

Mr. Warden GILES Report to PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, Nelson.

SIR,—

Westport, April 23, 1872.

I have the honor to furnish for the information of the Government and Provincial Council, my usual yearly report for that portion of the South-west Gold Fields under my charge as Warden.

*Inangahua.*—The principal feature in my last yearly Report was the rapid development and growth of the important quartz reefing district of the Inangahua. I took charge of that district in October, 1870, and the provisions made for its working were detailed in my last yearly Report; in which I also pointed out the strong probability that the district would very soon outgrow those provisions, or any others that might be made by a Warden residing at Westport. The rapidity with which this actually took place was not greater than was expected by those who, like myself, had watched from the commencement the growth of that remarkable district. Accordingly, it was found necessary early in the present year that there should be a resident Warden at Reefton; and after the court held there by me in the month of January, I handed over the charge of the district to Mr. Broad, and have not visited it since.

*Gold Mining Leases.*—At the time of my resigning the charge of the Inangahua district, a large number of applications for gold mining leases were waiting for hearing, and an agitation against the granting of such leases was set on foot at Reefton. It is not my present business to discuss a question the further progress of which is better known to the Government than to myself. But, in order to show the principles upon which I have always acted with regard to applications for leases at the Inangahua or elsewhere, I may be allowed to quote my own remarks on the subject in my last yearly Report:—

“The power to grant leases of ground for gold mining purposes, conferred by the Gold Fields Act, has proved very beneficial in the case of poor ground, and of ground requiring large works of any kind involving a heavy expense. I think it probable that it will prove equally beneficial in the case of quartz workings. The security of tenure conferred by a lease is the condition which capitalists desire to induce them to invest money in quartz mining, and I think that some of the existing quartz claims may with advantage be converted into leases, subject to proper conditions according to the special circumstances of each case. This appears to me a very different thing from the indiscriminate granting of leases at the beginning of a new rush, to the exclusion of the working miners who may be desirous of taking up the ground in ordinary claims according to the rules. Under such circumstances, I have always thought that leases are to be as distinctly discouraged as they are afterwards to be readily granted when it appears that their only effect will be to facilitate the working of the ground without prejudice to the miners, whose general right to take up ground under the rules, is, I think, except under very peculiar circumstances, always to be regarded as superior to the claims of any one else to a privilege the granting of which is entirely a matter of discretion with the Government.”

Upon this view of the subject I based such recommendations or refusals, as I had occasion to make whilst I had the charge of the Inangahua district, and I do not think that any difficulty is likely to arise in the application of these principles in practice. But I am quite sure that the experience and judgment of my successor will be well able to deal successfully with all questions that may arise in relation to the well working of the important district of which he has taken charge.

*Westport, Charleston, Brighton.*—From the time of my giving up the charge of the Inangahua, I have, at the request of the Provincial Government, undertaken the duties of the district of Charleston and Brighton, vacated by Mr. Broad. My present district is therefore rather an extensive one, reaching from the Razorback, on the south, to an indefinite distance along the coast north of Westport. So far as ordinary work, however, is concerned, the limits may be said to be Brighton on the one hand, and the terraces to the north of Westport on the other. I have found that the business of Brighton is so much diminished that a monthly Court is now all that is required. The business of Charleston is capable of being disposed of by means of a weekly Court, which, together with miscellaneous business requiring my attention, demands my presence in Charleston two or three days in each week. By this means the work of the whole district can be efficiently performed, provided that its present quantity is not increased, and that travelling is not frequently hindered by the weather. With reference to the latter point no important hindrance has yet taken place, but the experiment can scarcely be said to have been fully tried until the winter season has elapsed. But there is no doubt that any material increase in the amount of business would render it impossible for the work to be satisfactorily done by one Warden, whose time is already constantly occupied in attending to the two principal places of Westport and Charleston.

*Decline of Coast Diggings.*—The opening of the Inangahua reefs has not been without a marked effect upon the old diggings on the coast, where the mining population has experienced a considerable reduction. I shall append to this report some statistics which, although to a great extent conjectural, may yet assist in giving some notion of the present condition of the district. The falling off in the population has been very marked at the northern terraces, and at Addison's Flat. Charleston also has experienced its share of the decline, and at all these places I have no doubt that ground has been abandoned which is capable of paying fair wages, and which will be readily taken up again hereafter by men who are not able to realise all their expectations at the reefs. Beyond the fact that the mining population has diminished owing to the attractions of the reefs, there can be little to report in connection with this district.

*Peculiarities at Charleston.*—At Charleston it is true there may be matters which I have not yet had time or opportunity to observe. One of the principal peculiarities of that district appears to me to be the extreme complexity of the rights held by the miners to water and other privileges, owing to the crowding of the claims in and about the numerous creeks and water courses. Another difficulty is the mode of discharging tailings, which, owing to the extensive nature of the ground-slucing operations carried on, are of very great quantity, and which have already silted up the harbour to a great extent, and in another place have covered the main road, and threaten still further injury. I am not prepared at present, however, to make any suggestions for the removal of these difficulties.