect to expenditure on railways, the most pressing work is the connection of Auckland and Wellington by rail. The rolling-stock and number of engines on the lines generally have been largely increased during the year, and traffic requirements have been fairly met.

The demand for land continues, and one of the urgent requirements for settlement is the completion of roads in the back blocks. You will be asked to approve expenditure to meet these pressing necessities.

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

A Bill for insuring fair wages and reasonable working-hours in connection with contracts for public works entered into by the Government or by local bodies will be submitted for your consideration.

You have already partially considered measures dealing with compensation to workmen and accident insurance: they will be placed before you again.

The operation of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act has considerably expanded, and in consequence delays have been found to result. Remedial proposals will be submitted to Parliament.

Settlement is retarded on the East Coast of the North Island owing to complications that have arisen with regard to Trust and other Native lands. Proposals dealing with these matters and Native lands generally, and giving local control to Natives by their hapus, will be placed before you.

A Bill will be introduced amending the Advances to Settlers Act in the direction of reducing the rate of interest and extending the operation of the Act to urban and suburban lands.

A measure will be submitted removing existing defects in the electoral laws, and, with other amendments, making provisions to ensure correct returns in respect of questions submitted to the ballot, and removing disabilities on persons temporarily absent from the colony.

Bills will be introduced providing for a bare majority of voters at polls relating to local loans and rating on unimproved values, and providing also for a direct vote of the people on questions of colonial importance.

Bills will be again introduced dealing with local government, agriculture, technical education, mining, and trade; also, amendments and extensions of the law as regards several questions affecting the social and industrial progress of the colony will be submitted to you.

I pray that your deliberations may be for the good of the colony and the advancement of its people, and that the Almighty may guide, direct, and assist your efforts.

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