

the estates of the Crown, and it is from the proceeds of this estate that we propose to make the payment in charging the rates against the Land Fund.

The proposal, however, to advance rates upon Native lands will require some explanation. As a matter of strict justice, there is no reason why our Maori fellow-subjects should not pay their share of the cost of local works, which, as they are undertaken and completed, improve their lands in common with the lands of their European neighbours. But, although this might not unfairly be insisted upon, there are reasons which will, I hope, induce this House to make such provision as will, without unduly pressing upon the Maoris, deal fairly with the local bodies who are charged with the maintenance of roads passing through Native lands within their jurisdiction. The reasons are chiefly those of public policy. It would be a great mistake on our part, especially now that our relations with the Natives have so greatly improved, to make demands which large numbers of them could only meet with great difficulty, if at all. The Maoris will, I think, at once recognize the fact that the time has arrived when we may reasonably ask them to charge their lands with rates for local works which greatly enhance the value of those lands, the rates, without interest, to be payable only by Europeans when such lands are parted with to Europeans. I shall propose, if the House agrees to this plan, to charge these rates in the first place against the Consolidated Fund.

Before leaving this part of the question, there are two other important matters to which I must refer—the limitation of self-rating to one shilling in the pound, and the cost of the yearly valuation. It is, Sir, well known that in some parts of the colony a shilling rate is insufficient to maintain the roads. The Government are unable to see upon what grounds of either reason or justice the local bodies can be called upon to maintain the roads, while at the same time they are denied the power of raising enough money for that purpose. We shall therefore propose to increase the rating power to two shillings in the pound,—a power already possessed by several of the local bodies,—believing that that limit will be approved by the country, and be found ample for the duty imposed. With regard to the valuations, experience has shown that they are required by law to be made much oftener than is necessary, thereby causing the local bodies a large and useless expenditure. The Government propose to relieve the local bodies entirely of this charge, and so save them from an unprofitable expenditure of probably not less than £16,000 a year. We shall ask the House to permit all local bodies to use for rating purposes the valuation under the Property Assessment Act, with annual correction. I have had a Table prepared (No. 10), showing the valuations under the Act as compared with the valuations made by the local bodies, and, when honorable members compare the two valuations, the totals of which are remarkably near, the proposition will, I think, commend itself to their judgment.

CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS AND BRIDGES.

And this brings me, Mr Speaker, to the second branch of my subject, the construction of roads and bridges. Now, there are three distinct classes of roads with which we have to deal under this branch of our subject—first, there are the main roads through Crown lands not yet settled, second, the main roads running through the settled or partially-settled districts; and third, district roads both in settled and unsettled districts.

We will first consider the question of how money is to be provided for roads through Crown lands not yet settled. My colleague, the Minister of Lands, has given much attention to this subject during the recess. He has, by means of roads cleared and formed, with sufficient culverts to make them passable, opened a large quantity of land for settlement; and he will this year submit a scheme involving the expenditure for this purpose of £150,000 out of loan; the expenditure to extend over a period of three years, at the rate of £50,000 a year. This work, wherever practicable, will be done as hitherto by the local bodies.

But every one acquainted with the country must know that these provisional roads are only the beginning of a necessary work, and that settlement of small blocks of land cannot be successful without good roads. As a matter of sound policy, a good road, if it does not precede, ought certainly to immediately follow, settlement.