

No. 20.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the MINISTER for IMMIGRATION.

(No. 433.)

7, Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.,

23rd May, 1878.

SIR,—

Referring to your letter No. 28, of the 15th February last, and to the remarks made by Dr. Coward in his memorandum, a copy of which was contained in your letter No. 34, of the 27th of the same month, I would take the opportunity of making a few observations respecting the character and health of the emigrants sent out during the emigration season of 1877.

I have carefully examined the official reports received from the colony respecting the vessels despatched during the above period, and I attach a schedule hereto giving extracts therefrom, referring to the health and character of the emigrants.

You will observe that, as regards the character of the emigrants by ten out of twenty-one vessels, the Immigration Commissioners expressly and favourably report, and that as to the remainder they do not make any remark; but I think it is fair to assume that, as each shipment of emigrants was selected under the same regulations and with the same amount of care, they also were of a satisfactory description, and this assumption is confirmed by the favourable tenor of the quarterly reports of the Immigration Officers up to December 31st last, extracts from which I also attach.

The Immigration Officers, with two exceptions, in these reports speak well of the class of immigrants, and report that they obtained employment without difficulty.

The Canterbury officer reports unfavourably as regards the emigrants by one ship, and the Nelson officer reports that the men emigrants were unable to get work for a long time; but he gives as the reason for this, that the demand for labour was exceedingly limited, and he recommends the discontinuance of free emigration to that district.

But in all other cases the reports are favourable, the Canterbury officer remarking, as regards the ships to his port, excepting one only, that the emigrants were very good. That one exception was the "Rakaia," which sailed from Glasgow to Canterbury.

The Wellington officer remarks favourably on the large proportion of single women sent out, and that all appeared of the right class; and as regards the emigrants by one ship, the "Hurunui," he states that they were the finest body of emigrants he had seen brought to Wellington.

The remaining reports are all more or less favourable and satisfactory.

Then, as regards the question of mental and physical health, I can scarcely believe, in the remarks made by Dr. Coward to the effect that the number of persons sent out either mentally or bodily incapable is becoming very numerous, that that gentleman intended to refer to the emigrants sent out by the Government, at all events to those sent out during the past season of 1877; for I find that, out of twenty-one ships, expressly satisfactory remarks are made as to the health of the emigrants by twelve of those vessels, and, with the exception of the cases of the young woman who had paid her passage by the "Wanganui," and of a young man, an emigrant by the "Canterbury," there are no remarks of a contrary nature as regards any of the twenty-one vessels.

The number of deaths occurring on board these twenty-one vessels bears, I think, satisfactory evidence as to the health of the emigrants. Twenty-nine deaths occurred during the voyages of these twenty-one vessels, carrying over 5,000 people; and of these twenty-nine, twenty-two were infants, two were children under twelve years of age, and five only adults.

I do not desire, in citing the above-mentioned facts, to be understood to endeavour to prove that all the Government emigrants sent were without exception suitable both as regards health and occupation, for it is impossible I believe to adopt any system which would bring about so desirable a result; but I believe that the checks employed to prevent unsuitable persons from obtaining Government passages are as complete as can practically be used.

That the application of these checks by this office is not inefficient, is, I think, borne out by the following statistics, as per schedule attached. This schedule shows that, excluding the nominated cases, there were 4,838 emigrants sent out during the past year; that to obtain them applications from 15,805 persons were received and considered: of these, 5,226 were rejected or declined; 4,390 did not proceed with their applications, in consequence of the information furnished to them from this department as to the description of emigrants required, and for other reasons; and 1,351 who were approved did not embark, leaving 4,838 who finally sailed.

There is no doubt that New Zealand is looked upon as a most desirable sanitarium, and that a number of persons who are invalids, either by paying their own passages, or doing so through the assistance of their friends, proceed to the colony every year. Not infrequent inquiries are made at this office by persons of this description, but I have always peremptorily discouraged the idea of such people going out to New Zealand, and have quoted in more than one instance the provisions of the Imbecile Passengers Act for that purpose.

It is also no doubt the case with persons who are mentally weak, that their friends not unfrequently endeavour to get rid of them by encouraging and assisting their going to a distant part of the world, like Australia or New Zealand; and it therefore happens, on rare occasions, that persons with incipient diseases, physical and mental, manage to be accepted as emigrants, whose diseases cannot be discovered without a more searching medical examination than it is expedient to adopt in the general selection of emigrants.

And, similarly, there are rare cases in which persons with false characters, or by means of forged certificates (which are, I believe, almost always detected by this office), or by false representations as to the nature of their occupation, manage to obtain passages, but who are found to be unsuitable when they are tried by actual experience in the colony.

But, judging from the character of the reports sent Home, I am led to conclude there was a minimum of such cases as regards the emigration of last year. And here I may remark that, in addition to the difficulty of weeding out the unsuitable, there is the difficulty of reaching those who are most suitable. It may be taken as a rule that those most wanted in New Zealand, such as the really good class farm labourers, or the experienced domestic servants, are also in good demand here,