

1895.
NEW ZEALAND.

VILLAGE SETTLEMENTS IN AUSTRALIA

(MEMORANDUM RELATING TO, BY THE HON. W. P. REEVES, MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EDUCATION).

Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. Reeves, with the Leave of the House.

MEMORANDUM to the Hon. the PREMIER.

7th January, 1895.

WHILE in Australia I made it my business to get as complete a knowledge as possible of the work being done in the three colonies I visited in the direction of village-settlement and labour colonies. Knowing how severe the depression has been in all three, and how intense the "unemployed" difficulty, I was of course anxious to note what steps had been taken to meet these troubles by putting destitute and workless persons on the soil. It seemed to me then, and still does so, that it might be possible to learn valuable lessons both from their successes and from their mistakes.

Without therefore encumbering this memorandum with details and figures which can have no direct bearing on village-settlement as a question of policy, I will simply dwell on such features of what I saw as seem to be specially worth your attention, both as Premier and as Minister for Public Works, and such as may be of interest and use to our colleague the Minister of Lands, to whom I propose to send a copy of this memorandum.

If either of you should wish, after reading this, for more detailed information on any point, I shall be only too glad to try to give it. But a multitude of details would, I think, be out of place in what is a memorandum from one Minister to another, and not a report intended to contain full information as to the working of public departments.

For convenience' sake I will divide what I have to say under three heads, each having to do with one of the three colonies through which I passed.

I. NEW SOUTH WALES.

I begin with New South Wales:—

It is significant that, while much less has been done here in the way of village settlements than in other colonies, I found the "unemployed" difficulty proportionately greater. I heard of and saw more discontent and distress amongst workpeople in Sydney, by far, than in the other two colonies put together; this though Melbourne is commercially worse off than Sydney. Not only were large meetings of the unemployed going on in Sydney, but a gentleman who should know as much of the subject as any man in New South Wales told me earnestly that in forty years' experience as a colonist he could not remember that things had ever been worse in New South Wales, and he doubted whether they had ever been so bad. And this had come about in spite of the solid work that the Labour Bureau there had unquestionably done. It has not only been active in finding work, but has had much more support from private employers than we have had in New Zealand. On the other hand, I may mention that the trade-unionists in New South Wales regard their Bureau with much dislike and distrust, looking on it as a mere free-labour agency, and as being a class machine for picking up cheap labour for private employers.

The Bureau there has disposed of numbers of applicants for work by giving them tickets to gold-bearing localities, where they make a living by fossicking, and whither their wives and families are often sent after a time to join them. You are better able to judge than I am whether anything of this sort is possible in New Zealand.

I asked the chief of the Bureau how inexperienced men could make a living at this work. He explained that their practice was to make up little parties containing at least one man who had had some experience at gold-seeking, and who could guide and teach his ignorant mates.

There are very few village settlements in New South Wales—not more than three or four worth mentioning. Much the largest of these are the Pitt Town and Wilberforce Settlements, near the Town of Windsor, on the Hawkesbury River. I went to Pitt Town because it was the larger and likely to teach me more. Both it and the Wilberforce were started on co-operative lines, but at Wilberforce co-operation has been abandoned, and the block was being divided among the individual settlers. They had been totally unable to pull together in co-operation.

At Pitt Town co-operation was still in force. The Pitt Town Block lies about thirty-four miles from Sydney, and three or four from the country town of Windsor. It is about 2,200 acres in extent. In New Zealand we should call it dry, rolling, lightly-timbered country. The soil is stiff reddish loamy clay, obviously requiring much working. It struck me as poor, and from what I could find out by many inquiries not more than a fourth of it was classed as "pretty good." Until used for a settlement it had remained a Government reserve, though the country round had been settled for generations: that alone made one suspect its quality. A hundred settlers, representing about five times as many human beings, were on it when I went there, and had been there for more than a year and a half. A good deal of work had been done in the way of clearing and the planting of maize, wheat, potatoes, melons, tomatoes, fruit-trees, &c. The block has been fenced with a log fence. The crops seemed badly in need of water.

The manager told me they had not had an inch of rain for months. Two dams had been made, one new and empty, waiting for the rain, the other full of clay-coloured water. A sawmill had been put up, but had not been found to pay. The settlers were living in lines of *whares*, each on narrow half-acre strips of land; on these more or less gardening has been done. We went into one or two of the *whares* and talked to the settlers' wives. A gang of men were stumping near at hand, and seemed working steadily enough. I went into the store of the settlement, where several applicants were waiting for their rations and grumbling because certain articles were not forthcoming; I found that the credit account of the settlement was exhausted, and stores, in consequence, not easy to get.

