

their tails (as the members of the different provinces were called) stood in the way of carrying out a certain line of policy the provinces were sacrificed, and sixty-six useless counties, as we now find them, given in their places. Strange to say, had the provinces been properly amended, or even left as they were, the colony would never have run into debt to the extent it has done; for after the first madness of the public-works expenditure had passed away some of the provinces would have pulled up and refused to plunge the colony further into debt. Otago, under such a man as Mr. Macandrew, might have gone on building railways until its debentures were unsaleable.* It would only then have occupied a position similar to the Manawatu and West Coast railway trying to sell its debentures. But the abolition of the provinces removed the people's safeguard, and the colony has been plunged headlong into debt, until we find the weight of taxation keeps us all poor and struggling, or drives us into the Bankruptcy Court.

Of course the abolition of the provinces was a hasty measure, and a surprise to the country; but the country districts were complaining of the manner in which the great townships were spending the money, and many persons thought nine little Parliaments a farce. The constitutional step would have been to have divided each province into two, and lessened the number of Councilors forming the new subdivisions (like Southland and Westland). In place of that, sixty-six counties were given, which the people do not require, and too much of anything is often as great a mistake as too little. We do not require so many for half a century or probably a century to come. Therefore I have always maintained that these two counties of the Wairarapa should be amalgamated into one.

Secondly, as to who brought about this state of affairs. [Delegates will excuse me for deleting this portion of my letter, as I do not think any good will be done by naming any person.]

Letter III.

SIR,—And now as to the remedy. I have in my last letter shown your readers why our forms of local government are in a state of ruin, and the men who brought this about, with its great resulting evil. I have now to point out the remedy, although there is no remedy for the excessive taxation which the abolition of the provinces has brought upon us. That has to be borne, and we and our children must bear it as best we can. True, it has crippled our energies, and in many cases ruined us; but we must bear with it as best we can. Our House of Representatives has hurried us into a state of enormous indebtedness, and it yearly adds one million to the burden. If your readers only knew as well as I know how harmful a Parliament can be to the people of a country they would not be surprised at the harm our late Parliaments have brought upon us. But they will do far more harm yet, and that shortly too.

I propose then, sir, to step backwards some ten years, and, in place of abolishing the provinces, to divide them, and suit them to the wants of the people. The country districts complained formerly of the great towns neglecting "country" interests, and expending far too much of the provincial funds. The complaints were perfectly justified, I believe. The remedy was to have granted the country districts so complaining their own powers of local government. That was duly provided for in the Constitution Act, and is shown in the instance of the County of Westland being cut off from the Province of Canterbury because the people of Hokitika objected to be ruled from Christchurch. In a similar manner the district of the Wairarapa should have been cut off from Wellington, and granted a county government, and the same with the people living upon the other side of the Tararua Range. The Wellington Province might have been cut up into three great counties, of which the whole district of the Wairarapa would have formed one, because our interests, as a district, are identical. On the other hand the interests of the West Coast people and our interests are not identical. Different fencing-laws, different drainage-laws, are required there from what are here required. The same with the whole colony. Had eighteen or even twenty-seven substantial counties with efficient powers of local government replaced the eight or nine provinces, then there would never have happened the state of ruin and wreck which we see around us. All this was duly provided for in the Constitution Act. But the provinces were swept away, and sixty-six counties given to us. What, sir, are we to do with them? Of what use are they to us? Have they been any use? I think not; only harm. They have interfered with the Road Boards in every way they could, until at last the people in all parts of the colony are moving for their suspension or abolition. And the worst feature of this mistake has yet to come. People are beginning to take a positive dislike to the very name of county government; whereas county government has been prized by the people of England for more than a thousand years—prized to that extent that the Shire Council was oftentimes the only government the country districts had when the Crown was in dispute or revolution shook the State. I ask my fellow-settlers not to despise that which their ancestors valued for so many centuries. Properly applied, county government is the best form of local government we can have. County government keeps things together and makes us independent of the central authorities. It is the only true check to insular separation.

Therefore I wish to see these two counties of the Wairarapa amalgamated into one, and the Road Boards not interfered with. The County Council could then look after all those affairs, and pass by-laws for those things which it is evident half a dozen Road Boards could not do. Waste lands, roads, education, licensing matters, sheep, cattle, branding, fencing, drainage, rabbits, and the score of things which require looking after under good local by-laws, and which are not being looked after in any way, could then be attended to, and the evils of a central Administration avoided. I ask those whom this letter may reach to distrust central Administration and prize local government. In the course of a few years our House of Representatives has run us twenty millions into debt, and it will do worse than this unless the people impose some check. I warn your readers to look to the consolidation of their forms of local government, and that is why I propose county amalgamation.

I have, &c.,

COLEMAN PHILLIPS.

Dry River, 27th February, 1884.

* A most desirable thing to have come to pass. All I wish now is that New Zealand debentures were absolutely unsaleable.—C. P., 1894.