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THE Second Session of the Seventeenth 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,—

I have much pleasure in again meeting you in Parliament assembled.

Since last session I have availed myself of an opportunity of visiting the Cook and some of the other islands of the Pacific which were annexed to New Zealand in 1901. For the period of my absence from Wellington occasioned by this visit I appointed Sir James Prendergast the Administrator of the Government, who discharged his duties with characteristic care and discretion.

I was much impressed with the people, the fertility, and the picturesqueness of the islands I was able to visit. The islanders are vigorous and willingly industrious—qualities which if systematically applied to the natural resources there awaiting cultivation will insure the rapid progress and permanent prosperity of the Group.

I have also since I last met you here extended my acquaintance with the remoter parts and population of this Dominion. A widening knowledge of New Zealand always evokes an increasing admiration for its beauty and undeveloped natural wealth, and for the intelligence, sturdiness, and loyalty of its people.

Death has recently removed from his place in the House of Representatives Mr. Arthur Edward Remington, the member for Rangitikei, whose industrious devotion to his public duties emphasizes the widespread regret for a life shortened of the usual span.

During the recess two representatives of the Colonial Office, Sir Charles Lucas, K.C.M.G., and Mr. A. C. Pearson, C.M.G., visited New Zealand, and spent some time in this country studying its special laws, institutions, and social conditions. They saw some of its most impressive scenery, and by sympathetic contact with my Advisers and other public men learnt much of the sentiment, aspirations, and imperialistic ideals of its people.

Their visit, which was due to the wishes expressed by oversea delegates at the last Premiers' Conference, will, it is believed, be conducive to still greater harmony between this and the Imperial Government.

You will be gratified to know that Lord Kitchener, late Commander-in-Chief in India, who within the next few months will arrive in Australia, has accepted an invitation sent by me on behalf of the people of New Zealand to visit this Dominion, and I have no doubt that this great soldier's career of signal service to the Empire will insure him a worthy welcome.

The seasons and harvests of this country have continued bountiful, and the productiveness of its various industries has maintained more than its average forward stride. Measured quantitatively the total production is greater than ever. Unfortunately, financial disturbances in the Old World and low prices for some of the chief products of this Dominion resulted in stringency in the money-market and a reduction in the national income of New Zealand.

The depression consequent upon these causes is rapidly disappearing, as prices are recovering and financial stringency relaxing. The present outlook, all things temperately considered, is most encouraging, and is again heartening that spirit of vigorous enterprise which makes the people of New Zealand so progressive.

A Conference of delegates from the Chambers of Commerce of the whole Empire has recently been in session in Sydney, considering problems and questions which affect the commercial prosperity of all His Majesty's dominions. The members of this Conference have accepted the invitation of my Government to visit New Zealand. They will, I am sure, be cordially received.

One of the most important of our industries, measured by the value of its product and the number of its workmen, is the timber industry. Depression and disorganization having arisen in it (alleged to be chiefly due to the importation of foreign timber), my Advisers deemed it advisable to have a Royal Commission appointed to investigate and report upon the causes, and upon any suggested remedies. The Commission has concluded a very thorough inquiry, and its valuable report and recommendations will in due course be placed before you.

Towards the close of last session a series of charges were made in Parliament against the Police Department, and my Advisers, feeling that a Department so closely allied to the administration of justice as this is should be cleared, if not deemed beyond the suspicion, of such or similar charges, asked me to appoint a Commission to investigate and report on the charges in question and upon any others brought before it. The report and recommendations of the Commission will be laid before you for consideration.

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

As compared with the previous year's returns, there was an increase last year in revenue from Post and Telegraphs, Railways, Land and Income Tax, Excise, Stamps, Marine, and Miscellaneous Services. Owing, however, chiefly to the remission in Customs duties on the various imported necessaries of life, and partly to the falling-off in imports naturally consequent upon the diminished return for exports, the total amount of Customs revenue has decreased. So far as this is due to the remissions mentioned, no one (remembering that what the revenue has so lost the people have gained) has any occasion for regret.

An earnest and vigorous effort has been made to reduce the cost of the public service by amalgamating Departments and pruning and dispensing with any branches which have fulfilled, or nearly fulfilled, the purpose of public utility for which they were originated. It is believed that when the necessary retirements, changes, and amalgamations are completed the public service, as far as practicable, will combine the desiderata of a high standard of economy and efficiency.

Estimates for the year have been prepared, and will be submitted to you.

You will, in due course, be asked to pass the supplies necessary for the purposes of government.

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

As you are aware, the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Ward, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, left New Zealand on 18th June last to attend the Defence Conference in London. That Conference marks an epoch in the history of the Empire, in that then for the first time the great oversea dependencies were taken into counsel by the Home Government on the vital subject of Imperial Defence. It must be eminently gratifying to New Zealand to know that her action in voluntarily offering to take on her shoulders some share in the great work of maintaining the security of the Empire has not only been appreciated by all parties and classes in Great Britain, but has been followed, though on varying lines, by the other dependencies. The result of the deliberations of the Conference, if given effect to by the Parliaments concerned, will have a wide-reaching effect in strengthening the Empire in all its component parts. Canada and Australia favour local navies as being more consonant to local national needs, aspirations, and sentiment. In the case of New Zealand Sir Joseph Ward, following what he believed to be best for her interests and most in accord with the sentiments of her people and Parliament, preferred the policy of strengthening the Imperial navy, with provision for a section of one of the chief fleets—the Pacific fleet—keeping in touch with New Zealand.

Although the main purpose of the Conference was naval defence, the question of land defence was not neglected, and important resolutions on this subject were agreed to.

Full particulars of what was done at the Conference will be laid before you, together with such legislative and other proposals as are necessary in order to give effect to the resolutions arrived at. I feel assured that you will give them your most careful consideration, and that the result of your deliberations will be alike honourable to New Zealand and helpful to the Empire. Legislation effecting important alterations in the internal defence of the Dominion will also be submitted to you.

During his visit to London Sir Joseph Ward obtained and despatched to New Zealand £500,000 to carry on public works, and £500,000 for advances to settlers and workers—£1,000,000 in all—and has made arrangements by which, with a necessary alteration of the law, moneys required for local bodies and other public purposes can be obtained. To effect the requisite alterations proposals will be submitted extending the scope of the Advances to Settlers Department, and making it the medium for obtaining, in England, moneys for the use of local public bodies; and also for raising the necessary sums for the purchase of lands for settlement. The Department's loan operations will be guaranteed by the State. Legislation will be submitted with this object for your consideration.

What are known as the Webster land claims, which have been asserted by the United States Government against the Imperial Government at various times during the last fifty years, were again revived a short time ago, and, as on former occasions, the Imperial Government communicated with the Government of New Zealand. My Advisers caused the whole case to be exhaustively reviewed, and saw no reason to depart from the opinion held by former Administrations, that the claim had no warrant in either law or equity.

Although no financial liability attaches to New Zealand (the transactions having occurred before responsible government was established here), my Advisers considered it their duty to co-operate with the Imperial Government in dealing with the matter. To this end the Prime Minister conferred with the authorities in London, and subsequently with the British Ambassador to the United States, at Montreal. As a result, it is probable that certain legal questions will be submitted to a special tribunal, and there is little doubt but that this course will finally dispose of the whole matter.

The present condition of mail-connections with the United Kingdom is unsatisfactory, and negotiations are proceeding with a view to giving a closer connection *via* Vancouver, and also endeavouring to obtain an improved mail-service *via* San Francisco. The Government consider that it would be of great advantage to the Dominion if one of the large steamship, mail, and passenger lines now trading from England to Australia *via* the Suez Canal were to extend their voyage to New Zealand. My Advisers will ask the authority of Parliament to enable mail and passenger services generally to be improved, and thereby remove the undeniable isolation by which the Dominion at present is detrimentally affected.

The Native-land law of New Zealand, now contained in over seventy separate statutes, has, owing chiefly to the lines along which this legislation has developed for the last forty years under different Administrations, become perplexingly profuse, intricate, and inconsistent. In the circumstances the Commissioners appointed under "The Reprint of Statutes Act, 1895," found consolidation an impossible task, and so reported to me. My Advisers have accordingly had a separate Bill prepared, revising, recasting, and harmonizing the whole of the Native-land laws of this country, and making such amendments as are requisite. The Bill will shortly be introduced for your consideration. The triple gain in the simplicity, clearness, and brevity of this branch of law will facilitate the operation of the Native Land Courts, the determination of Native-land titles, and the settlement of Native lands.

