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978-1-108-06200-8 - *The Life and Work of Richard John Seddon (Premier of New Zealand, 1893–1906): With a History of the Liberal Party of New Zealand*  
James Drummond

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### **The Life and Work of Richard John Seddon (Premier of New Zealand, 1893–1906)**

A successful journalist, naturalist and author, James Drummond (1869–1940) began his biography of Richard John Seddon (1845–1906), New Zealand's prime minister, while his subject was still alive and in office. Originally intended as a collaborative effort, the work had to be completed without further assistance following Seddon's sudden death on a voyage from Australia to Auckland in June 1906. It was published in 1907, along lines 'that Mr Seddon approved of', and with an introduction by the prime minister at the time, Sir Joseph Ward. A popular figure, Seddon led his party to victory at five successive general elections. The book traces his life from his English childhood, through his emigration and entry into politics, to his last days, charting the achievements, personality and beliefs of New Zealand's longest-serving prime minister to date, and shedding light on the history of the Liberal Party.

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(Premier of New Zealand, 1893–1906)

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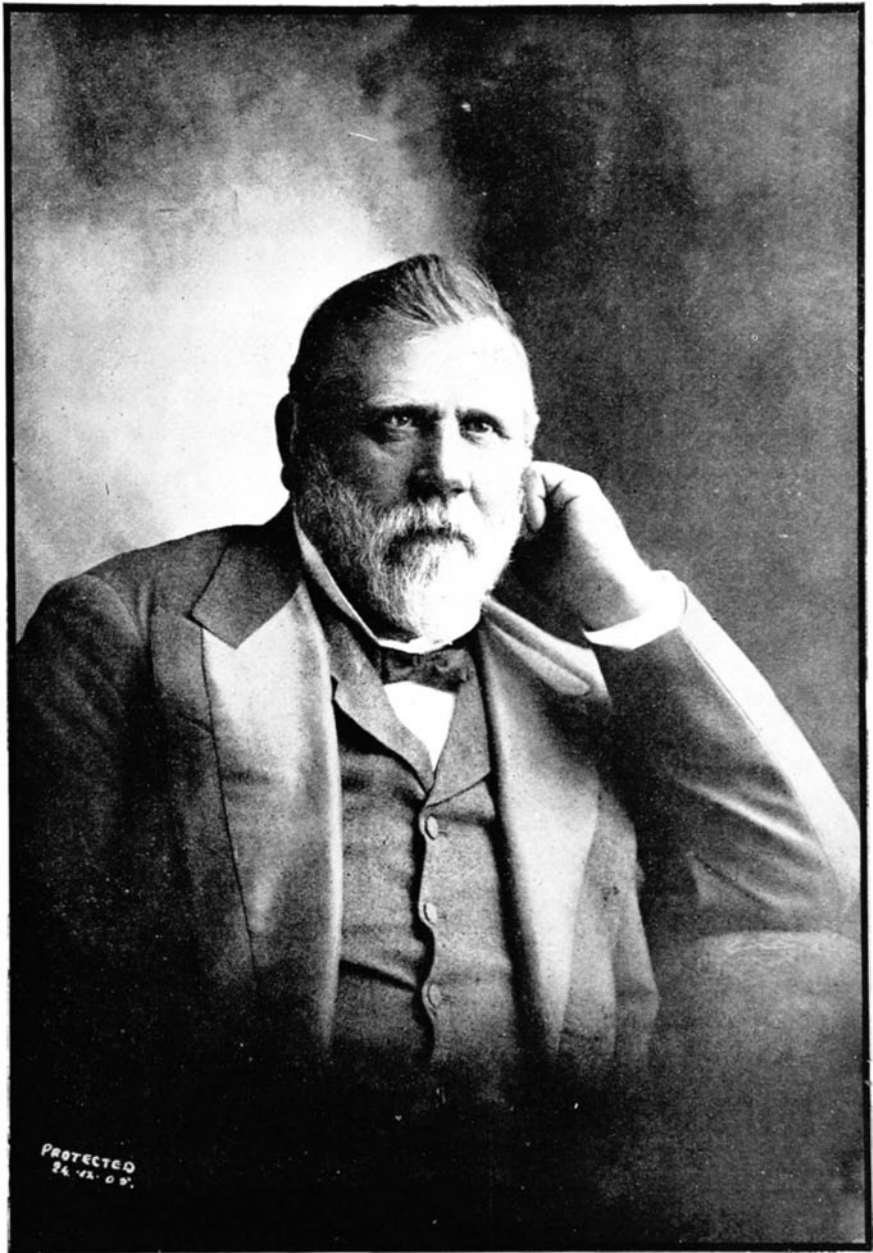
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RICHARD JOHN SEDDON.