The board of control in Sydney had just resigned, the manager was being changed, and the settlers seemed in much doubt and discouragement.

Before giving what, in my opinion, were the causes of this trouble, I would in a few sentences describe the system under which the settlement was founded and managed. The Government, while finding the land and obtaining power from Parliament to advance money, had handed over the management to a board of trustees, resident in Sydney, consisting of philanthropic gentlemen, merchants, professional men, Civil servants, and so forth. As to their special knowledge of agriculture and the work of settlement I was unable to satisfy myself. I met the chairman, I may say, and found him an honourable gentleman, and an enthusiastic believer in village settlements. The trustees seem to have enlisted the settlers with the aid of the Labour Bureau. They then appointed a manager and issued regulations under which the settlement had to be worked. All this was done in pursuance of an Act of Parliament empowering the Government to appoint and work with such boards, and the boards to make binding regulations for settlements. Under these regulations each male adult settler in good health had to work forty-eight hours a week under the manager's direction. In return they got coupons entitling them to receive from the store before mentioned about stores enough for themselves and families to live on. This arrangement was to go on till the settlement became more than self-supporting, when it was assumed, by sales of produce, that the advances from the Government would be repaid, and profits made, which were ultimately to be divided amongst the settlers.

It must be obvious to you, even from this outline sketch, that nothing but years of hard work, patience, self-denial, and enthusiasm could enable such a settlement to succeed. But to call up such qualities in a mixed body of destitute persons certain things are needed. The settlers must have hope; and they must feel that they are free men, managing and controlling their own affairs, and not mere paupers controlled by others, and looked upon as more or less a burden on the State. I do not see how the Pitt Town settlers can feel either hopeful or very proud of their position. Though they elect a committee of advice empowered to offer recommendations to the manager, they are, in truth, entirely subject to him and to the members of the philanthropic board, who do not belong to them or to their class, and who have not much more to do with them than the members of a charitable-aid board have to do with the board's paupers.

The prospects of ultimate profit must be so remote as to count for little. So it comes to this: that all are working month after month for a low uniform weekly wage paid in kind. The least competent and idlest get this, the ablest and most industrious get no more. That would be very well if the people had sorted themselves, and could kick loafers, shirkers, and bush-lawyers out of the settlement. It might even be tolerable if the manager could or would do this. But the Pitt Town manager explained to me that he had not been in this particular properly backed by the board. As he was about to be dispensed with, and, indeed, received notice on the day of my visit, I took what he said with caution. But, so far as I could check what he told me, it was supported by other evidence. This was the third change of management since the place had been started. As though that was not bad enough, the error had been committed of keeping on one of the deposed managers as a subordinate. I was not, therefore, surprised to hear that two factions existed amongst the settlers, one favourable to the earlier manager, the other to the later. The first of these divisions wished to continue the co-operative principle; the second, and much the larger, wished to individualise their interests and subdivide the block.

Disappointing as in many respects Pitt Town was, I do not look upon it as a proof that co-operative settlement need always be a failure. Would you expect five hundred poverty-stricken human beings, even if the breadwinners were skilled cultivators, to do well on something over 2,000 acres of medium-to-bad land? Would you expect their holdings to look well in their second year after months of dry baking weather? Would any practical farmer count upon good results from an estate controlled by a board of amateur philanthropists living thirty-four miles away in a town? Is it surprising, then, that the unskilled poverty-stricken Pitt Town settlers had become discouraged and quarrelsome? As if purposely to lead to bickering, their half-acre lots were laid out in such narrow strips that there could be no privacy or isolation, and gossiping among the women and wrangling were sure to ensue. In spite of all this, much good work had been done, and the settlers to whom I spoke did not want to leave if things could be paid up fairly for them.

