

1919.
NEW ZEALAND.

PRISONERS OF WAR AT SOMES ISLAND

(REPORT OF MR. JUSTICE CHAPMAN RESPECTING THE TREATMENT OF).

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.

REPORT.

To His Excellency the Governor-General of New Zealand.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

The commission issued to me on the 12th day of March, 1918, directs me to inquire into and report upon the treatment of prisoners of war and other persons now interned at Somes Island.

I have inquired very carefully into this subject, and now have to submit the following report to Your Excellency :—

1. GENERAL.

When Government was suddenly faced with the emergency of war it had to provide a place for the internment of dangerous or suspected persons, and it at once became necessary to detain all such alien enemies. The number detained grew as seamen arrived, and has been continuously growing from various causes. This detention camp has been since its institution in August, 1914, under the command of Major Dugald Matheson.

The most suitable place available was Somes Island, in Wellington Harbour, on which, about forty years before, large buildings had been erected for housing immigrants who had to undergo quarantine. At that date there was an extensive immigration as a direct result of Government policy, and when this came to an end there was not much use for the buildings, but they were kept in repair.

The island became in course of time a stock-quarantine station, where valuable animals imported into the Dominion were housed until they could be safely landed. For this purpose some of the land was enclosed and cultivated.

The island has the same climate as Wellington Harbour. Frost is seldom experienced; snow is unknown. Persons accustomed to a warm climate, however, feel the cold there, especially when a southerly gale comes in. The summer climate is very mild, but it must be described as windy, the wind being at times violent, though seldom excessively so. There is a considerable rainfall, generally in showers alternating with sunshine. The soil is a somewhat porous clay which rapidly turns to mud, but which dries rapidly when the rain takes off. The climate being windy assists to dry the roads and yards, but they require constant attention; it also greatly assists in the maintenance of sanitary conditions. The best testimony that can be given to the salubrity of the climate is that the death-rate in New Zealand is under 10 per 1,000, and that there is no more healthy place in the Dominion than this spot. Wellington is situated in latitude 41°14' S., longitude 174°44' E.