

1874.

NEW ZEALAND.

NINTH REPORT OF THE MARINE DEPARTMENT, FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE, 1874.

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

Customs Department (Marine Branch),
Wellington, 5th August, 1874.

SIR,—

I do myself the honor to furnish the following report of this department for the year ended on the 30th June last :—

Lighthouses.—The coastal lights throughout the colony have been maintained in good order during the year, and no complaints against the efficiency of any of them have reached the department. Only one instance during the year is known where a light became extinguished during the night. This occurred at the lighthouse at the entrance to Nelson Harbour, on the 27th March, and was duly reported by the lightkeeper himself, in obedience to his printed instructions. The first time I visited Nelson after this occurrence, I inquired into the cause of it, and found that it had not arisen through any neglect on the part of the keeper. The light went out in consequence of an accident suddenly happening to a part of the pressure apparatus of the lamp, during the temporary absence of the keeper from the light-room. The light, I believe, was not extinguished for any length of time, as the keeper had a second lamp at hand, ready trimmed, which he lighted immediately he discovered the accident. There is only one keeper at this light, the same that had charge of it when it was taken over from the Provincial Government. Heretofore he has been able, with the assistance of his wife, to attend to the light satisfactorily, and I have therefore refrained from recommending any change which would lead to additional expense; but the occurrence above referred to has led me to conclude that an assistant keeper should now be appointed, so as to place the Nelson light on the same footing as the other coastal lights of the colony, and I therefore recommend that this appointment be made with as little delay as possible, for, owing to the number of steamers that trade to Nelson, the consequence of allowing the light to go out, when one of these vessels was steaming down Blind Bay, in full confidence of being warned by the light of her near approach to the shore, might be most disastrous. There can be no doubt, that when a lighthouse is established, every possible precaution ought to be taken to ensure that the light shall be kept burning brightly every night, between sunset and sunrise, and no mere question of economy ought to interfere to prevent such precautions from being taken. One of the most obvious and necessary of these is, that every lighthouse should be provided with two keepers, for it is impossible that one man can keep awake and on the alert night after night, especially during the long winter nights, when vigilance is most required: sleep must, sooner or later, overcome him, and then an accident to the light, such as the one described above, may arise at any moment, causing it to be extinguished, and perhaps lead to shipwreck and serious loss of life.

Attention was called, in last year's report, to the recommendations that had been made from time to time that a light at the entrance to Tory Channel should be provided. In compliance with these recommendations, you authorized it to be proceeded with without delay, and accordingly the site was surveyed, and the lantern and apparatus were ordered in December. Advices have been received from Messrs. Stevenson, of Edinburgh, the Engineers to the Northern Board of Lighthouses, through whom the order was sent, that contracts for their construction had been entered into. The "Luna" was placed at the disposal of the department in the middle of November last, for the purpose of fixing the site for this light, and also of determining where the light for Cape Foulwind should be placed. Mr. Blackett, the Marine Engineer, and Captain Johnson, readily decided on the position for the Tory Channel light, and the "Luna" then proceeded to Farewell Spit Lighthouse with stores, and thence to Westport, the distance from which place to Cape Foulwind is only about six miles. The road from Westport to Charleston passes about a mile and a quarter inland of the extremity of the cape. The cape is everywhere covered with dense bush, so that a track had to be cut from the road to reach the coast at the point where it is proposed to erect the lighthouse, as the spot could not be approached from Westport by the beach, and a landing could not be effected from the sea, owing to the heavy swell and the rocky nature of the coast. On arriving at the end of the cape, an excellent site was fixed upon; but it was found that it would be necessary to have an extensive clearing made. This was required also to provide for the light being seen up and down the coast. Arrangements were there-