

SETTLEMENTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

Only three settlements have been established—namely, at Pitt Town, Wilberforce, and Bega. The total area occupied by these settlements is 5,140 acres—namely, Pitt Town, 2,150; Wilberforce, 1,630; Bega, 1,360.

The number of settlers originally enrolled was 145—namely, Pitt Town, 96; Wilberforce, 35; Bega, 14; total, 145.

The expenditure has been about £8,900—namely, at Pitt Town, £6,705; Wilberforce, £1,540; Bega, about £655; total, £8,900.

The value of improvements, including working-plant, is estimated as follow: Pitt Town, £5,992; Wilberforce, £1,718; Bega, about £600; total, £8,310.

It cannot therefore be said that the settlements are a success financially, and the cause seems to me apparent when the manner in which they were formed and the quality of the soil are taken into consideration.

First, with respect to Pitt Town, some seven hundred men were registered at the Labour Bureau as applicants for land in this settlement, and about one hundred men were selected and sent to occupy an area of 2,150 acres of second-class land. Many of the men had no previous experience, their wives and families were in a destitute condition, their landlords were turning them out of their houses because they were unable to pay their rent, and these men, with their families, were sent to settle on a block of land, a large proportion of which was only fit for grazing purposes. Under such circumstances, how can they be expected to succeed? And this is not all. The Act provides that Boards of Control may be nominated or appointed for the management of these settlements. Unfortunately, the original Board appointed to manage the affairs at Pitt Town was not a success. It is stated that the Board permitted an undue waste of money in the purchase of luxuries. For every shilling spent for bread twice as much was spent for butter, and it is alleged there was extravagance of all sorts. Then, again, it is said the Board did not agree amongst themselves, nor were they able to work together. It is true the Board was composed of men, many of whom had philanthropic views and kindly dispositions, yet, through weak management and internal dissensions amongst themselves, the Board soon became a source of weakness rather than of strength to successful settlement. It is not surprising, therefore, that the members resigned, and the Government appointed a Board, composed partly of Government officers and representatives nominated by the settlers, to manage and control the settlement.

The number of settlers now at Pitt Town comprise eighty-eight men, eighty-one women, and 275 children under fourteen years of age; of the eighty-eight men, seven are single. The Board of Control appoint a Superintendent, who is the responsible Executive Officer for the direction of the works undertaken, and the management of the settlers in relation to their employment. The men are put into gangs by the Superintendent, and work forty-eight hours per week under his directions, and under the co-operative system; they draw for food and clothing goods to the value of 5s. per week for male adults, 2s. for female adults (wives of settlers), and 1s. for each child. The maximum amount must not exceed 14s. per week for families, and 5s. per week for single men.

In the building used as a store I observed the following:—

“*Notice.*—On and after Monday next, the 18th February, absolutely no credit will be given at the store or butcher’s shop. Settlers who are short must borrow from each other. George Waite, Superintendent.”

If it was necessary to show the mistake of placing a large number of people on inferior land, a better illustration than the above could hardly be given. It is not the fault of the settlers, or that they are idle, as the Superintendent assured me they all worked very well, but in the fact that too many men have been placed on poor land, and consequently it cannot yield sufficient to support the number.

5. MR. MARCH’S REMARKS.

WHAT MAY BE DONE IN NEW ZEALAND.

And now the question will naturally arise: “What can be done in New Zealand, and what recommendations can be made to deal successfully with a difficulty—the excess of labour—which is continually arising in the large centres of population?” I find in all the Australian Colonies there has been great scarcity of work, and in several employment is still most difficult to obtain. New Zealand by no means stands alone in this respect. Unfortunately, also, this unemployed difficulty is no new thing amongst us. It has been constantly cropping up for years past, and will continue to do so until a radical cure is provided.

There is no easy or royal road to prosperity, but I have seen that it can be attained by industry, perseverance, and sheer hard work; and am decidedly of opinion that in this colony, where there is so much remunerative work to be done, there should be very few, if any, unemployed among the able-bodied men. In order to bring this about I would respectfully recommend:—

1. That more vigorous measures should be adopted to promote settlement under the village homestead system on suitable land in country districts, and the acquisition of land under the Land for Settlements Act, near large centres, for the same purpose.

The regulations under “The Lands Improvement and Native Lands Act, 1894,” provide that: “The Commissioner of Crown Lands, or the Chief Surveyor of the district, will in each case select the men who are to form the association.” I think similar power should be given in connection with the occupation of village-homestead settlement lands, more especially where those lands have been acquired under “The Land for Settlements Act, 1894.” Take, for instance, land purchased near a town or city. There the object is to offer some little assistance to artisans and others