

amount, and by the ordinary growth of certain branches of our revenue—we have been enabled to turn what I have shown would have been a deficit on the 31st March, 1890, of £572,946, supposing the Land Fund was balanced by cash sales, into a surplus of £115,174, after providing for all services chargeable against the Ordinary Revenue Account and paying off £50,000 of the deficit outstanding on the 31st March, 1888. This is a result of which I think the country, Parliament, and, I hope I may be allowed to say, the Government have reason to be proud.

I think, Mr. Hamlin, it will not be out of place here to call the attention of the Committee to the three things which the Government undertook as their first duty in 1888. In my Financial Statement of that year I said that we had—

“ Firstly: To see that our ordinary expenditure is reduced to the lowest practical point; and, this being done,—

“ Secondly: To devise a means to raise sufficient revenue to prevent the recurrence of a deficit; and in doing this we must, as far as can be done without loss to the community at large, assist our local industries and manufactures; and

“ Lastly: We have to reduce the expenditure of borrowed money on our public works to a much greater extent than was proposed last session.”

With reference to the first point I need say no more, as I have shown above what has been accomplished.

With regard to the second point, we have, it will be admitted, in the tariff devised a means of raising a sufficient revenue to meet our requirements. It was a most difficult matter, in making so large a change in the tariff in the then condition of the colony, to estimate what would be the financial results. We had, of course, to consider the stagnant state of trade through the seriously-disturbing causes of which I have already spoken. Trade was also in a transitional state, as it still is, apparently tending to pass from more to fewer hands. We had to consider not only how far the revenue might be affected by these causes, but how far also by the evident change which was coming over the spending habits of the people generally. I say all these things had to be taken into account in estimating the results of the amended tariff; and considering all these uncertainties I think it must be admitted—at any rate I am bound to admit—that the estimate made by the permanent officers of the department as to the probable results was exceedingly accurate. And I venture further to assert that the tariff has certainly not in any respect injured our local industries. It has on the contrary, I believe, assisted them considerably.

I have already shown that our local manufactures exported, exclusive of flax, have doubled in amount since 1887, and I know of no industry which is not now in as sound a condition as it was then, and in most cases the condition has been greatly improved. Take the woollen industry, which we are told confidently is languishing: let us see what are the facts. We find that in 1886 there were five mills at work, and they purchased wool that year to the extent of 1,879,999lb. In 1889 there were seven mills at work, and they purchased 3,556,004lb. of wool. This shows, I think, conclusively, that the industry is making real and rapid progress. The whole of the mills are fairly prosperous and are working full time. On reference to Table No. 22, honourable members will see the amount of wool purchased by the mills every year since 1882. I claim, therefore, that our second undertaking has so far been satisfactorily fulfilled.

With regard to the third proposition, I have already shown that we have reduced the public-works expenditure from £966,159 in 1887–88 to £410,729 in the year just closed. We have therefore accomplished what we said was necessary under the third heading also.

And, lastly, I will speak of what is certainly not least in importance, the settlement of our lands. What has been done on this vital subject during the last two years and a half as compared with the previous three years? The acreage per annum of all lands not pastoral disposed of has been practically doubled, that of lands disposed of on settlement conditions more than doubled: while the total cost of administration has been diminished by 27 per cent., so

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How they have
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intentions.