

ancestors in New Zealand. Planning also began late in 1886 for illustrating the entire work. Artists in the Survey Department, possibly including Tregear, were employed to carry out the necessary work.<sup>42</sup>

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At the very time the project was beginning to bear fruit, it was suddenly threatened by a change of government on 8 October 1887. The Stout administration, and in particular the Native Minister John Ballance, had ensured over the previous three years that what had originally seemed a broad and ill-defined project would become a scholarly reality. Lack of sales of the later volumes now precipitated a consideration of the project's worth by the new government. Despite a raft of retrenchments being ordered elsewhere, the new Premier, Harry Atkinson, minuted that the history be continued.<sup>43</sup> Judging from the available evidence, Atkinson believed the work to be a worthwhile enterprise and White's own abilities for the job without equal.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps too his brother, A. S. Atkinson, who was a longstanding friend of White may have acted as an advocate in the history's favour.

The beneficial effects of such support were felt less and less during these last years of the project's life. As early as 1886 Parliament had begun to query expenditure and the length of time the work was taking.<sup>45</sup> In 1888 the government promised that the year's vote would be the last. During the same debate supporters of the project stuck grimly to the same arguments advanced in 1880. They stressed the importance of the project for knowledge of Maori history, and pointed out that to cut funding would be 'manifestly foolish', as one put it, with the work so near completion. The government tried to mollify its opponents with one or two minor criticisms of their own, and a solemn promise made both by the Colonial Secretary and the Premier to enquire into the costs of completing the history. The annual vote was reduced by the symbolic amount of £5.<sup>46</sup>

The official files for the history after 1888 reveal growing alarm and a strengthening desire to finish off the matter as speedily as possible. The government repeatedly sought to learn the exact number of volumes in *The Ancient History*. Estimates varied widely depending on whose opinion was sought, though the final figure seems to have been twenty-one (seventeen volumes of traditions, three of genealogies and one of notes). The muddled situation was typified by the actions of the Colonial Secretary who reported to Parliament the Government Printer's estimate of eight volumes even though White's own figure of thirteen had earlier been reported to the Cabinet. Estimates of a completion date were almost as wide of the mark. Although in all fairness this may have been due to an overburdened Government Printing Office, which had to try and fit in producing this major work together with its other business, without any additional funding or staff.<sup>47</sup>