

regard to the Native Department: that, whereas the salaries for the year before last were £19,014, last year they were £15,321; while the contingencies had risen from £4,893 in 1876-77, to £16,741 last year; that is to say, the control is being gradually taken out of the hands of this House—the habit is growing up of expending all this money upon contingencies, instead of submitting each item to the vote of this House. This is a question which I hope the House will take into its serious consideration. I hope it will carefully examine into this matter, and see how far the expenditure can be properly checked. For myself, I have not the slightest doubt it can be largely reduced with great public advantage. I might here incidentally remark that such expenditure as took place at the Kopua meeting is not, in my opinion, advisable at all. That meeting, the House might like to know, cost the country some £4,500, and the Waitara meeting cost over £1,000. Such then, Sir, is the general result of the last year—an actual deficit to be provided for of £131,824; an actual deficit on the transactions of the year—if the year were taken by itself—of £248,668. There were issued during the year, and paid off at the end of the year, deficiency bills to the amount of £184,000. I merely mention this as a transaction which has occurred: it does not affect the balance one way or the other.

FINANCIAL YEAR, 1879-80.

I now come to the present year 1879-80. The estimated expenditure, as left by the late Government, deducting from it a sum of £140,000 for contingent defence, which it is proposed to place upon loan, amounts to £3,974,034. This is exclusive, also, of a sum of about £125,000, which the Government merely collects and pays over to local bodies. I have omitted that sum from both sides of the account, in order to obtain greater simplicity. In quoting the estimate of expenditure as left by the late Government, I do not in any way wish to commit them to that expenditure. I am merely stating what I found in the office. Nor do I wish to commit the present Government to it; because honorable members will quite understand that it is impossible that I could have satisfactorily examined it or gone through it, so as to be able to speak with sufficient certainty to be committed to it. But I have given it what attention I could, and I say at once that, as far as I can see, there is nothing unreasonable in it, and that, if we are to continue the present system, I do not think we shall be able to reduce it to any great extent. This expenditure includes £1,325,373 for sinking fund and interest, £279,257 payable as subsidies to local bodies, and £63,540 being 20 per cent. of the Land Revenue. I might perhaps be permitted to remark here, with regard to this amount payable for sinking fund and interest, that it is to me a matter of very great regret that the late Government did not see their way to bring into operation the Consolidated Stock Act. I believe that, had that Act been brought into force at the time when the Government of which I had the honor to be a member was turned out of office, we should already have been deriving very considerable advantages from it. But, unfortunately, the one man who had taken the deepest interest in it throughout was not appointed agent until lately, and then only in such a way that it was impossible for him to go heartily into the work, being not at all assured of his position in the matter, or of receiving any co-operation from the Government here.