

SIR JULIUS VOGEL

APOSTLE OF HIGH FINANCE

By R. M. BURDON

SPEAKING OF Sir Julius Vogel, a well-known newspaper once said: "The Treasury to him is the Tattersall of finance. He must give and take odds. Official ledgers are betting-books on a large scale, and balances represent what the State stands to win or lose."

This was undoubtedly a case where the writer was so pleased with his analogy that he allowed himself to be led astray by it into a somewhat unjust exaggeration. It was true that Vogel always believed the millenium, or something very like it, could be attained by bold, carefully-planned financial enterprises and Government-guaranteed loans at cheap rates of interest—a creed which, though not exactly one of moral elevation, had a great deal to be said for it in an empty country with few roads and railways—but he was not a true gambler in the real meaning of the word, because he always saw to it that the chances of fortune were enlisted in his favour by careful planning.

Unhappily for him, this rule only applied to public transactions. In private life he really was a gambler—a reckless, injudicious one, too, in consequence of which he died penniless. He was always ready to speculate with his own money, but when investing State funds he always wagered on what he believed were certainties.

His first attempt to guide the country's financial policy was not exactly a fortunate one—at least it sounded unfortunate, especially coming from him. Even in those days there were new and old

colonists. Vogel, a brilliant Jewish journalist, having only lately arrived on the heels of the Otago gold rush, was decidedly new, and an object of suspicion for the old. In 1865 he wrote to Edward Stafford, the Premier, explaining a scheme he had for settling the lands confiscated from the Maoris after the Waikato War. A million acres of this land was to be disposed of by lottery in sections of from 50 to 100,000 acres. Every section disposed of was to carry with it the grant of a certain number of free passages for immigrants from England—nearly 2,000 in all. The winner of a 100,000-acre section would be given eight free cabin passages; the winner of 10,000 acres, four cabin passages; the winner of 500 acres, five steerage passages; and so on. Free grants of land were to be made to 1,000 volunteers, who would be expected, if necessary, to defend the settlement. According to Vogel's calculations, the lottery would bring in a sum of £2,000,000 to the New Zealand Government.

The proposal would surely have carried greater weight, the aim and object of the proposer have sounded more altruistic, had not Vogel gone on to add:—

"I have the honour to offer, as a condition of trying my plan, that its negotiation be left to me in conjunction with any one named for the purpose by the Government or Provincial Governments.

"In respect to the cost of negotiation, the expenses will be large. There will have to be a vast number of agencies and sub-agencies for the disposal of tickets, and an allowance of 2½ to 7½ per

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Gold built the bank its sham façade;
Behind that studded door
Gold dribbled over the counter
Into the cracks of the floor.

Gold pollinated the whole town;
But the golden bees are gone—
Now round a country butcher's shop
The sullen blowflies drone.

Now paved with common clay
Are the roads of Arrowtown;
And the silt of the river is grey,
In the golden sun.

Arrowtown doesn't need an epitaph,
and if the poet had stayed a little longer
he would have found that the grave had
never been occupied.