

Mr. J. T. THOMSON to the Hon. the SECRETARY for CROWN LANDS.

SIR,—

Dunedin, 13th May, 1873.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 7th instant, and in reply beg to thank you for allowing me the privilege of adding my remarks to the Report of the recent Conference of Chief Surveyors, and at which, to my great regret, I was not able to be present.

Your courtesy very much relieves me from the reflection that untoward circumstances had prevented me from doing a public duty. The information that I have received from friends attending the Conference also suggests the fact that I could not have been of much service, as the officers holding opinions against change of system in their respective Provinces were in a large majority. It may be surmised from this that where only £250 or £1,000 are the sums total voted in a Province for survey, that amelioration of system to such officers would appear hopeless. Besides this, I would have stood in a position of unfairness to the Province which I represent, by the fact of my having only a single vote, while the operations under my control, and work executed, greatly exceed any Province in particular, and are immensely larger than the majority. I may also note that Canterbury (that is, the east portion of old Canterbury Province) had two votes. These remarks I merely make in extenuation, for I would have been most happy to have met my brother officers at any time as directed by Government.

I perceive that the Conference, under the circumstances, has come to no practical conclusion, which I have no doubt is due to the miscellaneous nature of its composition, as well as from the above causes.

*Major Triangulation not sufficient.*—One thing they suggest, a major triangulation for the Colony, but this, in the geographical sense, has no advantages without the higher and more scientific process of astronomical determinations of the absolute latitudes and longitudes governing the same; nor, in the sense of actual or section survey, without minor triangulation guaranteed systematically in connection therewith and subsequently thereto. Minor triangulation, I may say in passing, is the really essential part of Colonial survey, more necessary than all other processes to sectionizing and settlement. The Report of the Conference is thus evidently the disjointed enunciation of two distinct parties of surveyors—one endeavouring to institute system and completeness, the other obsolete and ineffective operations.

*Political Position to be weighed.*—In my humble opinion, the first object of a Survey Adviser is to weigh the position of political parties in New Zealand, and then advance a scheme of general operations that all (Central and Provincial) must perforce assent to. This, I think, can be done by a little mutual forbearance. Provincial susceptibilities must not be intruded on, but, on the contrary, be carefully regarded.

*Settlement Survey to remain as Provincial.*—Thus the actual settlement surveys might be perfectly well left to local administration as heretofore. In other words, the Provincial Executives could all direct what and how much is to be done, the General Government merely interfering with the scientific question of how, professionally, it is to be done. To this end, the whole Provincial staffs might remain permanently with the Provincial Councils, the only alteration being what has already been given effect to in the persons of the Chief Commissioners in the respective Land Offices: that is, the Chief Surveyors being placed as members of the general staff. This single act would, I think, be a sufficient guarantee to the Colony that detail or settlement surveys would be carried out with the same spirit as the general system, and with equal efficiency.

*Varying nature of Provincial and General Government interests.*—Taking a comprehensive and prospective view of the subject, it will appear that, as the Crown lands are parted with, the Provincial interest gets less and less as the revenue also thus decreases; but the Colonial interest, through the Land Transfer Act, becomes more and more. Thus the Central Government can never, if it were inclined, denude itself of all interest in settlement survey; on the contrary, its interest will be ever increasing, and the necessity of its taking measures for self-guarantee of more and more import. It is therefore incumbent on both parties (Centralising or Provincial) to come to a fair adjustment of the question, such adjustment in itself being so equitable that it will stand at least for some years to come. The future arrangements can alone be decided by events connected with the condition into which the ultimate colonizing operations will lead.

*Provinces unable to carry out Standard Survey.*—The area of the Colony is 67,500,000 acres, divided between nine Provinces. The standard branches of Colonial survey (over so extensive a geographical space), which govern and check all actual or sectional operations, cannot, of necessity, be undertaken or even partially attained to by the majority of those divisions; neither is it desirable, on professional grounds, that these works should be attempted by what would be disjointed and unregulated parties. The astronomical, geographical, and geodesical—which are the standard branches—are clearly a responsibility of the Colony at large, so should be set about as soon as possible; for without their application to and extension over plane or section survey, the latter cannot be accepted as sound or correct, and this fault, so long as it continues, will prejudicially affect the titles to property of all freehold settlers in New Zealand.

*Now is the time to introduce one system.*—The area actually surveyed, *i.e.* sectionized, is only 7,238,156 acres, or about one-ninth of the whole; thus the surveys may be said to have only commenced. Now, therefore, is the time, more than ever it was, to initiate a system that can bear inspection in its truth of principle and correctness of practice: in other words, to commence a Colonial work that will compare well with other colonies, and which can be adhered to for all time to come, just as much as the survey systems of the United States of America, Canada, and India are adhered to on account of their fitness and scientific soundness, however much they differ in detail.

*Officers and Instruments ready for Work.*—I submit that the Colony now possesses the officers and instruments, the experience and material, to commence and carry out a general scheme of survey on an approved and yet an economical system, and which at the same time will meet the approval and support of all political parties, if the object be fairly put to them, and the scheme need involve no material extra expense on the Colony, but more than probably a large saving. The officers, in the present