

New Zealand.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

MESSAGE No. 4.

On the 2nd instant, the Officer administering the Government, received an address from the House of Representatives in answer to the Speech with which he opened the second Session of the General Assembly.

In order that no time might be lost in obtaining for the people of New Zealand, the establishment, by competent authority of Ministerial Responsibility in the conduct of the Government, the Officer Administering the Government fulfilled without delay his promise given to the House, and urgently pressed the subject upon the consideration of Her Majesty's Government, and at the same time, expressed his own earnest hope that the wishes of the Assembly might have received Her Majesty's gracious approval; and that he might, ere long, have the pleasing task of conveying to the inhabitants of these Islands, the gratifying intelligence that the boon has been conceded by the Crown and Parliament.

In the meantime, and with a view to secure for the people of New Zealand, the practical acknowledgement of the principle of Ministerial Responsibility in the conduct of the Government, the Officer Administering the Government, added to the Executive Council some Members having seats in the Assembly with the twofold object of strengthening the General Government, and of securing a due representation of the various Provinces in the Executive Government of the Colony; and he laid before the Assembly in his opening Address, the course of policy which the Government thus constituted were prepared to pursue.

The Officer administering the Government learns with regret that these Measures which he believed to be calculated to give contentment to Her Majesty's subjects in the Colony, have not received the approval of the House of Representatives.

Looking to the inconveniences suffered by the greater number of the Members of the Assembly, from an already protracted absence from their homes, the Officer administering the Government cannot expect that the House should be willing to prolong their attendance, so far as to be able to give effect to any general course of policy which might now be submitted for their adoption. He has deemed it expedient, therefore, to propose that the business of the Session should be confined to the appropriation of the Public Revenues, and to the passing of a few Measures of immediate practical importance not likely to lead to lengthened discussion.

The Officer administering the Government, will cause to be immediately laid before the house, a carefully prepared statement of the financial condition of the Colony, accompanied by an Appropriation Bill, and by an explanatory minute. The public accounts have been made up to the 1st July last, and it will appear from the statement in question that there was on that day a clear available balance of cash in the Colonial Chest of £50,081 (Fifty thousand and eighty-one pounds.) The Constitution Act provides, as the House is aware, for the distribution of the surplus Land Revenue, and of the surplus of the Revenue to arise under any Act of the General Assembly; but no provision has been made by the Act for regulating the appropriation of the Customs Revenue already arising under Colonial Ordinances. In the absence of any special enactment by the Assembly, the surplus of Her Majesty's Customs Revenue would not be payable into the several Provincial Treasuries, but would remain to the credit of the General Government. It is proposed for the consideration of the House, that, subject to the charges necessary for the maintenance of the Civil Establishments, the surplus of the present Customs Revenue should be divided amongst the various Provinces in the proportion prescribed by the Constitution Act in respect of the Revenues to be raised under the provisions of an Act of the Assembly, and the Bill for appropriating the Public Revenues, has been framed with a view to carry that object into effect. With respect to the ultimate distribution of the surplus Land Revenue, it may be a question deserving consideration whether it would not be more generally satisfactory to the Colonists, that a separate account of the Land Revenue should be kept for each Province, and that as far as may be practicable the ultimate sum to be paid into each Provincial Treasury, should be determined by the amount of the Land Revenue actually received and expended within each Province in the course of the preceding year.

The ordinary Establishments of the General Government, and the salaries of the Officers have been placed upon the Estimates at the same rate at which they were originally fixed, and at which they have for some time been paid; considering the continued high price of every description of labour, and the cost of the necessaries of life, the House will doubtless be of opinion that the Public Officers are at present inadequately paid. The Officer administering the Government will be glad to concur with the House in making any general augmentation of their salaries which may appear to be reasonable and just:—with respect to the salaries, charges, and expenses, now for the first time brought into the Estimates, and to the amount to be reserved for General Public Works, &c., he will be glad to be guided by the recommendations of the House.

During the short period which appears to be remaining at the disposal of the House, it can hardly be expected that the Assembly should exercise the power granted to them by the Constitution Act of regulating the disposal and management of the Waste Lands of the Crown.

Believing that the maintenance of uniformity in the mode of disposing of the Public Lands is not of essential importance, and indeed that no general system can be equally well adopted, or can long remain suited to the various and varying conditions of a country like New Zealand, the Officer administering the Government suggested for the consideration of the Assembly, in his opening address, whether it might not be expedient for the Assembly to delegate to the Provincial Legislatures the power of making laws for regulating the sale, letting, disposal and occupation of the Waste Lands of the Crown, and he would have been prepared at once to submit to the Assembly, a Bill to carry that object into effect. It may well deserve consideration however, whether any Act to be passed by the Assembly to authorize the Provincial Councils to legislate on this subject, should not, in order to secure to the General Government an efficient controlling power, contain a provision that no Ordinance to be passed by any Provincial Council, relating to the Lands of the Crown should come into actual operation until it shall have received the Governor's assent. Looking to the magnitude of the interests at stake, it may also be a wise precaution to enact, that the power of regulating the disposal and management of the Waste Lands of any Province, shall not be exercised by the local Legislature until there shall have been a new Election of its Members.

Until the Assembly shall Legislate on the subject, it will be competent for the Governor by virtue of the provisions of the Constitution Act, to regulate the sale, letting, disposal, and occupation of the Demesne Lands of the Crown. Pending legislation by the Assembly and aided by the best information which local knowledge and experience can supply, the Officer administering the Government will be prepared, as occasion may require, to adapt the existing general regulations to the particular requirements of the various Provinces, and as far as may be consistent with the interests of the Colony at large, in conformity with the wants and wishes of their several inhabitants, many of the subjects of the most pressing importance have already for some time been under the consideration of the house. Amongst the Measures which will probably engage their attention with a view to immediate legislation, are the Secondary Punishment Bill, the Naturalization Bill, the Dower Bill, the Nelson Trust Fund Bill, &c., &c.

With a general desire to work together, with a view to promote the interests of the Colony, the Assembly will be able by a close attention to the actual business of legislation to turn even a short Session to profitable account, and the Officer administering the Government in conclusion, has to assure the House of his most earnest wish cordially to co-operate with them, during the short period which may yet remain at their disposal, in the endeavour to secure for the people of New Zealand, the greatest possible measure of useful Legislation.

R. H. WYNYARD,
Officer Administering the Government.

Government House, Auckland,
4th September, 1854.