Born, June 22nd, 1845; died, June 10th, 1906.

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## ERRATA.

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On page 178, third line from the bottom, read “Minister for Marine” instead  
of “Minister for Mines.”

On page 264, read “Judge Backhouse, of New South Wales,” instead of “Judge  
Backhouse, of Victoria.”

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THE LIFE AND WORK  
OF  
RICHARD JOHN SEDDON

PREMIER OF NEW ZEALAND, 1893–1906

WITH A HISTORY OF THE LIBERAL  
PARTY IN NEW ZEALAND

BY  
JAMES DRUMMOND

LONDON  
SIEGLE, HILL AND CO.  
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## PREFACE.

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THIS work was commenced two years ago, when Mr. Seddon was taking a very active part in New Zealand's politics; and the intention was that he should contribute largely to the material, so that the work should be, to some extent, autobiographical.

Having had many opportunities as a journalist of studying the political history of this colony, and having watched the rise and progress of the Liberal Party, I became well acquainted with Mr. Seddon's career from the time he entered Parliament, in 1879. Besides that, in writing and conversation, he sometimes expressed his opinions on political situations and public men, and spoke of his early battles, giving me a further insight into the view he took of past events and of those that were passing rapidly in front of him.

It was early in July, 1904, that I first asked him to allow me to write his biography. He fell in with the proposal at once, and telegraphed his hearty consent in the following message:—

*Re* your communication of the 21st ultimo., I shall be pleased to give you every reasonable assistance. Kind regards and best wishes.

R. J. SEDDON.

I immediately prepared a scheme for the work, and submitted to him a list of questions, which I asked him to answer at his leisure. He replied as follows:—

Prime Minister's Office,  
Wellington, 13th November, 1904.

DEAR SIR,—

I duly received your letter, and have time and again tried to get an opportunity to comply with your request, but pressure of parliamentary business has prevented it. However, in the absence of direct replies to the questions you ask me to answer, I do not think I can do better than send you the Souvenir of my Silver

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## PREFACE

Jubilee and a short account of my career. From these you will be able to gather a good deal of the information you seek.

Apologising for allowing your communication to remain unanswered so long,

I am,

Yours sincerely,

R. J. SEDDON.

I did not wish to give him any more trouble than was absolutely necessary, and worked without further assistance from him. In May, 1906, Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs informed me that they desired to have the work brought to a conclusion, and I found that I would have to appeal to him for further information. He was then arranging to go for a holiday trip to Australia. I suggested to him that I might accompany him on the voyage back to New Zealand, but he said that he would rather regard the time spent at sea as a real holiday, so I decided to wait until he was in New Zealand again. Shortly after leaving Sydney in the "Oswestry Grange" to return to New Zealand, he passed away.

At the request of the publishers, the work has now been completed. The lines followed are those that Mr. Seddon approved of, and a suggestion made by him in the course of conversation, that the work should sketch the history of the Liberal Party in New Zealand, has been carried out.

To avoid confusion, I have given statesmen throughout the work titles they received in later years. In the early part of their careers, for instance, Sir Harry Atkinson was Major Atkinson, Sir John Hall the Hon. J. Hall, Sir Joseph Ward the Hon. J. G. Ward, and so on. Dr. J. Hight undertook to read over the proofs. I am specially indebted to Mr. James Cowan, of the New Zealand Government Tourist Department, for the description of the Maori ceremonies on the occasion of Mr. Seddon's funeral, and for translations of the Maori songs and laments.

J. D.

*Christchurch, New Zealand,  
September, 1906.*

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## INTRODUCTION.

BY THE HON. SIR JOSEPH G. WARD, K.C.M.G., PRIME MINISTER  
OF NEW ZEALAND.

My acquaintance and friendship with my late chief and colleague, Richard John Seddon, extended over a period of twenty-one years. For nearly thirteen years of that period I was a member of the Ministry with him, and was naturally constantly and closely associated with him. I had probably better opportunities than most men for gauging his qualities of head and heart, and observing his peculiarly vigorous methods of work, and I am pleased to have this chance of briefly recording my personal impressions of the strong man and good friend who has gone.

