

No. 34.

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SIR,—

Downing Street, 14th July, 1926.

I have the honour to transmit to Your Excellency, for the information of your Ministers, copies of a report on the group settlements in Western Australia (Cmd. 2673).

I have, &c.,

L. S. AMERY.

Governor-General His Excellency General Sir C. Fergusson, Bart.,
LL.D., G.C.M.G., K.C.B., D.S.O., M.V.O., &c.

Enclosure.

REPORT ON THE GROUP SETTLEMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

By W. BANKES AMERY, C.B.E., British Government Representative for Migration in Australia.

1. IN the company of Lord Burnham and other members of the Imperial Press Conference, I inspected the group settlements in the Busselton (Abba River) area on the 28th October, 1925, and in the Margaret River District on the 29th October. On the 3rd November I inspected the Peel Estate, on the 5th November the Catterick group at Hester, near Bridgetown, in each case accompanying Lord Burnham and the Press Delegation. On the 8th November I set out in a motor-car, accompanied by Mr. G. M. Richardson, the Field Supervisor of the Group Settlements, for a fortnight's tour of the settlements in the Manjimup, Jarnadup, Pemberton, Northcliffe, and Denmark areas. I regret that through lack of time I was unable to visit the settlements round about Augusta.

Historical.

2. There can be no question that when the scheme was inaugurated the settlers, often arriving at the rate of one hundred families per month, came in greater numbers than could be satisfactorily handled and were faced by many difficulties. I am told by the Supervisors, who worked unceasingly to make the burden as light as possible, that the great majority of the settlers, realizing the difficulties which had to be contended against, exercised great patience and resource, and that serious difficulties could not have been obviated had the settlers not "played the game."

3. In those days the shacks were all erected around a central dump, near the foreman's quarters, the store-shed, &c. This system was very convenient in many respects, as it enabled the foreman to supervise his charges effectively, and it facilitated the delivery of stores, &c. Further, it prevented any intense feeling of isolation in the bush. But it was speedily discovered that there were serious disadvantages in the system, as there was little or no occupation for the women when the men were away. "Tidying" a shack is not a long task, and time was soon heavy on their hands. Further, there were no schools to divert the children's attention. The result was that quarrels between the children, leading to quarrels between the women, became alarmingly frequent, and threatened to disturb the peace of the whole community. As soon as was practicable, therefore, the men were given an opportunity to remove their shacks to their own blocks, where, as soon as a piece of land had been sufficiently cleared, the women could usefully employ themselves in growing vegetables, rearing poultry, &c., on the property which was eventually to become their own. In all future groups the shacks will be erected on the individual blocks in the first instance, though the officials of the scheme are somewhat fearful of the effect on the new settlers of the first few nights in the bush in these circumstances, as the nearest neighbour may in some cases be as far as a quarter of a mile or more away.

4. It was perhaps inevitable that in the early days of the scheme, when the Government were concentrating every effort in an endeavour to accommodate the maximum number of settlers, difficulty was experienced in matters such as the following:—

(a) Selecting the group settlers from amongst the general run of migrants. Apparently every married settler automatically went to a group without any preliminary training on a farm, as was contemplated during the negotiations in England. Many nominated and full-paying passengers applied for and were admitted to the scheme.

(b) The selection of the administrative staff.

(c) The provision of hospital accommodation, particularly for maternity cases. There was hardship for a time on these points, though this has since been rectified.

(d) The adequate provision of roads and railways. The badness of the tracks separating the settlers from the nearest shops and doctor in the early days is quite indescribable. At Denmark, group 113, which has been established over two years, is thirty miles away from the nearest shop and doctor, and the road to it, which is now of excellent quality, has only just been finished. I believe that during the negotiations in London a railway from Denmark to Pemberton which would pass near this group was spoken of, but this railway, though authorized by Parliament, has not yet been begun. Similarly, the road from Pemberton to Northcliffe, which is nearly thirty miles long, has only just been finished. This applies also to main roads radiating from Northcliffe itself to the outlying Northcliffe groups, some of which are fully ten miles away from Northcliffe itself.

(e) The provision of stores at which the settlers can purchase the necessaries of life. Private enterprise came along as quickly as possible, but high prices are frequently charged, and the cost of delivery is added in some cases. On the Denmark group 113 above referred to the cost of delivery amounts to as much as 4s. 6d. a hundredweight, recently reduced to 2s. 6d. a hundredweight.