

done, all details in reference to the different loans which this Colony has from time to time contracted; nor have I the time or the means, at this very late period of the Session, to revise them. The Government has no other course to adopt but to accept them. So, also, with regard to the expenditure: anxious as we are to effect changes of system by means of rearrangement, economy, and consolidation, yet—as more than one-third of the present financial year has already elapsed, and as much patient inquiry is requisite to prevent changes and reorganization of this kind becoming mischievous and even dangerous to the public service—I feel that I have no other course open to me at the present time than to accept the Estimates of Expenditure nearly as they appear in the Tables recently submitted by the late Treasurer. If, however, by the circumstances of the case I am necessarily precluded from dealing with details, I ask the attention of the House for a short time whilst I endeavour, from my point of view, to indicate briefly the tendency of our present system of finance, the evils to which it is rapidly leading, and the only available remedy that I can see possible to enable this Colony, without imposing enormous burdens upon the people, to maintain its credit, and to bring to a successful issue the great policy of Immigration and Public Works to which the Colony is pledged by the contracts it has entered into in relation to the works that are in progress—besides the promises of works to be initiated.

EARLIER MEETINGS OF PARLIAMENT NECESSARY.

One striking defect in the present system of conducting the public expenditure is, that the General Assembly frequently meets some time after the commencement of a new financial year. After the meeting of Parliament, a period of several months sometimes elapses before the Act of Appropriation passes the Assembly.

Under such a system the expenditure is conducted without any Appropriation having been made; and is incurred solely upon the authority of Imprest Supply Acts, which direct the moneys to be charged in a manner thereafter to be expressed in the Appropriation of the year. From this it results that the Government is able to incur any expenditure it pleases, by simply placing on an Estimate any amount for any service which it thinks proper to undertake; and the duty of the Assembly resolves itself rather into the ratification of expenditure incurred during several months of the year, than a careful watching of amounts which it is asked to vote. To cure this system, one of the duties of the present Government will be, either to alter the time of the commencement of the Financial Year, or to take care that the Assembly meets at an earlier period, say not later than the first week in June.

TREASURY BILLS AND OTHER FLOATING DEBTS.

Sir, in the Financial Year 1874–75, there were outstanding Treasury Bills—that is, loans raised to meet deficiencies in the revenues of previous years, and chargeable on the Consolidated Fund—to the extent of £400,000. That amount was due and payable in that year; but the Consolidated Fund was unable to bear so large a charge. It was, however, hoped that this sum might be gradually reduced by the payment out of revenue of £100,000 per annum until the whole amount was extinguished. If that sanguine expectation had been realized, there would be outstanding now only £200,000 of Treasury