When I went into the school and saw the scores of healthy, bright, well-taught children, who but for this settlement would have been running about in the moral and physical dirt of the back-slums of Sydney, I could but hope that a little common-sense would come to the rescue and prevent the breakdown which seemed impending. The lessons to be learnt from Pitt Town are—(1) Not to plump down too many people in any one spot; (2) to put no settlers on poor or dry land; (3) to give no authority to amateur philanthropists and private boards of management. If settlements are to be established by the Government they should be managed direct by the State's responsible officers. But, in my opinion, if we start a co-operative settlement in New Zealand, the South Australian system, under which each settlement is autonomous, and the Government only interferes when interference seems absolutely necessary, is much the better. In Adelaide the sympathetic philanthropist plays his part in a Village Settlers' Aid Society, which helps the destitute settlers with gifts of stock, clothing, and so on, and is exceedingly useful without being able to meddle over much. One is inclined to think that the smaller of the two factions at Pitt Town should be moved bodily away and planted as a co-operative settlement, on good soil, in some district where there would be a chance of the settlers getting odd jobs outside. There is no such chance at Pitt Town, the settlers around being a poor, struggling sort of people themselves. In a long and most interesting talk I had with Mr. Carruthers, the Sydney Minister of Lands, he explained to me a scheme he had of planting fishing-village settlements along the coast, where the settlers might divide their time between fishing and tillage, and under Government take up the curing of fish as time went on. I afterwards saw a settlement something like this at Raymond Island, in Gippsland, Victoria. He also explained to me a proposal for establishing a settlement in connection with drainage and irrigation work at Lake Cowal. But, as I afterwards found his scheme to all intents and purposes in full working order on the Koo-wee-rup Swamp, in Victoria, I will not describe it to you here as I had meant to do.

On the whole I think New South Wales a warning rather than an example in the matter of village settlements, and the Sydney labour market appeared to me to be suffering in consequence.

II. VICTORIA.

The amount of village settlement done in Victoria during the last two or three years has been large. Something like six thousand human beings are, I believe, now on the land, and the unemployed in Melbourne are proportionately fewer. From what I could hear, I should say that the outlook for a number of the settlements is gloomy. These are said to be on light land, and some in not very suitable localities. Several of the settlements are the result of private philanthropy—*e.g.*, the Tucker Colonies—and are financially in a mess. Those I did not see. I visited five settlements, and did not pick out the failures, as I thought more could be learnt from the successful. I did not want to learn that village-settlers badly located on poor soil will not succeed: that has been proved long ago in New Zealand. So I was quite satisfied to go to settlements wholly or partially successful. Much the most important of those I visited was that which is being carried out in connection with the reclaiming of the great Koo-wee-rup Swamp. To this I should specially like to draw your attention as Minister for Public Works.

The work going on is on a large scale. The swamp contains no less than 53,000 acres, and measures about eighteen miles from north to south, with a fall of about 120ft. To the eye it shows as a huge oval expanse clothed by nature in a thick green sheet of tea-tree and blackwood scrub, with an undergrowth of wild reeds and other marsh plants. This is so dense as to be more like the jungle of the New Zealand forest than the usual open park-like Australian bush. But, as the swamp becomes dried by the action of the drains, the scrub dries too, and is easy to clear and burn. Not very much heavy bog-timber is found buried in the peat; and, though £106,000 has already been sunk in the draining, I should say that Victoria ought to make a handsome profit out of the reclamation of what bids fair to be a wide, fertile, closely-tilled territory. The work is being carried on by the Victorian Public Works Department, the head of which, Mr. Davidson, took me there, showed me all I wished to see, and was kindness itself. The village settlements are at the two ends of the swamp, the north and the south. About 6,000 acres are given over to them. The maximum holding of each settler is 20 acres. There are three hundred of them, but, counting in women and children, the number of souls on the settlements is nearly eighteen hundred. The earliest arrivals came there not more than eighteen months ago. Most of them were down to bed-rock, unable to pay their train-fares from town. Already most of the holdings that I saw show signs of steady attention, and promise exceedingly well. The peat is of a kind that becomes fertile as it dries, sinks, and consolidates, and will grow luxuriant cocksfoot, potatoes, and other vegetables and fruit, all quite first-class, as one was able to see. Physically the settlers whom I saw were fine men. Some were frozen-out artisans, others country-folk who had fallen on bad times. One nice-looking allotment was held by an ex-Salvation-Army captain. We went some two miles and a half into the swamp, on a tramway made and managed by the settlers out of material given by the Government. They levy a small charge on those who use it, and have built a hall for themselves out of the proceeds. After leaving the tramway we walked down the main arterial drain for half a mile or so. This is eighteen miles long; where I saw it, it is 45ft. wide at the top, further down its course it is 60ft. wide: that will give you some idea of the scale of the operations. Leaving this, we turned up a lateral drain for about half a mile, and then up a parallel. From that we struck into and across the swamp, coming on to the backs of several allotments on the way, and so returned to the main drain.

I think, therefore, I may claim to have seen enough to get a fair notion of what was being done. The point that I think particularly worthy of your notice is the system under which the Public Works Department contrive to make the swamp-reclamation find work for the greatest possible number of men, while at the same time insuring that, as the Government work goes on,

the men carry onward the improvement of their holdings hand-in-hand with it. The object is so to arrange that when the drainage is done the men shall remain rooted to the soil as the holders of improved allotments and comfortable homes.

