

The next point is to apply this principle to the local institutions of New Zealand. Besides the ordinary tasks which have—wisely or unwisely—been intrusted to the inferior bodies here in common with those of England, such as the repair of roads, the maintenance of police and goals, and the making provision for education and works of charity, the work of colonization has been thrown upon their hands. As long as we adhere to a general term like “colonization,” it is evident that the whole of New Zealand, and each part of every Province, has an equal interest in the result. But when we come to examine the meaning of the word, it is found to be very different for different parts of the Colony. There are in New Zealand agricultural, pastoral, mining, and mercantile communities, and that which will promote the interest of one, will in most cases only confer upon the others the indirect benefits resulting from the general advancement of the Colony. To a certain extent, those divisions of interest coincide with the division into Provinces, and so far the work of colonization can be efficiently carried out by Provincial Governments. In every Province, indeed, there is the one division into the trading and producing classes, consequently into town and country populations; and it is on this rock that Provincial Governments have so frequently struck. But as far as the producing classes are concerned, there are several Provinces in each of which there is but one kind of producer, namely the farmer, and consequently but one interest to attend to in the matter of colonization. In the early days of the Colony the rough approximation to a plan for developing the country exhibited by the Provincial organization was sufficient, or at all events it had the advantage of being a great saving in expense—in those days a paramount consideration—on any more minute system which could have been introduced. But the influx year by year of a large population of different classes of people has rendered the difference of interests more and more apparent, and the Provincial Governments less and less competent as instruments of colonization. It becomes daily more evident that Provincial Governments should be confined to those fields of action which give a common ground on which the whole body of constituents can meet; but that wherever the interests of localities clash, there should be formed separate governments. Provincial Governments would then be limited, so far as diverse interests are concerned, to the same position as the Colonial Government, viz., that of instructors and arbitrators. A judicious cession by Provinces to districts of parts of their executive powers forms the necessary corollary to the Constitution; and it is only by voluntary working in this direction that the supporters of Provincial organization can place themselves in their proper intermediate position between Colonial and District Governments. Unless this is done they impose upon the Colony the duty of stepping in, in its office of arbitrator, to see that the districts get justice. Nothing could be more unfortunate than that the Colonial Government should have to occupy itself in this task, whereas nothing could confer greater strength upon the Provinces than that they should take the task upon themselves; instead of a fictitious semblance of local government they would then become an indispensable link in the downward series from colonial to true local government.

As matters now stand, however, that class which has the preponderance monopolizes the government—and that one is indubitably the trading class. It has been frequently said—and it is precisely the result which we should expect—that an unfair proportion of Provincial revenue is spent upon the chief towns. Whether or not this is the case, the numerous petitions which have at different times been laid before the House of Assembly, complaining of mismanagement on the part of Provincial Governments, against which the petitioners had no redress through the Provincial system, are in themselves sufficient evidence of a flaw in our Constitution. Granted that the petitioners were all wrong, that what they had called mismanagement was in reality a plan of administration worthy of Solomon, it would, nevertheless, be far wiser in the long run to allow these petitioners to manage their own local affairs, even though they did so in a manner which fell very far short of the great king’s method. They would at once be changed from grumblers into actors, and, if the Provincial Government knew its own duty as instructors, into learners also. At present, however, the majority of New Zealand electors are grumblers and grumblers only, and that not only in the country, but in the towns; for the short-sighted policy of starving out-district and town alike of useful works, for the purpose of whitewashing the poverty of the latter by the erection of extensive public buildings, is sufficiently evident to all. The inquirer need but look at the amount of interest displayed by the people in the elections for the Provincial Councils, to satisfy himself that the local Governments have not got the real and hearty support of the electors of New Zealand, and this alone I take to be sufficient evidence that they do not deserve it. A Government which crawls along without exciting the sympathy and co-operation of the people, can only be fit to excite their contempt.

It is by no means my intention to assert that this state of things arises from the one cause which I have alluded to as having given birth to the petitions of the out-districts. My belief is that it owes its origin mainly to the importation of a Constitution unsuited to the stage of advancement which the people had reached in political education. It would, however, be beyond the province of this Essay to trace out the effects of trying to build a house from the roof downwards. It is evident enough, that even though the roof may be supported by a vast balloon of British supremacy, there must be a difficulty about the adhesion of the lower masonry—in fact, that it will not cohere until we have built up to it in the ordinary manner; and that if in the meanwhile our balloon got adrift, there is a very great likelihood of a collapse. In fact, the Constitution of New Zealand seems little more than a piece of high-flown pedantry worthy of Abbé Sieyès.

From what has been said above, it appears that it is not to be expected from Provincial Governments, which have to preside over a number of different interests, that they should concern themselves more particularly about the development of one, and that if they take that task in hand—as they are frequently compelled to do—they are transgressing their proper functions, and doing an injustice to all other interests. This, therefore, leads us to the conclusion that the establishment of mining industries in New Zealand ought in the main to be left to those who are directly interested. When the local body—call it what we may—will not, by bestowing its attention on this subject, be neglecting others, it may properly enter upon the task. In cases, therefore, where districts coinciding in extent with the field of industry which it is desired to throw open have a local Government of their own, that Government is justified, at the people’s request, in taking direct means to develop