

1900.

NEW ZEALAND.

MAJOR-GENERAL FRENCH'S DEFENCE SCHEME.

(AUSTRALIA'S MOUNTED MEN.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.

Major-General FRENCH to the Right Hon. the PREMIER.

SIR,—

Sydney, 8th May, 1900.

The present war in South Africa has demonstrated the fact that the defence of the British Empire in the future is not a question to be left wholly to the people of the British Isles, but that the English-speaking people throughout the Empire are willing to take their share in its defence, and provide the men, and possibly the money, therefor.

Having had an experience of a dozen years in Canada and a similar amount in Australia, mostly with colonial forces, I would like to make two points clear: (1) It is idle to hope or expect that any large force of Imperial troops, paid at Imperial rates, could be raised in these colonies for ordinary garrison work or duties in peace time. (2) It is equally certain that thousands of men can be raised in war time, who will engage for the war at a fair rate of pay.

With regard to the first point, I may mention that the minimum rate of wages for labourers on Government contracts has been fixed at 7s. per diem in this colony, and it is pretty much the same in the other Australian colonies. This will give some idea of the futility of attempting to carry out this matter.

The second point is one of the greatest possible importance to my mind. Few who have not resided in these colonies during the past six months could realise the intense enthusiasm and desire amongst all classes to take part in the war; this colony has sent some 2,700 officers and men, and as many horses, and the difficulty was not in finding the men, but in having to send away the thousands who could not be taken on. The other Australian colonies had a similar experience. At the present moment some 300 infantry that have been kept in reserve here have offered their services at the Imperial rates of pay rather than not go at all!

The real way, in my opinion, to help Old England to keep the flag flying all over the Empire is to form war reserves in the colonies. In doing so the specialities of the colonies should be borne in mind. Thus Canada, with her 75,000 sailors and fishermen on the Atlantic seaboard, should provide a large war reserve for the fleet, and probably would do so if the Admiralty, instead of framing cast-iron regulations suitable for Great Britain, would appreciate the fact that the most suitable time to carry out the training of these fishermen would be the time of year when they could not carry on their usual avocations.

Australia, on the other hand, could do little as a war reserve for the navy, but much for the land forces of all arms, but especially the mounted services. I have little hesitation in saying that the finest material for the light