

I do not propose to weary you with a mass of figures connected with the results of last year's Treasury work. I have already reminded you that such figures as I shall be able to place before you must not be considered final, but only approximate, and therefore I am sure you will excuse me if I confine myself to the main features of our receipts and expenditure.

AS TO THE RECEIPTS FOR 1896-97.

The receipts for the financial year 1896-97 were estimated at £4,484,000, while the actual receipts, so far as I can at present learn, have reached £4,796,000. Customs revenue exceeded the estimate by £148,500, Railways by £86,000, Stamps by £38,500, Land- and Income-tax by £17,500, Territorial by £5,500, and the remaining heads of revenue and receipts by £16,000. These tell their own tale, and it is quite superfluous to observe that they evidence a substantial increase in the material prosperity of our colony.

EXPENDITURE OF 1896-97.

The approximate results of the revenue can be ascertained with a considerable degree of certainty, but it is more difficult to furnish an estimate of the actual expenditure. It has to be remembered that on the close of business on the 31st March last over £230,000 of imprest moneys were outstanding against the Ordinary Revenue Account of the Consolidated Fund. This amount is reduced by the departments dealing with the imprestees' vouchers, and charging the votes with the respective amounts paid, and also by the cash repayments by the imprestees of their respective balances on the 31st ultimo. If, on the one hand, we estimate the expenditure out of imprests at too large a figure, we unduly reduce the surplus, while, on the other hand, if our estimate is too little, the surplus is proportionately increased. The Treasury and the departments concerned have, however, made very careful estimates, and I am able to submit the results with every confidence. The figures, however, must not be accepted as final, but the alterations are not likely to be large. I estimate our permanent expenditure, including interest and sinking fund, subsidies, payments to local bodies of endowment moneys, pensions, &c., at £2,076,000. My estimate for the year was £2,093,000. For the annual appropriations members were good enough to vote £2,438,000. I do not anticipate, however, that the final expenditure will reach more than £2,420,000. Under the two heads, therefore, a saving of some £35,000 may be expected. Economy has been rigidly practised by departments, but members, I am sure, do not expect large savings to be effected, as it would bear the appearance of having asked the Committee for sums in excess of what was really required. To this expenditure there has also to be added £150,000 transferred to the Public Works Fund out of the previous year's surplus, and also £26,000 advanced to the Advances to Settlers Office.

I do not propose on this occasion to submit what I call the minor accounts connected with the Consolidated Fund, such as the "Accounts of Local Bodies," "Deposits," &c., but I shall at once pass on to the more important accounts, and take up the state of the Public Works Fund. Part I. of this fund commenced the year with a balance of £31,150, and also received £150,000 from the Consolidated Fund surplus of the previous year. Other miscellaneous receipts swelled the available balance to £196,413. During the year we were able to raise £750,000 of the £1,000,000 authorised under "The Aid to Public Works and Land Settlement Act, 1896," and of this £375,000 was credited to Part I., making the total receipts, including the balance brought forward, £571,413. The expenditure, after the imprests have been duly accounted for, I estimate at £420,655, leaving a balance of £150,758. £250,000 has still to be raised under the Act I have just mentioned, so there will be further funds available for this account to the amount of £125,000, which, with the amount in hand and the usual assistance from the Consolidated Fund, should be amply sufficient for our requirements during the current year. Part II. had a balance of £13,900 to begin the year with: expenditure will be charged so as to clear off this balance. This account is now practically merged in Part I., where further appropriations for the North Island Main Trunk Railway have been provided.