

No. 14.

Mr. Warden STRATFORD to the UNDER SECRETARY for GOLD FIELDS.

SIR,—

Warden's Office, Naseby, Mount Ida, Otago, 31st March, 1874.

I have the honor to report upon the Mount Ida district under my charge, for the year ending 31st March, 1874. The statistical returns annexed contain such detailed information of the progress made in the various pursuits on this gold field, that in them the subject is well nigh exhausted; but as some localities are waning and others advancing, which the returns do not explain, I will endeavour to supply the deficiency in this my general report.

There are fourteen distinct mining localities in this district, which I shall describe in order according to their prospective importance, viz., **Naseby, **Marawhenua, **St. Bathan's, *Kyebrun, *Macrae's, Hamilton, *Serpentine, *Hyde, **Blackstone Hill, *Sowburn, Rough Ridge, Shag Valley, Cambridge, and Garibaldi. Those I have marked with two stars will, in my opinion, be places of great mining repute in a few years; those with one star, with present population permanently settled; and those unmarked, waning into insignificance. At St. Bathan's, Courts are held twice, and at Hamilton, Hyde, and Macrae's, once a month; at Marawhenua once in two months; and at Serpentine about four times a year.

The only changes I contemplate in this respect are, that when the Marawhenua races are completed it will be necessary to station a Receiver there, and that the Warden shall visit there once a month, at St. Bathan's three times a month, and at Hamilton once in two months. To perform these duties I now travel about 260 miles a month. The seasons have on the whole been favourable for the mining industry that prevails here,—that of sluicing. Water has been tolerably abundant. The winter of 1873 was perhaps rather longer than usual, but the frosts were by no means constant nor severe, and falls of snow late in the season served to secure supplies of water to the reservoirs, well into the summer; but although nature has been thus gracious, the past year has not been a prosperous one for this district, but to the contrary, as far as mining is concerned. The reason being that the numerous public works in operation in various parts of the Province have attracted men away who would otherwise have remained, ready to take advantage of full supplies of water as they became available. I refer especially to the class of miners who work for wages, but even claim-owners have been induced to seize the advantages of steady wages at high rates on public works. By this means the mining population (particularly in the neighbourhood of Naseby) has become considerably reduced. However, this decrease of population can only be looked upon as temporary, for as the public works verge towards completion, men will again resort to the old familiar occupation of gold mining.

The great public works in this vicinity are the Naseby sludge-channel and the water-race from the Manuhirikia River, which, when finished, will restore Naseby to the prosperous position it once before enjoyed, when the water-race companies first discharged their water into Hogburn Gully. Since the commencement of the public works here, doubts have been expressed at times as to the results; but if the sludge-channel is brought up at a depth sufficient to work the payable auriferous ground down Hogburn Gully (and it can be), I have no hesitation in expressing a decided opinion, that as soon as the Government water-race has performed its first duty of scouring the valley of the tailings that for years have choked up many rich pockets or basins of gold, despised in the early days on account of the still greater riches of the terraces, men will set to work with a will into virgin ground, well preserved under a great depth of sludge; will cut up tail-races into the terraces, right and left of the sludge-channel; and work claims alongside it to advantage for three miles down the valley. Fair prospecting, quite recently, has proved the ground worthy of trial, and if the channel is deepened as it ought to be (for all depends on this), the Government, I anticipate, will have reason to be satisfied with its investment. It is not at Naseby alone the benefit of the race will be felt, but at different places (not less than three) on the line of race diggings will spring up, where gold is known to be in payable quantities for sluicing, but to which water has not been brought because the expense would have been beyond private enterprise; but now that the water runs by, the ground will rise in value. I would here remark upon a singular fact, worthy of attention by geologists, and for practical purposes by the Government, who own the race, and the miners who claim to be permanent residents of Mount Ida, and it is this—that on all the neighbouring ranges—viz., Rock and Pillar, Lammerlaw, Rough Ridge on both sides, Raggedy Ridge, Blackstone Hill, and Mount Ida—rich deposits of gold have been found at the same level, and the diggings, as fresh discoveries have been made, have stretched out along the ranges, but at the same level or height above the sea; and, strange to state, the same rule applies to heavy dead timber on the places I have named, to which may be added Garibaldi and Cambridge, though the latter is outside the limits of the boundary my remarks apply to. This discovery should encourage belief in a run of gold along the whole course of the Government race, a distance of sixty miles, but especially at places which assume the same appearance as Naseby and Hamilton. The want of a large block of arable land is much felt by the inhabitants, who, with growing families, begin to pine for homesteads, with gardens, orchards, grass and oat paddocks, so indispensable for would-be domesticated people. It is this want that makes Naseby so purely a mining township, and its inhabitants unsettled. A change for the better could be brought about by the opening of land for the purpose, but it would considerably depreciate the value of the pastoral tenant's lease. I consider it right to mention this, in fairness to another class that has done so much towards settlement and the opening up of the country.

Water! water! water! is the cry everywhere, and capital to divert it around these rugged, rocky ranges. At Mount Burster, on the summit of Mount Ida Ranges, where the snow lodges from ten to thirty feet deep for six months each year, and, owing to the frosts, the miners can only work four months in the year, so rich is the yield of gold that six weeks' washing is sufficient to repay for eight months' complete idleness, and give the claim-holders besides a handsome return (not to exaggerate, I will say £500 a year a man) without fail. One man alone has been satisfied to spend seven years and £2,500 in bringing a water-race from Mount Domett, and cheerfully looks forward in another year to complete his race, and a few months afterwards extract from his claim his capital back and the multiple of it by three at least; and from my knowledge of the place, the man, and his practical experience, I believe his calculations to be correct. And Mount Burster is not a singular spot of