

REPORT.

THE SELECT COMMITTEE of the House of Representatives, appointed April 18, 1856, to enquire into and report as to the nature and amount of Land Scrip issued in the Colony, and already satisfied, and of the amount of all such Land Scrip remaining unsatisfied, and of all outstanding and unsatisfied Land Orders, report as follows :—

Your Committee have enquired into the subjects referred to it, and taken evidence thereon. There is some difficulty in ascertaining the particulars, but they find the facts, as far as they can be ascertained, to be as follows.

Scrip has been issued to a great extent in all the Settlements except Canterbury and Otago. The circumstances under which the issue took place were as follows ; 1st, as regards the Settlements of Wellington, New Plymouth, and Nelson, which were founded by the New Zealand Company ; that body having failed to a great extent to give possession of the lands purchased of it and paid for in cash several years before, or having given possession of worthless land, entered into arrangements for the adjustment of the claims of the purchasers. The basis of the adjustment was, a right of re-selection where desired, and an award of compensation in satisfaction for the loss occasioned by the delay in the performance of the contract. In Wellington the compensation was on a fixed scale of 150 acres in addition to every 100 originally purchased, in the case of residents, and 75 acres additional in the case of absentees. At Nelson and New Plymouth the claims of residents were adjusted by arbitration ; those of absentees were taken at a fixed amount. Residents in all cases were required to select, within certain districts, then provided by the Company ; absentees from districts to be thereafter assigned by the Company, but which were not assigned before it ceased from its colonizing operations. The right of selection was to be exercised within twelve months after any district had been declared open for it ; and had it been effected during the continuance of the company's operations, could of course only have been made in those districts within which the Native title was then extinguished ; and in all cases the right of selection was limited to the Settlement within which the claim arose.

The functions and obligations of the Company devolved on the Government in July, 1850, at which date the claims of resident purchasers had been for the most part satisfied by the selection of land, but those of the absentees remained unprovided for. •

In 1851 an Ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council of the Colony, the effect of which was to re-open the adjustments effected by the Company, and to give to all purchasers under it a right of re-selection, while it provided a Commission to adjudicate upon all claims arising out of contracts with that body. Parties desiring to re-select, or in whose favour an award of the Commissioners was made, were to be entitled to Scrip issued by the Colonial Government, which was to be taken as cash, at a fixed rate, at all Government land sales within the Colony, except those within the limits of hundreds in New Ulster, (practically within the present limits of the Province of Auckland) and the town site of New Plymouth. The 1st of January, 1853, was fixed by the Ordinance as the latest time within which claims could be preferred, unless in cases where it was made to appear to the satisfaction of the Governor that the claimant was for some reasonable and sufficient cause prevented from preferring his claim within that period. Practically, no limit was adhered to, and your Committee understand that a very large number of the claims were preferred after the date assigned, and without any reasonable or sufficient cause shown, or required to be shown, for the delay.

In the Province of Auckland, Land Scrip has been issued by the Government apparently without legal authority, chiefly in satisfaction of old Land Claims, originating either in purchases from the Natives by individuals, before the establishment of British authority in the Islands, or in the failure of the Government to give possession of Lands which it had sold.

There appears to be six classes of claims, for which Scrip has been, or ought to be issued, and of which a large amount has not yet been exercised by the holders.