

REPORT OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON COLONIAL INDUSTRIES.

THE Joint Committee appointed to inquire what steps, if any, should be taken to ascertain and develop the producing and manufacturing interests of the Colony, regret that the time at their disposal, as well as the numerous important duties, which during the Session have engaged their attention in common with that of all other members of Parliament, have prevented their devoting to the subject remitted to them that continuous attention which its importance deserved. The subject, however, was so comprehensive, and opened up so extensive a field of inquiry, that under no circumstances would it have been possible for them to do full justice to it within the limits of an ordinary session of Parliament. They can only indicate the direction they think legislation should take, with a view to developing the Industrial resources of the Colony; while they leave the Parliament to decide as to the desirability or otherwise of instituting further inquiries by means of a Committee to be specially appointed for that purpose.

The Committee took such evidence as was readily available upon the spot, but did not deem it desirable to incur the expenditure which would have been requisite to bring it from a distance. This evidence, as well as numerous communications bearing upon the subject of their inquiries which the Committee have received, are appended herewith.

The evidence given by Dr. Hector is of an extremely valuable character. It affords abundant proof of the vast natural resources of the country, and establishes the insufficiency of the efforts which have hitherto been made to develop them. Increase of population and improved means of communication, doubtless, are the primary requisites to the development of the industrial resources of the Colony; but as these matters already engage the attention of the Legislature, the Committee do not feel called upon specially to report in reference thereto. The Committee have confined their inquiries to the consideration of those steps which should be taken to develop industrial resources which can be successfully prosecuted with the high wages current in these colonies. To attract and to keep a large population, those industries which yield the highest return to the labour employed in their prosecution should first be developed. Nothing is more calculated to attract a large labouring population to these shores than the knowledge that constant employment at remunerative rates of wages is to be found here. A general prosperity of the labour class implies, in these colonies, where this class of the population is more or less of a migratory description, increase of population and revenue, with a development of the productive resources. Low wages and irregular employment imply emigration to more favoured regions, a falling off in the revenue, and a general depreciation of the value of property of all descriptions. It therefore becomes a matter of the utmost importance that, without artificially stimulating high wages, we should yet do all in our power to promote the development of those industries which can be worked to the greatest advantage to the labouring classes, and thereby promote a constant flow of immigration.

The Committee have agreed to the following suggestions:—

1. That to promote the development of large tracts of country known to be auriferous, but at present unworked, owing to the absence of any adequate water supply, it is desirable that Government should grant pecuniary assistance to enable a sufficient supply of water to be introduced.

2. That the law regarding the finding and working of minerals should be assimilated throughout the Colony. A mining population is always of a migratory character; and to insure to the Colony the results of the observations and investigations of persons practically acquainted with minerals, it is essential that these should feel assured of being able to obtain a beneficial interest in their discoveries, in whatever Province their business or inclination may lead them. The great attention devoted to mining matters in Australia and California is undoubtedly to a great extent due to the enlightened and liberal mining regulations which prevail there.

3. That the law as regards the working of quartz reefs should be altered, so as to adapt our legislation to the different circumstances under which quartz-reefing is prosecuted in this Colony, as indicated in Dr. Hector's evidence. It appears that in New Zealand the quartz reefs in which gold is at present generally mined are of a horizontal rather than vertical character, and thus quartz reef claims are likely to be worked out sooner than in most other auriferous countries. The present state of the law, it is probable, will practically put a stop to the working of these reefs when any considerable depth is reached, as it may pay a company to continue to follow the lode down to a greater depth when it may not pay them to compensate a neighbouring claim for working in their boundary.

4. That the existing uncertainty as to the right of owners of the soil to the precious metals existing below should be settled by law. The uncertainty existing upon this subject consequent upon a recent decision of the Law Officers of the Crown alike deters private landowners as well as gold miners from prosecuting explorations upon private property.

5. That with a view to attracting attention to the tin mines which not improbably exist in the Middle and Southern Islands, and to promote their speedy development, a suitable reward should be offered to the first discoverer of a remunerative mine.

6. That special attention should be directed to the development of the coal mines at the Grey and Buller Rivers, so as to render the Colony independent of foreign supplies; and that, if requisite, the Government should advance, on the security of any responsible company formed to work these mines, the amount of money requisite for the construction of a tramway or railroad. The evidence taken by your Committee leads to the belief that of all the coal mines known to exist in New Zealand (and of which the value and importance can scarcely be exaggerated, and promise to have the most important