The means adopted are simply these: Twice as many men are put on the land as the department employs. Instead of all the men being given continuous work by the department, each settler works for half a month, and then he has to spend the other half improving his allotment.

The wages (6d. to 9d. per yard piece-work) are so scaled that married men are able to earn about £5, or 8s. per day, for the half-month. In that way they need not starve during the other fortnight. The result of this system is that twice as many men are employed as would be were the employes to devote their whole time to the reclamation. Better still, when the reclamation is ended the labourers will be permanently settled on the soil, and they will be State tenants, in a fair way to be self-supporting, instead of workless nomads clamouring to the Government for further aid, as so many of our co-operative labourers do. This alternative system, under which men divide their time between Government work and the cultivation of their blocks, is the one which Mr. Carruthers, of New South Wales, proposes to put in force at Lake Cowal. The only difference is that he means that the men should work alternate months instead of alternate half-months.

How, you may ask, does the Government insure that the men work honestly on their land during their spell off, and do not simply loaf or go to town on drinking-bouts? They do so by sending an inspector round the lots, who has to certify that three pounds' worth of improving work is done on each lot every month. Unless he thus certifies the settlers are not taken back to work by the department. Under this arrangement the men's wives and families are brought out of town and live on the holdings. Moreover, the Government is not obliged to advance considerable sums to each settler, as is the case in ordinary village settlements, as the men are earning subsistence-money during their first year or two of occupation. I do not think that the piece-work arrangement under which the men are paid is as good as your co-operative contract system. Nor do I think that the tenure under which the Koo-wee-rup settlers are holding their lots is as good as our perpetual lease. But those are mere details which there is no need to imitate. Of course, to carry out anything of the sort in New Zealand you would require to choose some public work sufficiently big or difficult to take many months, such as a viaduct, bridge, or tunnel. For the men to be at all comfortable, the work must not extend more than a few miles from their holdings, as it does not do for them to leave their crops or gardens for weeks at a time. But, with this reservation, I cannot speak too highly of the Koo-wee-rup system, as one which we should study, and, where practicable, adopt. I therefore most earnestly commend it to the attention of yourself and your permanent officers.

After seeing Koo-wee-rup, which, I may mention, is about forty-six miles from Melbourne, I made another journey into Gippsland, this time going more than three times as far, in order to see the Sarsfield, Eagle Point, and Raymond Island Settlements. The two first do not differ sufficiently from our New Zealand villages to make it needful for me to describe them at much length. They consist of local unemployed—country people who were out of work. They therefore do not represent any attempt to solve the problem of city poverty, except in so far as they may have kept some of their settlers from drifting into Melbourne. The allotments at Sarsfield, too, are noteworthy for their small size. There ten families are placed on no more than 33 acres of land in all, yet are doing well. Of course the land is rich, is contiguous to a main road (it was once camping-ground for travelling sheep), and is not more than ten miles from a country town—Bairnsdale. Still, fifty souls on 33 acres of land is something unusual. As in New Zealand, the people look to making part of their living by getting jobs outside. They were making good progress, and those I spoke to were confident and hopeful.

I could say much the same of the Eagle Point Settlement, though there both the number of the settlers and the size of the allotments are larger. It is on a narrow tongue of land jutting out into the Gippsland lakes. Nothing could look better than some of the spade-cultivation I saw there. Placed between a river and a lake, the settlers have the advantage of a supply of fish. They reckon also on getting work from their neighbours.

The village on Raymond Island is a fishing settlement. The island is long and low, contains about 2,000 acres, and stands near the sea in the Gippsland lakes. The fishermen have been given land there in order that they may have two strings to their bow, and divide their time between fishing and cultivation. I not only got a good view of their holdings, as the boat steamed slowly past their front gates, but I landed and went into some of the gardens and talked with the settlers. Though not much of the land on the island seemed to be good, there is enough of the better quality for the settlers to grow fruit and vegetables in small gardens, and I dare say the scheme will turn out to be successful. I was told that the fishing in the lake for the last year had been very bad, and one of the men remarked to me emphatically, "We could not have lived but for our allotments." That testifies to the usefulness of the mixed system. Still, as a rule, it is obvious that such settlements should be placed where the fishing can be relied upon. Fishermen are not, as a class, supposed to be fond of working on land, but from the look of their fences, cottages, and spade-work on Raymond Island I should say that these Gippsland fishermen were taking to their amphibious mode of living fairly well. In addition to their allotments they were allowed to run stock over the island rent-free. Generally speaking, the tenure in Victorian village settlements is of the most ultra-liberal kind. The land is appraised at a moderate capital value, and the settlers pay 4 per cent. on it annually for twenty-five years, after which it becomes theirs without further payment of any description. Moreover, the first two or three annual payments are postponed. You will, doubtless, agree with me that our perpetual-lease system is fairer to the State and its taxpayers than this.

