

No. 5.

The Hon. W. GISBORNE to His Honor O. CURTIS.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office, Wellington, 13th June, 1872.

I have the honor to transmit herewith the accompanying copy of a memorial from 950 inhabitants of the Inangahua district, relative to the administration of certain gold fields in the Province of Nelson, for such remarks thereon as your Honor may desire to make.

I have, &c.,

His Honor the Superintendent, Nelson.

W. GISBORNE.

No. 6.

His Honor O. CURTIS to the Hon. W. GISBORNE.

SIR,—

Superintendent's Office, Nelson, 26th June, 1872.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 13th instant, covering copy of a petition to His Excellency the Governor, signed by 950 persons, describing themselves as inhabitants of the Inangahua District, praying that the powers under the Gold Fields Act delegated by His Excellency to myself, as Superintendent of the Province, may be withdrawn, and that the Under Secretary for Public Works on Gold Fields and the Warden of the Inangahua District should be instructed to inquire into the allegations contained in the petition, with a view to the preparation of a scheme for the establishment of the Nelson South-West Gold Fields under a new form of government.

In accordance with your suggestion, I proceed to make a few remarks upon the statements contained in the petition, but propose, on the present occasion, to confine myself chiefly to the question of administration by the Provincial Government under the delegated powers, leaving the question of the action of the Provincial Council and the Executive Government, in the management and application of Provincial revenues, for future consideration, if the Colonial Government should think it desirable to enter upon the subject.

I will, however, observe that the considerable population, estimated by the petitioners, probably with sufficient correctness, at 3,000 persons, now assembled in the Inangahua Valley, have, for the most part, collected there within the last nine months; and in reference to the statement of the petitioners that the Provincial Government has been "drawing monthly an almost incredibly large revenue from the miners," it is sufficient to state that the total revenue the Provincial Government has derived from that district, from all sources, during the twelve months ending 31st of March last (the petition having been drawn up in April), did not exceed £3,600; and that, so far from the Provincial revenue from the South-West Gold Fields having increased in consequence of the discovery of the Inangahua reefs, it has, on the contrary, diminished during the past year from that very cause, by the withdrawal of a large number of miners from claims already in profitable operation.

The action of the General Assembly, during the last Session, in devoting a sum of £24,000 to expenditure upon roads within these gold fields, and of the Colonial Government in deciding, in accordance with my recommendation, to expend £16,000 of that amount (and subsequently the remaining £8,000) for the benefit of the Inangahua District, made it imperative, in justice to other districts of the gold fields contributing much more largely to the revenue, that some portion at least of the remaining funds available for public works should be allotted to them.

The petition, however, has its origin in, and is in reality grounded upon, the action taken by the Provincial Government in refusing some of the applications for leases for portions of the lately discovered reefs, and in other cases reducing the area applied for.

In reply to the allegations of the petitioners, I have the honor to state that previously to the applications coming before the Provincial Executive, I received two petitions from miners and others resident in the Inangahua District, protesting against any leases whatever being granted. The petitions were signed by 964 persons, a somewhat larger number than those who have signed the petition now under consideration.

In reply to these first-named petitions, the Provincial Executive declined, for the reasons stated in a letter addressed to the petitioners by the Provincial Secretary, to comply with their request, but at the same time laid down at length the conditions and restrictions under which alone leases would be granted.

Copies of the petitions and of the reply of the Provincial Government were forwarded a short time since, at his own request, to the Under Secretary for Public Works on Gold Fields, and I presume it is therefore unnecessary that I should now forward them.

The purport of that letter has since been adhered to as strictly as possible in dealing with all applications for leases for quartz mining in the Inangahua District.

No lease has been refused except on the recommendation of the Warden, or in cases where no work had been done and the application was obviously of a merely speculative character, or in cases of repeated applications for several leases of large blocks of land by the same persons; and in all cases of reduction of the area applied for, the number of the applicants, the amount of work done, and the genuineness of the application or otherwise, have been carefully taken into consideration and proportionate areas granted.

In the cases of the prospectors or discoverers of the reefs, large areas have in all instances been conceded; in several cases by special grants, under the 12th section of "The Gold Fields Act, 1866," in excess of the extreme area which can by law be granted on lease, namely, sixteen and a half acres, or forty men's ground, under the regulations for ordinary claims.

To the general language and character of the statements contained in this memorial I do not think it necessary to advert; but the following paragraph contains explicit statements, which, if left uncontradicted, might be calculated to do mischief:—

"In many of the cases, the areas claimed were, and for long periods have been, held under miners'