

SESS. II.—1879.
NEW ZEALAND.

SYSTEM OF SELECTION OF LAND ON DEFERRED PAYMENTS

(REPORT OF COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS, INVERCARGILL, AS TO THE WORKING OF THE).

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by the Hon. Mr. Thomson, with leave of the House.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS to the Hon. the MINISTER of CROWN LANDS.

SIR,—

Crown Lands Office, Invercargill, 9th June, 1879,

Being desirous of ascertaining by personal inspection the progress made by the deferred-payment selectors on the east bank of the Maitara, I lately traversed the district from the Toi Tois to Tapanui, and beg to subjoin my report.

In 1871 I stood on a hill in the centre of the Toi Tois Hundred, and far as the eye could reach the noonday sun disclosed earth's bosom covered with its primeval carpet. The tussock lent its yellow hair to the breeze. The graceful head of the cabbage-tree quivered in its embrace. The brilliant green of the flax and tutu bushes glowed in contrast with the darker tints of the luxuriant fern, and the spirit of solitude brooded over the landscape. The purple shadows of descending night were unbroken by a single scintillation of light from cottage window or ruddy glow of cotter's fire, and, under the gently-falling beams of the mistress of the night, earth slumbered with the perfect rest of utter solitude.

In 1879 I stand on the same hill, and see stretched before me the undulating plains clothed with the strong breath of man's labour, the spirit of man's life. The sunbeam dances over well-tilled fields ripe with cultivated abundance. The soft autumn breeze, sighing through the golden effort of the dying summer, wafts along the glad some laughter of sunny childhood; kisses the russet cheek of the matron watching at her cottage door the gambols of her children; cools the brow of honest labour, as, resting for a moment the farmer surveys the bright landscape, and proudly realizes that the great gift of "The Master"—"the earth and the abundance thereof," is being turned to its legitimate use—the blessing of the many—while the grey smoke wreaths itself aloft from many a smiling homestead.

That the experiment of settling the waste lands of the Crown under a system of deferred payments has proved a perfect success in the Toi Tois District, there can be no doubt. In my report of 1873, when I recommended its adoption, there were not in an area of 58,500 acres more than ten settlers—the lessee of the run and a few others. The first block was surveyed and thrown open for application under the system in 1873. The whole block was applied for shortly after it was opened, and so satisfactory have the results proved to those who settled, that I do not think £10 an acre would induce any of them to sell out. This, success, moreover has been achieved despite the very considerable drawbacks of bad roads, and imperfect and tedious communication with any centre near the seaboard to secure a ready and remunerative sale for produce.

In my reports of 16th April, 1872, and 1st May, 1873, to the Provincial Government of Otago, I strongly recommended that the whole of the then unsold lands in the Tuturau, Makoreta, and Toi Tois Hundreds should be sold only under the system of deferred payments, and my recent inspection has more fully confirmed the opinion I then held, that this district was peculiarly adapted for settlement by small holders. Its climate, soil, natural drainage, timber, and admirable water supply in the many creeks and streams meandering through it, render it the choicest tract of country for successful yeoman agriculture to be found in New Zealand.

Proceeding northward along the east bank of the Maitara, the deferred-payment blocks are again touched, situated in the valley of the Waikaka, being the southernmost of a series which extend for some thirty-seven miles through the Waipahi, Chatton, Glenkenich, Greenvale, and Crookston Districts. Here the same stable prosperity evinces that the battle with nature is being fought out to a successful issue. In many instances the struggle is undoubtedly hard, owing to an insufficiency of material in commencing the campaign; but thrift, energy, practical acquaintance with the pursuit, assisted by the employment afforded by the surrounding large proprietors, will ultimately conquer, more particularly