My last day in Victoria was given up to a journey to Leongatha. This is not a village settlement; neither is it a labour colony, as it is usually incorrectly styled. The people are not settled

there. Men simply go there to work for a time, getting in return their keep and a few shillings a week. Married men do not take with them their wives or children. No homes may be established there—indeed, there is nothing homelike about the place. The men sleep in large huts, like shearers' *whares*, where you walk through a door and find yourselves standing in a narrow passage between sides each taken up by three tiers of rough bunks, and where twenty-four men are put into a "shedifice" some 10ft. by 24ft. From the multitude of cracks and crevices, however, there should be an ample supply of ventilation. They have their meals in a large dining-hut. Our party shared their dinner. The food, though rough, was certainly plentiful and wholesome. The men looked dull and quiet, and I was told that one of the greatest difficulties in dealing with them was their lack of spring and hopefulness. I have no reason to suppose that they are not kindly enough treated, or that they are not better off at Leongatha than breaking stones for an ordinary charitable-aid board. At the same time, the whole aspect of the farm was that of a charitable-aid institution rather than that of a settlement. Its good points were its healthfulness, and the good food, fresh air, and regular work it affords to destitute and broken-down men. Those in charge of it do their best to find permanent private employment for their labourers after they have done a term of work on the farm and proved their ability and willingness to work. From what I can find out they manage to do this for about 25 per cent. of their people. Of the remainder, about two-thirds are believed to shift for themselves successfully. What becomes of the residuum I did not make out. The weak points of Leongatha must be, first, the cheerless nature of the life there, which must be that of a large number of unprosperous men, herded together without comforts, amusements, wife or child, working in gangs under an overseer, earning nothing but the barest subsistence, and with no settled prospects of improvement. It is, of course, better than breaking stones or loafing at street-corners, but a poor, depressing sort of life at best. Moreover, it leaves the men's wives and children in town. Then, of course, there is the question of money. During the first year the farm cost £5,000, and, though the improvements were assessed at between £4,000 and £5,000, I have reason to think the assessment was too high.

No doubt the first year of such an enterprise is always the costliest. Colonel Goldstein, the honorary superintendent of the place, who went there with me, and to whose courtesy I am indebted for much full and frank information, explained why the initial year had been expensive, and how error had subsequently been corrected and expenses curtailed. The same mistake had been made at Leongatha as at Pitt Town. The undertaking had been intrusted to the hands of a board of benevolent amateurs. The Government, shirking the trouble of management, had merely stood in the background as paymaster. That arrangement, after doing the inevitable amount of mischief, had been put an end to before my visit. For the rest, much useful farm and garden work had been done on the land, which, by the way, contains about 650 acres, and is about eighty miles south-east of Melbourne. I do not regard the money spent on Leongatha as all thrown away by any means. It must be good for workless, penniless men to have such a place to go to. But I should not recommend modelling our State Farm upon its lines. I do not believe in separating men from their families, in crowding them into rough *whares*, or in working them in gangs for their keep, *plus* two or three shillings weekly. The encouragement of the family life, cheerfulness, and a permanent connection between the workmen and the soil are what I think we should aim at in anything we do, though no doubt there are plenty of cases where the last-mentioned ideal is out of the question.

III. SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

What we call village settlements are called homestead blocks in South Australia. Their village settlements are co-operative undertakings for which we have no parallel in this colony. They commonly speak of their homestead blocks as simply "blocks," and of the settlers on them as "blockers."

Of these, as far ago as 1891, there were no less than 1,902 in South Australia, and the increase since then has been so rapid that, on the 30th June, 1894, the number had risen to 3,059. The average size of the blocks is $11\frac{1}{4}$ acres, and the average has decreased since 1891 instead of increasing. The 3,059 lessees represent something over 10,000 human beings. I have before me an analysis of 1,760 of these blocks. Out of these no less than 1,449 are set down as being held by labourers, about three-quarters of whom seem to be married men. The average rent per acre is slightly over 1s. 6d. The figures given in the report before me as to the value of the improvements are decidedly encouraging. From them one may fairly conclude that the condition of the blockers is not only decently comfortable but progressively improving. I may mention that, under an Act passed last year, power was given to repurchase private land for homestead blocks. Under this, 2,835 acres was acquired during the first six months of last year, and 2,082 acres leased out in the same time at an annual rental of nearly £500. So far, therefore, the Government do not seem to lose on the transaction. The amount advanced to blockers six months ago was about £9,000, and the unpaid interest thereon was only £12 1s. 10d. I extract the following paragraph from the report of the Inspector of Homestead Blocks:—

