



Millions Yet Unborn

An address by Sir George Grey

Date: 8 March 1878

Background

This speech was delivered in Dunedin, 30 years after the arrival of the Otago settlers. The following description of Sir George Grey's speech is from *Speeches that shaped New Zealand 1814- 1956* by Hugh Templeton, Ian Templeton & Josh Easby.

'Grey was not a likeable man. Yet his vision of a greater New Zealand of 'millions yet unborn', the greyhounds of the Liberal era 1891 – 1912 put in place small land holdings, women's suffrage on top of male suffrage, labour laws, old age pensions and Empire in the Pacific.

Source Retrieved 5 May 2015 from Templeton, H and others *Speeches that shaped New Zealand 1814- 1956*, (2014) p88.

Speech

It is with feelings of very great pleasure I have the opportunity afforded me of addressing the citizens of Dunedin.

What renders this so peculiarly agreeable is this, that many years ago – so many years ago that those now approaching middle age who are here were not then born, and those who have attained middle age could have been but children – I formed a belief that this portion of the country would form a very great country, and that its inhabitants would be distinguished in many respects. At that time there was a great doubt whether or not the Middle Island should be settled by a European population for many years. It was contended that the soil was not adapted to the inhabitants of Great Brittan ... and that altogether it was desirable to turn the tide of European population solely into the Northern Island of New Zealand.



Many objections to that course presented themselves to my mind. One was this, that I believed impossible to pour suddenly into the Northern Island a large European population without creating such alarm in the native mind that contests must have taken place throughout every portion of that Island; and that the European race could only have become its conquerors by having almost to exterminate the race of native inhabitants. Such a series of event must have delayed the colonisation of that island for many years.

On the other hand, in the Middle Island there were hardly any Native inhabitants, and ... those Europeans who did enter it, would enter it unencumbered by any Maori population, by any Native questions, or war; would establish themselves here without acts of cruelty, without acts of injustice, and from the first moment they planted foot on this island would have afield before them for developing all their energies...

These were strong arguments for placing a large European population in the Middle Island, and I thought ultimately when this island had become tolerably people the inhabitants would spread off gradually and as gradually occupy the North Island without alarming the Native population.

I believed that when the North Island was gradually settled such friendly relations might spring up between the two races that insensibly the lesser population might be adopted into and absorbed in the larger population.

But another circumstance weighed in my mind. I knew that it was proposed that this part of New Zealand should be occupied by a hardy race, a race whose religious institutions necessarily inclined them to freedom, because they are the freest in the world – and I thought that here a great opportunity would be presented of trying what could be done in a new colony by conferring upon the inhabitants of that colony the most absolute freedom of self- government that the world had perhaps ever seen.

Are the new institutions such as will conduce to happiness and prosperity?

Let us calmly consider the whole of this question. First ... the franchise was most liberal. That (controversial) franchise was conferred upon you ... every man possessing the franchise would have one vote and no more. Now the law says one man is to have one vote, some none at all, and some to have four or five... I say that is a violation of the constitution more open than that could never possibly have taken place.

Those who think with me in Parliament are anxious ... That every male adult should have a vote in that district to return its representative – and that no man should have more than one vote ... The greatest statesman in England (Mr Gladstone) is claiming the same right ... (Mr Gladstone) believes the welfare of his fellow men depends upon every male of his fellow countrymen having a vote.

Now I argue in this way. If a man loves his wife – if he loves his children ... if he so far neglects his children (on their behalf) he is a man devoid of all self-respects interest, if he does not struggle to get the right of having a voice.

(Then) if you do not allow every individual to assent to the laws under which he lives under which he lives through his representative, or at least to have voice in dissenting from them, if you compel them to live under laws imposed upon him in which he has no voice whatever, I tell you that you must educate the people badly ... that the person who is shut out from our civil rights is inferior.