Probably no colonial statesman was more praised or more abused than was Richard Seddon during his long term of office as Premier of New Zealand—idolised by his friends and made the target of unreservedly frank criticism by his political opponents. Probably this very criticism, to use a mild term, was the most convincing proof of his energy, ability, and courage. No weak man makes enemies. But Seddon had very few personal antagonists; what opponents he had—and they were many—based their dislike on political grounds. Politics aside, there were few who could not like and love him. His hearty, bluff manner, his loud cheery laugh and kindly greeting, his unfailing memory for names and faces, his readiness to adapt himself to his company, won him friendship where many a man a trifle more reserved would have failed. “He never forgot a friend,” might well have been his epitaph. No man was ever less ashamed of his humble friends of early days; to the last the democrat whom kings delighted to honour was unspoiled by the praises showered upon him, and to his old old mates of the digging-days he was to the last plain “Dick.”

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It is probably unnecessary for me to write much concerning my late chief's political achievements; Mr. Drummond in his excellent work tells in detail the story of Mr. Seddon's legislative triumphs. It will be sufficient to remark that for twenty-seven years he sat in the Parliament of this country, returned again and again by his staunch West Coast friends, though any constituency in the colony would probably have returned him. For fifteen years he was a Minister of the Crown, and for thirteen years, as Premier, he practically ruled New Zealand. To chronicle the measures which he has been mainly instrumental in passing into law during those thirteen years would be to write our public history for that period. Humanitarianism was his political creed. "I believe," he wrote in his famous manifesto issued just prior to the last general election, which resulted in such an overwhelming victory for the Liberal party, "that the cardinal aim of government is to provide the conditions which will reduce want, and permit the very largest possible number of its people to be healthy, happy human beings. The life, the health, the intelligence, and the morals of a nation count for more than riches, and I would rather have this country free from want and squalor and unemployed than the home of multi-millionaires." This was the keynote of Mr. Seddon's political life-work. It was a lofty and noble ideal. Long ago a philosopher laid down the axiom that "ideals can never be completely realised," but Richard Seddon did his strenuous best, and the truly happy State which he had in his mind's eye is more nearly approached in New Zealand than in any other country on the globe.

It was often said of the late Premier that with all his insight and keenness of judgment he was too impulsive, too apt to be led away by a wave of public opinion. But he had the true democratic conviction that it was his duty to give effect to what he believed to be the will of the people. Indeed, one of the great secrets of his success was that he possessed the gift, or knack, or whatever it may be called, of anticipating the trend of popular feeling; the happy gift of intuition. This was particularly emphasized during the Boer War, when Mr. Seddon's offer of New Zealand contingents for service in South Africa not

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only gave definite and hugely popular expression to the rising feeling of patriotic sympathy with the Old Land, but anticipated similar offers from the other British colonies, to the unbounded delight of New Zealanders and the liberal advertisement of their country in lands where the very name of New Zealand was hardly known.

The fact that Mr. Seddon was the first, after the campaign, to protest against the flooding of South Africa with Chinese coolies by the men in whose interests the grievous war had unwittingly been waged, in no wise detracted from the merit of the promptitude of his offer of troops. Indeed, to the Boer War and Mr. Seddon's share therein, New Zealand owes more than perhaps most of us readily grasp. It was really to his big-hearted impulse, his initiative, that we owe the new and broader Imperialism, and when the great Council of the Empire, as yet *in nubibus* is fully realised, let us remember that it is through Mr. Seddon that it has been made possible. Perhaps we were too close to him to see him in the true perspective. Half a world away they sized the big man up more accurately than even New Zealanders could. What New Zealander's heart but beat with pride when he read, the day after the tragic news of the Prime Minister's end, the sorrowful panegyrics cabled from all parts of the world, the eulogies of the most famous English journals! "A man of noble ideals and generous sentiments;" "a great servant of the Empire;" "the most effective labour politician of his day;" "a man whose death deprived the Empire of a powerful driving force;" "a man who largely taught the British worker to grasp the value of Empire"—these were the verdicts passed on Richard Seddon by the great voices of public opinion at the other end of the world. His strenuous and earnest advocacy of the maintenance of racial purity, too, and his efforts in the direction of the extension of British rule and New Zealand's influence in the Pacific, were all the outcome of his splendid and far-seeing patriotism.