"The blockers have, in common with their fellow-colonists, suffered from the general depression through which the province has been passing, especially in respect of scarcity of work and money, which has prevented them from making progress so rapidly as they would with such improvements as required an outlay of ready cash. At the same time, the opportunities they have had for raising food have prevented them from suffering from the scarcity of food which has been so greatly deplored in the city, and from the danger of losing their homes. They have not failed to use the advantage offered by the proximity of their homes for social meetings, sports, &c. In several places local leagues have been formed, and meetings held in which matters of mutual interest have been discussed and dealt with. Some have become members of branch agricultural bureaux, district councils, &c., and one has been elected to represent a district in the House of

Assembly. Their religious interests have not been neglected, and their children have not been allowed to suffer for want of facilities for education. In some cases by private efforts, and in others by the Government, school-buildings have been erected and schools opened for their special benefit. On the Aldgate Blocks four churches and three schools have been built since the land was settled upon by the blockers."

Now for what I saw myself. My first visit to a "block" was paid on the day I reached Adelaide. I had not far to go. A drive of three miles took us to the Goodwood Block of 80 acres divided into sixteen 5-acre lots. I can best describe them by saying that the better sort of them looked like very home-like and substantial cottages, standing in large vegetable-gardens and young orchards. The chocolate-coloured ground was said to be rich, but dry, and in that hot arid climate irrigation was of course a prime necessity. This was managed by windmill-pumps, the water from which was poured into deep circular concrete tanks, and looked clear, cool, and inviting there. We walked about some of the gardens and orchards. The fruit trees were young peaches, apples, loquats, almonds, apricots, oranges, and lemons. The vegetables were the same as ours. One of the settlers with whom I talked told me his trade,—he was an artisan,—and explained how in the dull times when he was on half-time he fell back on working in his block. I asked him how he managed to find time to look after his garden when trade was brisk. He explained that work was then done on half-holidays and in the evenings, and that his father who lived with him also lent a helping hand. I gathered also that the neighbours on the blocks, when on friendly terms, helped each other at intervals. Of course the appearance of the lots varied, no doubt according to the skill and characters of the occupants. I heard that some of them were mortgaged, a result that was doubtless due to the right of purchase foolishly given by the Act under which the Goodwood Blocks had been leased. By a recent amending Act, however, this right has been taken away in the case of all blocks to be leased within twelve miles of Adelaide.

I need not say how interested I was in these Adelaide suburban blocks. They are just the "artisans' allotments" which many people are so anxious for in New Zealand, and which, so far, our Government has not been able to get. The impression made on my mind by what I saw, both at Goodwood and at another block in the suburbs of Adelaide, was highly favourable; and I think it should encourage us in making similar experiments here. Such homes would be a boon, indeed, to industrious artisans in slack times. Of course, the initial cost of such blocks must be a restriction. The land at Goodwood was priced at £60 an acre; the price of a 5-acre block would therefore be £300; but the rent fixed is but £7 10s. a year—rather too low, I think, for us to venture on. The maximum amount which may be advanced per settler is £50, repayable in nine years; the interest is 5 per cent.

A South Australian block of a different kind is that at Aldgate, among the hills, about sixteen miles from Adelaide by road and twenty-three miles by train. Here about three hundred blockers were placed, representing about a thousand human beings. Their orchards and fields lie among the thinly-spread bush on the slopes of the hills; down below are their vegetable-gardens, in the troughs of the narrow winding valleys. Except in these bottoms the soil seemed poor enough; but the rainfall was said to be abundant, and I could feel that the climate was much cooler than on the Adelaide plains. Many of the cottages were pictures of comfort. Some, built of stone, looked more like the smaller sort of suburban villas than settlers' huts. The land is by nature sparsely covered with stringy-bark and other timber: that enables some of the settlers to turn a useful penny by selling firewood. They are also near enough to Adelaide to sell flowers and vegetables in town.

