

1899.

NEW ZEALAND.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

(In Committee of Supply, 1st August, 1899)

BY THE COLONIAL TREASURER, THE RIGHT HON. R. J. SEDDON.

MR. GUINNESS,—

I am in the happy position of being able to reiterate the announcement I have made each year since I have had the honour of being Colonial Treasurer—namely, that the past year closed with a surplus or credit balance (call it which you will) of a very substantial amount—in the present instance, of £495,861.

The statement of the receipts and expenditure of the various accounts forming the Public Accounts of the colony having been gazetted, honourable members have of course made themselves acquainted with the figures, and it only remains for me to make some comments upon them for the information of members and the public at large.

The ordinary revenue exceeded my estimate to the extent of £217,428, of which, in round figures, Customs contributed £30,000; Land- and Income-tax, £23,500; Railways, £95,500; and Territorial, £46,800: other heads of revenue contributed nearly £22,000. The only item which fell short was “Registration and other Fees,” which did not reach the estimate by £178.

Adverse criticism has occurred because my estimate of revenue was not much larger, and it is seriously asserted that the balance at the end of the year has been increased (relatively, I suppose) by reason of the underestimate. How this could be possible I leave to the quidnuncs to explain. So far as concerns the estimate of Customs revenue, I was content to adopt the figures representing the actual receipts of the previous year. These figures have been exceeded by £30,000, largely owing to the increased spending-power of the people and the general prosperity we continue to enjoy. To get at an absolutely accurate forecast of the receipts under the land- and income-tax is almost impossible. The income-tax came in to an amount similar to that of the preceding year, but the land-tax produced a larger revenue than was anticipated. The largest increase in the revenue items took place in the railway receipts, and, as I have already stated, these exceeded the estimate by £95,500. An extraordinary expansion in the goods and passenger traffic accounts for most of this; also sheep, cattle, chaff, minerals, &c., were carried largely in excess of the business done the preceding year, the only decreases being in wool, grain, timber, and pigs. It is necessary to explain that the falling-off in grain may be accounted for by the lateness of the season and the low prices ruling. Since the end of the financial year there has been a large increase over and above what we carried during the corresponding period of last year.

The last revenue item showing a substantial increase is under the head of “Territorial,” and arises from the fact that settlers with perpetual leases (having a right of purchase) converted their properties into freeholds, and thus enlarged the amount of cash land-sales to an extent which was not anticipated when the estimate was prepared.

The item £17,500, “Advances repaid,” representing the net transactions with the Advances to Settlers Office, is, I am informed, not likely to recur, as