My Advisers fully recognise that the rapidly increasing population of the North Island demands a vigorous policy of European settlement on all surplus Native lands. The work of the recent Native Land Commission and the present energetic promotion of surveys facilitate this policy. Returns showing what has been lately done in various directions towards this end will be shortly submitted to you. Provision will also be made for the better settlement of the Natives upon the lands reserved for their use and occupation.

The time has arrived when Native lands should bear a larger share of the expense of the public works by which these lands are made more accessible or otherwise improved in value, and legislation providing for the rating of Native land in all reasonable cases will be brought before you. Such a provision will, my Advisers think, serve the dual purpose of a just impost and a spur to the closer settlement or cultivation of the lands affected.

The permanent prosperity and steady progress of this Dominion depend chiefly upon the increase in number and success of its small farmers in all branches of that great industry, and the two cardinal aims of the Government in this country are to get and keep an ever-increasing proportion of its population upon its lands. To this end you will be asked to consider and pass the Special Settlement Finance Bill, introduced last year, which makes the State a guarantor behind every group of willing and capable small settlers without adequate means, that they will pay the purchase-money of the freehold of any suitable area they can acquire for closer settlement from larger owners.

You will be asked to consider further land legislation, devised, among other things, to make rural life more attractive, to encourage settlement, and to more effectively prevent undesirable aggregation of holdings.

You will also be asked to pass further legislation to prevent continuing evasions of the Land and Income Assessment Act.

The subject of prison reform has been engaging the attention of my Advisers, and a system proceeding along the lines already successfully tried in other progressive countries is now nearly completed. It is essential to the effective working of this system that the principle of the indeterminate sentence should be extended, and fuller powers than exist at present be given to Magistrates for the committal of female and juvenile offenders to homes or reformatories instead of to gaols. To further assist this system some amendments of the law relating to inebriates are requisite. Legislation embodying these purposes will be brought before you.

My Advisers have been much interested in and impressed by the discussions and resolutions of the various conferences of Harbour Board delegates, and in

particular with the objections which have been raised to the systems of electing and nominating the members of the various Harbour Boards. A Bill will be introduced for your consideration this session which, although mainly a consolidating measure, will include many amendments suggested and approved by the different Harbour Board conferences.

My Advisers are of opinion that it is the duty of the State to encourage the workpeople of the Dominion to make provision against loss of earnings due to incapacity through sickness or accident, and further to make provision for old age, and, in the case of death, for the maintenance of dependents. Such provision the State now substantially assists the members of its Civil Service to make, and similar assistance is proposed in the case of all workers in private employment. With this object you will be asked to pass the National Annuities Bill introduced last year, and also amendments of the laws dealing with the superannuation of the Public Service.

The paramount importance to human health and life of a pure milk-supply has been increasingly recognised by the municipalities of this country, and the time has now arrived when boroughs and cities should be empowered by law to take such measures as they think fit to secure pure milk for the people, including, if necessary, that of establishing a municipal supply. This and some other desirable amendments of the Municipal Corporations Act will be submitted for your consideration.

At present there is some overlapping of function among the Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards, and some objection to the method of creating these Boards. These defects will be remedied by a Bill which will be laid before you.

It will be remembered that important proposals for the amendment of shipping and seamen legislation were agreed to by the Maritime Conference held in London in 1907, at which the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Ward, represented New Zealand. You will be asked to consider legislation amending our Shipping and Seamen Act so as to give effect to the proposals of the Conference.

The mining industry continues prosperous, but, employing as it does a very large number of our people, it deserves the fullest encouragement at the hands of the Government. The existing mining legislation is working smoothly, but some amendments are desirable to make it more effective. These will be submitted for your consideration.

Legislation removing the difficulties which arose in connection with miners' complaint and medical examination of miners will be submitted to you.

Bills amending or consolidating the law with regard to Native lands, lands for settlement, advances to settlers, Crown lands, friendly societies, hospital and charitable aid, Municipal Corporations, Harbour Boards, factories, shops and offices, workmen's homes, workers' compensation for accidents, industrial schools, public works, valuation of land, Maori Councils, companies, bankruptcy, the law of libel, indecent literature, and other important matters will be introduced for your attention.

I feel sure that in all these matters whose purpose is the improvement of the well-being of the people and the development of the resources of a richly endowed country you will employ your best energy and judgment, and I trust that by the blessing of Almighty God your deliberations and proceedings will be to the credit of Parliament, the good of New Zealand, and the honour of the Empire.

