

SESS. II.—1879.

NEW ZEALAND.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

(*In Committee of Ways and Means, Monday, 17th November, 1879.*)

BY THE COLONIAL TREASURER, THE HONORABLE MAJOR ATKINSON.

MR. SEYMOUR,—

The difficulties and dangers of the position into which we have permitted our finance to drift are admittedly so great, and the time at the disposal of the Government has been so short and so broken, that I feel confident I shall have the sympathy of honorable members when I ask the Committee for as favourable a consideration of the proposals I am about to submit, as may be found compatible with careful criticism and a full discussion of their merits.

Sir, I think that all those who have given any real thought to the question of our present financial condition must have come to the conclusion, that it will be impossible to surmount our monetary difficulties and escape the dangers of our position without something like a complete remodelling of our finance, both general and local, without careful administration by Ministers, and without the exercise of much thrift and self-denial on the part of all classes of the community.

The period of the session at which we have now arrived renders it impossible to properly consider the whole question of our finance this year. My unfitness for the responsible position I have the honor to hold would be at once manifest, if I were to pretend to be capable, in the short time I have been in office, of maturing and submitting in detail so complete a financial policy as the Government believe to be practicable and necessary. I shall, however, Sir, endeavour to indicate clearly the general scope and direction of that policy, and to give what I hope the Committee will consider sufficiently full details of such parts of it as we think it is possible to deal with this session.

But, first, it will be necessary that I should recall to the mind of the Committee our present financial position, a position, Sir, I venture to say, unparalleled in the history of the colony, for with abundant natural resources, with excellent credit, and with an increasing ordinary revenue—notwithstanding great commercial depression—we find ourselves reduced to such a position as to cause the gravest anxiety to all true friends of the colony, and to necessitate important measures of financial reform involving large additional taxation.

POSITION OF THE CONSOLIDATED FUND RE-STATEMENT.

In the speech which I had the honor to address to the House on the 14th of October last, I showed that the total expenditure within and on account of the year 1878–79 was £4,006,961; that the total receipts amounted to £3,875,137—including therein the surplus of 1877–78, amounting to £116,844, and the assets of the year 1878–79 amounting to £6,695 realized since 30th June, 1879; and