

As honorable members would see by the papers laid on the table, considerable differences have arisen between the Agent-General and the Government. The general state of the Agent-General's office was not thought to be quite satisfactory, and the Government last year appointed a gentleman from Canterbury to be Permanent Under Secretary to that department, and he went Home at the same time as Sir Julius Vogel. By papers I have laid on the table, honorable members will see that Sir Julius Vogel gave very excellent directions as to the organization, and laid down general rules for the performance of the various duties in that office; and I have every reason to believe that very great advantage will have resulted from his visit to England, and the re-arrangement of the general affairs of the office by himself and the Agent-General. I trust that all difficulties have now been removed.

The total number of persons who have been induced to come out to the colony under the provisions of the Immigrants Land Act, or rather the number registered under that Act up to the present time, is 798, and the total amount for which the Government is liable under the claims of these persons is £13,860. Actually they have only bought land to the extent of £1,700 at the present time.

There has been published in England during the year a second edition of the Official Handbook, and we are informed that very great good has resulted from the distribution of this book. We hear that it has awakened a very lively interest, not only among the labouring and farming classes, but also among that large class of persons possessing small capital; and many persons of considerable means have also been induced to come out to the colony through their attention having been directed to New Zealand by the Handbook. The return, showing the cost of it, has already been laid on the table of the House. The sum is undoubtedly large; but, considering all the circumstances, I think it will be found that the money has been well invested.

Honorable gentlemen are aware that when this scheme of immigration was first initiated, the Superintendents of the provinces were invited to assist the Government in the location of immigrants; and since they have been arriving in large numbers, the local administration has practically rested with the Superintendents. I must say that since I have had the honor to administer this department, I have received every assistance from those gentlemen. They have, I believe, sincerely endeavoured to carry out the works which they undertook on behalf of the colony; but they have not—and here I may be allowed to express an opinion rather in opposition to what fell from honorable gentlemen in Committee a short time ago—they have not devised, as I think they might reasonably have done, any scheme for settling the immigrants on the land. Now, my own view is quite clear on the matter. I consider that, having undertaken the distribution and management of the immigrants on arrival, the duty of settling them upon the land clearly devolved upon them, and not upon the General Government. My remarks refer to honorable gentlemen generally, especially to the honorable member for Avon, who said the Government had entirely neglected their duty in this matter. I contend that the duty devolved not upon this Government but upon the local Government which undertook the distribution and settlement of these immigrants. I do not altogether agree with those honorable gentlemen who think that nothing has been done in this direction. My own opinion is that a very great deal has been done. I had the pleasure of visiting the Provinces of Canterbury and Otago lately, and I must say that the efforts of the Superintendent of Canterbury to get the people settled about the country in all directions have been very great indeed. I found that he had not only built houses of various descriptions, or rather by grants in aid encouraged the immigrants to build them themselves, but had also devoted a great amount of personal attention to the matter, with the view of getting the people out of town and into the country, where they were sure ultimately to fall upon their legs. Considerable efforts had also been made in the Province of Otago, but not to so great an extent as in Canterbury.

Now, I have no hesitation at all in saying that it is, or will be, clearly the duty of the General Government, if they are going to assume the government of this country in place of the provinces, to provide some means, as I have already stated, by which the people can be systematically settled upon the land, and by which the land may be made valuable by being occupied by persons of small