

since 1891 in the number of houses of brick, stone, or concrete being 793, and in wood, iron, lath-and-plaster 17,291. In houses having more than six rooms there was an increase since 1891 of 7,617. Of the chief cities, Wellington shows the greatest number of persons to a house. In 1891 there were in the colony 123,851 inhabited dwellings; in 1896 the number was 141,339, being an increase of 17,488. In 1891 there were 9,558 uninhabited dwellings; in 1896 there were only 8,006, being a decrease in the number of uninhabited houses of 1,552. Of the religions of the people, the Church of England has the most adherents, the percentage being 40·27. The percentage of Presbyterians is shown to be 22·78, of Roman Catholics 14·07, of Methodists 10·44. The percentage of Baptists and the Salvation Army is 2·28 and 1·50 respectively. Freethinkers decreased from 4,475 to 3,983, or nearly 11 per cent., which is worthy of remark when contrasted with the increase of 14·01 per cent. between 1886 and 1891. As to the birthplaces of the people, 441,661 were born in New Zealand, or 62·95 per cent., and 215,161 were born in the United Kingdom, or 30·62 per cent. In 1896 there were in the colony 20,756 persons over the age of sixty-five years.

As to the education of the people, satisfactory progress has been made. Excluding Chinese, 80·60 per cent. could read and write, 2·89 per cent. could read only, and 16·51 per cent. were unable to read. The proportion per cent. of those unable to read fell from 23·72 in 1878 to 21·19 in 1886, and further to 16·51 in 1896. The number of children shown by the census household schedules as attending schools of various kinds in 1896 was as follows: At Government primary schools, 133,364; at colleges, high, grammar, or private schools, 17,600; and being taught at home, 6,352. In 1891 the attendance at the Government schools was returned as 124,063, or 9,301 less than in 1896. At colleges, high, grammar, or private schools 17,047 attended in 1891, or 553 less than in 1896; whilst in 1891 8,178 children were receiving tuition at home, being 1,826 more than in 1896.

THE PROGRESS OF THE COLONY.

The time has now arrived, after six years of the Liberal party's administration, when we can fairly ask whether "wide diffusion of wealth and industry among the people," accompanied by "a buoyant revenue and a healthy exchequer," has been realised. The buoyancy of the revenue and the healthiness of the exchequer have been abundantly demonstrated. Each year has shown a substantial surplus. But perhaps the most striking way of showing this is to compare the revenue for the year before we took office—1890–91—with the year just closed:—

	1890-91.	1896-97.
Ordinary revenue	£3,808,222	£4,452,845

It will be seen that between these years the revenue has increased by £644,623, a magnificent proof of the spending-power of the people, and the more general diffusion of wealth in the colony.

It will be contended that this increase has been largely caused by the operation of the new tariff, but I am in a position to assert that this is not the case. The total increase on items affected by the new tariff amounted to £82,000, while the reductions and concessions reached £67,000, leaving a net increase of only £15,000, which was represented by the increase on spirits alone.

There are, however, other means of testing the progress of the colony than that of increase of revenue. I have had prepared a series of tables, which will be found attached, showing the progress of the colony as regards its agricultural, mineral, and other products during the six years of the Ballance and Seddon Administrations. The figures show conclusively that the policy which the Government has pursued of assisting our industries and opening up the lands of the colony has proved beneficial, and been justified by events. Equally, they demonstrate that the labour legislation, although denounced as calculated to hamper our industries, has had no such effect. No clearer proof of this could be given than the gratifying increase which has to be recorded in the number of hands employed in