

SESS. II.—1879.
NEW ZEALAND.

GOLD FIELDS COMMITTEE

(REPORT OF, ON PETITION OF R. H. J. REEVES, M.H.R., AND OTHERS, OF CHARLESTON AND WESTPORT, TOGETHER WITH MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(Brought up 31st October, 1879, and ordered to be Printed.)

REPORT.

THE Gold Fields Committee, to whom was referred the petition of R. H. J. Reeves, M.H.R., and others, of Charleston and Westport, Nelson South-West Gold Fields, representing the present inadequate supply of water there for mining purposes, and praying that inquiry be made into the subject, have directed me to report the following resolution, viz. :—

“That it is desirable that the Four-Mile Race should be constructed, and the Committee see no reason why the agreement made between the Government and the Buller County Council should not be carried out. They therefore recommend the Government to make provision accordingly.”

The evidence taken before the Committee is attached hereto.

31st October, 1879.

C. A. DE LAUTOUR,
Chairman.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 30TH OCTOBER, 1879.

J. B. FISHER, Esq., M.H.R., examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you be good enough to make a statement of the facts of this case?—I may state that in the Charleston District the whole of the area named in the petition is composed of gold-bearing cement; and some years ago, when the gold field was first opened, the richest part of it was worked out by means of crushing machines. The difficulty in the way of obtaining the gold there, particularly in the ground which is not rich enough to pay for crushing, has always been the want of water. It paid those who worked the richest part of the ground, even though they had but little water; but, as I have said, the richest parts have already been worked out. There now exists a large quantity of ground which could be worked profitably if there was plenty of water available. The question of constructing this Four-Mile Water-race has been before the Government for a number of years. Some years ago a company was formed for the purpose of bringing in this Four-Mile Water-race, which was estimated to cost £14,000, and about a mile and a half of the race was constructed. Then, however, the public works scheme came up, and this, with a number of other causes, conduced to take away the moneyed part of the population; and the result was, that the people who remained were not able to carry on the work. A large number of miners and others remained, however, in the hope that the work would be completed. The necessity for the work was strongly urged upon the Government in 1877, and a sum of £15,000 was placed on the estimates for the purpose of constructing the race. That vote, however, was allowed to lapse, the Government being full of other business. Last year further representations were made to the Government, and they instructed their Engineer, Mr. O'Connor, to examine into the matter and ascertain whether there was any necessity for this particular race, and to report on the subject. He made surveys, and prepared plans and specifications, which are all ready. Mr. O'Connor's report is printed in the Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1879 (Sess. I., E.—1, pp. 41–42). He says, “The project comprehended under the title ‘Four Mile Water-race,’ as set forth in previous annual reports, comprised—(1) The purchase of the Argyle Water-race Company's reservoir, service dams, and water-races (except only their race known as Race No. 2) at Charleston; (2) the improvement and enlargement of the said reservoir and works; and (3) the construction of a further supply race from the Four-Mile River to the said reservoir, with headworks at Four-Mile River.” With regard to the first of these points, relating to the purchase of the Argyle Company's water-race, I have only to say that the Government actually did purchase the race for £3,000. I was informed by the Government officers that the principal reason which actuated the Government in making this purchase was, that they thought that by doing so they would put an end to all anxiety with reference to the carrying-out of this scheme; they thought, in fact, that the prime movers in the matter were persons who wished to get rid of the Argyle Water-race. That was a mistake, however, on the part of the Government, who had not made themselves acquainted with the fact that those who had moved in the matter were really anxious to get water in order that they