

No. 22.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the MINISTER for IMMIGRATION.

(No. 1439.)

7, Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.,

SIR,—

10th July, 1874.

Referring to your letters of 9th and 10th April (Nos. 93 and 97), I beg to offer the following observations:—

In the first place, with regard to my supposed or implied inaction in the matter of "The Immigrants Land Act, 1873," copies of which were forwarded under cover of your letter of 21st October, 1873 (No. 218), it is true that I have not reported specially on the steps taken by me to give effect to your instructions; but it does not follow that I have under-rated the importance of your letter or neglected to carry out your views. On the contrary, as I shall now endeavour to show, I have used every possible means of bringing the Act before those classes of the community whom it is intended to influence; and the number of applications for certificates under this Act (which continue to increase daily) afford evidence of the fact that the inducements held out by the Act are very generally understood and appreciated.

Immediately on receiving your instructions on the subject, I had the Act reprinted in a convenient pamphlet form (copy enclosed), and from time to time I have altogether ordered some seven thousand copies, which have been extensively circulated in various parts of the country. In addition to this, the provisions of the Act have been made widely known by means of advertisements in the leading newspapers; and the local agents in all parts of the kingdom have been instructed to give it due prominence in their intercourse with intending emigrants. Furthermore, I have directed Mr. Kirchner, the chief Emigration Agent on the Continent, to get the Act translated and printed in German. I attach some importance to this, as we are likely to obtain a far larger number of small farmers able and willing to pay their own passages, on the terms of the Act, from the Continent than from this country.

In connection with this subject, I may inform the Government that I recently had a visit from Mr. R. S. Parry, formerly High Sheriff for Carnarvonshire, who is interesting himself in a proposed movement of Welshmen to New Zealand. He assured me that the association which he represents would be prepared to ship from 500 to 1000 families, all of whom would pay their own passages to the colony provided they could have some guarantee of employment on public works, or some other assurance that they would not be allowed to starve in their newly acquired land, and before they could have time to make it reproductive. This body consists chiefly of slate quarrymen, and others, all more or less accustomed to agricultural pursuits. He represented that a considerable number of the heads of families would have command of a fair amount of capital, and that the whole of them belonged to a very deserving class. Their language is Welsh, and having a community of interest, there would be every probability of their holding together in their new home, and thoroughly developing any district that might be assigned to them.

I discussed the subject very fully with Mr. Parry, and he has promised to communicate with me again at an early date. I intimated to him my readiness, as soon as his scheme was sufficiently matured, to visit Wales myself, and meet those intending emigrants. I gathered, however, that the conditions he would insist upon, especially as to the quantity of land required and the guarantee of employment on public works, would be such as the Government could hardly accede to. I have mentioned this as a significant proof that the Land Act has been widely disseminated, and has attracted a considerable amount of favourable consideration in this country.

There are other points adverted to in your letter of 9th April which appear to demand a reply from me; and, while most anxious to avoid anything controversial, I must be allowed to make a few observations thereon.

1. The local agents are chosen with all the care that can be exercised in such cases; and their remuneration is entirely dependent on the success of their operations. In a few cases complaints have reached me as to the conduct of agents, and I have had to dismiss them; but as a body they have discharged their duties, so far as I can discover, well and faithfully.

2. Every care and trouble, short of a personal inspection by myself, is taken to insure the emigrants being of good character. In spite of every precaution, persons of an undesirable class will, of course, sometimes be passed; but, on the whole, and especially since I have discontinued the recruiting of emigrants in London and its neighbourhood, I venture to think that the standard of character and quality attained is a very fair one. The Immigration Commissioners' reports lately received from the colony appear to confirm me in this conclusion.

3. I fully concur in your views as to the evil of introducing emigrants of an undesirable class, and to the policy of sparing no expense that may be necessary to exclude objectionable applicants. I have found the Agricultural Unions valuable agencies for securing men of the right class. But the Government must not for one moment suppose that any such unfettered discretion as that implied in your remarks has ever been given by me to the representatives of these Unions. On the contrary, I have enforced all my regulations to the very letter in all cases, whether the applicant belonged to any Union or not. The managers of the Union, even if so inclined (which I am not disposed to admit), have no opportunity of weeding out and palming off upon me "the least meritorious of their members."

4. I feel myself quite unprepared to discuss with you the genuineness of the certificates of character furnished to applicants for free passages, inasmuch as the doubts expressed in your letter appear to me to reflect on the honor and credibility of clergymen, magistrates, and other persons of high respectability, who are accustomed to sign these certificates. It is quite possible that in some cases, without any intention to deceive, written characters are given of a kind more favourable than the applicant is really entitled to. It must be obvious to you, however, that no amount of personal supervision on my part, or examination of the applicants, could prevent this happening.

5. I fully agree with the opinion expressed in your letter, that in the case of some of the single women lately sent out a sufficiently careful selection was not made. I have already written fully to