

ADDRESS

OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR,
ON OPENING THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,

It has been my duty to assemble you under circumstances of no ordinary kind, and which are indeed, so unusual that they must, I fear, necessarily impart to my opening Address a character somewhat different from that which such documents usually wear.

You will see from the extracts of a despatch which I have directed to be laid before you, that Her Majesty's Government contemplate introducing some great changes into the constitution of this Colony. It seems very probable that this territory will be shortly divided into two colonies: the Executive attached to one of which will, in some respects, exercise a superintending controul over that of the other Colony. This change in the existing constitution will, I believe, be accompanied by the introduction into the Legislative body of members elected by the Colonists; and it is probable that a still more extensive development will, at an early period, be given to the representative principle.

In the meantime, as I am not only ignorant of what may be the exact form of the future government of this Colony, but also of the extent of naval and military protection which Her Majesty's Government may be able permanently to afford it, as well as of the extent of pecuniary assistance which may be granted in aid of its revenues by the Imperial Parliament, it is not in my power to submit to you such definite and precise measures as I could have desired, nor to ask you to assent to any Estimates for the future expenditure of the Colony, which can be hoped to wear any character of permanence.

At the same time that I labor under these disadvantages from the change which the Colony is about to undergo, I have to encounter the still greater disadvantage of finding nothing settled upon a fixed and permanent basis. I have not to conduct a change such as frequently takes place when a Colony, having attained to a high degree of prosperity and advancement under certain institutions which have worked well for years, its inhabitants are admitted to a share in the administration of its government. But, in the present case, the form of government established having admittedly failed to give either contentment to the people, or peace or prosperity to the country, and rapid and frequent changes having taken place in the mode under which its Revenue was collected, and Justice administered between the two races, and the whole country having been involved in a state of embarrassment and difficulty, I am required not only to advise as to the form of Government which should be introduced here, but I am also required during the time my suggestions are under consideration, and then until effect can be given to them, not only to carry on the government under its present constitution, but at the same time to make preparations for the great changes which are about to be introduced into it.

Under these circumstances it becomes necessary for me to request you to lighten, by your advice and assistance, those difficulties against which I have to contend, and to afford me that large confidence which is absolutely requisite to enable me to overcome the difficulties of my position. In order that I may establish a just claim upon you for the assistance I require, and for the confidence which I solicit, it is right that I should unreservedly put you in possession of the principles on which I propose to conduct the Government until such time as our Institutions have taken a settled form.

I intend then, in as far as practicable, to submit to this Council nothing but measures of a general character and which affect only general interests, leaving to each Settlement, so soon as the new form of constitution is introduced, the consideration of those measures of a local character, which it is hardly probable a Council, sitting at so remote a distance from some of them, could arrange in a manner satisfactory and advantageous to all.

The general measures which I propose to submit to you, will have for their object, in the first place, the settlement of the revenue of this country upon such a satisfactory basis, as to the sources from which

it is to be raised, as well as to the prospect which it holds out, of this country being at no very distant period able from its internal resources fully to provide for its own expenditure, as will justify the British Parliament in continuing to afford to it the pecuniary aid it at present requires, and at the same time shew that the principle of popular representation may be safely extended to it. Whilst, in the second place, the objects of the measures I intend to submit to you, will be, to give to the Laws of Great Britain a practical adaptation to the circumstances of this country; to afford the benefit of a prompt and vigorous administration of justice to as large a proportion as possible both of the European and Native population; to provide for the safety of life and property, and to secure to the native population benefits and rights which they have not hitherto enjoyed, and which will, I believe, tend greatly to promote their morality and social advancement.

With regard to the sources from which a Revenue can be most advantageously raised in this Colony, I think it right to offer the following remarks to the Council:—

In the lowest estimates of the native population, it is admitted that they at present exceed the Europeans in the ratio of, at least ten to one. Hence I have been led to conclude that if any attempt is made, as was formerly the case, to obtain a Revenue by direct taxation upon the property of the Europeans alone, from which that of the natives is to be exempted, it will be found impossible to raise the funds absolutely requisite for the protection, controul, and good Government of the Natives. Indeed, it would be essentially unjust and ruinous to the European population to attempt to do so. In endeavouring, therefore, to raise a revenue by taxation of this nature, the Government must necessarily forego all intention of maintaining the Establishments requisite to attain the above mentioned objects;—that is, it must abandon all hopes of rendering secure the lives and properties of Europeans, and of promoting the civilization of the Aborigines, by protecting the well disposed, but weak, against the violence of the turbulent and strong.

No reasonable expectations could at present be entertained of successfully amending the former system by subjecting the property of Europeans and Natives alike to direct taxation. No establishments are in existence which could collect such taxes, nor do I deem it probable that the large warlike population of natives, who are yet to a great extent ignorant of our customs and laws, could be brought quietly to submit to a taxation of this nature.

Whilst these objections, and many others of great weight appear to me to render it hopeless to expect to raise a Revenue by direct taxation, I entertain no doubt whatever, that a revenue which will amply suffice to defray all the expenses (excepting those of Naval and Military protection) which need be incurred in providing establishments in all respects adequate for the good government and complete controul of both races, can, in the course of a few years, be provided by a judicious system of indirect taxation;—that is, by levying moderate duties of customs upon all imported goods, these duties being so arranged as to press in a fair degree upon the population of both races.

An undoubted necessity exists for raising a revenue of this nature. The present condition of this Colony in reference to its financial state is different from that of all other portions of the empire. It is not in the ordinary position of a young country, the establishments of which could grow in the same proportion as its population, commerce, and revenue. The fact is, that a large population rapidly becoming civilized, and capable shortly of affording a considerable commerce and revenue, already exists here, but no establishments have yet been formed for the protection of life, property or commerce, or for the collection of a sufficient revenue, or indeed for the good government and controul of this large population, who if their energies are not directed into proper channels, and if they are not well governed and kept under controul, will certainly be the cause of continually repeated disturbances and of a great expense.

It is therefore, clear, both that a considerable expenditure in excess of the revenue will be necessary for some years to come, and that the Local Government