

1901.
NEW ZEALAND.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

(In Committee of Supply, 16th August, 1901.)

BY THE COLONIAL TREASURER, THE RIGHT HON. R. J. SEDDON.

MR. GUINNESS,—

The people, and especially honourable members, are naturally anxious at any time to have the Financial Statement, and this, my sixth Budget, is, owing to various causes, awaited with more than passing interest. In this, as in other preceding Statements, I will without reservation endeavour to place the finances of the colony before members in such a way that all may understand the National Account.

The revenue received last year exceeded my most sanguine expectations. Notwithstanding the remissions granted in Customs duties, railway freights, passenger-fares, and the reduction in postal rates by giving the penny postage, there was a pleasant surprise in store, for, after meeting all current obligations, there was a balance on the credit side amounting to £532,564.

The pessimistic criticism of our finance during the last few weeks has almost verged upon the ludicrous, and thereby a feeling has been raised in the public mind that additional taxation was imperative. The financial hotch-potch created by some of the critics in mixing the ordinary revenue with the loan account proves gross ignorance, and the necessity for a better education in respect to public finance; whilst the great ingenuity and industry displayed in endeavouring to prove that this year the balance must be on the wrong side of the ledger may be appreciated by the few who desired such a contingency. I am glad to say that the few must be disappointed and the many pleased, for it is certain that the revenue this year more than meets the expenditure, and that there will be no deficit.

It has been stated in several newspapers that it is proposed to meet the estimated deficiency in part by an additional land-tax, and also by some slight rearrangement of the Customs. It was further alleged that some stringency has occurred in the finances through the claims for old-age pensions being much more numerous than was anticipated, and our detractors have even gone the length of cabling this nonsense to the London journals. The credence given to the imagination of the penny-a-liner should not be found fault with by me, for, with a patriotism that does them infinite credit—which as Colonial Treasurer I very much appreciate—merchants have risen to the occasion, cleared kerosene, sugar, and tea, with the result that the Customs revenue this month is buoyant in the extreme, and contrasts very favourably with the same month of last year.