But again it is on the attractive personality, the very human side, of the late Premier, that one wants to dwell. His very foibles, his boisterous impulses, his little eccentricities, all

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went to make him the loveable man that he was. Instances of his tender-heartedness, his overflowing good-nature, even to those with whom he had at one time or other “differences,” will occur to everyone who knew him. Above all, the children loved the old man, and this love of the children is perhaps a finer testimony of worth than the esteem of older people. In his life-work, Mr. Seddon, it is scarcely necessary to tell New Zealanders, toiled like a very horse. He never gave himself a rest, nor did he allow others to rest. His love of work, of action, of public speaking, killed him in his prime, but it could not have been otherwise. A life of leisured and luxurious inactivity he could never have endured.

Physically powerful, vigorous, and imposing, with a keen and fearless eye, Mr. Seddon was a man who compelled respect and attention whenever and wherever he spoke. There was a stern and fighting glint in his clear straight eyes that said, as Carlyle said of the Abbot Samson, “Let all sluggards and cowards, remiss, false-spoken, unjust, and otherwise diabolic persons, have a care; this is a dangerous man for them.” And as the sage has written elsewhere of that same grave old Abbot, it could with exactitude be said here of my old chief, that he was “a skilful man; full of cunning insight, lively interests; always discerning the road to his object, be it circuit, be it short-cut, and victoriously travelling forward thereon.”

Probably the best monument to a departed statesman is a faithful, sympathetic record of his life and works. In this book Mr. Drummond has given such a record, and it is one that I trust will be widely read, and that will faithfully preserve for those who come after us the memory of a truly great man, and a man whose influence has irrevocably moulded for good the fortunes of our country, New Zealand.

JOSEPH GEORGE WARD.

WELLINGTON,

*29th December, 1906.*

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THE LIFE AND WORK  
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CHAPTER I.

EARLY LIFE AND LIFE ON THE GOLDFIELDS.

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On Eccleston Hill, near the outskirts of St. Helens, Lancashire, England, there stands an old-fashioned, two-storey, stone cottage, with small latticed windows, a wooden porch, and a picturesque aspect.

A tidy pathway leads from a rustic gate to the porch. In the spring and summer the garden is gay with flowers; at one end of the house an old tree almost shades an upstairs window from view; and ivy and other creeping plants cling to the wall and strive to peep into the windows and doors.

The cottage is very weather-beaten; and well it might be, for it has stood on Eccleston Hill, in storm and sunshine, for over 200 years. Some of the old residents of the town, indeed, say that it has seen exactly 300 summers, but in this there seems to be more surmise than evidence.

The cottage has a history. It could hardly help having one at its time of life. Its past, however, can only be partly guessed at. In the pretty little garden, curious stones, bearing signs of the work of some craftsman, have been found in fairly large numbers. There was once a large collection of these stones, some of which have been elaborately carved, and others bear inscriptions that nobody can decipher. An old cross was in the collection, but it has been missing for many years, and has

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probably found its way into the private museum of an antiquarian.

The presence of these relics, although supplying no direct evidence, supports a belief held in the district that the garden was once a burial ground, connected with a Roman Catholic Mission that carried on its good work at Scholes Farm, close by. Colour is given to this story by the tradition that long underground passages once extended from Scholes Farm to the garden, and that the passage was used in those bad old days when Merry England was torn with religious persecutions.

At any rate, there the cottage stands to this day, wrapped in its glamour of a lost history, looking pleasantly out into the world, and caring very little for the attacks of its enemies, old Time and the elements.

It is about 65 years since the cottage took part in an important series of events connected with the story of a man's life related in this book.

Mr. Thomas Seddon, a member of one of the oldest farming Lancashire families, was headmaster of the Eccleston Hill Grammar School. Miss Jean Lindsay, a native of Annan, a town in Dumfrieshire, also the descendant of farming people, was mistress of the denominational school. There was not room for two establishments of that kind at Eccleston, and it was not long before very keen rivalry sprang up, the bachelor master competing with the maiden mistress. The heads of the establishments met at public functions in the town, and were often called upon to act together, and even work together, when movements were on foot for charitable purposes, or for the advancement of the community's interests. By and by, the rivals found that they met more frequently. More occasions seemed to arise, somehow, for consultations. Circumstances over which, of course, they had absolutely no control whatever, threw them together, led them to take pleasant walks along country lanes, brought about mutual confidences, and forged a bond of sympathy. The old folk of the village smiled and nodded and looked wise, because it was the old, old story again; and when it was announced that the master and the "school-m'am" had decided not only to roam the lanes and roads