

They considered that it was especially important, at this critical juncture, that the opinion of the Colonists should be known through the recognized constitutional channel. Much misconception might arise from communications which, purporting to be official, might fail to thoroughly represent the views of the Colony. But as a moral support to public opinion in New Zealand, and to the course which it may be decided the Colony shall take, the independent expression in Great Britain of sympathy and good feeling is invaluable. They feel it would be unfair to the large views expressed by Mr. Edward Wilson, in his letter to "The Times," which has obtained a world-wide publicity, did they fail to take this opportunity of stating that they concur with him in regarding the policy lately pursued by the Colonial Office as one tending towards the disintegration of the Empire, and also that they agree with Sir George Grey, in considering that the action of the Imperial Government has not only been unfriendly, but that it is scarcely reconcilable with any other motive than a desire to drive New Zealand from the Empire.

In some quarters a disposition has been shown to test the propriety of the departure of the troops by the immediate result. Thus it has been said that the removal would be justified if no actual disaster at once followed it. Such a test is in itself an admission of an inclination to run a great risk by way of a political experiment; and the opinion of persons who can deal with the interests of an important Colony so callously is of little moment. But it is of importance that it should be fully understood the Colony does not admit that immediate events are to decide the liability of Great Britain for the consequences arising from the course she has taken. It is well, therefore, to define what Ministers consider the position to be, as far as they can do so with public safety. It is necessary to make this reservation, because it should be understood that the recent action of Lord Granville in publishing Despatches, makes Ministers feel that they must refrain from any statements the publication of which would be injurious.

It would not be advisable to particularise the consequences which there is good reason to believe would have followed had the troops not been detained last year by General Chute in obedience to the earnestly expressed wish of both Houses of the Legislature; but Ministers desire to place on record their conviction that the then detention of the troops saved the Colony from disaster, and has proved of signal public service. That the removal now is not fraught with immediate disaster, is through no care of the Imperial Government. The orders sent out were in the last degree peremptory. Ministers do not believe that immediate calamity will now follow the departure of the troops. The intervening months since the detention last year have placed the Colony in a somewhat better position. Ministers earnestly hope that no future disaster will be attributable to that departure; but supposing this hope to prove well founded, it is still not to be assumed that it is right that the Troops should have left, or that, without any absolute disaster to instance, great injury may not be caused. If this document were confidential, Ministers could point to obvious immediate injury resulting from the departure, and to difficulties which it is occasioning; but as it is, they can only in general terms state that the departure of the troops means the loss of a valuable garrison force,—that it lessens the prestige of the Government in dealing with the neutral and hostile Natives; that it impairs the confidence of the friendly Natives, who hold that the Treaty of Waitangi gave them the right to look directly to the Crown for the fulfilment of its obligations; and that in the event of complications and disturbances, which Ministers trust and hope will be avoided, the consequence of the departure of the troops will probably be a feeling that the Colony owes no heed whatever to the obligations undertaken by Great Britain.

Substantially the position is this: the Imperial Government retire from the great colonizing work which Great Britain undertook; they give no notice to those Natives who have always aided her; they say to the Colonists and to the Natives, Do what you like, we cease to care for what may happen. It is impossible to define any time during which the effects of this course may be apparent; it is sufficient to know that it is one which affects the future of the Colony. It is alleged by Lord Granville that the step has been taken in the interests of the Colony. This is a view which Ministers cannot allow to pass unchallenged. If it really be the opinion of Ministers at Home that they can better judge what the Colony requires than the Colonists themselves, surely they should withdraw, and not increase, the local powers. The Colonial Legislature deliberately asked that the troops should remain, and offered to pay for them whatever was required. It is a singular excuse for fastening on the Colony greater responsibility, that its judgment in so important a matter is considered to be at fault. But it is idle to pursue this branch of the subject, for, clearly, the protestations about the troops being removed for the benefit of the Colony are merely official euphemisms—a civil disguise of the fact that it is considered necessary to sacrifice the Colony to Imperial policy. The Imperial Government have acted, not only in disregard of the wish of the Colony, but of the advice of all those of their own officers who are able to give them recommendations founded on experience. His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief has given the Government a positive expression of his opinion that the removal of the Troops would be prejudicial to Imperial interests. The late Governor, Sir George Grey, and His Excellency Sir George Bowen, have often most powerfully urged the same views, as have also, repeatedly, officers of high position in the Imperial services. Until quite lately, the Imperial Government have held, it is to be inferred, similar opinions. The persistence with which they invited the Colony to defray the cost, and the fact that twice, in 1866 and 1867, they determined, irrespectively of the previously expressed wish of the Colonial Government, that one regiment should remain, showed that they considered some Troops should be detained. The evidence is conclusive, that the Imperial Government have now decided that possible pecuniary liabilities are superior to national considerations, as far as New Zealand is concerned. Even although the Colony offers to pay for the Troops, Her Majesty's Ministers, as shown by Earl Granville in his Despatch No. 115, 17th October, 1869, are apprehensive of the responsibilities which might result from a continued connection with the Colony, altogether forgetting those which they have incurred, and which they cannot shake off.

Some idea of the enormous gravity of the step taken by Her Majesty's Ministers may be conceived when it is remembered, that though the removal of the Troops was opposed to the advice of the Imperial officers who had a personal knowledge of the Colony, the orders were so unconditional that the removal must have taken place, no matter what condition existed when the orders arrived, and what sacrifice of life might have ensued.