One lot was pointed out to me where lived the family of a selector who had died almost directly after taking up his lot. His sons, mere lads of thirteen and fourteen, had buckled to the work, and had kept their mother and sisters, had complied with the requirements of the Act in the way of improvements, with the result that I saw a comfortable home. Another block was that of a shearer who kept his parents there while spending some months of the year in the far interior and in other colonies. One of the best-looking lots had for an owner a man who had come to the block with just £1 10s. in his pocket. The fruit in the Aldgate orchards was only what we can grow nearly everywhere in New Zealand, as the climate was not so suitable for oranges and semi-tropical fruit as the low-lying plain. Some of the settlers had horses, many more cows, pigs, and poultry. The rent put on the land varied from 6d. to 1s. per acre, the size of the allotments from 15 to 20 acres. In driving about I saw nothing to make me think that the rosy accounts of the settlement given me by Mr. Wilson, the Inspector (an old Coromandel man), who kindly acted as our guide, were in any way misleading. Indeed, unless I am much mistaken, the block is a genuine success, and shows that, under certain circumstances, village settlers, if they use their wits, can make headway even on poor hill clay.

The most interesting and novel part of my journey, however, was a visit which the hospitable kindness of the South Australian Ministry enabled me to pay to their young co-operative settlements on the banks of the River Murray. These lie a long way from town. We went by train for six hours to Morgan, at the north-western bend where the Murray turns southward towards the sea. There we went on board a river-steamer, and spent the next sixty-five hours going up and down the river. It was then in high flood, and a very strange sight, as the eucalypt forest on the banks was half-submerged, often as far as the eye could see. The settlements are twelve in number, but I could only visit six, though I was lucky enough to meet the chairman of another, with whom I had a long talk. The westernmost of them is but five miles from Morgan, the easternmost 157. The number of human beings now in them is almost two thousand, and continues to increase. Each body of settlers form their own association, elect their own trustees, and, subject to the Act and a certain overriding power on the part of the Government, manage their own affairs. I have before me now the memorandum of association and the rules of more than one of their village associations. The chairman and trustees direct the work, but are, of course, themselves co-operators, not only elected by their fellow-settlers and living among them, but removable at any time should two-

thirds of the settlers request their removal in writing. The Government makes an advance in money to the association, which may amount to £50 per settler. The answer to my inquiries on this point seemed to show that most of the settlements had so far drawn from £20 to £30 per head.

Up to the present their object is, of course, to live as cheaply as possible, and get no deeper in debt than they must, pending the bringing of their land into full working order and full production. They therefore regulate the drawing of stores and supplies as economically as the majority will agree to do. At one settlement I found that the married settlers drew about ten shillings' worth weekly, at another even less. One settler, a single man, told me he could live on four-and-sixpence' worth per week. Elsewhere, of course, more is drawn.

The South Australian Government has not made the mistake of putting these people either on bad land or on too little. The average of land granted to the association may be 160 acres per settler. The Lyrup Settlement, which is the largest, is marked on the map as 14,060 acres, and its settlers are ninety in number, and mostly married. There and elsewhere the land is sandy loam, which will grow anything when irrigated, and something even when left to the mercy of the clouds.

The usual aspect of a settlement is a long gentle slope to the river-bank. On some spot by the stream, or perhaps near some lagoon or shallow branch, a number of dwellings were clustered together in irregular order. Some are very primitive, some quite the reverse. Away from the bank the country is low and rolling, covered before clearing with light scrubby timber. When I was told that the oldest settlement was ten months old, I was astonished at the amount of honest hard work which had been done in this time. For instance, at Ramco, where there were but eighteen settlers, half of them married, and which had only been in existence five months, I was told that 200 acres had been cleared, two miles of wire-netting fencing done; and I saw a vegetable-garden in cultivation and a large store and public hall going up.

At Pyap, a larger settlement, where eighty-two settlers represent 350 souls, 450 acres had been thoroughly cleared and grubbed up; 115 acres were planted with fruit-trees and vegetables—apricots, vines, lemons, &c. A large haystack was pointed out to me, which I was told contained 105 tons of hay, though I scarcely thought so. More than all this, a fine steam-pump had been erected, the masonry in connection with which seemed thoroughly well and solidly built, and which was to irrigate the plantation through a series of trenches, along which I walked, and which must have entailed no small amount of labour.

At Lyrup, before mentioned, the clearing was but 300 acres, but the irrigation work was actually completed and in operation, whereas at Pyap the pump was just being started—in fact, I had the honour of setting it in motion. At Lyrup the pump, capable of raising 600 gallons per minute, was driving water along a flume of corrugated iron on trestle-work. Nothing could have looked better than the young vines and vine-cuttings, irrigated fruit, and vegetables.

At Holder the chairman told me that they expected to have 1,000 acres of wheat next season, and hoped to have a 14-bushel crop. So far, the health of the people at all the settlements had been excellent, sandy-blight being the worst ailment they seem to be troubled with.

At Holder they were building substantial stone houses for one another. Six were already up, as well as one public building. At all the settlements the houses and the private gardens round them varied very much. Some of the settlers told me that they did not believe in too much work being put into that sort of thing in the earlier stages of settlement. They thought that the working strength of the community should, for the first year or so, be kept for communal work.

