

SESS. II.—1887.
NEW ZEALAND.

VINE-CULTURE, ETC., IN AMERICA

(REPORT ON), BY MR. G. E. ALDERTON.

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

No. 1.

MR. G. E. ALDERTON to the Hon. the MINISTER of LANDS.

SIR,—

Auckland, 15th December, 1886.

Herewith I have the honour to forward reports on different subjects which I inquired into during my journey through America, *en route* for England, in the early part of the year. Though Government only allowed me travelling expenses for two months, I devoted three months to the work, and then left it not half done. I regret not only that I was unable to complete my inquiries while in the States, but also that my leisure time has not been sufficient to enable me to do the report justice. A man might easily spend a year on this work, half of which he might spend travelling in the States—and every day he would be learning something new—and the other half he could profitably employ writing a book on the subject. It would be impossible to exhaust a subject a full knowledge of which necessarily embraces an acquaintance with chemistry, biology, entomology, meteorology, and other sciences. The field of information open to the student is practically limitless.

The practical conclusion to which I have come from my inquiries is this: That just precisely what they can do in California in regard to fruit-culture we can do here, at least in the northern part of New Zealand, with these differences: that we must substitute the American native grape for the European, which is almost exclusively in cultivation in California. The necessity for this alteration is caused by the difference in rainfall, California having a dry climate, while we have a comparatively wet one; but the difference is not to our detriment, since land is only valuable in California for fruit-culture where it can be irrigated, while here nature affords the necessary moisture, and all our lands are equally valuable. In many parts of California land suitable for fruit-culture fetches from £40 to £120 an acre—its limited character really giving the great value—but here there is no limit to area. We only want the fact demonstrated that we can do here what they do in California. It remains with the Government to do it.

The actual annual value of the fruit-crops of California is £2,000,000, and, when it is considered that the great bulk of this amount is the product of thousands of small landowners, who are settled on the land, and on the highway to prosperity, the immense value of such an industry to the State is at once apparent.

The climate of California varies according to latitude and the topography of the country. In some places in the north oranges mature earlier than in the south; but in California the counterpart of the New Zealand climate is found in many places. In Los Angeles and San Diego, in the south, the finest fruit-districts of the State, the mean temperature for every month of the year is almost similar to that of Auckland, to wit,—

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April.	May.	June.	July.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
San Diego ..	52·3	53·3	55·4	57·9	61·1	64·4	66·3	68·3	66·6	61·8	57·0	55·8
Auckland ..	52·9	51·8	53·4	55·3	58·3	61·8	65·6	68·9	68·9	65·9	62·3	56·8

There is a greater difference in the maximum and minimum of heat, but that is not to the disadvantage of our climate, since great extremes are not beneficial to vegetable growth.

The quality of our climate is not appreciated, and, while crowds of English people are going to California and Florida to engage in fruit-culture, our colony is never thought of for such a purpose. But were its merits more fully known in England—that we have here a climate surpassed by none in the world, and a country free from every kind of reptile—how many would then go to Florida, with its malarial climate, its rivers swarming with crocodiles, and its jungle with the most deadly snakes; or to Southern California, the home of the dreaded tarantula! The English farmers I met at Home had been frightened by Froude's "Oceana" into the belief that New Zealand was sinking with debt, and that the taxpayer was so overburdened that the colony would have to repudiate. But is such the case? The farmer in this colony has to pay a property-tax of five-eighths of a penny in the pound (with £500 exemption), and a road-rate of one penny in the pound on the value to let. Now, what has he to pay in the United States? He has to pay 3½d. in the pound on every bit of property he owns, even if it only amounts to a cow; and he, and every son he may