



NEW ZEALAND  
GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

PROVINCE OF CANTERBURY.

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Published by Authority.

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By His Honor's Command,  
F. E. STEWART,  
Provincial Secretary.

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VOL. XV.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1868.

No VIII.

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MR. SPEAKER AND GENTLEMEN OF THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL—

Circumstances have prevented your being called together as early as I had wished. I was advised that an earlier Session would have been inconvenient to many of your number on account of its occurrence during the harvest and sheep shearing.

My desire for an earlier Session may be referred to the altered circumstances of the province, partly caused by the recent legislation of the General Assembly, as well as by the depression which has lately weighed so heavily upon every branch of productive industry.

It is matter for the profoundest regret that this province, in common with the greater part of the Middle Island, has been visited by very unexpected and disastrous inundations, causing damage to an extent never before experienced. Except for this cause, I had hoped to have been able at this time to offer my congratulations on a very much improved condition of the agricultural interest.

Measures have been taken to ascertain the damage sustained by public and private property throughout all the flooded districts; so that a report may be presently laid before you for your guidance in ordering repairs of public works, and, within your available resources, in some degree relieving urgent private distresses.

It is not for me in this place to remark at any length on the torpidity of our commerce, or to recommend your attempting direct legislative remedies; neither on the other

hand, is it necessary to ask you to bear in mind through all your deliberations that the great basis of public revenue and social wealth is commercial industry ; and that unless the provinces now mainly limit their larger expenditures to the purchase of increased mercantile appliances, we shall be utterly incapable of competing with other markets of the world ; and so, with a diminished population, and loaded with debt, public and private, the colony would soon suffer the mortification of insolvency and virtual repudiation.

In introducing the business of the session, I would venture to suggest that this is not a season for the indulgence of luxurious cravings from any quarter whatever, and what revenue we can command must be expended upon absolute necessities, and that our principal care in the matter of public works should be to invest our money in reproductive undertakings. I have caused to be prepared estimates of revenue and expenditure, which, when laid before you, will disclose a proposal for very considerable retrenchments throughout every department of the Provincial service.

Public opinion has been greatly agitated for some time past by a very general discussion of the adaptability of the existing form of Provincial Constitution to the present advanced state of the Colony, and it is generally (and with good reason) supposed that the Central Legislature, next session, will very earnestly debate this subject. The ablest public men in the colony are much divided in opinion—one party favouring the abolition of the provinces at once, another loudly advocating the continuance of the Provincial Governments and Legislatures with greatly increased powers. A third class of politicians desire to retain Provincial institutions, which, while divested of nearly all their present legislative functions, would still have exclusive and absolute power, both legislative and administrative, in the matter of the waste lands of the Crown and public works of a commercial character.

This Council, as you are aware, has no power to make any alterations in the Constitution ; but, as representing very reliably the public opinion of the Province, it may by its resolutions express to the Parliament of the Colony its feeling in regard of any proposal for effecting alterations or reforms.

I am impressed with the conviction that very considerable changes in the Constitution of the Provinces would have very salutary results, I therefore purpose to send down for your consideration a memorandum shortly describing certain alternative schemes of reform. I may at once declare my entire approval of the relinquishment of most of our powers of legislation, and although at law we may not enact any change of our Constitutional powers, still it is now competent to your majority to decline legislation on any except a given class of subjects, and so voluntarily impose limits on your action, to the great saving of time and money. Without any external aid or permission we may accomplish one very material and imperatively necessary measure of reform, by very largely reducing the expenses of legislation, as well as of administration.

Among other things, your opinion will be requested as to the expediency of altering the present system of Executive Government. I incline to a very prevalent idea that great waste of time and power, both in the case of the governing and governed, is involved in the present scheme of Responsible Government. However responsible the Executive Council or Ministers may be, it appears to me, at any rate, that the responsibility of the Superintendent is of a very mythical order, excepting in so far as he is responsible at law upon breaches of certain statutes made expressly in his behalf. In fact, under the existing order of things, the Superintendent has none except a merely nominal political responsibility.

