

upon the funds which we should like to see left free to supply local wants; while at the same time it seems to be entirely forgotten that the localities themselves have largely benefited by the Public Works scheme, and that by the construction of railways, roads, and bridges at the charge of the colony, they have been permanently relieved of much expenditure. It is, indeed, quite certain that if we are to people the waste lands and make the country progress, as we have determined it shall progress, we must find the means not only to keep in proper repair our roads and bridges already constructed, but also to extend our road system throughout the colony step by step with advancing settlement. I propose to-night to speak only in relation to the financial aspect of the question, without reference to the organization or powers of the local bodies: of these I shall speak at large at an early date. I now take it for granted that the local bodies will be charged with the duty of making and maintaining the roads within their jurisdiction, and that upon these works the bulk of their expenditure will be made. The local bodies have other duties to perform, but, if that part of the problem relating to roads and bridges can be satisfactorily solved, the rest will follow without much difficulty. This, then, is the great question for solution—how are funds to be provided for the construction and maintenance of our roads and bridges? And the question naturally divides itself into two branches—first, maintenance; and second, construction. But, before proceeding further, let me say what, in my opinion, are the requisites of a sound local finance. These are, that local finance should be as distinct from and independent of our general finance as possible, and that the funds should be sufficient.

MAINTENANCE OF ROADS AND BRIDGES.

First, then, let us consider the means at our disposal for the maintenance of roads and bridges already constructed. With very little consideration, it will be evident, I think, to every one, that our roads and bridges must be maintained for the future, with perhaps one or two exceptions, by local rates. The landed property in each district must, as a rule, maintain the roads and bridges of the district. This being so, it is evident that all land must pay rates. The Government therefore propose that Crown lands and Native lands shall be rated, with certain exceptions, with which I need not now trouble the House. This proposal is the same as that which I had the honor to submit last year, with one or two important alterations. The proposal is shortly this. that, within boroughs, the property of the Crown, with certain exceptions, and of Maoris, shall, for the future, be rated under "The Rating Act, 1876," the Maoris being in this case placed on the same footing as European holders of town property; and that country lands, both Crown and Native, shall be divided into two classes, agricultural and pastoral, and shall be rated at £1 an acre for agricultural land, and 6s. 8d. an acre for pastoral land, which amounts, for rating purposes, will be taken as the value of the fee-simple. Honorable members will observe that, while last year it was proposed to estimate Native land at one-half the value of Crown land, it is now proposed to value them alike; and I cannot but believe that, upon considering all the circumstances of the case, the House will think this fair and reasonable. If the Crown and Native lands are to pay rates, the question arises: who is to be responsible for their payment to the local bodies, and out of what funds are they to be paid? We propose in every case that the Colonial Treasurer shall be primarily liable, and shall pay the rates to the local bodies. The rates on Crown property within boroughs we propose to charge against the Consolidated Fund, the rates on country Crown lands against the Land Fund; and the rates on country Native lands we propose to advance out of money appropriated by Parliament for the purpose, but to remain a charge against the Native land for which the rates are paid, and to be recovered without interest, as a duty under the Stamp Act, from the first purchaser or lessee of the land so charged. With regard to making the rates to be paid upon Crown property within boroughs a charge against the Consolidated Fund, I think all sides will agree that these rates are a proper charge against that fund. In respect to the rates upon country Crown lands, I hope it will need no argument to prove that they should be a charge against the Land Fund. Having determined that the land shall maintain the roads, there can be no reason to make an exception in favour of