

have made which renders us so impatient with regard to our future progress, and this impatience is for us an evil, against the possible effects of which we must jealously guard.

I need scarcely say that there are lines of railway in each island, besides those embodied in my proposals, the importance of which are fully recognized by the Government, and which we should have been glad to have included. The present proposals involve an expenditure of £1,677,000 a year, until the lines mentioned are completed; and if we can come to an arrangement as between ourselves—an honourable understanding, which ought to be held as binding as the laws of the Medes and Persians—that, upon the completion of those lines, a similar amount shall continue to be expended on productive railways only, it is a mere question of time when all the land throughout the colony which it is required to occupy and render available by means of railway communication, shall be so rendered available. By the time that the railways now proposed are complete, we shall, no doubt, find that many branch lines will be undertaken by private enterprise. There are at present throughout the colony nearly 100 miles which are being taken in hand under the provisions of the District Railways Act of last session, and it is believed that by slightly amending that Act, advantage will be taken of its provisions to a much larger extent, and the Government will thereby be relieved of constructing many lines which, sooner or later, must otherwise devolve upon it. I look upon this as one of the most gratifying features in the future railway policy of New Zealand.

LOCAL WORKS.

I must now solicit the earnest attention of honorable members to a question which may virtually affect the whole scope of the future policy of the colony, and which, in my belief, may largely influence the functions and the character of this House—I refer to the question of Roads and Bridges. Although the gradual extension of the railway system is diminishing the extent to which money must needs be expended in such works, as compared with what was unavoidable in the past, there are still many districts in which such works will continue to be for years to come essential. I need not remind you, that one of the great advantages which was to be secured by the recent political changes was, that the name of a road or a bridge was never more to be heard in this House as connected with any askings for money. Such, we were asked to believe, was to be one of the first results of the Abolition of the Provinces. As it is, however, unless the House is prepared to make a decided stand, it is to be feared that roads, bridges, and culverts will become subjects of the most anxious and excited discussions to be heard within these walls. What, then, is to be our policy with respect to these works? My colleagues and myself are clearly of opinion that they ought to be wholly devolved upon local bodies, by whom the requisite funds must be found. One thing seems to me to be beyond doubt or question: The Colony must undertake all such works, or must refuse to undertake any. Any other course must be brimful of injustice. Last session we passed various votes for roads and bridges, with the understanding that the amounts were to be provided out of loan. Those votes will, I apprehend, have to be made good in any case. Many of them are now in course of expenditure; and we propose to renew all the unexpended portions by putting them upon this year's Estimates. This will, in round numbers, mean the appropriation of about £102,000 for local works in the North Island, and about £166,000 for similar works in the Middle Island. Thereafter we propose to finally close the account, and to confine Public Works operations entirely to railway construction. I admit that if we are sustained in this course, it will be productive of hardship to those portions of the colony which were not fortunate enough to participate in the scramble for roads and bridges last year. It seems to me, however, as I have said that, in fairness, we have no middle course open. If we are to construct arterial roads and bridges, we must take charge of all such works, and subsidies in aid of them, which are now paid to local bodies, must cease. It is manifestly unreasonable to expect that the colony can go on paying, as it did last year, nearly three-quarters of a million to local bodies, if it has to perform the functions which devolve upon such bodies besides.