I am of opinion that the original constitution never intended the addition of responsible Government (in the present shape) to the then already sufficiently cumbrous machinery of Provincial Government ; and the recent enactment by the General Assembly

of certain very cogent and fitting statutory restraints upon the Superintendents render the continuance of responsible ministers in the provinces altogether unnecessary. The people elect as Superintendent a person, in their opinion, fit to preside over the administration, and also to suggest legislation, and to this hour the mass of the Public believe in his primary responsibility; a circumstance which has no existence even in theory.

Would it not be well that the Council should give plain instructions and authorizations to the Superintendent, leaving upon him in the Executive superintendence of a permanent staff of officers, direct unsheltered responsibility to the Council, and so to the public and the law.

The Council will condole with me on the loss of our common friend and distinguished public servant, Mr. Crosbie Ward, late agent in London for the province, who died in the midst of duty on the 10th of November last. The loss of Mr. Ward will be felt severely, not only by this province, but by the colony at large.

On many grounds, the separation from this province of the county of Westland is naturally to be regretted, but material reasons exist for congratulating ourselves and the county on its having attained a distinctive existence. On behalf of this Province, I have to thank the Chairman of the County for the cordial way in which he testifies to the desire of the Canterbury Government to facilitate the transfer of the administration. I am assured that you join me in a wish that the Government of Westland may rapidly succeed in subduing every difficulty attending its initiation, and that it may grow in wealth and importance, and usefulness to the Colony.

The southern portion of the Province, by the Timaru and Gladstone Board of Works Bill, is invested with independent powers to receive and disburse a fixed 25 per cent. of the proceeds of land sales within its limits. Notwithstanding this exceptional appropriation, I am advised that the Board will apply for additional subsidies from time to time in aid of its public works. I shall cordially concur in any appropriation beyond the said fixed proportion of land revenue, which may appear to you to be conducive to the general welfare, and at the same time within the means of the Province.

The Province is to be congratulated on the successful accomplishment of railway communication between the Port and the Plains, by means of the tunnel. I have entered into an arrangement with Messrs. George Holmes and Co., for the conduct of the business of the railways from Lyttelton to the Selwyn until the 31st March next. The particulars of this arrangement will be laid before you.

Returns of the receipts and expenditure upon the working of the railways since the 1st September, on which date the arrangement above referred to came into force, are being prepared, and will be laid before you on an early day. The information to be derived from these will assist you in your decision as to the course to be followed by the Government in the management of the lines after the termination of the agreement with Messrs. George Holmes and Co.

In view of the depressed state of the finances of the Province, I propose that immigration should, for the present, cease. A small sum only will be placed on the estimates, in order to liquidate liabilities already entered into.

I recently received an intimation from his Excellency the Governor that His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh would honour the Province with his presence during his visit to New Zealand. It is not necessary for me to observe that His Royal Highness will be received with the greatest enthusiasm by a loyal population.

The Province has now the remarkable gratification of welcoming, as visitors, Lord Lyttelton and Mr. Selge, to whom we owe many and great benefits, and whose names are so intimately bound up with all the early history of the settlement.

Gentlemen,—The convenient limits of a speech would be transgressed, were I to make more than a general notice of the leading business which it is intended to lay before you. During the session I shall endeavour to furnish you with information in detail upon the several subjects now adverted to.

In dealing with the suggestions for reforms, you will, in addition to the advantage of intimate local knowledge, bring to bear upon such subjects an intelligent observation of the condition of the other provinces of the colony, and, so far as you are enabled, adapt your own plans of reformation to the circumstances of the whole.

Trusting that your deliberations may result in great advantage to this Province and colony, I have now to declare this Council duly opened for the transaction of public business.

W. S. MOORHOUSE,  
Superintendent of Canterbury.

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CHRISTCHURCH :

Printed, under the authority of the Provincial Government of the Province of Canterbury, at the *Lyttelton Times* Office, Gloucester Street, by CROSBIE WARD and WILLIAM REEVES, Official Printers for the time being to the said Government.