

constitutional student than all the money of even England's national debt. (The narrow strip that separates Ireland from England, or England from France, is a sufficient example of what I mean.)

12. I therefore suggest a step backwards, and that a cautious one. It is sad to see the haste of modern legislation, when we think of the centuries of legislative error that have passed away. The minds of a community of people move but slowly. But already the existing state of confusion concerning the local government of our roads, and the want of local by-laws touching drainage, fencing, rabbits, sheep, cattle, brands, dogs, and the like, are setting the minds of the community slowly but surely back to the desirability of restoring the provinces, which I think would be a mistake. Such is the effect of late Acts of Parliament. Everything is in confusion; there is no simplicity.

13. It appears as if too hurried a system of legislation has been determined upon with regard to questions of local government. The agricultural improvement of the land of a community does not move so fast as our politicians suppose. It takes time more than money to convert a swamp into pasturage. Herein the aiming at one valuation roll, say, for the whole colony is nearly a quarter of a century before its time. Greater elasticity, during the progress of development, is required than the one roll can furnish, and it may be found to be a mistake to have centralised this valuation. I have served a fair apprenticeship upon the Boards of the various local bodies, in order to acquire a knowledge of their method of working, and I trust you will excuse me for venturing to express the opinion that three different valuations are required in the colony in place of one: (1) for the property-tax; (2) for the Road Board; and (3) for some of the objects contemplated by the Hon. Major Atkinson's Roads and Bridges Construction Act.

14. It is quite clear that the sixty-six counties do not fulfil, nor do they understand, the work expected from them, which work is principally referred to in clause 12. On the other hand, we shall always be a weak State if one central authority attempts to perform that work. We can only then act by force, and not by voluntary wish. But it is impossible to compel settlers to do everything from the steps of the Resident Magistrate's Court—the present practice. A time must soon come when settlers will grow tired of these constant threats, if that time is not already. In many cases Government officers dare not put the laws into effect. When the people are thoroughly aroused against what they consider the oppression of Government officials, no consideration of money, or unity of the colony, or county government withholds them. At the present time many a man is being driven into the position of a bad citizen by the working of the sheep and rabbit laws. A few more years, and so many will have been disappointed that the provinces will be restored to put a stop to this system of centralisation. Herein the local Justices of the Peace might be found of great assistance; but these gentlemen are not trusted. The Resident Magistrate is preferred to administer such questions of local government, and his hands are tied, perhaps, by the simple desire of retaining his position. Those who deem that the errors of the country Justices are bad for the community at large wrongly read the problem. Their errors may harm the private individual for a time, but the Justices of the colony fairly and fully, and perhaps in the best degree, represent the voluntary wish of the community. If they administer an Act badly, and persistently continue in so doing, we may rest assured that the Act is faulty. Their other errors are usually held up to scorn, and right themselves. We cannot expect perfect Acts in a young colony. The constant amendments of our late general Acts of Parliament point out the necessity of good local by-laws.

15. I separate the land question from that of local government, although a properly-constituted county might act as a Waste Lands Board (I have before observed that the present existence of our Waste Lands Boards shows how impossible it was to do away with the provincial system of government entirely). In questions of education, licensing, charitable aid, &c., a properly-constituted county might be found of great use, strength, and service. The elasticity of local by-laws subject to one general Act will best represent the voluntary wish of any community, especially such a community as ours, stretching through so many parallels of latitude. In abolishing the provinces we have run to the other extreme, and set up so many bodies that the colony has no local by-laws. Without the local by-laws we cannot have local government. I see no objection to plead them in our Courts of law. Our aim should be to provide this colony with such a form of local government that its by-laws are fitted to the circumstances of each particular district, and represent the voluntary wish of the community. This might have been done by conserving some of the powers granted to the provinces. The people then would have valued and defended their Constitution. At present they are only too ready to attack it. It is a bad plan to throw a Constitution to the multitude and tell them to form one for themselves. During the whole of the French Revolution of 1788-98, M. Sieyès was the one man who, like a power behind the throne, watched that vast upheaval and sketched out its different Constitutions—that one man and he alone. The Greeks always intrusted their wisest citizens with framing the laws or amending their Constitution. Our eight or nine provinces were like a tight-fitting coat, not room enough across our expanding chest. The sixty-six counties, numerous Licensing Boards, and other such bodies, are miles and miles too big for us. We have not even the population sufficient to find representatives. It is customary for the same gentlemen to be chosen members of Parliament, County Councillors, members of Education Boards, and members of Waste Lands Boards. With, say, twenty-six counties in place of sixty-six, Commissioners of Waste Lands, Education, &c., might report to these same gentlemen, whose time thereby would be much economized. The Hon. Frederick Whitaker would, however, be far better qualified than myself to sketch out a consolidating measure of local government. In the Premier's office may be found a plan of present North Island counties roughly amalgamated, which I had the honour of submitting through Mr. George Beetham three years since to Sir John Hall.

16. I much doubt whether it is advisable to leave this question to right itself. It may be so left, but there is a danger then of the provinces being restored. Or the *vis inertia* of the great centres, at some moment of trouble, may carry the two Islands into separation. Such things have arisen upon a sudden. I would much rather see a proper form of local government at once provided: