

1873.
NEW ZEALAND.

REPORT ON THE DISTILLERY BRANCH, CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Mr. W. SEED to the Hon. the COMMISSIONER of CUSTOMS.

Customs Department (Distilleries Branch), Wellington,
30th September, 1873.

SIR,—

I have the honor to furnish the following information regarding the working of the Distilleries Branch of the Custom Department.

As this is the first occasion on which a general report on this subject has been submitted to you, it may be well, before describing the routine work of carrying out the provisions of "The Distillation Act, 1868," to shortly refer to the several enactments that have been passed relative to distillation.

The first law that was passed was in 1841, and was framed with the object of prohibiting distillation; it was entitled "An Ordinance for prohibiting the Distillation of Spirits within the Colony of New Zealand." In 1844 an Ordinance was passed to repeal the Ordinance of 1841, but it was not to come into operation until after it received the Royal confirmation. It never was confirmed, so that the Ordinance of 1841 remained in force until 1865, when "The Distillation Prohibition Ordinance Amendment Act, 1865," was passed, which authorized the Governor in Council to make regulations for licensing persons to carry on the business of distillers. In January of the following year an application was made for a license to distil under this Act. The applicant was informed that the regulations under which licenses would be granted would be in general character such as were contained in the Victorian Distillation Act, but no further communication was received from him. The Act above referred to was made to lapse at the end of the next Session of the Assembly. In the next Session, "The Distillation Prohibition Ordinance Amendment Act, 1866," was passed, which continued the provisions of the Act of the previous year for a similar period, and contained several stringent regulations against illicit distillation, which considerably improved the law on that head. During the recess another application for a license to distil was received; and although it came to nothing, as in the previous case, the Government decided to learn the experience of the Victorian Government on the subject, with a view to introducing a general measure for the regulation of distillation; but it was found that the requisite information could not be procured in time to introduce such a measure during the Session of 1867, so the provisions of the Act of the previous Session were again re-enacted in an Act entitled "The Distillation Act 1866 Amendment Act, 1867," with further provisions designed for still more effectually suppressing illicit distillation; and it was determined that I should be despatched to Melbourne and Sydney, "for the purpose of acquiring an insight into the working of the distilleries and Excise Departments there."

On my return I recommended the repeal of the previous imperfect and disjointed Acts, and the consolidation of the whole into one comprehensive measure, to be laid before the next Session of the General Assembly. The information I had collected enabled me to undertake the preparation of such a measure, which took the form of the Act now in force, ("The Distillation Act, 1868,") and became law from the 1st of January, 1869.

In a report on my mission to Australia I furnished a brief description of the licensed distilleries then at work in Victoria and New South Wales, and of the Government departments established for their supervision, and pointed out the arrangements which would have to be made for the supervision of any distilleries that might be started in New Zealand. I suggested the engagement in Melbourne of a competent Inspector, and also that one of our Customs officers should be sent there for six months to learn, by actual service in some of the distilleries, the work of the department, so that he might be able independently of outside aid to train other officers for the same duty. The Government having acceded to my recommendation that the supervision of the distilleries should be carried on as a branch of the Customs Department, did me the honor to appoint me to be Chief Inspector of Distilleries, and authorized me to undertake all necessary arrangements for giving effect to that recommendation. I accordingly commenced at once to organize a staff. The Victorian Government readily