

SESS. II.—1897.
NEW ZEALAND.

BEET-ROOT SUGAR.

CULTIVATION OF SUGAR-BEET, AND MANUFACTURE OF SUGAR THEREFROM IN VICTORIA, AND
STATISTICAL DATA OF OTHER COUNTRIES RELATING THERETO.

[Reprint of Paper presented in 1894 to both Houses of Parliament in Victoria by Command of His
Excellency the Governor.]

Laid on the Table by Leave of the House.

FOR several years past the conviction has been gaining ground that the Colony of Victoria is eminently suited for the beet-sugar industry, and in the Premier's manifesto to the people of Victoria, 11th November, 1894, the following sentence appears: "It is intended by every means to foster producing industries, and to encourage the growth of sugar-beet, flax, and other products for home consumption and export."

General attention having been thus prominently directed to this subject, the Minister of Agriculture has deemed it desirable to collect all the information available, and to herewith present it in a concise form to the honourable members of both Houses of Parliament.

The question of promoting this most important branch of industry in Victoria is by no means of very recent origin, as we find that almost thirty years ago the Melbourne Press has paid considerable attention thereto.

The *Age* of the first June, 1867, says: "At last the very great importance and usefulness of this branch of industry have been recognised; its beneficial influence is further seen in its tendency to diminish the curse of slavery still existing in some of the tropical countries where sugar is produced, and to improve in no small degree the condition of the working-classes in all countries where the cultivation of the sugar-beet and the manufacture of sugar therefrom have been introduced," &c.

The *Express and Telegraph*, 1868: ". . . . would not the practicability of experimenting upon the cultivation of beet-roots in this colony for the purpose of manufacturing sugar be a good subject for the consideration of our various farmers' clubs and chamber of manufactures? We commend the matter to the attention of practical men who are desirous of extending the sphere of colonial industry, and adding from time to time to the list of our products."

The *Daily Herald*, 1868: ". . . . there may be some delay in bringing about a large production of sugar-beet just at present in this country we have no doubt that in a year or two hence its culture in Victoria will be thoroughly established."

The *Australasian*, of the 10th November, 1866, says: "Although the prevailing opinion in Europe is that the beet does not grow well in warm climates, we may rest perfectly satisfied that Victoria suits it; and, after a few years' experience, as large crops will be carted off these soils as were raised in any part of Europe."

Practical experiments with the growth of sugar-beet have indeed been carried on in this colony for over thirty years past. So long ago as 1860 a "mixed crop yielding 43 tons of sugar-beet per acre was produced on the Government Experimental Farm at Royal Park," says Mr. Thomas Skilling, the then director, "thus incontestably proving the capabilities of our soil and climate in this direction, and enabling me, as the result of this experiment, to declare Victoria to be the home of the sugar-beet." Unfortunately, no record exists of the quality of the beet produced in this early Victorian experiment. Further tests, however, have clearly demonstrated the fact that, in conformity with all other countries, the beet cultivation in this colony, under increasing attentions to the growing crops, has proved itself to be of an emphatically progressive nature. Thus, for instance, the Secretary for Agriculture, in his report for 1874, says, "According to the returns sent in, it appears that the roots manufactured into sugar and spirit gave on an average 7·09 per cent. of sugar only, a quantity much too small to render the manufacture of sugar from beet-root a profitable industry in Victoria."

Continued experimenting with this plant by the Agricultural Department has been attended with very material success, so much so that in his report for 1889-90 the Agricultural Chemist was enabled to state that "the results remove all doubts as to the possibility of growing beets in this colony as rich in sugar as they are in Europe."