All the settlements swarmed with children, who looked healthy and happy to a degree, splashing about in the shallow water, and rushing down with shouts to meet the steamer as we drew up.

The rent which is paid for the Murray River co-operative settlements varies from 2½d. to 3d. per acre—little enough, but more than the Government received from the squatters who held the land previous to the beginning of last year.

At each place the leading men to whom I spoke agreed that small associations of from twenty-five to thirty families were more manageable than larger ones. In every case the settlers who spoke to me expressed themselves as firm believers in co-operation, and as confident in the prospects of their settlement, provided only dissensions did not spring up or increase.

That there have been—and, indeed, are—dissensions is certain. No one denies it; but, except at Pyap, I saw nothing at all serious, and even there I was told that things were improving. At the Waikerie Settlement a split had caused the Government to divide the association into two, the minority being formed into the Ramco Association, whose settlement was the first I visited. I dare say something of the sort will have to be done at Pyap. But I am bound to say that the general picture left upon my mind by these curious and interesting associations was as hopeful as it was novel.

So long as the Kingston Government remain in office they will receive friendly and liberal treatment, and for their sakes I trust that a change of Ministry in Adelaide may be long deferred. No doubt an unsympathetic Commissioner of Lands could very speedily set the villages by the ears.

The advantages of co-operation apparent on the surface are: The cheapness with which the settlers live, the solid work that union enables them to do, and the scale on which they can set about it. Irrigation, indeed, would be impossible without co-operation, unless the settlers are to be clients of some big irrigation company, as in the case of the Chaffey Brothers' settlements, or unless the State undertook the work of irrigation. What I most wish to draw your attention to is the great fact that in ten months or less two thousand human beings, mostly poor artisans or labourers, and their families have been actually planted on the soil, far away from street-corners and lamp-posts, and are actively engaged in literally turning the desert into gardens. Surely this is better than relief-works, or even employment on public works of an unproductive character!

Taking the homestead blocks and co-operative settlements of South Australia together, I was as surprised as pleased at their extent and the promise they gave. Though not all very recent, or all the work of the Kingston Government, they owe much to that Ministry collectively, and to members of it individually. From the untiring courtesy shown me by Mr. Kingston, Dr. Cockburn, and their colleagues, I am sure that any officer whom we sent over to inspect the blocks and collective settlements would be actively helped by them in his work.

I have tried to give you some idea of how successful that work seems to me to have been in coping with the "unemployed" difficulty, and in helping poor and often unskilled people to make homes for themselves on the land. I cannot too earnestly urge upon you how strongly I feel that we can learn from South Australia in this matter, just as I dare say they can learn from us in other respects relating to land and settlement.

As head of the Labour Department I can only look enviously at a colony where the yearly call is not made on a Labour Bureau to find work again and again for the same men, and where the same complaints and distress do not arise in each succeeding winter. If neither you nor the Minister of Lands can spare the time to visit South Australia and Victoria, I have the honour to suggest that some experienced officer—say, Mr. March—should without delay visit the Adelaide settlements, and the Koo-wee-rup Swamp in Victoria. If one of the Public Works officers could examine the system in force at the last-mentioned work, it would be all the better. I feel sure that the result would be information that would materially aid us in our endeavour to cope with the greatest difficulty we have had to struggle against during our term of office.

In urging upon you that we should now take a fresh departure, and push on the work of village settlement even faster than in recent years, I would point out that we have now the Land for Settlements Act on the statute-book. Moreover, the finance of last session provided us with money. Unless we set to work to settle labourers on the soil on something like a large scale, I do not see how we are to hope for anything like finality in dealing with the unemployed. They will simply take what work we have to give and clamour for more. Even the settlement of Cheviot, splendid success though it has been from every other point of view, has left the "unemployed" difficulty in Christchurch only partially reduced. It has helped Canterbury to get through two bad winters. But in a month or two we shall have to face the same difficulty. What do we mean to do? Any immediate and large extension of the public-works policy I regard as financially out of the question. Even if it were not, it would be only a stop-gap. The aim and end of our labour policy—our co-operative system, Bureau, and liberal land-laws—should be the placing of all competent surplus labour on the land.

If South Australia, with not much more than half our population, and a dry climate, has put twelve thousand human beings on small allotments and co-operative settlements, surely such an achievement is well worth our study, and, so far as possible, our prompt imitation.

W. P. REEVES.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,400 copies), £4 17s.

By Authority: SAMUEL COSTALL, Government Printer, Wellington.—1895.

Price 6d.]