

1885.

NEW ZEALAND.

DISPOSAL OF LAND FOR SPECIAL SETTLEMENT

(CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE AGENT-GENERAL AS TO THE) IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

No. 1.

The Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS to the AGENT-GENERAL.

(Telegram.)

Wellington, 8th June, 1885.

CAN you dispose to suitable farmers with small capital some special settlements, under conditions gazetted, if I place such settlements entirely at your disposal, with guarantee descriptions, farmers to pay own passages and instalments for surveys? It might be desirable a few should come in advance, families to follow. Would conditions require modification in any important particular?

No. 2.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the PREMIER, New Zealand.

(Telegram.)

SPECIAL settlement. I do not think prospect disposal here, subject compulsory residence and improving clauses.

No. 3.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 15th June, 1885.

I received in due course your telegram of the 8th instant, inquiring whether I could dispose in this country of some special settlements under the conditions that have been gazetted, if you placed such settlements entirely at my disposal, and guaranteed the descriptions of the land, it being understood that the farmers should pay their own passages and instalments for surveys. You added that it might be desirable that a few farmers should come in advance, leaving their families to follow; and you further asked me whether I thought the published conditions required modification in any important particular.

In reply, I sent you a message on the 9th instant, stating that I could see no prospect of disposing of any special settlement here upon the published conditions of compulsory residence and cultivation; and I now beg permission to state some of the grounds upon which I expressed that opinion.

I was in great doubt, from the first moment of receiving the Special Settlement Regulations in January, whether they would be likely to attract small farmers to the colony; but at any rate there never was much prospect of their being attracted unless I could give them exact and detailed information as to the sites set apart and the character of the land to be offered to them. While, therefore, I made public in the "Leaflets," which we distribute in large numbers, the fact of your intention to establish these special settlements, and also circulated the regulations themselves, I hardly expected any result. In the face of the immense efforts which are made by the Dominion of Canada to attract small farmers under liberal conditions, I long ago arrived at the conclusion that, under the restrictions in the Special Settlement Regulations, few farmers of the class we really want would be tempted to go out. This class has been worried and harried for many years past all over England, Scotland and Ireland by its conditions of tenure, by bad seasons, and by a collapse in prices; it is greatly disheartened, has lost money year by year, and is at last reduced to very great straits. People of this kind hug every shilling of what is left to them; and, although they are perfectly aware of the great advantage New Zealand offers them in climate as compared to Canada, they know they can get the best of soil in Canada or the States, and the difference in cost of passage is so serious to them that it carries the day. But, more than this, people who have been disheartened and dispirited by their tenancy of land they can never make their own long above everything else for liberty. You want something to set

against the difference of passage money; instead of this the difference is aggravated by restrictions to which they are not subjected elsewhere. Colonists who have been for some time in New Zealand, and have got accustomed to the severe restrictions of our land-law, can and do make light of them; but it is quite a different thing when you come to deal with people in this country, who are not only very ill-informed but naturally timid. They contrast your offer with what is offered to them by others, and again the difference in passage money turns the scale.

The Dominion Government spend thousands every year in advertising, lecturing, and otherwise bringing continually before the public in this country the advantages of Canada as a field for people with small capital; and with the illimitable extent of fertile land at their disposal, as well as the cheapness with which an emigrant can reach his destination there, New Zealand is always at a great disadvantage. A farmer going to the North-west Territory has not only a wide choice of good land, but can take it up with the greatest ease. The surveyed lines of every subdivision are ready marked for him on the prairie, and the moment he makes himself acquainted with these he can tell the position and extent not only of his own farm, but of any other in the country. He gets a grant of 160 acres free, on condition of three years' residence and cultivation, at a nominal payment of £2 for his "patent" or grant; he can secure the adjoining portions and sections, by pre-emption or otherwise, at the rate of from 8s. to 10s. per acre, though I ought to add that this latter privilege will cease in 1887; he is held to have performed his "homestead duties" if he has been a *bona fide* resident within a radius of two miles from his homestead. In the first year after entry he must have broken up ten acres of his homestead, in the second year have cropped these ten acres and broken up fifteen more, and in the third year have twenty-five acres in crop, besides fifteen broken up. Lastly, he can easily put up a "habitable house" on his homestead, and he may be "continually absent from it for six months in the year."

In Queensland farms in proclaimed "agricultural areas" may now be selected of not less than 320 or more than 1,280 acres, at a rent to be fixed by the Land Board, not being less than 3d. per acre per annum. When the conditions of fencing and improvements are fulfilled the settler gets a transferable lease for fifty years; and if he can show ten years' continued residence he can buy his holding, at a price to be fixed by the Land Board, not being less than £1 per acre. Grazing farms may be selected of not less than 2,560 nor more than 20,000 acres, at a rent to be fixed by the Land Board, not being less than 3d. per acre per annum; and when the conditions of fencing and so forth are fulfilled a transferable lease of thirty years is granted.

If these proposals, or those of Canada, are contrasted with ours, it will, I think, be evident that not much temptation exists for a small farmer to prefer New Zealand.

I have so often expressed my own opinion to the Government as to the best means of attracting farmers to the colony that I am unwilling to trouble you with a repetition of them; but each year's experience since I have been in England has only confirmed me in the opinion that, if you want really to tempt farmers to go out in any numbers, assistance must be given to them towards the cost of their passage. Permit me to repeat what I said in a letter to your predecessor, nearly eighteen months ago (31st January, 1884, No. 267*): "Referring to the class which above any other we want in the colony—namely, small farmers with moderate capital—there are thousands of small farmers who might easily be brought to New Zealand if we would adopt towards them a policy which may be expressed in these words: 'The Government will take you to New Zealand as cheaply as you can be taken to Manitoba.' I do not hesitate to say that each fortnightly steamer could be made to take out its complement of valuable settlers; and, if it pays the colony to bring out working-people, it would pay at least as well to devote part of the Immigration Fund to bringing out small farmers."

I am still convinced that, if such a policy could ever commend itself to the Government and Parliament, it might be made a great success. It would involve a good deal of organization and expense, and, above all, the periodical sending of good maps and very detailed information as to the land set apart for each special settlement, in addition to the general information given by the "Crown Lands Guide." As to the cost, it would, in my opinion, soon repay itself a hundred times over.

I have always thought that it ought to be quite immaterial to the Government whose land is occupied by a small farmer, so long as he does occupy it. While the colony was depending so largely upon the receipt of land revenue an immense area of land fit for settlement and cultivation was acquired on speculation, the greater part of which was in a state of wilderness and waste when I left to come to England, and, as far as I know, is a wilderness and waste to-day. I have always thought it infinitely better that this land should be occupied and cultivated than that people should ever be led to take up poor land, without means of communication, and at a distance from markets; and since there has been direct steam communication I have never ceased to regret that farmers were not being invited to go out and occupy really good land, whosever it might happen to be, by means of the only inducement really effective for the purpose—namely, the reduction of the cost of their passage to them. But, as I have never yet seen the least indication of my views being concurred in by either the Government or the Legislature, I should not feel that I ought to press them upon your own notice if I did not read your telegram as an invitation to express my opinion again for what it may be worth. Of course you will in any case be sure that, whatever may be my own opinions, if you resolve upon offering special settlements in this country, and send me specific instructions on the subject, I will do my best to give effect to them so long as I am Agent-General, and make them a success so far as any exertion of mine can help to do it.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Lands.

F. D. BELL.