Now, all these reasons satisfy me that you have the best chance of educating a free population, the best chance of educating ... a moral population, the best chance of creating happy homes, the best chance of raising eminent statesmen, and giving to all a free and fair race in the battle of life if you provide by legislation that ... every adult male ...shall have a vote in returning representatives for that district.

No honest man ought to deprive his fellow citizens of a vote for a representative. The Queen herself assented to in the constitution which is part of the land... a right of which you have been deprived by your own legislators, but which the British Parliament never intended you to lose.

We must revert to that rule of the constitution.

And again on that subject I have Mr Gladstone's absolute declaration that he agrees thoroughly with these views, and will do his utmost to get them altered in England.

Therefore I ask you to join me in claiming the representation which your sovereign gave you, and which, in asking for you prove yourself a loyal population.

As I told you the old constitution has been shattered to pieces and a new constitution set up which satisfies nobody. Let the whole male population deliberately choose a commission to

frame a constitution for them, and let them determine the constitution under which they will live. And see that a fair system of taxation is established...

Now in asking you to see that a system of that kind is carried out, people will tell you I am radical. I have heard myself called a chartist. But reflect upon this, what I am ask you to do is done in England.

Therefore I say again let us in the next session of Parliament acquit ourselves upon this subject like men and do our best to get a reform made in this great and pressing question of taxation.

I think men are pretty much the same ... where you place power in the hands of the wealthy; they will naturally legislate for their own good... they think it is good to set a great landed aristocracy.

No country can thrive without it; it is good any should we not be that landed aristocracy. I feel such a constituency as I speak to now will always endeavour to have a fair law, and a very different one from any you have had in this country...

Somehow it leaked out I advised the Government to disallow a land law. I was said to be a democrat (but) if I believed I could save the right of one subject had disallowed the law. I was quite justified in order to save the rights of the whole of the inhabitants of New Zealand to try to get the law disallowed to ...

... the act which was accomplished last session of prolonging these licences for ten years was a fraud upon the entire population of New Zealand –

I say this that if you do not attempt to the question of the franchise you will achieve nothing ... unless you get the power into your own hands abuses will spring up almost instantly again. Now remember this; here we are all placed in a position such as the world had hardly ever seen ... a country of extraordinary fertility, minerals, forests, fish, the climate the most healthy possible.

It is our duty to be a nation in which wealth is tolerably well distributed the poor shall not be trodden down by the rich, that enormous property must not be in single hands.

We must strive to build up a really great and free nation in which whoever he is, should take

an active part in the affairs of the country and try to become one of the statesmen of New Zealand.

Just think for a moment what position a statesman is in. Go forth and do the almost unlimited good which we enable you to do, with power to make laws, power to remove abuses, power to reward merit, power to promote education, and power to the lasting good. Is that not a career towards the achievement of which everyone should strive?

Every one of you has to take part in this transaction. Every one of you must aid in building up what I believe will be one of the great nations the world has ever seen.

I fancy I sometimes see passing along the beach what are vast populations, now say half a million, then in a few years two or three millions, then in a few years countless millions. All passing on, all founded by you, the present inhabitants of New Zealand, all depending upon the lands you have made, depending upon the institutions you have established.

And then I look carefully to see as I gaze at these populations passing by, what is their aspect. Is it one of general comfort, general happiness, general contentment? Are these countless millions which I see ... leading a happier life than the men hitherto were? Am I to see a mean, wretched squalid population, some million or two strutting with pomp and power, and perhaps 38 million starving, scarcely fed, scarcely clothed?

Which are the populations to pass before us? Well the hopes I indulge in are these: I imagine I see banners in their hands and upon them the names of families that I have known in New Zealand, and I hear loud shouts and loud acclamations of joy and an encouragement as these banners wave. I believe – I believe that such will be the future of New Zealand.

Let us strive to found such a nation such as never been ... We have power to do it. Who will prove recreant to such a trust. Who will prove ungrateful to such a course? I believe the people of New Zealand never will.