

Estimates
carefully framed.

It is no mere figure of speech to say that Ministers have given most careful attention to the estimates to be presently submitted to you. Every effort has been made to frame them with a view to strict economy: at the same time it is recognised that the efficiency of the different departments administering to the varied requirements of the Public Service must be maintained.

Land Fund
Account
abolished.

My predecessor stated last year with reference to the Land Fund Account that "the time is not far distant when this separate account will have to be absorbed in the ordinary revenue, and the annually-recurring deficit effaced from the estimates. There is less reason now to keep them distinct, as the larger portion of the work done by the Survey Department and debited to the Land Fund Account is in connection with perpetual leases, the revenue derived from these being credited as territorial revenue in the Ordinary Revenue Account of the Consolidated Fund." I quite agree with the above remarks, and have given instructions for the separate account to be discontinued; and the alteration will result in a simplification of the public accounts of the colony.

Expenditure for
1893-94,
£4,409,371.

The estimated expenditure is set down at £4,409,371. Deducting the charges of the public debt and the amount required under the permanent Acts, which together come to £2,246,574, the annual or departmental estimates are £8,304 less than last year's appropriations, notwithstanding the increased expenditure which has to be provided for on education and working railways.

Interest and
Sinking Fund
larger than last
year.

Our bill for payment of interest and sinking fund is very much larger this year than it was last. During 1892-93 it was only necessary to make provision for nine months' interest (£143,817) on the large conversion operation which I have previously referred to; this year we have to pay £182,282. We also require to provide for nearly double the amount of interest and sinking fund on the issue of debentures under the Government Loans to Local Bodies Acts of 1886: the Sinking Fund under this Act not having been provided by previous Governments, the arrears had accumulated to a large sum. We shall also have to pay interest on debentures issued under the Native Land Purchases Act, the Naval and Military Settlers Act, and the Land for Settlements Act passed last session: these, with other increases, swell our estimate from £1,835,770 of last year to £1,901,698 for the current year.

Proposed expen-
diture compared
with the actual
of last year.

In comparing the proposed expenditure of the current year with the actual of last year, an excess of £115,202 is shown, of which £85,425 belongs to the permanent charges, including interest and sinking fund; deducting this amount from £115,202, we have an increase of £29,777 in the annual or departmental votes over the actual expenditure of last year. In the table accompanying the Statement honourable members will see the various increases, amounting to £71,678, and the decreases, amounting to £41,901. Amongst the former is an item of £10,000 in the Colonial Secretary's Department, to defray the cost of the approaching general election. The Postal Department requires an extra £15,000, mainly for transit cost of San Francisco-New York Mail Service since the 10th October, 1891. The Public Buildings Class, exclusive of school-buildings, which will be liberally provided for in the Public Works Estimates, shows a substantial increase, but it is found that much painting and many repairs allowed to stand over from year to year cannot any longer be delayed: this class also contains a vote for £4,100, cost of inspection of machinery, which was previously provided on the Marine Vote; the fees, however, very nearly cover the cost of inspection. The Minister of Defence also asks for more money, amounting to £7,829; but at the same time it is right to point out that the proposed expenditure is £3,783 less than the amount voted last year.

Increase of
£7,690 for
surveys.

I feel confident that exception will not be taken to the proposed increased expenditure of £7,690 for surveys, for it must be acknowledged that to settle the people on the lands of the colony should be our chief aim, and this cannot be done without causing the necessary surveys to be pushed on with the utmost expedition.

Decrease in
Colonial
Treasurer's
Department.

In the Colonial Treasurer's Department there is a large decrease in the expenditure, arising from the absence of two non-recurrent items—namely, the cost of the triennial assessment (nearly £16,000) and a refund of £11,579 to the New Zealand Estates Company. In the Customs and Marine Departments there is also a decreased expenditure.